

Drumragh IC

Omagh

Drumragh Integrated College opened in September 1995. This was a triumph in itself, a victory for determined, pioneering parents who insisted on having integrated post-primary education in Omagh. Important work went on before opening, including meetings to answer urgent questions like, 'Where shall we get desks?' Staff and students moved into the old, Victorian Tyrone and Fermanagh Psychiatric Hospital building and spread through large parts of the site as the college grew.



By the time we left in 2009, to move into our new purpose-built accommodation, Drumragh was not only full but over-subscribed.

Our time in the T&F building was challenging, even while many students described it as cool. Our battle to thrive despite our surroundings inspired something of a Dunkirk spirit. We got used to being cold, watching water come in through strange places, damp walls, the smell of deceased mice, checking the many escape routes the site provided for students and evacuating after yet another false fire alarm. We monitored the building to see if anything was about to fall off or fall apart, and closed early one year because of the asbestos in the basement. It was frankly dangerous at times, completely mad at others and, overall, sort of fun. We value it as part of our story – but we don't necessarily miss it!

Our beautiful new building was too small before we moved in. Our struggle to expand has included aggressive opposition as well as support, a successful judicial review against the Department of Education, a second judicial review progressing at time of writing and an application for additional accommodation for existing student numbers.

'The future looks both challenging and bright. – Martin Luther King Jnr.'

Over the years we have grown bigger and stronger, responding positively to public perception of us and developing through our own vision and values. One outcome of all this has been our Gifted and Talented Programme, designed not only to cater for bright students but to show the world that we are a viable alternative to the outdated grammar school system. Drumragh genuinely caters for children from all backgrounds and of all abilities – it actually works.

As the college has developed, its strengths have proved to include its heart as well as its skill, the amazing relationships that exist between staff and students, the fact that we take integration so seriously, the impressive values of many of our students and the standards the college achieves. Our slogan is 'Excellence for Everyone', aiming to provide a shining example of integration in practice and a quality of education second to none. No two years are the same; we grow, we evaluate, we develop, we get stronger. And our integrated heart beats on.

To close, we should hear from one of our students, Katie-Ellen, who speaks eloquently about her school and its vision:

'It is a well-known fact that people strive to get into this school, this is evidence that this secondary school is perceived to be truly exceptional. This school encourages people of different cultures, religions, colours, races, beliefs and thoughts. An acceptance of difference in Northern Ireland is really important so that people can live in harmony together.

This is what Drumragh College is all about...'

'We may have all come from different ships, but we're in the same boat now'