

ALL CHILDREN TOGETHER

DESIGNATION OF ONE SCHOOL IN AN AREA AS "INTEGRATED"
thus giving parents a wider choice in schools.

This brief discussion paper has been prepared at the request of Lord Elton as a basis for discussion at the meeting arranged for Thursday 26 February 1981.

It does not attempt to dot all the "i"s and cross all the "t"s but merely seeks to "air" the idea in an attempt to find a way to meet the wishes of those parents who want integrated schools for their children whilst respecting the wishes of those preferring separate schools.

A simple definition of an integrated school would be one in which those of differing religious and cultural backgrounds share at all levels in management, staffing and pupils and the education given in the school reflects this. Real integration would make demands on the content and process of the education provided. It would have to be widened to include the dearly held elements of both cultures of our community so that neither feels cheated of part of their cultural tradition.

No such schools exist at present.

1. In suggesting that the Department of Education should consider designation of one school in an area as integrated we would refer to the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1972. It would appear looking at Article 1(2) that the Order may be implemented to such extent as the Minister may by order appoint.

Looking at the last part of Article 5 and I quote " and it shall be the duty of each board, so far as its powers extend, to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community by securing that efficient education throughout those stages (i.e. primary, secondary, further) is available to meet the needs of its area."

WE WOULD QUESTION WHETHER THIS DUTY IS BEING CARRIED OUT.

We think Article 6 can also be looked at particularly the word " character " (6(1) line 4.).

Article 34. Pupils to be educated in accordance with wishes of their parents and I quote " and boards shall have regard to the general principle that, so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils shall be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents."

WE WOULD SAY THAT THIS APPLIES FOR SOME BUT NOT FOR OTHERS.

It is widely accepted that our "dual" system results in duplication and wastage of scarce resources both human and physical as well as being completely uneconomic, particularly now at a time of severe financial stringency.

We make this point whilst re-iterating our respect for the wishes of those parents preferring separate schools for their children.

2. Government policy in other parts of the United Kingdom takes account of its' pluralist society. It quite deliberately takes measures to encourage integration as one community, whilst respecting differences.

The education provided in state schools is a fine example of this. In Northern Ireland it is remarkable that the Department of Education appears to have no policy to encourage the elimination of violent divisions in the community through education. The Northern Ireland state schools (i.e. controlled schools) particularly primary and secondary by virtue of their management structure, are looked on as "Protestant" by many Roman Catholics. Protestants themselves frequently refer to "our" schools.

Therefore the state school in Northern Ireland can not be looked at in the same way as state schools in other parts of the United Kingdom.

WE WOULD SAY THAT IF THE STATE SCHOOL HERE WAS FULFILLING ITS' ROLE THERE WOULD BE NO NEED FOR PARENTS TO SEEK "INTEGRATED" SCHOOLS.

3. Four Opinion Polls over the past ten years (all strife-torn) have consistently shown around two thirds of both communities to be in favour of integrated education.

The recent Fortnight/R.T.E. Poll shows roughly the same figures but further shows that about one third of parents would send their children to an integrated school NOW - if it was available, which it is not.

This could represent a figure of 100,600 children.

Whilst Opinion Polls are not universally accepted as necessarily accurate, it behoves a Government to take note when Polls constantly produce the same answers, in this case consistent support for integrated education.

A reasonable Government would at least set about looking at ways to meet the public demand .

4. Historically the Churches in Northern Ireland have played a major role in dominating management of schools. The Reformed Churches have indicated their willingness to take part in "pilot schemes" and experiments in integrated education. They have also said they would respond to parents wishes.

The Roman Catholic Church has not voiced the same willingness.

However " Violence in Ireland " (published 1976) a report from the fifth Working Party appointed by the Irish Council of Churches / Roman Catholic Church Joint Group on Social Questions, jointly chaired by R.C. Bishop Cahal Daly and Rev. Dr. Eric Gallagher, gives cause for hope.

The Working Party whilst not being in agreement on the issue of integrated education, nevertheless made some interesting recommendations.

They were in agreement that the Churches should promote pilot schemes and research projects to find effective ways of bringing together Protestant and Catholic young people at school level. Such schemes could include exchanges of teachers between Catholic and Protestant schools (particularly in sensitive areas of the curriculum).

Shared Sixth Form Colleges were suggested as well as the development of common nursery schools in suitable areas (also giving mothers opportunities to meet.) Other suggestions for sharing included games, athletics, debates, cultural and folk-cultural exhibitions and other extra-curricular activities. The teaching of religion in schools of both traditions must have explicitly and deliberately an ecumenical dimension.

Finally the establishment of a Joint Committee to consider in detail the implementation of the various suggestions was recommended.

To date this Joint Committee has not been set up but we feel there exists enough goodwill for this to happen.

5. Falling enrolments in schools is with us and will be for some years. Particularly in Belfast this appears to be so. It is likely that a number of schools will have to be closed as the number of pupils becomes unviable, or makes the school unviable.

Whilst not wishing to use this situation to further integration we recognise, that in the probable re-organisation of education in Belfast, opportunities will be created to seriously consider the coming together of say two schools to serve a mixed community.

The economic situation alone makes it essential to look at ways of using resources as effectively as possible in the interests of all.

In rural areas consideration may also have to be given to one school serving the locality, not least to avoid unnecessary hardship and fatigue being suffered by the children having to travel long distances to school.

6. To designate a school in an area as " integrated " machinery would have to be devised first of all to identify which area or part of an area would welcome such a development. The boundaries of a district council could be used as a convenient way of defining an " area ".

It should be possible to devise a means of " testing the temperature " of each district council area before selecting say three likely areas.

The next step might be to encourage public debate by organising meetings and using the local media , in each selected area.

Having raised public awareness the time might then be ripe to ascertain the view of each household or of each household where there are children of pre-school or school age, by a carefully conducted poll.

Should the polls reveal sufficient children to start an integrated school (at whatever level) the onus would be squarely on the Government to meet their responsibilities.

All Children Together do not consider that it would be their role to carry out any of the above suggestions, but we put them forward in rough form for consideration.

We believe the Government has a duty now to initiate some thing on these lines. As suggested three "pilot schemes " could be set up. This would be in line with the thinking of the Protestant Churches and should ensure their support and co-operation. The Roman Catholic Church has recently through their Primate, Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich called for "bridge building between the communities " and it is committed to implementing or looking at ways to implement the suggestions quoted from " Violence in Ireland ".

7. In conclusion, we have put forward arguments for integrated education in previous papers and do not propose repeating them here.

Instead we would like to remind the Government that its responsibility for this part of the United Kingdom extends beyond security and seeking acceptable political solutions.

There comes a time when it must take a lead in other spheres traditionally dominated by vested interests. There comes a time when it must listen to the people and not those who profess to speak for them.

Work in the field of social psychology suggests that prejudice, between members of two groups is likely to be diminished if they experience:-

- a. Face-to-face social interaction.
- b. Of a co-operative nature
- c. in the pursuit of shared goals
- d. Over a long period of time
- e With equality of status.

Work in the field of sociology of education suggests that :-

- a. Strong mutual re-inforcement of home and school is normally a necessary condition of the internalisation of a system of values in children.
- b. Values of tolerance, respect for the out-group and its culture and rights and a universalistic understanding of love and charity, are most likely to be transmitted to the children of parents who already embrace these values if their children are educated in institutions that are institutionally structured to cherish them.

E.B.
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 Chairman A.C.T.

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