

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland boosts integrated education in NI with £1.9m funding package

- Northern Ireland Secretary announces new funding package to support greater integration in education in Northern Ireland.
- Funds to raise awareness of and support the transformation process for schools.
- Builds on Northern Ireland Office's work to support reconciliation and build a shared and integrated society.

Secretary of State, Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP has made the £1.9m funding announcement during a visit to Lough View Integrated Primary School.

The funding will help support schools through the transformation process as they work towards integrated status.

The £1.9m will go to the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), which work to enable a greater number of children from different community backgrounds to be educated together. NICIE offers advice and support to parents and schools in the ballot process which sees parents vote on where to transform to an integrated school. The IEF raises awareness of the transformation process and the merits of integrated education.

The Secretary of State today (Wednesday 6 July) visited Lough View Integrated Primary, where he met its Principal, Sean Spillane and discussed the school's work to provide a high quality education to children in an integrated setting.

At the school, he discussed how, as highlighted by the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, greater integration in education is an essential aspect of the reconciliation process and the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society.

Research clearly demonstrates the positive social attitudes instilled by increased integration in education. Schools of all types have been successful in delivering greater integration and instilling the values of acceptance and cooperation that they carry with them into later life, helping to create a more inclusive society.

The Secretary of State, Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP, said:

Seeing greater integration of education across Northern Ireland is an absolute priority for me.

When a school becomes integrated, children learn, grow and build communities together. Parents get to know each other, and long term

friendships develop. This is an essential aspect of the reconciliation process.

My hope is that integration will soon become the norm and not the exception in schools across Northern Ireland. The work done by the IEF and NICIE is essential in helping Northern Ireland's children to grow up in a truly shared society.

Tina Merron, Chief Executive of the Integrated Education Fund said:

The Integrated Education Fund is delighted with today's announcement by the Secretary of State. Integrated Education is a core commitment of the Good Friday Agreement and we remember that the British Government is a co-guarantor of that Agreement.

This is an enormous boost to our charitable organisation as we seek to empower and support parents, schools and local communities who want to see more Integrated schooling.

In the past few years 14 schools across Northern Ireland have held a democratic ballot of their parents in favour of Integrated status and the IEF and Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education are now working to support more schools than ever before.

Roisin Marshall, the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education said:

The Council for Integrated Education empowers school communities to deliberately and intentionally attract children, young people and the adults, who identify as coming from both sides of our divided society as well as those from other religions and cultural backgrounds.

This funding will enable NICIE to offer more dedicated support to those school communities who wish to explore, develop and embed their Integrated ethos. We are very grateful for this additional support to help to meet the increase in parental demand for Integrated Education.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) will receive £1,465,000 and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) will receive £435,000 over the next 2.5 Financial Years (2022 – 2025).