

## Denise McBay

Founding Parent, Millennium Integrated Primary School and Blackwater Integrated College

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My partner was on the steering committee for Millennium Integrated Primary School but he was killed in an accident and in his honour I carried on the work; I felt we had to succeed – I never questioned it.

I was naive; I hadn't realised what a struggle it would be. You don't realise the politics involved. We began in one room with toilet facilities in a former Health Service building and we were funded by the IEF. My son was one of the first ten pupils, in 2000. After two years Martin McGuinness became Education Minister and one of his first actions was to lower the criteria for pupil numbers, and we got departmental funding.

The biggest struggle for all new schools is the site and the building. You have to ask prospective parents to trust you; all we had to offer was the integrated ethos. Luckily parents of those first children were very committed. They stayed with us all the way, for seven years.

Then parents from Millennium and Cedar Integrated Primary School realised they needed somewhere for their children to move on to. The campaign for Rowallane Integrated College turned out to be long and difficult. We were back to direct rule by then, and although ministers seemed supportive we were turned down for funding twice. However, the government, I think, realised we weren't going to go away and they could see we were growing. They asked us to look at the idea of a merger. So now we have Blackwater Integrated College, and I'm one of the governors; we are still growing, and still dreaming of a new school building.

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The IEF supported Millennium IPS from its inception, funding its first two years and more recently sourcing money for a sensory room for pupils with special needs.

