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INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Integration in Practice

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FOREWORD

Between 1999 and 2001 the Nuffield Foundation supported a research project into aspects of integrated education in Northern Ireland. The project was co-ordinated by Prof Alan Smith, University of Ulster and Prof Tony Gallagher, Queen's University Belfast. The final report was presented to the Nuffield Foundation in 2002 and a seminar was held in London later the same year to discuss its implications, particularly in the light of discussions on faith schools in England. Given the range of information gathered during the project, Nuffield agreed to support a series of further seminars to consider the current and future state of integrated education in Northern Ireland.

There are three reports in the series:

Integrated Education in Northern Ireland:
1. Participation, Profile and Performance;
2. Integration in Practice; and
3. The Challenge of Transformation.

This report is the second in the series and focuses on the nature of integration in practice. The report is based on data gathered through a survey of integrated schools, qualitative case studies and a study of past pupils from two integrated post-primary schools.

INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the main findings emerging from a research project on Integrated Education in Northern Ireland funded by the Nuffield Foundation (1999-2001).

The first planned integrated school in Northern Ireland was Lagan College, Belfast which opened in 1981 with a first intake of 28 pupils. Other schools followed and by the end of the 1980s the number of integrated schools throughout Northern Ireland had reached double figures. An important feature that distinguishes the establishment of integrated schools is that the impetus had not come from state or church authorities. The main activists have been parents from different traditions, engaged in a community development process to prove the viability of cross-community schools. The schools that were established during this pioneering phase were independent schools, supported by charitable funding from bodies such as The Nuffield Foundation, and schools had to demonstrate their viability for a number of years before government would commit funding.

The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 was something of a watershed for the development of integrated education. The legislation introduced statutory support for integrated education, enabling government to fund the development role of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and introduced day one funding for Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools provided they met government criteria for the establishment of new schools. The Reform Order also provided for existing controlled or maintained schools to 'transform' into integrated schools following a ballot among parents of pupils in attendance at the school.

Within this new climate of statutory support the number of integrated schools in Northern Ireland increased significantly during the 1990s. Between 1990 and 1998:

- The number of integrated primary schools increased from 7 to 22, of which 7 were in the new category of transforming controlled integrated schools;

- The number of pupils enrolled in integrated primary schools increased from 647 to 3,846 (a factor of six);

- The number of integrated post-primary schools increased from 2 to 11, of which one was in the new category of transforming controlled integrated schools; and

- The number of pupils enrolled in integrated post-primary schools increased from 1,023 to 3,950 (a factor of four).

By September 2000 there were 45 integrated schools (28 primary and 17 post-primary) with approximately 14,000 pupils. However, this still represents just over 4% of the school population.

Following consultation with representatives from NICIE, the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) and personnel from integrated schools, it was agreed to undertake a research programme that contained the following elements:

- An analysis of statistical patterns related to integrated schools in terms of religious composition, patterns of enrolment and academic performance;

- A survey that involved questionnaires to pupils, teachers, Principals, governors and parents in integrated schools;

- Case studies of 16 integrated schools involving qualitative interviews about the nature of integration in practice;

- A study of past pupils from the first two post-primary schools; and

- A study of the transformation process in 6 of the 12 transforming schools.

This report draws on findings from the survey, the case studies and the past pupil study in an attempt to understand the nature of integration in practice within integrated schools and what makes them distinctive as institutions and learning environments in Northern Ireland.

SURVEY OF INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

The purpose of the survey across the sector was to identify characteristics in relation to the schools, staff, pupils and the parents of pupils attending integrated schools.

In the spring of 1999, a letter outlining the main aims and objectives of the research and the nature of the proposed involvement of each school was sent to each integrated school Principal in Northern Ireland (N=44). This initial letter was then followed up a month later by a second letter, which provided further details of the research and a request that the school consider participating in the research. Each school Principal was asked in the first instance if they would agree to their school completing a series of questionnaires. These were designed in consultation with researchers and educationalists associated with integrated education and piloted with a small number of staff, parents and pupils. The questionnaires were addressed to:

• The Principal;

• The Chair of the Board of Governors;

• Each member of the teaching staff; and

• A group of ten parents (chosen at random by the Principal).

Of the 44 schools approached, 40 schools agreed to participate in the research (24 primary and 16 post-primary schools). This constitutes 91% of schools in the integrated sector. Following their agreement to participate, each school Principal was provided with further details about the questionnaires, and asked to forward a copy of their prospectus and current staff numbers. A brief visit to each school by a researcher was also arranged in consultation with school Principals. The purpose of this visit was to deliver the questionnaires and to address any concerns or queries that the Principals or members of staff might have had. The questionnaire was substantial and in most cases was administered in person by a researcher visiting the school. To assure Principals, staff, chairs of Board of Governors and parents of the confidential nature of the research issues, each questionnaire was issued along with a letter detailing the aims and objectives of the research and assurances concerning confidentiality. It was agreed with integrated post-primary Principals that pupil questionnaires would be completed during form or tutorial periods and forwarded directly by the form tutor to the research team. The following section highlights the main findings.

Demography within the schools

Information was sought concerning distribution of provision in terms of geographical location, social, religious and cultural characteristics of communities served by schools and patterns of enrolment. Respondents were asked to describe the nature of the local community in terms of its religious affiliation, and socio-economic and political characteristics. The vast majority of schools appeared to be located in mixed or predominantly Catholic or Protestant areas. No school was perceived to be in an area that was entirely Catholic or entirely Protestant. In terms of socio-economic and political characteristics, areas were again described in the majority of cases as mixed (mixed urban and rural settings, mixed social class, medium levels of unemployment and mixed political leanings). Only two schools from this sample reported that the area had not experienced sectarian tension. Almost every school indicated that this was most prevalent in the

summer months during the *'marching season.'* Several schools referred to incidents of vandalism to school buildings, *'huge amounts of tension and social unrest'* and violence. A small number of schools indicated the presence of ongoing tension throughout the year, *'painted kerbstones'* and slogans daubed on walls near the school.

Figures for enrolment have increased steadily in all primary and post-primary schools. From the time of foundation, each school had increased its original intake between five and nine fold. The majority of schools also expected their numbers to increase further, and this was indicated in the projections they gave for the next five years. Some schools had already reached their full quota. The gender ratio in schools tended to be more balanced in integrated post-primary schools than in the primary schools. A significant number of primary schools indicated that boys outnumbered girls (in one case the ratio was 14:9).

The most significant issue to emerge concerned practical difficulties in monitoring school enrolment by religious affiliation. Three-quarters of the schools indicated a majority of Catholic pupils. The greatest religious imbalance in a primary school was 64% Catholic, 34% Protestant; and in a post-primary school, 62% Catholic, 30% Protestant. Most schools also referred to two further categories of religious identification, namely Other or None, both of which were increasingly selected by parents when completing enrolment forms. Schools indicated that the percentage of pupils included in these categories ranged from 2% to 26% of the school population. This decision by increasing numbers of parents not to label their child either Protestant or Catholic was causing difficulties for some schools when they were addressing the issue of religious balance and pupil intake.

Respondents indicated that parents were often *'reluctant to commit their child to one category or another'* or that they had become *'rather creative in describing their child's tradition.'* Some post-primary Principals had circumvented this problem by contacting the child's primary school and asking how s/he had been identified there. This situation reflects an interesting debate surrounding pupil identity and the potential mismatch between *'perceived'* background and parental aspirations.

Every primary school in the sample had entered pupils for the Transfer Procedure, although numbers in some schools were very small. The percentage of Year 7 pupils entered in a school ranged from 16% to 100%. In terms of variation in these figures, some schools reported a decline in numbers opting to sit the tests, though the majority of schools indicated that the figures were generally rising, due in their opinion to *'parental'* or *'peer pressure.'* Only two post-primary schools in this sub-sample had entered pupils for GCSE examinations. The other schools had not been in existence long enough to establish a Year 12.

Sixty percent of primary schools that completed the question regarding the destination of their P7 pupils, indicated that they tended to transfer to the nearest integrated post-primary school. Only one school said that a greater proportion of its pupils transferred to a maintained post-primary school and location appeared to be an important factor in this case. A significant number of primary schools also reported that each year they had pupils who despite having achieved an 'A' grade in the Transfer tests, opted to transfer to an integrated post-primary school. One respondent noted *'these are the parents who have more interest in ethos than academia.'*

Practically every school felt that the local community regarded it positively. Respondents reported that they were perceived as *'particularly caring'* or *'concerned'* and as having a *'good reputation.'* A number of primary and post-primary schools did feel that the local clergy, politicians and other school Principals regarded them with some suspicion and dislike. A few commented on *'ongoing opposition'* from clergy while others noted that the relationship with clergy had improved, *'though we still can't persuade the priest to visit us.'* Perceived suspicion on the part of non-integrated school Principals was attributed to the perception that integrated schools were having a detrimental affect on intake numbers in other schools, that integrated schools had poached funding from the segregated sector or that integrated schools simply *'threaten their existence.'*

Principals from integrated schools
Completed questionnaires were received from 26 Principals (16 primary, 10 post-primary schools). This represents responses from 60% of all integrated school Principals. The findings in terms of nationality, religious affiliation and political identity can be summarised as follows:

Table 1: Nationality, Religious Affiliation & Political Identity	
Identity factor	**% of respondents**
Nationality	
British	27%
Irish	23%
Northern Irish	35%
Other	15%
Religious affiliation	
Catholic	27%
Protestant	46%
Other	20%
None	7%
Political identity	
Nationalist	0%
Unionist	12%
Other	57%
None	31%

There are a number of interesting findings:

- In terms of nationality, most integrated school Principals described themselves as Northern Irish (35%), rather than British (27%) or Irish (23%);

- Significantly more Principals in the sample (n=26) described themselves as Protestant (46%) rather than Catholic (27%);

- A fifth of the Principals in the sample described their religious affiliation as Other and less than a tenth (7%) identified their religion as None; and

- The majority of Principals in the sample described their political identity as Other (57%) or None (31%), and no respondents identified themselves as Nationalist, Republican or Loyalist in political outlook.

Despite the small number of respondents, these findings suggest that it would be worthwhile securing deeper insight into the thinking on identity issues amongst the leadership within integrated schools. Particular issues include:

- Whether the concept of Northern Irish as the predominant identity label for nationality amongst Principals has any implications for the ethos of integrated schools or implicit messages conveyed by the informal curriculum;

- Whether the finding from this sample, that there are significantly more Protestants as Catholics in leadership positions in integrated schools, has any implications for the sector;

- How the significant number of integrated school Principals who describe their religious affiliation as Other or None relates to the commitment of integrated schools to a 'Christian ethos'; and

- Why the majority of integrated school Principals describe their political identity as Other or None; and what the implications are

of there being no representation of Nationalist, Republican or Loyalist perspectives within the Principals in this sample.

Further aspects of the profile of Principals within integrated schools are that:

- The majority (73%) were trained as teachers within Northern Ireland, the remainder at institutions in Britain or Ireland. Just over 25% have had broader experience teaching outside Northern Ireland; and

- All have experience teaching in schools other than integrated schools and 96% have taught for more than 15 years. There was some anecdotal evidence of different qualities required of Principals who initiated or founded integrated schools and those required to sustain or develop schools once they had been established.

The second part of the questionnaire to Principals addressed issues relating to motivations and frustrations associated with the post of Principal in the integrated education sector. Respondents were asked if they felt supported by the school governors, other members of staff and by parents and pupils. All of the post-primary Principals ticked the 'Yes' box, with only one Principal commenting that his current Board of Governors was much more supportive than the previous group and two Principals noted that only a small number of parents and pupils were 'problematic.' Primary school Principals generally agreed that all of the groups mentioned were supportive, however a minority did qualify their response, indicating a variable or lack of support again from the Board of Governors and/or parents. In contrast perhaps to some of the other groups, some primary school Principals described pupils as a strong source of encouragement or motivation –'the kids are great.'

Principals were also asked to indicate what expectations they had in terms of career opportunities and if they felt these could be met within the integrated sector. In general Principals from both primary schools and post-primary schools appeared fairly content in their current posts. Where a primary or post-primary school was fairly recently established or the Principal was relatively new to the role, individuals commented that they were *'getting to grips'* with the post, or anticipating future challenges to develop the school. There was also some indication of a desire to transfer or *'deepen'* skills that had been acquired or developed within the integrated sector. In contrast to these comments, there was a discernible tone of disillusionment in a number of Principals' responses. Two primary Principals quite explicitly expressed a desire to move out of the integrated sector completely, one of whom described the experience as having been *'very damaging.'* Amongst post-primary Principals there was an uncertainty in some responses regarding their future in the sector.

