

Diversity and Inclusion
in
Catholic Maintained Schools



Foreword



Donal Flanagan
Chief Executive

The emergence from a period of conflict and social unrest challenges everyone, and particularly schools in Northern Ireland, to create a more open, inclusive and just society where the promotion of reconciliation and respect for diversity becomes a priority for all. Significant developments are already taking place within our society, particularly within education.

For example, the social landscape has already been enriched by people from different cultural backgrounds making Northern Ireland their home. As a community, we must recognise their material and social needs, in particular the welfare and education of their children.

In addition, the educational entitlement for all children, heralded by the recent Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005, the Revised Curriculum, the ending of Academic Selection and the introduction of new legislation governing the process of transfer to post-primary education, challenge our schools to be more open and inclusive.

Catholic education works for the Common Good, to acknowledge and respect difference and to meet the needs of all young people, equally. It is not surprising that Catholic schools, with their open and inclusive ethos, have in many cases, already embraced children from an increasingly diverse range of religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

With this publication, CCMS wishes to acknowledge the inclusive nature of our schools, to congratulate them for embracing all children and to encourage them to continue to meet the challenge of contributing to the development of an open, inclusive and just society.

Donal Flanagan



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Introduction

The purpose of education is to ensure that children gain access to the knowledge, understanding, skills and values that will help them grow as confident people able to contribute to their community and workplace. This right of access should be available to every child. To achieve this challenging aim we must develop schools and processes of education that are genuinely inclusive and which help contribute to the development of inclusive communities.

In our schools much is being done to develop an understanding of the diverse nature of the people who live in the local and wider community. As Northern Ireland becomes more ethnically diverse, the task of helping our young people to develop more open minds and respect and tolerance for their neighbours will continue to be a critical one. None of this is new, but it is important at this time to collectively reiterate and reinforce our commitment to the development of such values in our schools.

St Genevieve's High School, Belfast

In our school we have a pupil with scoliosis and neurofibromatosis. After unsuccessful surgery her spinal fusion has recurred and she now has to wear a body brace which is very painful. Despite her problems she has prospered well at school, with the help and encouragement of her teachers and fellow pupils. Every effort has been made to help her cope with her physical difficulties. She has been provided with an adapted school uniform, use of a lap-top computer, easy grip pens, adapted scissors and a writing wedge to help her maintain better posture.

In the words of one of her teachers,

“Despite her obvious physical difficulties, she is enjoying a happy, fulfilled school life.”

Aims

While the over-riding aim of this publication is to challenge schools to consider what they are doing to promote and sustain a climate of openness and inclusivity, it also seeks to:

- a) Re-affirm that Catholic Education is inclusive and has at its heart respect for diversity and a desire to work for the common good.
- b) Examine the dual imperative of providing for the educational equality of individuals that is enshrined in the ethos of Catholic Education and is the legal entitlement of every child.
- c) Develop a shared understanding of what is meant by diversity and inclusion as they apply in our schools and wider community.
- d) Describe what truly inclusive schools might look like and provide support, advice and guidance for school staff and governors as they strive to develop and sustain them.
- e) Make some suggestions that may help schools become aware of how much they have already achieved and of the need to celebrate it.



Inclusion and Equality in Schools A Dual Imperative

Catholic schools, through their particular ethos and value system, are committed to identifying and providing for the educational, social, physical, spiritual and emotional needs of their students. In doing so, the challenge of ensuring that they are genuinely inclusive is a constant one.

In their publication, **‘Proclaiming the Mission’**, the Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland refer to the importance of schools working not just for individual and institutional advantage, but for the common good. They state that:

“The true sense of solidarity involves a form of duty towards the larger community of one’s fellow beings.”

They further state that Catholic schools are characterized by a ‘reaching out’ which is not only desirable but, in fact, an essential responsibility in a pluralist society. This ‘reaching out’ must be both an internal process and one which aims to link the school with the immediate and wider community.

In the words of the bishops:

“Catholic schools must be not simply institutions of learning but ‘voluntary communities’ in which the student as ‘a person in community’ is actively engaged with teachers (and fellow students) in a process of mutual formation and affirmation.”

