



Terms of reference: Coalition for Inclusive Education

The Coalition for Inclusive Education is a coalition of organisations and experts who are committed to reforming the education system in Northern Ireland to be inclusive of all pupils, staff, and parents, regardless of religion or belief.

What do we mean by inclusive education?

When we use the term 'inclusive education' we mean an educational environment which is not segregated and intentionally strives to include the religion or belief, cultural and social identities of all, enabling pupils to learn with and from each other. Further, we mean education according to a curriculum that is objective, critical, and pluralistic, and is designed to cultivate open-mindedness alongside an appreciation of shared values and interdependence. In sum, it is an education that treats all learners with dignity and respect, and so is suitable for all.

Our vision

We want all state-funded schools to have an inclusive ethos and be open, welcoming, and fair to pupils, staff, and parents from all backgrounds, regardless of religion or belief.

In line with the European Convention on Human Rights, we accept that parents have the freedom for their children to be educated in the religion or belief of their choice. However, this right must always be balanced with the developing rights of the child as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), particularly freedom of religion or belief.

We believe that, if teaching about religions and worldviews is to have application and relevance in a plural society, it must include balanced and meaningful learning about a diverse range of beliefs.

Our mission

We campaign for:

- All state-funded schools to foster an inclusive ethos based on shared values which should be reflected in their respectful treatment of young people and a recognition of each person's right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief;
- Education about a range of religious and non-religious worldviews in a way that is objective, critical, and pluralistic, and inspected in line with other curriculum subjects;
- School assemblies to be inclusive and suitable for all pupils, regardless of religion or belief. Collective worship should not be mandated by legislation;
- Fair employment legislation extended to the employment of all teachers, irrespective of religion or belief, in all state-funded schools.

Grounding principles

We are guided by and support the internationally recognised *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, prepared by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights' advisory council of experts on freedom of religion or belief.

We specifically highlight the following when considering religion or belief in Northern Ireland schools:

- Teaching about religions and worldviews must be provided in ways that are fair, accurate, and based on sound scholarship. Students should learn about religions and beliefs in an environment respectful of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and civic values.
- Preparation of curricula, textbooks, and educational materials for

teaching about religions and worldviews should take into account religious and non-religious views in a way that is inclusive, fair, and respectful. Care should be taken to avoid inaccurate or prejudicial material, particularly when this reinforces negative stereotypes

- Curricula should be developed in accordance with recognised professional standards in order to ensure a balanced approach to study about religions and beliefs
- Any basic teacher preparation should be framed and developed according to democratic and human rights principles and include insight into cultural and religious diversity in society

We recognise the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides that:

- Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
- No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
- Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
- The States Parties to the Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Supporters

The Coalition is a network of individuals and organisations committed to creating an inclusive education system in Northern Ireland. Supporters are defined as those who sign up to our communications.

Members

Members are those who have explicitly signed up to the aims of the Coalition including those involved in our steering group and wider Coalition. New members must be approved by the steering group.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee sets the strategic objectives of the Coalition and oversees its work. It provides advice and expertise on key matters of concern.

The Steering Committee is made up of education professionals, membership organisations, and various interested parties including advisors.

Current members of the Committee include representatives from the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, the Interfaith Forum, Belfast Islamic Centre, Northern Ireland Humanists, Left Side Up and the Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality; education professionals whose field of work centres on religion in schools from Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University, and Stranmillis University College, and human rights solicitors Phoenix Law.

Dr Ruth Wareham, Education Campaigns Manager for Humanists UK, and Paul Pettinger of the Accord Coalition hold advisory positions.

Types of activities we carry out

- We undertake research relating to our policy areas, creating a wide evidence base that supports and highlights our aims.
- We lobby the Northern Ireland Assembly to reform the education system in line with our aims.
- We endeavour to take/support relevant legal cases.
- We respond to all relevant Government consultations and calls for evidence and, where possible, advise the Department of Education and other official bodies on the best course of action to take in order to advance our stated aims.
- We provide guidance to help schools and teachers make their current practice more inclusive.

- We create media and awareness-raising campaigns focusing on our issues and the work the coalition carries out.
- We create resources that support and facilitate inclusive teaching for parents, schools, and teachers.

Communication

Regular emails are sent to supporters signed up to our mailing list. These contain details of collective and individual actions that can be taken by supporters in the upcoming weeks. Emails with urgent actions can be sent in addition to the regular emails. All emails will be drafted and prepared by the communications lead, and receive a proof and policy check from appointed steering committee individuals.

Social media

The steering committee has a member (or a job-share) who is responsible for managing a branded Facebook and Twitter page. Content for this page can include:

- Links to upcoming events, current campaigns, goals, or research
- Updates on what has been happening within the group, e.g. sharing stories
- Calls to action on a particular campaign, goal, or piece of research
- Links to our relevant resources.

Agreed August 2021