

LEARNING TOGETHER

ISSUE 34 AUTUMN/WINTER 2019

IN THIS ISSUE

PARENTS VOTE YES TO
INTEGRATION

CELEBRATING THE NOBEL
NOMINATION

LISTENING TO PUPILS ON
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES



Hello and welcome to *Learning Together* issue 34.

There was great excitement in the integrated education movement after it emerged that NICIE and the IEF had been nominated for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. It was a great honour and acknowledged the work of the pioneers who founded integrated education in NI. It also reflects the work which goes on every day in integrated schools to promote diversity and respect.

Learning Together reflects that work and it has been wonderful to share success stories. On p 08 and 12 we feature visits from supporters who hear from pupils the benefits of integrated education.

“Our work campaigning for a single, inclusive model of schooling for NI has been gathering pace.”

We have had many reasons to celebrate over recent months, not least the number of parental ballots showing support for schools to transform to integrated status and you can read more about this on the opposite page.

Our work campaigning for a single, inclusive model of schooling for NI has been gathering pace. We were delighted to see our submission to the NI Affairs Committee’s investigation into education funding quoted in the committee’s final report (see p 11). We have also enjoyed exploring the challenges to education reform which are highlighted in a series of papers from Ulster University called *Transforming Education* (p 07)

We’ve also had lots of fun at the sell-out Stand Up for IE comedy night (p 09) and the Carson Awards showcase, as you can see on the back page.



Tina Merron,
Chief Executive,
IEF

NURSERY TO GROW AT MILL STRAND INTEGRATED PRIMARY

More children can experience integrated nursery education after the Department of Education approved the creation of 26 additional nursery places at Mill Strand Integrated Primary School in Portrush. The additional nursery places opened in September, replacing voluntary playgroup provision at the school site and supplementing the 26 existing nursery places.

Approving the proposal, DE Permanent Secretary Derek Baker said, “The school is clearly popular, viable in all respects and providing good-quality education. Its nursery unit has consistently been oversubscribed in recent years...there is strong evidence of parental demand for pre-school provision of this management type.”

The school had operated a voluntary playgroup for four years supported by the trustees of Mill Strand IPS and by the IEF thanks to donations from Brian and Sue Dickie. Everyone



is delighted that the school now has government support to meet local demand for integration.

Mill Strand IPS was granted permission to double its primary enrolment from September 2018 and has been promised Fresh Start Agreement funding for a new building.

NEW BUILD AT STRANGFORD COLLEGE

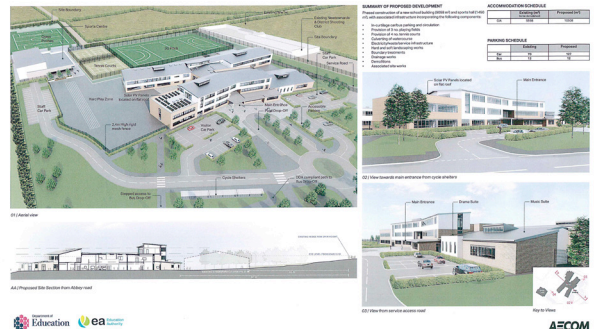
Plans are progressing towards a new school building for Strangford Integrated College on the Ards Peninsula. The project was given the go-ahead in April 2016, to be supported by Fresh Start Agreement funding.

The detailed proposals will be put forward for planning permission and the public have been invited to have their say on the outline designs, from architects AECOM, which have been on display at the college.

The proposed development will consist of a new school building and dedicated sports hall with playing fields, tennis courts and car parking.

The initial plan was to accommodate 670 students but the college, which has been consistently over-subscribed, was granted approval for the new build with the capacity for 720 students. The existing school, which opened in 1997, includes ten modular buildings and everyone is looking forward to moving into state-of-the-art permanent facilities, which is expected to happen in 2021.

Strangford Integrated College, Carrowdore
PRE-APPLICATION COMMUNITY CONSULTATION
2. Visualisations



AECOM

ASPIRATION FOR INTEGRATION

Celebrating at Seaview PS.

A series of votes by parents to bring integration to their children's schools are demonstrating the high demand for integrated education across NI.

In September, parents at Brefne Nursery School in north Belfast voted overwhelmingly to take the pre-school facility on the path to becoming officially integrated.

The school's principal and board took the step of balloting parents after they found evident interest in integration among the school community. The vote, run by Electoral Reform Services, showed just over 92% support for working towards integration through the process known as "transformation".



Harding Memorial PS

The stand-alone nursery in North Belfast has been welcoming children of all backgrounds for more than 50 years and the school leaders were keen to strengthen and promote that inclusive ethos and become integrated.

The ballot followed similar votes this year at Carrickfergus Central Primary School, Bangor Central Nursery School, Harding Memorial Primary School in east Belfast, Ballyhackett Primary School in Castlerock and Seaview Primary School in Glenarm.

