

Anne Odling-Smee CBE

Integrated Education Campaigner

I was invited to join the IEF when I was already a governor at Lagan College and on the Belfast Education and Library Board. I always felt the segregation here was a scandal in a Christian country, and that children could get to know each other without losing their own identity. The IEF's main role was to provide capital funding for new schools until it became available from Government when the school proved viable after three years. We were the protectors of the public purse. Anything else we did was up to our imagination, which I think we used quite well.

Our first task was to assess the task. We commissioned a survey of the demand: where it would be; how much we would need to meet it. The survey showed the need for £50m. In light of the general dearth of capital funds this sum could not be entertained by the Department of Education. But they collaborated on the development of our strategic plan and fundraising aims.

The early years were heavy work - talking to people, gathering people together. We had good supporters but it was slow progress. I remember going to London to a philanthropic organisation and getting £10,000 for free school meals for eligible pupils at an unfunded school. We provided buses to get children to schools, money to set up sixth-forms until the government decided they were worth supporting.

Integrated education is now a credible option, not an alternative lifestyle, but there still aren't the places for everyone who wants it. I'm absolutely convinced that we were right, and of course we faced difficulties and we probably made mistakes, but I think it's been tremendous.

14/20

Anne Odling-Smee was a founder governor of the IEF, serving as chair from 1995-2000. She was awarded the CBE for services to education in 1999.

