

24/10/14

Dear Mr McCallion

I am writing in response to your request for written evidence with regard to Shared and Integrated Education. It surprises me greatly that 29 years since I, as a parent deeply committed to helping to create a society at peace, worked tirelessly and in a long term voluntary capacity to cultivate the first integrated primary school outside Belfast, All Children's Integrated Primary School, Newcastle, Co. Down and chaired the first meeting of a new parent's group to set in progress the development of Shimna Integrated College, next door, that there is so little understanding of the statutory duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education and the range of interventions to try and eliminate or drastically change the meaning of this duty.

Before I comment further on the areas of the inquiry which I can from deep commitment and personal experience contribute to, I share the story I wrote a few days ago for an up and coming publication about my journey.

All Children's Integrated Primary School, Newcastle, Co. Down, nestles at the foot of the Mourne Mountains behind the wall of what was originally a traditional Walled Garden, part of the Annesley Estate.

It would be hard to imagine a more perfect setting, the green of the forest and peaks of the hills on one side and the sweeping coastline of sea and sand on the other.

Today, 230 children, aged four to eleven, and reflecting the diversity of faith, culture and creed that is Northern Ireland, 2014, come together every day to learn, play, share and develop a caring understanding of one another.

And yet, All Children's only exists because a small group of dedicated parents and concerned friends came together in 1985. They were united in their belief that educating children together was important if Northern Ireland was to become a society at peace after so many years of violent conflict.

Anne Carr, is one of those founding parents and this is her story:

It was October 1985 when I read the small advertisement on the front page of our local paper, the Mourne Observer.

It invited all parents interesting in establishing a new integrated primary school in Newcastle, Co. Down, to a meeting in the community centre.

I had followed the news items on the group of parents who had a few years before established Lagan College and had been inspired by their determination and courage.

The mayhem of the "Troubles" had already deeply affected our lives in so many ways and as a young mother of three children, I was immediately drawn to the possibility of my children being educated locally with children of all faiths and none instead of the segregated education that was the norm.

I went to the meeting and found the room filled with parents from across our community divides, all passionate about the possibility of integrated education in our area.

The meeting was addressed by Belinda Loftus, a parent from Dundrum and representatives of the organisation All Children Together, a charitable group that had supported Lagan College in their endeavours and whose aim was to support parent groups interested in developing integrated schools in their areas.

I realised that the initial idea had come from a group of parents involved with Dundrum Community Association and led by Belinda, they had contacted the Board of Governors of Downshire Controlled Primary School in Dundrum to explore the possibility of it transforming to integrated status. They knew that pupil numbers in the school were dwindling and hoped that the idea of developing a planned shared school for the village might sustain its future. The request had been turned down so, still passionate about the development of integrated education in the area, they called upon the support of All Children Together and this meeting was organised to gauge wider support.

It was explained that a steering committee was required initially, to start to raise the funding required to get a school off the ground. The process was that All Children Together could provide a small grant to pay for administration, publicity and meeting costs and that they could also help with raising more substantial funds from charitable organisations around the word, interested in supporting the development of integrated education in Northern Ireland.

The reality was that funding from government sources would only be available when the school was up and running and considered viable and this could take at least one school year.

Despite the challenges, the enthusiasm of the people in the room was amazing and a steering committee was soon elected. The goal was to work towards the establishment of a new integrated primary and nursery school ready to open its doors to the first pupils in September 1986. I was appointed public relations officer that night and my journey with integrated education began.

It was only when we got down to the nitty gritty of the work involved that we realised what an enormous challenge we had set ourselves. If our school was to open in less than one year we had approx. £150,000.00 to raise, a school building to secure, teaching staff to appoint, classrooms to furnish, educational resources to source and most importantly, parents to sign up who would buy into our dream and enrol their children in our nursery and primary classes.

Whilst others got on with their area of development, I got on with sharing the dream -

raising the profile of our plans, writing a monthly newsletter, writing articles for the local press, organising coffee mornings, meeting potential parents, sending letters to funders, getting as much publicity as possible.

The months flew by and slowly but surely the pupil numbers grew.

Our fundraisers proved an excellent way to engage potential parents and Belinda's efforts to secure educational charitable funds were successful and enough funding to hand we prepared to open our new school as planned.