The vote at Seaview PS in June showed 95% support for the school to become officially integrated, leading to hopes that the school might become the first Catholic Maintained school to be transformed to integrated status.

Harding Memorial PS, if its proposal to become integrated is accepted, would be the first integrated primary in the area. A parental ballot is the first stage in moving towards formal integrated status; NICIE and the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) will now support these schools as they prepare development proposals for transformation, to be considered by the Education Authority and the Department of Education.

There are currently 65 integrated schools and 25 of these are transformed schools. Transforming a school often brings growth as more families seek integrated education. Cliftonville, Killyleagh and Mallusk Integrated Primary Schools have all seen markedly increased enrolments since becoming integrated.



Children and staff at Brefne Nursery School.

TELLING TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

The Integrated Education Fund hosted a 'Tenx9' storytelling evening on 18 September, as part of the programme for Good Relations Week which is run by the Community Relations Council. The IEF event, hosted by the parental engagement team, was held in the Black Box in Belfast and the stories were shared to a full house of listeners.

The concept of Tenx9 is based on nine people having up to ten minutes each to tell a true story from their own life, and was founded in Belfast in 2011 by Paul Doran and Pádraig Ó Tuama. The organisers explain that "Everybody has a story: ordinary stories, extraordinary stories, stories that delight, entertain, educate, stories that make you laugh, think, hope and cry."

The theme of the evening was "peace" and Clare Bailey MLA, leader of the Green Party in Northern Ireland, opened the evening sharing her experiences of being in the first class of Lagan College, the first integrated school in Northern Ireland.

There were a variety of stories and inputs that followed. **A selection can be heard on the Tenx9 podcast, <http://www.tenx9.com/podcast>**



New podcast: Peace
tenx9.com/podcast



The IEF parental engagement team has been busy all summer at festivals and family events, chatting to parents all over NI about integrated education and letting them know that parents can vote to set their school on the path to becoming officially integrated. The IEF has had colourful stands at events including the Belfast Mela, the Stendhal Festival in Limavady, the Saintfield Show and the Tulip Festival at Glenarm. Children are invited to enjoy art and craft activities whilst their parents can learn more about the Integrate My School website.

The team has also been working to gauge support for integration in areas where the Integrate My School website has shown a high level of interest. Micropolls in Lurgan and Holywood have shown majority support, among parents of children of primary school age and younger, for their local school to follow the transformation process to become integrated.

NOBEL NOMINATION HONOURS EVERYONE INVOLVED IN INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Staff and directors of NICIE and the IEF were delighted and humbled to be nominated for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize.

The nomination, from eminent politicians and academics, was a great honour and acknowledged the work of parents, campaigners, schools and donors over four decades to develop integrated education. It also recognises the daily work within integrated schools to bring children of all backgrounds, beliefs and traditions together in the classroom every day.

Lagan College in Belfast, the first planned integrated school, holds the Cross of Nails and, more recently, New-Bridge Integrated College in Loughbrickland received the Evens Peace Prize, so the Nobel nomination is the latest international recognition of the spirit and dedication of the integrated education movement.

Politicians from across the spectrum expressed their support with unanimous backing for statements of congratulation at both Derry City & Strabane District Council and Belfast City Council.

The Lord Mayor of Belfast hosted a reception for representatives of the integrated education movement on 07 October. Welcoming staff and supporters of NICIE and the IEF to City Hall, Councillor John Finucane said: "The impact that integrated education has had in building peace cannot be underestimated. The vision and bravery of the teachers, parents and campaigners who took forward the idea of building a better future for our young people through the medium of integrated education was groundbreaking. To be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize is an absolutely outstanding achievement and I want to congratulate everyone involved in the movement and wish them the very best of luck."

Members of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement congratulated representatives of NICIE, the IEF and integrated schools, who had been invited to Leinster House in Dublin to address the committee.

Chairman Seán Crowe TD said: "Our committee wants to congratulate both groups on their Nobel prize nomination, which recognises the powerful work education plays in peace building. We are delighted to welcome representatives from both the Integrated Education Fund and Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education to our meeting to hear about their groundbreaking work on integrated education."

Integrated education representatives with the Oireachtas committee in Dublin.



HIGH PROFILE SUPPORTERS CELEBRATE IN LONDON

Supporters of the IEF were joined by influencers and past pupils at a reception to celebrate the integrated education movement nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize 2019.

The event was kindly hosted by Roger Cummings (MD of Big Sky) and Marie O'Riordan (formerly editor of Marie Claire and Elle), at Big Sky Studios in London. Broadcaster Maxine Mawhinney was MC for the evening.

Guests included IEF Campaign Chair Baroness May Blood and actor Packy Lee (who plays Johnny Dogs in BBC drama Peaky Blinders).

