



Transformation Toolkit



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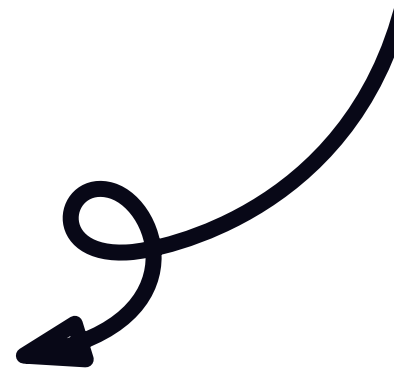
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Welcome



Choosing to explore or move towards Integrated status is a powerful and positive step, and one that recent research¹ has shown brings clear benefits for both pupils and schools. Integrated Education has experienced a renewed and significant period of growth over the past decade. As parental demand continues to grow, an increasing number of school leaders and communities are taking proactive steps to Transform their school to Integrated status and shape a more inclusive future.

This resource has been co-produced by the Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) and the Education Authority Shared Education and Sectoral Support Team (EA). It is designed to provide additional information alongside the Department of Education's (DE) guidance for schools **'Transforming Together – Understanding the Pathway to Integrated Education'**² (2026).

It has been shaped with care, recognising that becoming an Integrated school is not just a structural change but a journey taken together by pupils, staff, governors, families and the wider community. Drawing on shared experiences and practical insights, this resource is intended to enable schools to acknowledge and build on their existing strengths, provide reassurance, inspiration and a sense of direction as they embark on this exciting process. School leaders in recent years have worked positively through the process of Transformation to Integrated status and have generously shared what they have learned with our organisations and academic researchers. This document has been developed as a result of this learning.

Collectively, we are in a strong position to provide a supportive and positive experience for schools considering Transformation to Integrated status and we hope that this document proves useful and informative no matter the school's context.

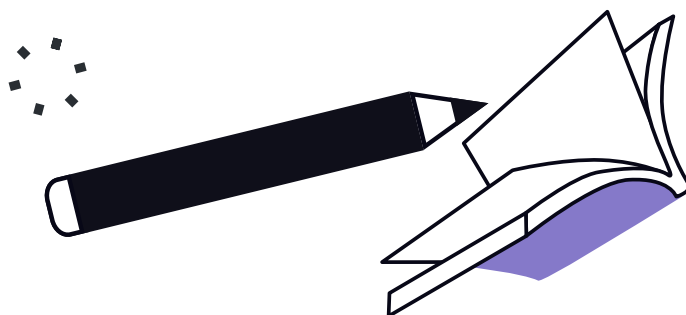
All inquiries are welcome from any member of any school community. Almost all schools in Northern Ireland can engage in the legal process that is required in order to acquire Integrated status.

**The Integrated Education Fund (IEF)
The Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)
The Education Authority – Shared Education
and Sectoral Support Team (EA).**



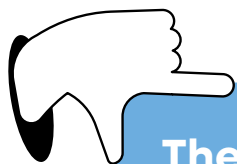
**“When I go to work
in the future, I will
work with people
from a range
of cultures and
backgrounds, so it
makes sense that
we go to school
together as well.”**

(Pupil)



¹ <https://www.ief.org.uk/2025/12/02/research-into-social-attitudes-and-integrated-education/>
² <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/transforming-together-understanding-pathway-integrated-education>

Integrated Education Support Organisations



The Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)



NICIE is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and a charity. DE fund NICIE as a sectoral body to support, grow and promote Integrated Education. NICIE has a coordinating role through the legal process of acquiring Integrated status. NICIE's activities have an in-school focus on professional development and facilitating learning about Integrated Education. NICIE guides schools as they explore and develop the Integrated ethos, and provides connections to the wider Integrated Education movement.

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF)

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) is an independent charity that supports the growth and development of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland. It provides funding and practical support to schools exploring Transformation to Integrated status, helping them engage with pupils, parents, staff and the wider community and navigate the process if they choose to proceed. Integrated schools can also access support to strengthen and develop their integrated ethos and practice. The IEF's **Integrate My School³** campaign enables parents to register their interest in Transforming their child's school.

Education Authority - Shared Education and Sectoral Support Team (EA)



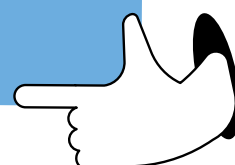
The Shared Education and Sectoral Support Team takes a lead role in supporting the development of the school's Transformation Plan and alongside NICIE has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Plan. All schools going through the Transformation process continue to have access to the full range of EA services. Within the context of the Sustainable Schools Policy, the Area Planning team will draft the Case for Change and provide the relevant data required by the Board of Governors for the Development Proposal.

Department of Education (DE)

DE has a statutory duty under the Integrated Education Act (NI) 2022 to encourage, facilitate and support the development of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland. The Integrated Education Team leads this work by providing policy direction, advancing delivery of the Department's **Integrated Education Strategy, Vision 2030⁴**, coordinating engagement with key partners and ensuring that all decisions comply with legislative requirements. The team monitors progress across the sector to support high quality Integrated provision that meets the needs of children and young people from all backgrounds and can be contacted at **IntegratedEducationTeam@education-ni.gov.uk**.

3 <https://www.ief.org.uk/integrate-my-school/>

4 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/vision-2030-strategy-integrated-education>



About this Document

The purpose of this document is to support schools to initially consider and, if appropriate, embark on the legal process of acquiring Integrated status, which is referred to as 'Transformation'. It is intended to be a practical accompaniment to the Department of Education's (DE) guidance **'Vision 2030 Transforming Together – Understanding the Pathway to Integrated Education' (2026)⁵**.

This document is structured into three parts:

Integrated Education - The Basics

This initial part provides a brief introduction to Integrated Education, including the history and the current legal definition.

The Transformation Programme

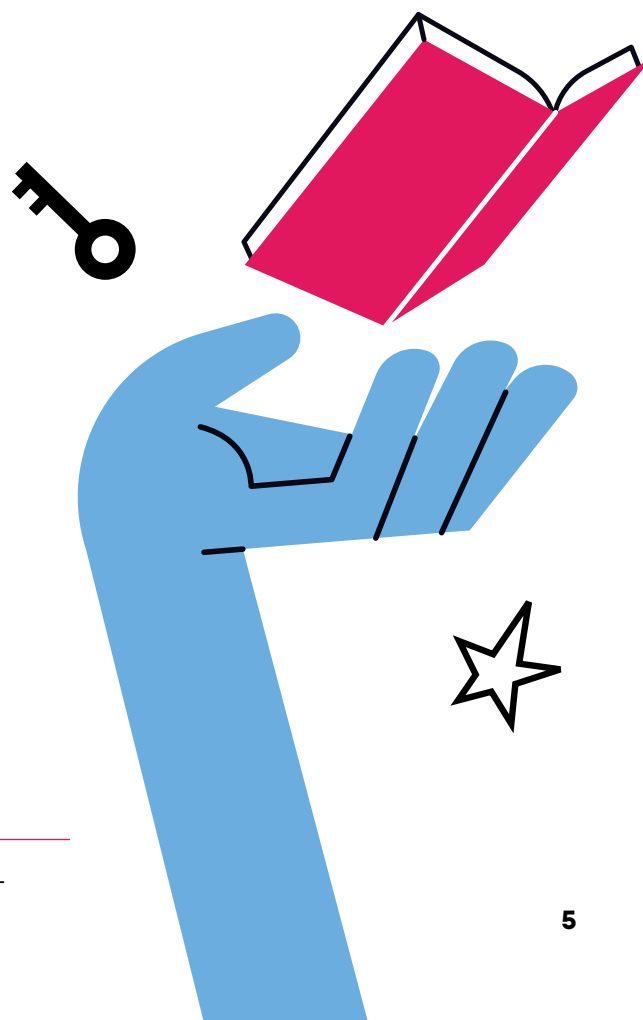
This central part provides an overview of the three-year Transformation Programme, followed by more detailed information and summary checklists relating to each phase.

Integrated Education - Delving Deeper

This final part provides more detailed information about Integrated Education, the process of planning for Integrated Education, and the support that is available.

This document has been written for school leaders: Principal, Board of Governors and Senior Leadership Team. These people are pivotal in the initiation and follow through of the process of acquiring Integrated status. The commitment of the Principal and their team to work through each phase in a diligent and enthusiastic way is important. Determination and resilience within the school leadership team is essential. Effective consultation with stakeholders will require clarity and diplomacy. The quality of the relationships and communications between Principal, staff and parents will continually impact on the process.

Whilst the main audience of this document is school leadership, it is hoped that it also will provide useful information for a wider audience, including staff, parents and pupils.



Integrated Education: The Basics



Pathways to providing Integrated Education

There are three main routes to providing Integrated Education.

- **A school becomes Integrated via a legal process referred to as Transformation to Integrated status.**
- **Two or more schools come together to explore the provision of Integrated Education in their community.**
- **A group of parents and others come together in an area to set up a new Integrated school.**

This toolkit document focusses primarily on the first route, Transformation to Integrated status. This has been the most popular route over the last 20 years, and in the last decade, more than 30 schools have engaged in this process. Based on learning from these schools' experiences, the toolkit concentrates on the mechanisms and support structures for schools seeking to Transform to Integrated status. It aligns to a new three-year support programme which has been developed by educational partners over the last few years, aimed at bringing a cohort of schools through the process of Transformation at a manageable and appropriate pace. The programme will be delivered by NICIE, EA and IEF, in association with other educational partners and is supported by DE. While the partners view participation in the programme as a supportive route to initiating and progressing Transformation to Integrated status, it is not a statutory requirement.

Introduction to Integrated Education

The education system in Northern Ireland is complex, with several different school management types. As a movement for social change, and with an explicit commitment to building peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, Integrated Education is different from other types of education provision. Integrated schools do things intentionally so that children with diverse cultural, religious, belief, class and ability backgrounds come together and learn from and with each other every day. This has implications right across the school day and in every area of school life. Empowering adults, children and young people to engage positively with diversity and act in a purposeful way to effect positive change in the shared society we live in, is a priority for Integrated Schools.

Integrated Education is supported in legislation through **The Education Reform (NI) Order (1989)⁶**, the 1998 Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement, the 2020 New Decade, New Approach Agreement and the **Integrated Education Act (NI) 2022⁷**, which sets out the duties of the Department of Education and the Education Authority to 'encourage, facilitate and support' the development of Integrated Education.

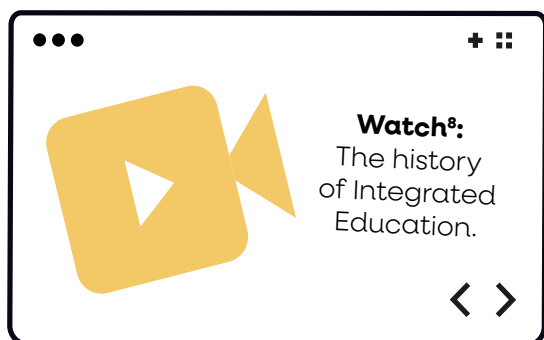


6 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1989/2406/contents>

7 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2022/15/contents/enacted>

A Brief History

Integrated Education started when a group of Protestant and Catholic parents responded to the divided education system of Northern Ireland in the 1970s, and the broken and conflicted society surrounding it.



These parents formed a group called 'All Children Together' and eventually, when all other avenues available to them at that time were exhausted, they established the first Integrated school - Lagan College, which welcomed 28 Year 8 students in September 1981. At that time, the daily news brought images of violence, community resentment and unrest. It was often not safe to talk about one's personal, political and/or religious views. The early 80's marked the beginning of the growth and development of Integrated Education.

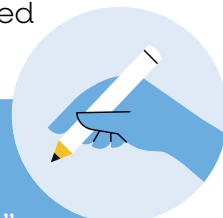
Whilst huge progress has been made, Northern Ireland/the north of Ireland remains a contested place. We continue to experience mistrust and division even as diversity increases in our communities. It can be challenging to speak out against sectarianism, racism and a wide range of other biases. Nevertheless, this is what the reconciliation project of Integrated Education requires us to strive towards. It is not an easy task, but it is ultimately rewarding.

The legal definition of an Integrated school

The Education Reform Order (NI) 1989⁸

provided the first legal definition of an Integrated school as 'the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils'.

This definition is now replaced because the **Integrated Education Act (NI) 2022¹⁰** outlined a fuller legal definition of Integrated Education.



The 2022 Act states:

Meaning of "integrated education"

(1) "Integrated education" means the education together, in an integrated school, of—

- (a) those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons;*
- (b) those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not; and*
- (c) those of different abilities.*

(2) An "integrated school" is a school which—

- (a) intentionally supports, protects and advances an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding between those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, between those of different socio-economic backgrounds and between those of different abilities, and*
- (b) has acquired—*
 - (i) grant-maintained integrated status, or*
 - (ii) controlled integrated status under the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.*

The legal framework for schools Transforming to Integrated status is laid out in the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 and was not changed by the Integrated Education Act (NI) 2022.

8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynbneeW-k94>
9 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1989/2406/contents>
10 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ni/2022/15/contents/enacted>

The 1989 Order and the 2022 Act both use the terms ‘Protestant’ and ‘Roman Catholic’ and striving to achieve this diversity remains a central feature of the Integrated school. These words used to be widely accepted as terms that conflated our religious, political and national identities, but this has changed - and continues to change. Many schools now have a large proportion of families who have chosen to designate their child’s religious identity in a different way, as part of the annual DE school census activity. The challenge for Integrated schools is to identify and engage with the complex cultural, religious and belief identities of families in the school.

