



# Strategic Vision 2022-2025



## Towards 100 Integrated Schools





**Your say.**  
*Their future.*

## **Towards 100 Integrated Schools**

### **Our Vision**

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) shares the vision held by an overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland that more integration and mixing between communities is essential to building a more inclusive and reconciled society.

The IEF wants a society where, increasingly, children from different traditions learn and play together at the same schools, helping to build a more united community where there is respect and celebration, not fear, of religious and cultural diversity.

71% of people believe Integrated Education - where children from Protestant, Catholic, other faith backgrounds and none, are educated together and where the symbols, ethos and traditions of the entire community are valued and respected - should be the main model for our education system.

The IEF wants an education system which fully prepares its young people to contribute positively to a modern democracy and be successful citizens in an increasingly complex global society. It sees the development of more Integrated Education in a reformed education system as an essential ingredient of this future – a system which also ensures that all children and young people feel included and welcome in the school environment.

The aspiration of parents for more integration is clear and now is the time to make it a reality.

## Our Divided Education System

From the age of four, most children in Northern Ireland attend schools that are largely seen as belonging to one religious or cultural tradition. Less than 2% of children attending Catholic Maintained schools come from the Protestant tradition and less than 8% of children attending Controlled Schools are from the Catholic tradition. This division limits the chances of children and young people getting to know and form friendships with those of a different background from their own.

The four main Churches have been deeply connected with education in Northern Ireland where they are guaranteed places on schools' Boards of Governors and they devise the statutory syllabus for Religious Education.

The development of teacher training institutions remains closely entwined with religion where, separately, these institutions have traditionally produced teachers for either the Catholic Maintained system or the State Controlled system. Many primary school teachers, like their pupils, continue to pass through every stage of education without ever having any meaningful experience of schooling alongside a person with a different community identity.

Area planning for schools aims to establish a network of viable schools. In theory, area planning works in partnership with all education sectors, however, the education system has two statutory planning authorities for schools, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the Education Authority.

Integrated Education challenges such separation across our education system.

## What is Integrated Education?

Integrated Education brings together pupils, staff and governors from Protestant, Catholic and other faiths and none within each school community. An Integrated school is one that intentionally supports, protects and advances an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding between those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, and between those of different socio-economic backgrounds and between those of different abilities.

## Why the need for the Integrated Education Fund?

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) was established as a charity in 1992 to support the growth and development of Integrated Education.

The IEF is needed because there are financial barriers to overcome in helping Integrated schools get started and additional support is needed to help them grow and develop. Parents, schools and local communities need to be supported so that they can explore what Integrated Education is and the benefits it could bring to their child, school and local community.

From September 2022 there will be 70 Integrated schools, educating over 25,000 children, representing almost 8% of the education system. However, growth has been restricted because Integrated schools are currently not planned for by government.

Parents must create Integrated schools themselves. They either must set up new schools on 'greenfield' sites or they can vote through a parental ballot to 'transform' an existing school into an Integrated school.

The passing of the Integrated Education Act (2022) means the Department of Education (DE) must now 'support' as well as 'encourage and facilitate' Integrated Education. This is to include identifying, assessing, monitoring and aiming to meet the demand for the provision of Integrated Education within the context of area planning. The DE must therefore prepare, publish and maintain a strategy to deliver on these duties and the IEF must do all it can to try to ensure that any strategy leads to effective action to meet the demand for Integrated Education going forward.

# The Benefits of Integrated Education

Integrated Education has much to offer the education system and society as a whole.

## Social Benefit: Positive Attitudes

Independent research indicates that pupils who attend Integrated schools are most likely to have positive social attitudes to, and have more friendships with, pupils with a different background to their own. A large body of data suggests that extended contact between children and young people from different community backgrounds creates the conditions for generating mutual respect and understanding. Research evidence indicates that Integrated schooling has a significant and positive social influence on the lives of those who experience it. This includes reducing prejudicial attitudes and promoting a sense of security in religious, racial or ethnically diverse environments.

## Educational Benefit: Preparation for Life

Integrated schools are more likely to reflect the makeup of society at large, thus helping to prepare children for life after school where many are likely to work and socialise in a mixed environment whether in third level education or employment.

