

Ep 42: Transforming education in Northern Ireland

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(Emma Park, EP): You're listening to Episode 42 of the National Secular Society podcast presented by Emma Park.

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Northern Ireland has perhaps the most religiously segregated education system in the democratic

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world. Religious interests are heavily entrenched in the system. This has meant that efforts to

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create a more inclusive alternative have been painfully slow. However, last year

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the government introduced its 'New decade, a New approach' to restore devolution in Northern Ireland.

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As a result of this an independent review has been launched that could recommend

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significant changes to the education system. In this episode, Alastair Lichten the Head of

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Education at the National Secular Society, speaks to Sam Fitzsimmons and Matthew Milliken about the

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challenges facing education in Northern Ireland and the difficulties of making it more inclusive.

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Matthew is a researcher at the University of Ulster. He has worked on 'Transforming Education' -

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a major series of papers that explores the roots of the religious control of schools

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in Northern Ireland and its ongoing impact on the children who are educated there. Sam works for the

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Integrated Education Fund - a charity that supports inclusive integrated education in Northern Ireland.

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I spoke to Sam earlier on episode 21 of the podcast so this is his second appearance here.

0:01:17.280,0:01:21.440

(Alastair Lichten, AL): Matthew, Sam. Perhaps you could start by introducing yourselves to the audience.

0:01:22.560,0:01:26.640

(Sam Fitzsimmons, SF): I'm Sam Fitzsimmons, Head of Communications at the Integrated Education Fund.

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The Integrated Education Fund is a charity set up to support the growth of integrated education

0:01:34.320,0:01:42.560
in Northern Ireland. (Matthew Milliken,MM):
..and I'm Matthew Milliken.
I'm a researcher at the School of Education

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at Ulster University. I'm attached to the
UNESCO Centre and our principle aim is to
investigate

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peace building and integration programmes
uh, both in Northern Ireland and around the
world.

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(AL): Northern Ireland is often brought up as
an example of the problems caused by
segregated

0:02:03.200,0:02:10.880
education. How fair do you feel that
perception is? (SF): I think it's more than a
perception - uh, in

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fact, some of the facts and statistics in
relation to our education system is evidence
that it is

0:02:18.400,0:02:26.240
segregated. For example, there are two
main management systems in terms of school
management -

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one is the controlled management sector
and the other is the Catholic maintained
sector -

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so I think that gives an indication of, just
in terms of the separation and division that
happens

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within the classroom, but also you have the
likes of the UN CRC report which called for an
end

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to the segregated education system in
Northern Ireland, and even more recently, in
the New Decade,

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New Approach agreement which was brought
about the return of the Northern Ireland
executive after a

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three-year suspension - that document
acknowledged the segregated nature of our
education system.

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(MM): Yeah the system that we have is
essentially segregated root and branch. Sam
talks rightly

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about the levels of segregation between the
two school systems - the control system that's
attended

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mainly by Protestant pupils and the
maintained system that's attended almost
exclusively by

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Catholic systems. Those two systems operate
side by side. They're both 100 per cent funded
by the state.

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The boards of governors of those schools
represent those communities so a maintained
school

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with Catholic pupils is also likely to have
100 per cent Catholic board of governors
they're also likely

0:03:50.080,0:03:57.280
to have 100 per cent catholic staff team,
teaching staff. Likewise on the controlled side
they're likely

0:03:57.280,0:04:03.440
to have a board of governors that's entirely
Protestant and a teaching staff that is

0:04:03.440,0:04:12.640
entirely protestant so it's, the segregation of
the system is deep and endemic. (AL):
Changing tack slightly

0:04:12.640,0:04:19.120
uh, for a moment - the Integrated Education
Fund is a campaigning organization but you're
more involved

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with directly supporting integrated schools
than similar campaigns in the UK would. What
unique

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perspectives and challenges does this bring I
would suppose, especially in today's climate?

0:04:30.480,0:04:36.400
(SF): The challenge which that brings is that
the government nor the Department of
Education

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plan for integrated education. It's left the
parents to establish an integrated school

0:04:42.240,0:04:48.960
in their area and that process can take up
to three years. An example of the growing
demand

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for integrated education is highlighted
in a recent government report

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which identified that there was 21 per cent of
pupils choosing an integrated post-primary
college

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and they were turned away because of
over subscription. On top of that, last year
there were

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eight parental ballots held on schools
wishing to transform the integrated status
and, and this -

0:05:16.720,0:05:23.120
just to give you an example of the demand
and support for it - those ballots were
between 70

0:05:23.120,0:05:33.840
and 100 per cent in favour of integrated
education. So until we have equity in terms of
planning and parents

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and community shaping the type of provision
that they would like in their area, it's going to
be,

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remain a challenge to meet that demand and
the growth that we need to see in integrated
education.

