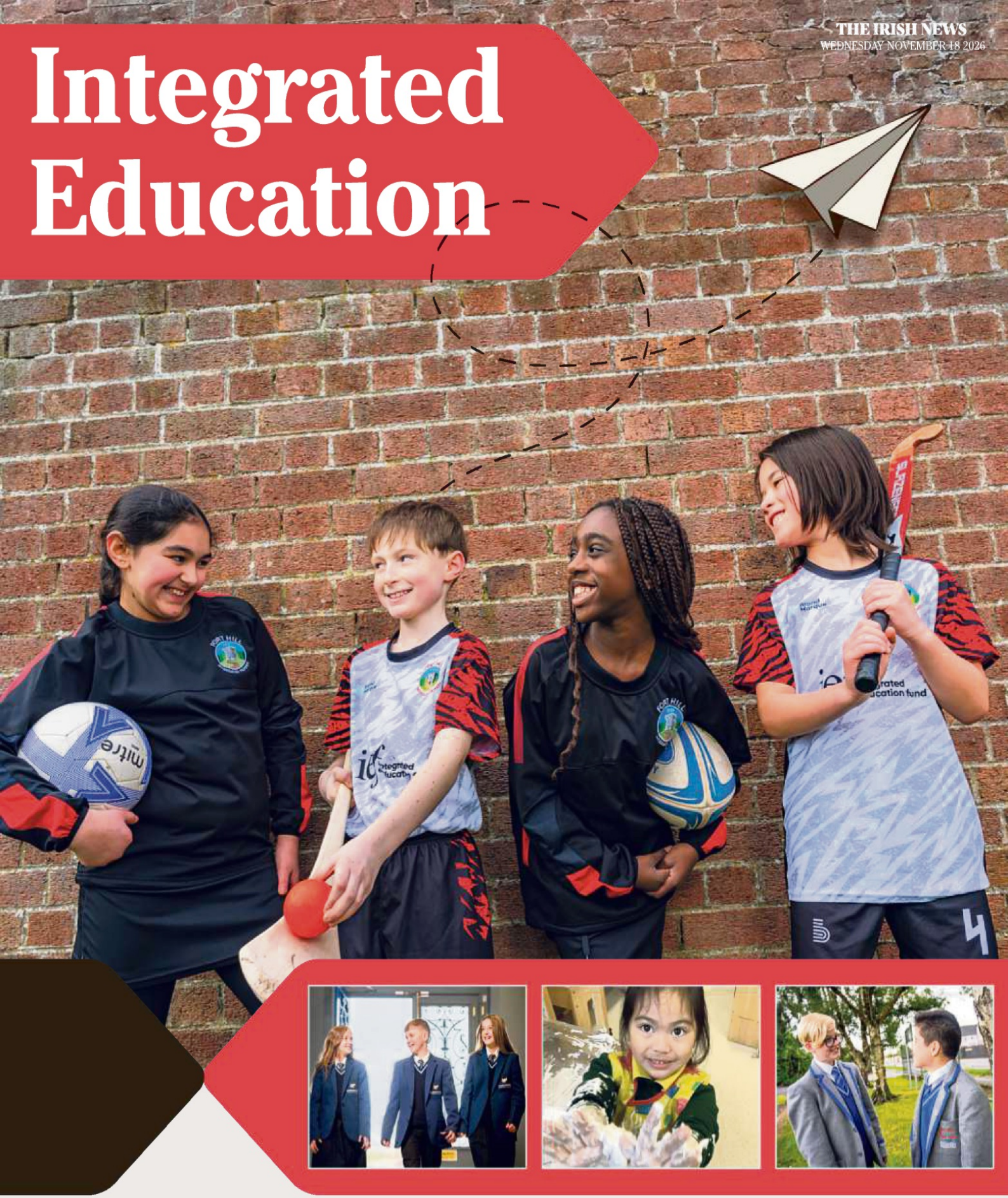
Integrated Education



ief integrated education fund

Council for Integrated Education
Learning Together for a Shared Society

Hazelwood IC

Find the space and support to GROW here at Hazelwood Integrated College

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Lurgan Model Integrated

One school, one family and one community at Lurgan Model Integrated Primary and Nursery

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30 years of success

Crumlin Integrated College celebrates three decades of integrated education

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‘Now is the time to close the gap between the demand and supply of integrated education’

PAUL CASKEY OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
INTEGRATED EDUCATION FUND



Students at Malone Integrated College

ACROSS 76 approved integrated schools, more than 28,000 children and young people are learning with, from and about each other every day, embracing rather than fearing religious and cultural diversity. This remarkable achievement reflects the strength and vision of a grassroots movement led by parents and school communities. At a time of renewed division and uncertainty, Integrated Education provides a powerful example of how education can bring people together and help build a more inclusive society.