When asked to identify three main frustrations of their current job, Principals often ignored the number and listed up to eleven issues. *'Paperwork'* was a frustration that was noted with remarkable regularity across the whole sample of Principals and staff. One Principal referred to the *'paper mountain,'* much of which originated from DENI and the Education and Library Boards. Linked to this, the Department of Education (DE) was criticised by primary Principals for generating too many initiatives, some of which were stressful and complex to deal with. The general weight of Principals' workloads was commented upon frequently, with one teaching Principal noting the difficulties of time management, resulting in *'two jobs half-done.'* A post-primary Principal also commented on his workload rendering him *'deskbound which means I cannot walk the job.'* Other frustrations cited by Principals included a lack of funding and accommodation and *'too much power and interference'* by some parents and governors. Concerns about Boards of Governors' involvement or parental interference may be more likely to be raised within the integrated sector, due to the particular management structures and ethos of integrated schools.

The final question given to Principals, asked them to indicate how they felt an integrated ethos was promoted in the daily activities and management structure of their school. In primary schools, an emphasis was placed on the importance of setting a good example to children, for example, through good staff relations and relationships with parents. Post-primary schools highlighted the importance of attitudes and behaviour and both primary and post-primary schools referred to the communication of the school's ethos via the curriculum - PSE, EMU, RE classes and activities, assemblies, students' council, circle time and extra-curricular activities. One primary school Principal commented:

'There has to be a whole school approach to show how everyone fits into the big picture.'

Teachers

Questionnaires were completed by 197 teachers (68 primary, 129 post-primary) from integrated schools. The main findings were:

- In terms of nationality, teachers in the sample described themselves as British (40%), Irish (30%), Northern Irish (22%) and Other or None (8%);

- In terms of religious affiliation, teachers in the sample described themselves as Catholic (41%), Protestant (36%), Christian (14%), Other or None (9%); and

- In terms of political identity, teachers in the sample described themselves as Unionist (24%), Nationalist (20%), Republican (2%), Loyalist (1%), Other (20%) and None (33%).

Some implications of these findings are:

- In contrast to Principals, the teachers in integrated schools were more likely to define their nationality as British or Irish, rather than use the generic term Northern Irish. This suggests that pupils encounter teachers who represent the British and Irish identities as well as those who define nationality in terms of a *'shared'* Northern Irish identity, but it is not clear what impact this may have on pupils' own sense of national identity;

- The two main religious traditions in Northern Ireland are well represented amongst teachers in integrated schools and a significant number (14%) identify themselves as Christian. In this sample, significantly fewer teachers describe their religious affiliation as Other or None (9%) compared to the school Principals (27%). Overall 56% of primary teachers and 54% of post-primary teachers in integrated schools stated that religion is *'very important'* or *'important'* in their lives;

- There is a broader representation of different political perspectives amongst teachers in the sample when compared to Principals. However, like the sample of Principals, the majority of teachers describe their political identity as Other (20%) or None (33%). This suggests that the majority of teachers that pupils encounter do not have strong allegiances in terms of the traditional political identities in Northern Ireland; and

- In terms of initial teacher training, 75% of primary teachers and 73% of post-primary teachers in the sample were trained in institutions in Northern Ireland (Queen's University Belfast, University of Ulster, Stranmillis College which is predominantly Protestant in enrolment and St Mary's College which provides Catholic teacher education).

Overall 25% of teachers in the sample had taught for less than 5 years and 50% had taught for more than 15 years. In terms of previous experience, 39% had taught only in the controlled (predominantly Protestant) sector and 32% had taught only in the Catholic maintained sector. Only 16% had taught in both sectors before taking up a post in an integrated school. Whilst all had access to in-service courses provided by local authorities, there was a concern about the lack of induction and in-service education to prepare teachers for the distinctive challenges of working within integrated schools.

Some concerns were raised about the lack of opportunity for career development within the small, integrated education sector and there were perceptions that opportunities for promotion and employment within other sectors would be limited by accepting a post within an integrated school. In a section of the questionnaire concerning career routes, staff were asked to explain briefly why they had applied for their current job. Thirty-seven percent said that they had wanted to work in an integrated school *or 'liked the idea of integrated education.'* Due to the restrictions inherent in the questionnaire method of research, and respondents' tendency to offer brief responses to questions, in most cases it was not possible to discern any further information relating to individuals' desire to teach in the integrated sector. Some did elaborate on this point, commenting that they felt *'this* [was] *the way forward for education in Northern Ireland,'* that they *'did not want to teach in a suffocating Catholic context,'* or that having returned to Northern Ireland after some time abroad, this was *'the only kind of education I felt I could return to.'*

Other staff commented that they felt there were *'good promotion prospects'* in the integrated sector, and that they were *'disillusioned'* with the controlled or

maintained education sector. Almost 25% (the majority of which were primary school staff) indicated that they had applied for their job because of financial or practical considerations. Several said the post was convenient in terms of location and hours, others said it had been advertised *'at just the right time'* and a small number of individuals explained that *'it was the first job that came up.'* It is evident that there is a range of motivations affecting teachers' decisions to apply for posts in the integrated sector. It also seems reasonable to suggest that not all of these are due to a strong commitment to the philosophy underpinning integrated education. This observation is perhaps further supported by responses to a subsequent question that asked staff if they would consider applying for a post in the segregated sector. An overwhelming majority (67%) indicated that they would apply. A number argued that a *'job's a job'* and they would have applied for a suitable teaching post wherever one became available. One respondent commented that he would *'apply anywhere I could be of value'* and another felt that *'satisfaction in the workplace is far more important than school type.'* For some teachers at least, the particular religious, social and academic characteristics of a school did not appear to be significantly important when they were applying for a teaching post. Teaching was considered rather as a specific practice consisting of a series of challenges and rewards, which existed irrespective of the particular sector a school happened to be in.

Staff were also asked to comment on promotion prospects within the integrated education sector. Overall, respondents offered positive responses to this question. The majority felt there were enough/plenty of opportunities for promotion within their school or within other schools. Quite a number of respondents felt that promotion was likely to occur at an earlier stage in a teachers' career in an integrated school, than in a school in another sector. This had resulted in a greater number of younger teachers holding middle management positions, an issue which caused some new or beginning teachers some disgruntlement as they felt such teachers would stay on at the school for some time *'blocking opportunities for those below.'* Almost 20% of primary school staff commented that they were unlikely to be presented with promotion opportunities either in their school or in the integrated sector. Several said they would be prepared to look outside the sector, and one post-primary teacher commented that if he wanted to secure a senior management position, he would have to consider all schools and not just the integrated sector. A few teachers anticipated some difficulty in moving from the integrated sector to *'mainstream'* schools, especially in seeking more senior positions. Almost 12% of primary school staff (all female) indicated that they did *'not wish to avail of promotion opportunities,'* that they *'have enough to do'* or that their *'present responsibilities were sufficient.'* The majority of teachers intimated that their aspirations for promotion could be met within the integrated sector, because it is *'comparatively new and expanding.'* However, it does appear that the sector may have to continue its expansion for a longer period, if teachers' expectations are still to be met.

A final question in the section on teacher motivation addressed the issue of support structures within schools, and specifically, the extent to which teachers felt they received support from formal and informal sources, for example other staff or the school pastoral care system. The majority of teachers were full of praise for the support they received in their schools. Closer examination of these responses revealed that this support was largely informal and usually generated by teaching colleagues. Primary and post-primary school staff offered fairly similar responses to this question, both suggesting that there was a lack of clarity, a

disorganisation and inconsistency in the administration of a formal support system. A fairly significant proportion of primary school teachers (30%), however, were less than happy with the support they received in their schools, commenting that there was only a *'reasonable response'* from other members of staff, that *'staff have so much to do, support has dwindled'* and a number of staff from one school did comment that because of the unacceptable management approach in their school, *'staff support was required rather too often.'* Four teachers commented that the level of support given in their schools was *'poor.'*

Pupils

Questionnaires were completed by 400 Year 8 and Year 10 pupils from 11 integrated post-primary schools. Pupils were asked to comment on a range of issues including their views of school, friendship patterns, transfer after the eleven-plus, and their experience of integrated schools. The main findings were:

Only 16% of pupils in the sample had attended an integrated primary school so the initial intake of integrated post-primary schools is mainly pupils encountering the concept for the first time. This has implications for the induction programme.

The majority of pupils had a positive attitude towards their school and identified specific curriculum subjects (24%), their friends (20%), individual teachers or teachers in general (15%) in positive terms.

Of the 400 pupils in the sample, 60% sat the eleven-plus (a third of these stated that they had been *'coached'*). The grade profile of those pupils who took the tests was:

Table 2: Grade Profile of Pupils in the Sample					
A	B1	B2	C1	C2	D
14%	6%	12%	15%	14%	39%

The majority of pupils (65%) stated that the integrated school was their first choice, 10% had listed a grammar school as their first choice and 5% had listed an integrated school as second choice after a grammar school. This suggests that at least some pupils may arrive with a sense of the integrated school as *'second best.'*

A high proportion of pupils seem to have been personally involved in the decision-making process. Approximately 30% of pupils stated that they had made the choice of school, 28% that they and their parents had decided together. Mothers were more influential than fathers with 14% of pupils stating that their mother took the decision and 5% stated it was a joint decision with their mother.

The main reasons for choice of school were having relatives or siblings already there (25%), the fact that the school is integrated (24%), friends going there (16%), parental decision (15%) and good reputation of the school (14%). A small number of Year 10 pupils had transferred from other schools, often because of bullying in the previous school. A small number of pupils stated that they had been *'forced to attend'* the integrated school by their parents.

Pupils were also asked why they had chosen to come to their particular school. Almost all responses were positive - *'I liked the sound of it,' 'my friends were coming,' 'I liked the idea of integration'* and *'it has a good reputation.'* One girl said *'it's just perfect for me.'* Only a small number were more negative - *'I didn't choose - I was told by my parents,' 'I didn't get into the grammar'* and *'it's the only school that wanted me.'* When asked if they could select a post-primary school again would they still choose to come to their present school, 78% of pupils confirmed that they would still choose the school they now attended. Their reasons for this were relatively few. Thirty percent of the

sample simply said that they liked their school or thought that *'it [was] great!,'* 22% indicated that their friends were all at their present school and 9% felt that the teachers were *'the best.'* Most of those who indicated that they would not choose to come to their school now if they had the choice, attributed this to the fact that they would have preferred to have transferred from their primary school to a grammar school. While they did not strongly dislike the integrated school they attended, several pupils clearly had not identified the school as their first choice and said that it had *'just been a better option than some other schools.'*

Pupils' responses to the question regarding their views of school indicated that the vast majority felt quite positively about their school. Ninety-three percent of respondents either *'really liked'* school (29%), think that school is *'OK'* (32%) or *'like some things'* (32%). Only 4% stated that they *'hated'* school. When asked to identify what they liked best about school, most pupils tended to mention one of four things. These were specific curriculum subjects (24%), their friends (20%), individual teachers or teachers in general (15%) or the clubs and facilities available at school (13%). A small number commented that they particularly like the *'atmosphere'* or the fact *'that it is mixed.'* Several other pupils liked their school because *'it's fair,' 'there are lots of opportunities,' 'there is some freedom'* and *'everyone is treated equally.'* Responses to this question tend to suggest that the vast majority of pupils in integrated schools identify similar *'favourite things about school'* as their counterparts in non-integrated schools (Harland *et. al.*, 1999). Only a small number made reference to specific characteristics of integration such as the school being *'mixed'* or *'being able to learn with other traditions.'*

Pupils were asked if they thought that their school was different in any way to other

schools. The three main areas identified related to religion, *'no-one teases you about religion'*, academic attainment, *'there are worse grades in this school'* and standard of accommodation *'our classroom is a hut'.* The majority of pupils (66%) appeared to be on the receiving end of unkind and frequently hostile comments from friends attending other schools. These often focused on similar areas such as religion, *'My boyfriend who is a Protestant doesn't know how I can stand being in the same class as Catholics'* and status *'They say it is for drop outs from other schools'.*

Almost every pupil attending a school which was awaiting the provision of new buildings commented on the accommodation in *'huts'* and *'prefabs'* and talked about having to walk through *'mud and muck'* to get from one class to another. One pupil commented that it had been okay in Year 8 but he was *'getting a bit fed up with it'* now he was in Year 10.

A final question asked pupils if they would consider sending any children they might have to an integrated school. A clear majority of 65% of pupils in the sample said that they would send their child to an integrated school because, *'it would help him or her to mix well'* (20%), *'it's good'* or *'mixed education is important'* or because *'it might help bring peace.'* Twenty three percent of the sample said that it *'depended'* on a number of things, such as whether their child wanted to go there, and *'how good the school was.'* The few pupils (5%) who said that they would not send their child to an integrated school commented that they would prefer a different kind of school - *'grammar,'* *'Catholic education'* or *'Protestant school.'*

Parents
Questionnaires were completed by 142 parents (94 primary and 48 post-primary). Questions concerned the social profile of the parents, reasons for choice of integrated school and the nature of parental involvement. The main findings were:

A distinctive feature of the parent sample was that 18% had been educated outside Northern Ireland, mainly in Britain, Ireland or internationally in roughly equal proportions. Approximately one third had been educated in grammar schools, a similar ratio to the overall population, but a significantly higher proportion had gone on to third level education (37% University, 57% Further Education, Technical and Training Colleges).

