



## SPIRES INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Principal: Mrs J Bell

23 October 2014

Dear Mr McCallion

Spires Integrated Primary School, Magherafelt, owes its birth to the hopes and dedication of local parents and grandparents. People, who differed greatly in background, shared a common desire – to see children from different cultural and religious backgrounds educated together in an environment in which the traditions of all are valued equally. It opened in September 1999 catering for 58 children in P1 – P4 and has grown steadily to an enrolment of over 200. Having an enrolment figure of 29 each year, which is set by the Department frequently results in children being denied an education in an integrated setting. Indeed last year eleven children were denied the opportunity to attend Spires Integrated Primary School.

As an Integrated school we bring families and communities together; integration, respect for differences and cultural awareness seeps into the wider community as a direct consequence of the existence of our school.

The 2011 Census indicated a clear demographic change in Northern Ireland and the Integrated Sector can accommodate this trend very effectively. There is a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education and it is, therefore, disappointing to see that this is not actually apparent in Northern Ireland.

Communities face barriers at the initial stage of establishing a school, as DENI give more consideration to the impact on existing schools rather than parental choice. Similarly, capped enrolments ensure that only a limited amount of children can avail of the unique and diverse experiences offered through Integrated Education.

To develop Shared Education would put additional pressure on an already restricted Education Budget. As past experience (EMU) and current policy (CRED) have shown, schools are willing to participate in these programmes primarily for two reasons; (i) DENI requirement (ii) financial incentive. If these were removed it is doubtful how many schools would engage in such initiatives. I feel there is a similar attitude towards Shared Education. Schools may engage in it for financial reasons without any real commitment towards establishing strong, worthwhile connections to schools from different sectors.

Rather than allocate additional funds to Shared Education, money should be provided to grant further places for children within integrated schools and allow them to grow in accordance with parental choice. Shared Education and Integrated Education are **not** the same. Integrated schools have existed for over thirty years now and are having a major impact on strengthening relationships across the religious divide.



On a daily basis, pupils at our school engage in open and meaningful discussions with each other both inside and outside of the classroom. Integrated schools are very effectively bringing communities together because they are planned, desired and there is a commitment to their success, as opposed to Government initiatives that are taken on board due to requirement or financial gain.

Integration works. It is an extremely significant and positive step towards a peaceful future in Northern Ireland. In order for the Education Committee to make an informed decision regarding Shared and Integrated Education, it needs to **experience** integration and **engage** in purposeful discussions with all elements of the integrated sector namely Governors, Staff, Pupils, Parents and NICIE.

The children are the future and their voices should not only be heard but given serious consideration when the Education Committee meets to discuss this area.

I have also attached the thoughts and feelings of some of the pupils from Spires Integrated Primary School.

Yours sincerely

J Bell  
Principal



## Minutes of School Council Meeting

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Mr Clarke welcomed everyone to the school council meeting and Lee was voted as chair person and Alanagh as secretary.

### Examples of how Integrated Education is good

- Learn about religions and celebrate them.
- Learn, eat and play together, if we eat together we know what our friends like or what they don't like.
- We get to play sports together.
- All the classes work together as a whole school on Tuesday evenings - mixed age groups for literacy and numeracy.
- We don't only learn about other religions and languages, we get to share experiences, we don't just learn about Catholics doing their confirmation we can see it and talk about it.
- If your parents are different religions you get to choose which one.
- You get to make very close friends with people who are very different or have disabilities.
- You get to experience being with different people.
- We do activities with other schools.
- Going to an integrated school makes you more tolerant a reason why is, you have friends that are different, so you understand.

- A good rule is don't do something mean to someone, if you don't want it done to you. (Would I like them to do it to me?)
- We get to make friends with different people, we get to celebrate some things like (St Patricks day and 12<sup>th</sup> July, Orange Order) but we celebrate everything.

Meeting finished at 2.50 pm.

People that were here:

Katie, Lee - P6

Alangah, Tiarnan - P7

Rhys, Emily - P5

Harry, Olivia - P4

## 21<sup>st</sup> October 2014 P5 Class Council

- We talked about why Integrated schools are important.

The following reasons were given:

- Everyone has the right to an education.
- It doesn't matter who you are or what language you speak.
- Everyone is equal.
- Everyone has the right to have friends. It shouldn't matter what religion they are.
- We get to learn other languages.
- We get to learn about other religions.
- You get to play more sports such as gaelic and camogie.

## What Integration means to me



## What Integration Means to me

Integration means that I can meet people that are from different cultures, different Religions and believe in different Gods. For example; My Mum is Protestant and my Step dad is Catholic, It doesn't matter to them or me because to us, everyone is the same and God loves all of us no matter what.

## Why Does Skin Colour Matter?



In my opinion skin colour doesn't matter. We are all the same in my eyes. No matter what religion, culture, what God we believe in or what skin colour we are. My best friend is Priya. Her mum is Indian and her dad is Northern Irish, so she is half Indian. She gets treated the same as everyone else and I think everyone should be treated like her.

## God Everyone No Matter What



## The Meaning Of Integrated

To make into a whole by bringing all parts together; unify

## My School

My School is an Integrated School. I really like it because I get the chance to mix with people from different backgrounds, cultures and religions. I get to learn about their beliefs (If they believe in a different God etc.) In some assemblies priests or ministers come in to talk to us, I find it really interesting because I get to find out things that I never knew before.



Integration Is  
AWESOME!!!



Thank You For  
Watching!!

THANK  
YOU

By Ellie Montgomery P.7 ©

In my school we have the chance to participate in many different sporting activities such as:

Rugby  
Hockey  
Football  
Gaelic  
Athletics  
Swimming  
Basketball  
Dodge ball



Once again many of these sports were new to me when I started Spires and as a result, I have met many different people and have made some good friends 😊

BY MATTHEW

WALSHE P.6 😊