2026 has been another year of significant progress and activity for the Integrated Education Movement in Northern Ireland, despite the considerable challenges and barriers created by disappointing decisions taken by the Minister of Education.

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) was delighted to launch its Strategic Vision for 2026–2030 at three high profile events in London Belfast and Dublin. The strategy entitled ‘Unmet demand: Time to close the gap’ highlights the need for decisive action to work towards meeting parental demand for Integrated Education in Northern Ireland.

According to societal level survey data sponsored by the Department of Education, 76% of respondents who stated a preference for the type of school to send their child/children, stated Integrated. However, just under 9% of pupils currently attend an Integrated school. Measuring and meeting demand is now a legal requirement for the Department of Education and the Education Authority. Most parents want more integration, so now is the time to make it a realistic choice, now is the time to close the gap between demand and supply.

2026 has been another year of significant progress and activity for the Integrated Education Movement in Northern Ireland, despite the considerable challenges and barriers created by disappointing decisions taken by the Minister of Education

In September, the gap between provision and demand became even more evident when applications from four schools - Ballyhenry Primary School, Downshire Primary School (Hillsborough), Killowen Primary School (Coleraine), and Larne and Inver Primary School - to transform to Integrated status were rejected by the Minister of Education. The decision to become Integrated came after each school held a democratic parental ballot, each of which confirmed parental support for Integrated status. Throughout the process the schools have been continuing their integration journeys, proactively planning for Transformation and promoting respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion. In doing so, they have worked to embed an integrated ethos across school life.

The basis given for the four decisions is ‘reasonable numbers’ of Protestants and Catholics required within an integrated school, which was a new policy introduced in 2026. The Minister is relying on his own interpretation of the requirement for ‘reasonable numbers’ of Catholic and Protestant pupils, a criterion contained within the legal definition of an integrated school, as grounds for refusing proposals for Integrated status, against the support of the Education Authority. The legislation also, of course, makes clear that Integrated Education is about much more than just pupil numbers. Integrated Education is about fostering respect, inclusion and meaningful interaction between children from different faiths, cultures, identities and backgrounds. It is reflected not only in pupil enrolment but also in a school’s ethos, governance and daily life.

The IEF is immensely proud of these schools and the parents, staff, governors and communities who have worked so hard throughout the Transformation process. We will continue to support them on their integration journeys.

We will continue to work to ensure that every parent who wishes to choose an Integrated Education for their child, is able to do so.

www.ief.org.uk



Pupils at Lough View IPS balancing studies with play

Growing at Hazelwood

STARTING secondary school is a major milestone, and at Hazelwood College, Year 8 is designed to make this transition an inspiring, encouraging, and memorable journey. We guide our newest pupils as they adapt to a vibrant new environment, build lifelong friendships, and discover their true potential. Central to everything we do is our commitment to GROW – a set of core values that shapes the Year 8 experience from day one.

GRATITUDE
At Hazelwood, gratitude is the foundation of our supportive community. In Year 8, pupils are encouraged to recognise the value in others, celebrate each other's successes, and appreciate the wealth of opportunities provided to them. From helpful form tutors to dedicated teachers, students quickly learn that they are part of a caring environment where every contribution matters and every act of kindness counts.

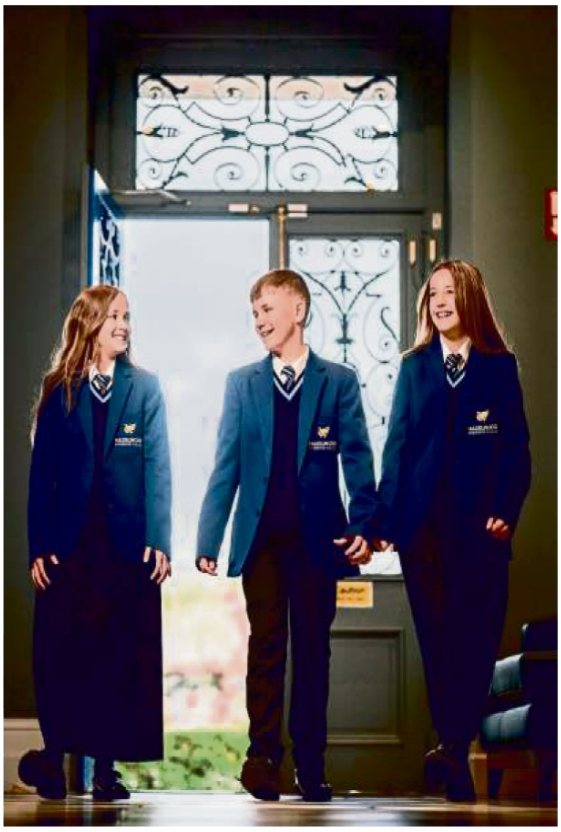
RESILIENCE
Transitioning to a new school brings exciting fresh challenges, from managing a new timetable to trying new subjects. We encourage persistence and determination, helping our Year 8 pupils develop the strength to bounce back when things don't go according to plan. Through constructive support and a positive growth mindset, students learn to view mistakes not as setbacks, but as valuable stepping stones on their educational journey.

