

Hazelwood Integrated Primary School

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Principal: *Mrs Patricia Murtagh*

Dear Mr Mc Callion

I am writing in response to your request for written evidence with regard to Shared and Integrated Education on behalf of the governors, staff, parents and pupils of Hazelwood Integrated Primary School.

In recent years huge investment in shared education has revealed, that it seems to the key decision makers, to be a good idea that some concession is made to educating children together. We agree that this is indeed a good idea – we feel it would be more effective if they were in a shared context all the time. There are some ‘shared projects’ that have produced useful outcomes and the integrated movement are happy to see the beginning of any relationship building – but as politicians try to sell shared education as a **viable alternative** to integrated education- those of us who see integration every day in practice know it is not.

Shared education projects that create a school in which Catholics go in one door and Protestants another - are nothing short of insane! At best it allows pupils to share some time together but in essence, whilst better than nothing, it is similar to most CRED work.

These projects are a step towards encouraging children to engage with each other for a limited time –but by returning to their own environment after a brief engagement the effects on attitudes are minimal. In our schools the positive relationships we foster go on every second of every day and beyond the classrooms into communities. These friendships are real, long lasting and make a difference.

The recent judgement by Mr Justice Treacy as part of the court Proceedings surrounding Drumragh clarified that integrated education ‘is a standalone concept’ that is to say educating together at school, protestant and catholic children.

This is sharing at its most effective and the success of this case and its re-emphasis that DE are obliged to ‘encourage and facilitate integrated education’ raises the question - is the search for a legal obligation to support Shared Education an

avoidance of this obligation to support Integrated education? We continue to demand the implementation of Article 64.

Surely there is an ethical duty on all of us to recognise the potential of educating children together all the time as a means of nurturing friendships across boundaries and across generations –therefore making cultural strife and conflict less palatable- some of our schools are educating third generation children – a lasting impact made.

The nature of our society remains complex – falling levels in English and Maths, underachievement in Protestant working class boys, racist tensions, issues around flags and emblems all proving to be challenges – we should be normalising our schools in the recognition that a mix of social groups, religions, cultures and academic abilities ensures better outcomes for all. From a young age, bias and prejudice can become embedded however influencing young minds to think in a different way makes for well-balanced young people and adults of the future.

Groups from other parts of the world have come to the Integrated sector to learn from us and to apply elements of the model to their own troubled environments. Why then is it so difficult for our own politicians to see what is under their nose – a model for removing barriers, for opening hearts, for sharing and most importantly for giving children skills to deal with difference in a respectful way.

There is a need for an explicit reference to Integrated education in Shared Education Policy – funding should be given to all on this continuum – to maximise its effects.

At Hazelwood integrated Primary we practice meaningful engagement each day and challenge all to face their own prejudices and deal with all the areas which in our society have caused conflict – open and honest engagement with each other adults and children alike creates positivity and a context for creative change.

If there is a genuine desire to move Northern Ireland forward we urge you to talk to the integrated sector in particular to NICIE and in addition we welcome you come and visit our schools - see what we do and talk to our children- we are not a gimmick or a phase – we are real and strong and determined to persist because we know that what we do is important!