

EMAIL

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Department of Education

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Dear Team

Re: The Department of Education's Integrated Education Strategy - Action Plan

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ("NICCY") was established in accordance with 'The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order' (2003) to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland. Under Articles 7(2) and (3) of this legislation, NICCY has a mandate to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law, practice and services relating to the rights and best interests of children and young people by relevant authorities. Under Article 7(4), NICCY has a statutory duty to advise any relevant authority on matters concerning the rights or best interests of children and young persons.

The Commissioner's remit includes children and young people up to 18 years, or 21 years, if the young person is disabled or in the care of social services. In carrying out his functions, the Commissioner's paramount consideration is the rights of the child or young person, having particular regard to their wishes and feelings. In exercising his functions, the Commissioner has regard to all relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ("UNCRC").

NICCY welcomes that the Department of Education (DE) are consulting on a draft Integrated Education Strategy - Action Plan, and the opportunity to respond to this. The draft Plan details 15 actions that will be undertaken by the Department over the following five key areas in forthcoming years:

- Effective Engagement and Consultation;
- Demand for Integrated Education;
- Measuring Progress;
- Ethos, Information and Guidance; and
- Regulation and Compliance.

NICCY will not be responding in detail to the draft Action Plan but would like to raise a number of key issues.

Action 3 refers to the consultative process with all partners in respect of the implementation of the IE Act, including school leaders and practitioners. We advise that this process must include engagement with children, young people and their parents/guardians, who should be provided with the information and support necessary to enable their meaningful participation. Children's participation is critical in ensuring fulfilment of Article 12 of the UNCRC and should be regarded as a central tenet of DE consultation processes. Accordingly, children's participation should be reflected in the Department's engagement and consultation protocol which will set out the basis for consultation and the extent of coverage.

Action 6 notes that the Department will routinely publish data relating to the demand for Integrated Education. Data collected will be considered in the development and updating of future Strategic Area Plans and associated operational plans. We advise that accurately capturing demand for IE will require the increased provision and accessibility of information on IE to children, young people and their parents to enhance understanding of IE and its contribution to the education system in NI.¹ The Department and the education sectors also need to prioritise giving a voice to young people and to local communities in

¹ <https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/files/456933668/ARKIEFAssessingDemand.pdf>

relation to area planning of future school provision, area learning communities and school development plans. This requires investment, time and space for deliberation.²

Finally, to ensure that the Plan is truly child's rights compliant, **we strongly recommend that DE engage in a Child's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA)**. The CRIA Framework examines the potential impacts on children and young people of laws, policies, budget decisions, programmes and services as they are being developed and, if necessary, suggest ways to avoid or mitigate any negative impacts. It focuses on how children's rights may be affected by the decisions and actions of governments, departments, institutions and others. Impacts are, as you will be aware, measured against the rights set out in the UNCRC, its Optional Protocols, and other international human rights treaties. By conducting a CRIA, the Department will be able to assess the extent to which the action plan delivers on their children's rights obligations.

I look forward to further engagement on this.

Yours sincerely



Chris Quinn
Commissioner

² [Community Conversation Toolkit - IEF: Integrated Education Fund](#)