Curiosity drives learning at Hazelwood. We aim to spark the natural drive to question, explore, and create, cultivating a lifelong love of knowledge

OPPORTUNITIES
Year 8 is packed with possibilities. We offer a dynamic curriculum alongside an extensive extracurricular program designed to ensure every pupil finds their passion. Whether representing the school on the sports field, taking part in creative arts, joining STEM clubs, or leading as class representatives, our opportunities are fully inclusive. Every student is empowered to explore new interests and build confidence in a welcoming environment.

WONDER
Curiosity drives learning at Hazelwood. We aim to spark the natural drive to question, explore, and create, cultivating a lifelong love of knowledge. In Year 8 classrooms, learning comes alive through hands-on science experiments, creative writing, interactive technology, and collaborative projects. We encourage pupils to stay curious about the world around them and to think critically and creatively every step of the way.
By embedding Gratitude, Resilience, Opportunities, and Wonder into daily school life, Year 8 pupils at Hazelwood College build a firm foundation for academic success and personal character. We look forward to welcoming our next intake of students and watching them GROW into confident, capable young people.

www.hazelwoodcollege.co.uk/



Hazelwood Integrated College enjoys an outstanding record for pastoral care and academic achievement



A state-of-the-art new school and a symbol of hope for the future

NEW-BRIDGE Integrated College recently celebrated a landmark moment in our history as we celebrated the official opening of the College's new £27.5 million school, marking the beginning of an exciting new chapter for integrated education.

Our state-of-the-art school, funded through the Fresh Start Agreement Programme, provides exceptional facilities for current and future generations of pupils and represents the culmination of many years of vision, determination and advocacy by the New-Bridge community.

Speaking at the official opening, Principal Hilary Harbinson described the day as "one of the most significant milestones in the history of New-Bridge Integrated College, a day of celebration, gratitude and hope".

As we officially open this outstanding new building, we reflect with pride on the remarkable journey of New-Bridge Integrated College from its modest beginnings in 1995 to the thriving and successful school community we are today.

This building is much more than bricks and mortar. It represents a belief in our young people, an investment in their futures and a commitment to providing the highest quality educational experience for generations to come. We are deeply grateful to everyone who played a part in turning this vision into reality. This achievement belongs to our pupils, staff, parents, governors, former principals and countless supporters who believed in what New-Bridge could become.

Our new school stands as a symbol of what can be achieved through courage, partnership and shared belief. It tells a story of hope for our pupils and confidence in their future. We know that the opportunities provided by these facilities will extend far beyond our classrooms and will bring lasting benefits to families and communities across the wider area. As we look to the future, we do so with gratitude for all those who have brought us to this point, pride in all that has been achieved, and excitement for the generations of young people whose lives will be shaped within these walls.

New-Bridge Integrated College is an 11–18 school, which welcomes boys and girls, all abilities, and families from catholic, protestant and other traditions. Our school was established in 1995 by parents from the Banbridge and Newry areas, who wanted a school where children from different communities could be educated together, every day, under one roof.



Education Minister Paul Givan officially opened the £27.5m new school building at New-Bridge Integrated College

As the Evens Foundation Laureate of Peace Education, we continue to play a significant role in promoting our inclusive ethos, as we not only recognise our accomplishments as an all-ability school, but also our role as peacebuilders; celebrating Integrated Education at its best. We reflect on the well-rounded individuals our students have become, respectful of other traditions and cultures, as they, like so many have benefited from an authentic integrated experience. Our integrated ethos underpins all our interactions, our relationships, our decisions and also in our curriculum design as we operate tailored pathways for our students in KS3, KS4 and Post 16.

The many awards our school has won over the years is testimony to a whole community approach to education; and our inclusive spirit is reflected in our:

- NICIE 'Excellence in Integration Award
- Children in Crossfire Gold Compassion Award
- Rights Respecting School Gold Award
- Families First Outstanding Pastoral Care Award
- School of Sanctuary Award
- Evens Foundation Laureate of Peace Education
- Goldsmith Community Engagement Award
- Aware NI Investors in Mental Health Award
- Paul Dix 'When the Adults Change' Partner School

It is our whole school approach to nurture and restorative practices, along with our relational based approach to teaching and learning, that has enabled our school to become the first school in Northern Ireland to be recognised as a Paul Dix 'When the Adults Change Partner school'.