All parents were asked to choose from a list of ten considerations, which had most influenced them in their decision to send their child to an integrated school. The most popular response was a commitment to integrated education (83%). Other popular choices were the relatively *'small class sizes'* (39%), the *'school's reputation'* (34%), their *'own educational experiences'* (32%), *'siblings already pupils'* (27%), *'recommendation'* (25%) and *'convenient location'* (16%).

Parents were also asked if they had encountered any opposition in their choice of integrated education. Approximately 27% said they had been presented with some kind of opposition. This ranged from family and friends *'raising their eyebrows'* because integrated education was perceived as *'not the mainstream'* or *'unknown territory,'* to primary school staff *'actively trying to dissuade'* parents from sending their children to an integrated school, suggesting a *'better standard'* of education existed elsewhere.

Parents were asked what they understood by the term *'parental involvement'* and their responses reveal a broad range of interpretations from suggestions of practical involvement to more general references about support. Some less specific forms of involvement included *'contributing to all*

aspects of the school community,' 'working hand in hand with the teachers' and 'providing teachers with full support.' Thirty eight percent of parents used these kinds of phrases, but did not offer any further indication of how this support was given. Almost 18% indicated the importance of supporting school endeavours and initiatives while 26% defined parental involvement as 'encouraging my children in their learning' or 'taking an active part in the education of my children.'

Interpretations of 'parental involvement' indicated that a pyramid of involvement exists. A quarter of the parents in the sample had been directly involved in the establishment of the school with small numbers maintaining involvement in the Board of Governors or Parents' Council, although this held least appeal for the majority of parents. Moderate levels of involvement were reported in practical areas such as being a classroom helper, playground supervision, helping with fundraising and school events. A lower level of involvement involved supporting school events, attending parents' evenings, special assemblies and maintaining contact with teachers. Approximately half of the respondents felt that there was room for improvement or that the reality of involvement had fallen short of their expectations. A small number of parents regarded the members of the Parents' Council in their children's schools as an 'elite' and felt excluded.

While a majority of parents felt that parental involvement was encouraged in their children's school, a number did suggest that they felt less welcome or less appreciated than perhaps they had previously. Several parents said they only had contact with the teachers now if there was a 'discipline or work-related problem.' Others felt that as the school had grown, it had become less welcoming and even appeared to keep parents 'at some distance.' One parent felt that it would be difficult for parents of

new pupils to 'develop or maintain meaningful relationships with teachers' as it had grown too large. Several parents in one school indicated that since DE funding had been secured, governors, teachers and parents were less motivated to communicate with one another or to support fund-raising events.

A final question asked parents to identify what they felt were the most important aspects of integrated education. Their responses may be grouped as follows:

- The promotion of particular values and attitudes - many references were made to the potential of integrated education to 'bring children together,' 'to promote an acceptance of difference' and to 'develop mutual respect for one another';

- The nature of learning and standard of education - parents referred to the 'child-centred nature' of integrated education, and emphasised the inclusive learning environment of integrated schools which 'caters for all needs, skills and talents.' They also described integrated schools as providing a 'good standard' of the 'best of education';

- School management and ethos - respondents referred to 'small classes,' the 'positive' or 'committed approach of teachers,' 'sound ethos' and 'opportunities for parental involvement'; and

- The contribution of integrated education to societal harmony - parents described integrated schools as 'the way forward (for education) in Northern Ireland' and as 'an island of normality in a sea of abnormality.'

CASE STUDIES

The meaning of integration

The second element contributing to the establishment of a profile of the integrated sector was a series of case studies involving 16 of the 40 schools in the sample. Each case study consisted of a programme of interviews conducted with the Principal, teachers, support staff and pupils over a two to three day period in each of the case study schools. The purpose of these visits was to provide a deeper qualitative insight into what is distinctive about integrated schools. It was anticipated that more direct evidence would be able to be gathered on the following range of issues:

• What people within integrated schools mean by *'integration'* in terms of daily practice;

• How integrated schools take account of socially divisive issues; and

• What the role of ritual, symbols and symbolism is within integrated schools.

An overriding concern of this aspect of the research was to try to ascertain the extent to which integrated schools emphasise the development of common experiences and the extent to which they are developing practices to meet the challenges of diversity within the school population.

Sixteen schools (10 primary and 6 post-primary schools) were originally approached by letter inviting them to participate as case study schools in this part of the research. Following further telephone calls with each of the school Principals, all except one of the schools elected to participate. Another school was then substituted, with agreement from the Principal. The schools in the sample were carefully selected to be broadly representative of all schools in the integrated sector. Factors considered in selection included geographical location, length of time established, size and school type (newly integrated or transforming). As with the questionnaires, however, access to schools was affected by a range of issues, including preparation for open nights, inspections and the transfer procedure. In addition, a slight hiatus was caused by change of research team personnel. The final number of case study schools was 14, 10 primary and 4 post-primary. Of these, 4 were transforming primary and 2 were transforming post-primary schools, i.e. making 6 transforming schools in total. The results of research on the process of transformation in these 6 schools are documented in the third report in this series.

It is worth noting that, because of their integrated status, many integrated schools in Northern Ireland are constantly inundated with requests to participate in a wide range of educational, political and social research projects. The willingness of such a high proportion of schools to engage in such demanding research deserves our recognition and thanks.

Methodology

Participating school Principals received a letter outlining the schedule for interviews. In all cases, Principals went to considerable lengths to ensure that all categories requested for interview were able to be interviewed, even when the school concerned had a small teaching staff and the Principal also had teaching duties. The interview schedule proposed to Principals was as follows:

PRIMARY
• With the Principal (approximately 45 mins)

• With a number of individual classroom teachers (approx. 30 mins each)

• With 1-2 support staff, including classroom assistants (20-25 mins)

• With a group of 6-8 Key Stage 1 pupils (30 mins)

• With a group of 6-8 Key Stage 2 pupils
  (30 mins)

POST-PRIMARY
• With the Principal (approximately 45 mins)

• With a number of individual classroom
  teachers (approx. 30 mins each)

• With 1-2 support staff, including classroom
  assistants (20-25 mins)

• With a group of 6 Key Stage 3 pupils
  (30 mins)

• With a group of 6 Key Stage 4 pupils
  (30 mins)

The interviews were taped and later transcribed
and the qualitative data obtained analysed by
the research team. For Principals and teaching
staff, the interviews were conducted formally
according to a semi-structured framework of
questions grouped under the following themes:

• Biographical information, e.g., length
  of time in post/school, teaching experience
  (integrated/non-integrated), responsibilities, age;

• Integration;

• Socially divisive issues;

• Rituals and symbols; and

• Challenges.

For support staff, the interviews were similar
but with these themes:

• Biographical information, e.g., post held,
  length of time in post/school, age;

• Experience of working in the school;

• Integration; and

• Symbols and rituals.

According to documents such as statements of
principles, integrated education is not simply
about integration in the classroom but about
the integration of all involved in the school,
including parents, teachers, support staff
and pupils.

Interviews with teaching and support staff
were therefore designed to offer an insight
into what it is like to work within and be part
of this community. In the case of the pupil
interviews, pupils were not interviewed
individually but informally in small groups.
By interviewing pupils at various levels, it was
hoped that their comments would reflect the
experience of pupils from the early to the final
stages of integrated schooling. Therefore,
pupils were interviewed from P2/3, P6/7, Years
9/10 and 11. With the youngest category, P2/3
children, the researchers utilised the strategy
of *'circle time'* with which children in all
integrated primary schools were likely to be
familiar. A small soft toy was passed around
the group and each child had the opportunity
to speak when it was their turn to hold the toy.
Some researchers found that the *'soft toy'*
approach worked equally well with the older
primary children provoking much *'mature'*
humour and providing increased
encouragement to offer an opinion. The post-
primary pupils were also interviewed in small
groups and talked easily to the researchers.

Analysis of data from case study interviews
A series of questions explored interviewees'
perceptions of ethos and how they felt it
should impact on their school in terms of
pupils and staff. At the start, Principals and
teaching staff were asked how they would
describe *'integration'* to *'someone unfamiliar
with the concept.'* A broad consensus of
opinion was offered which recognised that
within integrated education at least two
levels of integration should be taking place,
firstly, to bring together the two main religious
communities - Catholic and Protestant - in
Northern Ireland. Secondly, having brought
them into contact with each other, to educate
them in a manner that would enable them to
live together. The key element emphasised by

all was the child-centred focus of this educational process whereby each child would be regarded as an individual worthy of respect regardless of ability, religion, social background or gender. A child who was respected would respect others and would hopefully become a *'fulfilled and caring adult.'* In this way, as one primary Vice-Principal said, *'We hoped our schools would make a big difference.'* Almost all teaching staff defined integration in similar terms, defining community division but also going beyond the provision of contact to the facilitation of preparation for life in a pluralist society. There was clear recognition of the interdependence of these two elements as one post-primary Principal commented:

> *'It's such an enormous topic. It has a very narrow kind of view, that I suppose is generally accepted - of bringing Protestants and Catholics together and I think that difference is one of the main issues here - as well as that there is difference in ability and in other things. We should actually try to work with that, rather than separating things, we should be appreciating differences. Maybe that's the key to the whole thing - to help one individual appreciate another's gifts and talents, points of view and their right to hold these particular points of view, no matter how contrary they seem to run to your own.'*

A primary classroom assistant whose own children had begun their education abroad in *'a multicultural school with sixty different nationalities'* commented:

> *'In this school, the children do feel positive about themselves. The staff look for just whatever little bit of spark or individuality in the child that makes them special. This is what the children are taught - they all have one little thing they are good at and this is recognised, praised and encouraged...I had friends who came back from overseas and their children were teased because of*

accents or suntan, etc. This did not happen here. My children were respected and accepted.'

There is perhaps little in the above which appears different from the standard description of integrated education as defined in NICIE's principles and guidelines. However, interviewees' statements, and the manner in which they delivered them, showed evidence of opinions formed, often over a period of time, in the light of personal experience. Most were both thoughtful and concerned, reflecting a continuing commitment to meeting the challenge of *'getting it right.'* One transforming primary Principal's comments in effect may be indicative of the existence of different stages of thinking about the meaning of integration as they seem to argue that the fundamental purpose of integrated schooling is to effect religious integration:

> *'An integrated school is basically a school where all religions are educated together and everyone is able to follow and learn about their own traditions. It could go as far as all-ability integration, e.g., disabled with able-bodied, but I don't see it in that way. I see it in a Northern Ireland context of religion.'*

While interviewees' definitions/descriptions of integration evidenced a strong element of shared perceptions, most also believed that each school went about the pursuit of ethos in its own way. This was clearly down to the influence of a number of factors, e.g., geographic location, religious demography, etc., but most importantly to the influence of individual teachers, especially Principals. As team leaders, all school Principals, to some extent, stamp their own mark on their school. In the case of integrated schools, and of transforming schools in particular, they have an additional role of steering their school towards a destination which is pre-determined, but by a course which ultimately they have to

map out for themselves. Not surprisingly, each journey is unique. This was certainly confirmed by the observations of those teaching staff that had experience of working in more than one integrated school:

'It's only my opinion but it depends on who your Principal is as to how the ethos of the school goes. In this school the Principal's very open to everything that's going on and that's great. I certainly don't feel threatened in any way. You say your own opinion and it's taken very well but my previous [integrated] school was not like that at all.' [Teacher/grant-maintained post-primary]

Information deriving from interviews throughout the case study schools clearly revealed that integration in practice took a number of forms. At the same time, there was a fairly universally held perception that it involved a process which had to be both ongoing and empirical. The process was not automatic however - it had to be put in place by the school. This was an important distinction:

'*I think it's something we've realised will not just happen and through the past year we actually appointed someone to try to make it happen...It does need serious consideration and work and it's not an ongoing process.'* [Principal/grant-maintained post-primary]

'I would hate to think that you would ever have achieved integration. That would be just an illusion because every human being is a changing, growing human being. You have to acknowledge that with constant change you have to constantly address new things - a learning process for myself. I think that has been the most exciting part of this whole situation...it is a process, for the individual, for the school and for the movement and I can't think that even were we to achieve integration throughout

Northern Ireland the process would still have to go on because that's human nature.' [Principal/grant-maintained primary]

When undertaken, practicing integration appears to have had a far from smooth path. The same Principal succinctly concluded:

'Talking about it is one thing; putting it into practice is quite another.'

