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## **Response to Education Committee Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education**

Rowandale Integrated Primary School in Moira opened in September 2007, with an intake of 18 pupils. It now has an intake of 198, is oversubscribed and currently has a development proposal before the Minister to expand to 2 form entry. This proposal received 130 letters of support initially.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence from the Committee on their Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education. The Department for Education has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education in Article 64 of the 1989 Act. The subsequent judicial review earlier this year and the ruling by Justice Treacy clarified this duty and how it applies to education policy. This ruling should enable the expansion of integrated education to meet local demand.

At present we do not consider that the Department is fulfilling its existing duty with regard to integrated education. As part of the judicial review an attempt was made to provide a definition of "shared education". We are strongly of the view that any attempt to put a duty on the Department to promote and facilitate shared education would further dilute and impede the Department's to avoid their existing, and currently failed, statutory duty to promote Integrated education.

Shared and Integrated Education are not the same, neither are they mutually exclusive. It is our belief however, backed up by years of academic research and evidence that shared education is not a viable alternative to integrated education in social, academic or financial terms. Rather shared education perpetuates division, with children being labelled according to the school they attend and the uniform they wear.

Shared Education sustains the segregation. The children remain taught in separate classrooms by different teachers on different topics. There is limited or no attempt to learn about their own or each other's beliefs to try and break down societal divisions. It can be described as promoting education apartheid, and whilst we recognise that it is better than no effort being made at all, programmes such as CRED have little lasting impact.

Our parents have chosen integrated education for their children because they wish to have their children from across the communities educated in the same school, by the

same teachers, wearing the same uniform and being taught the same things as their peers of different religious backgrounds and none. Lasting and meaningful change can only be achieved by stopping the prejudices and barriers from being built in the first place.

Rowandale, as with other integrated schools, seeks to provide an environment which promotes a united community through celebrating diversity and respecting all cultures and backgrounds all day and every day. It is ingrained in the ethos of our school and we seek to do this not just in the classroom but within our local community, as recognised by the awarding of the Queens Award for Service to the Community to the school in 2009.

We would be happy to meet members of the Committee, either formally or informally to discuss further the key aspects of integrated education. If the Committee wishes to meet pupils, parents, staff or Governors of the school at Stormont we will facilitate that, or would welcome any MLA who wishes to spend time at the school and begin to understand why so many parents seek an integrated school for their children.

Rowandale Integrated Primary