



Mill Strand Integrated Primary School

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Principal: Mr P. Reid B.Ed D.A.S.E. M.Sc PQH(NI)

21st January 2013

Dear Minister

I write on behalf of the Board of Governors of Mill Strand Integrated Primary School. While part of this letter will be similar to that coming from other integrated schools the overall message is unique to us and written to plead that the Ministers that serve us are committed to a shared future for all of our young people and that this is not merely a sound bite used by politicians without commitment of meaning.

We note 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 but no corresponding duty on ESA regarding integrated education.

The stakeholders of Mill Strand Integrated Primary School argue that the Education Bill must be amended to enshrine this statutory obligation to encourage and facilitate integrated education in the bill.

There is no representation for integrated education on the board, as constituted at the moment, the board reflects the segregated nature of our educational system and 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.

Mill Strand Integrated Primary School has a pupil enrolment of 207 children; we serve 145 families. We are oversubscribed and turn away on average 12 children each year. Since our foundation in 1987 we have educated 5000 children who have been educated in a manner that will make them effective members of a shared society and better future for us all. In addition, we have a staff of 30.

Where is the representation on ESA for the staff, children and families who are part of an integrated school 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.

Mill Strand Integrated School requests an equal representation for the integrated sector, as of right, on the board of ESA with at least the same number of seats as the segregated sectors.

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.

Mill Strand Integrated School 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 date to frame the area based planning process, based as it is on a sectarian headcount of children within the straitjacket of the existing sectors.

Mill Strand Integrated School argues there should be a duty on ESA to maximize opportunities for integrating education within a system of sustainable schools. In our area alone we have seen how those from the segregated sectors of education have sought to create even bigger segregated schools, removing the need for collaboration and sharing as well as effectively trying to prevent the growth of integrated education so badly needed in our communities.

Mill Strand Integrated School 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. Mill Strand Integrated School registers their 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 is striking and concerning. We trust our concerns will be acted on and that this situation will be rectified.

I have spoken to you personally on educational matters in the past. I am proud of my own culture and background but am not afraid to move forwards together with those from differing backgrounds and opinions. I would be happy to meet you and discuss this matter at any time. The hope of a better future for all of our children is too important.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Reid', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Philip Reid

Principal

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