

# Hazelwood Integrated College

Specialist School in Creativity & Visual Arts



Registered Charity No. XR 22627

24 October 2014

Dear Mr McCallion,

In Celtic tradition hazel woods are synonymous with knowledge and wisdom. Hence the name 'Hazelwood' encapsulates the aspirations of the pioneering Protestant and Catholic parents who, back in 1985, wanted something different from the segregated and selective education system that existed then and still exists today in Northern Ireland. Against a backdrop of daily sectarian violence it was the dream of those courageous parents that the new Hazelwood schools would shine like beacons and be rooted in a wisdom that would spread far and wide.

Today the Hazelwood beacons shine brighter than ever. Hazelwood College is a thriving integrated, non-selective, and mixed, 11–19 secondary school of 917 students (with growing demand). It is situated on a sectarian interface on the Whitewell Road in North Belfast. Its physical campus is *truly* a shared space, but it is its unique integrated ethos that sets it and other integrated schools apart.

Ethos is often a loosely defined term and is used to describe the affective as well as cognitive learning that takes place in a school. Results and research have consistently indicated that the integrated schools can compete very favourably in the cognitive aspect of the equation. However, the same research and evidence, gathered from hundreds of parents and pupils, shows that where they excel and where they are significantly different from segregated schools is in the informal, day to day learning that takes place. In Hazelwood Integrated College our Catholic children, Protestant children and those children of other or no faith, meet, greet, and squabble, make-up, laugh and play with each other, every single day, throughout their most formative years.

If schools are to shape social change, which in a post-conflict Northern Ireland it is generally recognised they should do, and be supported by government to do so, then this change must fundamentally begin in the very institutions we educate our children in and in the way we educate them. Change of any significance will never happen when over 90% of our young people remain in a highly selective and divided education system. This is particularly illogical when that lack of will appears to be because there are already unfilled spaces in the segregated schools.

Starving the supply for parents wanting integrated education at pre-school also shows lack of will. Pre-school education provision attached to existing segregated schools disenfranchises those parents who desire integration and they are left with no choice than to send their children to these alternative segregated schools. This perpetuates the problem and normalises segregation in infants from the very earliest days of their learning experiences.



Specialist Schools  
and Academies Trust  
EXCELLENCE AND DIVERSITY



INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE

**Principal:**  
Kathleen Gormley  
BA. (Hons), MA., PQH

70 Whitewell Road,  
NEWTOWNABBEY  
BT36 7ES

telephone: 028 9077 4202  
fax: 028 9077 7989

email: [info@hazelwood.belfast.ni.sch.uk](mailto:info@hazelwood.belfast.ni.sch.uk)  
website: [www.hazelwoodcollege.co.uk](http://www.hazelwoodcollege.co.uk)

Doing little also appears to us to be contrary to what was agreed in the Good Friday promise which charged Government with the promotion of integrated education. It is difficult to accept that the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education should consider the need to obligate in statute the facilitation and encouragement of shared education when there is already a legal obligation to promote integrated education. 'Where there's a will there's a way' and integrated education must not be sacrificed at the expense of what at best can be described as isolated success stories of sharing, to at worst, diluted initiatives and unsustainable passing fads.

We fully recognise the merits of sustainable and meaningful movement towards any arrangement that encourages the development of mutual respect and understanding between our communities, and particularly our young people. In this context Hazelwood Integrated College has always demonstrated its willingness to lead by example and offers our wider community an already established and recognised shared space through its Extended Schools programme.

In its recent OFMDFM Shared Education bid to locate a North Belfast STEM Centre on the Hazelwood campus, support was forthcoming from practically every school in the North Belfast and Newtownabbey Area Learning Communities. The bid was rejected. Nonetheless, we remain committed and it is our intention to enter into Phase 2 of the OFMDFM Shared Space bid process. Indeed we would be pleased to be included in any initiatives that we consider would develop the extensive groundwork in integration and integrated education for which we are recognised both here in Northern Ireland, in the United Kingdom and also abroad, particularly in the United States.

Integrated education works. There is a plethora of evidence that supports what we in integrated education already know, and that is, the friendships and relationships that develop between our pupils last a lifetime and the values of tolerance and mutual respect learned side by side in the classroom are carried with our young adults into an increasingly diverse and pluralist society.

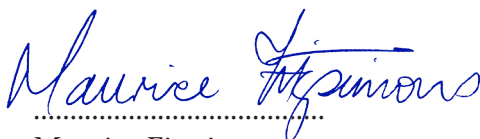
We would be delighted if the Committee for Education would accept an open invitation to visit our integrated college. We would also be more than happy to offer our shared space to them to host some of their meetings in the future.

I went out to the hazel wood

Because a fire was in my head

*The Song of the Wandering Aengus, W.B. Yeats*

Yours sincerely



Maurice Fitzsimons

*Deputy Principal, Hazelwood Integrated College*