

Sir

As the Principal of Bridge Integrated Primary School, I feel it is appropriate for me to make a written response to the Committee. I have worked in Bridge IPS for 20 years and have had the privilege of being Principal in our school since 2005. Having grown up in a Catholic family and having attended Maintained schools, I was struck forcefully on entering the integrated school system, by the passion of the parents, staff and governors who led to its creation and maintained and encouraged its growth. This continues to be the case today.

Integrated Education inspires and achieves quality education alongside quality contact for the children who attend our schools. Our pupils are immersed in an ethos of respect for one another's communities from the outset of their attendance and from this grows curiosity and genuine interest in one another, without a need to suspiciously or negatively compare the beliefs, practices and cultures of a classmate or colleague. Friendships grow beyond the classroom and into the communities in which we live. Barriers, often formed through ignorance or as a result of community pressure, begin to be broken down and our pupils bring home a new message – that we can break the mould!

Shared education is a start – but must not be the end. It is imperative that fully fledged integrated schools, which are desired by parents, are allowed to grow and are facilitated and encouraged by the Department of Education. Shared education is a model of partial contact and this is not enough if the communities in our country are to grow in knowledge and trust of one another.

With thanks for your consideration of my comments.

Teresa Devlin