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(AL): For example, like say in the 'no more
faith schools' campaign campaigns for there
to be community

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schools and against faith schools but we
don't provide services for, we're not any sort
of service

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delivery or sectoral body for community
schools, so it's a very different thing in that
case. (SF): We have

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a sister organization called The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education which supports integrated

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schools in terms of ethos, training and curriculum development within integrated schools.

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The Integrated Education Fund as a charity really helps with financial support to

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schools for example, if they need a new classroom to help with expansion, the IEF would help

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support the school to develop that. Equally, if the school needs some financial support to bring in

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uh, a teacher, again we've helped schools in the past do that but in terms of actual delivery of

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service to those schools we very much are uh, just supporting parents and existing schools to grow

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and develop. So that's the type of role that we play. Our sister organization

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NICIE is much more involved in the day-to-day operational issues that happen within,

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within integrated schools. Our campaigning work is very much about um, a conduit for parents who

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want to see more integrated provision and I suppose that's a role that we fill and

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that is supported by evidence-based advocacy and it's why we work with academic institutions like

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Ulster University to develop that um, that evidence base. (AL): In December there was the announcement

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of the terms of reference for the independent review on education which you mentioned earlier -

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could you just give us a bit more context on what is the purpose of this review and

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what is it expected to cover? (SF): Okay um, there'll be three strands to the review.

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The first strand will look at the education journey and outcomes for children - that'll look

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at early years including child care preschool, the transition and transfer of children from primary

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to post-primary and it'll also look at special educational needs and disabilities and pathways.

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Strand 2 will review the funding arrangements within our schools and the governing processes

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and part of that will also include initial teacher training or initial teacher education and I'm sure

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Matt will be able to expand more on that. Strand three - which will review the school management type

0:08:47.920,0:08:51.440

uh, and the impact of the current structures and that, that should include

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duplication, segregation and fragmentation of the current system. Uh, we, we, are - as an

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organization, we have been campaigning for an independent review of our education system

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for a number of years and we were absolutely delighted that that was a commitment within

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the New Decade, New Approach uh and more so, we're incredibly encouraged by the scope of the terms of

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reference of this - I'm sure Matt will be able to expand a little bit more on some of this.

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(MM): I think the, the New Decade, New Approach document was brought into being as a way of bringing

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the local assembly uh, back to sitting after a three-year hiatus and writ large in that was

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trying to find new ways of cooperating - new ways of, of the two communities - the Protestant community

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and the Catholic community working together. The division that we have in Northern Ireland

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is costly - when you have to have two of everything in every location, it does

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add a considerable burden to the public purse and the New Decade, New Approach

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document stated very clearly that this ongoing division isn't sustainable.

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I think in the legacy of covid we can also expect that there will be massive public debt

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and that there will need to be savings made in public services. The way we deliver our education

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system with essentially two of everything is, is not sustainable and it has to be

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a key area within which savings can be made. The uh, panel is to be recruited in

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March/April and they will then be looking at the ways of revising our education system

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to make it more sustainable - they're going to have to go through some significant hurdles in terms of

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getting through vested interests,
challenging accepted ways of doing things

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but uh it, it shows uh, an interesting
potential uh, but it's gonna have to be really
quite radical

0:11:21.120,0:11:25.920

if it's gonna a) save money and b) change
the system in the way that it needs to be.

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(SF): Perhaps maybe I just add a little bit to
that. Uh, Matt highlighted the cost of
duplication and

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some of the outcomes of that duplication is
that we have, and these are the department's
figures,

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around 50,000 empty school desks across
the school estate and that the cost of
duplication

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in schools alone is around 95 million per
annum. Again, these are, these are figures
that um, come

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from academia and it's, it's mind-boggling
to think that we have spent over 1 billion

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pound over the last 10 years bringing our
young people into contact with each other in
various

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cross-community initiatives substantially
to correct the negative consequences and
prejudices

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resulting from their initial segregation in
school.

