

MINISTRY OF HIGHER AND SECONDARY  
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# Essay

TOPIC: **Education in Northern Ireland**

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# Education in Northern Ireland

Education in Northern Ireland differs slightly from systems used elsewhere in the United Kingdom, though it is more similar to that used in England and Wales than it is to Scotland. A child's age on 1 July determines the point of entry into the relevant stage of education unlike England and Wales where it is the 1 September. Northern Ireland's results at GCSE and A-Level are consistently top in the UK. At A-Level, one third of students in Northern Ireland achieved A grades in 2007, compared with England and Wales.

## Central administration

The Northern Ireland Executive's Department of Education (DE) is responsible for the country's education policy except for the higher and further education sector for which the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) retains responsibility.

The Department of Education's main areas of responsibility cover pre-school, primary, post-primary and special education; the youth service; the promotion of community relations within and between schools; and teacher education and salaries. Its primary statutory duty is to promote the education of the people of Northern Ireland and to ensure the effective implementation of education policy.

## Local administration

Education at a local level in Northern Ireland is administered by five education and library boards covering different geographical areas. The role of the boards is to ensure that high quality education, youth and library support services exist throughout their areas. Each board is allocated resources by the Department of Education.

Classroom 2000 (C2k), on behalf of the five boards, is responsible for the provision of information and communications technology managed services to all schools in Northern Ireland.

These boards are as follows:

Belfast Education and Library Board

North Eastern Education and Library Board

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Southern Education and Library Board

Western Education and Library Board    Name            Area

1.        Belfast
2.        North Eastern    Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney,  
Carrickfergus, Coleraine, Larne, Magherafelt, Moyle, Newtownabbey
3.        South Eastern    Ards, Castlereagh, Down, Lisburn and  
North Down
4.        Southern    Armagh, Banbridge, Cookstown, Craigavon,  
Dungannon and South Tyrone, Newry and Mourne
5.        Western    Derry, Fermanagh, Limavady, Omagh, Strabane

## Curriculum

The majority of examinations sat, and education plans followed, in Northern Irish schools are set by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA). All schools in Northern Ireland follow the Northern Ireland Curriculum which is based on the National Curriculum used in England and Wales. At age 11, on entering secondary education, all pupils study a broad base of subjects which include geography, English, mathematics, science, physical education, music and modern languages. Currently there are proposals to reform the curriculum to make its emphasis more skills-based under which, in addition to those mentioned, home economics, local and global citizenship and personal, social and health education would become compulsory subjects[citation needed].

At age 14, pupils select which subjects to continue to study for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations. Currently it is compulsory to study English, mathematics, science, a modern language[citation needed] and religious studies, although a full GCSE course does not have to be studied for the latter[citation needed]. In addition, pupils usually elect to continue with other subjects and many study for eight or nine GCSEs but possibly up to

ten or eleven. GCSEs mark the end of compulsory education in Northern Ireland.

At age 16, some pupils stay at school and choose to study Advanced Level AS and A2 level subjects or more vocational qualifications such as Applied Advanced Levels. Those choosing AS and A2 levels normally pick three or four subjects and success in these can determine acceptance into higher education courses at university.

Eleven plus

Main article: Eleven plus exam

Northern Ireland remains the largest area in the UK which still operates grammar schools. In the last year of primary school, children sit the eleven plus transfer test, and the results determine which school they will go to. In 2001, a decision was made to abolish the system, and to replace it with separate exams each grammar school will set prospective primary students but this will not take effect until 2009. Northern Ireland ministers of education have chosen not to turn grammar schools into comprehensive schools, as once thought, due to other UK government systems failing to meet expectations with their decision of comprehensive schools. For further information, see the article on the tripartite system. These changes will not affect the North Armagh area where the Dickson Plan is in effect.

Controlled schools

Controlled schools (nursery, primary, special, secondary modern and grammar schools) are under the management of the school's board of governors and the employing authorities are the five education and library boards. Although open to those of all faiths and none, many of these schools were originally church schools, whose control was transferred to the state in the first half of the twentieth century. The three largest Protestant churches (Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Methodist), known as the transferors, maintain a link with the schools through church representation on controlled school boards of governors.

This statutory representational role on boards of governors is set out in schedules 4 and 5 of the Education & Library Board (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Under this order, for example, transferor

governors comprise four out of nine members on a controlled primary school. This right of representation on controlled schools is being re-examined under the Review of Public Administration (RPA).

The RPA has proposed the removal of this statutory role for transferors on the ground that it purportedly contravenes the equality requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Transferors' Representative Council, speaking on behalf of the three churches, argues that this proposal will remove the Christian ethos as of right from the controlled sector of education.

#### Catholic education

There are 547 Roman-Catholic-managed schools in Northern Ireland. According to figures from the Department of Education for 2006/2007, the number of pupils registered at school in Northern Ireland is 329,583. The number of pupils attending Catholic-managed schools is 148,225. Approximately 45% of children in Northern Ireland are educated in Catholic-managed schools.

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) is the advocate for the Catholic maintained schools sector in Northern Ireland. CCMS represents trustees, schools and governors on issues such as raising and maintaining standards, the school estate and teacher employment. As the largest employer of teachers in Northern Ireland (8500 teachers), CCMS plays a central role in supporting teachers whether through its welfare service or, for example, in working parties such as the Independent Inquiry into Teacher Pay and Conditions of Service.