The Process of Transformation to Integrated Status

As outlined in the **DE guidance**¹¹, there are four phases of Transformation to Integrated status:



Exploring Transformation	Phase 1 School communities, primarily supported by NICIE, EA and assisted by other support bodies, will carry out a more in-depth exploration of Transformation before deciding whether to formally initiate the statutory process.
The Statutory Transformation Process	Phase 2 This phase covers the period from the initiation of the statutory process and the resolution to hold a parental ballot, to when the decision on a Development Proposal is made.
Preparing for Transformation to Integrated Status	Phase 3 This is a key planning phase leading up to the approved implementation date for Transformation in which the school will begin to formalise key arrangements, including promotional activities to announce the school’s new vision, making changes to the school’s admissions criteria and developing governance arrangements to reflect its eventual move to Integrated status.
Post Transformation Delivering Integrated Education	Phase 4 Post Transformation, schools will continue to develop and strengthen their Integrated ethos and engage in a process of monitoring and evaluation with NICIE and the EA.

What makes a Successful Transformation?

Recent research¹² from Queen's University Belfast about the strengths and weaknesses of the process of Transformation to Integrated status outlined five critical success factors for schools:

- **A commitment to Integration**, characterised by a belief that Transformation is the most appropriate development for the school and its community and a willingness to engage with the challenges that this may entail.
- **Comprehensive consultation and engagement** throughout the Transformation process to engender support for Integration across the school community. This requires transparency of communication, the opportunity for parents, staff and others to provide feedback and be heard, and a sense of ownership of Integration among the school community.
- **Skilled strategic leaders** with the vision and capability to drive Transformation and to develop both the necessary skills for and commitment to Integrated Education among the school community.
- **Recognition that Transformation is a developmental process** that requires schools and support staff to be accepting of mistakes and to create space for reflective practice and collective learning. Therefore, Transformation to Integrated status should be woven into the school's strategic development planning processes.

- **Ongoing support from external organisations** with expertise in Transformation and Integration, particularly EA, NICIE and IEF, which in turn requires these bodies to be adequately resourced to respond to schools' needs.

The research found that all school-based participants in this study were glad that the school had opted for Transformation and regarded it as a success in their context to date. Numerous benefits of Integration were cited, including an improved educational experience for pupils, enhanced community relationships, and a stronger school brand.



The Transformation Programme



This section provides more detail about the three phases of the support Programme that has been developed to guide schools through the Transformation process.

The three-year programme will require school staff attendance at professional development days. These engagements will occur regularly throughout the programme, and there is an expectation that at least one staff member will attend information and/or development sessions at least once every term throughout the programme.

The programme is delivered collaboratively by The Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), the Education Authority (EA), the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) and other educational partners. IEF grants and DE funding will be available for schools in the programme (subject to annual budgets).

- **Year 1: Exploring Transformation**
Understanding Integrated Education, stakeholder engagement, baseline assessment and drafting the Case for Change.
- **Year 2: The Statutory Transformation Process**
Moving through the statutory process: ballot of parents, submission and publication of a Development Proposal, and the Ministerial decision.
- **Year 3: Preparing for Transformation to Integrated Status**
Updating admissions criteria, preparing for Board of Governors reconstitution and embedding ethos, cultural and operational changes.

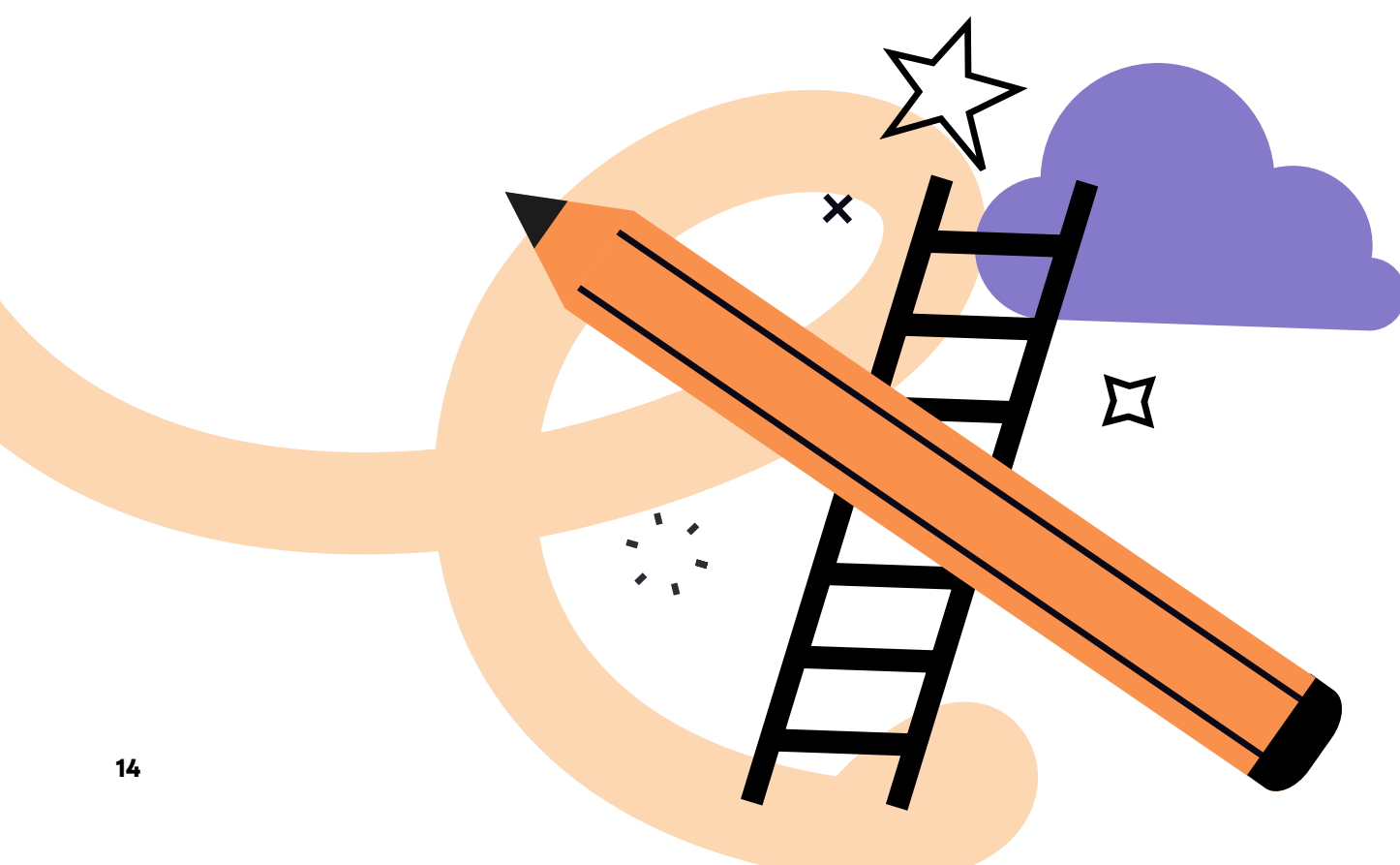
It is intended that following completion of the Programme, schools will open as Integrated at the start of the following academic year.



Programme Phase	Key Actions
Year One: Exploring Transformation School communities will carry out an in-depth exploration of Integrated Education.	• Developing the school's understanding of Integrated Education and developing the rationale for change. • Exploring and implementing effective communication and engagement strategies with governors, staff, parents, pupils and wider community. • Information and/or Professional Learning sessions for governors/ staff/parents supported by NICIE, EA, IEF and partners. • Baseline assessment of readiness for Integration conducted using the Framework for Integrated Education. • Developing the three-year Transformation Plan (strategic overview) and drafting the Year 1 Action Plan. • Starting to build the school's Case for Change. • Understanding the logistics of the process of Transformation to Integrated status.

Programme Phase	Key Actions
Year Two: The Statutory Transformation Process This phase covers the period from the initiation of the statutory process to the Ministerial decision as to whether a school can acquire Integrated status.	• Initiating the legal process and conducting the parental ballot on the question of Transformation to Integrated status. • Completion and submission of the Development Proposal, which includes the Case for Change and the three-year Transformation Plan. • Gathering Expressions of Interest. • Professional development opportunities for staff, including visits to existing Integrated schools and training sessions supported by NICIE, EA and partners. • Year 1 Action Plan of the Transformation Plan is delivered this year and reviewed. Year 2 of the Plan is developed. This will involve the continuing review of issues such as ethos, policies, extra-curricular and curricular offer and community linkages. • Ministerial decision delivered (subject to DE timeframes). • Continuing to implement effective communication and engagement strategies with governors, staff, parents, pupils and wider community.

Programme Phase	Key Actions
Year Three: Preparing for Transformation to Integrated Status This is a key planning year leading up to the approved implementation date, which will be 1st September of the following academic year. The school will begin to formalise key arrangements, including branding and communications, amendment of admissions criteria and governance.	- Transformation Planning is further embedded in the School Development Plan. Year 2 Action Plan of the Transformation Plan is delivered this year and reviewed. Year 3 of the plan is developed. This will involve the continuing review of issues such as ethos, policies, extra-curricular and curricular offer and community linkages. - Reviewing admissions criteria to reflect the change in status to Integrated and submission of these to EA in October/November. - Introducing anti-bias approaches in Integrated Education and other learning opportunities for staff, facilitated by NICIE, EA and partners. - Preparing for reconstitution of the Board of Governors. - Consulting on changes to school branding: uniform/logo etc. and celebrations! - Continuing to implement effective communication and engagement strategies with governors, staff, parents, pupils and wider community. - Following Ministerial approval, the school will be invited to attend a range of professional learning networks, which are facilitated by NICIE.

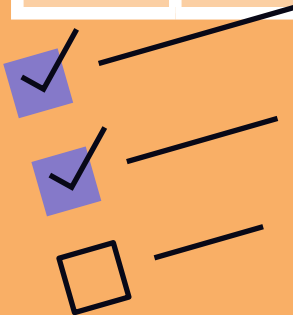


Checklist - Year One

Exploring Transformation



Item	Action
1	The school will begin to articulate a rationale as to why they want to Transform to Integrated status.
2	The school will create multiple opportunities for communication and engagement with staff, parents and pupils, and the wider community in order to consider if becoming Integrated is appropriate.
3	Schools will conduct a baseline assessment of readiness using the Framework for Integrated Education.
4	If applicable, the school will begin to build the Transformation Plan.



Exploring Transformation:

Key Actions

Working alongside the Integrated Education support bodies, the contents of this section may be used to initially explore, with the whole school community, what Integrated Education might mean in each school's unique context.

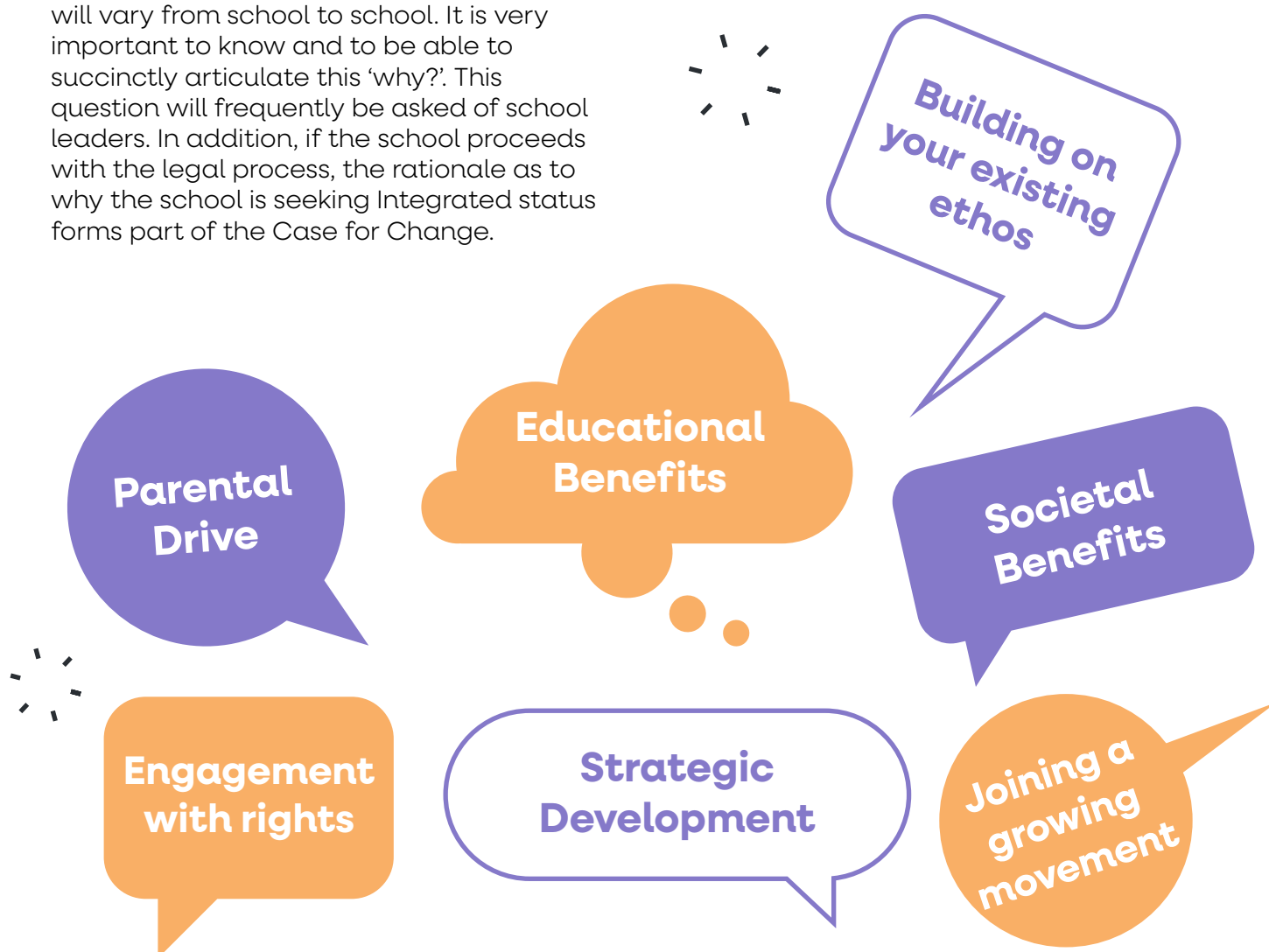
1. The Rationale

Why would the school Transform to acquire Integrated status?