Individual successes can also be attributed to the wider enrichment experiences our students are able to access at New-Bridge and the many external collaborations which supports our work in building student leadership capacity.

- Our Taking Boys Seriously research work with Ulster University has played a role in maximising our boys potential
- Our Scholar's Programme "The Brilliant Club"which is a collaboration with Queens' University, Belfast has provided a unique insight into university practices and has enabled our students to make a smooth transition into university life.
- Our Business Mentorship programmes through our 'Business Experience' and 'Sisters IN' Programme provides an additional layer of careers guidance for our students as it builds stronger connections between business and school
- Our outreach primary schools programme has provided opportunities for so many New-Bridge students to prepare and deliver lessons, to primary students, enabling primary students to access specialist learning on a range of subject topics which in turn helps strengthen our community connections
- Our work as a 'Catalyst School' has upskilled staff on design thinking practices to further enhance the learning experiences of our students, extending beyond the classroom.
- Our Cross Border Projects, funded through Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund enables our pupils and staff to work together on projects around identity and social change.
- Our JOLT (Joy of Learning Together) Project Based Learning Programme develops our students youth advocacy skills .A programme which has gained the formal recognition of the Social Impact Award as well as the Road Safety Partnership Post Primary Award for 2025.

At New-Bridge we provide high quality education through a broad and balanced curriculum which caters for the full ability range. With over 30 GCSE/Vocational subjects on offer and 3 tailored pathways to meet the full ability range and 24 subjects on offer at A Level, our New-Bridge students continue to progress to high demand courses at university as well as Higher Level Apprenticeship Programmes. We are very proud of our excellent record of academic and vocational success which ensures progression for all our young people. We are proud to say that our dedicated and committed staff offer many opportunities for each student to achieve their full potential here and we celebrate the 'personal best' of every student at New-Bridge.

Our child centred approach to learning and teaching is built on positive relationships between staff, students, and parents; with priority given to the care and welfare of our students.

As an integrated school we celebrate 30 years of providing an authentic integrated experience which provides a model of education fit for building a prosperous and peaceful 21st century society.

This is a very exciting time to join New-Bridge and we are looking forward to welcoming our new Year 8 students in 2027. We have moved into our state of the art new school building which is already bringing many benefits to our entire school community. Our cutting-edge sports facilities enable us to enhance our current extra-curricular menu of Gaelic football, football, hockey, camogie, netball, rugby and orienteering, to name but a few.

> **"This building is much more than bricks and mortar. It represents a belief in our young people, an investment in their futures and a commitment to providing the highest quality educational experience for generations to come**

New-Bridge is a happy place to learn and work. Our school motto 'The School for All the Family' highlights that we celebrate every success story of every student every day at New-Bridge. We have high standards and high expectations, asking that everyone works and learns to their full potential, everyone helps those around them to do their best and every student develops into a thoughtful and caring member of her or his community. It is our integrated ethos; that sense of belonging and our capacity to care which has made our school the success story it is today.

Our students leave us ready to play a key role in change for the better, because they have had the privilege of an integrated education and they understand in practice the values of respect, compassion and tolerance

Through our school website, prospectus and our social media pages, we have captured the ethos of our school in word and pictures, as one of inclusion. We look forward to expanding our New-Bridge family and welcome new students and new families to our **Open Day on Saturday January 16 2027 from 9.15am to 1pm.** Principal's address, 9.30am.

WEBSITE: newbridgeintegrated.org
FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/newbridgeintegrated.org
INSTAGRAM: @newbridgeintegrated
TWITTER: Twitter @NewbridgIC



New-Bridge Integrated College

OPEN DAY | Saturday 16 January 2027 9:15am to 12:30pm

Principal's Address 9:30am

NEW SCHOOL BUILD



- State of the Art Building
- Sports Hall / Fitness Suite
- Football / Gaelic / Rugby Pitch
- 4G Pitch
- Tennis Courts





25 Donard View Road, Loughbrickland , BT32 3LN
Telephone: 028 4062 5010

New-Bridge Integrated College

@newbridgeintegrated

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www.newbridgeintegrated.org

Laureate for Peace Education

GOLD AWARD

Excellence in Integrated Education Award

School of SANCTUARY AWARD

unicef

WHEN THE ADULTS CHANGE PARTNER SCHOOL

OPEN DAY INVITATION
TO PROSPECTIVE PRE SCHOOL AND P1 PARENTS



FORGE INTEGRATED PRIMARY AND PRE SCHOOL

TEDDY BEAR'S PLAYDAY
Bring your teddy and join us for a play session! Parents can chat with staff and current parents at the school in a relaxed environment.
FRIDAY 4TH DECEMBER 2.30-3.30PM

OPEN MORNING
See the school in action! Principal's talk at 10am and 11.30am.
SATURDAY 9TH JANUARY 10AM-12PM

www.forgeips.co.uk
02890 492177

What makes Forge Integrated Primary and Pre School special?

