

Excellence in Integrated Education Award

Introduction and Guidance Notes



Background

For many years principals and staff in Integrated schools have been asked questions like, 'What exactly is different about your school?' or 'What can you offer my child that is different to every other school?' Often the difference has been hard to define. Between 2005 and 2007 Dr Claire McGlynn from Queen's University carried out a substantial piece of research within the sector. It emerged that Integrated schools sometimes took very different approaches to delivering Integrated Education. However, there were two common themes which emerged from discussions with principals:

- The desire for clarity in regard to the 'definition' of Integrated Education;
- Identification of ways in which a school could demonstrate its Integrated ethos.

The first point resulted in a comprehensive review of the NICIE Statement of Principles (2008). The second point resulted in the development of the 'Excellence in Integrated Education Award (EIEA)'. Since then, over 20 schools have gained their EIEA, with several of those also having renewed their Award at least once.

Being an Integrated school means being INTENTIONAL across every aspect of school ethos and practice about the core purpose of educating together to the highest standards children of different abilities, backgrounds, cultures and beliefs. (EA Integrated Education Hub)

EIEA is first and foremost a self-evaluation tool for schools which sits alongside and complements Department of Education policy such as 'Every School A Good School', the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) Policy and the Education and Training Inspectorate's self-evaluation frameworks.

Founded on the NICIE Statement of Principles,



and connected to the four key characteristics of a successful school,



the EIEA audit tool provides a structure through which schools can review, develop and strengthen their approach to delivering high quality education within an Integrated setting. It

is a framework for school improvement defined within the context of the Integrated ethos and the legal definitions of the new Integrated Education Act (2022).

What benefit does EIEA have for a school?

‘EIEA accreditation provides an opportunity for schools to show parents, and the wider school community, the ‘added value’ offered to their pupils through Integrated Education. It also celebrates and endorses good practice, and creates a shared identity for Integrated schools.’ (School Principal)

- It recognises, develops and promotes quality Integrated Education, a prerequisite of which is high academic standards.
- It can be used as a self-evaluation and self-improvement tool to guide the Integration section of the School Development Plan.
- It creates an opportunity for schools to revisit and renew their Integrated mission.
- It provides an opportunity for schools to show parents, and the wider school community, the ‘value added’ offered to pupils.
- It endorses and celebrates good practice.
- It contributes to creating a shared identity for Integrated schools.

The EIE Award Process

The timeframe for the EIEA process is flexible. Experience of schools to date indicates that it is likely to be between 18 months and 3 years. Evidence for assessment should be gathered throughout the process.

1. Initial Contact and Support

- Initial contact between school and NICIE.
- Preparatory visit by NICIE staff or Associate.
- ‘Integration in Practice’ Group, or equivalent, formed, representative of the whole school community.

2. Auditing

- Use of the EIEA audit tool (see detailed information below) as *a whole school process* for self-evaluation.
- Identify existing good practice and begin to gather evidence for assessment.
- Identify areas for development, particularly the key aspects on which you wish to work as part of your Award process and which can be linked into the School Development Plan.

3. Working on Areas for Development

- Once areas for development have been identified, an action plan can be developed and implemented.
- Support may be available from NICIE staff and Associates, as appropriate.
- Using the EIEA audit tool, progress should be reviewed at different points, as identified within the action plan.
- It is not essential for areas for development to be completely achieved before assessment – for example, some aspects may always be an ongoing work in progress. However, it is important to be able to demonstrate the steps which have been taken, how effective these have been and further actions which are planned.
- Alongside identified areas for development, the process must include staff development sessions on 'Integrated Ethos' and 'Anti-Bias Approaches to Education', and an 'EIEA/Integrated Ethos' session for Governors. NICIE also strongly recommends that an Integrated ethos session(s) is facilitated for parents.

4. Application for Assessment

- Once the school feels close to being ready to go forward for assessment, they should communicate this in writing to NICIE Development Officer, Mary Potter (mary.potter@nicie.org.uk), who will work with them to set up the assessment process.

