



22 October 2014

Dear Mr McCallion

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Governors of Blackwater Integrated College in response to your request for written evidence with regard to Shared and Integrated Education.

Lagan College in Belfast and Shimna IC in Newcastle were oversubscribed and parents, in particular those whose children attended integrated primary schools, wanted to ensure the choice of integrated post-primary provision in the mid-down area. Rowallane IC opened in 2006 as an independent school, funded by the IEF. Unfortunately Rowallane did not receive government backing due mainly to the policy of proposals being considered in relation to likely impact on nearby schools, rather than in the light of parental demand. Undeterred in the second year of the school the parents sought another integrated option for their children.

Blackwater IC opened in September 2008 as the result of bringing together the independent school Rowallane Integrated College and the former Down Academy Controlled Integrated High School.

Blackwater IC is a school which operates in a building which is less than satisfactory. The current school was built for 250 pupils. If we were to meet our enrolment of 400 there would be serious health and safety issues! The lack of suitable facilities makes it more difficult to attract students.

I believe that Shared Education and Integrated Education are different. Integrated Education is full immersion sharing in which the children and young people are given the opportunity to learn about and from each other in their daily interactions. They learn to get to know each other as people and not as labels.

I have personal experience of shared education having attended a mixed school. The school was, however, single identity in its ethos and practice.

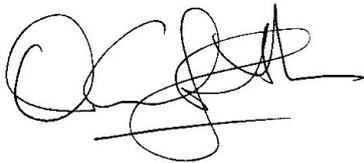
In addition, while working in the Controlled Sector, I was involved in a number of cross-community projects. While these displayed many examples of good practice and certainly had a worth and value, they had little, if any, long term impact.

Any legislation to support Shared Education must not be at the expense of Integrated Education. Integrated Education is more effective in bringing children and young people together and is more financially efficient than retaining separate schools with the resulting need to duplicate resources.

The key barriers to the growth of Integrated Education have been a weak political commitment due to our existing divided political system and the ‘what we have we hold’ mentality of so many educational institutions. It is significant that a Judicial Review was needed to clarify the Department’s statutory duty and to remind the Minister to fulfil it.

Educating our children together from a young age gives the opportunity for education to heal division. It is time to find a sustainable way to bring children and young people together if we are to work “together, building a united community”. Integrated Education as the norm for our children and young people provides an excellent model.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Olwen Griffith', written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Olwen Griffith
Principal