The answer to this question of 'why?' will vary from school to school. It is very important to know and to be able to succinctly articulate this 'why?'. This question will frequently be asked of school leaders. In addition, if the school proceeds with the legal process, the rationale as to why the school is seeking Integrated status forms part of the Case for Change.

The Case for Change is the document accompanying the school Development Proposal to acquire Integrated status and is submitted for public consultation and Ministerial decision.

Below are some of the more common reasons as to why schools have been inspired to become Integrated. It is usually a combination of several reasons.



Educational benefits - The **DE guidance**¹³ states that the Transformation process: *‘... provides schools with a unique opportunity to not only develop a more diverse school environment but also deliver improved educational experiences and enhanced education provision for all pupils. For this reason, the Department places the Transformation process firmly within the context of school self-evaluation and planning for school improvement.’* (page 6, 2026).

The enhanced educational experiences for pupils that come with exposure to and engagement with difference is recognised by educationalists, governors and school leaders. School leaders often view Transformation as the next logical phase of their school’s improvement journey.

Societal benefits - For many schools, the intentionality of Integrated Education as a means to build peace and reconciliation and its potential to support social and community cohesion, is at the heart of the decision to move towards Integrated status. There is evidence that attending an Integrated school contributes to **positive social attitudes**¹⁴ of children and young people and provides enhanced educational benefits for them.

‘Integrated Education consistently fosters positive intergroup interactions, particularly in post-primary settings, where students report higher levels of cross-community and cross-ethnic engagement, greater self-confidence in diverse social settings, and a deeper understanding of others’ beliefs. Primary Integrated Education plays an important foundational role, shaping positive attitudes across community backgrounds and fostering prosocial behaviours’¹⁵



13 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/transforming-together-understanding-pathway-integrated-education>
14 <https://www.ief.org.uk/2025/12/02/research-into-social-attitudes-and-integrated-education/>
15 <https://www.ief.org.uk/2025/12/02/research-into-social-attitudes-and-integrated-education/>

Strategic Development - Governors may be examining local demographical changes and enrolment patterns and consider Transformation as a path to enhance the school's sustainability and position within the wider community.

Parental drive - Governors may be responding to a parent-led initiative to explore Integrated status as an option for the school. Parental demand for Integrated Education exceeds supply. Surveys published in 2025 by DE indicate that between **31%**¹⁶ and **55%**¹⁷ of people would prefer an Integrated school for their child. In 2024, an independent survey indicated that **67%**¹⁸ of parents expressed support for Integrated Education. At the moment, less than 10% of pupils go to Integrated schools. In the last seven years, across 32 parental ballots about Transformation to Integrated status, the average 'yes' vote was 78.6%. This average figure includes the three schools which had a 'no' result.

Building on your existing ethos - Schools may have a long history of diverse religious, cultural, socio-economic and all-ability enrolments and governors feel that the time is right to recognise this by embracing Integrated status. The drive may come from a person in the school community who has a vision that the school would work as an Integrated school. They may have been considering this for many years before the time feels right to begin a structured exploration.

Engagement with Rights - Schools that are engaging with UNICEF's **Rights Respecting School Award**¹⁹ may be well positioned to build on their existing inclusion and participation activity. Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that education should prepare children to live responsibly and peacefully in a free society,

"in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin."

The Convention, along with many other peace and reconciliation, social and educational policy developments, has enabled schools in Northern Ireland to regularly connect with issues of equality and human rights. Educators are better equipped to engage with differences such as religious and non-religious beliefs, nationality, neurodiversity, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. In our society, as we emerge from conflict, another challenge lies in engaging with the contested social, cultural, religious and political identities at the root of that conflict: being British, Irish, Northern Irish, Nationalist, Unionist, Protestant, Catholic and so on.

Joining a growing movement - School communities may be excited about the prospect of joining the growing and popular movement of Integrated Education. In just over 45 years, and despite the number of pupils in the system decreasing in recent years, the numbers of children educated in Integrated schools has developed a thousand-fold – from 28 pupils to almost 29,000 in **2025**²⁰

16 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/parental-school-admission-survey-report-2025>

17 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/demand-integrated-education-findings-2024-northern-ireland-life-and-times-survey>

18 <https://www.ief.org.uk/our-work/research/northern-ireland-attitudinal-poll-2024/>

19 <https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/>

20 <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/DEstatistics/annual-enrolments-schools-and-funded-pre-school-education-northern-ireland-202526.html>

2. Communication and Engagement

The process of becoming an Integrated school requires effective communication and consultation with the whole school community throughout.

A central part of the legal process of acquiring Integrated status via Transformation is the ballot of parents. It is likely that this will be the subject of much discussion, right from the start of the school's exploration. How the ballot is conducted is covered in detail in Phase/Year Two. There are two ways that the ballot is triggered: Either the Board of Governors passes a resolution to ballot parents, or parents representing 20% of the pupil population write to the Governors to request that a ballot be held. In either scenario, it is essential to take time to effectively explore Integrated Education, although this can be more challenging if parents have triggered the ballot, as the time frame may be tighter.

The most effective school Transformations are well informed from the start, but all Transformations involve continuous communication, engagement, collaborative exploration, learning and development across the whole school.

Integrated Education seems to be one of those things that the more you know, the more you realise you don't know! It is often the case that people don't want to ask questions in case they come across as being against the idea. Many people assume they know all there is to know and others believe things about Integrated schools that are not true.

Peeling back layers at a comfortable pace is important. This is part of the reason that most schools find the journey of Integrating their school so interesting and rewarding.

In the initial exploration phase, the whole school community should be given time to explore and understand what Integrated Education means in each school's unique context. This requires engagement with all stakeholders, in a participative, open and honest manner.



There are at least five groups that should be considered and consulted with. Schools should keep a record of these consultations as they will form part of the information that is contained in the Case for Change that accompanies the Development Proposal that must be submitted if the ballot result is a yes.

The **DE guidance**²¹ outlines the stakeholder engagement requirements in section 2.4 (page 10) and these are further considered below:

Governors: It is usual for the Board of Governors to invite staff from one or more of IEF, NICIE and EA to an initial information meeting with the Board, to begin the school's exploration.

Staff: Teaching and non teaching staff do not have a formal vote on whether a school should proceed with a Development Proposal to become Integrated, because they do not have parental responsibility. Considering this, it is understandable that staff may sometimes feel less involved in the initial stage of the process. Providing clear information and engaging with staff at the earliest opportunity helps ensure they are included, informed, and valued throughout the journey. School leadership should provide ongoing opportunities for feedback and support. Staff will be expected to embrace the Integrated ethos over time and therefore may feel anxious about what this means for workload and what changes they might be expected to make. NICIE and EA are available to facilitate staff sessions in schools.

Parent/carers: In order to cast a well-informed vote, persons with parental responsibility must be informed about the changes to the school and what Transformation to Integrated status means. Schools will provide a variety of opportunities for parents to engage and ask any questions they may have about Integrated Education in the school's context. The IEF take a lead in parental engagement within schools and communities and can provide valuable guidance and support.

Pupils: Staff in schools are the experts in developing age-appropriate opportunities for pupils to understand what Transformation to Integrated status means. The School/Pupil Council may be willing to take a lead role in this regard, and schools can use whatever mechanisms they currently have in place to listen to pupils' voices.

Local Schools/Community: Open communication with all local schools is advised. Whilst it is appreciated that this can sometimes be a challenge, neighbouring schools will have the opportunity to respond within the public consultation period later in the process, and so it is recommended that they are informed at the earliest opportunity. It may be the case that a school close by is also exploring Integration. The Board of Governors can use a range of methods to inform and engage with their local community, including churches, about a possible change to Integrated status.

21 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/transforming-together-understanding-pathway-integrated-education>

3. Baseline Assessment

DE Guidance recommends that schools carry out a baseline assessment exercise to assist with planning for Integrated Education. The Department's statement on 'reasonable numbers'²² will be a consideration as schools plan for increasing diversity.

Schools will be supported to use **The Framework for Integrated Education**²³ to determine priority areas of focus. The Framework is a self-evaluation tool, developed by EA and NICIE to help schools evaluate the nature, extent and quality of their Integration practices. Underpinned by the **Statement of Principles for Integrated Education**²⁴, the overarching vision for the Framework is to support the development of sustainable Integrated schools which deliver impactful and value-added Integrated Education.

In this initial phase of the Programme, schools will be supported to use the Framework to create a baseline assessment which will help inform the governors' decision about pursuing Integrated status as well as acting as the foundation for any future Transformation Plan.

The Framework comprises a comprehensive series of Integration Indicators which are intended to support reflection and self-evaluation by encouraging conversations about Integrated Education across the school community. The Framework's focus on supporting schools to engage with vision and ethos development aligns well with The Education and Training Inspectorate's recent publication **'Empowering Improvement'**²⁵ and can assist schools in responding to the **ETI's five core questions**²⁶.

Information on how to use the Framework for Integrated Education to carry out a baseline assessment can be found in the Appendix.



22 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/written-ministerial-statement-reasonable-numbers>
23 <https://www.eani.org.uk/services/support-for-schools/shared-education-and-sectoral-support-service/integrated-education-4>

24 <https://nicie.org/what-is-integrated-education/integrated-ethos/sop/>

25 https://www.etini.gov.uk/files/etini/publications/empowering-improvement-new-framework-for-inspection_2.pdf

26 <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/five-core-questions>

4. Building the Transformation Plan

As outlined in the DE guidance, (pages 12 to 16) the Transformation Plan is a vital element of the change process.

The Plan is comprised of:

- The baseline assessment
- The three-year strategic overview
- The Annual Action Plan

The Plan will be scrutinised by DE as part of the Ministerial decision process and is the school's road map for Integration. It outlines the changes that the school intends to undertake within its structures, ethos and practice to become an Integrated school and sets out clear actions, through an annual Action Plan, which enable effective tracking of the school's progress along the way. As it develops, it will become an integral part of the School Development Plan.

Some common changes that Transforming schools include within their Transformation Plan are described in the **short video below**²⁷.

As outlined above, the school will have previously used the **Framework for Integrated Education**²⁸ to conduct a baseline assessment. From this, the school will decide a series of strategic targets over the three-year period of the Plan and then on an annual basis, will develop detailed yearly Action Plans. The ongoing review and development of the Plan is a central focus throughout the three years of the Programme and beyond. Further information on how to build the Transformation Plan can be found in the Appendix.

In developing ownership for the Plan amongst the school community, and in the spirit of a democratic and participative process, it is a good idea to establish a support group, which can act as a representative 'drive team' for the Transformation.

The support group may be made up of parents, governors, teaching and non-teaching staff who can reflect some of those groups' perspectives into the plans and activities of the school. Where and when appropriate, members of the school's pupils' council can also be part of the team.

Integration support teams have worked most effectively in schools where an Integration Coordinator has been appointed. The coordinator role is important in providing a focus for Transformation activity, but they should not be the person that does all the work – Transformation to Integrated status is everyone's responsibility and so the coordinator role acts as an active reminder of this fact to others in the school community.



27 <https://www.eani.org.uk/services/support-for-schools/shared-education-and-sectoral-support-service/integrated-education-2>

28 <https://www.eani.org.uk/services/support-for-schools/shared-education-and-sectoral-support-service/integrated-education-4>

Leadership Considerations: Year One

- There is value in taking time to build a clear and well-informed understanding of Integrated Education. This will help school leaders to engage confidently and answer questions with clarity.
- There is likely to be a range of views in relation to Transformation, and this can provide a constructive foundation for meaningful dialogue. It is important to ensure all voices are heard, and this consultation process can help guide the pace of change.
- Conversations about Transformation should take a democratic approach, ensuring a wide range of perspectives are heard. These insights will play a key role in shaping the school's Transformation Plan.
- Any process of change can bring challenges, but it also creates valuable opportunities for reflection, dialogue and growth.
- Schools will work with support bodies to access the funding that is available to cover the costs of the school's participation in the Programme.
- Gathering evidence and keeping records at this stage will assist in the drafting of the Case for Change.

Key Themes:



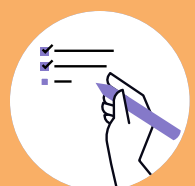
Exploration



Consultation



Learning



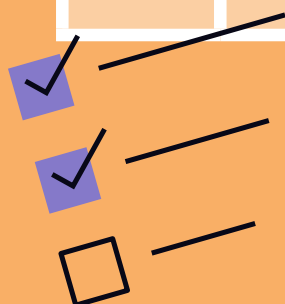
Planning

Checklist - Year Two

The Statutory Transformation Process



Item	Action
1	Initiating the legal process and conducting the ballot of parents.
2	Completion and submission of the Development Proposal, which includes the Case for Change and the three-year Transformation Plan.
3	Gathering Expressions of Interest.
4	Continuing professional development opportunities for staff.
5	Continuing to implement effective communication and engagement strategies with governors, staff, parents, pupils and wider community.
6	Transformation Plan - Year 1 Implementation and evaluation and Year 2 development.
7	Ministerial Decision (subject to DE timeframes).



