

MILL STRAND INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOL & NURSERY UNIT

Promoting Excellence, Celebrating Difference

33 Dhu Varren Portrush Co.Antrim BT56 8EW
Tel: 028 70823090 Fax: 028 70824226

e-mail: info@millstrandintegratedps.portrush.ni.sch.uk
web site: www.millstrand.co.uk

Principal: Mr P. Reid B.Ed D.A.S.E. M.Sc PQH(NI)



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Dear Mr McCallion

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

- **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. Having worked in the controlled sector for twenty years and having been involved in supporting and running CRED activities for almost thirty years I know from personal experience and from the views of professional colleagues that while providing some 'nice' opportunities it has limited long term effect. 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 created are long lasting and meaningful. An analogy would be to describe Rangers playing Celtic as 'Shared Education'. Different shirts, different managers, different clubs, different tactics, different changing rooms, different teams... allowed to play together and interact for periods on a shared pitch before dividing again. Integrated Education would be to describe playing for Scotland. Different views, different clubs, same team, same shirt, shared goals.
- 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. Seeking a legal obligation to promote 'Shared Education' is just another excuse to continue to avoid an existing legal obligation to promote

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Integrated Education. 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.

- 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 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.
- 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? 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)
- CRED is an elastoplast for a compound fracture. Having attended 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. We are more likely to have argument and fall out over football in Mill Strand Integrated School than religion or politics (maybe it would be more logical to have different schools for pupils supporting different football teams). Even those disagreements are dealt with easily as we celebrate difference/tolerate nothing.
- As a school, Mill Strand Integrated Primary School is more than the sum of its parts. The rich ethos of the school, practice in meaningful integration is embedded in the culture of the school. It is something that is unique to this area but then it is something that IS unique to integrated schools. There is an old saying “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.” The only way to heal a divided society is to heal the

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division. Education from the earliest age in an integrated setting is the best way to heal the division. This is not an opinion. It is a fact, supported by countless years of research and in Northern Ireland there already exists a model of best practice. It is ironic that we have the means to create a truly inclusive society building a shared future at a time when schools in the mainland may be moving in a direction that will see the creation of a divided society. There are examples of integration in action on the doorstep of every MLA in the province. I would urge every one of them to spend a week in an integrated school.

- 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 spoke at Stormont about Creative Change. The work of Derek Wilson from the University of Ulster, a fantastic and real cross community initiative that really did engage stakeholders and make a difference. Despite our presentations funding ended when the work should have been extended. It was disheartening to realise afterwards that few MLAs actually attended and those that did, did so fleetingly. With £23m recently donated it should be wisely spent on Integrated Education and the Creative Change project. It will more likely be wasted on shared initiatives that are less efficient, effective and that will leave no long term legacy for the better.

It is completely appropriate 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.

If this inquiry genuinely wishes to move Northern Ireland forward I will gladly travel to Stormont, I will gladly give up my time, I will willingly engage with MLAs for as many days as it takes. I am sure my colleagues from other integrated schools and NICIE would do the same. Equally, I would welcome any MLA to spend time at Mill Strand Integrated School & Nursery. Should they wish to spend a week here they will walk away informed, enriched and enabled to think about integration.

Yours sincerely



Philip Reid

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Principal

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