India Fahy, a former pupil of Drumragh Integrated College, spoke about her experience of integrated education, and there was a special video message to the party from actor Liam Neeson, who said he was proud to support the IEF and added that the prize nomination honoured everyone involved over the years: "I want to congratulate the teachers in integrated schools and all the parents who have supported integrated education so that their children can learn together and respect each other."



Cecil Lenihan (A founder of All Children Together), Róisín Marshall (CEO NICIE), Belfast Lord Mayor John Finucane and Tina Merron (CEO IEF).



Maxine Mawhinney, Roger Cummings, Baroness May Blood, India Fahy and Marie O'Riordan at Big Sky.

LISTENING TO PUPILS ON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Around 70 young people in integrated education gathered at Drumlins Integrated Primary School, Ballynahinch, on 10 October - World Mental Health Day - to have their say on mental health issues.

“Listening... A Mental Health Conference” was organised by the IEF in partnership with NICIE and was supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Teachers from integrated schools across NI joined pupils to hear the views and experiences of young people and to



explore ideas to develop school-based support.

Harry McGoldrick, from Drumragh Integrated College in Omagh was one of the keynote speakers and commented: “It’s such an honour to be a part of something that could help all of us make changes to how we look at and deal with our mental health and well-being.”

Conference speakers included Richard Pengelly, Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health and Kate Beggs, NI Director of the National Lottery Community Fund. The closing remarks came from NI Children’s Commissioner Koulla Yiasouma, who said: “Providing an education is about more than academic learning and today’s event is a great example of schools playing a crucial role in promoting and safeguarding the emotional wellbeing and mental health of our children and young people. We must listen to them when they feel unwell and we must learn from them when designing the services they need.”

One of the pupils attending, Freya Collins from Lagan College, wrote afterwards to say that the conference was amazing: “Fia Cowan [Integrated AlumNI] spoke about her mental health as a teenager and I found her very inspiring! Harry gave a very eye-opening presentation...I really learnt a lot. Thank you so much for this conference.”



HOUSING AND SCHOOLS DISCUSSED AT BELFAST FÉILE

Following the success of the IEF’s event at last year’s Féile an Phobail, the Fund hosted another discussion on 07 August as part of the 2019 festival. This time the conversation considered both education and housing and the potential for designing both services to support their potential for peace-building. The chair was Gerry McConville [Director of Falls Community Council and Chair of the West Belfast Partnership Board].



Speakers were Deborah Howe of the Equality Commission, Chris Davis from the NI Housing Executive, Grainne Mullan of the Radius housing association and Jill Caskey, the IEF’s parental engagement manager.

The audience heard calls for political leadership to encourage and incentivise integration in education and sharing in housing. It was emphasised that there is evidence of support for mixed housing and integrated education, though it was also pointed out that any plans for a shared neighbourhood should include the development of a “good relations plan” which not only works with residents but also with the wider community.

Following an engaging question-and-answer session, it was generally agreed that more needs to be done to meet the demand for both shared housing and integrated education, and that planning should put the needs of the community at the heart of the process.



Deborah Howe (Equality Commission), Chris Davis (Housing Executive), Grainne Mullan (Radius), and Jill Caskey (IEF).

transforming education


Religion and Education
02


Legislation


All school pupils are required to study RE from 4 to 16 years (unless their parents ask for them to be withdrawn from classes)
All schools must provide a daily act of collective Christian worship.


RE Syllabus

The RE syllabus is drawn up by four Christian churches in NI:



Catholic


Presbyterian


Church of Ireland


Methodist

Religion in Northern Ireland (Census 2011)




In the 2011 census:

- 77% identified themselves as belonging to one of the four denominations that draw up the syllabus
- 23% of the population were not associated with any of these faiths
 - 5.8% belonged to an 'other' Christian denomination
 - 0.8% had a non-Christian faith
 - 16.9% followed no religion or did not state their religion

There has been a steady increase in the number of young people who do not regard themselves as belonging to any religion – currently 1/3

**Q. Do you regard yourself as belonging to any religion?
A. No religion (YLT, 2003-2015)**



The RE syllabus assumes a Christian perspective and places Bible teaching at its core

Study of 'world religions' is only introduced at Key Stage 3 – for secondary school pupils

Exploring the differences in Catholic and Protestant beliefs and practices is reserved until Key Stage 4

Schools may choose to teach aspects of religion outside of the syllabus to reflect their ethos

The Education and Training Inspectorate do not inspect RE (unless called upon to do so) but clergy are entitled to inspect RE classes in school

In the absence of inspection, there is no consistent quality control mechanism for RE

Other Considerations

The four denominations influence the management and governance of schools with reserved places on:

- Boards of Governors
- The Education Authority
- Catholic Council for Maintained Schools
- Controlled Schools Support Council

There are indications that there has been a decrease in the population affiliated to the four denominations since 2011

There is evidence of growth in the population following non-Christian faiths.