THERE is something very simple at the heart of Forge Integrated Primary School: children should have the opportunity to grow up together.

Since opening in 1985, Forge has served the South Belfast community as an Integrated school, bringing children and families together within a shared learning environment. Forty years later, that purpose feels every bit as important.

Integration at Forge is lived every day. It can be seen in friendships, conversations and in children learning that difference is not something to fear or avoid.

Our ambition is that pupils leave Forge with respect for themselves, respect for others and the confidence to play their part in an increasingly diverse Northern Ireland.

This year we are particularly excited about an important development in our preschool provision.

Our school community has wanted this for some time, and we are delighted that it will strengthen the pathway into Integrated Education, giving our youngest children and their families the opportunity to become part of the Forge community from the very beginning.

Forge is proud of its past, but Integration is really about the future: children growing up together and learning, from their earliest years, that everyone belongs.

www.forgeips.co.uk

“Integration at Forge is lived every day. It can be seen in friendships, conversations and in children learning that difference is not something to fear or avoid

BRIDGE PRIMARY
ONE IN THE SPIRIT

BRIDGE INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOL

70 Ballygown Road, Banbridge, County Down BT32 3EL
info@bridge.banbridge.ni.sch.uk | T: 02840 662055
www.bridgeips.net





'Our children are growing and learning together to be the best that they can be.'

In Bridge Integrated Primary School our vision is to ensure that every child is nurtured as an individual and is supported and challenged to achieve their full potential.

Bridge IPS has 395 pupils and is in the heart of the community in the town of Banbridge. We value the links that we have with our parents, carers, school and wider community. We endeavour to provide our pupils with exciting and enriching experiences which enhance the day to day provision of high quality learning and teaching, in a kind and nurturing environment. We aim to meet the needs of every child. Our integrated ethos helps every child to feel included, valued and special in their own right, while being respectful of the similarities we share and the differences we cherish, that makes each of us an individual.

P1 ADMISSIONS CRITERIA
Our admissions criteria will be published on our school website www.bridgeips.net in December 2026.

OPEN EVENING
On Thurs 7th January 2027, our school will be open from 5.30pm – 7.30pm for prospective parents to visit us and gain a flavour of day to day life in our school. There will be an information session with the Principal that evening for prospective P1 parents at 6.30pm.

Join us for our OPEN EVENING on Thursday 7th January 2027 5.30pm - 7.30pm
Principal's Address is at 6.30pm in the Assembly Hall

We are open to individual appointments and these can be organised by calling the school on 02840662055.

SLEMISH COLLEGE
REVERENTIA INTELLECTIO VERITAS

AN INTEGRATED COLLEGE
WHERE VALUES MATTER

Slemish College is a vibrant, forward thinking learning community with a wonderfully diverse family of learners.

Since our foundation in 1996, we have been striving to meet the needs of students who come from all faiths and traditions, backgrounds and academic abilities. We have grown from our first cohort of 84 students in 1996 to over 1000 today, reflecting the strong regard for Slemish by the local and wider community.

Our College Credo is 'Learning Together for Individual Success' and we are committed to excellence for every student entrusted to us.

Our hallmarks are strong teaching, and strong identity as a college community. This has ensured that for many, Slemish has been a natural choice for all in the family.

Whatever their aims and aspirations, Slemish seeks to provide courses that will help students achieve their goals, and the College aims to develop the strengths inherent in each individual character. The credo sums up our belief that our school is truly about **Learning Together for Individual Success.**

After 7 years with us, we want children to take away more than just a set of great results at GCSE and A Level. Our strong Christian ethos ensures that each and every member of our community develops a genuine sense of self-worth and respect for others - qualities that we hope will transcend the boundaries of the classroom to help shape a brighter, better future.

OUR VALUES
MORE THAN JUST WORDS ON A WALL

These values were chosen not just through careful consultations with students, parents, staff and governors. They were chosen because they reflect all that we want the people of Slemish College to be.