Both teachers and Principals of planned integrated schools described how in the early years it was a process which sometimes was lost sight of amid the huge amount of work involved in setting up a new school. Consequently they had to keep reminding themselves that they could ill afford not to sustain the ethos which had fostered it. Not surprisingly, it was the more tangible aspects and especially the necessity of achieving a religiously balanced intake that impinged on staff, particularly Principals. One Principal recalled how this had been brought home very forcibly when parents from the small minority in the school complained that their children felt under threat and that they would be prepared to take them away. This compelled the school to take stock:

'*We had a look at where we were going with integration and did this mean that we had to just sit back and say all right the children are in the school and that will integrate them enough so we'll try and bring it in through History and Geography and do it very quietly or we could be pro-active or what should we do? At that stage we appointed an integration co-ordinator and began an action plan.'* [Principal/grant-maintained post-primary]

Having played a prominent role in the founding of planned integrated schools, many parents did have their own expectations of what integration should mean in practice. One Principal believed they were being unrealistic:

'In any integrated school, there are people who also want to push their own agenda...parents who would have read something or who would have had a bad experience of education themselves, saying this was too strict, too formal or I learned far more outside the classroom, or I wonder if we couldn't invent a school where there was a happier blend or where in fact the hidden curriculum would actually promote it, so the children would have a very high self-esteem, etc., able to talk and sing and dance up on stage and do all sorts of things...and I agree with that as well but I have to say at the same time we are in competition with other formal traditional schools and if we can't match their standard we will go down hill. We may also of course just attract pupils who want that style of education. The integrated school has got to be a broad church but it has got to base itself in its own locality and if the norm is for high academic standard you have to match that otherwise you are not going to be in the running.'
[Principal/grant-maintained post-primary]

In a small number of instances, teachers and Principals said that pressure of work often meant that work on integration received low priority. This feeling was also reflected in responses to the teacher questionnaire. It may be that some of the case study interviewees were reluctant to be quite as frank on the subject as this senior primary teacher:

'When I moved here from the maintained sector, I came in blazing with enthusiasm... As the years progressed, the enthusiasm for integrated education is still within me and still within our school but certainly the pressures of the curriculum and everything else takes over completely. There's no doubt about it - we are always trying to tell the children that you are in a special school and we are a different school from any other school. But unfortunately I have found

myself because I'm so heavily involved in assessments throughout the school and the raising of school standards that we could easily be tied in with the controlled or maintained school.' [Teacher/grant-maintained primary]

This inevitably raises issues that are essentially developmental. The research team knew that although a *'profile'* would in effect provide a *'snapshot'* of integrated schools, what they were examining was not static but organic. It was important therefore to ask staff if they thought that the nature of integration had changed since its beginnings in 1981. Obviously those with the longest involvement felt more able to comment so that the answers given are the product of their considerable experience, which of course, included their own development. These examples have been selected and quoted at length because they identify significant concerns about how the movement has developed:

'We are sucked along by whatever the Government's priorities are for education and this is not integration. It is that every child is literate, numerate and competent on the keyboard...A team of four inspectors spent three days in school searching for flaws and integration wasn't even a feature. So if that is their priority it has to be ours as well...so we push integration to one side... In some ways, yes, the concept and maybe the original ideas, the lovely vision that people had in their mind, the vision has been deluded. When a new parent asks for information about the school as a lady did yesterday, I sent her a lot of documentation including the Inspection Report and where did she pick that it was an integrated school? Somewhere obviously, yes, in the vision statement in the prospectus but she got one hundred pieces of information and only one of them was on integration- the rest were on the school's performance.'
[Principal/grant-maintained primary]

'Well, the pioneer spirit isn't here as it was in the very beginning...but I think there's a greater depth now to what integration is all about and I think that the integrated movement has become so big that we all work very much as a team to help each other, e.g., when a new school has been set up, to share a problem, etc., so I think there is a lot more depth to the integrated movement than there was previously...the quality of it has probably improved a lot and we're all learning about each other. My big worry now is transformation - if things are going to go back again.' [Principal/grant-maintained post-primary]

'For grant-maintained schools, it can be like flying without a parachute. It bothers me at times and Principals have been lost - there have been casualties and this is not good for the sector. Why does it happen? New governors arrive with no background of involvement in integrated education but they are ambitious, they think the school is their own and they go head to head with a strong Principal or walk over and dump a weak Principal.' [Principal/grant-maintained primary]

'Each school is in effect autonomous - NICIE cannot dictate a model. We all have our own ideas. Is this a weakness? Yes, some integrated schools are ending up like controlled schools, or CCMS schools. An integrated school should have at least three things identifiable which is not the case at the minute: respect for other cultures; a practice of mixing different traditions; and a different style of management.' [Principal/grant-maintained primary]

'I don't think the issues have changed. It is much easier now - to get money, to get status, if you can get the numbers of children. In the beginning we were fighting to prove a point that the school would work and you had the belief that it would. Now I think we have proved the point. I mean, sometimes the teachers who would come into integrated schools would come in for different reasons. In the beginning I think people came because they had a conviction about integration. Now I think some teachers are coming because it is a good school and it is a job.... so we make commitment / interest in integrated education essential criteria. We would still be quite strict about that.' [Principal/grant-maintained primary]

Some of the issues raised in the comments above include concerns that:

- Integration may be becoming less of a priority on the part of government;
- The coherence of planned integration may be fragmented by the transformation model; and
- The profile of the integrated movement may be damaged by disputes between Principals and parent governors.

The movement has not stayed still - it has changed over the years. In the opinion of some, this was largely positive and was only to be expected and should be built upon; others were unhappy about the direction in which the government appeared to be leading them, especially over its transformation policy. Some felt that this could be an opportune time for all involved to revisit the *'basics'* of the movement. One primary Principal said:

'You tend to get so concerned with everything, integration almost gets forgotten but because it is the basis of everything we tend to pull back to that. If you have got to make a decision on something you go back to the integration fact, that everyone is important and that we are here to help the children pull together. So that tends to be your guiding light.' [Principal/grant-maintained primary]

Teachers

Principals were asked about how important an applicant's commitment to integrated education was when appointing teachers. The majority considered that the most important priority for them was to ensure the appointment of good teachers, people who were experienced, committed to children and to education. At the same time, the degree to which integration appeared to exert an influence on recruitment showed considerable variation:

> '*This is paramount. I think if you have a teacher like that and they are applying to your school, their commitment to the vocation and the job will come through in what they are doing and also in the way they approach integration as well... Ultimately you've got to have the best possible staff that you can have in the position... And yes, on commitment to the integrated ethos, I think for some that would be slightly stronger than others. But you would hope to get a balance.*'
> [Principal/grant-maintained post-primary]

> '*I would just assume that if they have applied for the job then they know that the school is integrated. None of our questions are ever towards anything to do with integration. They are all job-related.*'
> [Principal/controlled integrated primary]

> '*Whenever we interview, the first and most essential criteria is complete commitment. We interviewed one candidate and asked them what they felt about integrated education. They said, 'I don't have any objection to that.' Needless to say, they didn't get the job.*' [Principal/grant-maintained primary]

While teaching staff stressed that they regarded integration as important, the majority were adamant that it was the job of teaching which was their priority. In this respect, those

who had also taught outside the integrated sector argued that in terms of the day to day running of schools, integrated schools were '*not that different.*' What might require some adjustment, however, could be not so much what was done as how it was done:

> '*They might find it more open and democratic. I think some of the teachers also find it difficult if they have been teaching in a Catholic school, they could stick to the set of rules where you can say, 'that is a sin,' the rules are easy. Whereas here it would be more difficult because they have to cater for a pupil differently and the child might even challenge you.*'
> [Teacher/grant-maintained primary]

The Vice-Principal of a grant-maintained primary agreed that regardless of commitment to the integrated ethos teaching in an integrated school was no soft option for teachers.

> '*I think if you were to take the wide view of it, more teachers would say, well, it's a job. There are a few teachers out there who are completely committed and are excellent within the integrated sector but generally they feel it is a job, first and foremost. I think the evidence is if they stay at it. It would be very easy for the Protestant teachers in this school to go into a controlled school but they haven't.*'

At least two interviewees believed that lack of communication among staff was unhelpful to the promotion of integration. It is likely that the size of school as well as the nature of the accommodation affects staff contact, especially informal contact:

> '*I sorely miss the concept of a central corridor where you walk down and look at everybody's work...I would love a front door and a corridor and a foyer where people could gather and chat. So it does affect us.*'

It does even affect the curriculum because the interaction which teachers have from just bumping into each other in the corridor and picking up ideas from others. Our teachers are very good and we wander into each other's rooms and sit on the desk and chat but there is still something missing. It is called circulation space and it happens in corridors and foyers and open areas.' [Principal/grant-maintained primary]

Even in the staff rooms of small primary schools communication and therefore the discussion of contentious issues could be difficult. One teacher claimed that this had been easier when the school had opened:

'In the past, we used to have an evening in somebody's house and we would just throw out pieces of the newspaper, or the bible, etc., and then we would talk about what that meant to us. It was hard at the beginning but it was a very good way of opening up and we are all from different backgrounds and we have all been brought up entrenched in one side or another and it was a great way of sharing that we all went through the same.' [Teacher/grant-maintained primary]

But in more recent times, there had been avoidance of *'difficult'* issues:

'Last year, when the Assembly was set up - I mean that is very controversial but also topical - I said, 'Well, what do you all think about the Education Minister?' There was a silence and then thankfully one of the teachers talked about it. I am from the Catholic tradition; she is from the Protestant tradition. So she gave her view and I chatted back and the other teachers kept their heads down. Like this is day-to-day life - if we can't talk about it, how can we go into our classroom and expect to marry the two diversities together in the classroom.'

It is possible to identify a number of different perspectives held by teachers on the question of becoming 'integrated' that must influence the process as a whole:

Integration as an 'add-on', e.g.,

'It's more like, you're just in the school, you teach your subject, you do your work and try to tuck in integration somewhere if possible.' [Teacher/grant-maintained post-primary]

Integration will happen as a matter of course, e.g.,

'We don't go out of our way.... for us, there wasn't a process of integration...we already had a mixed staff both teaching and non-teaching. We already were confident with each other about our integrated nature so really for us, I don't think there was any difference at all...any thinking person should be able to rationalise their ideas and accept/work within the system and be happy with it.' [Teacher/controlled integrated primary]

The staff should be a model of integration for the school community, e.g.,

'As a teacher, you have to start by demonstrating ways of behaving and inter-acting in your own practice with whomsoever you meet. Essentially at the core of it all, for me, is respect - respect for someone else's point of view, background, whatever...In demonstrating that as a teacher, you have already taken the first step.' [Teacher/grant-maintained primary]

What these suggest is that as far as integration is concerned, there is no base-line by which the *'level'* of integration attained can be judged. Commitment to integrated education as expressed at job interview is unreliable:

'Somebody can come in and give a very committed answer and not mean a word of it.' [Teacher/grant-maintained post-primary]

At the same time, most case study interviewees were positive towards integration. The differences lay in how individual staff members thought it should be attained and in what they thought the nature of their role in this should be.

Support staff

The environment, or atmosphere or ambience was stressed by many interviewees as playing a significant role in facilitating integration for all in the school. Ancillary or support staff are perhaps in a position uniquely suited to the observation of the workings of the *'hidden curriculum'* and they were therefore asked to *'describe the atmosphere'* in their school. Their perspective is especially interesting regarding the social hierarchy operating in the school as a workplace and also in their perception of how the ethos operated. Although there were differences of opinion, the majority emphasised the positive aspects of working in an integrated school:

'I enjoy it. Nice atmosphere, people get on. I worked previously in a business complex as a cleaner. It was a completely different atmosphere - the office people were standoffish. You were just "the cleaner." Here everyone is approachable, especially the Principal...Families in other schools do not seem to get as involved as here. It is "family-oriented" like a country school. I hear this from other parents and children.' [Caretaker and parent/grant-maintained primary]

'At the start of the year there was always a big meeting, everybody was invited, the whole staff, not just teaching staff, we never ever separated. So you were asked for your input, e.g., whenever there are surveys being done...you never get the feeling that you're put down just because you're

ancillary staff or a technician. I know from the last school I was in teachers were aloof. They were like "we're teachers and you're just underfoot." Here that idea isn't a part of work.' [Technician/grant-maintained post-primary]

'As a classroom assistant I feel very much included, we can go to the staff briefings, we go to meetings, we're very much consulted, particularly in the area of special needs...You feel really a part of the school.' [Classroom assistant/grant-maintained post-primary]

Communication between teaching and support staff was something that some support staff thought could be improved:

'There is a sense of equality - there's never been any great feeling that you're at the bottom of the heap or anything like that... but maybe communication doesn't necessarily get through. That's where it falls apart in a way...I don't think it's deliberate. I think it's just a matter of it's not happening and it's partly not happening because you are not necessarily involved in whatever particular meeting or it's not that you even want to. If you have the relevant information to your situation with that child/person, it helps. The structures are probably there for it but that aspect of it needs a bit more work.' [Classroom assistant/grant-maintained post-primary]

At post-primary level, a few support staff felt the approach to discipline was different from other, non-integrated, schools in which they had worked:

'I don't know if they are going about things the right way discipline wise... I don't know, maybe it's a thing that integrated schools have. They're a bit more wishy-washy and I know in one school that one of our teachers came from, she wasn't allowed to shout and

she was always reprimanded for shouting at the pupils and that was a rule they had in that school. It's definitely not a good thing.' [Technician/grant-maintained post-primary]

One interviewee whose children attended the same school was especially critical of the integrated education movement's commitment to treat everyone equally:

'They are very good at accepting each other as Protestants and Catholics but it is still quite difficult to accept minority groups and I think that is a very important issue which needs to be looked at and developed. We recognise that every child is unique - that doesn't just mean if they are a Catholic or a Protestant. You sometimes get the feeling that if you are doing this you are not accepted, you know if they are all going to the Catholic church for a service you are all integrated which to me is not right. I think that integration is being together, praying together, sharing what you believe but you don't necessarily have to participate in things you disagree with to prove that...that is not the reason why I send my children to an integrated school...We have Chinese children here and I don't see why they should have to go to other church services which are not part of their culture just to make them feel accepted.' [School secretary/grant-maintained primary]

Another support staff interviewee saw little difference from the maintained schools attended by her children:

'I don't see a lot of difference really. I don't think the fact that we are integrated really crops up a lot, if you know what I mean - the sort of things that are going on in the school are mixed anyway and what went on in my children's school goes on here too.' [Classroom assistant/controlled integrated]

Children

Most teaching staff considered that integration should be taking place on at least two levels - firstly, to bring together the two main religious communities in Northern Ireland. Secondly, having brought them into contact with each other, to educate them in a manner which would enable them to live together. The key element emphasised by all was the child-centred focus of this educational process whereby each child would be regarded as an individual worthy of respect regardless of ability, religion, social background or gender. A child who was respected would respect others and would hopefully become a *'fulfilled and caring adult.'* Almost all teaching staff defined integration in terms similar to above, defining community division but also going beyond the provision of contact to the facilitation of preparation for life in a pluralist society.

