



[Slemish IC]

Ballymena

The Slemish College Journey- an epic adventure!

Slemish College, the province's first planned integrated post primary school lies at the heart of North Antrim. The College opened in response to parental demand for an integrated college in the Ballymena area, at a time of significant sectarian tension in the Harryville area. At the time of opening, community relations in the school's immediate area were at an all-time low, reflected by the Harryville Chapel dispute. In this context, and with significant local skepticism, Slemish College opened. Parents from local integrated nursery and primary schools, wanted a secondary option to ensure integrated education across all phases of their children's schooling. They formed a steering group in 1994, seeking advice and support from NICIE. The steering group surveyed all local post primary schools, encouraging them to transform to integrated status. No school accepted this challenge, leaving the steering group with one option – to establish a new integrated post primary school.

With NICIE support, they approached the Department of Education to acquire funding for the new school. At that time, conditional approval was granted on the basis that 80+ students were recruited for the first intake. This meant that members of the steering group visited local primary schools, spoke with parents, pupils and teachers, arranged public meetings and produced a prospectus. The outcome was that 84 students opted to attend the new Slemish Integrated College. Approval was granted by the Department of Education in mid June 1996. The Principal was appointed in March 1996, and subsequently 7 assistant teachers were appointed in addition to a caretaker and a secretary. Staff meetings were held in teachers' homes, and all furniture and equipment was requisitioned during these meetings. These meetings established an attitude of 'above and beyond' which characterises the workforce at Slemish to this day.



[<http://slemishcollege.org.uk/>]



Governors and all new staff met for a teambuilding weekend in the Marine Hotel, Ballycastle in June 1996. Excellent working relationships were established. A significant outcome was the decision that Slemish College must be built on excellence and innovation in Learning and Teaching. From the outset, all stakeholders were aware of the need to establish an agreed vision for Slemish College. Staff and Governors were focused on the fact that every child matters and all decisions were predicated on that principle. Staff, students, parents and governors were surveyed and a school mission statement written as an outcome of this. In any new organisation, strong visionary leadership is essential. Due to small numbers of staff, from the very outset the Principal recognised the need for distributed leadership. This has been maintained through years of successive growth and expansion.

The College is now proud to have 800 students and 80 members of teaching staff, a reflection of the stoic work that was undertaken to build an excellent reputation of a learning community that truly meets the needs of each and every individual. Over the years Slemish College has received many plaudits including a number of prestigious Pearson Teaching Awards for teaching and leadership whilst in April 2009 it was only the second school in the province to be awarded the designation of being 'Outstanding' by the ETI, acknowledging the high quality education and pastoral care offered by the school. Slemish College continues to go from strength to strength with building work for a new multi-million pound sporting facility to be commenced this year, heralding the exciting times that lie ahead for our young sportsmen and women.

The Slemish community doesn't just stop at the periphery of its catchment area. As result of a passion for humanitarianism, a close bond has formed between Slemish College and Zambia with Habitat For Humanity supporting the College in the building of homes in Africa. Such relationships have allowed the core values of Citizenship, Happiness, Integration, Integrity, Justice, Security and Tolerance to be firmly embedded in the community as students, staff, parents and friends have all shown how much they care for their local and indeed global community, raising tens of thousands of pounds to be used to help others. All this and more has been achieved and it has yet to experience its twentieth birthday.

Surely Slemish College is just at the beginning of a journey – one that is set to become an epic adventure!