Parents have a right to withdraw their children from collective worship and/or RE classes – it has been identified that the alternative provision currently offered to these pupils may be inadequate




The ethos of Maintained schools is underpinned by the practice of Catholic faith.

Christian beliefs frame the culture of Controlled schools, although religion is generally less prominent.

Integrated schools are essentially Christian in character and consciously navigate denominational sensitivities.

Report 02
Published September 2018
Transforming Education

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RESEARCH PROJECT TURNS A SPOTLIGHT ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

A team of academics at the Ulster University UNESCO centre is working to produce a series of papers bringing their research into the education system to a wider audience.



The Transforming Education project aims to examine and illuminate issues which impact on the delivery of education in NI. The idea is to encourage wider debate about the issues facing education, and to consider how we might develop a common system of education. Topics are explored in accessible reports, accompanied by infographics summarising the relevant data. The project is supported by the Community Foundation and the IEF.

The first briefing paper in the series looks at how far teachers in NI tend to train and work in schools identified with their community background, and the impact of employment law on career patterns. It is not widely known that teaching staff have no protection against religious discrimination in their employment due to an exemption from the Fair Employment legislation. The paper drew attention to this issue and was widely reported in the media.

The second paper looks at the influence of religion in schools, both through compulsory worship and the RE syllabus and through the involvement of the four main churches in education planning and governance.

Future publications will examine the home-to-school transport issue, the true extent of parental choice in education and the sectoral divisions in teacher training and teacher unions. Mapping techniques will be used to analyse school planning and levels of integration and segregation.

The project was introduced to an audience of MLAs, education planners, civic and business leaders and young people at an event at Stormont on 17 September, during Good Relations Week. "Transforming Education: a Conversation" was sponsored by Kellie Armstrong MLA and hosted by the UU research team and the IEF. Guests were invited to discuss in small groups the challenges facing our education system and feed back to the room. It was agreed that the system is marked by division of all kinds and many people commented that a cultural change was needed to give vocational training the same status as academic education. There was evident appetite for further engagement and more conversations are being planned.

transforming education

Employment mobility of teachers and the FETO exception.
01

01. The Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to present up-to-date research information on the division of teachers according to their community identity and outline the extent to which this distribution is affected by the exemption of teachers from fair employment legislation in NI (i.e. Fair Employment and Treatment Order, 1996).

02. Background

2.1 Teacher Separation

The distribution of teachers between the various sectors of education in Northern Ireland demonstrates notable levels of consistency in respect of community identity.

In 2018, over 1,000 teachers completed an on-line survey conducted through the UNESCO centre at Ulster University. It was shown that 2% of those teachers employed in Catholic Maintained (CCMS) primaries had attended a Controlled primary school in NI and that 7% of those teachers employed in Controlled primary schools had been educated in a CCMS primary.

Similarly, 8% of those teaching in CCMS post primaries and 17% of teachers in Catholic voluntary grammar schools had attended non-Catholic primaries in NI, whilst 17% of those employed in Controlled post primary schools and 22% of teachers in non-Catholic grammars had attended CCMS primaries.

The 7% of pupils who attend integrated schools¹ are taught by a cohort of teachers that, on the whole reflects the target composition of the pupil body (i.e. 40% Catholic, 40% Non-Catholic, 20% other).

The Ulster University research also highlighted that many teachers follow a community consistent career path, working within those sectors associated with their community of origin.

A proportion of teachers are culturally encapsulated having taken the community consistent path at all stages of their career (primary, post primary, Initial Teacher Education, teaching practice and every teaching post they have taken).

- 22% teachers in mainstream Controlled schools and non-Catholic grammar schools had no experience of having ever worked within any sector of Catholic education
- This cultural encapsulation was particularly prevalent amongst those teaching in Controlled primary schools – 38%.

¹ Figures from DES School Census 2018



MLAs Rosemary Barton, Colin McGrath and Karen Mullan, Dr Matt Milliken and Dr Jessica Bates (UU), Ciaran Owen (Co-Operation Ireland), Kellie Armstrong MLA and Dr Stephen Roulston (UU) at the Stormont event in September.

FRIENDS HELP OMAGH IPS CELEBRATE NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Omagh Integrated Primary School celebrated its new build with some special guests at two ceremonies earlier this year.

Representatives of the Department of Education and NICIE joined writer Tony Macaulay on 17 May to mark the official opening of the new 14-classroom primary school and nursery building, sited next to Drumragh Integrated College.

John Fitzpatrick, hotelier and chair of the Ireland Funds, flew in on 22 May to join Baroness May Blood, IEF campaign chair, to celebrate the new children's centre, which he has supported from its inception.

