

EA Equality Action Plan Consultation Response

Written response submitted to the EA

Submitted by the Controlled Schools' Support Council

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- As the support body for almost half of the schools in Northern Ireland, the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Education Authority Equality Action Plan.
- The controlled sector is the largest education sector in Northern Ireland, representing 49% of all schools. CSSC supports controlled schools in Northern Ireland which include Nursery Schools, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, Grammar Schools, Integrated Schools, Special Schools and Irish-Medium Schools. Additionally, 28% of children and young people who attend controlled schools are entitled to Free School Meals).
- As 38 of NI's 40 Special Schools in NI are controlled schools and 33,729 pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are educated within controlled schools, CSSC recognises the vital role education plays in creating an equitable society.
- GCSE data since 2012 shows that Catholic maintained schools have consistently outperformed controlled schools by between 8 and 12.6 percentage points, despite Catholic Maintained schools having higher levels of Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME). Controlled schools are also historically more likely to enter the formal intervention process and to require external support to improve education provision. These disparities are not inevitable. The Independent Review of Education has

attributed differences in performance, in part, to the presence of sector-specific support structures, highlighting the role of strong leadership and dedicated support in the Catholic maintained sector, and identifying principals' concerns about EA's capacity to sufficiently meet the needs of the sector it manages.

- The EA's governance arrangements further constrain its ability to provide a focused managing authority role for controlled schools. Its Board includes representatives from political parties, the Transferors Representatives' Council, Trustees of Catholic Maintained Schools, and representatives from the integrated, Irish medium, voluntary grammar, and controlled sectors. Whilst this reflects the diversity of the education system, it does not provide governance with a primary focus on the controlled sector.
- However, CSSC welcomes the Minister of Education's endorsement of the Taskforce recommendation to establish the Controlled Schools' Unit (CSU) within the EA, working collaboratively with CSSC. This is a very positive step for the controlled sector. CSSC looks forward to working with the CSU in the Education Authority to drive meaningful improvements for all controlled schools across Northern Ireland.
- CSSC's vision is to empower controlled schools to serve their communities by enriching the lives of their children and young people. Controlled schools are open to all, welcoming children and young people of all faiths and none, richly diverse and inclusive, reflective of and embedded in the communities they serve. CSSC firmly challenges those who represent the controlled sector as serving only one community group. CSSC also challenges controlled schools to understand what being open to all means in their own communities. Notably controlled schools educate 46% of newcomer pupils in Northern Ireland.
- CSSC promotes our children and young people being educated together and the need for investment in the education system. We need a vision and strategy for education that includes everyone working together and all voices being heard.