COMMUNITY · **HIGH EXPECTATIONS** · **INTEGRITY** · **KINDNESS** · **DETERMINATION** · **CREATIVITY**

Primary school pupils and their parents are invited to attend our

OPEN NIGHTS

WEDNESDAY 20 & THURSDAY 21 JANUARY • 6:30 – 9:00PM

slemishcollege.org.uk



Celebrating culture, learning together

MR N CAMPBELL
PRINCIPAL

AT Lurgan Model Integrated Primary School & Nursery, we are incredibly proud of our Integrated ethos and of the opportunities we provide for our children to explore, understand and celebrate the different cultures and traditions that enrich our community.

This year, pupils from Years 4 to 7 have thoroughly enjoyed taking part in our Ulster-Scots Afterschool Club, supported by the Ulster-Scots Agency. Through traditional dance, language and music, the children have embraced the opportunity to learn new skills, have fun together and discover more about Ulster-Scots culture and heritage.

But our cultural journey doesn't end there! Once the Ulster-Scots programme concludes, the children will continue the same project by exploring Irish culture and language in partnership with St Peter's GAA Language and Culture Committee.

Bringing these experiences together reflects what Integrated Education means to us: learning about one another, celebrating what makes us different and discovering everything that we share. We want our children to be curious about the world around them, proud of their own identity and genuinely interested in the identities, cultures and traditions of others.



Children enjoying learning about Ulster-Scots culture and heritage at a special Afterschool Club supported by the Ulster-Scots Agency


Making learning fun at Lurgan Model Integrated

We are immensely proud of the enthusiasm with which our pupils have embraced the project and grateful to everyone who has helped make these opportunities possible. At Lurgan Model Integrated, we believe that experiences like these help our children grow into confident, respectful and open-minded young people, while bringing our school community closer together.

This wonderful opportunity has been made possible through the generous support of an Integrated Education Fund (IEF) grant. We are extremely grateful to IEF for helping us provide meaningful experiences that bring our Integrated ethos to life, enabling our children to learn about, experience and celebrate the cultural traditions that make our community so rich and diverse. Their support helps us turn our vision of learning together into reality.

Open afternoon for Nursery and Year One - December 3
028 3832 1003
lurganmodelintegrated.co.uk



Cultivating talent and positivity in an integrated community

MRS IMELDA KIRK
PRINCIPAL



DRUMRAGH Integrated College is a vibrant, forward thinking and dynamic college. Since our foundation in 1995, we have been striving to meet the needs of students who come from all faiths and traditions, backgrounds and academic abilities.

Drumragh Integrated College and Omagh Integrated Primary School, located on adjacent sites on the periphery of Omagh town, comprise the Omagh Integrated Campus offering parents an invitation to embark on a Nursery to Sixth Form learning journey.

Our College Mission Statement 'Excellence for Everyone' and the College's Core Values of Respect, Equality and Diversity permeate everything we do.

Our success as a college is well documented, particularly for our focus on Innovative Teaching and Learning, our comprehensive Pastoral Care Programme and our endeavours to build close partnerships with parents and families. This is a place of real learning, where we adopt a holistic approach to education, offering a comprehensive curriculum alongside an exciting extra-curricular programme.

In Drumragh Integrated College, staff and students work together to ensure academic and personal success.

Young people of all abilities, all nationalities and all religious traditions are not only welcome here but they enrich the successful college that Drumragh has become. We offer a quality learning experience for all students.

Students are afforded a range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills ensuring they have the necessary capabilities to become innovative leaders of the future.

Student Voice is central to the day-to-day operations within the college.

The Student Council provides a forum for all students to have their views considered. Our Student Senior Leadership Team is very much proactive within the college offering a range of support strategies to our younger students in the classroom.

Ambassadors for the Environment, Integration, Wellbeing and Primary Transition ensure the College's Vision and Core Values are celebrated and enacted each day.

This College seeks to ensure that all young people can fulfil their aspirations in an integrated setting, developing the skills to succeed in the modern and diverse society. Drumragh Integrated College aims to be a natural choice for all in the family, providing excellence in education and adopting a holistic approach to ensuring student success.

drumraghcollege.co.uk

> Becoming Head Boy at Drumragh Integrated College is something I'm incredibly proud of. I see it as an opportunity to give something back to a school that has given me so much, while helping shape its future for the students who come after me. I want to represent Drumragh in a way that reflects what our school stands for and what we can continue to achieve together.
> **– Callum, Head Boy**

> My time at Drumragh Integrated College has played a huge role in defining who I am today: a tolerant, creative person who always strives to help others. Throughout these seven years, doors have been opened, providing opportunities I never saw myself pursuing, which have pushed me to grow and develop as a person
> **– Ellie, Head Girl**



THE IRISH NEWS

YOUNG NEWS READERS

ynr

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"This is one of the best cross-curricular projects I have ever brought into the classroom - I'm not letting go of this resource book!"