The parent group met and decided on the name for our new school – All Children's Integrated Primary and Nursery School. The motto – "Harmony Through Understanding" was agreed and Steve Murphy, a founder parent and graphic artist designed the logo which depicted a dove of peace rising from an open book of knowledge. The first parents designed the uniform and decided that comfort and practicality would replace the normal shirt and tie uniform of the time in other schools. It would be a navy sweatshirt, short sleeved polo shirt and grey skirt or trousers. Trousers were accepted as the choice for both boys and girls if preferred.

It proved impossible to secure a building to house our new school so the only option was to rent a site in a local industrial area and buy second hand mobile classrooms. It was all hands on deck preparing the land, bringing the mobiles on site, securing toilet facilities and tackling the internal and external painting of the classrooms, office area, kitchen, buying furniture and resources, much of which was second hand and hiring our teachers and ancillary staff.

As the 1st September, 1986 approached, time simply ran out and delays on the site meant that the school mobiles would not be ready. Emergency measures then and we were delighted when the local St John's Church of Ireland church hall was made available to our group as initial temporary premises from which to run the school.

It was with immense pride that I watched our first pupils enter the gates of St John's Church Hall on 1st September 1986, the day All Children's Integrated Primary and Nursery School was born. There were 62 children on the role, a full nursery class, a combined Primary 1 – 3 class and a combined Primary 4 – 7 class.

My daughter Ashlee was one of the first Primary 1 pupils and my twin sons Darryl and Nathan were in Primary 5 and part of the combined Primary 4 – 7 class. (My youngest son Adam, born in 1988, was to enter the Reception Class in 1992.)

All Children's, the first fully integrated primary school outside the Belfast area had arrived and as PR officer I welcomed the world's press at the gates. Our opening was big and worldwide news. I did interviews with American, Australian and Japanese news crews. I travelled to Belfast to share our excitement and explain why we had developed

the school to Wendy Austin on BBC Northern Ireland News and Gerry Kelly on UTV.

The school opened, we moved to a new phase of development. Settling into the mobile classrooms after three weeks in the temporary church hall, the much larger team of founder parents and friends, new parents, principal and teachers worked tirelessly to continue to raise the funds to keep the school going, develop the curriculum and at the same time ensure that the important ethos of sharing and developing understanding, parental involvement and child centred learning was at the heart of everything we planned.

Parental support was always crucial but in the early days it was volunteer parents who manned the school kitchen, made the lunches, did a lot of the maintenance and cleaning, led extra curriculum activities and continued to hold all sorts of fund raising events to raise much needed cash.

The pupils thrived, despite the often inclement weather and the reality of moving between mobile classrooms and a separate toilet block. Wellington boots were the answer for breaktime and outdoor play and the double size mobile became assembly hall, sports hall and classroom combined.

Enrolments grew steadily and the search for a permanent building to house our school continued. The lease on the industrial site was running out so it was a dream come true when we secured a piece of land, just off King Street, Newcastle to become our permanent home. The Annesley family in Newcastle owned the site and offered it to our governors at a significantly reduced price. It had been a traditional Walled Garden in the past and some of the old wall remained. It was on a magnificent setting between the Mourne Mountains and the sea and although in the interim it would house our rapidly deteriorating mobile classrooms, our long term vision was a new purpose built school on the site.

Two years after our school opened its doors, we were delighted to have been deemed a viable school by the Department of Education and awarded maintained status. This meant that our primary school's teacher salaries would be funded one hundred percent and seventy five percent of our running costs covered. We had still money to raise but significantly less than before and we as parents and staff celebrated our wonderful achievement.

The new school site was wonderful. We had space for many outdoor activities. A new school garden was developed and a large grassy area at the front was turned into an "All Ball Pitch". Two of the parents crafted goalposts which were suitable for soccer, gaelic football and rugby and our pupils enjoyed learning all three, a first for any school in the area at the time.

We made the most of the setting and a summer barbeque for parents, friends and

pupils became an annual event and always incorporated a walk to the top of Slieve Donard led by mountaineering parents and a less strenuous walk to the top of Commedagh which often included mum's pushing buggys.

The development of our integrated school was not without its challenges. We had great community support but also faced the reality of those who saw our efforts as a threat to the status quo. It took many years to build relationships with some of the local churches and schools. Support from some of our political representatives was slow to develop. We had peaks and troughs in relation to pupil numbers, staffing and good relationships, some with the local education board and Department of Education took time to establish.

