

Integr. Integrated School Study

Faxed to NICIE

at 12.10 pm

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11 February 1998

TONY WORTHINGTON ANNOUNCES NEW BOOST FOR INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

The Department of Education confirmed today that the Education Minister, Tony Worthington MP, has revised the viability criteria which new integrated secondary schools will have to meet in future before they will be approved for grant-aid by the Department.

The Minister's decision represents the conclusion of a review of the criteria which the Minister announced last year.

The main criteria applied by the Department in considering proposals for the establishment of new integrated schools relate to the potential viability of the school, ie the number of pupils which will be enrolled in its first year, and the school's consequent longer term enrolment; and to the balance of this opening enrolment between Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils.

Commenting on the review the Minister said: "I have looked closely at all of the viability criteria and other factors applied to new integrated schools and am content that they are, with one exception, both fair to parents and appropriate within the financial resources available to me. I have concluded that the action of the previous Government in raising the first-year enrolment requirement for secondary schools from 60 to 100 was too severe. I am therefore making a key change to the criteria by reducing the required minimum opening enrolment for all new integrated secondary schools from 100 to 80 and the long-term enrolment in Forms 1-5 from 500 to 400 pupils. This change, which was proposed by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and the Integrated Education Fund during the review, should extend the possibility of new secondary schools into some areas where the previous arrangements effectively prohibited development."

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The Minister also indicated his intention to establish a Working Group, which he will Chair, to examine ways of further promoting the development of the integrated schools sector while safeguarding the interests of other schools. The membership and terms of reference of the group will be discussed with NICIE and other school interests but will include consideration of the following issues:-

- * ways to encourage more schools to transform to integrated status;

- * the capital and recurrent funding arrangements for new integrated schools;

and

- * ways to encourage further integrated school development without damaging existing integrated schools.

Commenting on this development the Minister said: "The establishment of this Group, which I intend to chair personally, is evidence of Government's continuing commitment to the development of the integrated sector. Transformation remains our preferred route for the expansion of integrated education and is proving extremely successful. In the last year, seven existing grant-aided schools have been given conditional approval to transform to integrated status, and if their status is confirmed in September, this will increase the number of places in integrated schools by almost 30%. However, we cannot rest on our laurels and I wish to see the momentum sustained in future while not distorting the overall education budget".

The Minister also stressed that the viability criteria are only one of a range of factors against which proposals for new schools are tested. Other important factors include religious balance in enrolments; impact on other schools; the prospects for transformation in the area; objections received; the identification of a suitable site and accommodation; and, affordability.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The revised viability criteria for new schools are:

	INTAKE	LONG-TERM ENROLMENT	RELIGIOUS BALANCE
Primary	25	150-175	30% of enrolment from the Protestant or Roman Catholic tradition, whichever is the minority in the overall enrolment
Secondary	80	400	As above

Transformation

2. Schools wishing to transform are not required to have a pre-existing level of integration but are expected to work towards a religious balance of at least 30:70 over time. To ensure that this process is well grounded at the outset, schools are required to achieve a minimum of 10% of their intake from the minority religion in that first year (with the objective that over time this will increase to 30% or more), before approval is granted.

3. Of the 33 integrated schools which are currently grant-aided by the Department, 13 are existing schools which have transformed to integrated status. (However only five of these are "genuine" transformations as the remaining eight opened as integrated schools but had to adopt voluntary maintained status until formal integrated status became available following the 1989 Education Reform Order). The remaining 19 integrated schools were founded by groups of parents as integrated schools from the outset and, after demonstrating their viability, were awarded grant-maintained integrated status.

4. There are two categories of integrated school: Grant-maintained Integrated (GMI) schools which are under the management of individual Boards of Governors and funded directly by the Department; and Controlled Integrated (CI) schools which are under the management of, and funded by, Education and Library Boards.

5. There are at present 33 grant-aided integrated schools in Northern Ireland catering for over 7,000 pupils (just over 2% of the total). Of these, 25 are grant-maintained integrated schools and eight are controlled integrated. There are 22 integrated primary schools and 11 integrated secondary schools. In addition, six schools will transform to integrated status in September 1998 if they pass the integration test in their intakes and one independent secondary school will be given grant-maintained integrated status if it passes the tests set for its approval. There are three registered independent integrated schools, two secondary and one primary.

6. The estimated recurrent budget for all integrated schools in 1997/98 is about £20 million.