

Mill Strand IPS

Portrush

Mill Strand- 'A dream that has taken wings'

An Integrated School seeks to be:

"A place of hope that a shared future here will be secured in new generations of young people and adults being 'at ease with difference'; a new, cross-community owned institution, open to all; a welcoming and inclusive place where people from different backgrounds, beliefs and cultures can jointly share in the school governance and the teaching and support functions; a school committed to the reconstruction of this society on a shared and mutual basis, having children from the different religious traditions, and none, together as equals; an invitation to everyone to build more new, shared organisations and groups."

Derick Wilson

In the beginning...

In 1986, when Elaine and Alan Smith invited a small group of people to join them to consider the creation of an integrated school in the Triangle Area, many thought they were crazy! The group, amongst others, consisted of : Alan Smith, Marie Elaine Smith, Jim Cavalleros, Stephen Steger-Huey, John Derby, Derick and Dorothy Wilson, Alan McCully, Lesley Marriot, Fiona Stelfox, Hylda Armstrong, William O'Neill and Desmond Lynn.



The group worked tirelessly to secure the purchase of Glenmanus House, Portrush as premises for a school and several of them re-mortgaged their own homes to raise the funds. At that time Integrated Education was a new idea that had developed some support, and a lot of opposition, in Northern Ireland. However there had been much hard work done to establish Lagan College and Hazelwood Primary and Secondary Schools in Belfast and there were several groups, including the group on 'The North Coast', contemplating the creation of new schools in various areas of Northern Ireland. For nearly two years the groups spent several nights a week and many weekends in meetings - arguing and agreeing the values and purposes of an integrated school, within the limits of the education legislation associated with Northern Ireland. The search for funds: locally, in Great Britain and Ireland, in the US and Canada; the local barbecues and events; the drafted, and many times redrafted, papers to establish the legal and administrative structures for the school; were all part and parcel of this effort before the school was ready for lift off.

<http://www.millstrand.co.uk/>



Finding a Name

Other integrated schools had chosen names of local landmarks or areas inspired by their surroundings and nature. The founding group looked around and came up with the name Mill Strand. It was the name of the beach below the school. Choosing the name of a beach was most significant in the creation of the school. A beach is renewed and refreshed daily by the sea. It was hoped that the school would take on board the idea that each new day, when people came back, everyone would begin with a clean sheet and there could be a fresh beginning for everyone who might have got 'entangled' on the day before. This continues to be the ethos of Mill Strand Integrated Primary School to this day.

Trusting One Another

The founding members group then had to make the courageous decision to trust this new Mill Strand School with their own children! This was another major decision-this was putting your money where your mouth was! And being responsible for these teachers and support staff that took the risk of being employed in a school where the future was not guaranteed was a question of trust on all sides too! Integrated schools need to be places where staff, parents and carers, grandparents and governors trust one another.

Staff and pupils on the first day

The school had its official opening in September 1987 with an intake of about 50 pupils. Mr Desmond (Desi) Irwin, a native of Dungiven was appointed as teaching principal, Mrs Grace Doone took Primary 2, 3 and 4, Ms Pauline Henderson taught P.1 until Mrs Wilma Moulden was appointed later as permanent P.1 teacher. A full nursery class was established and taught by Mrs Sally Osbourne (Teacher), with Mrs Norah Nevin as Nursery Assistant. Ms Attracta Walsh was appointed as school secretary. Mr Tom O Kane was appointed Caretaker and minibus-driver and he and Mrs Nevin did a 'bus run' around the towns of Portrush, Coleraine and Portstewart collecting pupils and bringing them to the school. The use of the mini-bus meant that many more children in 'The Triangle Area' could avail of 'integrated education' in those early days.

Dr Hylda Armstrong

One of our early Trustees was the late Dr Hylda Armstrong, a Portballintrae woman who went on to become the World President of Soroptimist International. Hylda's son, Sean Armstrong, was a youth worker who brought children and young people together. Sean lost his life during the "Troubles" in 1973 and a playground in his memory was established at the Corrymeela Centre in Ballycastle. Part of Hylda's drive for Mill Strand was to further honour Sean's work and commitment.

Mill Strand IPS in 2015:

The school has gone from strength to strength and has grown and developed in all areas of school life. We currently have 211 pupils on roll and the future for integrated education in the 'Triangle Area' is very encouraging. Now, after twenty eight years, everyone involved over those years- parents, carers, grandparents, staff and Governors- have all good reason to be proud!