On 1st April, 1991, five years after the opening of All Children's Integrated Primary and Nursery School, we became the first Controlled Integrated Primary School in Northern Ireland enjoying full support and services provided by the South Eastern Education and Library Board. We closed the nursery school as it proved too expensive to continue and replaced it with a new Reception Class and our school was now fully funded in line with other schools in the area.

Thirteen years later, on 6th May 2004, after 18 long years in shabby mobile accommodation, and following a sustained, determined and at times fraught lobbying process, we moved into our new school. Our new school building is simply magnificent, nestled behind the Walled Garden with panoramic views of the Mourne Mountains. The bright and airy facilities are first class and pupils, staff and parents are thrilled to be afforded such a happy, safe and stimulating environment.

I came on board as a volunteer steering group member in 1985, progressed to become a trustee of the South Down Education Society, established to raise the funds to develop integrated education in the area, was a member of the parent's council and chaired the Board of Governors in total for just over fourteen years.

The successful development of All Children's became an everyday part of my life for over twenty years and like so many others involved, the journey we embarked on took determination, passion, perseverance and at times a backbone of steel.

I have said for a long time that integrated education may be just a baby step towards creating a fully shared and united community, at ease with difference but I firmly believe that it is a giant step in the right direction!

Now to contribute to the inquiry I offer the following:

- Shared and Integrated Education are completely different. In recent years politicians have sought to sell shared education as a viable alternative to

integrated education. It is not. Shared Education at its worst is apartheid education with Catholics going in one door, Protestants another. At best it allows pupils to share some time together but in essence, while better than nothing, it is similar to most CRED work. While there are some examples of good work, it is largely ineffective. Two of my children attended a local Catholic primary school for the first five years of their primary school life and despite this Catholic Maintained Primary and the local Controlled Primary being literally across a bridge over the river from one another there was no real engagement between the two. The idea that the CRED programme compares in any way is baffling as my children's experience was going to nice places with another school and not really getting to know the children at all. The good work evident in CRED happens every second of every minute of every day in Integrated schools. More importantly, as the interaction is ongoing and a natural part of daily life, rather than artificial and forced, it IS effective in that the friendships and bonds are developed on an ongoing basis.

- It is the ethos of Integrated Education which so many fail to understand. I have faced the naysayers, those who say integrated schools were developed to satisfy the needs of middle class parents whose children couldn't pass the transfer test. So many of these people I found had never set foot in an integrated, and my term, PLANNED shared school, where parents deeply committed to creating an inclusive society gave years and years of their time to create something new and special.
- We have been made aware that a definition of shared education as opposed to integrated education was provided to Mr Justice Treacy as part of the court proceedings surrounding Drumragh. Why seek a legal obligation to facilitate Shared Education when our assembly, MLAs and educational bodies have ignored and avoided a legal obligation to develop Integrated Education. In fact, since, the Good Friday Agreement Integrated Education has been capped and suppressed. Having been an active member of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition who along with my colleague Jane Morrice, actually wrote the clause into the final draft of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement around Integrated Education and mixed housing I can assure you that there was no confusion. Fully integrated, planned shared schools is what we meant, not "integrating" schools or "shared education". This was voted on by our people and passed at Referendum, and as we know this is an International Agreement, no cherry picking, the legal obligations are clear and concise. Seeking a legal obligation to promote 'Shared Education' is just another excuse to continue to avoid an existing legal obligation to promote Integrated Education. Do we live in a democracy or a dictatorship? Any

legislation underpinning Shared Education must not be to the detriment of Integrated Education which is more effective and financially efficient at achieving the shared aims. Rather it should demand 'shared practice' within the segregated sectors where they exist. This is the way forward. Fully Integrated education and all kinds of sharing practices as well.

