

## **Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education:**

### **Submission from St. Martin's Primary School, Garrison**

St. Martin's PS has been involved in the Shared Education Programme since its inception. Initially the programme was with another primary school in Co. Donegal. In recent times, the school has established links with other schools in the locality which led to the establishment of the Erne West Learning Community in 2012. The programme has been integral to school life and all pupils have had opportunities to take part in shared classes. Teachers have also had the opportunity to take part in cluster groups concentrating on upskilling and professional development across a number of curricular areas including Literacy, Numeracy, ICT. SENCOs have also been working together and facilitated an information evening for parents from all schools on the theme of dyslexia. Teachers have also been released for one day per week to facilitate a utilisation of their skills in other schools where there has been a deficit of skill e.g. music, ICT.

Significant financial resources have allowed Shared Education to permeate school life and it is thanks to Fermanagh Trust through Atlantic Philanthropies for taking this work forward with enthusiasm and putting it high on their agenda of work.

The schools of the Erne West Learning Community employed the services of a consultancy group to determine the views of staff, governors and parents in relation to Shared Education. The pupils have displayed overwhelmingly their support for the programme and look forward to its future with enthusiasm.

### *Benefits*

- Children building positive relationships with other children from the locality
- Relaxed atmosphere of learning for pupils – sharing of ideas, working together, constructive work on different projects
- Focus on what they have in common as opposed to what makes them different
- Pupils feel comfortable visiting other schools
- Parents have become interested as to what shared education means for their children and for schools
- Parents building links with parents from other schools
- Teachers sharing information, resources and coming together in cluster groups
- Shared School Development Days
- Alignment of work within School Development Planning Process
- Joint submission to the Area Planning Process
- Ethos of each school is respected
- Access to services and programmes for children which individual schools could not afford to provide
- Acquisition and sharing of resources between schools
- Support from Boards of Governors and Trustees for the Shared Education programme
- Parents willing to see an expansion of the programme to include strengthening of links between parent groups
- Educational benefit has led to raising of attainment levels
- People in leadership with shared vision to take the programme forward
- Agreed objectives for the schools to take Shared Education forward

- Agreement that Community background / Culture should be an integral part of the Shared Education programme
- Department of Education has agreed recommendations as to the definition of Shared Education and how it should be implemented

### *Challenges*

- Uncertainty of future funding
- Adequate funding to keep the programme at a high level which has been seen in the school over the last 5 years
- Streamlining of funding and application process
- Paperwork and workload as demanded by DE may lead to less enthusiasm for the programme
- Wealth of information and knowledge and experiences from Fermanagh schools may not be tapped into
- Bringing all parents on board
- Piecemeal approach due to funding or direction
- Shared Education is not the same as CRED
- Up until now Shared Education has had many facets – what it looks like in Fermanagh has been very different for other organisations involved.
- How will Shared education look in 5 years time?
- Vision of DE for Shared Education
- Schools should be further supported in their aspirations and work in relation to Shared Education. There is a need for Government to back this crucial work in the community also. It will be a lost cause if schools have to take on the work alone.
- School leaders not sharing the same vision for Shared Education
- Resistance in other parts of Northern Ireland – the need to move sensitively
- Shared Education can be seen as an ‘add-on’. If this is the view, it will have no meaningful place with a school
- Diminishing school identity
- Small school of a different ethos from larger schools could feel overwhelmed

While this submission does not address the terms of reference clearly, it is a snap shot of the experiences which this school has had over the last number of years. The list of benefits and challenges is a reminder of the positives which have been had and also is a marker as to what needs to be addressed to enable a positive and meaningful implementation of Shared Education across Northern Ireland.