

EGM/OM/130122

Mr John O'Dowd MLA
Minister for Education
Department of Education
Rathgael House, Balloo Road
Bangor BT19 7PR

21 January 2013

Dear Minister

I write on behalf of the Board of Governors of Ulidia Integrated College, Carrickfergus. My Board of Governors and I note that the Education Bill to establish the Education Skills Authority (ESA) is at present in committee stage in the Assembly. We wish to bring to your attention the following grave concerns we have in relation to 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 it in relation to integrated education.

Ulidia Integrated College argues 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 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, there *must* be representation on the board from the integrated movement.

Ulidia Integrated College has a pupil enrolment of 576, serving 481 families in the East Antrim area. We are oversubscribed and turn away, on average, 40 children each year. Since our foundation in 1997 we have educated 1671 students. In addition, we have a staff of approximately 38 teachers, together with 60 auxiliary and ancillary staff.

Where is the representation on ESA for the staff, children and families who are part of this integrated school and the even greater number of people from 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.

Ulidia 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 it.

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

This school, together with the wider integrated movement, has grave concerns about the limitations of 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.

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

Ulidia Integrated College understands that the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) 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 of ESA. Ulidia Integrated College registers its support for 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 from the Bill of this commitment and the almost total failure to mention integrated education in any part of it are both striking and concerning. We therefore trust that our concerns will be acted upon and that this situation will be rectified.

Yours sincerely

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E G Martin, Principal

On behalf of the Board of Governors

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