

# INTEGRATION WORKS

A Short Guide to Integrated Education  
in Northern Ireland



Over the last two decades we have witnessed changes in society in Northern Ireland that many, if not most of us, would have had difficulty imagining possible not so long ago. Continuing to build a truly shared society is a key priority for government.

Integrated education, which provides exciting opportunities for children and young people from different community backgrounds to learn together, has an important role to play in that process.

The Department of Education aims to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education in line with parental preference. Therefore we have produced this short guide to help you to consider the benefits of integrated education and how your school could become integrated through a process called transformation.



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 and young people to recognise what they share in common as well as what makes them different, and 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.

### Why consider the integrated option for your school?

In integrated schools, children of all backgrounds learn side by side in the same classrooms every day. Since the first 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 young people.

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.

There are also intellectual benefits provided by learning environments where assumptions are challenged, problems without obvious solutions are tackled and opposing viewpoints and interpretations of events are considered.

Staff and Principals who 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.

## What is Transformation?

Transformation is the name given to the process when a school can change to become an integrated school. Any school is able to transform to become an integrated school, with the exception of special schools and schools established in hospitals.

## How does the process start?

Transformation 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 your 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](http://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 an integrated school. The ballot is a postal ballot, organised by an independent organisation known as the Electoral Reform Service (ERS), and all responses will remain confidential. Every adult registered as a parent of a child at the school will get a vote.

## What happens after a ballot in favour of transformation?

At least 50% of parents must vote for the result to be considered. If there is a turn-out of less than 50% then a second ballot will automatically take place. If 51% or more of those who have voted, vote in favour of transformation, then the Board of Governors must start the transformation process. They do this by submitting a Development Proposal to the Education Authority. A Development Proposal is the mechanism that must be used for any school to change to an integrated school. The Education Authority will then publish an advertisement in the press about the Development Proposal and there will be a two month consultation period during which time relevant supporting data to change to an integrated school (including an Action Plan for Integration and how this will be managed and introduced into the school) will be lodged with the Department of Education.

## Who decides if the school will be allowed to transform?

The final decision regarding the transformation rests with the Minister for Education who will base their judgement on the information available to them. This will include information relating to long term viability of the proposed new 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 Year1/Year8 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.

## Will a child be asked to play sports associated with specific cultural traditions as part of PE?

The school will try to cater for the cultural interests, including games, of both the main traditions of Northern Ireland. All pupils will be able to participate or not, according to the wishes of their parents.

## Will Religious Education be taught if the school becomes integrated?

Yes. All schools, including integrated schools, are required to follow a core RE curriculum agreed by the four main churches. The Board of Governors will ensure that all religions and philosophies are equally recognised and embraced. Financial support may be available from the Department of Education to help schools access specialist teaching for sacramental preparation.

## **How will the management of the school be affected if it becomes integrated?**

The Board of Governors will increase in size to reflect the interests of the school's minority community. Additional places will also be made available for 'parent governors' to allow greater parental involvement in the running of the school.

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

The Education Authority, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), and the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), will be available to offer guidance and support at all stages of the transformation process. Other schools who have gone through the transformation process may be willing to offer advice and guidance too. The services and support offered by these organisations will continue even after integrated status has been achieved.

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

The first person you ask about transformation should be your school Principal, or your Board of Governors. If you would like further information about what transformation is before contacting your school, or you require support before you do this then you can contact the IEF, NICIE, or the EA, who should all be able to provide you with some more information and guidance.



## Useful contacts

### **NICIE**

25 College Gardens  
Belfast, BT9 6BS

T: 028 9097 2910  
E: [info@nicie.org.uk](mailto:info@nicie.org.uk)  
W: [nicie.org.uk](http://nicie.org.uk)

### **Integrated Education Fund**

Forestview, Purdy's Lane  
Belfast, BT8 7AR

T: 028 9069 4099  
E: [info@ief.org.uk](mailto:info@ief.org.uk)  
W: [ief.org.uk](http://ief.org.uk)

### **Education Authority**

School Improvement Team (Sectoral Support)  
17 Lough Road  
Antrim, BT41 4DH

T: 028 9448 2200  
E: [info@eani.org.uk](mailto:info@eani.org.uk)  
W: [eani.org.uk](http://eani.org.uk)



# INTEGRATION WORKS

A Short Guide to Integrated Education  
in Northern Ireland