



## **Listening to controlled schools**

### **CSSC Listening Events update report**

#### **Executive summary**

In September 2016, CSSC was formally established as the advocacy body for the controlled sector, representing over 49% of schools in Northern Ireland. This marked the first time in over 30 years that the sector had a representative voice. The establishment of CSSC was timely and much needed, particularly given the many educational issues affecting controlled schools. Currently 96% of controlled schools have become members of CSSC, giving a clear mandate to speak on behalf of the sector.

#### **Context**

Engaging with controlled school leaders has been critical to the work of CSSC from the beginning. The organisation has taken a number of steps to progress recommendations made by controlled school Principals and Governors to underpin its work following a series of well attended engagement events held in 2017. CSSC committed to incorporating the recommendations into its programme of work and controlled school governors and school principals agreed to supporting this.

The 'Listening to controlled schools – CSSC Listening event update report' informs the sector about this work undertaken by the organisation in the last four years.

The listening events provided clear guidance from schools on the work CSSC should undertake and the issues which were a priority for the sector. A report based on the findings of the listening events was published by CSSC in June 2017. [Access the original report here.](#)

**A summary of the work of the organisation is provided below.**

### **Advocacy and representation**

CSSC's launch was timely in respect of the many educational issues affecting schools, such as funding concerns, administration changes and reduction in support arrangements. All of which created significant challenges for the governance, leadership and management of schools.

As the advocacy body for the controlled sector, CSSC has a significant contribution to make to the quality of learning, the well-being of students and staff, the raising of standards and the improvement of the school estate. As such, CSSC has advocated on behalf of the sector in a number of areas, at a strategic level, a policy level and at the grassroots level ensuring that the sector is represented and promoted, and encouraging the best system outcomes for all controlled schools.

CSSC is proactive in identifying and understanding the needs of the sector, particularly in the context of the wider education system. The representation of the controlled sector is one key area which CSSC aims to address.

CSSC's first baseline analysis and subsequent communications work has focused heavily on the controlled sector under three headings: large, diverse, and inclusive. This has emphasised the diversity and inclusiveness of the sector, key traits which controlled school leaders felt were often overlooked.

### **Ethos**

Ethos is at the heart of school improvement. There is a significant body of research evidence that demonstrates that ethos is at the core of a successful school. A key area of activity for CSSC since its introduction has been supporting the development of ethos both at a sectoral and school level.

Taking on board the recommendations from the listening events, CSSC worked on understanding and developing ethos within the controlled sector. Through extensive stakeholder consultation CSSC developed its vision statement as an overarching statement of ethos for controlled schools. The development of the ethos self-evaluation toolkit for controlled schools is fundamental in assisting controlled schools to explore and reconsider their individual ethos, as well as providing a reference point for the sector as a whole.

### **Governance**

CSSC recognises and values the significant contribution that governors make to controlled schools. CSSC has sought to work in conjunction with EA to support governors in their role. As well as providing training opportunities, CSSC has also sought to promote the roles and responsibilities of governors.

Working in partnership as part of the reconstitution process was key to this. As part of the 2018 reconstitution process, CSSC was represented on EA's reconstitution working group

and reconstitution panels. CSSC and EA also worked together to raise awareness of the reconstitution process and call for new school governors.

CSSC seeks to support governors in their role through advice and training in collaboration with the Education Authority. CSSC conducted a series of governor engagement sessions that were delivered during meetings at the request of governors of individual member schools within the controlled sector. Ethos development training sessions for governors delivered by CSSC explore the history of the controlled sector, what ethos is, current legislation in respect of ethos and the role of governors in ethos development.

### **Raising standards**

Every child should have access to quality education to enable them to meet their potential. CSSC works with leaders in controlled schools to achieve this, and ensure that the education system delivers for all. Building the capacity of school leaders in one area which CSSC has focused extensively on, in order to support school leaders and pupils. It has also been CSSC's aim to promote the excellent and innovative work of controlled schools in raising achievement and educational outcomes.

In order to provide targeted support for school improvement, CSSC developed the building capacity programme. The content and structure of the programme was borne out of a review of outcomes from ETI inspection reports and current research and developments in school improvement.

CSSC's involvement in the Ulster University's Taking Boys Seriously project, including organising a conference on the topic of boys' underachievement, has also raised the profile of controlled schools and innovative measures they have successfully implemented to raise the achievement of boys.

### **Communication and research**

Two-way communication with schools has existed from the establishment of the organisation and remains an essential part of how the organisation operates. CSSC has a communications strategy in place to enable it to take a proactive approach to promoting the Council, the successes of individual schools and the sector as a whole.

A range of tactics has been employed to ensure that CSSC engages with, and represents the needs of the controlled sector. Bespoke plans are tailored to emerging issues.

CSSC has a fundamental role to play in undertaking research which provides a clearer picture of the controlled sector, for example in reducing misconceptions and raising the profile of the sector as a whole. It is also essential that the CSSC work programme is evidence based and as such research is an underpinning factor.

### **Conclusion**

CSSC has extensively progressed the recommendations set out by controlled schools through the listening events. It will continue to work on behalf of controlled schools in the years to

come continuing to focus on these existing, and still pertinent issues, and placing new focus on other issues as they arise for the benefit of the controlled sector.