- The key barrier for Integrated Education is the 'what we have we hold/no change' mentality of those in power and those working within the segregated sectors of education. Integrated schools have been actively prevented from growing so as not to negatively impact on neighbouring segregated schools. I have been at meetings for years and years with local and national politicians who have described integrated education as 'artificial, false and forced'. They have no knowledge of integrated education, no understanding of it and no desire to either. They fear it because Integrated Education is the only effective means of bringing about real positive change. With thirty years of experience the established integrated sector inc NICIE & IEF and existing Integrated Schools is the only body capable of facilitating it. The biggest barrier to Integrated Education is the existing divided political and educational system that needs a divided society to survive. Integrated Education would heal that division. Add the disgraceful behaviour that I as one parent have been subjected to by various churches and the discrimination which still exists where Catholic children and their parents are still in some cases shunned and not afforded the same pastoral care as other children in the parish.
- Vested interest knows no bounds.
- Other jurisdictions have come to the Integrated Sector to learn from the model of existing good practice in Northern Ireland. It speaks volumes that our politicians ignore the obvious answer on their doorstep to seek something else. Why on earth would you look at practice elsewhere and ignore the established practice within our own integrated sector that is seen as a benchmark of good practice? I for one have spent thirty years of my life sharing with others from all over the world, talking to parents here, trying to explain the journey in integrated education that I have taken and helping everyone to understand better what we as parents, and remember this is an education system that parents have driven. Does the education committee at Stormont have a reason for failing to recognise the integrated sector's thirty years of knowledge and expertise? It is beyond belief that the ELBs, are tasked with CRED when they have sought to maintain their status as a single ELB rather than potentially dilute their identity within ESA while the bodies with real knowledge and expertise are sidelined (eg NICIE). When I officially

opened our new school building in Newcastle, the then Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education Board, Jackie Fitsimmons, talked of my passion, my knowledge of creating ease with difference and my perseverance in standing my ground in the face of unbelievable opposition coming from a range of statutory bodies and politicians. He talked about me not understanding the meaning of the word "No" and considering the magnificent achievement that is All Children's, he hoped that I would never learn the meaning of that word "No". I can assure you that I never will because right always triumphs vested interest.

- CRED programmes and many others like it, are helpful. Every intervention in segregation is important. Having read about a dissemination of 'outstanding' practice for CRED last year it is no wonder why Northern Ireland is and will remain a divided society. The best facilitators had extensive work experience with NICIE yet NICIE was not part of the process. The outcomes of best practice were minimal and those identified happen every second of every minute of every day in integrated schools. It is what planned, shared integration is all about. Bringing all that is special about every single child into the classroom and working with it. Engaging parents and all levels of our school community, teaching and ancillary staff, friends. Celebrating diversity in a real way, every day. Providing safe enough spaces for the most contentious issues to be explored together and working out how best to make room for all.
- You cannot make a school integrated by simply changing its title/name and artificially forcing pupils together. Integrated schools have a unique ethos and practice. I have personal experience of education boards, obviously seeing the threat of a new parent group exploring integration in their area, targeting small Controlled schools to transform to integrated status. The transformation process is very important and in reality probably takes about ten years to be working effectively and for all the right reasons. Transformation should not be for limited, survival reasons. Long term commitment, willingness to change root and branch practice and buy in to a new and inclusive ethos is organic and complex. A Controlled School is not already an integrated school, something I have heard so many times, particularly from some political representatives.
- As so well written by the late Frank Wright, in his booklet on integrated education twenty years ago, Northern Ireland has British and Irish schools. Controlled schools support a British ethos and Catholic Maintained Schools support an Irish ethos. This permeates all areas of school life including sporting, music, after school activities etc and various emphasis in the

everyday curriculum. We have definitely seen some excellent crossover activities and much more inclusion of new peoples and all the richness they bring to the school environment but basically this reality continues.

It is so important that you seek the views of all sectors. It is vital that you engage with the segregated sectors to ascertain the barriers to shared education, the effectiveness of any shared practice and the limits within the current structures.

If you ask a question you must be prepared to listen to the answer. If you want to be informed about Integrated Education you must talk to the integrated sector. If you want to bring about change you need to listen to the integrated sector. If you want to continue to promote division, continue to ignore it, sideline it and suppress it.

I hope this inquiry genuinely intends to listen to all the voices, passionate about our children and their education here. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with the committee to elaborate more fully on the points I have made above. I attended a controlled secondary school in the Greater Shankill area of Belfast in the sixties, my husband attended a Catholic Maintained Secondary school in North Belfast, two of my children attended a Catholic Maintained Primary for five years, a Catholic Grammar School for 5 years and a Voluntary Grammar School for A Levels. My younger two children have had an education in All Children's Integrated Primary School, Lagan College and Shimna College.

I am a committed dialogue practitioner having engaged our people in years of focussed conversations and sharing and learning processes for the last thirty years. I am passionate about our need to create real ease with difference, learn from the past and create a truly shared and caring society for future generations.

Yours sincerely

Anne Carr