



## Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

**From**  
Rt Hon. Sir Robert Buckland KBE KC MP

Rt Hon. Chris Heaton-Harris MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

**by email only**

23 May 2024

Dear Chris,

In December 2023, my Committee launched an inquiry into integrated education. As you are aware, the Belfast Agreement/Good Friday Agreement identifies integrated education and mixed housing as an “essential aspect of the reconciliation process.” The inquiry examined the growth of the integrated education sector in Northern Ireland since the Belfast Agreement/Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and examined barriers to growth. It also considered the implications of the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

When we launched our inquiry, Northern Ireland had been without functioning political institutions for almost two years. Though we were pleased to see the restoration of the political institutions in February, we decided to complete our inquiry, not least to recognise the time and thought that stakeholders had put into their evidence.

We received and published 54 written submissions and held three oral evidence sessions on our inquiry, culminating in a session with the NI Minister for Education and his officials when we visited Belfast in March 2024. We also published an online survey to gather views from a wider audience. This received 463 responses.

Following the Prime Minister’s announcement of a general election on 4 July 2024 and the prorogation of Parliament on 24 May, my Committee will be unable to report on this inquiry in the usual way. Instead, with Members’ agreement, I write to you with our findings. I will also write to the NI Education Minister, Paul Givan MLA.

Since the Belfast Agreement/Good Friday Agreement, a number of intergovernmental agreements have recognised the value of integrated education in reconciliation. These include the Stormont House Agreement, the Fresh Start Agreement, and the New Decade New Approach Deal. We received evidence from many individuals who shared the positive impact integrated education has had on their lives or those of their children. For them, integrated education is formative, promoting mutual respect and an appreciation of cultural diversity and religious differences.



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The creation of integrated schools has largely been a result of parent-led action. 26 years after the Belfast Agreement/Good Friday Agreement, around 8% of the school population attends integrated schools. In accordance with the provisions of the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 Act, a more strategic approach must be taken by the NI Department of Education. However, this needs to be properly resourced.

As my Committee's report into the funding and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland highlighted, the education sector is struggling to fulfil its statutory duties after years of underfunding. Per-pupil funding in Northern Ireland is £450 per pupil less than that in England, indicating a funding gap of £155m across the school population in 22/23.

I revert to my previous letter of 15 March 2024 regarding Fresh Start funding and integrated education. Thank you for your response of 25 March 2024 where you provided more information about the process relating to the decision to remove the ringfence around Fresh Start funding for integrated education projects. This decision had, however, a profound impact on the families and communities of the schools affected.

My Committee and I underscore the points we heard about the importance of investment in integrated education. At a time when the education system in Northern Ireland faces increased funding pressures, we highlight those calls made for the NI Office to honour its commitment to integrated education by allocating additional funding for integrated education projects previously promised under Fresh Start funding.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Buckland".

**Sir Robert Buckland KBE KC MP**  
Chair, Northern Ireland Affairs Committee