(AL): This is something we see across the UK,
so for

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example, in England uh, faith school proposals
are supposed to put forward proposals about
how they will

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encourage pupils from different backgrounds
to meet pupils from other schools whereas if
they

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were just in school together that would all
be much more efficient. (MM): As Sam has
already alluded to,

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there's a significant scheme operating in
Northern Ireland for schools called Shared
Education

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which has taken large sums of money uh, 10
million Sam, is that what you mentioned?
(SF): Well certainly

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in Shared Education um the, the costs
would be, I think, over the last number of
years uh

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closer to um between 50 and 100 million...
(MM): So, I mean significant monies from
outside -

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uh, from philanthropy, from the government,
from taxpayers obviously then and that's to
try to

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address the legacy of the system that, that the
government's already propping up.

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Where in an English town, if kids are going to a Catholic school or a Protestant school, those

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kids are probably living side by side with each other. They potentially go to the same scout troop

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or play on the same soccer team. That isn't the case in Northern Ireland. The communities

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in Northern Ireland remain deeply divided. In urban areas the demarcation of Catholic communities and

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Protestant communities is written on the wall, it's written on the curbstones. You can see the, from

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tattered flags flying on lampposts whether you're in a Catholic community or a Protestant community.

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Kids that grow up 10, 15 yards from each other, the distance between them may be demarcated by a

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five metre high wall - those children never get to meet. So they, they live in, in an environment

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where they only ever encounter children from the same background, they only ever play with children

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from the same background, they celebrate different events, they have different holidays

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and a lot of things and they, they even play different sports. They're in those separate schools.

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Although they follow a national curriculum, there's a different focus - so in a Catholic school you

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learn Irish, in a state school you won't. In a state school you may learn history from a particularly

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British perspective. In a Catholic school you'll learn it from an Irish perspective.

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(AL): We wanted to give the audience an overview of the issues in Northern

0:15:21.360,0:15:25.840

Ireland education and I thought that I'd use the Transforming Education series as a framework.

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Matthew, could you start by just introducing the series - what it is and what it aims to do?

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(MM): The Transforming Education project is a research project run through the UNESCO

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centre at the school of education at Ulster University which aims to highlight the areas of

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segregation in our system, the factors that underpin those and how those

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uh, affect the way that we educate our children. So over the last 18 months

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the project has examined such things as the way we employ teachers, the laws that govern teachers, the

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ways in which teachers are not protected from fair employment in the way that other professions, other

0:16:21.040,0:16:32.800

employees can expect to be. We looked at religion in schools - how the curriculum has a very

0:16:32.800,0:16:43.360

clear Christian orientation, how that's directed by four mainstream uh churches, so uh, the Transforming

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Education program uh, project is aiming to, to influence three audiences. First of all,

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we're looking to talk to parents, to communities, to those who have an interest in education by

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making sure that the, the research we're doing is highlighted in the media, highlighted in local

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radio and television, covered in the newspapers - that the issues of segregation and education

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become a talking point, that they're not just assumed, that it's not just 'that's the way we've

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always done it', that they really are matters that can be talked about if we still had water coolers

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but they could be talked around the water cooler or the virtual water cooler now. The other audience

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then are the decision makers themselves, the policy makers, the uh, the stakeholders in education,

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the educational authorities, the councils for uh maintained schools etc. etc.

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And the third audience are other academics - people who are, are looking to engage with, with

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education, with the issues of education in Northern Ireland. So they've been written for a non-academic

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audience, they have also included infographics - trying to get across the message simply and in a

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straightforward way even though they are sometimes quite deeply theoretical and deeply academic

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and there are a range of academic papers also being published in academic journals - there's one

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just out today in the Oxford Review of Education - that support the depth of the work that we're

0:18:40.160,0:18:46.960

doing. (AL): Yes, I, I just want to say on the papers, some things I really appreciate about them

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is that they are, they are very accessible and also the, that they give that historical context

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to the, so obviously they are about very very current issues but they do set that in the

0:19:00.720,0:19:06.000

in the longer historical context. (MM): Yeah - welcome to Northern Ireland - we have very long memories.

