



# DRUMRAGH INTEGRATED COLLEGE

Principal: Mr. Nigel Frith BA, MA, NPQH

*Excellence For Everyone*

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## **Evidence in Relation to the Shared Education Bill**

The vision for both shared education and integrated education includes the transformation of young people's values so that they actively support the growth of a peaceful and tolerant society, both now and in the future. Whether the route to this is through integrated or shared education, a vital success criterion is the **quality** of this transformation. The Shared Education Bill should specify this, that it is not the existence of either shared or integrated education that is the central factor, but rather the quality and impact of it. By way of metaphor, having a car in the driveway is fine, but if it does not work it is pointless. Shared and integrated education must both work, in order to have value; otherwise this becomes a tick-box exercise and at worst a smoke-screen in place of the change we really need to see, both in our schools and in our communities. The Bill should address this essential question of quality and impact, not just the mere existence of 'education together' as is quoted in it presently.

This short Bill has reduced the definition of shared education into a few brief lines. In this instance, less is not more. Surely with all the work involved in drafting and passing a Bill, more needs to be said to make sure that shared education fulfils its goals.

Integrated education is the 'Rolls-Royce' of the shared education range. Based on the concept that maximum contact encourages maximum impact, a central quality of integrated schools is that they educate students side by side, every day; so barriers are removed and mutual respect takes their place. They also do this thoughtfully and strategically. In 'Sharing Works - a Policy for Shared Education' we read, 'integrated education, which has already embraced a culture of diversity, is at the upper end of that continuum. Indeed, by supporting Shared Education, it is envisaged that a proportion of schools may move along the continuum to a more fully integrated model.' Surely therefore this progression should be presented in the Bill. The integrated education movement would like to see the inclusion of a new clause or amendments putting a duty on the Education Department or Education Authority to help schools involved in shared education to explore the possibility and value of moving up the continuum. Putting this responsibility on those who will have a power to encourage and facilitate shared education creates a robust mechanism to ensure that any school who wishes to explore integration as an option will be fully supported in doing so.

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Before closing, the following statements have been written recently by members of our Sixth Form; you may find them both informative and inspiring as they capture the vision before us today.

Integrated education is:

- 'A way to put our past behind us and move towards a fully integrated society whilst still keeping our own identity. A way for all people to live in harmony with each other and not get defensive if the topic of religion or race etc comes up. To give everyone the ability to talk and to listen to others without feeling threatened. A way of not denying people their rights but to be respectful and mindful of others. A society where every minority or majority is considered equal. A society where we can live together without leaving each other. Becoming more rounded individuals. Sharing experiences, the scars of our past, mourning, recognising events together; pain is never segregated, why should we be when we recover from it?'
- 'An opportunity to learn in a place where differences are respected and embraced by those around you. Prepares you for the real world where you will have to work and respect people who don't share your viewpoint. The solution to segregation in Northern Ireland.'
- 'The opportunity to be able to mix with different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs on a daily basis without really paying attention to the exterior of the person. Also it gives the individual the chance to truly be themselves without any judgement passed on them. Integrated education is the starting point for teaching young people to be accepting of these different cultures and be able to treat them with respect.'

Finally, since there is a clear and urgent vision for both integrated and shared education, these two routes to educational and social transformation should be presented and resourced **equally**. Every community should be offered the possibility of either or both, as possible ways forward. And the status quo of a largely segregated education system should not be allowed as an option. Polls are too easily dismissed; they give voice to the majority of the population who want a truly shared future. This Bill represents an historic moment; Northern Ireland deserves legislation which genuinely helps us to fulfil this vision.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Education Committee on this important matter, along with colleagues from APTIS (The Association of Principal Teachers in Integrated Schools).

Many thanks for taking the time to consider this brief response.

Yours faithfully,



Nigel Frith  
Principal