CCMS supports trustees in the provision of school buildings and governors and principals in the effective management and control of schools. CCMS also has a wider role within the Northern Ireland education sector and contributes with education partners to policy on a wide range of issues such as curriculum review, selection, pre-school education, pastoral care and leadership.

There are 36 council members who oversee and authorise the strategic and operational policies and practices of CCMS. Council members are appointed for the duration of each council period for four

years. Membership to the council is by appointment and recommendation[citation needed]. Council members receive payment for travelling and incurred costs only. There are four categories of Council members:

Department of Education representatives - membership is advertised through the press for these positions.

Trustee representatives - members are recommended by the Northern bishops.

Parents' representatives - members are drawn from local community on a voluntary basis.

Teachers' Representatives - members are drawn from the teaching profession on a voluntary basis.

Established under the auspices of 1989 Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order, the Council's primary purpose is the provision of an upper tier of management for the Catholic Maintained Sector with the primary objective of raising standards in Catholic maintained schools.

The seminal activities of the Council are set out in Articles 142-146 and Schedule 8 of the 1989 Education Reform (NI) Order and are as follows:

- to employ all such teachers as are required on the staffs of Catholic maintained schools;

- to advise the Department or a board on such matters relating to Catholic maintained schools as the Department or board may refer to the Council or as the Council may see fit;

- to promote and co-ordinate, in consultation with the trustees of Catholic maintained schools, the planning of the effective provision of such schools;

- to promote the effective management and control of Catholic maintained schools by the boards of governors of such schools;

- to provide or secure, with the approval of the Department, the provision of such advice and information to the trustees, boards of governors, principal and staff of Catholic maintained schools as appears to the Council to be appropriate in connection with the Council's duty;

- to exercise such other functions as are conferred on it by the education orders.

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools continues to promote the philosophy and vision articulated in Building Peace Shaping the Future and is committed to ensuring that through a process of managing through influence, there is a healthy respect for diversity throughout the Catholic maintained school system.

#### Integrated education

Although integrated education is expanding, Northern Ireland has a highly-segregated education system, with 95% of pupils attending either a maintained (Catholic) school or a controlled school (mostly Protestant). Controlled schools are open to children of all faiths and none, as are Catholic schools (Catholic describes the way the school is run but the students do not have to be Roman Catholic to attend). Teaching a balanced view of some subjects (especially regional history) is difficult in these conditions. The churches in Northern Ireland have not been involved in the development of integrated schools. The schools have been established by the voluntary efforts of parents. The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), a voluntary organisation, promotes, develops and supports integrated education in Northern Ireland.

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) is a financial foundation for the development and growth of integrated education in Northern Ireland in response to parental demand. The IEF seeks to bridge the financial gap between starting integrated schools and securing full government funding and support.

It was established in 1992 with money from EU Structural Funds, the Department of Education NI, the Nuffield Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, as a financial foundation for the development and growth of Integrated Education. The Fund financially supports the establishment of new schools, the growth of existing schools and those schools seeking to become integrated through the transformation process. Funding is generally seed corn and projects are 'pump primed' with the objective of eventually securing full government funding and support.

#### Irish-language-medium education

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 placed a duty on the Department of Education, similar to that already in existence in relation to integrated education through the 1989 Education Reform Order, “to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education”. Irish language medium schools are able to achieve grant-aided status, under the same procedures as other schools, by applying for voluntary maintained status. In addition to free-standing schools, Irish language medium education can be provided through units in existing schools. Unit arrangements permit Irish-language-medium education to be supported where a free-standing school would not be viable. A unit may operate as a self-contained provision under the management of a host English-medium school and usually on the same site.

School years

Primary education

Primary school

Foundation Stage

Primary 1, age 4 to 5

Primary 2, age 5 to 6

Key Stage 1

Primary 3, age 6 to 7

Primary 4, age 7 to 8

Key Stage 2

Primary 5, age 8 to 9

Primary 6, age 9 to 10

Primary 7, age 10 to 11 (Transfer procedure exams to determine secondary school placement.)

List of primary schools in Northern Ireland

Secondary education

Secondary school or grammar school

Key Stage 3

Year 8, age 11 to 12 (equivalent to Year 7 in England and Wales)

Year 9, age 12 to 13

Year 10, age 13 to 14

Key Stage 4

Year 11, age 14 to 15

Year 12, age 15 to 16 (GCSE examinations)

Secondary school, grammar school, or further education college

Sixth form



Year 13, age 16 to 17 (AS-level examinations)

Year 14, age 17 to 18 (A-levels (A2))

Note that although the Department of Education uses Year 8 to Year 14 for secondary education, the traditional First-Fifth Form, Lower Sixth and Upper Sixth are still used, at least informally, by some schools.

List of grammar schools in Northern Ireland

List of secondary schools in Northern Ireland

List of integrated schools in Northern Ireland

School holidays

School holidays in Northern Ireland are considerably different from Great Britain, and are more similar to those in the rest of Ireland. Northern Irish schools often do not take a full week for half-term holidays, and the summer term does not usually have a half-term holiday at all. Christmas holidays sometimes consist of less than two weeks, the same with the Easter holiday. This does, however, vary considerably between schools. The major difference, however, is that summer holidays are considerably longer with the end of June and entirety of July and August off, giving a nine-to-ten-week summer holidays.