



DRUMRAGH INTEGRATED COLLEGE

Principal: Mr. Nigel Frith BA, MA, NPQH

Excellence For Everyone

Mr J O'Dowd
Minister for Education
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Rathgill
Bangor
BT19 7PR

15th January 2013

Dear Minister

I write on behalf of the Board of Governors of Drumragh Integrated College. We are aware that the Education Bill to establish ESA is at present in committee stage in the Assembly. We wish to bring to your attention the following grave concerns we have with this Bill in its present form.

Both the Education Reform Order (1989) and the Belfast Agreement (1998) place an obligation on the Department of Education to 'encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education that is the education together of Catholic and Protestant children'. Under clause 2(5) of the Education Bill, there is a duty on ESA to encourage and facilitate the development of education in an Irish speaking school, yet there is no corresponding duty on ESA regarding integrated education. **Drumragh Integrated College argues that the Education Bill must be amended to enshrine this statutory obligation to encourage and facilitate integrated education, as a matter of priority and urgency.**

There is no representation for integrated education on the board of ESA; as constituted at the moment, the board reflects the segregated nature of our educational system and our divided society. In order to meet the statutory obligation referred to above it is essential that there must be representation from the Integrated Movement on the board.

Drumragh Integrated College has a pupil enrolment of 580; it has been oversubscribed for some years now, as you are aware:

Drumragh IC	Admission number	Number of applications				
		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
	96	128	129	152	127	124

As can be seen above, we are consistently oversubscribed. Having listened carefully to the wider community, it is repeatedly clear that the reason why levels of over-subscription have been falling since 2010 is because potential applicants are despairing of gaining admission and in a number of cases are 'giving up'; indeed last and this year we have witnessed substantial numbers of prospective parents telling us they will not apply because they have given up hope. Some of our feeder primary schools are informing us of the same situation. I would emphasise then that this statistic does **not** reflect falling demand for this college.

Using this school as an example for a few moments longer, we would make these points;

1. The college is over-subscribed, as has been discussed above.
2. The current LTE limit is too low to cater for future trends.
3. There is insufficient provision for integrated education in the Omagh area.
4. There is a substantial demand from parents, for the quality and type of education provided by the College.
5. There is increased parental frustration at a shortage of places in the College.
6. There is both a community-based and province-wide need and desire for integration.

Where is the representation on ESA for the staff, children and families who are part of an integrated school, those who would like to be but are denied the opportunity, and the much greater number of the wider public who support this type of education? It is inequitable and unjust that those choosing Integrated Education should be denied representation on the Board of ESA.

Drumragh Integrated College requests representation for the Integrated Sector, as of right, on the board of ESA.

The Education Bill outlines responsibilities under Area Based Planning for the establishment of new Controlled and new Catholic Maintained schools but there appears to be no mechanism for the establishment of new integrated schools, either controlled or grant maintained. It is not clear

how a new integrated school might open under ESA or how parental demand for integration might be supported under ESA.

Drumragh Integrated College argues that the mechanism for opening new integrated schools must be written into the Education Bill.

This school, along with the wider Integrated Movement, has grave concerns about the limitations of ABP as the model used to frame the area-based planning process, based as it is on a sectarian headcount of children within the straitjacket of the existing sectors.

Drumragh Integrated College argues there should be a duty on ESA to maximize opportunities for integrating education within a system of sustainable schools.

Drumragh Integrated College understands that the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education has submitted a number of amendments which would write into the Bill an acknowledgement of the statutory obligation to facilitate and encourage Integrated Education and which would ensure representation for Integrated Education on the board. Drumragh Integrated College registers its support of these amendments.

Finally, we see an opportunity in ESA to shape a new educational landscape, one which does not reflect or further embed the divisions of the past. We seek assurance that every step will be taken to ensure that ESA can play a positive role in shaping such a future.

The omission of this commitment from the Bill and the almost total failure to mention Integrated Education in any parts of the Bill are striking and urgently concerning. We trust our concerns will be acted on and that this situation will be rectified.

Yours sincerely,



Nigel Frith

Principal

On behalf of the Board of Governors

Cc: Mervyn Storey, Chair of the Education Committee
Members of the Education Committee