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**Principal: Mrs Janice Marshall**

**24<sup>th</sup> October 2014.**

Dear Mr McCallion

I am writing in response to your request for written evidence with regard to Shared and Integrated Education.

I am principal of Drumlins Integrated Primary School, in Ballynahinch. Our school opened 10 years ago due to parental demand; parents in Ballynahinch wanted the choice of integrated education for their children in this town. Drumlins met all necessary criteria for the school to receive full Department of Education funding and approval. The school opened in September 2004 with 12 Primary 1 pupils and currently has over 170 pupils and is one of the most oversubscribed schools in the area.

This oversubscription has certainly not been achieved through the school having better resources and physical structure than other schools; indeed the school currently sits in an industrial estate, in a number of mobiles on our third temporary site. Our school has faced a number of very significant challenges since opening; outgrowing each site, having poor physical accommodation, facing uncertainty as to where – or even if – a permanent school site could be identified and having low admissions and enrolments set for the school causing difficulty for the school's growth. Despite these obstacles the school has remained a popular choice with parents and in most years has been oversubscribed.

We were delighted on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2014 when the Minister for Education, John O'Dowd, announced that Drumlins was to receive a new purpose built school to serve the children of the Ballynahinch area – but our success has not been dependant on this announcement.

In Ballynahinch sharing occurs successfully across sectors at both primary and post-primary level; we are fully in support of this and are often involved in sharing activities with the other schools. However the parents in the town still wanted to have the choice of integrated education for their children. A huge amount of work had to be undertaken over several years for the parents to achieve this goal and I personally have a huge amount of respect for the school steering group as I had the privilege of joining them at a later stage, when so much of the work had already been done. I do however have the shared goal with those early parents and our current parents of achieving academic excellence for our pupils through learning in an integrated setting.

Our pupils have opportunities to learn about and develop respect and understanding of one another's culture, religion, beliefs and abilities. I have no doubt that this happens in other educational settings which are not integrated but we value having 'Integrated' in our title as it clearly states our intention in both learning and ethos.

Sharing is a term which can be open to much misinterpretation; for example, how much sharing? In what ways are things shared? What is shared? How is the sharing regulated? Integrated schools clearly state what integration is and how it is regulated in the schools by adopting NICIE's Statement of Principles and by adhering to the legal structures set out through the Scheme of Management and the adherence to the Department of Education's requirements for Integrated Schools.

Integrated schools allow children to learn, play, develop friendships and set in place the building blocks of respect and understanding for the adults of Northern Ireland for our future. There is no ambiguity or misunderstanding in this goal; it is one which clearly sets out the intention – to educate children together side by side in the same classrooms with clearly set out aims and objectives.

Our concern is that Shared Education would be seen as the same as, or equivalent to, Integrated Education when these two systems are entirely different, with totally different goals. There is no doubt that many schools and educational establishments would benefit from greater sharing – but this does not equate to integrated education, integrated education exists in Integrated Schools. We do not want to see the excellent work which exists in Integrated Schools being undermined by a separate system albeit one with good intentions and positive elements.

I would be happy to add to this submission or discuss this further if required.

Yours sincerely

*Janice Marshall*

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