The Statutory Transformation Process:

Key Actions

1. Initiating the legal process and conducting the parental ballot

The clock starts ticking when the legal process to acquire Integrated status is triggered/initiated. This begins on the date when either:

- The Board of Governors passes a resolution to ballot parents or,
- The Board of Governors receives a request from the parents of at least 20% of registered pupils to ballot parents.

The ballot of parents must be held no earlier than 28 days and no later than three months from the date of the resolution or the date of the request from parents. In exceptional circumstances, DE may approve a longer intervening period. The school should formally record the initiation of the legal process via the Board of Governors' minutes. The text below is suggested.

"The Governors discussed the potential for the school to Transform to Controlled/Grant Maintained [choose the applicable term] Integrated status and passed a resolution to ballot parents on this issue."

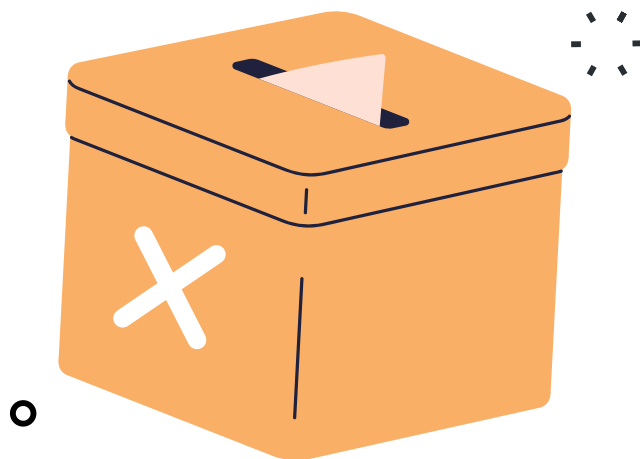
Or

"The Governors have received and verified a request from the parents of (insert % figure) of registered pupils to hold a ballot as to whether the school should transform to become an Integrated school on (insert date). As a result, the school is legally required to ballot parents on this issue."

There is a legal requirement to inform the school's managing authority that the school has initiated the legal process. This should be done as soon as possible after the resolution or receipt of request from parents. Depending on school type, this will be EA, CCMS or, in the case of a Voluntary school, the trustees. Whilst it is not a legal requirement, NICIE²⁹, IEF, DE and any other educational body that the school has an existing relationship with should also be informed.

The Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, which is the legislative frame for the ballot, stipulates that the ballot is postal and there is currently no alternative voting method.

Persons eligible to vote are referred to in the legislation as the 'parent' of a pupil on the school register fourteen days after the date that the legal process was initiated. 'Parent' is interpreted as being any person with legal parental responsibility. Bearing this in mind, the school may want to invite unregistered parents/carers to register with the school in this fourteen-day period, or prior to it. This maximises the democracy of the process.



Civica Election Services³⁰, is currently the ‘prescribed body’³¹ that carries out the ballot of parents on behalf of the school’s Board of Governors.

The cost of the ballot of parents in all schools has, to date, been met by DE. The school Principal should contact Civica Election Services: Tel 020 8365 8909, or email electionservices@civica.co.uk. They will assign a Project Manager who will be the school’s point of contact. Civica will ask for the proposed ballot dates and an approximate number of persons who are eligible to vote. Voters receive a ballot paper, a parent information leaflet and a return pre-paid envelope by post. They must mark the ballot paper with a Yes or No response and put it into the pre-paid envelope and post it back to Civica in London.

Civica recommend that the postal ballot is open for a period of at least three weeks. The length and timing of the voting period can be negotiated and may be influenced by other issues which can impact the return rate of ballots: for example: bank holidays, public elections, school holiday periods. To allow for their administrative processes, Civica require the following information at least two weeks before the balloting period begins:

- The names and addresses of every person eligible to vote. Civica has arrangements in place so that this data is securely transferred to them by the school in accordance with GDPR.
- The ballot question, which must state the proposed change in school status and the date on which this is intended this to happen. For example:

“Do you want [school name] to become a Controlled/Grant Maintained [choose the applicable term] Integrated school from 1st September [insert year], or as soon as possible thereafter?”

☐

Yes

☐

No



An Information leaflet for voters which contains ‘...such information about the procedure and consequences of acquisition of [Integrated status]...as may reasonably be expected...’ to enable them to form a proper judgment. **(Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 – article 70)**³² This information leaflet will be posted to each voter with their ballot paper.

The **DE guidance**³³ (pages 18 to 20) contains further detail about the information that must be provided to those eligible to vote. The school’s allocated NICIE officer can assist schools to develop the information leaflet content. Civica will post the ballots out on the date that the ballot opens, using first class post. They keep a record of any undelivered mail and will keep the school informed if this is relevant.

Schools should use their preferred parent messaging services and social media to encourage voters to vote. It may be wise to align the ballot period with other traditional parent engagement activities, such as parent teacher interviews or other school events, so that everyone can be reminded to return the ballot paper. The school Principal can contact the Civica Project Manager to monitor voter turnout. Civica will inform the school of the result, usually the day after the ballot closes. The ballot is valid if 50% of ballots are returned and is decided by simple majority, which is 50% plus one vote. If the total number of votes cast in the ballot (disregarding spoiled votes) is less than 50%, the ballot is invalid and the Board of Governors must hold another ballot within fourteen days.

30 <https://www.civica.com/en-gb/product-pages/election-management-services/>

31 Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 – Article 70

32 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1989/2406/article/70>

33 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/transforming-together-understanding-pathway-integrated-education>

When the school gets the ballot result from Civica, educational partners and stakeholders should be informed. DE, NICIE, IEF and EA will ask the school to provide the official 'Report of Voting' PDF which Civica sends to the school. Beyond this, the news about the ballot result is the school's news. It is important to think about how the ballot result will be shared and who will share it, perhaps creating a communication plan or allocating a member of staff to oversee the announcement, so that the result can be promoted in a timely and appropriate manner.

2. The Development Proposal

The Development Proposal refers to the proposal itself, which is usually a single sentence that states that a school wants to acquire Controlled Integrated status (or Grant Maintained Integrated status) by the 1st September in a given year.

The paperwork that accompanies this simple proposal is the core of what the DE officials will base their Ministerial recommendation on and will subsequently inform the Ministerial decision. It is very important that all the evidence to support the Proposal is gathered and presented effectively. This information is referred to as the Case for Change and a central part of that document is the Transformation Plan.



In Year One of the Programme, the school will have completed much of the foundation work for the Case for Change, which is essentially the rationale and evidence as to the why the school is seeking to acquire Integrated status. **The Department's Development Proposal Guidance (2024)**³⁴ outlines the required information to be included. For schools Transforming, this will include an assessment of the school's current diversity and practices, and it will outline how the school will implement its Transformation Plan to provide Integrated Education.

The EA and NICIE support schools in the production of the Case for Change. For schools that have been accepted onto the Programme, EA Area Planning Officers will provide a first draft, which contains the bulk of the data. The task for the school is to update the documentation and for the Board of Governors to be satisfied that it reflects the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the school.

Once it is completed, the Board of Governors submits a formal request to the EA to publish the Development Proposal and its accompanying Case for Change and Transformation Plan. The document then undergoes a pre-publication phase for four weeks, when local schools are invited to give an opinion/provide a response. The EA then summarises any responses received and the proposal is considered by a sub-committee of the EA Board, who will express the EA's considered view on the proposal. All these views are collated by the EA, added to the Case for Change and the proposal then undergoes a two-month public consultation period. During this time, it is appropriate for the school community to encourage stakeholders to submit responses to the DE.



3. Expression of Interest Form

One way that schools in the process of Transformation may provide evidence of future cultural and religious diversity in the school, is by using an Expression of Interest Form.

This is a form that asks people if they would consider sending their child to the school if it were to become Integrated. Parents of children currently at the school can complete the form, as they are not currently sending their child to an Integrated school.

NICIE and IEF will provide support in the development, use and promotion of the Expression of Interest Form, which is usually shared via a QR code and can be completed in a few minutes by anyone who is a parent of a child who could attend the school in the future, if it were to become Integrated.

The Expression of Interest Form asks people (parent 1 and parent 2) about their own cultural and religious background and about the child's background. In doing so, the form may produce enlightening information about the nature of the current diversity in the school, as well as providing evidence of potential future diversity and popularity of the school, if it were to become Integrated. Previously, schools using the form have discovered that there is a larger proportion of minority communities than the DE census data on religion has captured. This might be because the form enables a more in-depth disclosure of individual cultural and religious background.

4. Continuing professional development opportunities for staff

In this phase, staff will continue to engage in information and development sessions, facilitated by NICIE, EA, IEF and other educational partners.

Sessions may explore and consider the school's vision and values. Opportunities will be provided for staff to contribute to the planning processes that will prepare the school to deliver Integrated Education in line with the Integrated Education Act (NI) 2022.

5. Continuing communication and engagement strategies

Effective communication and engagement with governors, staff, parents, pupils and the wider community remains a key feature of this phase.

This is, of course, especially relevant during the ballot process, as mentioned above.

Following the conclusion of the ballot, parents should continue to be kept informed about the ongoing changes, progression and developments. This is particularly important when much of the work is happening within the school and may not always be visible to them.

6. The Transformation Planning process continues

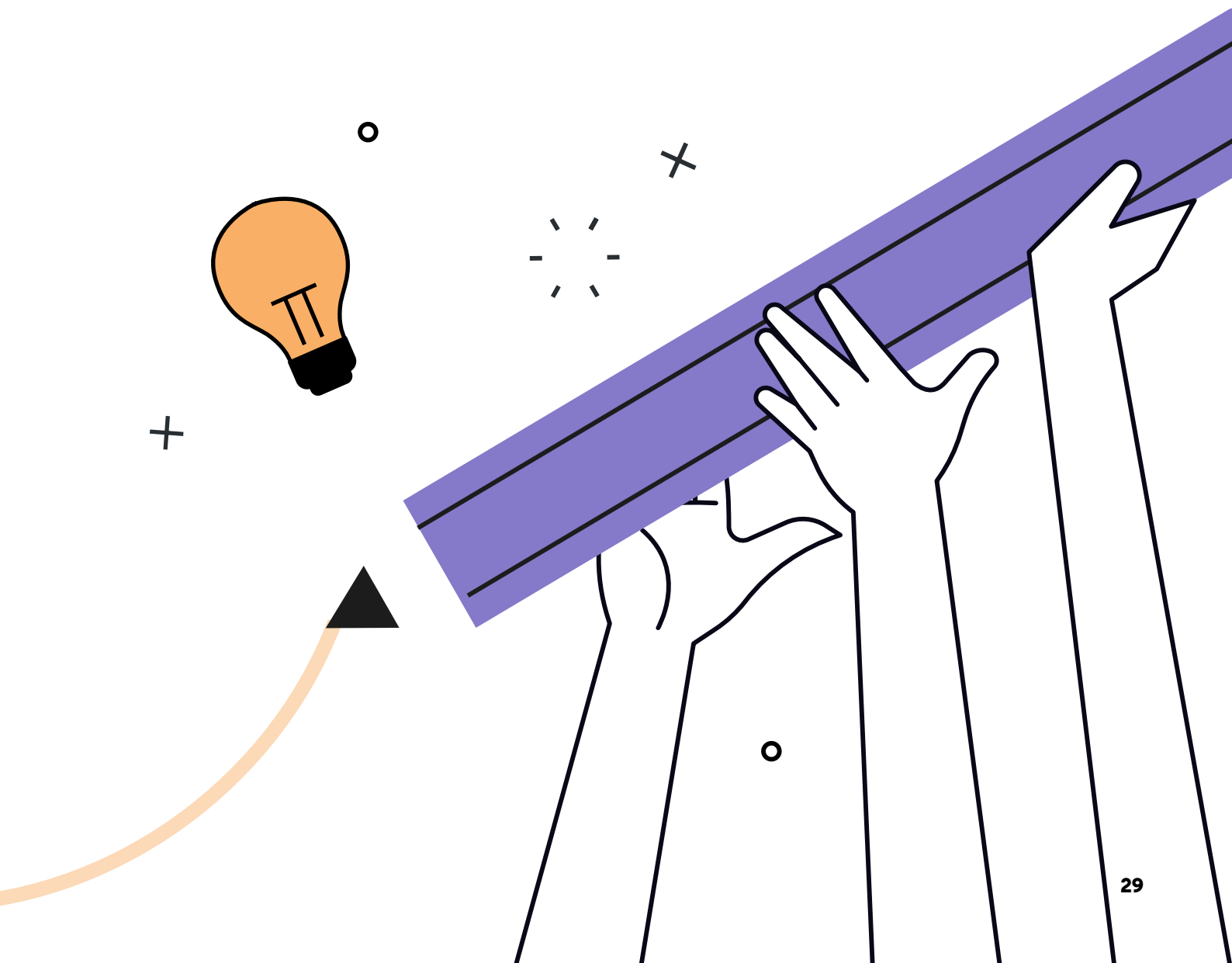
This year is a key year, as it is the first year of implementation of the Transformation Plan.

At the end of the year, a school-based evaluation of Year 1 will be carried out and a detailed Action Plan for the incoming year drawn up. Staff and whole school community engagement in planning for the future continue to be the central focus. Through ongoing monitoring process, EA and NICIE will continue to work alongside the school in the implementation of the Transformation Plan.

7. Ministerial decision

There is no legal requirement for the Minister to take a decision on a school's proposal to acquire Integrated status within a set time frame. For schools engaged in the Programme, it is anticipated that a decision will be taken prior to the start of the next academic year (Year Three of the Programme).

Whilst it is hoped that schools participating in the Programme will receive approval, each proposal is considered on its own merits, and outcomes cannot be guaranteed. The aim of the Programme is to support schools as positively and fully as possible, whatever the decision may be.



