

Request for submissions to National Intercultural Education Strategy

Submission of St. Patrick's College Drumcondra

St. Patrick's College welcomes this joint initiative by the Office of the Minister for Integration and the Department of Education and Science. Given the college's status as both a site of third level education and of teacher education, it has a strong interest in the development of policy in this area. St. Patrick's College recognises in its own practice the need to respond to the changing nature of Irish society and the complex educational issues which arise from those changes. The college also recognises that Irish society has always had a diverse population in terms of religious, ethnic and sexual identities, membership of the Travelling community, disability, age, gender and class. It sees its approach to interculturalism as including the many ways in which categories of difference interact and overlap.

Diversity of student intake

St. Patrick's College has initiated projects to encourage applications from a wide range of students and to provide support for students from non-traditional backgrounds while in college. While these access initiatives have been successful in promoting a more diverse student body, barriers to entry remain, particularly in relation to the B.Ed. This is discussed below. The college has succeeded in providing a supportive context for mature students across its programmes, and this is reflected in the growing number of such students in our student body. The college remains committed to widening access to third level for key groups such as ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, students from disadvantaged communities and older students.

Promoting an intercultural ethos:

The college has engaged in a number of initiatives that promote an intercultural ethos within the college. Since 2002, the Intercultural and Development Education Committee has raised awareness of intercultural issues within the college. It has organised a range of activities including intercultural festivals and seminars and lectures where intercultural issues are discussed and debated. In 2004, the college established a Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights Education (CHRCE) whose remit includes developing policy and practice relating to interculturalism and anti-racism. Since its foundation the CHRCE has organised conferences, seminars and events; it has developed curriculum projects, engaged in continuing professional development with primary teachers and built relationships with other actors in the area of intercultural education.

Developing expertise in intercultural education:

St. Patrick's College has contributed to the emerging understanding of intercultural education in Ireland and to the growing body of research about diversity and education. The following is a selection of its most recent contributions, each of which had a strong intercultural component:

- Seamus Heaney Lecture Series 2008/2009 *Cultúr agus féiniúlacht in Éirinn an lae inniu / Culture and identity in contemporary Ireland*
- Human Rights Education for a sustainable future: Conference to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. September 19th, 20th 2008.
- Minority ethnic and language Children in Primary schools: Seminar for primary teachers. March 5th 2007
- Minority Ethnicities and Minority Languages in Irish Education Conference. 21st June, 2007.
- Sugrue, C. and O'Gorman, E. (2007) *Intercultural Education: Primary Challenges in Dublin 15*.

Postgraduate and In-service Education

InService Cert / Diploma - Minority Ethnic and Minority Language Children in Irish Schools: A Practical Vision for a Better Future

Developing an intercultural curriculum:

St. Patrick's College has worked to embed intercultural education within the B.Ed and Graduate Diploma courses through the provision of dedicated, mandatory courses, integrated courses and elective specialisms. The following is a brief outline of the provision for intercultural education within the B.Ed programme:

- All B.Ed students explore issues relating to interculturalism, diversity, racism and anti-racism as part of their sociology of education, philosophy of education and psychology of education programmes. There is a particular focus within sociology on diversity, and specifically on Irish Travellers.
- First Year B.Ed students receive a mandatory seminar-based course in Development and Intercultural Education, which focuses on providing the students with the space to explore their own perspectives and experiences, as well as raising awareness of issues.
- Second Year B.Ed students participate in a range of curriculum courses which integrate intercultural education into their approaches and strategies. This includes a focus on minority language speakers, with all students receiving a minimum of two dedicated lectures and two dedicated seminars on teaching English as an additional language in the context of literacy. The needs of English language learners would also be addressed throughout the course.
- Third Year B. Ed students receive a mandatory seminar-based course entitled *The Global Teacher* which focuses on developing practice in the classroom and in a whole school context which is intercultural, and informed by a global perspective. These seminars focus particularly on pedagogy and on embedding these perspectives in classroom teaching across the curriculum.

- Third Year B.Ed students are offered the following elective specialisms which specifically address intercultural education:
 - The World in the Classroom (Development, Intercultural and Human Rights Education)
 - Literacy Skills for English Language Learners
 - Teaching and thinking in different school contexts
 - Elective course on Teaching and Learning in Ethnically and Linguistically
 - Diverse Classrooms
- Graduate Diploma students receive a similar range of courses, including a dedicated and mandatory course on intercultural and development education.

What are the key issues?

St. Patrick's College identifies the following issues and concerns as central to any intercultural strategy:

- Diversity in teaching body: There is an issue relating to the lack of diversity within the teaching body and within the student teacher population that needs to be addressed. This is a complex issue and it has a range of causes, including the recent origins of many of our ethnic minorities. One barrier to increased diversity is the Irish language requirement for entry to B.Ed programmes. We recognise that negotiating this issue in a way that is respectful of and responsive to the needs and wishes of Irish speakers and that recognises the right of all children in Ireland to have access to the Irish language is a difficult task. Nevertheless, some framework needs to be put in place that serves both the interests of a more diverse population and the interests of the Irish language itself. A second barrier to a more diverse student body is the denominational nature of teacher education in Ireland. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss ways in which the system can become more inclusive in terms of belief systems.
- St. Patrick's College is concerned that any intercultural strategy would identify Irish Travellers as a central concern of that strategy. We hope that the consultation process that is ongoing includes the voice of Travellers directly and that the final report addresses issues relating to Travellers and education as central, rather than peripheral, to the strategy.
- We recognise also the extent to which diversity can be multi-dimensional. We are concerned that the strategy recognise the interaction between gender, ethnicity, class and disability. We advocate also that the strategy include sexuality as a category of diversity. Homophobia has been identified as a factor in school bullying and a strategy that is premised on the principle of inclusion should address this.

Draft Strategy:

In addition to the key issues identified above, St. Patrick's College offers the following comments on the draft strategy document:

- Document needs to be set in a wider context that identifies relevant obligations and guidelines under foundational documents and standards such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as programmes and initiatives of the Council of Europe and the European Union, some of which have already been noted in the document.
- The principles should include equality as one of the underpinning concepts and an acknowledgement of the benefits of recognising and supporting diversity would also be helpful. The understanding of integration which is outlined in the section headed proposed actions would also be very usefully highlighted in the Guiding Principles of the Strategy.
- The coupling of rights and responsibilities suggests that the rights of children/young adults or older learners are dependent on the fulfilment of their responsibilities rather than being accepted as universal and inalienable. If responsibilities are to be included as a concept, they should be mentioned separately. As the human rights framework includes the reciprocal recognition of and respect for the rights of others it may not be necessary to use the term responsibilities at all.
- The European Commission Green Paper -Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems- refers to the necessity to accommodate increased diversity of mother tongues, cultural perspectives and attainments. The strategy needs to address how policy and guidelines regarding how mother tongues might be integrated into teaching and learning in schools with children with EAL needs, could be developed.
- The Strategy also address how schools and the Education system generally can be practically supported in building bridges with migrant families and communities in the context of work with diverse groups generally.

Prepared on behalf of the College by CHRCE, 2008

