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**Moneynick Primary and Duneane Primary working together in Shared Education**

## **Our Partnership**

Moneynick and Duneane are two rural primary schools which lie on the outskirts of Toomebridge and are situated 1.7 miles from each other. They had been working together over the last ten years and joined the Primary Integrating Enriching Education Project (PIEE) which began in 2009 and were funded by the International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies. Both Moneynick and Duneane are small schools and since the cessation of the PIEE project, have continued to grow and develop as a confederation.

The principals saw how PIEE impacted positively on all areas of their school communities: principals, staff, pupils, parents and governors. For principals and staff, being in PIEE meant that they were able to avail of opportunities to train and plan together.

The Boards of Governors play a vital role in the continuing development of the partnership, supporting joint events showcasing pupils' work. In 2012 a joint subcommittee of Governors was formed. They have overseen the running of the Partnership including the appointment of a shared teacher in 2012 and have played an integral part in our development to date.

The Governors made a joint submission to the Area Plan for Primary Schools in Northern Ireland the outcome of which called for the schools to work together in shared education. Initially our intention was to seek a shared space through investment in a mobile classroom, where our children could learn together and our communities could meet.

After a visit from the Minister of Education to our Partnership in September 2013, we submitted a business plan to the Department of Education outlining our vision for the shared space. The Principals were aware of the existence of Shared Campus Schools in Scotland and visited four schools in Lanarkshire in September 2013. The visit confirmed that the direction our schools were taking could lead to a successful shared future on one campus.

Following an announcement by OFMDFM in early 2014, with full support of governors and parents, we submitted an Expression of Interest in a Shared Campus for our schools. Prior to this the whole school community was involved in a stringent consultation process the outcome of which gave 100% commitment from governors and staff, and over 90% commitment from parents.

What Shared Education means for us?

Over the last number of years, our pupils have taken part in regular shared classes which have now become part of normal school routine. In 2012-2013 we had PEE funding for a full time shared teacher and since then the two schools have been funding a part-time shared teacher from their own budgets. Funding for transport between the two schools has come from Shared Education at Queens, through Atlantic Philanthropies. Each Monday and Tuesday our pupils work together in single year groups. Our aim is to raise standards across both schools and give our children an opportunity to cement friendships and become comfortable working side by side.

Both schools currently have three composite classes. Shared classes provide our children with the opportunity of being taught in joint, single year groupings. This also benefits the pupils who are left behind with their own class teacher who are also left as a single year group or smaller composite class. The majority of the shared lessons are literacy and numeracy based and areas targeted are identified from both school development plans in line with Count, Read; Succeed. Raising standards in both schools is the priority for our children.

Our current Y7 children have been involved in shared classes since they were in Y1. Sharing is now accepted as a normal part of their school routine. Although harder to quantify, our involvement in shared education

has delivered wonderful opportunities for developing friendships and building relationships pupil to pupil, teacher to teacher and family to family. The children have also had the opportunity to reach out to the wider community and develop links with a local Residential Home and with local Sports Clubs.

Our children now have a joint School Choir who performed on Radio and last year achieved second place at Ballymena Festival. Last Christmas they sang for the residents of the nearby Nursing Home. We have also fielded joint Sports Teams at local competitions and would see this developing further on a shared campus.

Moneynick Mothers & Toddlers has welcomed parents and younger siblings from Duneane Primary School, enhancing community cohesion at its most fundamental level. We hope to expand the Mothers & Toddlers provision if we move to a shared campus.

Parents have enjoyed attending joint showcase events and have even taken part in joint parent-only events such as salsa dancing. They have been consulted at every step along our journey and are very supportive of the partnership. Links have been established between both Parent Teacher Associations with joint events to enhance social cohesion and raise some funds for joint activities.

### **Barriers**

- We feel that the biggest barrier to the development of Shared Education and our partnership in particular, is the lack of support and acknowledgement at department level. For a number of years we along with other principals within the PIEE project were under the illusion that the Education Committee at Stormont were aware of the different Shared Education projects that were running within Northern Ireland. Following a visit to both schools by a local MLA we discovered that this was not the case. Our partnership has been seen as 'pathfinding' and yet the education committee was unaware of our existence.
- We feel there is a lack of vision at government level. We hear the words 'SHARED FUTURE' but there is a lack of process in achieving this within education, eg. through our business plan submitted in 2013 it became evident that there was no application process for a shared space. Even though both schools had the support of their

managing authorities, there appeared to be no system to follow or no particular individual within the department that we could take advice from.

- For our partnership the biggest barrier to date has been the rejection of our bid for a shared campus announced in July 2014. Without a doubt we are the most pro-active primary partnership in Northern Ireland and are seen as pathfinders in Shared Education, yet we were told that our bid appeared to be more about co-locating than sharing.

## **Enablers**

- Tremendous support and advice from our local MLAs who have encouraged us to have a voice at Education Committee level. It is important for all partnerships to have cross-party support.
- Pro-active thinkers at education board level who have the vision to create successful projects such as PIEE and have the business acumen to secure funding from external bodies.
- Support from authorities who give encouragement and recognition and source funding for shared partnerships eg. Shared Education at QUB.
- Positive leadership with energetic and enthusiastic staff and governors who share the vision and are aware of the bigger picture.

## **Priorities and Actions needed to move forward**

- Committee for Education who engage with shared education partnerships in Northern Ireland. The Committee would benefit from visiting successful partnerships to witness sharing first-hand.
- Cross party agreement on making shared education a priority.
- A team of active educational practitioners who have first-hand experience of Shared Education directing DENI policy and contributing to decision-making for future programmes of sharing.
- Honesty and integrity in dealing with shared education partnerships and clear guidelines and criteria for any application process.
- Development of a continuum of good practice in sharing with guidance for schools on how to move forward.