

ULIDIA INTEGRATED COLLEGE



A Brief History

Area Background

East Antrim is the only area of Northern Ireland in which the separate communities of that area have become more polarised since the 'troubles' began. The area contains approximately 8% Roman Catholic population.

An Integrated School

Under the Education Reform Order (NI), 1989 a school wishing to obtain Grant Maintained Integrated status must convince the Department of Education that it can draw a minimum of 30% of its population from the minority tradition of the area it wishes to serve.

Ulidia History

The history of the College begins with the failed attempt to open an integrated college in Carrickfergus, in 1995. Castle Integrated College failed because of massive opposition from interested parties in the East Antrim area. However, the steering group behind Castle Integrated College refused to give up and started planning again for an integrated college in East Antrim.

A proposal for a new college was lodged again with the Department of Education in early 1997. This proposal was for the opening of a brand new integrated college in Whitehead, a few miles north of Carrickfergus. The Department of Education refused the request and financial assistance. Under the guidance of Tom Pennycook, a parent, the steering committee steadfastly refused to give up hope and decided to open the proposed new integrated college, independently, without financial assistance from the Department of Education.

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) was approached in February 1997 for support. NICIE acted for the steering group. Their sister organisation, the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), obtained funding for the college for a period of three months only, with the promise that the IEF would fund-raise for the college to help maintain it throughout its first year.

The steering group, having secured guaranteed funding for three months went about enlisting the necessary 60 students (with a 30% balance from the minority religion), and the recruitment of Principal and Staff.

The college eventually opened on a disused hockey pitch, in Whitehead, on the 1 September 1997, under the leadership of Mr Eugene Martin, an experienced teacher and

manager from Northern Ireland's first integrated school, Lagan College. Ulidia consisted then of six teachers, second-hand temporary accommodation, second-hand furniture and equipment, but first class, quality teachers. It also had its most valuable asset - 63 wonderful students -and religious balance!

A further development proposal was submitted to the Department of Education, but again this was rejected. The Department did not feel that 'such a school in such an area was viable. The college had to survive on its own finances for another year before a new Development Proposal could be submitted.

With additional financial assistance from the IEF, Ulidia Integrated College did survive. Interest in this new integrated college from parents in the area was overwhelming. Yet another Development Proposal was submitted to try and obtain full government funding for the 1998/99 academic year and yet again the Department of Education turned the college down. The Department was 'not convinced about the viability of an integrated college in an area where the minority religion represented only 9% of the population'.

Once again, the college approached the IEF for financial assistance for 1998/99 and once again our friends at both NICIE and the IEF pledged their support. Of course, money had to be found from somewhere!

The college continued independently in 1998/99 with over 130 students and ten staff and, of course, more mobile accommodation. The religious balance was perfect and completely in line with government recommendations - yet the government of the day "was not convinced." The IEF continued to fund the college from their meagre resources and the high quality education that was promised to the students was delivered by the staff.

The now customary Development Proposal was again presented to the Department of Education for the academic year 1999/2000. Given that the College had over 130 students with over 600 students on its waiting lists for the incoming years, everyone at the school was confident that this would be its year.

To everyone's complete astonishment, the College was, for the seventh time, refused funding for the year 1999/2000. Not dismayed, and with morale high, the college again sought help from the IEF and its sponsors and, true to the sincere and genuine nature of that organisation, the college was assured that the IEF would 'go to the wall' before it would cease funding the college. With the help of the American Ireland Fund and the European Peace Project, finance was *found* to allow it to continue in existence for yet another year. It was in this year that the college moved to its present site in Carrickfergus, necessitated by the fact that suitable land could not be *found* in Whitehead to allow for the college's rapid expansion.

In 1999/2000 we had 17 staff and 240 students enrolled, with religious balance, and more temporary accommodation. But the end of the terrible difficulties surrounding Ulidia's insecure future was in sight and with its eighth Development Proposal, submitted to the then new Secretary of State, Dr Mo Molum, in December 1999, the Department of

Education finally capitulated and granted Ulidia Integrated College full funding, effective from September 2000.

The initial journey was over and Ulidia Integrated College finally joined the ranks as Northern Ireland's 44th fully-funded integrated college.

During its time in the wilderness as an independently funded college Ulidia had to suffer three petrol bomb attacks and numerous sectarian incidents directed toward the students. It also experienced two arson attacks, once of which destroyed our library.

However, today the College sits proudly on a hill overlooking the beautiful Belfast Lough. Ulidia can justifiably be proud of its achievements. It proved that we were right in suffering the three long years of hardship, and that the need for an integrated college in such a troubled area was not only needed but essential.

The College is over-subscribed every year with enrolment passing 650 in 2018.

The College has been awarded a new build and hope to break ground in 2019 and be ready in a state of the art new building for September 2021.

The future of the College is now secure and genuine thanks are due to those who stood by the College in its times of need especially the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and the Integrated Education Fund.

For generations to come, the story of the origins of Ulidia Integrated College and its hardships in the face of adverse difficulties, will inspire and enthuse the children of the college and all those who look for a better future for Northern Ireland.

Educating together, Catholics and Protestants, and those of other religions, or none, in an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding, to the highest possible academic standards.