The children's centre has been developed thanks to generous donations through the IEF from the Eithne and Paddy

Fitzpatrick Memorial Fund, which was established in memory of John Fitzpatrick's parents. Additional funding came from the Friends of Omagh IPS. The centre houses a pre-school playgroup as well as a breakfast club and after-school service.

After chatting to children and staff, Dublin-born John said he was delighted to support the work of the IEF: "I get sentimental because I think what you guys do is very special. When you see all the kids together it's special to me but it's also frustrating because I want to do more."

Omagh IPS opened in 1990, thanks to a group of pioneering parents, with 32 pupils and a further 24 in the nursery. The school now has an enrolment of more than 300 children.



John Fitzpatrick with pupils at Omagh IPS playgroup.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS IN MAGHERAFELT



Spires Integrated Primary School in Magherafelt is celebrating its twentieth birthday. It opened on 01 September 1999 thanks to the dedication of local parents and grandparents who shared a desire to see children from different cultural and religious backgrounds educated together in an environment in which the traditions of all are valued equally.

A series of public meetings was organised with the support of NICIE, and a steering group was formed in 1997. This generated enough support and funds (with help from the IEF) to open a school, although in August 1999 the site had not yet been prepared and sheep grazed where the school was to be situated!

But Spires IPS opened on time in mobile huts, with 58 children in P1-P4. The staff and pupils moved into purpose-built accommodation in January 2000 and now have an enrolment of more than 200 pupils.

Spires IPS Principal, Joan Bell, who has been involved in the school since the beginning, said: "Our current school community owes a great deal to the work completed by the steering group and the courage shown by the first parents of Spires IPS who took a leap of faith by sending their child to this new school. It is very rewarding to see it as an established school in the locality, providing integrated education in the wider Magherafelt area."

THIRTY YEARS AT BRAIDSIDE

Braidside Integrated Primary and Nursery School is marking 30 years of integrated education in Ballymena. The initiative to establish an integrated school began in 1988, thanks to three local families. With the support of NICIE, Braidside IPS eventually opened in an old shirt factory with 50 children (including a pre-school class), gaining government funding after a year and now with an enrolment of more than 300 pupils.

As the new school year began, pupils and staff gathered for a special assembly with balloons, a cake and a chorus of "Happy Birthday Braidside" to get celebrations underway. Plans for the year ahead include a whole school photograph, a display of photos/ items from years past and a celebration involving pupils, parents, teachers and governors.

However, the highlight of the year could be a move into their new school building and everyone is eagerly watching the progress of the construction work.



STARS COME OUT FOR INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Friends of the Integrated Education Fund were among the comedy fans making up the capacity crowd enjoying a stellar line-up of performers at Stand Up for Integrated Education in Belfast on 19 September. Comedians Tim McGarry, Colin Murphy, Wendy Wason, Jake O'Kane and Teresa Livingstone delivered the laughs, welcomed to the stage at the Ulster Hall by IEF Campaign Chair Baroness May Blood.

Building on last year's success, the team sold out the Ulster Hall and did not disappoint the crowd, who roared their appreciation of the banter, songs and one-liners. Friends of the IEF later enjoyed a reception with the cast at the Grand Central Hotel.

The Fund owes a huge debt of thanks to the five comedians who generously gave their time and shared their talents in

support of integrated education. We are particularly grateful to Tim McGarry, who yet again pulled out all the stops to make the show happen. We should also like to thank the stalwart staff at the Ulster Hall who have been great to work with over the past three years, and of course everyone who bought tickets, put up posters, commented on social media, told their friends and turned up for a laugh!



Wendy Wason, Tim McGarry, Teresa Livingstone, Jake O'Kane and Colin Murphy.



Colin Murphy on stage.



Baroness May Blood thanks the performers.



Jane Morrice, Neil Mathews, Terry Cross and Tim McGarry relax at the post-show reception.

SPECIAL GUESTS AT IEF LUNCH

The IEF's Campaign Council was proud to host an exclusive lunch in May 2019, featuring Senator George J Mitchell in conversation with Jeremy Paxman. Guests gathered at the prestigious Brewers' Hall in London for the event, which was generously sponsored by the Turnaround Foundation.

Senator Mitchell, the Chair of the Northern Ireland peace talks, kindly agreed to travel from the USA to London for the event.

Under Senator Mitchell's leadership the Good Friday Agreement, an historic accord ending decades of conflict, was reached by the governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom and political parties of Northern Ireland.

Jeremy Paxman, who began his career covering 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland, presented the BBC's nightly current affairs programme, Newsnight, for 25 years. What our special guests had in common was a belief that educating children in Northern Ireland together in the same schools, irrespective of religious and cultural background, would foster greater understanding and contribute significantly to a more peaceful and shared society.