Inherent in this communal approach is the Christian commitment to treat all individuals equally.

In their publication, **‘Building Peace, Shaping the Future’** the Northern Bishops state that:

‘All schools should be welcoming and fair to pupils and staff from other traditions, and ensure that relationships with them reflect justice and promote self esteem.’

and that,

‘.....while retaining their commitment to a distinctive Catholic ethos, Catholic schools embody a spirit of outreach and reconciliation.’

They also identify a role for Catholic schools as;

‘being ideally placed to assist our society to move beyond its deeply-ingrained divisions into a new coherence and openness to the world at large.’

Corpus Christi College, Belfast

Roy is a Year 9 pupil from a strict Muslim background. His parents requested that he be excused from RE classes. Our school has facilitated this and with the help of a support teacher provided through the BELB, Roy uses that time to help improve his reading.

The school has also helped Roy with his religious observance throughout the period of Ramadan.

As a result of the continuing support provided, Roy has settled into school life and has since been elected class Ceannaire (Chair) on the Student Council by his classmates.



In Catholic Education the imperative to be inclusive has its origins in the Christian vision of human dignity and solidarity. However, there is also an increasing legal imperative to treat all people equally and this entitlement to equality in society, of which schools are a part, is enshrined within international and Northern Ireland law.

All countries are obligated, under **Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**, to:

'respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's, or his or her parents or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.'

and to;

'take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians or family members.'

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, 1998, also protects the human and equality rights of all individuals. That part of the Act determines that;

'A public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between;

- a) **persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;**
- b) **men and women generally;**
- c) **persons with a disability and persons without; and**
- d) **persons with dependants and persons without'.**



St Comgall's College, Larne

In our school we make every effort to include all students in our wide curriculum and in all activities and opportunities that will enable everyone to achieve success. We have set up our Learning Partnership which identified the responsibilities of each partner, student, parent and the college. We provide help and support to individual students to ensure inclusion in all areas of the curriculum.

Paul's Story

Paul was a pupil at our school who suffered from a congenital heart disease known as dextracardiac. This left him, in the words of his mother, "indescribably breathless and unable to walk for any distance or time." During the first three years at St Comgall's Paul missed a lot of school because the strain of getting from class to class left him exhausted. Then, with the assistance of CCMS, a lift was fitted in the school and Paul was able to attend more regularly. With the help of his teachers and fellow pupils he was able to attend his classes and become involved in a range of extra curricular activities. Despite his illness, Paul worked hard and achieved six GCSEs and a qualification in Text Processing Skills.

Unfortunately Paul passed away some time ago. During his time at our school his parents, our staff and his fellow pupils worked closely to support him. We feel enriched for having known him and more aware of the support that is sometimes needed to ensure everyone is included.



St Anne's PS, Strabane

In our school we are committed to:

- An appreciation and acceptance of cultural diversity;
- An understanding of racism, particularly as experienced by our traveller children;
- The development of structures which cultivate acceptance and tolerance of all.

Since October 2005 new Special Education Needs and Disability Legislation has been introduced in Northern Ireland. It will give children the same rights, with regard to access to schools, as exists in other parts of the United Kingdom. This legislative change also heralds the removal of the exemption of the educational sector from the requirements of the **1995 Disability Discrimination Act**. The combined impact of these changes will be an increased requirement for schools to be more inclusive of students with a wide range of educational and other special needs.

The social context within which schools exist is constantly changing. As Northern Ireland emerges from its violent past the strict geographical boundaries that divide Catholic and Protestant communities, in many places, may begin to soften to allow a greater degree of cross-community interaction. As community confidence grows and society normalises, the potential for the influx of new citizens from other parts of the world, particularly the expanded European Community, increases.

As the cultural diversity of Northern Ireland grows, schools, like the rest of society, should strive to embrace that diversity and provide the highest quality education for all children, irrespective of their social or cultural origin. This respect for difference and recognition of the needs and rights of the individual are integral parts of the philosophy of Catholic Education.

In January 2003 the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office, Des Browne, published a consultation

paper entitled '**A Shared Future**'. CCMS was very happy to support the broad thrust of that paper. One of its aims is to;

'support the development of shared communities where people wish to learn, live, work and play together.'