It was recognised that like all members of the school community, children also derive from a variety of backgrounds and that their attitudes will be correspondingly different when they become members of an integrated school community. Most teachers believed that parental commitment was vital and could make or break the efforts of the school but that should not prevent the school from making the effort to promote integration:

'I think it depends really on the parents, because I think the schools are here, the teachers are here and the way I see we all try to promote one thing and to work for the pupil but if you get the pupils in whose parents are not really so committed...you still need them as a major force in the background even if they don't care.' [Teacher/grant-maintained post-primary]

'I think the difficulty arises when children go back into their own community...That can be difficult but at least their parents have been open enough to send them here.

Some of them, I think, that's probably just because they live close to school but I would say there would be hard core elements that maybe wouldn't want to be part of it but they accept it and we can accept it in school.' [Teacher/grant-maintained post-primary]

Given all this, did interviewees think that children *'can or do become integrated'?* As with the staff, there is no benchmark against which children can be measured. Levels of integration would be highly subjective. When staff were asked during interviews if they had noticed differences/changes in behaviour of children over their time in school, they found this extremely hard to pinpoint:

'In the long run I would like to see a progression from Year 8 to Year 11 but that is going to take years and it's going to be very slow and I would say the biggest challenge is that it is frustrating. Because you don't know how well they're doing. It's not like any other policy where you go from A to B.' [Integrated Education Co-ordinator /grant-maintained post-primary]

Comments tended to be general and aspirational, but at the same time, realistic in terms of what was achievable, e.g.,

'Yes. Children come together from different traditions and have more respect for each other and understanding. It becomes a natural, right environment.' [Teacher/grant-maintained primary]

'Pupils, when they come to school, they are aware that they are coming to an integrated school, especially from mixed marriages - there are a lot of them. It is important not to see it as just Protestant and Catholic - there are other religions. Religion is just one aspect - forming friendships, working together, eating in the dining hall - these are also important.' [Teacher/grant-maintained primary]

'We are very well aware that children come from very diverse backgrounds and when they leave here they are not always going to hear the kind of things we want them to hear whether in their own home or in the street or in the playground. We do try to bring to their minds the ideals and to put them in context and at their level so that they can learn ways of coping with the issues that we think are important.' [Principal/grant-maintained primary]

'Pupils can certainly adapt and take on attitudes and values within the school but children are still going home to their homes in hard line areas and I would imagine that they slip very easily back into the Republican/Loyalist areas where they came from. But you would hope that something sticks on values. Certainly within the school you'd never hear religious argument or any sort of conflict at all - to me that is important, that is a success.' [Vice-Principal/grant-maintained primary]

'There should be no difficulty for the children unless the parents are not behind them. Children themselves are not bothered what people are, one way or the other but they have learned perceptions of what people should/shouldn't be. Very often the comments you might hear in the playground have come from someone else. Children themselves are very accepting of anybody and everybody and can integrate perfectly happily. It's possible where parents have strong, e.g., hard line views which children overhear, pick up...but I don't see why once they have been here and become used to it, they should begin to be able to realise.' [Principal/controlled integrated primary]

'Basically by the time they get to year 11/12 they have known their form class for about 3 years and they do know who's Protestant and who's Catholic, etc. I think it works

well...most of them would happily say what they are. Although in some circumstances, I do find students that are in a minority are probably the quiet students. And it's up to me to acknowledge that and to see where maybe they do feel embarrassed. It is a bit difficult for them.' [R.E. teacher/grant-maintained post-primary]

Relevant data from the informal interviews conducted with groups of pupils has also been drawn on for purposes of comparison with the kind of comments cited above. Pupils were drawn from Key Stages 1-4. From the interview data, it is possible to cite a significant number of perceptions which children shared and which are clearly identifiable as belonging to the ethos of integrated education. Most were found at both primary and post-primary levels, with the latter exhibiting, as one would expect, greater awareness and maturity in their handling of terminology and in their understanding of the implications of what they said. Analysis of perceptions is given below:

Small classes were appreciated because pupils believed they derived greater benefit from teachers being able to offer them more individual attention. Primary pupils at P7 stage expressed hope that their post-primary school would be like their present school - also small so that they would get to know people easily and *'not get lost.'*

There was definite awareness of the traditional religious divisions in Northern Ireland. Almost all pupils even at P2 stage said that integrated schools were about bringing Protestant and Catholic children together under the same roof. By P7 stage this extended to *'getting on with everyone / not fighting over religion and politics.'*

Friendship was regarded as highly important by all. Pupils valued the opportunity to make friends from a variety of backgrounds. P7 pupils said they hoped they would be able to make new friends at their new schools and that the older pupils would treat them with kindness. Teachers were praised for being *'friendly / caring / treating people equally.'*

Most pupils from P2/3 upwards showed some level of understanding of the concept of difference in relation to the integrated ethos. Integrated schools, they said, were for all children. When asked what this meant, although the terminology used varied, essentially the message was the same. Children were different but each one was '*special'* and was entitled to be treated with respect:

> *'Every child in this school is different. Because they are different people and not everybody has the same colour of hair. They are not all the same because some are boys and some are girls. Some people are smart and some people aren't. Some people are bullies and some people aren't.'* [P2/3 child]

> *'Children look different, sound different, talk different, walk different but we are all God's family.'* [P3 pupil]

> *'Since we were in the younger classes we've always known and been told that it doesn't matter what we are and that is why the school is what it is.'* [P7 pupil]

> *'The teachers don't separate us. They don't have favourites. They just treat us like we are all the same. Miss - usually talks about we're a special school because we are integrated.'* [P7 pupil]

There were frequent references to the '*atmosphere'* when older primary and post-primary pupils explained why they liked their school. They found it hard to describe but insisted that it did exist:

> *'I would say the best thing about school is the friendly atmosphere.'* [P7 pupil]

'The atmosphere. It's a new school. It's sort of personal.' [Year 11 pupil]

'I think it's mainly just the whole school that shows it (integration).' [Year 10 pupil]

Most of the pupils interviewed thought their school was different from non-integrated schools. At post-primary level, this was for more sophisticated reasons, e.g., school policy on wearing/display of symbols/badges, ability range, tolerance of opinions as well as the more obvious one of religious segregation. One group of post-primary pupils commented that some pupils came for the '*wrong reasons,*' i.e., nothing to do with integration and that this could be a problem:

'It takes quite a wee while for people to be integrated. There's a few people that were like that but they're not here any longer because they got into fights and things over a period of time...some only come here because they failed their 11+ or it's closer to home.'

A group of P7 pupils agreed that although it was possible to learn about different religions in other schools, *'we would not understand it as much.'*

Many pupils at all levels felt disadvantaged because the accommodation in which their school was housed was poor in comparison to other local schools and that this often meant they were made to feel second-best. This reflected what pupils had also said in the questionnaire. A Year 11 pupil described how she had felt as one of the first intake:

'It was really, really humiliating because when you went to all the other schools and they were all really big buildings and everything and here's us with our two little cabins. In August, I went down to see it - the whole thing was a pile of stones. It was

like in late August and it was a field. It was a bit worrying.'

A P7 pupil whose school had been entirely located in mobiles for all of his time there commented:

'My cousin goes to St - and I think our school is really different because we are the only ones that have mobiles where theirs is plain buildings and if it is raining they don't get wet going from one class to another.'

A number of pupils took pride in the fact that children from different backgrounds, abilities, etc., were able to *'get on with each other.'* Adults were sometimes viewed as poor role models by P7 children:

'I don't see why people can't get along the way people in our school get along.'

'We are different religions but we get on. They are adults and totally different to us. We are mature.'

There were a large number of the same fairly altruistic words/phrases which were used by pupils, e.g., '*kind*', '*caring*', '*friendly*', '*different*', '*special*', '*fun*' and *'equal.'*

Older pupils, mainly at post-primary level, talked in terms of respect.

'Respect. We hear that often, nearly every day. Respect teachers, respect others, respect property.'

Integration in practice
An important part of the design of the case study interviews was to gain further insight into how individual schools tried to implement integration in everyday school life. The preceding analysis has suggested what the ethos appeared to mean to staff and pupils. Information from the case study interviews

was also analysed to help build a picture of *'integration in practice.'* Two closely related relevant themes were also incorporated into the interviews because it was considered that the handling of these would help bring the picture into sharp focus. These were *'socially divisive issues'* and *'rituals and symbols.'*

How schools dealt with these two themes was examined under the headings of:

• Relevant policy/rules;

• Training/support for staff;

• The influence/impact of parental opinion; and

• The perspective of pupils.

Policy/rules
Only the post-primary schools in the case studies appeared to have anything approaching a formal structured way of dealing with controversial issues/symbols. This reflected what many staff said in questionnaires. The situation in the primary schools appeared vague, with Principals often saying either that this was *'not an issue'* or that it rarely was an issue for their school. Their approach seemed essentially informal and reactive, relying on the *'commonsense'* of individual staff members to cope if a problem arose. One senior teacher replied: *'Is there a policy? You'll never get a policy until something happens.'*

At the same time, it was clear that in the early years of some schools, there had been incidents relating to the display of symbols that had caused considerable controversy, among both staff and parents. One school had faced the threat of closure over the withdrawal of children by parents *'who did not realise what it [symbols] was.'* The Principal firmly believed that it had been a cathartic experience for the school:

'Catholics outside were able to see that we were not hiding Catholics under the table, that they had a clear identity in our school and that in fact by displaying this symbol we were probably doing things that Catholic schools were not doing.'
[Principal/grant-maintained primary]

One of the post-primary schools had undergone a similar traumatic experience, also in its early years, when different groups of parents had objected to pupils wearing Remembrance Day poppy badges in November and/or black ribbons to commemorate Bloody Sunday in January. It was clear that the school had tried to use this experience to put in place procedures designed to assist in dealing with such highly sensitive matters in future. The evidence does suggest that many schools maintained an unwritten policy whereby no symbols with the exception of the school badge were put on display on walls, etc. or worn by pupils. Most often mentioned in connection with the latter were football shirts, which in the Northern Ireland context are often identified with political as well as sporting allegiances. Teaching staff from a transforming primary school emphasised that a ban had to be instituted only after a visit to an EMU partner school whose pupils greeted their visitors wearing the other team's football shirts.

However, what were termed *'symbols of worship'* could be used for the purpose of weekly assemblies/lessons. One primary Principal explained the rationale:

'We set up a religious programme and we had a lot of meetings about it. We had decided beforehand that we wouldn't have any symbols in the school unless they were part of a lesson. The group at the beginning felt it was better not to have them at all because they could be divisive, they could upset people and that has worked well

because it has meant that it has never been an issue. We don't have any joint symbols because we are not trying to make a new group - we are trying to bring the two communities together. I think the school crest does this.' [Principal/grant-maintained primary]

Not everyone was happy with this kind of solution to problems of symbols, preferring a more pragmatic approach. One post-primary teacher said:

'I think we ended up deciding to ban the whole thing really because it was becoming too contentious. Some people thought that wasn't the way forward for integration. It was such a dicey one, it was very difficult and maybe it was the best decision at the time. Other issues are dealt with better, for example, relationships between different types of staff be it teachers, caretakers, etc. and that's quite good ... teachers work along with them and their ideas are brought to us.'

