

INTEGRATION WORKS

A Short Guide to Integrated Education
for Nursery Schools



Over the last two decades, society has been transformed. We have witnessed changes that many, if not most of us, would have had difficulty imagining possible not so long ago. Continuing to build a transformed and more shared society is a key priority for government.

Integrated education, which provides exciting opportunities for children and young people from diverse community backgrounds to learn together, has an important role to play in that process. Many nursery schools also have a diverse mix of children – becoming integrated, and declaring your integration to the wider population, sends a strong message to the communities which the school serves. We need your help to strengthen the power of change in our society through integrated education.

The Department of Education aims to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education in line with parental preference. Schools can become integrated through a process called “transformation”. We have therefore produced this short guide to help you to consider the benefits of integrated education and transformation specifically for nursery schools.



What is integrated education?

Integrated education brings together pupils, staff and governors from Protestant, Catholic and other cultural traditions within a single school community. At its core, integrated education encourages children to recognise what they share in common as well as what makes them different. It promotes the expression of different cultures and traditions. It accepts and nurtures the individual and respects the culture and identity of each child equally. Integrated education sits very comfortably within the pre-school curriculum. Is your nursery school ready to take on the challenges that come with being integrated?

Why Consider the Integrated Option for Your Nursery School?

Since the first integrated school opened in the 1980s, integrated education has demonstrated that it can:

- help break down barriers
- develop more positive social attitudes
- nurture and improve community relations among children, families and communities
- proactively and intentionally include everyone in school

This is backed up by research which suggests that the extended contact provided by integrated schools can create the conditions for generating mutual respect and understanding, fostering cross-community friendships, reducing prejudicial attitudes and promoting a sense of security in religious, racial or ethnically diverse environments. Many parents would like to see this integrated journey begin in pre-school education and continue throughout their child's educational pathway. This early start in integrated education gives children a good start in life. The idea is that parents choose an education that respects both the major traditions in Northern Ireland but also opens up the potential for children to meet, learn, play and become friends with children from a range of other backgrounds and perspectives.

Staff and Principals whose schools have gone through the transformation process report many positive benefits such as giving pupils opportunities to broaden their perspectives and to prepare for a more culturally diverse world. Parents report that they feel more comfortable in a school that respects their traditions and culture. There are a number of nursery schools currently exploring the process.

Transformation is the name given to the process involved when a school changes to become an integrated school. Any school, with the exception of a special school and a school established in a hospital, can transform, this includes nursery schools.

How does the process start?

The transformation process is the same for nursery, primary and post-primary schools and can be started in one of two ways;

1. A school's Board of Governors can decide it would like to consider transformation and consults with parents, or
2. A written request to change to an integrated school is submitted to a school's Board of Governors by at least 20% of the school's parents.

Parents can register this request and find out more information on www.integratemyschool.com

What happens next?

Once either of these takes place, a parental ballot will be held. The parental ballot is the opportunity for parents to vote on whether they want the school to transform to become an integrated school. The ballot is organised by an independent organisation known as the Electoral Reform Service (ERS), and all responses are confidential. Every adult registered as a parent of a child at the school is entitled to a vote.

Who decides if the school will be allowed to transform?

The final decision regarding the transformation rests with the Department of Education who will base their judgement on the information available to them. This will include information relating to long-term viability of the school, educational standards and the ability of the school to achieve and maintain religious balance. Schools must be able to demonstrate that they can achieve a minimum of 10% of their intake from the minority population within the school's enrolment and also the potential to achieve a minimum of 30% in the longer term.



Will the school receive more money if it becomes integrated?

No. Integrated schools receive the same funding as other schools, though the Department of Education has undertaken to provide some financial assistance to transforming schools to help them during the first years of the process.

They may also be eligible for grants from the Integrated Education Fund (IEF).

Will the curriculum change?

The pre-school curriculum already includes key elements of the integrated ethos; this can be seen in the "Ensuring Equality of Opportunity" section of Curricular Guidance for Pre-School Education (2018) that states;

"It is important to help young children understand that we see the world in many different ways depending on our cultural, social and religious viewpoints. Staff in a setting should:

- acknowledge and respect the culture, beliefs and lifestyles of the families and children in the setting;
- include activities and resources that encourage respect for diversity; and
- talk about cultural and religious festivals, discuss foods in different countries, read stories or listen to music from different cultures, and display photographs of cultural traditions, "as appropriate".

What support will be available for the school if it decides to become integrated?

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), the Shared Education & Sectoral Support Team within the Education Authority (EA), and the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), will be available to offer guidance and support at all stages of the transformation process. The services and support offered by these organisations will continue even after integrated status has been achieved for up to five years and beyond.

If I want my school to become integrated, what should I do, or who should I talk to?

If you would like more information about transformation you can contact NICIE, the Shared Education & Sectoral Support Team or the IEF. Your journey to help support peace and reconciliation through education starts here.





Useful contacts

NICIE

25 College Gardens
Belfast, BT9 6BS

T: 028 9097 2910
E: admin@nicie.org.uk
W: nicie.org.uk

Education Authority (EA)

(Shared Education & Sectoral
Support Team)
17 Lough Road
Antrim, BT41 4DH

T: 028 9448 2200
E: info@eani.org.uk
W: eani.org.uk

Integrated Education Fund

Forestview, Purdy's Lane
Belfast, BT8 7AR

T: 028 9069 4099
E: info@ief.org.uk
W: ief.org.uk

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