Catholic schools, welcome children from any part of society, and will play their full part in developing such communities.

The ethos of Catholic Education and the practices in Catholic schools have and will continue to ensure that equality of opportunity is available for everyone. There are, however, some children for whom mainstream schools are not appropriate because their needs cannot be met within the physical or personnel resources available. It is the right of those children to have the necessary specialist facility and expertise provided for them. Such provision is a form of educational inclusion in itself.

The Nature of Diversity in our Schools and Communities

Good Shepherd Nursery School, Dunmurry

We have children with Down's Syndrome, William Syndrome, visual impairment and physical impairment attending our school. All of our pupils are important and the staff work together to provide a curriculum for the benefit of all.

One of our ex-pupils who has Down's Syndrome works within our school with our pupils. The school considers her involvement as invaluable to our pupil's and her own personal development. She is an integral part of our school community.

Our school is based on the idea of the family and families can be different. At our school we embrace difference. Our aim is to work together for a common good which allows children to feel good about themselves, to have confidence to face the world without fear. Our pastoral role, as a Catholic school, is centred on this ideal."

School communities recognize and acknowledge the diversity that exists within them. Catholic schools embrace that diversity and welcome the opportunity it provides to create learning contexts within which to locate a wide range of educational processes.

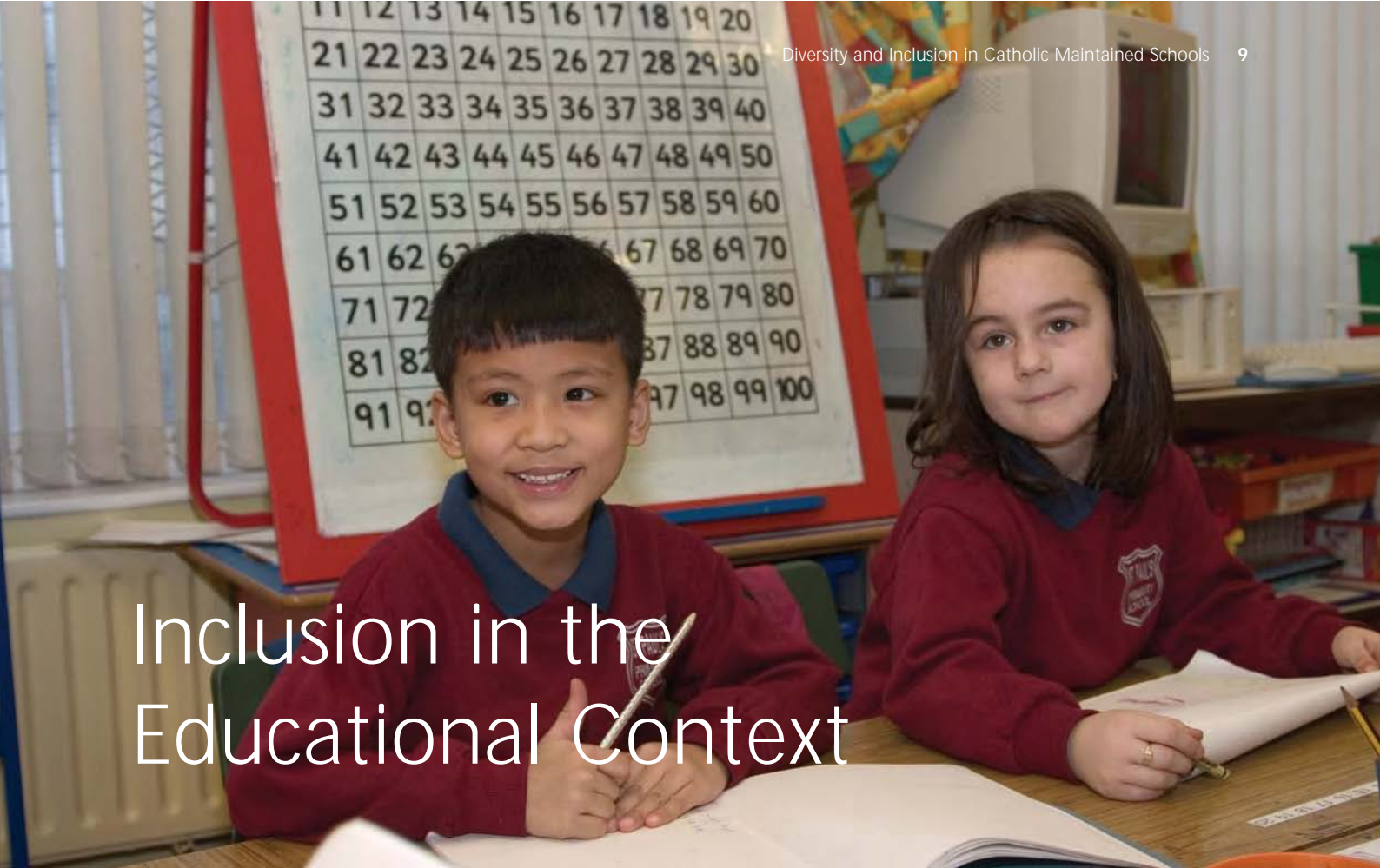
In schools, students differ in their capacity for and love of learning, their ability to listen, to think and to communicate and their ability to form relationships. They come from different family, racial and cultural backgrounds and also differ in their sporting, musical and other talents. Some come to school with special needs including physical disabilities and learning or behavioural challenges.

