

[Glencraig CIPS]

Holywood

Introduction and history of Glencraig

Glencraig Integrated Primary School is located in a quiet residential area between Holywood and Bangor on the County Down coast. There are currently over two hundred pupils attending the school and they are drawn from Seahill, neighbouring Helen's Bay and Cultra, from Holywood, Bangor and a few from as far afield as Belfast. Parents chose to make the journey to Glencraig knowing their children are enrolled in an integrated school whose size and surroundings provide an ideal backdrop for a learning environment. The school is easily recognised by the distinctive orchard garden wall which surrounds it.

There has been a school at Glencraig since the early years of the nineteenth century when old records described it as the entrance to 'Mr Turnley's House' at Rockport. For just over a century the school was administered and maintained by the Church of Ireland. During the latter part of the twentieth century responsibility was transferred to the Down County Education Committee and in 1966 the South Eastern Education and Library Board provided the present building, which was further extended in 1977.

In 2004 the Board of Governors decided to apply for and were granted integrated status, further reflecting their commitment to creating a school which reflected the diversity of the local community and fulfilled the need for a fully inclusive school for the local community. It is hard to believe that ten years have passed since then and it is safe to say that the school has never looked back!

After our transformation our enrolment grew steadily and is now at a very healthy and importantly sustainable level. This confirms the decision of the Governors back in 2004 when they recognised the need and desire within the community for an integrated school and set the wheels of transformation in motion.

[<http://www.glencraigips.co.uk/>]

So what has that entailed?

Our Governors believed that our school could reflect the growing diversity within the population and again they were justified as our religious balance demonstrates at enrolment a 20/40/40 mix. At Open Enrolment last year we were over-subscribed in each category – this in the North Down area that according to the 2011 Census has a 13% minority faith, is a remarkable and positive move. However our journey to integration has not been all about statistics, interesting as they may be. Our journey has been about the people who learn and work at Glenraig. Our journey towards Integration has been about changing hearts and minds, about seeing things differently, about not accepting the “same old, same old” but trying to create a something a bit special.

It has involved learning a lot more about each other, exploring what is important to the people who work at Glenraig, the parents who choose to send their children to Glenraig and the pupils who come to learn at Glenraig. Finding out about our own and each other’s backgrounds, faiths and cultures and the similarities and differences that exist. It has been about giving all those folks a voice in how things are done at Glenraig whether through our active Pupil Council; the many different ways in which parents are involved in the daily life of the school; or the numerous questionnaires and audits to explore parent, pupil and staff views on how we’re doing. We are more confident in simply asking questions than we ever would have been before.

As well as examining ourselves it has been about looking out. Finding out about the local and wider community and seeing how we fit into the “big picture” and what contribution we can make. This has involved a plethora of activities that I am not sure we would have explored had we not transformed. We’ve been involved in projects to challenge ageism, disability, poverty and sectarianism. Our children have developed links with peers from local maintained and integrated schools, with children in Dublin, Limerick and Kildare and they have exchanged experiences with pupils in China, Uganda and Sri Lanka.

Transforming to become an integrated school has been as much about HOW we do things. How we treat one another, how we welcome visitors, how we make decisions, how we manage change, how we speak to one another and how we teach. The change has been gradual but very profound. The ethos of our school has been positively transformed and that impacts on all we do.

So what next for Glenraig? We believe we are still on our journey – continually learning and developing. Though we now feel that the time is right to test how we’ve done so far and hope to put ourselves forward to be assessed for the Excellence in Integration Education Award next year. Our plan had been to apply this year however school is about to be a bit disrupted. We are delighted that the SEELB have recognised the need to invest in our school buildings and some major improvements to the fabric of the school are due to start in the New Year and so that is our focus just now. Hopefully when completed we will have a building that celebrates the great work that has gone on and will continue to go on here at Glenraig!