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(AL): Yeah, yes. (SF): One of the things, I mean the IEF is one of a number of funders who are supporting

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this initiative and uh one of the, the things that attracted us to it was the fact of taking

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academic research and making it more accessible, more consumable for a wider audience because there

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is so much research out there that, that doesn't get the awareness, that we felt that this was a

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unique initiative and, you know, following on from, I think you're up to your eighth topic in the these

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research papers, Matt? uh and each of them have generated significant media and political interest

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and to the point where I know that we have been engaging in some round-table discussions

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uh with the main parties and they are helping to influence and inform

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uh policy within political parties. That's just to give one of the reasons why the IEF have been

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keen to partner uh, Ulster University and this, this project and this initiative. (AL): In the first

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paper in the series and uh revisited elsewhere you talk about the issues with teacher mobility. Just

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briefly, why do teachers not tend to cross religious lines and what can be done about that?

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(MM): There are three main factors involved in this. It's, the lack of crossing religious

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lines is most evident in primary school and least evident in the more elite grammar school sectors.

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In a primary school, in a Catholic primary school, teachers are required to have undertaken

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a specific additional qualification in order to prepare pupils for Catholic sacraments.

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That certificate has been offered traditionally to all students who have undertaken their training

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in Saint Mary's university college which is the teaching college that serves the maintained sector.

0:21:36.160,0:21:42.160
That course has not been available, easily available rather, to students who attend

0:21:42.160,0:21:49.040
Stranmillis University College which is the the college that prepares teachers for working

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in the controlled sector, in the state schools. So, there are two fundamental issues to begin with -

0:21:56.880,0:22:04.560
that is the certificate and the separation of teaching institutions between the two sides.

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There is then a third factor and that is that teachers are exempted from fair

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employment legislation. Unlike any other firm that employs 10 people or more in Northern Ireland,

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schools are perfectly legally allowed to discriminate between job applicants on the basis

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of their faith. They can say we don't want you to teach in our school because you're a Protestant or

0:22:38.160,0:22:44.560
we don't want you to teach in our school because you're a Catholic. In effect, it's rarely called on.

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Even when you speak to teachers they don't always know that they could apply for a job on

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the other side but they choose not to. They seem to want to pursue a career on the familiar side.

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As I've already described, communities grow up very, very separated from each other

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and there's a degree of fear in crossing into the other side, there's a degree of hesitancy, there's

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a degree of uncertainty, there's a degree of facing the unknown. People prefer to stay where it's safe

0:23:28.720,0:23:35.840
and teachers perhaps particularly so. (SF):
Matt, I just, if I could cut in here a second,

0:23:36.400,0:23:43.600
one of the things that, um, the terms that you identified within that report was cultural

0:23:43.600,0:23:53.120
encapsulation. (MM): Yes. (SF): ..and I think perhaps maybe if you were able to expand a little bit on, on that uh

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it could perhaps maybe give some indication of the life's journey of a teacher in, in Northern Ireland.

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(MM): Sure. A high proportion of teachers have a life journey that is culturally encapsulated .

0:24:09.520,0:24:17.360

By that I mean they are born into one side of the community - either a Catholic household, a

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Catholic community or a Protestant household and community. From there, they go to a school

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of the same community. From there they go to a post-primary school within the same community.

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From there they then choose to go to, to become a teacher and they enter a teaching college

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associated with their community identity. Whilst at that college, they undertake teaching practice

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in schools associated with their own community and they come out from teaching college and go

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into a school from their own community - they have never experienced at any significant level

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the education system that is on the other side - they have been culturally encapsulated. These are

0:25:10.640,0:25:18.720

the teachers that we are asking to engage in joint community activities. These are the people that we

0:25:18.720,0:25:29.360

as a society expect to bring our children together yet the plumber who comes to fix the toilet

0:25:29.360,0:25:35.760

in the school is more likely to have sat alongside pupils of the other community

0:25:35.760,0:25:40.320

while they've been learning their trade in a technical college than the teacher

0:25:40.320,0:25:44.960

who is leading the shared education program between the Catholic and Protestant schools.

0:25:46.960,0:25:52.640

(AL): The second paper in the series calls into question the religious influence on the curriculum and the

0:25:52.640,0:25:59.200

ethos of schools. I'm particularly interested in religious education, so how is education

0:25:59.200,0:26:06.480

about religion and belief currently delivered in schools and how pluralistic is it? (MM): Pluralistic? The,

0:26:07.120,0:26:17.600

the curriculum for uh, for educate, for religious education is constructed not by educationalists

0:26:17.600,0:26:25.360

but by representatives of churches. The Catholic church, the Presbyterian church, the church of

0:26:25.360,0:26:34.560
Ireland, the Methodist church and the uh, the entire curriculum is, is developed by by those churches.

