

Dear Minister

I write on behalf of the Board of Governors of Sperrin Integrated College. We understand that the Education Bill to establish ESA is presently in committee stage in the Assembly. We have concerns with the Bill in its present form and wish to bring these to your attention.

It is also our understanding that 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 apparent corresponding duty on ESA regarding integrated education.

We argue that the Education Bill must reference this statutory obligation to encourage and facilitate Integrated Education.

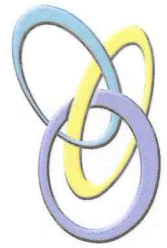
Sperrin Governors note that there is no representation for Integrated Education on the ESA board. As constituted at the moment, the board reflects the segregated nature of our educational system and divided society. In order to meet the statutory obligation referred to above it is essential that there be representation from the Integrated movement on the ESA board.

Sperrin has a pupil enrolment of 497 children; we serve 396 families. We have been oversubscribed at Year 8 for 4 of the last 5 years and anticipate being consistently oversubscribed in future years. Since our foundation in 2002 we have educated approximately 900 children. In addition, we have a staff of 70, including education and support staff.

ESA does not appear to have representation 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. We believe it to be inequitable and unjust that those choosing Integrated Education should be denied representation on the Board of ESA.

Sperrin 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.



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

The Area Based Planning concept has many commendable features, however, the way in which the consultation process was carried out appears to confirm acceptance of a segregated model, except where absolutely necessary to enable schools to survive.

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

We understand that the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education has submitted a number of proposed 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. **Sperrin Integrated College 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.

Yours sincerely

AP Rowan
Principal Sperrin Integrated School

F Symington
Chair Board of Governors

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