Leadership Considerations: Year Two

- Conducting the ballot of parents/carers can be exciting but can also be a tense time. The results are delivered almost immediately after the ballot closes, and therefore it is important to consider the school's communication and engagement strategy in advance of this.
- Maintaining open and effective communications continues to be important, considering how pupils, parents, staff and governors are informed at different stages of the process. Engagement with parents is particularly important in the run up to and throughout the ballot period.
- Once the ballot is initiated, the school enters a legal process. This year will require school input to further develop the Transformation Plan, the rationale and the Case for Change. These things all form part of the Development Proposal that will ultimately be considered by the Minister of Education. Whilst responsibility for this document rests with the Governors of the school, the school leadership team plays a central role in shaping its detail, supported by EA and NICIE.

Key Themes:



Exploration



Consultation



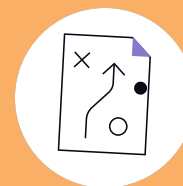
Learning



Planning



Clarifying



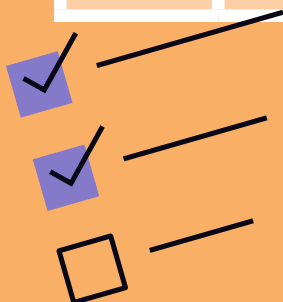
Administrating

Checklist - Year Three

Preparing for Transformation to Integrated Status



Item	Action
1	Transformation Plan review, development and incorporating into School Development Plan.
2	Revising existing admissions criteria to reflect change in status to Integrated school.
3	Anti-bias approaches in Integrated Education and other learning opportunities for staff.
4	Preparing for reconstitution of the Board of Governors.
5	Consulting on changes to school branding: uniform/logo etc and celebrations!
6	Continuing to implement effective communication and engagement strategies with governors, staff, parents, pupils and wider community.



Preparing for Transformation to Integrated Status:

Key Actions

1. The Transformation Plan

If the proposal has been approved by the Minister, the Transformation Plan will require additional review and development this year. This will involve the continuing review of issues such as ethos, policies, extra-curricular and curricular offer and community linkages. Some aspects of the Plan will be moving at pace and some will be delayed. This is normal. In this year, the Plan will become further incorporated within the ongoing School Development Planning process.

2. Admissions Criteria

The Board of Governors will consider how the school's admissions criteria will be amended for submission to EA October/ November of this year. EA and NICIE can advise on appropriate wording that communicates effectively how the Board of Governors are being intentional about welcoming the minority community into school and providing Integrated Education.

3. Anti-Bias in Education and other learning opportunities

The school will be developing new opportunities for professional development of staff and this will include Anti-Bias in Education, which is a central feature of the Integrated ethos.

4. Board of Governors

Schools will be supported in the reconstitution of the Board of Governors by the governance team within EA and by EA. The table on the next page indicates the structure of the Board in Integrated schools. A fundamental feature is that there is representation from both the Catholic and Protestant traditions. This may involve proactive approaches to outreach into local communities.



"I have been in my school through the change to Integration and have seen our community welcome everyone from different backgrounds and change for the better."

(Principal)

Board of Governors' membership by school type³⁴

Controlled Schools in Public Ownership	Number of Governors on the Board	Foundation Governors	EA Governors	DE Governors	Parent Governors	Teacher Governors
Primary & Secondary	9	4	2	None except for 'model' schools	2	1
	16	6	4		4	2
	24	9	6		6	3
Nursery, Grammar & Special	8	0	3	2	2	1
	16	0	6	4	4	2
	24	0	9	6	6	3
Integrated Primary & Secondary ¹	14	2 Transferors	4	0	4	2
		2 Trustees				
	21	3 Transferors	6	0	6	3
		3 Trustees				
Integrated Grammar or other Integrated School ²	14	0	4	4	4	2
	21	0	6	6	6	3
Schools in Private Ownership	Number of Governors on the Board	Foundation Governors	EA Governors	DE Governors	Parent Governors	Teacher Governors
Primary & Secondary (voluntary Maintained 100% capital grant)	9	4*	2	1	1	1
	18	8*	4	2	2	2
	27	12*	6	3	3	3
	*Trustee governors must include at least 1 parent in their nominees					
Primary & Secondary (voluntary Maintained 85% capital grant)	10	6*	2	0	1	1
	18	10*	4	0	2	2
	27	15*	6	0	3	3
	*Trustee governors must include at least 1 parent in their nominees					
Primary & Secondary (Grant Maintained Integrated)	16	6	0	4	4	2
	24	9	0	6	6	3
Voluntary Grammar (100% capital grant)	9	4*	0	3	1	1
	18	8*	0	6	2	2
	27	12*	0	9	3	3
	36	16*	0	12	4	4
	*Trustee governors must include at least 1 parent in their nominees					
Voluntary Grammar (85% capital grant)	10	6	0	2	1	1
	18	10	0	4	2	2
	27	15	0	6	3	3
	36	20	0	8	4	4
	*Trustee governors must include at least 1 parent in their nominees					
Voluntary Grammar (no capital grant)	13 or fewer	No set No.*	0	0	1	1
	14 or more	No set No.*	0	0	2	2
	*but must include at least 1 parent in their nominees					

NB: The Principal and Co-opted Governors are additional to the membership shown above.

¹Applies to a school which before transformation to controlled integrated status was a controlled or catholic maintained school.

²Applies to a school which before transformation to controlled integrated status was a voluntary school other than a catholic maintained school.

5. Ongoing Changes – Rebranding and Celebration

As the school is preparing to open as a new type of school, considerations now turn to the more practical changes that will need to take place.

The schools' DE number will change and this brings with it additional IT changes, including email addresses and website alterations. EA sectoral support is available to signpost schools to the correct support services within EA for these tasks.

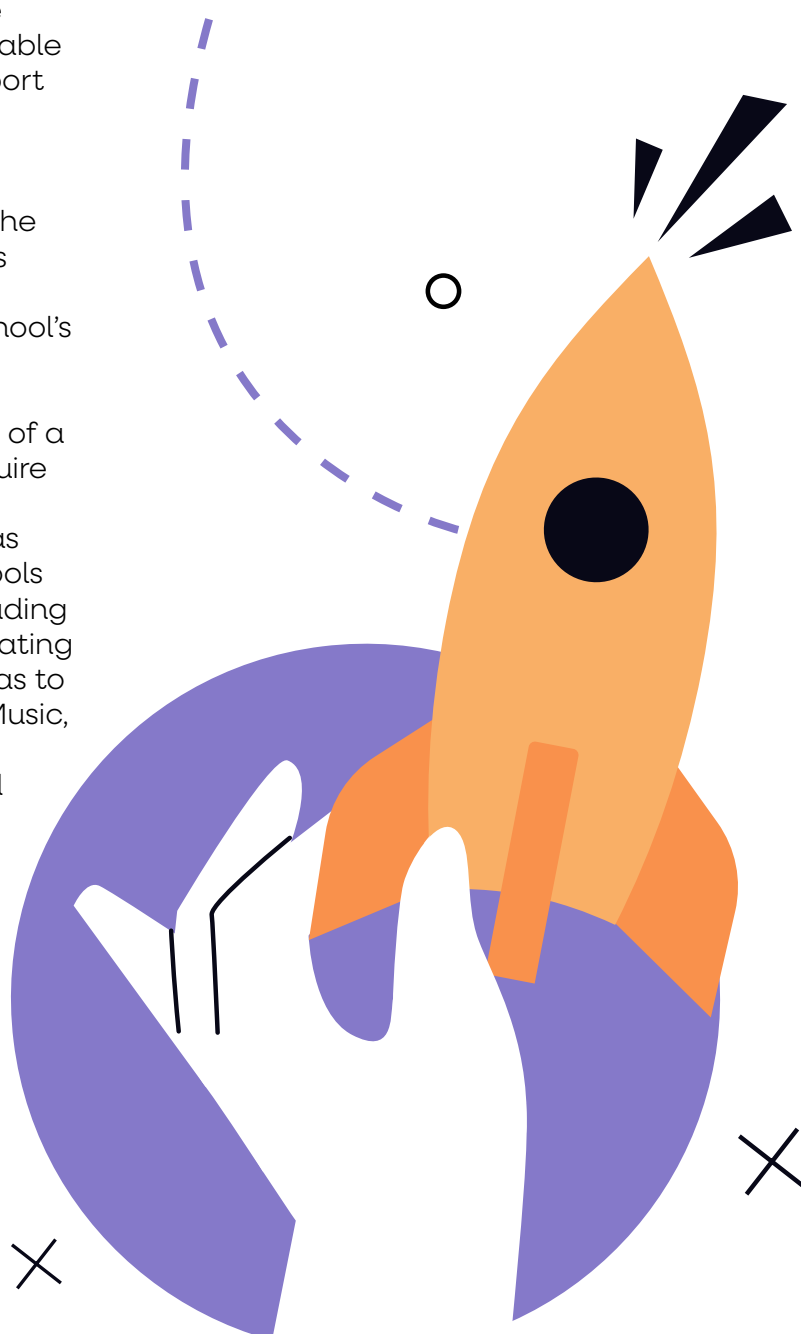
Schools that have Transformed to become Integrated will generally use the opportunity to make changes to things like school name, uniform and general rebranding, in order to promote the school's new identity.

This year is likely to involve a beginning of a process of re-visioning and this will require review of school policies to reflect the Integrated status. Whilst all policy areas will eventually be impacted, most schools begin with the more obvious ones including policy and curriculum development relating to Faith and Belief in school. Other areas to consider include: Physical Education, Music, The World Around Us, PDMU³⁶ and Language and Literacy at primary and at post-primary: History, Local and Global Citizenship and English. Extra-curricular activities may also expand. This is not exhaustive as the Integrated ethos runs through all aspects of the curriculum and school life.

The school may be reaching out to new groups, institutions, communities and neighbourhoods in this year, continuing to expand and develop relations across the communities it seeks to serve.

6. Continual communication and engagement strategies

Effective communication and engagement with all stakeholders remains a central feature as the school moves through this phase. The school community will want to know what is happening and keeping open communication channels remains a priority.



Leadership Considerations: Year Three

- Conversations this year may become more in depth and, as a result, unexpected opportunities and challenges can emerge. It can be helpful to regroup and reflect on experiences in the process so far.
- Review of the school values and vision will inform the ongoing policy review. These tasks are significant as the school continues to develop the Integrated ethos. Staying on task and inspiring others requires continued resilience.
- Reaching out to the support bodies and to other principals will be beneficial.

Key Themes:



Exploration



Consultation



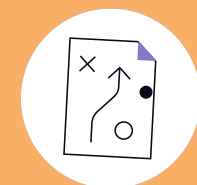
Learning



Planning



Clarifying



Administrating

Post Transformation

Delivering Integrated Education

Once the school opens as an Integrated school, celebrations will be in order! Promoting the new status to the local community is a key feature of this year. The school will carry on growing and

strengthening their Integrated ethos and will continue to engage in a process of monitoring and evaluation, supported by EA and NICIE, for a period of seven years following the change in status.



Leadership Considerations:

- Following completion of the three-year Programme, the school will be supported in the next phase of becoming an Integrated school, which will be the first year of delivery of Integrated Education at the school.
- Schools will continue to develop and strengthen their Integrated ethos and engage in a process of development, monitoring and evaluation of the Transformation Plan.
- Anti-Bias in Education approaches will begin to be embedded in school as part of the continual development of the Integrated ethos.
- NICIE will facilitate schools' engagement in Integrated Education professional learning networks: Principals, Vice-Principals, teachers, staff, SENCO, RE Coordinators and Early Years practitioners.
- Integrated schools will be eligible to apply for a wider range of grant funding from the IEF.
- It is in this year that the school will be expected to have cultural and religious diversity that reflects, as a minimum, the 'reasonable numbers' guiding principle contained in the Ministerial Statement of 2025 (See Appendix 3).
- As an Integrated school, there is an expectation that the delivery of Integrated Education is a central feature of the school, and that Integrated practices and concepts are being rolled out across all curricular and policy areas within the school. The Integrated ethos will now be informing school leadership and presentation in the wider community.
- Reviewing the school's values and vision will play an important role in shaping each school's new identity as an Integrated school.
- There is a wealth of information available from support bodies, and other Integrated Schools. They all can offer valuable insight, encouragement and practical guidance.