A highlight of the lunch was a limited-edition commemorative Long Good Friday Wit Beer, thanks to Tony Carson and the Love Lane Brewery in Liverpool. The IEF is indebted to all the people who helped pull this magnificent event together.



George Mitchell (l) and Jeremy Paxman.

AUTHOR RETURNS TO SCHOOL



Estere Gulbe is pictured with ICD Principal, Andrew Sleeth, and librarian Caroline Gilligan.

Integrated College Dungannon (ICD) were delighted to welcome back former student Estere Gulbe, who returned to present the College with a copy of her first published novel, "Flames' Descendant". The book has provoked so much interest that Estere has a five-book contract.

Estere, who left the College in June 2016, joined Year 9 at ICD from Latvia with no English. She attributes being able to pick up the language quickly and competently to the support she received from ICD teaching staff who "made learning fun."

FOND FAREWELL TO LAGAN'S LONGEST-SERVING TEACHER

The longest-serving full-time teacher in integrated education retired from her job at Lagan College this summer. Helen Smyth had been involved in the school since 1983, when it was based at the Scout hut at Ardnalvalley in south Belfast.

Helen taught many subjects in those early days before focusing on her passion for geography and becoming head of department. Helen introduced away days and numerous river studies and instilled a passion for all things geographical in many pupils over the years. She also served on the Board of Governors for four years and has been an active representative of her teachers' union. Helen committed herself to the new school when its future was uncertain and left 36 years later, proud of the school's success and tremendous growth, alongside that of the wider integrated education movement.

The school hosted a retirement lunch, where Helen heard speeches of thanks and appreciation from current and past staff and pupils and enjoyed a video compilation which included special messages from integrated education supporters Tim McGarry and Adrian Dunbar.



MPS LOOK AT THE COST OF EDUCATION IN NI

A committee of MPs has acknowledged the need for fundamental reform of the NI education system. The NI Affairs Committee at Westminster conducted an inquiry into education funding in Northern Ireland, inviting written submissions and hearing from a series of witnesses.

The select committee's report, published in July, said: **"We saw there is a clear need to reduce duplication across the education sector and for consolidation of the school estate. Witnesses were clear that alongside the immediate funding pressures on education, the complicated structure of education in Northern Ireland meant that money was not being spent in the most efficient way."**

And the report cites the IEF contribution to the inquiry: **"... some stakeholders told us that if the system was organised differently it ought to be possible to properly resource education at current funding levels. [The Integrated Education Fund] wrote that: 'Throwing more money at the financial problems facing our schools would only serve to temporarily mask and perpetuate the structural inefficiencies underlying these problems.'"**

The report makes 22 recommendations and highlights the lack of decision-making in the absence of a working Assembly and Executive, which has hampered progress in several areas of education policy and which also means there is no scrutiny of those decisions which are made. The committee concludes that the school estate should be "consolidated", concentrating resources in fewer schools to offer the best school experience. However it also said that all major planning decisions should be made after meaningful consultation with local communities.



House of Commons
Northern Ireland Affairs
Committee

Education funding in Northern Ireland

Ninth Report of Session 2017–19

Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report

Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 17 July 2019

HC 1497
Published on 22 July 2019
by authority of the House of Commons

EDITORIAL: KEN CATHCART, CHAIR IEF

The IEF welcomed the publication on 22 July of the report from the NI Affairs Committee's inquiry into education funding in Northern Ireland. The IEF's written contribution to the inquiry included a call for a reform of the structure of the NI education system to rationalise provision and enable better use of resources. We also called for community participation in decisions on education planning and delivery. We are delighted that both these points have been taken on board by the committee.

The NIAC report acknowledges the argument that the current structure of education delivery in NI does not represent the best use of limited resources. It also said that parents, schools and communities would have to be involved in plans for change:

Many witnesses concluded that there was a need for fundamental transformation of the way education in Northern Ireland is organised, and reorganisation of the school estate. However, it was acknowledged that this would involve difficult conversations with parents, schools and communities....

The Department of Education should use part of the public sector transformation fund allocated in the 2019–20 draft budget to run community consultations on school provision, so that communities have a real stake in decision-making rooted in their desired outcomes.

The IEF has supported a team of researchers from Ulster University in devising and testing a model for public consultation, running a series of pilot "Community Conversations" to promote the concept of meaningful participation in the planning process. You can find the resulting Community Conversation Toolkit on our website: <https://view.publitas.com/integrated-education-fund/community-conversion-toolkit-final/page/1>

The NIAC concludes with 22 recommendations including, crucially:

...we believe that a broad ambition for the education sector should be to consolidate the school estate so that resources can be concentrated in fewer schools, giving greater scope for an enriched, broadened school experience. The Department and the Education Authority should use this as its guiding principle when taking decisions about school provision.

Consultation is therefore an essential part of this process, so that parents and communities are truly included in these decisions and their concerns respected.