0:26:35.920,0:26:43.680
Because it's been developed by clerics, it is not inspected by educationalists, it is only inspected

0:26:44.240,0:26:52.320
by clerics. So the, the churches set the curriculum in the state system

0:26:52.320,0:26:59.440
and they inspect the system and its delivery in the state system. In addition, every school

0:26:59.440,0:27:06.640
of either state school or a maintained school or for that matter an integrated school

0:27:06.640,0:27:10.720
are required to start each day with an act of christian worship.

0:27:12.720,0:27:18.800
So and in addition, on top of that, each school - their board of governors -

0:27:19.440,0:27:30.400
has representatives from the churches. So religion is once again written branch throughout the entire

0:27:30.400,0:27:39.360
education system. In terms of pluralism, there are optional elements to study world religions

0:27:40.400,0:27:44.720
they're seen uh, in the language of the curriculum, not as being

0:27:46.960,0:27:55.520

religions located within Northern Ireland but from somewhere outside Northern Ireland. They are, they're

0:27:55.520,0:28:02.080
world religions, not our religion. (AL): Now when you say that that's an option, is that an option

0:28:02.080,0:28:08.320
for pupils or an option for the schools? Where's that decision made? (MM): It's an option for post-primary

0:28:08.320,0:28:14.800
uh students. It's the board of governors that ultimately decide uh and put the rubber stamp

0:28:14.800,0:28:21.680
on the, on the religious education that takes place in the school, so theoretically it's possible that

0:28:21.680,0:28:24.880
the board of governors would decide that that wasn't appropriate for that school.

0:28:26.240,0:28:30.880
(AL): A topic that I've seen a lot of interest in is the inefficiencies in Northern Ireland's separate

0:28:30.880,0:28:35.840
school system. I think the point that uh, Sam made earlier about those fifty thousand empty school

0:28:35.840,0:28:40.880
places is just astonishing and, and something that a lot of people may outside Ireland and don't

0:28:40.880,0:28:46.320
fully grasp. I think that's really vividly illustrated in the third paper in the series

0:28:46.320,0:28:52.480

which was on isolated pairs. So I wonder if you could just explain what isolated pairs are

0:28:52.480,0:28:56.960

and more broadly why do separate schools create these particular problems.

0:28:57.680,0:29:05.440

(MM): For those that don't know Northern Ireland, if you drive through almost any village outside the

0:29:05.440,0:29:12.720

urban areas of Belfast and Derry almost every rural village will have a primary school.

0:29:14.160,0:29:22.080

Most will actually have two primary schools - one serves Catholic community and the other

0:29:22.080,0:29:27.280

serves the Protestant community. Quite often neither of those schools because of declining

0:29:27.280,0:29:34.080

populations, because of changing demography, neither of those schools are, are sustainable.

0:29:34.640,0:29:41.440

There are empty desks in both schools yet the mechanisms for those schools to come together,

0:29:42.080,0:29:48.880

to function as one single school, aren't in place - the vested interests are protected

0:29:48.880,0:29:58.560

and the system simply doesn't allow for those two schools easily to merge into one sustainable

0:29:59.280,0:30:06.640

institution. (SF): And if I could just add to that as well, um, in terms of the planning

0:30:06.640,0:30:16.880

authorities, when it comes to planning the school's estate, will make decisions on a school by school

0:30:16.880,0:30:25.440

case without truly engaging with the wider community. In those rural villages where

0:30:25.440,0:30:34.160

you may have two schools that are less than a mile apart and where the school or the wider community

0:30:34.160,0:30:42.400

would like to see a single school retained in the village, there isn't again a mechanism uh, in place

0:30:43.040,0:30:51.200

for consulting with the wider community. The planning authorities may consult with each school

0:30:52.960,0:30:59.840

separately but as a community collective it doesn't happen and I have to say

0:30:59.840,0:31:06.640

just where we again, it's another initiative that we're developing with Ulster University called

0:31:06.640,0:31:14.000

the Future Schools Initiative which is trying to create a resource and a pathway to make it easier

0:31:14.640,0:31:21.200

for communities and school communities to come together to look for a single school solution.

0:31:21.200,0:31:26.480

We're engaging with the two planning authorities - the Catholic maintained managing authority and the

0:31:26.480,0:31:32.400
education authority that looks specifically for the control sector and we're trying to

0:31:32.400,0:31:41.040
work with them to establish a mechanism that would 1) engage with the local community and

0:31:41.040,0:31:48.640
2) create a more accelerated process where school communities could develop a single school solution.