Training and support for staff

There was little evidence of formal training for staff in dealing with potentially divisive issues. As mentioned in the responses to questionnaires, there was much reliance by staff on the informal network of support provided by colleagues, even in the post-primaries where staff could call on a formal *'chain of command,'* e.g., the Year Head. Co-ordinators at the time of the survey seemed for the most part in the beginning stages of deciding how best to go about the business of supporting staff. Some were further down this path than others, e.g., one had established a working party and had conducted an in-house survey of staff and pupils on integration. Some teachers felt that the main 'sticking point' lay with the staff themselves, because they were reluctant to confront issues that had the potential to divide them as staff. One teacher said that this was a *'sad fact.'* Courses

facilitated by experts from outside schools were therefore welcomed and a number of schools already make use of these. The mediation training programmes directed by Jerry Tyrrell of the University of Ulster and his colleagues were thought to have been particularly useful. In general, teachers felt greater follow-up was needed from in-house to one-day courses. Recognising both the need and the problems of facilitating this, one post-primary Principal stated:

'We did look at a number of things on a residential but really even though we were two days away cooped up together the amount of time that is necessary to actually do anything other than scratch the surface is enormous. Also to bring people to a point where they want more than the surface to be scratched and want to be challenged or made to think about a particular issue...yes, we probably do need to try and be more pro-active on that. Quite how you start that, or where you fit that into the day, when people are so busy anyway it is difficult. It is a sensitive issue that needs treated with a lot of care.' [Principal/grant-maintained post-primary]

The influence of parents

As suggested above, parents have been able to bring considerable influence to bear on integrated schools in their handling of controversial matters. Given the high parental representation on governing boards together with the strong emphasis on parental involvement, this is perhaps not surprising. Parents have themselves at times been the source of controversy to the extent that in at least one situation, a change of policy on the wearing of badges had to be made, despite strong misgivings on the part of some staff. In a few instances, parent groupings or individual parents, as one Principal said, *'with their own wee agenda,'* appeared to have initiated or *'ratcheted'* up tensions. Generally, parental input was welcomed, valued, respected, but

also accepted with staff always attempting to respond in a non-confrontational manner:

> 'Staff do not make a big deal out of, for example, a child turning up wearing a football shirt. They would say, 'You're in the wrong jersey today.' [Principal/grant-maintained primary]

At the same time, teaching staff were quite realistic about what many parents really thought about the fact that their child's school was integrated, concluding that a good education and the happiness of their children were most parents' primary concerns, with integration being viewed as separate or perhaps even serendipitous:

> 'Maybe specific parts of the community think integrated schools can deal with controversial issues… The parents here - there would be very few of them would think they would be the best ones to go down the Garvaghy Road and sort that out. I think their impression of integrated education and what they want to know is that their child is going to want to come to this school in the mornings and is going to meet them with a smile and a cuddle when they come home and that they are mixing with other religions. The aim that they are mixing with other religions - they're not necessarily interested in going into any deeper water. To them, that is grand that their child is confident, is well educated, is happy, and has an ability to tolerate other traditions.' [Senior teacher/grant-maintained primary]

> 'There are a number of parents who would ask that their children don't actively participate in assembly or in RE lessons but again that would be quite a small number. There have been kids who have been involved in a flute band or the like but it doesn't really bring any great tension into the school. We don't make a big issue of it,

> I suppose, and parents are more concerned about work and about lunches and about the buses and about the academic progress of their kids. For a lot of parents, the integration thing is nice but it's about getting the other bits right first.' [Principal/grant-maintained post-primary]

Pupils' perspectives

The post-primary pupils who were interviewed showed good understanding of the need for sensitivity over contentious issues, wearing of symbols, etc. They acknowledged that badges for charities or their schoolhouse were '*OK*' because '*they do not offend anyone,*' and explained:

> '*Ribbons, yes, if they are for cancer or breast cancer or maybe a charity sort of thing but it is not OK to wear anything that's related to a cause. We're not allowed to wear stuff like Rangers' badges. You're not really supposed to make a political statement.*'

Older boys talked of how when they were younger they had maintained a practice of wearing football shirts below their school shirt but had now given this up:

> '*The first and second year, there was like people, boys wore Rangers tops on underneath their shirts and stuff. There were a few like slogans and stuff and it was probably made an issue in assemblies but I think once you get more mature you just kind of think, what's the point?*'

Their comments also confirmed their teachers' attempts to manage contentious issues in a '*low-key*' manner:

> '*Maybe a teacher would say something in PE if they're wearing strips or anything. You're not allowed any of that. If you didn't have anything else, they would let you wear it. They would prefer you not to wear it.*'

They also appeared to value the fact that they could talk openly about issues, though insisted *'it was no big deal,'* and that sometimes as far as Northern Ireland politics were concerned, *'People just want to get away from it all.'*

It has already been acknowledged that each school involved in the case studies largely followed its own path as far as implementing integration was concerned. School staff identified what they considered to illustrate integration in practice. Pupils answered questions designed to probe for examples of the same. From an overall examination of this material, the following have been highlighted to show examples of shared points of view:

Teaching style - This was defined as open and child-centred. Subjects like English, History, R.E. and P.S.E. were regarded as especially suited to the discussion and explanation of controversial issues. Teachers of other subjects found the latter more difficult.

Curriculum subjects - Where the curriculum permitted, schools tried to offer subjects reflecting the main traditions and cultures here, e.g., in history, music, literature and sport.

Discipline - There was a strong emphasis on encouraging pupils to take responsibility for their actions from primary level on, with situations being viewed in the context of school and community.

Symbols/rituals - The majority of schools prohibited wearing or display of symbols considered to be potentially divisive. These could however be used as an aid to instruction. Schools frequently held two different types of assemblies - one reflected the declared Christian ethos and one was usually a celebration of achievement. These were viewed as opportunities for the whole school to meet together as a community and also with representatives from the local community.

Staff - Interviewees included Principals, teaching and support staff. The support staff expressed a strong sense, not only of sharing in the life of the school, but of being valued for their contribution to it. Some teachers expressed anxiety that integration was being *'pushed into a corner'* due to pressure of work. Informal discussion, reliance on informal networks of support or mentors, residentials, and staff handbooks were also mentioned in connection with integration in practice. Teaching staff with special responsibility for integration had been appointed in most instances but post-primary co-ordinators showed more evidence of a structured approach.

Parents - While recognising the input of parents, schools had at times found difficulty in balancing their interpretation of the ethos with that adopted by a small number of parents. On a few occasions, teachers own commitment to the *'partnership'* aspects of the ethos had therefore been severely stretched. Most parents, it was felt, were supportive of staff and did not fit this profile.

Pupils - Most pupils interviewed showed some degree of awareness of the meaning of the word *'integration.'* This varied from the basic level of trying to bring the two main communities together to more sophisticated perceptions involving the school as a working model for the community. Children demonstrated that they had been made aware of responsibilities for their actions and behaviour and set much store on making and maintaining friendships across difference. At the same time, older pupils were remarkably phlegmatic about being *'integrated'* pupils, with telling insistence on the whole process as being natural. This finding in itself must raise important questions about the degree to which integration in practice can be formalised.

Some conclusions

No single model of integration emerged from the case studies. While the underlying principles remained the same, there was more than one *modus operandi*. In terms of school policy, it seemed to depend on a number of factors that can include the following:

- Attitude of the Principal;
- Attitude of key personnel especially senior staff and/or staff given special responsibility for integration, e.g., co-ordinators;
- Type of integrated school, i.e. new or transforming;
- Primary or post-primary level;
- Location and demographic balance between the main traditions; and
- Influence of parents - founder parents and more recently involved.

As regards the actual implementation of integration, it was possible to identify three ways in which schools approached the concept of integration:

- Passive - do almost nothing because it will happen *'naturally'* anyway;
- Reactive - do something if the need arises; and
- Pro-active - after consultation with staff, etc., agree policy, establish appropriate structures, e.g., appoint Integrated Education co-ordinator.

How people understood integration was crucial to how they went about implementing it. In both questionnaires and case study interviews, repeating the same terminology to explain the integrated ethos was easier for staff than finding the vocabulary to define what it might mean in practice. The ethos was interpreted differently in practice by different people. Deciding what to do and how to do it was therefore far from simple. There was strong evidence to suggest that in some schools an orderly environment was maintained by the avoidance of controversial issues, not surprising perhaps when some staff complained of being too swamped in paperwork or problems with parent *'cliques'* to focus clearly on integration in practice.

Another word that cropped up many times in teacher interviews and questionnaires was *'balance.'* This was not only about maintaining or trying to maintain a religious balance in pupil numbers, though ultimately it could, of course, affect it. It concerned a kind of balancing act which schools felt compelled to manage in order to convince parents and the community that the school's promise to treat all pupils equally was indeed being fulfilled. The pursuit of equity, however, could prove time-consuming and very frustrating. This comment from a senior primary teacher illustrates this but also raises the questions, in their anxiety to be inclusive what in effect are schools trying to balance, and with what result?

> *'I think what needs to be stressed is the balancing act that we need to perform, like every decision, no matter how small, you have to think I wonder will that affect group A or how would group B take that on board. Like this father came up to me and said why do you not start a Gaelic Club and I know he is doing that because we have a very successful Soccer Club and I know he is trying to get the balance. It gets a bit tedious - where do you stop? We had a sort of inter-active bible day and it was called an Amazing Journey and it was a journey from Genesis right through to Revelations and it was brilliant, I mean brilliant. A couple of parents complained that it was a Protestant point of view. I don't know what bible it came from but the same course was used at St - 's primary school for two days*

... Sometimes I wish the parents would become a wee bit more integrated.'

At the same time, it was clear that overall there was a general willingness, in some cases, anxiety, to come to terms with the implementation of integration in practice. In a number of instances this seems to have been spurred on by the realisation that there was a need to *'return to basics,'* i.e. to re-visit the fundamental tenets of the integrated movement. A working party established by NICIE has published a guide to integration aimed at teachers new to the integrated sector, which would also appear to reflect this need. A number of teaching staff said that contrary to what some of the public thought, integrated school teachers did face up to the issues more because they had to deal with difference actually there before them in the classroom.

The basic difficulty for some teachers, including Principals, seemed to be how to incorporate integration into their concept of what an integrated school should be. In a number of cases, it appeared easier to keep it separate, almost as an *'add-on.'* This explains comments like being too busy with '*normal*' concerns to attend to this or '*it's hard to think of this when you are teaching maths*,' or even in a very few instances, a degree of panic when an incident occurs for which people either were not prepared or did not have access to support structures. More staff, however, clearly did view the promotion of integration as an integral part of school life - something that could not and should not be dealt with as a separate entity. Integration co-ordinators were only too aware of the problems of trying to *'integrate'* the *'integrators:'*

'At the moment, we need to talk to staff and re-evaluate where they are. We have to start thinking about their commitment to integrated education and how they can progress from this point on. I am beginning to think we are not integrating as people. We are not integrating as staff and we are not actively integrating our pupils and that's what we are here for. What are we trying to achieve?

THE PAST PUPIL STUDY

The past pupil study was the first attempt to trace the early school leavers from integrated schools. In May 1999, the two longest established integrated post-primary schools in Northern Ireland were approached and permission was given by the Principals for a database of past pupils to be set up in each of the schools. Names and addresses were taken from school roll books and files and a list of 915 past pupils was eventually compiled. The findings from the study are described in this final section.

Introduction

Research attempting to examine the potential impact of integrated education faces considerable methodological, logistical and ethical difficulties, with the result that work to date has been fragmented and *'elusive'* (Abbott et. al., 1998). The first major study (Irwin, 1991) found an increase in the number and duration of inter-community friendships amongst current pupils and those who had recently completed their education. In a study of integrated and desegregated schools McClenahan (1995) suggested that cross community relationships were increased by inter-group contact. She found no evidence of any change to national or socio-political identity as a result of co-education. Stringer, et. al. (2000) proposed that children in mixed schools adopt a more integrative position on key social issues in a divided society. It has also been suggested (Wicklow, 1997) that discussion of sensitive issues, in addition to the hidden and informal curricula, may be an important way of promoting mixing in integrated schools.

This study aimed to begin to address the significant gap in the research regarding the long term impact of integrated education by providing insight into the impact of integrated education on two populations of past pupils. Specifically it sought to investigate the impact:

• On respect for diversity;

• On subjective personal and social identity;

• On life choices; and

• On opinions on the future of Northern Ireland.

