

Dear Clerk of the Committee -

**Consultation on a United Community**

I write on behalf of students and staff of Oakgrove Integrated College, Derry-Londonderry, to offer thoughts on the consultation.

For 22 years, this school has sought to encourage students and staff to learn together and to explore issues of division. We have felt strongly that there are initiatives within an integrated school setting which are impossible in any other school model. We feel strongly, therefore, that more effort needs to be made to find a genuinely integrated experience for a greater number of students in Northern Ireland/North of Ireland (NI).

It has been our experience that the work of the Spirit of Enniskillen Trust was unparalleled in terms of its ability to bring together young people across the entire range of schools in NI. Despite the claims that efforts were made to preserve the work, it is the experience of a number of schools that more should have been done to follow up the suggestions of the volunteers and staff. Students and staff in our school who witnessed the benefits of the Spirit of Enniskillen's work would argue that efforts now could be made to restart that scheme so that its good work is not lost. Spirit of Enniskillen provided a unique model of young people leading change, bringing about a transformation in attitudes through emotional rather than intellectual development.

If we are serious about building a united community, then we need to facilitate reconciliation. A wonderful model which we have used is the Theatre of Witness, which allows young people to explore issues in depth and to understand why conflict is still relevant, and the human cost.

We have seen over 22 years that young people can be change leaders and we believe that there is value in young people facilitating discussions of politicians in order to make progress on the issues which divide.

We are happy to help the committee by providing any further information should it be required.

With good wishes,

Yours faithfully,

John Harkin

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"If you ever get to the place where injustice doesn't bother you, you're dead." - Myles Horton