The themes from Year One, Year Two and Year Three continue:
Exploration - Consultation - Learning – Planning – Clarifying - Administrating

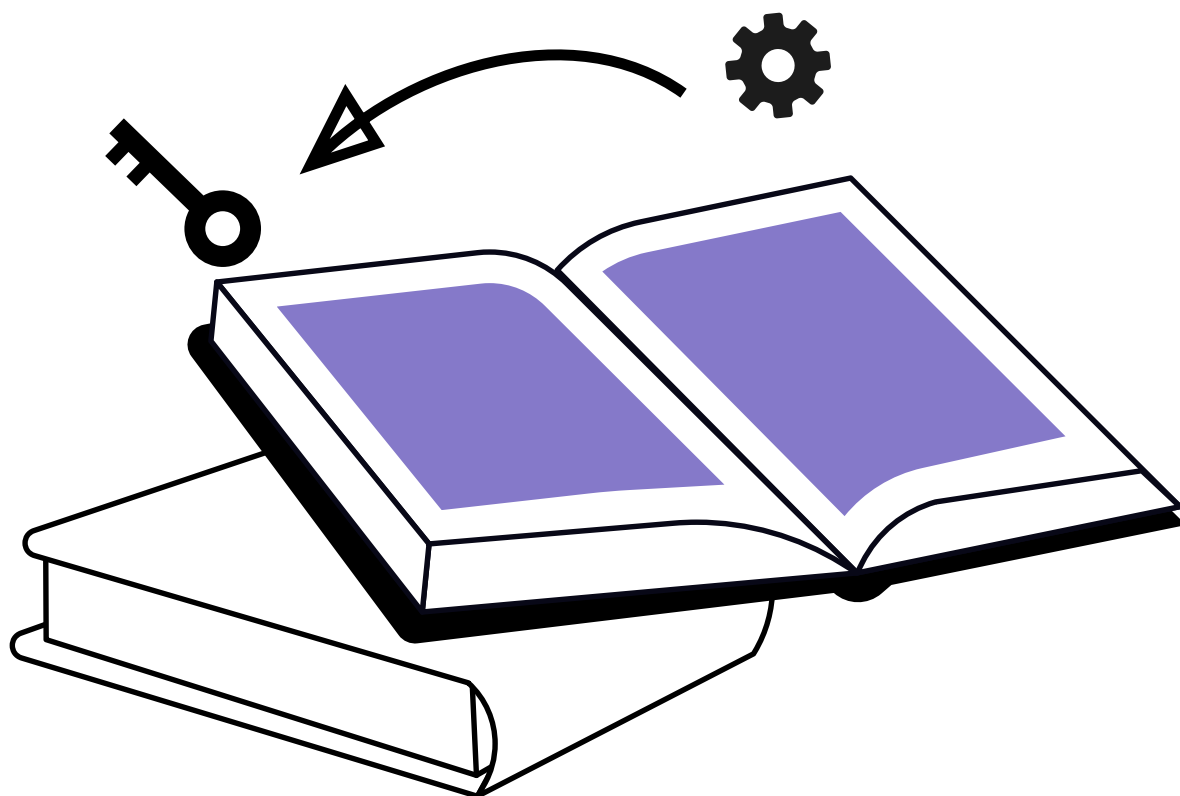
Learning, development and support opportunities post-Transformation

Integrated schools can access additional funding opportunities, workshops and whole-school development sessions facilitated by the support teams within NICIE, EA and IEF.

NICIE facilitate schools' engagement in Integrated Education professional learning networks. For Integrated school principals, **APTIS**³⁷ (the Association of Principal Teachers in Integrated Schools) holds a conference each term, including a residential conference in Spring term each year. In addition, there is a Vice-Principals' Forum, Teacher's Forum, an Early Years group, a forum for RE Coordinators in Integrated primary schools and a forum for Special Educational Needs Coordinators.

Throughout the Programme, NICIE will support staff development opportunities, including whole school development sessions which are tailored to each school's particular circumstances. These continue as the school engages further with the Integrated Education movement.

As well as the funding opportunities for schools exploring the acquisition of Integrated status, the IEF also has a range of **grant schemes**³⁸ that are available to established Integrated schools. These programmes of funding run annually and are regularly communicated to school Principals. In recent years, they have included funds for additional sport and cultural activity, Integrated ethos development projects and a range of celebratory activities that connect with Arts competitions. In addition, the IEF have access to a range of private donors who have generously supported the development of Integrated schools for decades.



37
38

<https://nicie.org/what-we-do/supporting-integrated-schools/learning-forums/association-of-principal-teachers-aptis/>
<https://www.ief.org.uk/our-work/grants/>

Integrated Education: Delving Deeper

In this section:

1. What is different about an Integrated school? - Intentionality
2. The Statement of Principles for Integrated Education
3. Anti-Bias in Education



1. What is different about an Integrated school? - Intentionality

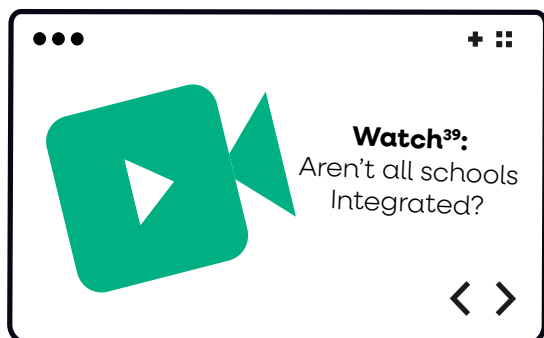
Integrated Education is not simply about a mix of pupils, it is also about the ethos and the everyday practice in the school. As the 2022 Act states, it is a school that intentionally supports, protects and advances a specific ethos.

Creating and building diversity in the school community is one thing, but Integrated schools are also expected to intentionally engage with that precious diversity, and this is at the core of what is different about Integrated Education. People in Integrated schools are uniquely advantaged, because they have the opportunity to learn with 'others', as well as about them.

This deliberate creation and intentional exploration of diversity is a unique feature of Integrated schools. The Integrated school engages with diversity in general and specifically with the diversity and divisions that have characterised our historical conflict locally. This latter type of engagement is usually the most challenging, because most of us have been socialised not to highlight our cultural identities. However, these identities still impact our lives and the lives of children and young people growing up here. The intention of the Integrated Education movement is to make a contribution to building peace and reconciliation – it is difficult to imagine how this can be achieved without talking about the political, social, religious and national identity issues at stake. Integrated schools strive to offer a safe environment in which these brave and complex conversations can take place.



This intentionality extends to delivery of the NI Curriculum through an Integrated lens and all other aspects of the school. For example, an Integrated school should consider, and plan for, the resources used in teaching and learning, the sports played and holidays and commemorations respected, to ensure that these are inclusive and reflective of the diversity within the school community.

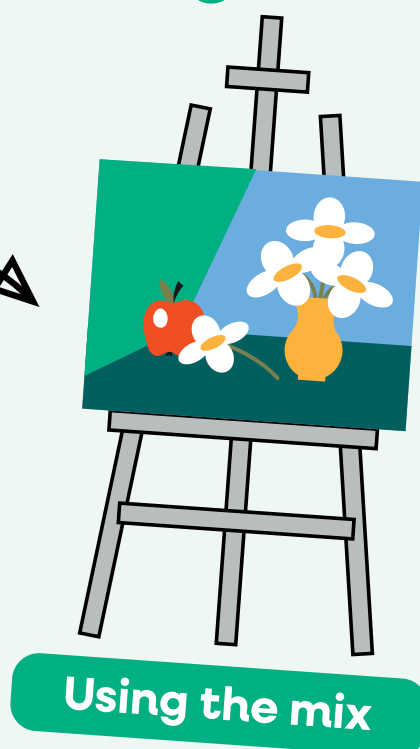


Integrated schools are funded the same way as other schools – via the Common Funding Formula. The IEF fundraises to support Integrated Education and provides grant schemes for Integrated schools to enhance and develop their Integration activities, depending on their level of resource.

An Integrated school has a Board of Governors which is structured in a way that includes representation from both main traditions and has additional parent and teacher representation.

As well as working to attract diversity within the pupil population, Integrated schools strive to enhance diversity within the staff and governor teams. Experience has shown that when schools become recognised as being Integrated they tend to attract a wider pool of job applicants and over time, diversity within the staff team increases.

Integration is more than mixing



2. The Statement of Principles for Integrated Education

Whilst Integrated schools can have some variance in terms of how they state their values and ethos, there is an expectation that these will align with the Statement of Principles for Integrated Education.

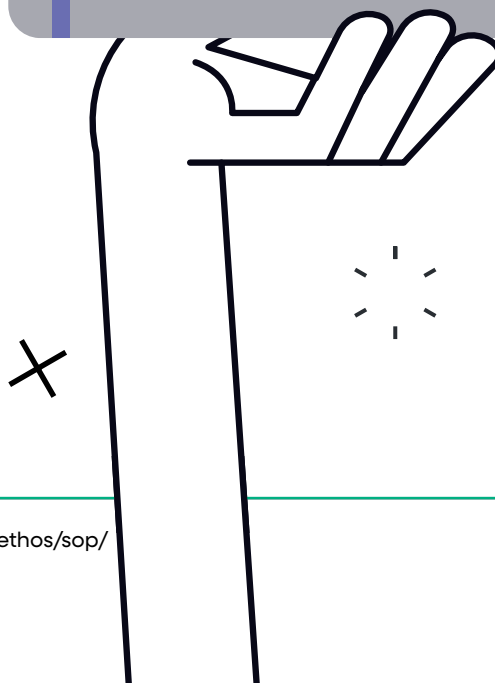
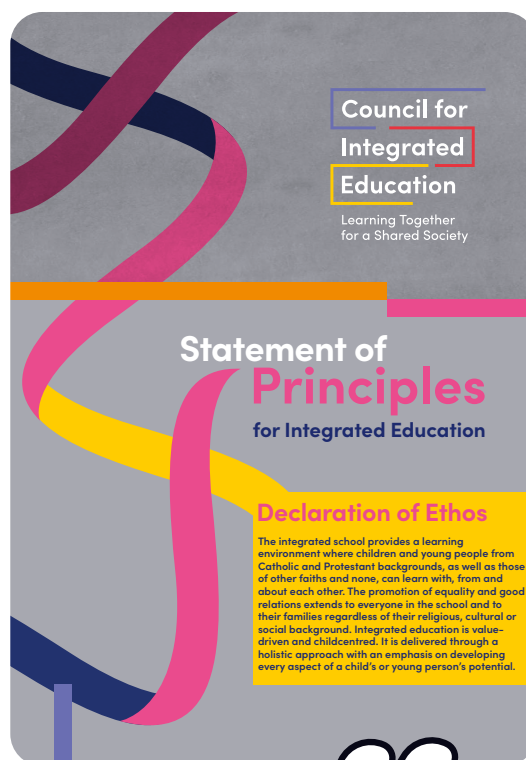
This connects Integrated schools with a shared vision of how the school community will contribute to building peace and reconciliation. The Statement was first created in 1991 and revised in 2007, led by NICIE in consultation with Integrated schools and other partners.

The Statement of Principles outlines the affirmations of the Integrated Education movement as follows:

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. Integrated Education contributes to reconciliation by purposefully creating an everyday educational environment which is representative of Protestant, Catholic and other religions, communities, traditions and diversities.**

The Statement of Principles for Integrated Education⁴⁰ is an advisory document that outlines the ethos of the Integrated school. The document has a DNA ribbon in the design, symbolising the fact that these Principles are the building blocks of the Integrated school.



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.’

This principle refers to the aspiration that an Integrated school will have a mix of staff, governors and pupils from different cultural/religious backgrounds and abilities. These features of the Integrated school are reflected in the Integrated Education Act (NI) 2022.

This principle advises that a balance of pupils from a Catholic and Protestant perceived background is a feature of Integrated Education. This is where the concept of 40/40/20 is introduced. While there is no perfect mix, this reflects the importance of having an aspiration to draw in equal numbers from the two main historical, cultural and religious communities, and others.

This expresses the aspiration that Integrated schools will have an even balance of pupils from Catholic and Protestant perceived backgrounds as well as those from other cultures, religions and beliefs. The reason that the Statement of Principles advises this, is to align with the long-established **Contact Theory**⁴¹, which, in summary, asserts that prejudice reduction is more effective when groups cooperate, have common goals, equal status and support from authorities.

When the data is reviewed, it appears that the use of 40/40/20, or a variation thereof, in the admissions criteria of an oversubscribed Integrated school, is an effective means to create this cultural and religious diversity in the school’s pupil population. The admissions criteria of any school in NI are the responsibility of the Board of Governors of the school.

There is widespread misunderstanding that Integrated schools are required by law to use these percentages in their admissions criteria - this is not the case. However, the Integrated school’s Board of Governors are required by law to use their ‘best endeavours’ to provide ‘Integrated Education’, as defined by the Integrated Education Act (NI) 2022. This definition includes having reasonable numbers of Catholic and Protestant pupils in the school.

The principle that Integrated schools should have a mix of the two traditions that have been in conflict in this part of the world for centuries, has always been, and will continue to be, a fundamental feature of Integrated Education. This aspect of the Integrated school is often controversial, perhaps because of our troubled past. Whilst it is central, it is just one of the diversities that Integrated schools seek to engage with in order to learn together for a shared society. The Programme will support schools to explore how to build diversity in the school enrolment in each school’s unique context.

41 <https://www.in-mind.org/article/intergroup-contact-theory-past-present-and-future>

Faith and 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.’

This principle states that pupils should learn together all that can reasonably be expected for them to learn together and that pupils will be introduced to the ideas, beliefs and practices of the major world religions and humanist philosophies.

The Integrated ethos is informed primarily by Christianity, partly because that is the religion which has the largest cultural influence here and partly because there is existing legislation that applies here in relation to Christianity in schools.

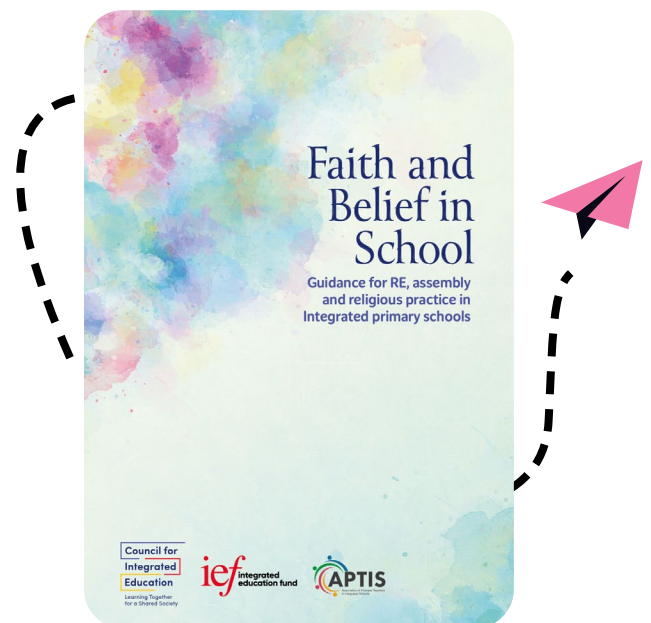
In November 2025, the UK’s Supreme Court ruled that the Christian-focused Religious Education in Northern Ireland schools is unlawful because it is not objective, critical or pluralist.