Children can also vary in their level of confidence, self esteem and experience of family love. All of these differences reflect the complexity of society and often this complexity produces a broad spectrum of need which our schools are challenged to provide for.

Children will also experience diversity in their community and the wider world. This may include differences in race, religion, language, gender, political belief, cultural tradition, sexual preference, well-being and wealth. Schools have an important role to play in helping young people make sense of this social and cultural complexity and to embrace it in a spirit of mutual respect.

Sometimes, in school or in their community, children have negative experiences because of differences between them and their peers. Young people need support and example to help form attitudes and values that are founded on tolerance and respect. This is often achieved through the many successful Personal, Social and Health Education programmes and activities provided in schools. These have been further enhanced by the involvement of some students in a wide range of educational experiences that take place outside the school often involving links with other schools in Northern Ireland, Europe, the USA and other places.





Inclusion in the Educational Context

Inclusive schools share many common characteristics. They provide a high quality educational environment, free from direct or indirect discrimination where the unique talents and dignity of the individual are valued and respected. The staff have their developmental needs catered for and each individual is involved purposefully and meaningfully in the life of the school.

In an inclusive school each student is regarded as a unique person and a unique learner. The challenge for the school is to acknowledge the diversity that exists within its community and to meet the needs of that diverse population. The inclusive school tries to adopt systems and structures that fully involve all children and adults. These may include adaptations to the curriculum, buildings, and the educational and non-educational processes that take place.

The inclusive curriculum is characterized by the setting of suitable learning challenges where all students have the opportunity to experience success. A broad brush

approach, lacking differentiation or the recognition of the baseline from which each student is working is avoided. This is especially true where a student's education has been disrupted for any reason.

There is a considerable interdependence between schools and the communities in which they exist. Sometimes schools may be better at including parents and other community representatives in school activities than they are at involving themselves in community activities. Likewise, communities could be better at reaching into their schools in an effort to provide or receive support. Inclusive schools reach out to visitors with the same hospitality and helpfulness that the fulltime members of the school community enjoy. All should have the opportunity to experience the ethos of the Catholic school.

Making provision for all students, especially those with specific physical or cognitive learning needs, is challenging and has significant implications in terms of the availability of appropriate resources.

Schools, and those responsible for initial teacher training and further professional development, should be aware of the need to provide appropriate training for teachers to help them undertake their duties effectively with an increasingly diverse pupil population. Many of our schools have been largely mono-cultural communities for a long time. With increasing staff and pupil diversity the capacity to deal openly with the issues raised by the presence of children and staff from a range of cultural backgrounds has to be as fully developed as possible. For pupils this should include the emotional and personal development that will allow them to challenge stereotypes, and in the words of Anne Oddling-Smee, Chair of the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association,

“Resist the gut reactions that resurrect ancestral ghosts and threaten our sense of identity”

Religious Education for Students from Other Faith Traditions, and None, in Catholic Schools



St Finian's PS, Newtownards

In our school there are children from a range of religious faiths, from differing ethnic backgrounds and with varying physical disabilities. All of their needs are met through the application of a very positive inclusion policy.