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WHAT SCHOOLS RECEIVE

- Open to Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils across Ireland and beyond
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- Digital resources, certificates and press passes for all pupils
- School visits, competitions and more!

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St Mary's University College

A College of Queen's University Belfast

Join hundreds of schools bringing news to life in the classroom.

SCAN TO GET YOUR SCHOOL INVOLVED

Thirty years of shaping futures: Crumlin Integrated College celebrates three decades of integrated education

FOR 30 years, Crumlin Integrated College has been at the forefront of inclusive education in the local community, proudly standing as the very first integrated school in the Antrim area. Three decades ago, we opened our doors with a pioneering vision: to build a vibrant, welcoming space where children of all traditions, backgrounds and abilities could learn, grow and thrive alongside one another.

At the heart of our longevity and success is an unshakeable commitment to a nurturing and caring ethos. We know that young people achieve their fullest potential when they feel safe, valued and genuinely understood. Our dedicated staff work tirelessly to foster a supportive environment that prioritises student wellbeing, ensuring every child receives the encouragement and individual guidance they need to build confidence and resilience.

That compassionate foundation continues to deliver exceptional academic results. Principal, Mr John Conlon said: "We are extremely proud to announce that 95.7% of our students achieved at least 5 GCSEs at grades A-C*.

"This is a testament to what can be accomplished when high ambition meets heartfelt support."

As we celebrate this major 30-year milestone, Crumlin Integrated College looks forward to continuing our tradition of educational excellence and community unity for many decades to come. We warmly invite prospective families to discover what makes our school community so special.

> **"We are extremely proud to announce that 95.7% of our students achieved at least 5 GCSEs at grades A-C*. This is a testament to what can be accomplished when high ambition meets heartfelt support**
>
> Principal, Mr John Conlon



Fostering a lifelong passion for learning at Crumlin Integrated College



A tradition of educational excellence and community unity here at Crumlin Integrated College





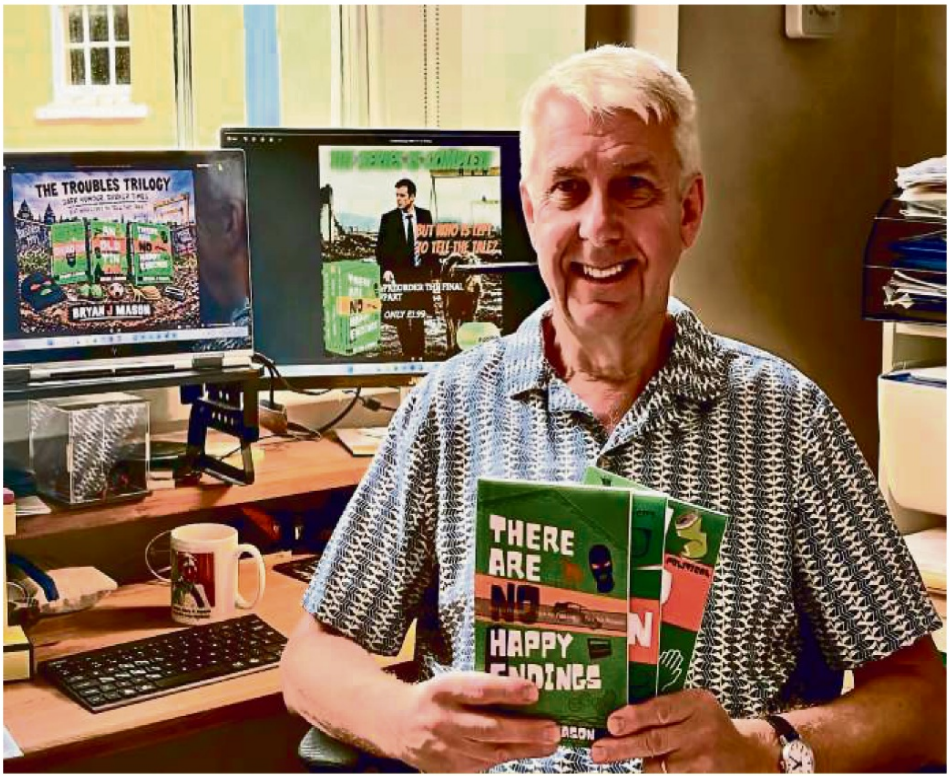
integrated education we’re in

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IntegrateMySchool.com

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ief integrated education fund

Crumlin Road Gaol visit sparks finale to crime series



Author Bryan J Mason, whose latest novel brings his Belfast-based crime trilogy to a close

SOPHIE CLARKE

A BRISTOL author has told how a visit to Crumlin Road Gaol inspired the finale of his Belfast-based black comedy crime series.