5. Assessment

- EIEA evidence can be submitted online or on two pen drives (one for each assessor). The EIEA online folder can be divided into four sub-folders with one linked to each of the NICIE Principles and using that section of the audit tool as an index for the related evidence. Within a folder, if the same piece of evidence links to more than one question, it is sufficient to cross-reference rather than including it multiple times. Too much evidence can be overwhelming for the assessors! If there is anything which they do not feel is sufficiently evidenced, this can be explored further and evidenced through the assessment visits.
- **First Assessment Visit (Half day):**
 - The two assessors assigned to the school will meet with the principal and other key staff to gain an overview of the school's EIEA process and to plan for the second assessment visit.
 - This is also an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the school, if they have not been there before.
 - If the EIEA evidence has been shared online with the assessors in advance of this visit, they will take this opportunity to clarify aspects of the evidence and request further evidence if necessary.

- **Second Assessment Visit (Full day):**
 - Assessors will be eager to experience an ‘ordinary’ day in the life of the school. For example, if it is a day when assembly usually takes place, assessors are likely to attend, but there is no need to put on special events or performances. Assessors are looking to see how Integration is woven into the fabric of the school community and its day-to-day life, not just how it is presented on special occasions.
 - Assessors will visit classes and will want to meet with groups of pupils/students, parents, teaching and support staff, and governors. You may also want them to speak to members of the community where these links have been referred to in the evidence.
- Assessors write a report (which is likely to include recommendations for further development) and make a recommendation to NICIE.

6. Achievement of Award

- A final decision on the Award is made by NICIE and ratified by the NICIE Board of Directors.
- NICIE provides feedback to the school.
- The EIE Award is presented, ideally at a special school or NICIE event.

‘The EIEA has meant that we really feel we have been recognised and encouraged for the progress that has been embedded!’ (School Principal)

The EIE Award Audit Tool

The EIEA audit tool has a number of potential uses, including:

- Carrying out an initial self-evaluation at the start of the Award process;
- As an overview/index, outlining how evidence links to particular statements within each section of the school’s Award portfolio;
- Monitoring and evaluation of work on areas for development or other identified ‘gaps’ as the Award process develops;
- As a final checklist before applying for assessment;
- Ongoing self-evaluation in relation to Integration, including after the Award has been achieved.

‘We use the EIEA self-evaluating document on a three-year cyclical basis as part of our whole school evaluation. It is an invaluable document to assist the staff to focus on and evaluate our Integrated ethos and practice which affects everything we do in this school.’ (School Principal)

Some practical points to note:

- The format of the tool does mean that one piece of evidence can be relevant to more than one section or question. However, it is important also to note that some statements are nuanced to explore the different aspects of what excellence looks like, for example, at the whole school level, in the classroom context or in the experience of individual pupils/students.
- The auditing process is most effective if consultation and involvement are as wide as possible. For example, some schools have used pupil/student and parent surveys, whole staff team development days, sessions for governors, etc. to ensure that everyone's perspective is heard. This can also help to ensure that examples of good practice are not missed and are shared more widely across the whole school community.
- As well as recognising the overarching Principles and commitment to Integration, it is important to make the tool work for you within your own specific context: Grant-Maintained or Controlled Integrated school; geographical and community setting; etc. Assessors will also be interested to hear about your school's particular journey and learning.

For how long is the Award current?

Once a school gains the Award, it is current for five years. At this point, a school will need to apply to re-new their Award. It will be important to demonstrate development and progression over the period since the Award was originally achieved, paying attention to any recommendations made in the initial report.

When the five years has passed, the school can retain the EIEA logo on its website, etc. if it is actively working towards Award renewal. Any recommendations around areas for development in the previous EIEA Report can form part of the renewal action plan.

For further information, please speak to your school's NICIE support officer or contact:

Mary Potter

NICIE Development Officer

Tel No: +44 (0)28 9694420

Mob: +44 (0) 77 61044344

Email: mary.potter@nicie.org.uk

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