Ken Cathcart

Given the groundswell of support for systemic reform, the IEF believes that a root-and-branch review of the NI education system is needed and, given the financial crisis facing schools and a lack of leadership at Stormont, an independent commission on education reform should be established as a matter of urgency.

Integrate
Education.
It doesn't subtract.
It adds.



Ireland Funds delegates and IEF representatives at Cliftonville IPS.

WORLDWIDE FOCUS ON INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Integrated education took centre stage when the Ireland Funds held their worldwide conference in Belfast in June. Almost 200 supporters from across the world, including Ireland, the UK, the USA, Singapore and Australia, gathered for the four-day event.

Chairman John Fitzpatrick addressed political, community and business leaders at the conference gala in St Anne's Cathedral and spoke of his desire to see more children and young people learning together in NI schools. The audience,

including DUP leader Arlene Foster, heard John Fitzpatrick say: "I want to see integrated education included in any future Programme for Government in Northern Ireland."

At a plenary session of the conference, Baroness May Blood, IEF Campaign Chair, shared her aspirations for the future growth of integrated schooling: "There is real momentum for more integration. There has never been so much interest from schools exploring integrated status. Unfortunately, it is still left to parents,

individual schools and charities to seize the initiative. What we need alongside local community efforts is effective education planning which acknowledges parental preference."

A number of conference delegates visited Cliftonville Integrated Primary School in north Belfast, where they heard how the school had almost trebled in size in the ten years following its transformation to integrated status.

SUPPORTERS SEE TRUST PROGRAMME WORK IN INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

Pupils at two integrated schools in north Belfast very proudly showed off their work through the IEF Trust Programme when some of the grant scheme's funders visited in May. Sir Trevor Pears (Executive Chair) and Bridget McGing (Deputy Director) of the Pears Foundation met young people at Hazelwood Integrated College and Cliftonville Integrated Primary School to hear how the Foundation has helped with the development and exploration of the integrated ethos in many schools in the area.

At Hazelwood IC, Sir Trevor and Bridget heard from students about their involvement in the College's internship programme, which features work placements in local feeder primary schools, helping develop lesson plans and activities to develop and reinforce integration.

The party moved on to Cliftonville IPS where the children shared their



Sir Trevor Pears meets students at Hazelwood IC.

enthusiasm for their Trust Programme project on "religious beliefs in our community". The school works with Cranmore IPS to explore religious diversity and they have visited buildings in Belfast significant to different faiths, including the synagogue and Belfast Islamic Centre.

The Pears Foundation has supported the grants for the Trust Programme over several years and the IEF and the schools were delighted to give Bridget and Sir Trevor an insight into how their generosity helps worthwhile educational initiatives.

YOUNG SCIENTISTS WANTED!

Children from three integrated primary schools took their big questions to Science Blast Belfast in the summer, and schools all over NI are invited to start planning a project for the next event. The annual Science Blast festival supports primary schools in developing key skills: critical thinking, creativity, communications and collaboration. Science Blast 2020 is open to every Key Stage 2 class and takes place in June at the Waterfront Hall. At the 2019 event, children from Forge, Crumlin and Corran Integrated Primary Schools displayed their work alongside hundreds of other young scientists and also enjoyed a series of entertaining science-themed shows.

The organisers, the Royal Dublin Society (RDS), say that participation is "child's play" and the projects help develop not only skills for science, but also skills for life.

Classes are asked to think of a simple question and children then investigate their question, using core activities – counting, measuring or observing – before designing their presentation for Science Blast 2020. Travel grants are available to help with the cost of attending and there is plenty of helpful material on the RDS Science Blast website: www.scienceblast.com



Crumlin IPS pupils at Science Blast 2019.

DIANA AWARDS FOR INSPIRATIONAL PUPILS

Students from three integrated schools were among the 22 NI recipients of the Diana Award in June this year. The accolade, established in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales, is presented to young people in recognition of inspirational social action or humanitarian work. The awards were presented at a ceremony at Stormont by Diana Award CEO Tessie Ojo.

The judges gave an award to all 14 members of New-Bridge Integrated College's Anti-bullying Ambassador team. This group works at peer education, advice and support and are positive role models,

organising a variety of annual activities including anti-bullying week events.

Shannon McCaul was Head Girl at Integrated College Dungannon and also chaired the school's anti-bullying ambassador team. Always working to make everyone feel included and valued, Shannon took a lead role in establishing a dedicated space for vulnerable students to take time out and feel safe.

Shimna Integrated College is very proud of award-winner Maya Ballentine, a leading member of the school's Gay-Straight



Alliance who has spoken up for equality and inclusion both on TV and in front of a crowd of 20,000 at an equal marriage rally in Belfast. Maya, who is 16, has gained a place on the Amnesty UK Youth Council after working tirelessly for the Shimna IC Amnesty Group.