There Are No Happy Endings is the third and final instalment in Bryan J Mason's trilogy following English police officer turned RUC Detective Chief Inspector Harry Burnard and his band of misfits, known collectively as "the squad".

Set against the backdrop of the Troubles, the novel draws on a real incident Mason heard about during a tour of the former Belfast prison.

"I think the reason I've ended the story in November 1991 was after I went on that tour," he explains.

"I was chatting to people afterwards about a particular incident that happened in Crumlin Road Gaol in November 1991 where a bomb was smuggled in."

His first assumption was that it had been intended to help prisoners escape.

"But actually, I don't want to give too much away, but it was used for other purposes instead. And I thought, oh God, I've never heard of that.

"All the reading and the speaking I've done with people for these books and I didn't know anything about this one event.

"I've slightly fictionalised what happened for the book, but it really provided me with the foundation for what I hope readers think is a good ending," he says.

Following on from An Old Tin Can and Dead On, the final novel finds Harry and his colleagues still barred from investigating terrorism, despite having proved their ability to catch killers.

Their latest investigation brings them into the path of Bobby White, an English drug runner supplying both republican and loyalist paramilitaries, as political conflict becomes entangled with organised crime.

For Mason, the uncertainty over who holds power and whose interests are being served is central to the story.

"Never quite knowing what the real political situation is, who's pushing which levers. That's quite a key part of this final story," he says.

Through it all, Harry remains determined to do his job.

"He represents what he represents, but he's out to catch criminals," Mason explains.

"Everyone follows their own particular agenda. But Harry's basically a goody and he comes across all sorts of challenges, and he tries to overcome them as best as he can."

Mason admits the third book is darker than its predecessors. Retaining the humour that helped define the first two meant finding it in the squad's personalities and their responses to the situations they face.

"The challenge for me was introducing the humour in an appropriate way to counterbalance some of the tragedy and tensions that were going on," he says.

"But I do that as I've done before by rooting it in the characters rather than making fun of a situation.

"It's the characters that produce the humour because they have all their human foibles."

> **"He comes to Northern Ireland thinking, I'm alone, I'm English, I'm Jewish. And then things change. And he thinks, oh, actually I'm not who I thought I was. But I'm still me**
>
> Brian J Mason



Crime writer Bryan J Mason explores Belfast's dark history in his Old Tin Can trilogy

New recruits bring fresh personalities and, inevitably, new nicknames. However, while the squad has another investigation to pursue, Harry's personal life offers little reprieve.

Having discovered he was adopted in the first book, he now knows he has Irish roots and a brother who is an IRA quartermaster in Derry. He fears what might happen if that connection becomes known, while his discoveries about his family have done little to resolve his own sense of isolation.

"Although he knows he's now of Irish descent, he doesn't feel Irish, he still feels as much a loner as he was before," says Mason.

"Knowing more about his identity hasn't actually helped him."

Those questions about identity and belonging run throughout the series.

"He comes to Northern Ireland thinking, I'm alone, I'm English, I'm Jewish. And then things change," Mason says.

"And he thinks, oh, actually I'm not who I thought I was. But I'm still me."

Having lived with his fictional characters across three books, Mason found leaving them behind an emotional experience.

The first novel was conceived as a standalone but encouragement from his publisher persuaded him to continue, allowing the characters and their stories to develop.

"When I wrote the first book, as I got to the end, I wanted to leave some things unresolved," he explains.

"I did think at the time, I might come back to this in a few years."

Instead, Harry's story grew into a trilogy, with Mason drawing inspiration from the endings of television series including The Sopranos and Breaking Bad as he considered how to bring its various threads together.

"When I wrote that final page, it was quite emotional," he says.

"You write it and think, my God, that's it, that's the end of them, what have I done?"

He has not entirely ruled out revisiting some of the characters, although readers should be prepared for losses along the way.

"Never say never," he says.

"But some of them don't make it out alive at the end and some of my favourite characters have been the ones that I have killed off."

For now, his attention has turned to Underwood & Niece, a new series set around a Victorian undertaking business in London. It follows Lionel, an undertaker forced to bury bodies for a villain to whom he owes money, and his niece, who joins the business through financial necessity. Together they become amateur detectives, uncovering crimes through their work and their connections within the community.



Crumlin Road Gaol

"The exciting thing is I've got new characters to play with," says Mason.

The setting may have changed, but a character from Belfast will provide a continuing connection to the city. Mason also hopes to retain the gallows humour running through Harry and the squad's adventures.

"It deals with tragedy and it deals with conflict and it deals with really difficult things," he says. "But it's got a quality of a lightness of touch that cuts through that."

There Are No Happy Endings by Bryan J. Mason is available now. For additional information, visit www.bryanjmason.com.