With regard to the second objective above, theoretical perspectives on social identity and social categorisation that have previously been applied to aid understanding of conflict in Northern Ireland can be considered in respect to the findings. These include Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978) which suggests that aspects of self are derived from the social group that you perceive you belong to and Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner, 1991) which emphasises the importance of group over personal identity and the emotional investment people in Northern Ireland can make in their social identity. This is in contrast with Giddens' (1992) view of personal identity as a key feature of modern society. Weinreich (1989) has suggested that exposure to different individuals can establish a new context for self-definition thus suggesting that aspects of identity are both fluid and changeable. If the latter holds true it raises questions for integrated schools that subscribe to a statement of principles that include a commitment to nurture the identity of parents (Internet Source 1).

Methodology

Past pupils from the two longest established post-primary schools were traced in order to explore the impact of integrated post-primary education. Of the post-primary integrated schools, only two were deemed to have been in existence long enough to have a valid number of past pupils.

Ideally former integrated pupils would have been compared with students who attended non-integrated post-primary schools. However, due to time constraints this was not possible. The tracking down of past pupils was a particularly time-consuming activity as the addresses in school records were often out of date. This study does not seek to draw comparisons between the integrated schools and other types of schools (controlled and/or maintained). Rather it aims to provide insights into two populations of pupils, their school environment and the legacy of their integrated school experiences.

Some effort to contextualize the findings was made by referring to the Northern Ireland Social Attitude Survey (Robinson, 1998) to provide comparisons with the views of the population of Northern Ireland as a whole. Please note that the latter survey took a broader cross-section by age of the community and was an earlier study.

Two methods were planned – a questionnaire sent out to past pupils and semi-structured focus group interviews. It was anticipated that issues arising from the survey returns would inform the interview schedule for the focus groups. Meetings were arranged with the current Principals of both sample schools and permission given by the Boards of Governors to proceed with the research. It was intended to sample the first five hundred students at each school but this proved challenging as no computer records were available at either school. Eventually databases of 500 and 415 names respectively were set up, exhausting all available names. Arrangements for confidentiality were negotiated with the schools. They then held the only databases of past pupils.

A survey was compiled to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Four sections asked questions relating to:

- Data collection regarding personal background and school leaving qualifications;
- Experiences at integrated post-primary;
- Impact of integrated education on friendship patterns and life choices, formative influences on social and cultural affairs; and
- Opinions on current Northern Ireland issues.

A number of questions were included to allow direct comparison with the 1998 Northern Ireland Social Attitude Survey (Robinson, 1998). The survey was then piloted with a group of sixth form students at School A.

The second strategy for collecting data on the impact of integrated education was the use of focus group interviews to supplement survey data. The reasoning behind the use of focus groups in this study was three-fold. Firstly, to add richness and depth to the survey data, secondly, to test propositions emerging from the questionnaire analysis and, thirdly, to encourage validity by the mutual negotiation of responses by participants. The sessions were recorded in writing by three non-participating members of the research team and detailed notes were subsequently drawn up.

Results
The results of surveys and focus group interviews with a total of 159 past pupils are presented here. Analysis of the data identified a series of emergent themes and discussion of the data will be around these themes, drawing on the evidence as appropriate. The four core themes are the impact on the respect for diversity/promotion of security in a plural environment; the impact on perceptions of identity; the impact on life choices and friendships; and hopes for the future of Northern Ireland.

The number of surveys returned was disappointing, with a total of 112 out of 915. However this may not accurately reflect on the willingness of past pupils to participate. It must be remembered that with no past pupil database available at either school, the study had to rely on names and addresses that stretched back nearly twenty years. A limited number of telephone numbers were in the school records, but in a small sample tested only 2 in 20 were found to be current.

The past pupils constituted a survey group balanced both by gender and religious background (Table 3). Although there were marginally more Catholics than Protestants, there were a significant number of Others (25 percent) who could have had either a Catholic or a Protestant background, or neither. According to recent census figures the number of people with *'no religion'* or choosing not to state a religion, rose from 10% in 1991 to nearly 14% (17% in Belfast) in 2001 (Internet source 2). Thus there were considerably more Others in the sample than in the population as a whole.

Table 3: The Past Pupil Sample			
Number of pupils	School A	School B	Total
Male	27	30	57
Female	28	27	55
Protestant	21	14	35
Catholic	19	30	49
Other	15	13	28
Total	55	57	112

As can be seen in Table 4, the focus group sample encompassed the full range of potential past pupil ages and also a good overall Catholic/Protestant balance. More pupils from School B than School A participated in the focus groups for several reasons. Firstly, School B appeared to be in more regular contact with its past pupils and secondly, more of its pupils appeared to still be in the locality. It is also noteworthy that there was not a balance of Catholics, Protestants and Others in each focus group. This was due in part to difficulty in convening the focus groups, which resulted in some being held on different days and also that the groups were arranged to reflect chronological pupil cohorts rather than religious balance.

Table 4: Composition of Focus Groups				
	Catholic	Protestant	Other	Total
School A				
Group 1	1	3	0	4
Group 2	0	4	0	4
Group 3	4	1	0	5
School B				
Group 1	2	5	3	10
Group 2	6	2	1	9
Group 3	0	0	18	18
Total	13	15	22	50

Note: the third group at School B was recorded as Other due to their late arrival, which made it hard to ascertain their denomination, as this was determined at the start of the other focus groups.

Initial plans to invite survey respondents to the focus groups met with a limited response at School A, so new past pupils were brought into the research by networking with other past pupils. Only three former students took part in both the survey and the focus groups.

Analysis of the survey data indicated that of the former students sampled:

- 93% reported that integrated education had either a major impact on their lives (45%) or some impact (48%);

- 55% said school very significantly helped them to mix with the *'other side.'* (Of the total sample, 21% had no prior contact and 59% only limited prior contact);

- There was an increase from 41% to 67% of mixed friendships after attending integrated school;

- Of those with a partner, 58% had one from a different background to themselves;

- 80% experienced opportunities to discuss religion and politics at school;

- 96% felt they had an increased respect for diversity and increased comfort in a plural environment; and

- The best way to increase tolerance in Northern Ireland was, in order of priority – integrated schooling, decommissioning of arms, integrated workplaces and housing.

Respect for Diversity/ Comfort in a Plural Environment

The surveys had indicated that the majority of respondents felt that attending an integrated school had made a significant impact on their lives, with more than half stating it had significantly helped in *'mixing with the other side.'* Exploration of this in the focus groups indicated there may be a distinction between past pupils who had mixed friends prior to going to integrated school and those who had not. The latter group appeared to be influenced more strongly by their experiences of mixing at school:

> *'...after integrated school it's much easier to mix with and make friends with people.'*

The former group, those who previously had mixed friends, were relatively unmoved by this aspect of integrated school:

> *'...(I) wasn't affected by integration. All (my) friends are mixed.'*

Responses to the surveys had indicated that both the planned, formal curriculum and informal day-to-day encounters had promoted effective integration. This was borne out by focus group discussions which revealed that pupils learned about integration throughout the school:

> *'...(There was) an air. We were supposed to be together and talk about it.'*

> *'No set class on integration (took place). It was simply school.'*

A number of participants pointed out that this integration appeared to be a subtle, low-key process. One past pupil elaborated:

> *'School A has no ideology, no hard believers. It prefers to sit on the fence. Integration was left up to ourselves.'*

Assemblies were generally seen as an important focus for integration, providing opportunities for different versions of prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer, with (Protestant version) or without the Doxology (Catholic version).

Other past pupils quoted the influence of particular classroom experiences. Many valued the freedom to discuss traumatic events or to express their opinions in the integrated classroom:

'I remember the two soldiers killed outside Casement Park, Andersonstown. It was discussed in form class in case anyone was upset.'

Genuine difference of opinion appeared to be expressed openly. The role and skills of teachers in facilitating this in class was reflected in comments such as:

'I think teachers here acted as mediators when the issues and debates got heated.'

Informal encounters were also considered by the past pupils as important opportunities for learning about integration:

'...from pupils. (I) don't remember talking about politics, but (I) understood why others thought differently.'

Integrated education appeared to offer some an alternative to the perpetuation of traditional divisions:

'It's not politics. Your attitude and religion are beat into you from an early age. You either get involved or not. Coming here changed me.'

Sectarian or stereotypical views appeared to be challenged in the integrated environment:

'Oh, he's a Protestant/Roman Catholic and doesn't have horns – (that) helped.'

The lessons learned appear to have persisted as the focus group sample seem to find it easy to discuss controversial issues in their current lives:

'(You) can see two sides to the argument.'

'It is definitely easier for us (to discuss religion and politics).'

A small minority expressed a realistic concern that despite benefits to the majority:

'Some people may have left with bigoted views.'

This indicates that awareness of the Catholic/Protestant division in school had perhaps been an issue for some. Translating the tolerant and empathetic viewpoint learned at integrated school into action in their lives after school was not always straightforward:

'People at work weren't as open-minded as me – their views were really entrenched.'

Perceptions of Identity - Social Identity
Social identity is treated here as distinct from religious identity, that is, reflecting association with a social category rather than actual religious belief. Sixty three percent of the survey respondents reported no change in their social identity, but considered themselves to have become a more tolerant Catholic or Protestant as a result of attending an integrated school. Some of these thought that their identity was now more moderate. Thirty three percent of the survey respondents thought their identity had changed and for the better, as they now had more respect for others.

Considering the importance of social categorisation in Northern Ireland, the focus group participants were asked how they classified themselves – as Catholic, Protestant or Other. Reasons given for self-categorisation as Other included:

• A resistance to being classified (quoted by majority of Others);

• Attendance at integrated school;

• Mixed (Catholic/Protestant) parents; and

• Did not feel either Catholic or Protestant.

One past pupil was particularly emphatic:

> 'I would like to see a box "None of your
> damn business!"'

Did attending an integrated school make people feel less or more Catholic or Protestant? There was a variety of response to this question, once again reflecting the individual's experience of integrated school and of the whole process of socialization. Some responded that they were more Catholic or Protestant:

> '(I am) more a Protestant – able to stand up
> to people.'

Others indicated that they were less Catholic or Protestant as a result of attending an integrated school:

> 'I am less Roman Catholic than previously.
> Integrated education makes you less likely
> to classify people. Unless the opportunity to
> think rationally had been presented I would
> not have been able to classify myself
> accurately.'

Some past pupils felt they were unchanged in this respect, although sometimes other people assumed they had been changed by going to an integrated school:

> 'I think some people think I'm less Catholic
> because I went to an integrated school but
> I'm not – I'm the same as them...'

A number suggested that rather than affirm or disaffirm Catholic or Protestant identity, integrated education may allow you to explore your own identity and sense of self:

> 'School A is not set up to make you less
> Catholic or Protestant but to be yourself.'

Others talked of possessing a new more tolerant identity that:

> '...makes you listen to other points of view.'

> '...makes you open your eyes.'

Perceptions of Identity - Religious Identity

To further distinguish between social and other aspects of identity, the focus groups were asked whether attending an integrated school had affected the formation of their religious beliefs, political opinion or cultural viewpoint.

Little was contributed to the discussion on the subject of religious belief. It did not appear to be a topic of either relevance or interest to the majority. Some seemed to have had no specific beliefs before going to integrated school and remained unchanged by the integrated experience. It was suggested by some participants that other socializing factors may be a greater influence on religious identity than integrated school:

> 'Mixed marriage is more influential on
> people's religious identity.'

Perceptions of Identity - Political Identity

Opinions were divided between a majority who were completely *'turned off'* from politics and a minority who felt that integrated school had influenced their political opinions.

The following are typical of the past pupils with little time for politics:

> 'Politics is something that adults do and
> doesn't concern us at all (agreement from
> whole focus group).'

> 'I'm sick of the whole thing.'

However, some disagreed and expressed the view that integrated education had contributed to the development of their political views:

> '(Integrated education) opened my eyes to
> politics in Ireland.'

'School made me more open-minded - being in an integrated school allowed me the space to formulate my own views and opinions.'

Others pointed to significant formative factors outside school that had helped to shape their political viewpoint:

'(If you) watch TV you'll be influenced on politics.'

Perceptions of Identity - Cultural Identity

One past pupil felt that although in her opinion integrated education had no cultural impact, it was correct for communities to maintain their cultural differences. The participants voiced a selection of their interpretations of the term culture:

'I think there is a Catholic or Protestant culture, but no youth culture.'

'We think our culture is about getting drunk with friends!'

Other cultural influences and aspirations were also given:

'US / pop culture was more influential.'

'We need a new shared culture if you ask me.'

It was acknowledged that defining the term *'culture'* was problematic:

'Culture is a very difficult word to define. It could mean anything from films to groups in society.'

Memories of cultural experiences in their integrated schools were limited:

'We had peace assemblies – mostly religious music.'

'Only in history was culture discussed.'

Perceptions of Identity - Integrated Identity

A further aspect of identity investigated in the focus groups was whether integrated education encouraged the development of other forms of identity. The majority of the past pupils felt that they had taken on an *'integrated'* identity as a result of their school experiences. This was in addition to their social identity (Catholic, Protestant or Other) and they defined it mainly in terms of shared values:

'Integrated means to be broadminded and understanding.'

'More tolerant people, better listeners.'