0:31:49.440,0:31:53.840
(AL): There are other parts of the UK that have similar demographic issues so

0:31:53.840,0:31:58.720
parts, particularly in Wales and in some areas of Scotland where you've, effectively you might have

0:31:58.720,0:32:05.360
within a set of villages, three schools that really need to be amalgamated down to two schools or , more interesting,

0:32:05.360,0:32:11.120
two down to one and in those cases problems can be caused because if you're

0:32:11.120,0:32:17.680
amalgamating denominational and non-denominational schools but this would effectively be trying to

0:32:17.680,0:32:23.040
amalgamate two different denominational schools with their own denominational sector bodies.

0:32:23.920,0:32:33.040

(MM): Yeah, that's, that's essentially it. You mentioned a while ago about history - originally the school,

0:32:33.600,0:32:40.000
the schools were managed by religious bodies both on the Catholic side and on the state side.

0:32:40.640,0:32:46.400
In the early 1920s after the partition, the Protestant schools or the schools that were

0:32:46.400,0:32:54.880
managed by Protestant authorities agreed to come on board into the state system and in return they

0:32:54.880,0:33:01.600
were guaranteed places within the management of both the schools and the education system per se.

0:33:02.640,0:33:10.960
The Catholic authorities feared the, the dominance of the, of the unionists, the Protestant side

0:33:10.960,0:33:18.880
and they opted to remain at arm's length from, from the state system. So although the

0:33:18.880,0:33:26.480
state system, the control system, the state control system is not officially a denominational system

0:33:27.120,0:33:34.960
it does have embedded within it the vested interests of the Presbyterian church, the

0:33:34.960,0:33:40.720
church of Ireland church and the Methodist church. The Methodist church at the last um,

0:33:41.760,0:33:47.520
at the last census accounted for I think it was something like less than one percent of

0:33:47.520,0:33:54.320
the population of Northern Ireland. About a quarter to a third of the population of Northern Ireland

0:33:54.880,0:34:02.160
identify as not belonging to any of the four religions that uh, that run our school system

0:34:03.760,0:34:10.960
yet there are, yet any school that exists to get state funding has to conform with the

0:34:10.960,0:34:18.080
uh the requirements of religious education and uh religious representation and the

0:34:18.080,0:34:25.680
school assemblies. (AL): I hope that listeners anywhere in the UK will be seeing here the interesting

0:34:25.680,0:34:30.640
similarities and differences between the four national education systems that we have there.

0:34:31.920,0:34:36.240
That brings us actually quite nicely onto the last paper that I wanted to ask about specifically and

0:34:36.240,0:34:42.720
that was the paper on governance. So, what are the specific challenges that are caused by

0:34:43.440,0:34:49.120
uh this replication and the need to have basically separate governance structures and

0:34:49.120,0:34:55.360
how would a more integrated system address them? So would you have one local governance system or

0:34:55.360,0:34:59.840

school by school or some sort of hierarchy? how would that work if it was fully integrated?

0:34:59.840,0:35:07.840
(SF): Perhaps maybe I could give a, just a perspective from the, from the IEF on this - I think what we need is a

0:35:07.840,0:35:17.200
model of governance which reflects wider society in Northern Ireland. Matt touched on the four main

0:35:17.200,0:35:26.000
churches and the obligation that they have a representative in each board of the uh control

0:35:26.000,0:35:34.400
schools yet uh the demographic shifts in Northern Ireland would suggest that uh, what we really need

0:35:34.400,0:35:43.840
is, is to focus on a fully representative uh, board of governors that reflect Northern Ireland society

0:35:44.640,0:35:50.480
and I think that would be one way of moving towards a more inclusive and integrated system

0:35:51.360,0:36:00.000
and would open up a whole host of opportunities for every school. (AL): Um we've not covered every

0:36:00.000,0:36:04.640
paper in the series in detail obviously uh, it's, it's very substantive but it

0:36:04.640,0:36:08.480
sounds like these are all important issues that should be covered in the independent review.

0:36:09.040,0:36:13.120

There were a couple of other issues that I want, I think our audience would be interested in, that I wanted to ask

0:36:13.120,0:36:17.600

about - we'd already touched on it but I wonder if you could tell us what the state of the collective

0:36:17.600,0:36:24.560

worship requirement is in Northern Ireland schools and also about sex and relationships education

0:36:24.560,0:36:29.600

and how well that's provided for in schools and how, how much that differs across the school types.

