

Statement of Principles for Integrated Education

Declaration of Ethos

The integrated school provides a learning environment where children and young people from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds, as well as those of other faiths and none, can learn with, from and about each other. The promotion of equality and good relations extends to everyone in the school and to their families regardless of their religious, cultural or social background. Integrated education is value-driven and child-centred. It is delivered through a holistic approach with an emphasis on developing every aspect of a child's or young person's potential.



Email: info@nicie.org
Visit: www.nicie.org
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Context

The history of Northern Ireland is one marked by prejudice and intolerance. It is a society divided politically, religiously, culturally and economically, where ignorance of those who are different has led to sectarian violence and strife. The current Peace Process reminds us that change is possible through dialogue and negotiation. At the same time the influx of newcomers from other parts of the world brings with it the challenge of enhanced ethnic diversity, demonstrating that Northern Ireland cannot afford to remain isolated and trapped in time. The 21st century therefore brings hope for the future, despite being burdened by the legacy of the past. Communities now find themselves in transition, feeling their way cautiously towards equality and sharing but still troubled by old loyalties and beliefs. At the core of their journey lies the need to create shared spaces where all have the opportunity to live, learn and grow together in understanding, rather than mistrust.

For over 25 years, integrated schools have sought to influence societal change and promote greater choice for parents. Thousands of young people have shared in the unique experience that is Integrated Education, but many thousands more have never had the opportunity to meet, or make friends with, someone of a different faith or tradition. In 1991 when the Statement of Principles was first written, Northern Ireland was a very different place to what it is today, although the common thread of sectarianism connects that past with this present. The revised Statement of Principles reflects an integrated movement that is still dealing with the country's internal divisions, while at the same time witnessing greater ethnic diversity and an increased reluctance for people to categorise themselves as being from a particular religious background. It is in this context that the Statement of Principles reaffirms the meaning of Integrated Education and articulates the integrated ethos.

Definition

In the spirit of promoting a better and shared future, the friends and supporters of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education define Integrated Education in the Northern Ireland context as:

'Education together in a school of children and young people drawn mainly from the Protestant and Catholic traditions, with the aim of providing for them an excellent education that gives recognition to and promotes the expression of these two main traditions. The integrated school, while essentially Christian in character, welcomes those of all faiths and none, and seeks to promote the worth and self-esteem of pupils, parents, staff, governors and all who are affected by the presence of the school in the community. The core aim is to provide children and young people with a caring and enhanced educational experience thus empowering them as individuals to affect positive change in a shared society.'

Affirmations

1. Parents, together with their children, have rights in determining the nature of each child's education as set out in the European Convention on Human Rights (Human Rights Act, 1998) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. Children and young people of all religious, social and cultural backgrounds, regardless of ability, race, gender or sexual orientation have a right to an education which respects and gives expression to their individual identities, while providing opportunities for them to explore the diversity of the world in which they live.
3. In an inherently segregated and contested society, children and young people can learn to respect difference more effectively when they are afforded the opportunity to have meaningful and sustained engagement with those who are different from themselves.
4. Young people should be encouraged to recognise those less fortunate than themselves, the oppressed and victims of injustice.

Core Principles of Integrated Education

The 4 core principles of Integrated Education represent the cornerstones of the integrated ethos. The integrated school demonstrates its distinctiveness and vision through a commitment to these principles.

(i) Equality

The integrated school promotes equality in sharing between and within the diverse groups that compose the school community. This occurs structurally at every level amongst pupils, staff and the board of governors, as well as culturally within the overt and hidden curricula of the school. To achieve these ends each integrated school aspires to the following:

- (a) an annual intake of at least 40% pupils from a perceived Catholic background and at least 40% pupils from a perceived Protestant background;
- (b) a board of governors comprising at least 40% members from a perceived Catholic background and 40% from a perceived Protestant background; and
- (c) the active recruitment of teachers whose cultural or traditional background reflects that of existing or potential pupils.

Furthermore the integrated school subscribes to:

- (d) maintaining high academic and vocational standards within an all-ability framework and providing equal access to the curriculum for all its pupils;
- (e) supporting the personal and professional development of all members of staff, with particular emphasis on enhancing the integrated learning experience of each pupil;
- (f) ensuring that all policies developed by the school reflect and respect the diversity within the school community; and
- (g) taking a democratic approach to all relationships between pupils, staff, parents and governors.

(ii) Faith & Values

The integrated school provides a Christian based rather than a secular approach. It aspires to create an environment where those of all faiths and none are respected, acknowledged and accepted as valued members of the school community. In this context:

- (a) pupils will learn together all that can reasonably be expected for them to learn together;
- (b) the school will facilitate specific provision, where necessary, for Catholic pupils whose parents wish them to undergo sacramental preparation. It will also seek to acknowledge significant religious and cultural celebrations which are representative of other faiths;
- (c) the school will encourage religious and community leaders to visit and participate in school activities;
- (d) pupils will be introduced to the ideas, beliefs and practices of the major world religions and humanist philosophies, in a manner appropriate to their age and ability, and in line with the NI curriculum; and
- (e) alternative provision will be made for those pupils whose parents do not wish them to participate in any religious activities or classes.

(iii) Parental Involvement

The support and commitment of parents is a fundamental element of Integrated Education and historically, parents have been central to the development of integrated schools.

The integrated school therefore seeks to encourage and sustain effective parental involvement in the life and work of the school by:

- (a) maintaining significant levels of parental representation on the board of governors (i.e. in accordance with legislative requirements and structures);
- (b) creating a forum for parents which cultivates and focuses parental support for the school;
- (c) establishing appropriate arrangements and procedures for individual and collective communication between parents and:
 - (i) the principal
 - (ii) other members of teaching staff
 - (iii) the governing body; and
- (d) ensuring that parents are made fully aware of the school's integrated ethos.

(iv) Social Responsibility

The integrated school delivers the curriculum on an all-ability and inclusive basis to all of its pupils. It respects the uniqueness of every pupil and acknowledges his/her entitlement to personal, social, intellectual and spiritual development in the attainment of individual potential. This philosophy affirms that pupils should be encouraged to:

- (a) understand and engage with the use of non-violent means of conflict resolution;
- (b) demonstrate mutual respect and understanding towards others, and develop tolerance and trust of those who are different;
- (c) nurture self-confidence and self-respect; and
- (d) appreciate the interdependence between society and the natural environment it inhabits.

Furthermore, the integrated school:

- (e) will deliver the curriculum in a way that reflects its particular ethos. Where possible, the subjects and activities offered, and the resources complementing their delivery, should reflect the diversity within the school's own pupil population;
- (f) has a duty to be open in its relationships with schools, learning partnerships, churches and other local institutions;
- (g) should present itself to the wider community as a shared civic space.

We the undersigned Governors agree to the NICIE Statement of Principles

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of _____

(school/college)

Signed: _____ (Chairperson)

Signed: _____ (Principal)

(Date)