'Integrated schools churn out people with a particular identity. Better informed, more rounded, probably more positive.'

'(I am) proud of (my) integrated identity.'

Some past pupils expressed the desire to see a wider choice of identities in Northern Ireland, including an *'integrated'* one. They seemed to find the prevalent Catholic or Protestant choice too restrictive:

'I wish there was another (identity).'

It would appear that if new aspects such as *'integrated'* identity emerge, wider society may not always be receptive. One particular past student explained:

'I'm in university now. It's difficult to communicate with others on political issues as they have closed minds. I used to make the effort and challenge them but I think they got sick of me because I was too "integrated" if you like.'

Life Choices and Friendships

The survey had suggested that although integrated education had an impact on its past pupils, the process of getting older and the impact of families were more formative influences. Impact on life choices appeared to be a very individual experience. For one particular pupil who is now:

> '...Studying community youth work...integrated education has changed my way totally – opened my mind.'

Another felt it had given her the impetus to do things, but above all, to be herself:

> 'It gave me the confidence to let other people accept me the way I am.'

Others also indicated a change in their way of thinking, but did not rate the impact so highly:

> 'Not a big impact. More a contribution.'

Survey analysis had revealed a significant increase from 41% to 67% in the number of past pupils for whom the majority of friendships are mixed after attending an integrated school. This was despite the difficulties of segregated environments outside of school. One participant thought that integrated school did not affect his choice of friends, but it did provide him with plenty of opportunities for mixing that he would not have experienced in a segregated school:

> 'We met in first year...we're drinking buddies and we're 23 now.'

Here a Protestant young man talks about the process of making friends after leaving school:

> '(Integrated school) makes it a lot easier. I would say roughly half my friends are Catholic.'

The survey had suggested that the pupils sampled had achieved well at GCSE examination compared to the post-primary population as a whole. The majority had gone on to further education after integrated school and had then entered a wide range of careers. For some, school had no impact on their choice of career. One individual talked of a specific career choice that stemmed from her integrated school experiences:

> 'Well, I'm studying community youth work in Jordanstown and I intend to work with both sides of the community.'

Another participant felt that integrated school had been influential as he now worked in a cross-community group directly related to School B. Others suggested that the impact of integrated education was more pronounced on their attitudes and social skills than on their career choices:

> '(Integrated education has) made me secure working with others of different religions.'

> 'I feel School A helped me to speak to others – especially in my work where I have been the only Roman Catholic in mainly Protestant surroundings.'

Fifty eight percent of the survey respondents, who had a partner, had one from a different religious or cultural background to themselves. The focus groups discussed whether integrated education had influenced their choice of partner. The majority indicated that integrated education had given them an opportunity to meet with the 'other side' and also a desire to be integrated:

> 'It gives you the chance to meet people from the other backgrounds.'

Some mixed relationships had led to marriage. The focus group members appeared to value

the freedom to choose partners from different backgrounds:

> 'I am free to choose my partner. My friends live within one area and don't mix with others. (It would be) totally different if they had mixed.'

Hopes for the Future of Northern Ireland
In July 1999, respondents to the survey were cautious about the potential of a Northern Ireland Assembly. Forty one percent had been optimistic and 33% pessimistic at a time when there were frantic attempts to implement the Good Friday Agreement to allow devolution to take place. By the time the focus groups were convened in March/April 2000, the Assembly had been in place for only a short while before being suspended. Unsurprisingly, the focus group sample was consequently more pessimistic about the chances of success for an Assembly. Many were also deeply cynical about the Assembly members:

> 'I have no faith in politicians...I think ordinary people are wising up to them.'

It was clear that few felt that the politicians represented them. Many past pupils felt that much had been sacrificed for the Assembly. After seeing the out-workings of the Good Friday Agreement their views on whether the sacrifices had been worthwhile varied:

> 'I voted 'yes' in the referendum. I would like to see it work. We have given up too much.'

> 'It's too one-sided. I voted "no" in the referendum. I knew what would happen.'

There was a strong sense of frustration that even though agreement had been reached and local democracy glimpsed, it had all been snatched away:

> 'I'm really disappointed because everyone was represented in the Assembly and then it failed...so typical of Northern Ireland.'

A minority of the focus group sample remained cautiously optimistic about the Assembly. They suggested that people focused on what had been already achieved:

> 'It's an achievement where we are today. People have more moderate thinking but it could still go back to violence.'

> 'An interesting time during self-rule - debates were held on real issues.'

The Future of Integrated Education
The survey sample had been strongly in favour of an expansion of integrated education. The focus group sample agreed wholeheartedly with this, requesting 'more' integrated schools and exhorting the government to 'keep them going.' Some went as far as to suggest that all schools should be integrated. Others were more pragmatic, demonstrating the difficulties involved in bringing about educational change:

> 'It will be difficult to change the old boys' network (grammar system).'

> 'You can't force people.'

Participants suggested that integrated schools could improve by:

> 'More emphasis on global (issues), rather than Ireland.'

> 'Need to face and address contested issues.'

Summary of the Findings of the Past Pupil Study

Respect for diversity and feeling secure in plural environments:

- The majority (93%) of the survey respondents felt that integrated education had made a significant impact on their lives;

- The main impact on past pupils appears to be in generating a respect for diversity and a feeling of security in a plural environments (96%);

- Fifty five percent of those surveyed felt that integrated school had helped them *'very significantly'* to mix with the *'other side.'* Of the total sample, 21% had no prior contact and 59% only limited prior contact;

- Those with no/little prior contact with the *'other side'* were often the most influenced. They also found it easier to differentiate the impact of their integrated school from other influences;

- The majority of the sample learned about integration through a *'low-key'* approach, by both formal and informal means;

- Eighty percent of the survey respondents recalled discussing politics and/or religion in the integrated classroom;

- The freedom to express and to hear alternative views appeared to be important in promoting tolerance and understanding; and

- Some past pupils found it difficult to adjust to less integrated work or study environments after leaving school.

Perceptions of Identity

- There was a split between self-categorization as Catholic, Protestant or Other. Some showed resistance to being classified;

- After attending an integrated school, some felt more Catholic or Protestant, Others less so. Some were unchanged;

- Few were interested in religion. There was little impact on religious identity;

- The impact on political identity varied. The majority was *'switched off'* to parliamentary politics;

- There was evidence of a lack of interest in both organised religion and politics;

- Different interpretations of cultural identity existed and the impact of integrated education appeared to vary. There was recall of Catholic, but not Protestant culture being taught;

- Views appeared to become either stronger but more informed or more moderate and tolerant as a result of attending an integrated school;

- The majority had a sense of an additional *'integrated'* aspect to their identity – one they described as broadminded, understanding and tolerant; and

- There was some evidence that the early pupils felt that society invested in them. Most past pupils were proud of having attended their integrated school.

Life Choices and Friendships

- The order of influence on socialization appeared to be getting older, family, integrated school;

- The impact of integrated school seems to vary between individuals;

- There was an increase from 41% to 67% in the number of mixed friendships after attending an integrated school. Many lasting friendships were made;

- There was little evidence of impact on career choice. However the sample generally felt more secure in a mixed environment;

- Fifty eight percent of the survey respondents with a partner, had one of a different background to themselves; and

- The sample valued the freedom to choose their partner, irrespective of their background.

Hopes for the Future of Northern Ireland
- Focus group members were less optimistic than the survey respondents regarding the Northern Ireland Assembly. This may have been due to the timing of the research;

- The past pupils were cynical about politicians' motives. They were fed up with recycled arguments and did not generally feel represented;

- There was a sense of frustration at the suspension of the Assembly;

- A minority remained cautiously optimistic about the Assembly. They felt that real issues had been debated; and

- The majority of the past pupil sample was strongly in favour of an expansion of integrated education.

Some Conclusions
Although all available former pupils were surveyed and/or interviewed in focus groups, the number sampled was small and no comparisons are made with non-integrated schools. However, the data collected give us some insight into the legacy of integrated school experiences for the first past student cohorts of School A and School B.

The majority felt that integrated education had a significant impact on their lives, with those who had the least prior contact with diversity often the most profoundly influenced. Integrated education had resulted in an increased respect for diversity and ability to feel comfortable in a plural environment for most past pupils. The freedom to express and listen to alternative views was felt to have promoted tolerance and understanding. The importance attached by the former students to the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom supports the findings of Wicklow (1997). There was a significant increase in the number of mixed friendships sustained after leaving an integrated school, in keeping with Irwin (1991) and McClenahan (1995). The liberty to choose one's partner irrespective of their background was highly valued by former students. However although integrated school was seen as a socialising influence, it was considered less important than the influences of getting older and family respectively.

There were mixed feelings about devolution of power from Westminster to the local Assembly, with some pessimistic and others cautiously optimistic. Many were cynical about politicians and frustrated at the political stalemate. The majority were strongly in favour of an expansion of integrated education.

This study provides some evidence that integrated education may impact on what Weinreich (1989) defines as subjective personal and social identities. This is in contrast to

McClenahan (1995) who found no change to social identity as a result of integrated or desegregated education. Integrated education appears to offer young people the chance to consider aspects of their identity in a tolerant environment. Identity is not threatened; rather exploration appears to be encouraged. For some students the relative importance of social identity in Northern Ireland society rather than personal identity forms (Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1991) may have been challenged. The modifications some have made to aspects of their identity support a model of identity formation as an ongoing social process in continual flux (Feinberg, 1999; Hall, Held & McGrew, 1992; Berger & Berger, 1972). Supporters of this concept of identity include McLoone who talks of identity as '*artefact not nature'* (1991, p7). The emergence of a common *'integrated'* identity as an additional component of the former students' identity profiles supports Weinreich's (1989) suggestion that exposure to difference may encourage new contexts for self-definition. If we are indeed cultural composites (Grant, 1997) and identities in Northern Ireland are far from homogeneous (Bloomer and Weinreich, 2002) there are implications for debate about the role of integrated schools in nurturing aspects of identity.

Implications for Schools
Further to the findings and discussion of this study, schools may wish:

- To consider the acquisition of identity as an evolving process and to explore the role they may play in this;

- To acknowledge a more diverse choice of identity forms in a multicultural society;

- To explore curricula, teaching methodologies and styles that encourage exploration and diversification of personal and group identity forms;

- To make provision for the ongoing training of teachers in facilitating discussion of controversial issues;

- To plan programmes of study that allow for such debate and to provide flexibility in the timetable to discuss such issues as they arise; and

- To establish past pupil records and/or past pupil societies.

CONCLUSIONS

This report has examined three strands of evidence on integrated education in Northern Ireland: first, a survey of 40 Integrated schools to develop a picture of the schools, staff, students and parents in the sector; second in-depth case studies of 14 schools to gain insight into integration in practice; and third, survey and focus group evidence collected from a sample of past pupils of two of the longest established Integrated schools.

The survey of schools suggested that they were well regarded in their local areas, most of which were heterogeneous in terms of religion and social background. Principals and teachers came from diverse backgrounds, with about a quarter having received their training outside Northern Ireland. They generally felt supported by other members of the school community, but identified frustration with the bureaucratic demands and education initiatives from the Department of Education. The pupils, too, were generally positive in their assessment of their schools and a majority of the parents in the survey expressed a commitment to integrated education.

Respondents in the in-depth case study schools felt that the Integrated schools were successful in bringing together Protestants and Catholics. This was not always unproblematic however, and some respondents felt that, at times, pressure from other sources meant that the priority attached to pro-active work on integration was occasionally lessened. Related to this, some concern was expressed that integration may not be as high a priority for government as it ought to be. Pupils said they valued the opportunity to make friends from other communities, but felt that the facilities of their schools sometimes compared poorly with neighbouring schools.

The teachers in the case study schools were a bit more sanguine and identified different ways in which the goal of integration was being pursued. This reflected a broader conclusion that a number of models of integration were being pursued in the schools: in some cases the attitude seems to be that integration will occur naturally once a diverse environment has been created, in others the pattern is to react to events and circumstances as they emerge, while in others the schools adopt a pro-active approach to addressing issues related to diversity. Unsurprisingly, therefore, there is a lack of consensus on the ideal ethos of integrated schools. For some it was unclear whether the priority should be towards maintaining a balance, in some empirical sense, as opposed to the development of an integrated environment although this is more difficult to define.

The third strand of evidence was based on a survey and focus groups with 159 past pupils of the two longest established Integrated schools. Most of these young people felt that attending an Integrated school had had a significant impact on their lives. They felt that the schools had facilitated opportunities for the exploration of issues related to difference in Northern Ireland, particularly for those who had not previously had opportunities to meet members of the other community. There was less consensus among the young people on whether their sense of identity had been changed or deepened as a consequence of attending one of the schools, although many seemed not to rate religion or politics as particularly significant in their lives. Of those who had a partner, over half had a partner from a different community background. Diversity in their views on the impact of integrated education was reflected also in a diverse pattern of views on political issues in Northern Ireland, although most were strongly in support of an expansion of integrated education.

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