Curricular change in this regard is a matter for the DE. Integrated schools deliver the same RE syllabus as other schools, but they often extend learning opportunities for pupils at all key stages.

Beyond Christianity, the Integrated ethos is also informed by other aspects of our culture and by the overarching aim of the movement, which is to build peace and reconciliation. Considering this, an important aspect of the Integrated school is providing education about a range of faiths and beliefs and ensuring that all cultural/religious/belief identities are expressed, respected and celebrated in school.



In February 2025 the IEF, NICIE and the Association of Principal Teachers in Integrated Schools (APTIS) commissioned research and published guidance about **Faith and Belief in the Integrated Primary School**⁴². This document deals with curricular and more general issues such as: assemblies, parent communications and school visitors to ensure that diverse school communities are supported in expressing, sharing and celebrating their belief and culture in school.



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.’

While all schools have a focus on parental engagement, this principle advises that Integrated schools have additional parent representation on the Board of Governors and that Integrated schools should create a forum which enables parental engagement with the school. This may involve an expanded role for the school’s Parent Teacher Association, or it may be an entirely new type of parents’ forum.

In the Transformation process, the role of parents/carers is central, given that they are the people who vote in the ballot, determining whether or not the school proceeds to submit a Development Proposal to Transform to Integrated status.

Engaging with parents at an early stage in the school’s exploration of Transformation to Integrated status is recommended. This will enable schools to begin to understand the range of views that will exist amongst the school’s parent body in relation to Integrated Education.

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 their entitlement to personal, social, intellectual and spiritual development in the attainment of individual potential.’

This principle encourages the Integrated school to understand and engage with the use of non-violent means of conflict resolution and deliver the curriculum in a way that reflects the Integrated ethos. Where possible, the subjects and activities offered, and the resources complementing their delivery, will reflect the diversity within the school’s own pupil population. The school has a duty to be open in its relationships with schools, learning partnerships, churches and other local institutions and should present itself to the wider community as a shared civic space.

The focus on social responsibility extends to the nurturing of mutual respect and tolerance of difference, as well as nurturing self-confidence and self-respect. Alongside this acknowledgement of self and others, this principle invites the Integrated school to develop appreciation of the interdependence between society and the natural environment. This is of course becoming more significant in all schools, as we begin to experience the consequences of climate change in our daily lives.



3. Anti-Bias in Education

NICIE has promoted Anti-Bias in Education as a central feature of Integrated Education for over 25 years. 'Bias Busting for Beginners – An Introduction to Anti-Bias in Education'^{4,3} is one of a series of publications by NICIE which provide a starting point for educators. The second edition was published in 2025.

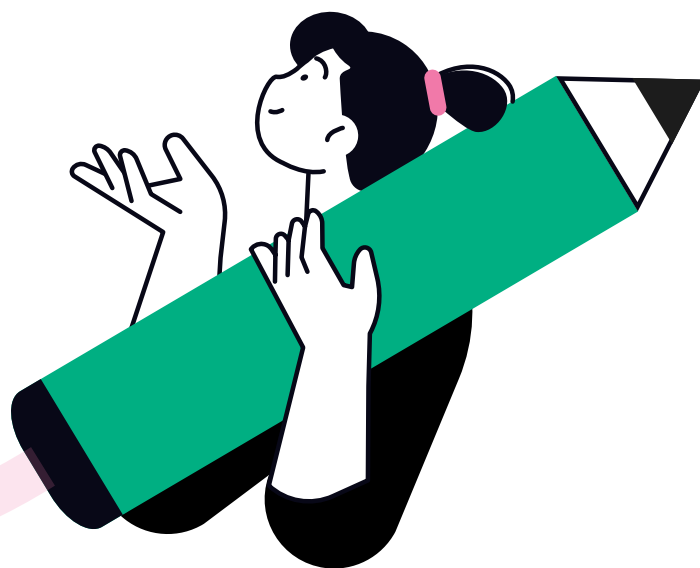
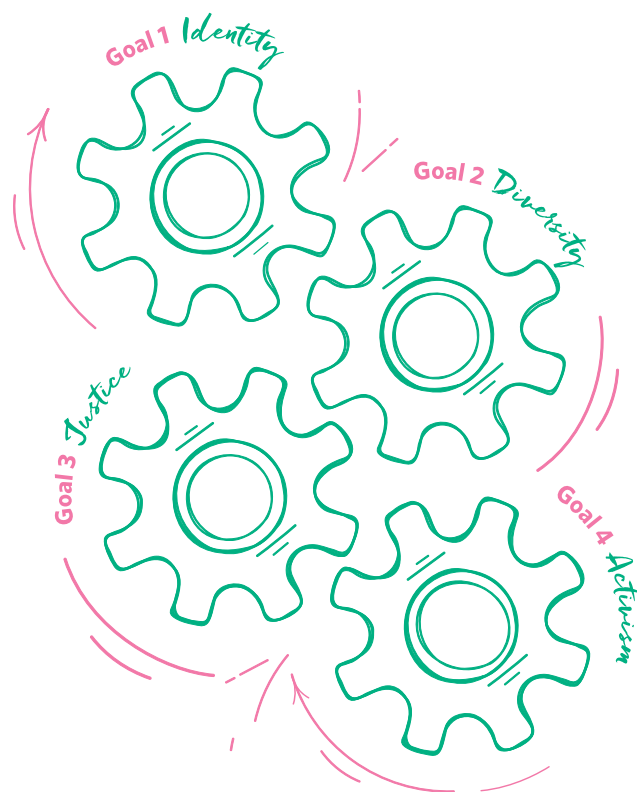
Work around anti-bias in educational settings emerged in the 1980s, primarily from the model developed by Louise Derman-Sparks and others in the USA.

Derman-Sparks (1989) describes it as an *'approach to challenging prejudice, stereotyping, bias and the 'isms'... It is not sufficient to be non-biased (and also highly unlikely), nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviours that perpetuate oppression.'*

The four goals of Anti-Bias in Education are interlinked as cogs that turn each other.

Being anti-bias means that one accepts that power struggles and supremacy are at play between different social groups in all human societies. An anti-bias commitment and approach disrupts these systems by actively challenging self and others' conscious and sub-conscious assumptions about each other. Everyone can be recognised as being in positions of both supremacy and powerlessness.

As a school develops its Integrated ethos, anti-bias approaches can inspire and challenge school staff and pupils to engage in active processes that are fundamental to building peace and reconciliation.



Appendices

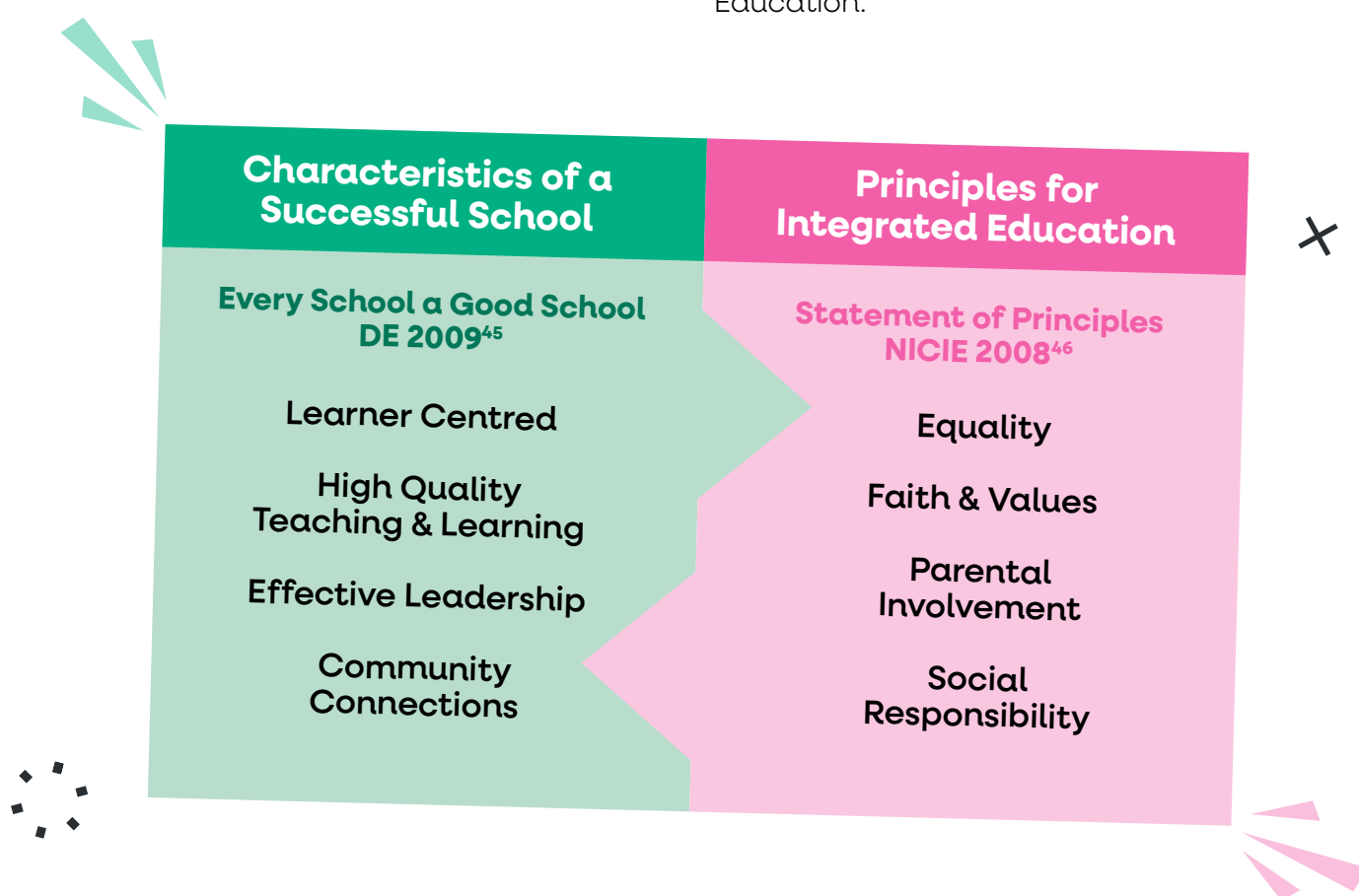
1. Using the Framework for Integrated Education to create a baseline assessment

Integrated Education challenges school leaders to not only create a more diverse school environment but also deliver improved educational experiences for all. The process of acquiring Integrated status provides opportunities to advance whole school change and make a real difference in the quality of learning for the pupils, teachers and wider community.

This is why it is recommended that any school considering Integrated Education takes time to carefully reflect on what this will mean not only for the current school population, but also for the future school community. To assist in this exploration, EA and NICIE advocate the use of the **Framework for Integrated Education⁴⁴**.

This resource is designed to help schools determine their level of readiness in respect of their ability to deliver Integrated Education.

Comprising three progressive phases, the Framework is made up of a series of 'Integration indicators' which are categorised within DE's characteristics of a successful school and aligned with the Statement of Principles for Integrated Education.



⁴⁴ <https://www.eani.org.uk/services/support-for-schools/shared-education-and-sectoral-support-service/integrated-education-4>

⁴⁵ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/every-school-good-school-esags>

⁴⁶ <https://nicie.org/what-is-integrated-education/integrated-ethos/sop/>

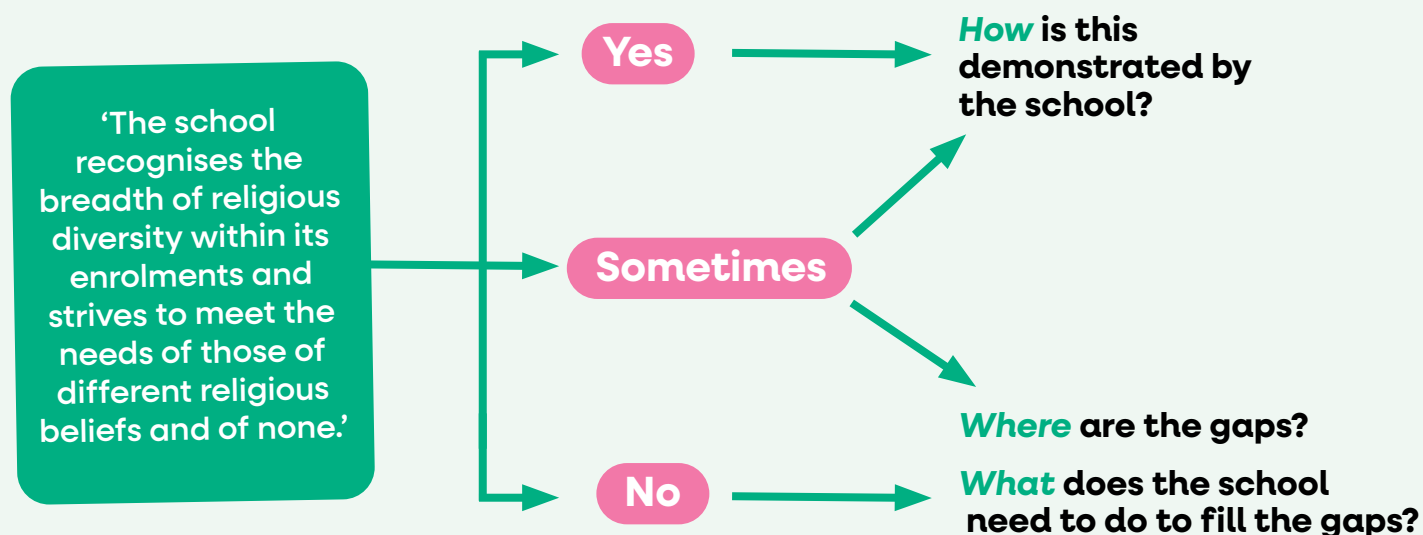
Transforming schools are advised to focus their attention on the first phase of the Framework, namely ‘defining and developing’ the Integrated ethos. Many of the indicators here have been adapted from those contained within **DE’s Community Relations, Equality & Diversity (CRED) policy⁴⁷** and can be applied in an age-appropriate manner across nursery, primary and post primary schools.