0:36:30.960,0:36:36.720

(MM): If I give a quick overview - essentially as I said by law

0:36:37.600,0:36:44.000

every school must include a daily act of Christian worship in their routine. The

0:36:44.880,0:36:52.880

extent to which that is strictly observed is in some instances questionable.

0:36:53.680,0:37:00.320

Certainly on the Catholic side, all schools are actively connected with their, with the

0:37:00.320,0:37:07.840

church. They, there are school masses, there are uh, in primary school they're prepared for the sacraments.

0:37:09.360,0:37:19.280

A lot of grammar schools and post-primary schools have a chapel within the, within the body of the

0:37:19.280,0:37:26.880

school. There are priests on management committees, just as there are um, ministers and clerics on

0:37:27.520,0:37:36.880

on the state side. So the, the observation of the, the act of worship does vary - some schools it's,

0:37:36.880,0:37:44.480

it's uh, central to the running of the day - some schools it's peripheral. Uh and I think it's fair

0:37:44.480,0:37:54.400

to say that in the, the state controlled sectors are less overtly denominationally Christian

0:37:54.400,0:38:02.640

than uh, than the Catholic schools. In terms of the sex education, frankly that isn't an area of

0:38:02.640,0:38:12.320

research that, that I'm involved with but there are..... one could reasonably expect that given the

0:38:14.240,0:38:20.720

morality that is incumbent within each of those faiths that, that would be reflected

0:38:21.680,0:38:28.240

in the teaching of that school. (AL): So the governing body has a duty to ensure that the RSE curriculum

0:38:28.240,0:38:34.480

is in, in accordance with the ethos of the school. Would you have an idea of how much that impacts the

0:38:34.480,0:38:42.320

teaching within different school types? (MM): It would be very difficult for me to, to give you anything

0:38:42.320,0:38:49.600

other than anecdotal evidence. I used to be a youth worker and there was a Catholic school in my patch

0:38:50.240,0:38:59.040

and the principal was more liberal than the staff around him and I as a youth worker was invited in

0:38:59.040,0:39:06.160

to provide relationships education that wouldn't have been permitted otherwise.

0:39:06.160,0:39:12.960

I was told very discreetly that I had to mention the, the attitudes of the Catholic church

0:39:12.960,0:39:21.680

towards contraception and then the, the principal winked at me and told me but once they know that,

0:39:22.880,0:39:29.600

you tell them what you need to. So that took place a number of years ago but I would still say that

0:39:30.960,0:39:39.040

the connection between religious ethos and sex, sexuality, relationships education is still very

0:39:39.040,0:39:44.880

much there. (AL): Would that, would that fall under any of the strands and review of pupils experience?

0:39:45.680,0:39:54.080

(SF): In terms of the review? (AL): Yeah (SF): I, I'm sure that uh elements of the curriculum will be explored

0:39:54.080,0:40:01.920

uh, um where that sits within the final recommendations of that report uh, would be

0:40:01.920,0:40:07.840

would be hard to judge at this stage because the, the role of the churches uh within

0:40:07.840,0:40:17.280

our education system uh, run deep and I'm sure that when it comes to sex education uh, there'll be some

0:40:17.280,0:40:24.000

fairly powerful voices trying to maintain a conservative and traditional approach

0:40:24.000,0:40:31.920

to how sex education is delivered in our schools. (AL): So if listeners either wanted to learn more or to

0:40:31.920,0:40:35.680

actively support a more integrated education system in Northern Ireland,

0:40:36.240,0:40:41.120

what would be the best way for them to get involved. (SF): Uh, they can visit the IEF website

0:40:41.680,0:40:50.000

www.ief.org.uk where they can find out more about integrated education or they can visit the

0:40:50.000,0:40:57.120

resources page on our website where we have made available a large body of academic research on the

0:40:57.120,0:41:03.680

Northern Ireland education system and of course because we're a charity, we have a donations page

0:41:03.680,0:41:10.320

on our website as well. (AL): Uh, Sam and Matthew thank you so much for your time. (MM): No Worries. (SF): You're more than

0:41:10.320,0:41:19.840

welcome. Thank you, thank you Alastair for uh, your interest in this issue of segregated education in Northern Ireland.

0:41:25.360,0:41:30.560

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Thanks for listening and I hope you can join us next time.