The development of Integrated schools has demonstrated that people from all religious, cultural and social backgrounds can work, learn and play together, successfully. It has contributed to the growing acceptance that learning together can enhance an educational experience, adding value to a child's education.

This is not just evidenced by Integrated schools. Schools of all types have sought to engage in cross-community projects and shared education for decades, because of the very benefits they believe it can bring.



## Economic Benefit: Effective and Efficient

Maintaining separate school systems based on religious or cultural background comes at a high price for government and many local communities. Having too many schools with too few pupils can make ineffective and inefficient use of resources and put these limited resources under further budgetary pressure. Integrated Education can offer a potential solution to maintaining local educational provision in communities where divided structures are no longer affordable or sustainable.

Moreover, a school system based more on integration would eventually reduce the need for external charitable funding as integration would be mainstreamed, and cross-community work would no longer be an 'add on'; it would be an integral part of every school day.

# Key Focus 1 – Empowering Communities to Access Integrated Education

Independent surveys and polls continually suggest that a majority of people in Northern Ireland aspire to having more Integrated Education.

There is no doubt that parents also want to send their children to what they believe are the 'best schools' regardless of their management type.

However, would any school be less good if it welcomed and included pupils, teachers and governors from different religious and cultural backgrounds? 79% of parents think not and believe all schools should strive to do this.

For many families there is simply no choice of an Integrated Education - many existing Integrated schools are oversubscribed and in some areas there is no Integrated school at all.

The IEF wants to empower parents, schools and local communities to be able to consider Integrated Education and to inform them as to how they can become involved in making such positive change happen.

New guidance from the DE published in 2017 entitled Integration Works provides a framework for all schools seeking to transform to Integrated status. Together, the IEF and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) provide additional financial and practical support for any school seeking to become Integrated.

## Project – Integrate My School

Many parents are unaware that legislation allows them to initiate a process of change in their school, and that almost any school can transform to Integrated status.

The 'Integrate My School' initiative of the IEF is an innovative way for parents to register their support for Integrated status for their child's school.

'Integrate My School' has been created to enable parents to gain information and declare their support whilst providing confidentiality and anonymity in the process. It also provides schools with evidence of support for integration within their parent body.

When parents representing 20% of pupils from the same school register then, by law, their school must at least consider transforming to Integrated status and hold a confidential ballot of parents.

Thousands of parents have already declared their support and there are more schools than ever before currently exploring Transformation.

In September 2022 there will be 70 Integrated schools in Northern Ireland, 30 of whom are schools that became Integrated through the Transformation process. No school that has transformed has ever chosen to revert back to non-Integrated status.

## Project – Future Schools

The IEF believes that education planning and provision in Northern Ireland must engage with local communities as well as existing education providers and their sectoral bodies. Local people have an important role to play and are often best placed to understand the needs of a local area.

To best reflect the needs of communities, education planners need to implement an independent consultation to measure demand for the type of schools in any given area.

The IEF, working with the Ulster University, the Education Authority and other education sectors, has invested in piloting several local area-based consultations across Northern Ireland. This work provides an evidence-based approach which we want to see adopted as part of any area-based planning process.

A Future Schools Tool Kit produced in June 2022, will soon become a vital resource for anyone interested in progressing effective area planning for schools.