Children from non-Catholic backgrounds may be excused from sacramental preparation if they wish. Often they choose to and attend the sacramental ceremonies to receive a blessing, to perform in the choir or to be part of a little drama, performed in the case of First Penance.

There are some children enrolled in the school who belong to ethnic minorities. These children enjoy all aspects of school, free from any racial harassment.

There are two children at our school who have mobility problems. They take part in all activities including PE. Parents are encouraged to attend the PE classes to be reassured about their children's safety. These pupils can be exempted from school activities if their parents so wish.

Our whole approach with these children has been to encourage social interaction with their peers to ensure that they are not deprived of any activity as a result of their disability.

A challenge for any faith school is the extent to which it is prepared to provide for the religious instruction of students from other faiths. In addition to providing a high quality, holistic education for all students another significant purpose of Catholic schools is to promote the Catholic faith and to provide religious instruction for the Catholic children who attend them.

What about the religious development of students from other faiths? Catholic Maintained schools are not exclusive. They are open to all students irrespective of their background. This includes students from other faiths. As the denominational diversity among the pupils of Catholic schools increases it is important that they are pro-active in their consideration of the Religious Education provided for all of their children. This consideration will include appropriate consultation with parents.

The position of the church regarding the commitment of Catholic schools to the development of the Catholic faith is clear. This is reflected in the most recent instruction from the

Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People in *'Erga migrantes caritas Christi' (The love of Christ towards migrants)*, Vatican City 2004.

Paragraph 62 of that document states that:

'Catholic schools (cf. EEu 59 and PaG 52) must not renounce their own characteristics and Christian-oriented educational programmes when children of another religion are accepted. Parents wishing to enrol their children should be clearly informed of this. At the same time no pupil must be compelled to take part in a Catholic liturgy or to perform actions contrary to his or her religious convictions. Moreover religious instruction provided for in the school curriculum, if given with a scholastic character, may be useful to help pupils learn about a faith different from their own. In religious instruction, however, all must be educated to respect persons of different religious convictions but relativism must be avoided'

Growing a Culture of Inclusivity



Lismore Comprehensive College, Craigavon

As a Catholic and Comprehensive school we adhere to a set of fundamental ideals about the nature of access to education, the nature of the relationship between teachers and pupils and the nature of the relationship between school and the wider community. We believe that the essence of Comprehensive Education is the equal valuing of all members of the school community and its inclusivity. We strive to reflect this in an open exchange between the school and local and wider community. We seek to recognize, foster and encourage all the dimensions of an individual's development and the creation of a just community which is inclusive and which fulfils all pupils' rights of entitlement to a worthwhile and appropriate education.

Staff and governors are leaders of inclusive schooling. They contribute to the development and communication of the vision for the school community to follow. They also lead the development of inclusion policy and ensure that practices and actions for inclusion are incorporated into the school development plan and the curriculum and pastoral programmes of the school. Staff and governors can also develop success criteria for the evaluation of the inclusion practices in the school and communicate the commitment to inclusion to the wider community.

As is the case with so many other aspects of desired change, schools that wish to become more inclusive can begin to do so by undertaking a process of self analysis. Some refer to this as 'visiting your own school' or 'auditing for inclusiveness'. With the demands that are placed on teachers and other educational leaders there is seldom the time to stop and have a hard reflective look at what the school is really like. Doing so can be very informative and can help build a reliable 'school portrait'. From there, it is a matter of identifying those aspects of school life where opportunities for greater inclusiveness are most obvious and where the gain for pupils and teachers will be readily achieved.