The indicators contained within each phase of the Framework are intended to support reflection and self-evaluation

by encouraging conversations about Integrated Education at all levels of the school community.

School leaders may identify specific indicators to explore with certain stakeholder groups, for example the Board of Governors, Student Council or Parent & Staff Associations/Parents’ Councils. Alternatively, the indicators may be incorporated into school surveys or become the focus for a staff development day.

Example of an indicator from the Framework for Integrated Education:



There is no expectation that a Transforming school will meet all the indicators contained within the defining and developing stage of the Framework in full. However, many will be met in part, and it is the identified ‘gaps’ that the school will seek to address through any future three-year Transformation Plan. The Framework relies on a school’s willingness to be open and honest about its current strengths and weaknesses in respect of Integrated Education. Time and effort invested at this stage of the Transformation process will result in more robust decision making and a stronger, more effective plan to guide Transformation change.

2. Building the Three-Year Transformation Plan

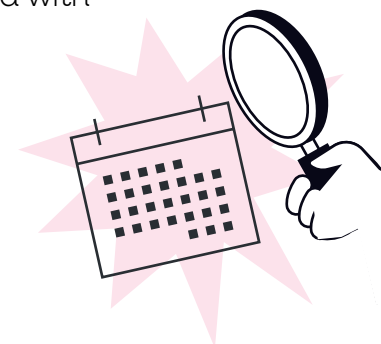
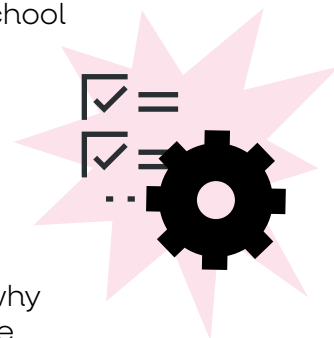
The Transformation Plan is designed to be a measured and purposeful document. When completed it will outline how the school not only intends to develop the Integrated ethos but also how it will go about realising the school improvement opportunities presented by the Transformation process.

In its entirety, the Transformation Plan comprises three main parts, namely,

- **The baseline assessment**
- **The three-year overview**
- **The Annual Action Plan**

Baseline Assessment

The Education & Training Inspectorate (ETI) recommends that schools approach school development and school improvement through self-evaluation and self-reflection. Since the DE places Transformation firmly within the school improvement agenda, the ETI approach is applied within this process. This is why EA and NICIE strongly advise those schools which are exploring Transformation to use the Framework for Integrated Education self-evaluation tool to create their baseline assessment. The baseline assessment does not need to be repeated each year as it is simply the starting point for the first statutory three-year Transformation Plan. However, as the school moves forward with Integration, further plans will be developed and new baseline positions created, again using the Framework for Integrated Education. This will allow schools to see clear evidence of their progress within Integration.



Three-year overview

The first three-year Transformation Plan is produced at a time when the school is going through the development proposal process and seeking Ministerial approval. Therefore, the initial three-year strategic overview exists purely as a guide because it is impossible for any school to predict exactly what their Transformation journey will be like. The school leadership will still need to have a strong vision of what they want their transformed school to be like but as with any journey, there is an understanding that the route ahead may change depending on the traveller's circumstances and the condition of the road.



Annual Action Plan

Because of the element of unpredictability around the delivery of the Transformation Plan, EA and NICIE recommend that detailed Annual Action Plans are produced. This means that the school will be required to conduct annual monitoring and evaluation processes which will help determine if the original targets are still relevant or if amendments are necessary.

The Transformation Plan is devised around the 'What?', 'So What?' and 'Now What?' approach. For each of the four characteristics (Learner Centred, High Quality Teaching & Learning, Effective Leadership and Community Connections), schools are invited to summarise their 'What?' - the baseline position, using the Framework for Integrated Education. It is an opportunity to reference and celebrate the things that the school currently does which have been identified as reflecting an Integrated ethos. Efforts should be made to try and ensure that the contents relate clearly to the title of the characteristic, for example, Learner Centred should be read in the context of the pupils' formal and informal experiences within school.

A 'So What?' consideration follows on from the baseline position. Here the school uses its knowledge of Integrated Education, along with advice from EA and NICIE, to highlight the areas that the Transformation Plan will need to address if the school is to effectively provide Integrated Education. These areas for development inform the targets to be set over the next three years, i.e. the 'Now What?' and also assist the school to develop its first Annual Action Plan.

Schools should be ambitious but realistic in setting their (SMART) targets. An average of three to four targets within each of the four characteristics (Learner-Centred, High Quality Teaching & Learning, Effective Leadership and Community Connections) is the norm but the number of targets is at the

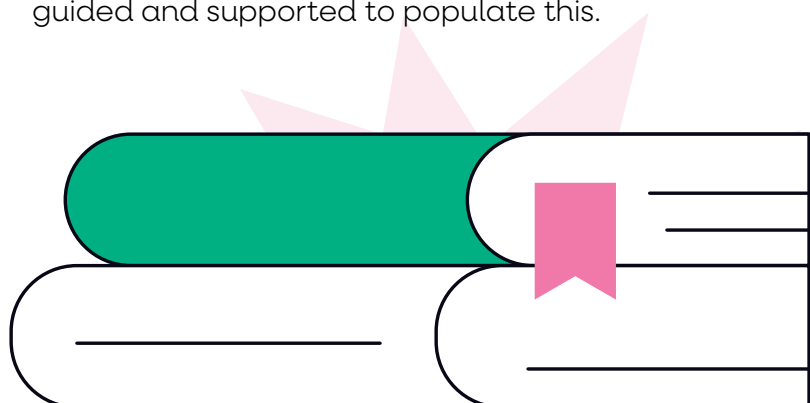
discretion of the school. It is worth noting that depending on its nature, even one target may result in a lengthy list of actions.

The three-year Transformation Plan is a vital part of the Case for Change but is also used by DE, EA, and NICIE to support monitoring and evaluation processes in schools up to and following a Ministerial decision. In partnership with NICIE, EA is available to help Transforming schools through the Transformation planning cycle for a period of up to 7 years following the conferral of Integrated status.

Although it is common for schools going through the process of Transformation to share similar targets and objectives, the most successful Transformations have come about when schools have invested significant time and effort into the planning process. This has ensured that the resulting plan is unique to them and wholly owned by the school community. It can take time to effect changes in the ethos, structure, and organisation of a school, and for a school to be fully acknowledged as being Integrated. The Transformation Plan is likely to be one of a number of similar plans which will ultimately provide a complete record of what the school has achieved before, during and after the actual legal process of Transformation.

The table overleaf provides some examples of activities and practices that might be considered within the Transformation Plan. These are not exhaustive and schools are likely to have other examples which may more accurately reflect their own settings. The **Transformation section of the EA website⁴⁸** provides further support and advice, and includes a Transformation Plan template. Schools in the Programme will be guided and supported to populate this.

48 <https://www.eani.org.uk/services/support-for-schools/shared-education-and-sectoral-support-service/integrated-education-2>





Transformation Plan Summary – At a Glance

The following areas are for consideration

Learner Centred

- Have opportunities to learn about and celebrate their similarities and differences
- Experience a curriculum which is beginning to be delivered through an integrated lens. This can cover all areas but could pay particular attention to Religious Education, Physical Education and Music; the World Around Us, PDMU and Language and Literacy at primary; and at post-primary for example, History, LLW, Physical Education, Citizenship and English (and/or the **TransformED⁴⁹** curricular equivalents).
- Have opportunities to participate in sacramental preparation - if it is not currently available
- Experience a range of additional extra-curricular activities that reflect different cultural traditions

Effective Leadership

- Setting the vision for becoming an integrated school and considering how to communicate this effectively using all available opportunities
- Planning for ethos development
- Planning for whole school community engagement in the Transformation Process
- Reconstitution of the Board of Governors
- Consideration of changes to admissions criteria
- Planning for possible changes to the school vision, name, uniform and badge may also require consideration
- Planning for assemblies, concerts, awards evenings, parents' evenings and sports and art events which can contribute to an Integrated ethos
- Consideration of charities supported, public holidays observed, events celebrated, the range of visitors invited into school, and how the internal and external environment reflects an Integrated ethos

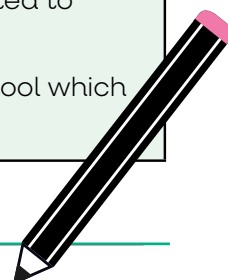
High Quality Teaching and Learning

- Staff should be informed about what Integrated Education is and be able to contribute to the schools' vision of becoming an Integrated School
- Staff experience visits to existing Integrated Schools to help consider what areas they may wish to develop
- Staff should be given opportunities to consider how to build upon their current teaching and learning to become more inclusive, to better reflect intercultural diversity, and to promote engagement with all beliefs, cultures, traditions and backgrounds, including Protestants and Catholics
- Staff to participate in policy review to ensure Integration is developed

Community Connections

- Establishing/improving existing relations with local pre-school or primary/post primary school of a different management type
- Engaging with parents from a range of faith and belief/socio-economic backgrounds locally
- Establishing/improving existing relations with local sports clubs, community organisations
- Engaging with a range of local churches, particularly those with whom there may have been limited contact
- Increasing the visibility of the schools Integrated image through social media messaging
- Engaging with a range of local politicians, particularly those with whom school engagements may have been limited to previously
- Plan events or activities held in school which are open to the local community

Please note this is not an exhaustive list, and support and guidance will be provided by NICIE and EA to help develop the school's plan in detail.



3. What will the Department consider when assessing the Development Proposal?

The DE guidance⁵⁰ outlines the five key areas of consideration when the DE assesses a Development Proposal to acquire Integrated status.

These are:

- Planning and Engagement in the Transformation Process
- Provision of Integrated Education
- Sustainability
- Demand for Integrated Education
- Area Planning Context

These will be fully explored within the Programme and schools will be supported to gather and submit evidence related to these considerations.

In relation to the provision of Integrated Education, a common challenge for Transforming schools is to increase the cultural and religious background of pupils in the school. In particular, there is a challenge in developing diversity from both of the traditional communities here. This may be because families often send their children to schools that they have historic connections with, or whichever school is close by. It may be because of how the school was created and how it developed, or it could be because of the school's connections with a local church.

These are long held associations that of course, remain in the Transformed school. However, through this process they are added to as the new Integrated school emerges and develops fresh connections with people from different communities, faiths, beliefs and cultures.

Achieving cultural and religious diversity, as well as 'reasonable numbers' of Protestant and Catholic designated pupils in the school is likely to be a task that will require ongoing intentional strategizing and activity.

In September 2025, the Minister of Education issued a **statement**⁵¹ which defined the term 'reasonable numbers' as it relates to the proportions of pupils designated by parents in schools as 'Protestant' or 'Catholic'. The statement outlines that schools seeking to become Integrated should be able to show progression towards an intake in year 1, year 8 (or in the Nursery school), of at least 10% of the minority community in the first year during which the school admits pupils as an Integrated school. The statement provides an alternative metric, which is that, when one counts only those pupils who have been designated as Protestant or Catholic, there is at least 15% of the minority community in the school intake year after Transformation.

The DE guidance includes a practical worked example of this calculation in Table 2 on page 25.

As mentioned previously, one way that schools can provide evidence of future cultural and religious diversity in the school is by using an Expression of Interest Form. It is important that parents are not confused between the ballot and this Form: The ballot is a legal requirement and the Expression of Interest Form is not. It is advisable to hold the parental ballot first and then gather Expression of Interest Forms as an ongoing activity, in order to provide additional evidence for the Case for Change.

It is reasonable to expect that the Department will also look for evidence of socio-economic and ability diversity, as these indicators are also within the 2022 'meaning' of Integrated Education.

50 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/transforming-together-understanding-pathway-integrated-education>
51 <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/written-ministerial-statement-reasonable-numbers>

Alongside this, the Act states that an Integrated school is one that:

‘intentionally supports, protects and advances an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding between those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, between those of different socio-economic backgrounds and between those of different abilities’

The school’s Transformation Plan should provide evidence of the school’s intentionality in this regard.

The Ministerial decision as to whether a school will become Integrated or not can only be challenged by a Judicial Review process – there is no appeal. If the decision is not to approve, support bodies are available to explore how the school proceeds. These situations are obviously a challenge for all stakeholders.

Decisions on whether a school may acquire Integrated status rest with the Minister of Education, or the Permanent Secretary in the absence of a Minister, and are taken on a case-by-case basis in line with legislation, published guidance and the evidence submitted by Boards of Governors, including sustainability and area planning considerations. Participation in sector-led programmes or engagement with support organisations is voluntary and does not confer any guarantee, expectation or advantage in the statutory process. Support provided by organisations such as NICIE, EA and the IEF is advisory in nature: accountability for decisions and statutory compliance remains with Boards of Governors and the DE.



[illegible]

Notes

[illegible]

An illustration featuring two white hands with black outlines, holding a large blue speech bubble. The background is a solid magenta color. Inside the speech bubble, there is a quote in white text, preceded by large black quotation marks.

“

I have gained lifelong friends and enjoyed learning about their cultures. I believe that Integrated Education is the future for coming generations in Northern Ireland and I am proud to play my part in it.

(Pupil)



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