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## Objectives

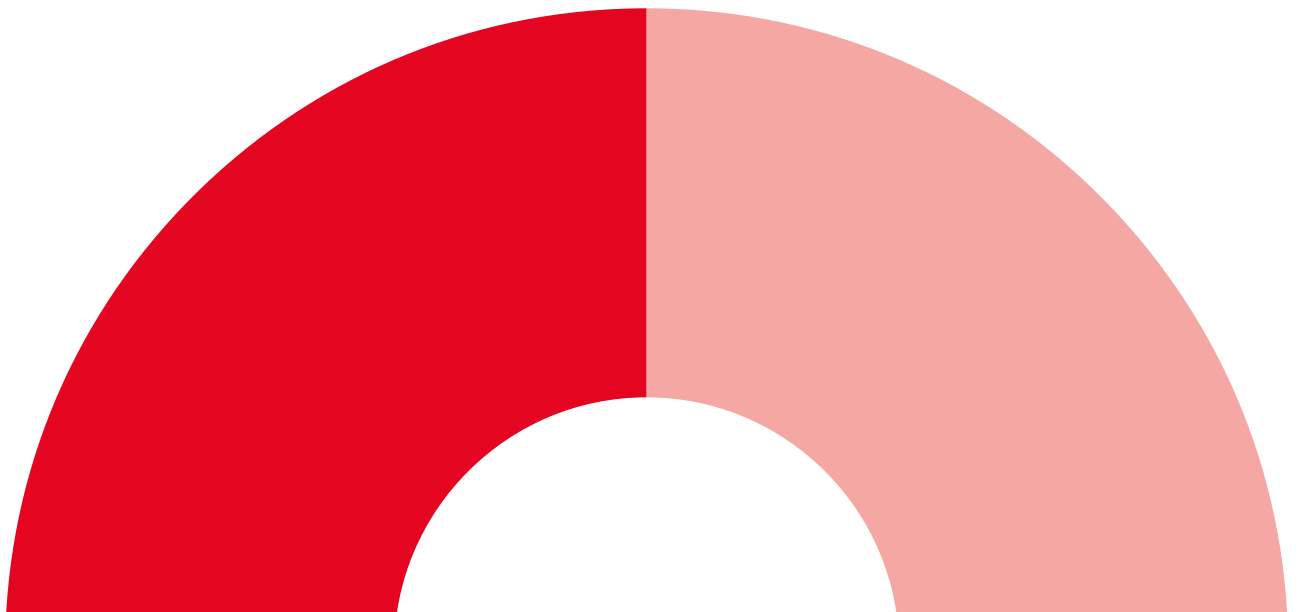
- Increase awareness and understanding of Integrated Education
- Encourage and mobilise parental support for Integrated Education
- Increase the number of schools transforming to Integrated status
- Encourage increased participation from parents, local communities and schools in helping to develop sustainable education provision
- Increase the number of schools working together to provide cross-sector sustainable local provision

## Actions

- A major advertising, marketing and promotional campaign aimed at parents, prospective parents, schools, young people and local communities
- An 'Integrate My School' digital platform that mobilises support into action
- A dedicated 'Engagement Team' to work with interested parents, schools and the wider community on the ground
- A series of information events for school leaders and governors working in partnership with NICIE
- Disseminate, promote and utilise the Future Schools Tool Kit to support communities to work together for sustainable school solutions

## Key Performance Indicators

- Market research that measures awareness levels and understanding of Integrated Education
- The number of parents registering on 'Integrate My School' website
- The number of schools actively engaged about Transformation with the IEF and NICIE through communication, meetings, event attendance and presentations; the number of schools in receipt of an IEF Transformation Grant; the number of schools that proceed to a parental ballot of their parents and those that submit a Development Proposal for Integrated status
- Increased engagement by IEF and NICIE with parents, local communities and schools in helping to develop sustainable education provision and working together, cross-sector, to provide sustainable local provision
- The number of Development Proposals presenting cross-sectoral solutions to sustainable education provision



# Key Focus 2 - Supporting Growth of Integrated Education

The IEF assists the growth of Integrated Education by supporting existing Integrated schools, the Transformation of schools to Integrated status, cross-sector solutions for schools and any new parents' groups who want Integrated Education.

## Objectives

- Support schools which are starting the journey to Integrated status
- Support existing Integrated schools to be able to increase their enrolments
- Support cross-sectoral solutions where schools can come together to provide sustainable single school solutions
- Support parents' groups working towards Integrated provision in their community

## Actions

### • Transformation Support Grants

The IEF aims to provide financial support to schools at all stages of the Transformation process, from the initial exploration stage right through to post ballot approval by the DE. This is a process that can take several years.

Transformation grants can assist schools in organising activities to help ensure the whole school community is fully informed and consulted on what is involved in the Transformation journey as well as provide support for any marketing and communication needs associated with becoming an Integrated school.

### • Impact of Growth Grants

The IEF will continue to support all Integrated schools in their development, in particular those Integrated schools trying to increase their enrolments in response to demand. Growth brings with it many challenges and the IEF is often needed to support growth through the provision of additional teaching resources, equipment and even accommodation until such time as statutory funding is made available.