Inclusive schools share many common characteristics. They:

- **See diversity as a reality.**
They welcome students from different ethnic and language groups, cultures, faith communities, family situations, and socio-economic situations, with different interests and purposes for learning, and different abilities and styles of learning. Students pursue a flexible set of curricular goals or learning standards, accomplishing them in different ways and sometimes to different degrees of mastery.
- **Individually facilitate learning.**
Students learn in lots of different places and in a variety of ways. Teachers use a range of approaches and strategies that personalize learning according to each person's learning abilities, needs, styles, purposes, and preferences. Each student is challenged to achieve to high standards in ways that fit what they already know, understand and can do.
- **Make sure each student gets access to knowledge, skills, and information.**
This improves the life chances, available choices, and values the contributions of every person.
- **Organise and structure themselves flexibly.**
Schools need to be organized in ways that are adaptable to the needs of students and teachers. They have seamless partnerships where families, community members, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers work together to address real world problems and create solutions that will improve the education and life chances of young people.
- **Use collaborative teaching arrangements.**
When teachers with different areas of expertise and skill work together, they can better tailor learning at the individual level for their students.
- **Keep improving.**
The thinking, progressive school, is characterized by the combined processes of self-evaluation and development planning. Information from all parts of the system is used to keep it improving. Improvement also comes when schools work together in the interests of meeting pupil needs.
- **Have high expectations for student success.**
All students are entitled to high expectations and a challenging curriculum that leads to positive educational outcomes regardless of its students' race, class, culture, ability, gender, language, or family circumstances. Such schools use a multitude of contexts through which students can demonstrate what they learn and how they use their learning.
- **Collaborate with families, agencies, and other community members.**
Collaboration with other agencies to provide needed health and social services is just one way that schools can be more embracing and supportive of students' lives. Including community members and organizations in the day-to-day work of the school is another way that school resources can be enriched and extended to achieve more effective learning and life outcomes for each student. Such actions are consistent with the broad thrust of the 'Costello' recommendations for post-primary review and the 'extended school' model that is now being presented in Northern Ireland.
- **Build Inclusive Communities.**
The philosophy of acceptability and flexibility that guides inclusive schools is one that we also need in our communities. The foundation that schooling and parenting plays lasts for life. Inclusive schools help build inclusive communities where people's differences are valued, where the contribution of everyone is encouraged and the values created as a result support our society to achieve its most valued outcomes.





Recommendations

Schools seeking to be more inclusive may wish to consider the following suggestions. They could:

- a) Undertake an inclusiveness audit to help establish a baseline from which to develop;
- b) Develop a welcoming statement to be displayed in the school and in policy and promotional documents prepared for parents and their children;
- c) Include reference to the development of inclusion policy and practice as part of the development planning process;
- d) Develop an Inclusion Policy which encapsulates the inclusion entitlement for all students and staff;
- e) Create an annual staff day which includes all staff and promotes a single inclusive adult community with the school;
- f) Review curriculum and assessment policies to ensure that they are inclusive of the needs of all pupils;
- g) Review the staff development policy of the school in the interests of including the development needs of all staff;
- h) Undertake an assessment of the suitability of the school environment and its resources for pupils with special educational needs and physical disabilities and seek to address any deficiencies identified;
- i) Arrange a set of activities throughout the year to acknowledge and cherish diversity;
- j) Forge effective partnerships with external agencies to help develop the inclusive nature of the school for all pupils.

St Columbanus' College, Bangor

Almost fifty percent of the children who attend our schools are members of faith traditions other than Catholic. In this school, which has a history of educational excellence and a strong Catholic ethos, all the children are equally welcomed, cared for and educated. Parents from all parts of the community are encouraged to involve themselves in the life of the school and they do.

Conclusion

Northern Ireland is in a period of considerable educational, political and social change. The educational community is experiencing large scale curricular and structural reform which will significantly alter the face of education. With that reform the educational experience of children will hopefully improve and be more enjoyable and relevant to their lives. That experience will now be provided in a non-selective environment and through structures that will place the child at the centre of the education process. There will be access to a broad, flexible, enriched curriculum and to a choice of pathways to follow.

Society in Northern Ireland is also becoming more culturally diverse with an increasing number of people from other countries and cultures coming to live here. This enriches the cultural context in which people are living but also presents a challenge for schools and society in general, to be aware of diversity and to have the structures, policies and practices in place to ensure that the needs of all children and adults are met. This is the challenge of inclusiveness. It is a challenge which Catholic schools will continue to meet.



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