Sandara Kelso-Robb MBE, NI Ambassador for the Diana Award, commented: "Northern Ireland needs a new generation of change-makers and this recognition will help motivate them and others to drive action in their communities."



SUMMER FUN IN KILLYLEAGH



Killyleagh Integrated Primary School in County Down reinforced its links with the local community through its first summer scheme, when 30 children attended local events as part of their seven weeks of fun.

The scheme was established to provide a safe environment where children could play together and to enable the children of working parents to maintain their normal routines over the long summer break. Each day began with a healthy breakfast followed by a range of activities, from slime workshops and football coaching to junk art and cookery. The Killyleagh IPS pupils joined other local children at events including a storytelling and illustration workshop, a Lego workshop and an environmental art session. The children also enjoyed trips to explore the rich heritage in their own area and a final day by the sea at Newcastle. The scheme was so successful that plans are already underway for next summer.

SLF SUPPORT...

The IEF was deeply moved by the generosity of fans of Stiff Little Fingers when they raised almost £500 in memory of fellow SLF devotee, Davey Armstrong. This fitting tribute was in addition to a further £1,700 raised at the band's Dublin and Belfast gigs in August. Our thanks go to SLF, everyone who donated and to all the volunteers and friends who helped with the collections.



Collecting at the Dublin gig.



Children at Hazelwood Integrated Primary School have been selected by Belfast City Council to help spread the message about cleaner streets. Community groups and schools were invited to enter the 'Design a Billboard Challenge' to highlight the impact of litter and graffiti on the city's communities. The artwork by the Hazelwood IPS Eco Council, reminding dog owners to clean up after their pets, was chosen as one of four winning entries. It has been made into a billboard and displayed in the north Belfast area. Talented Hazelwood IPS pupils are pictured with Eco Council teacher Lauren Davis and the winning billboard.

STAR STUDENTS!



Gaelic footballers from Parkhall Integrated College and Crumlin Integrated College enjoyed the opportunity to represent Ulster in the All Britain Championship in July, forming a football team called Antrim Cúchulainns.

The boys first took part through the GAA's Cúchulainn initiative, which aims to offer young people from different backgrounds the opportunity to engage with one another, and with Gaelic games. Having won their heats in NI, the team headed to west London to join hundreds of other young people for four days of sport. The Cúchulainns' stay in London included a trip to Clarence House and to the Irish Embassy.



Malone Integrated College is very proud of Sophie Early, a Year 10 student who is the youngest ever Ulster Senior Ladies Champion in table tennis. Sophie spends most of her weekends competing throughout Ireland, the UK and Europe; she is currently ranked 4th in the world at Under-13 level and is the Irish national and mixed doubles champion at Under-21 and Under-18 level. Sophie's success may help explain the popularity of the Malone IC table tennis club which sees students queuing up to play.



Congratulations to Bangor Central Integrated Primary School netballers on their success in the NI Finals. The last stage of the competition was held in Lisburn in June and teams from across Northern Ireland competed throughout the day. The girls from Bangor Central IPS were the reigning champions, so the pressure was on. After an exciting tournament, the girls won the championship for the second year in a row.



A team of Year 10 pupils from Lagan College are heading to the finals of an Irish language quiz in January, having successfully completed the Belfast round. The students competed against other schools from all over Belfast in the Tráth na gCeist and they are delighted to have achieved second place. The quiz, at the Falls Leisure Centre, was followed by a round of karaoke and then a céilí.

ART FOR INTEGRATION

Schools and integrated education supporters joined the IEF at a packed Ormeau Baths in Belfast on 17 October to celebrate the winners of the annual Carson Awards. Broadcaster, journalist and IEF supporter Maxine Mawhinney flew in from London especially to comperè the event, as did the founder and sponsor of the awards, Tony Carson.

Creative pupils from integrated schools were presented with their Carson Prizes and guests enjoyed a showcase of talent that had benefitted from the Carson Bursary scheme.

Guests included Baroness May Blood, actress Olivia Nash, artist Neil Shawcross and a number of major donors and supporters.

The audience was treated to a selection of music, film, poetry and drama reflecting the theme of integration, and there was an exhibition of artwork by a number of students.

The Carson Awards, funded by Tony, are also a tribute to his father, the late comedian Frank Carson. Tony was delighted to attend the showcase and enjoyed meeting many of the talented young people from integrated schools.

In closing the event, Mary Roulston, IEF Director, launched the next round of awards; you can find out more at www.ief.org.uk/grants/carson-awards



Viewing the exhibition.



Olivia Nash with children from Loughries IPS, Newtownards.



Maxine Mawhinney and creative students from Shimna IC, Newcastle.



Olivia Nash (centre) and Maxine Mawhinney with students from Ulidia IC, Carrickfergus.



Tony Carson and the group from Carhill IPS, Garvagh.