### • New Model Support Grants

The IEF wants to see more cross-sectoral solutions emerging in education and is keen to support new initiatives where schools can come together to provide sustainable single school solutions. A Development Proposal for three schools to amalgamate in Coleraine, including North Coast Integrated College, is the first example of a potential cross-sector solution to have been developed in Northern Ireland. The IEF would like to see many more schools considering innovative cross-community solutions within their local community.

### • New Parents' Groups

The IEF will always support parents who want to work together to create the option of an Integrated school in their local community. Our support can include funding to allow parents' groups to meet, raise awareness and engage with others in their local community.

## Key Performance Indicators

- Support 45 more schools starting the Transformation process, 30 to progress
- Support growth in existing Integrated schools
- 4 new single school solutions





# Key Focus 3 - Challenging our Segregated Education System

The IEF is working towards the day when it is no longer needed. That will only happen when Integrated Education is adequately planned for by government and when parental demand for it is being met. To bring this day closer we need to continually work with policy makers, influencers, politicians and government. To answer the widespread desire for Integrated Education, we need to see a government strategy with ambitious targets to grow the numbers of pupils in Integrated schools. This strategy needs to be reflected in education planning and in a commitment to reform the structure of the education system.

The passing of the *Integrated Education Act (2022)* presents a tremendous opportunity for Integrated Education to be planned for effectively. The IEF will work to hold policy makers and political representatives to account in seeking to ensure that the Act is implemented fully.

The *Independent Review of Education*, commissioned by the Minister of Education as part of *New Decade, New Approach (2020)*, is a further opportunity to reform our education system on a more integrated basis. *The New Decade, New Approach* agreement commits the Northern Ireland Executive to 'support educating children and young people of different backgrounds together in the classroom' and to examine 'the prospects of moving towards a single education system'. It describes the current system as 'unsustainable'.

The IEF will continue to provide an evidence base that will help inform this Review and other reviews and will advocate for the reform of the segregated nature of our education system.

The voices of young people must also be taken into consideration given that they have had the most recent experience of our education system. Young people, including former students of Integrated schools who have formed the group Integrated AlumNI, can be important advocates for how schools can deliver a more inclusive education.

## Objectives

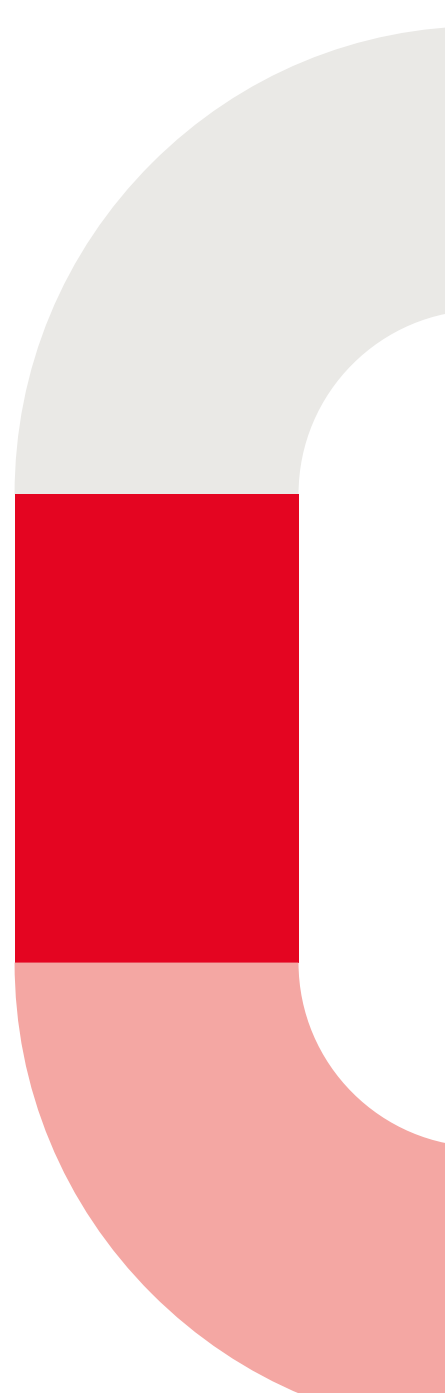
- Measure public opinion on Integrated Education, Transformation, the need to reform our education system, preference for schooling, etc
- Examine the key aspects of our education system that reinforce community division
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Transformation process for schools
- Assess how an Integrated school impacts on the social attitudes of pupils and school community
- Engage with key decision makers and influencers in government – locally, nationally and internationally
- Engage with the Independent Review of Education
- Engage with all education stakeholders, including the business community and civic society
- Engage young people and the Integrated AlumNI

## Actions

- Undertake major Northern Ireland wide attitudinal surveys, micro polling and other market research
- Continue work with academic partners such as Ulster University/UNESCO to examine issues within the current education system and the need for change
- Review the impact of the Transformation process on schools which transform
- Research the impact of Integrated Education on social attitudes of pupils
- Campaign for full implementation of the Integrated Education Act 2022
- Support the development of the Integrated AlumNI and engage with young people

## Key Performance Indicators

- Level of public support for Integrated Education
- Positive government policy changes achieved for Integrated Education
- High quality robust research briefings accessible to the public and media
- Strengths and weaknesses of the Transformation process identified
- Impact of Integrated Education on social attitudes of young people
- Increased cross-party political support for Integrated Education
- Increased campaigning by young people and Integrated AlumNI in support of Integrated Education





12  
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13

# Key Focus 4 -

## Supporting Integration in Action

An Integrated ethos does not develop by simply having a religious and cultural mix of pupils in a school. Schools need to regularly think about how they deliver integration in both policy and practice. They need to ensure all pupils, staff and governors feel welcome and their identity is celebrated, irrespective of their cultural or religious background.

### Objectives

- Strengthen and deepen Integrated Education by supporting schools to deliver 'Integration in Practice' through targeted grant making
- Support the creative talents of Integrated school pupils in celebrating inclusion and diversity

### Actions

- **The Trust Programme**

The Trust Programme supports activities that encourage schools to develop and enhance their Integrated ethos. The Programme encourages schools to not only reflect on their inclusive ethos but take action by developing special projects for pupils that will deepen and strengthen their commitment to inclusion and diversity. Projects will have children and young people at their core but can include whole school training for staff, governors and parents; updating school policies; developing inclusive school approaches on contentious issues; religious education; assemblies and/or festivals.

- **The Carson Awards**

The annual Carson Awards were founded by legendary Northern Ireland comedian, the late Frank Carson and his son Tony and reflect their long-standing support of Integrated Education as well as their commitment to celebrating the creative talents of young people. The theme of the Awards is 'What Integrated Education Means To Me' and the Awards reflect the creative talents of Integrated school pupils through a variety of creative mediums such as artwork, photography, music, dance, stories, poems, sculpture, short films, and drama.

- **Integration Through Sport**

The 'Integration Through Sport' programme is designed to help introduce new sports to a school in order to provide opportunities for pupils to experience sports normally associated with just one cultural tradition in Northern Ireland. The inaugural programme was funded by the Mitzi Gillespie Family Fund.

### Key Performance Indicators

- The number of schools that apply and the quality of projects being supported
- The number of participants involved in the projects
- The number of schools introducing and developing ongoing actions to:
  - deepen and strengthen their commitment to inclusion and diversity
  - celebrate the creative talents of young people
  - increase their participation in sports normally associated with 'the other community'

# The IEF'S commitment

The IEF receives no core public funding and is entirely dependent on fundraising to deliver on all its key objectives.

Funds generously donated will be used to provide an effective and efficient organisation that will:

- Empower parents, schools and local communities to express their support for Integrated Education and be an essential part of education planning to help ensure the types of schools provided reflect the wishes of the local community
- Encourage and support schools considering Transformation to Integrated status to create the conditions for achieving 100 Integrated schools in Northern Ireland
- Continue to support the growth and development of Integrated school places in response to parental demand
- Provide an evidence base that challenges segregation in the education system
- Hold to account the Northern Ireland Executive and Department of Education to ensure an Integrated Education strategy is implemented that encourages, facilitates and supports the growth and development of Integrated Education
- Support projects in Integrated schools that deliver 'integration in practice'

## Glossary

<b>DE</b>	Department of Education
<b>IEF</b>	Integrated Education Fund
<b>NICIE</b>	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education





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