

Frances Hughes

Principal, Rowandale Integrated Primary School

I had worked in integrated education before, at Portadown Integrated Primary School, but Rowandale Integrated Primary School is my first headship and my first experience of a brand new school. I was very committed to the integrated ethos and ready for the challenge, but we had no site, no building, nothing – it could be a bit fraught! We opened in portable buildings on a field; we have replaced farmyard noises with the voices of children. We started with 18 pupils and now we have 134 and we're opening a pre-school playgroup this September. The Integrated Education Fund has been with us all the way, finding donors who supplied the money for mobile classrooms, bringing Barry McGuigan along for the official opening – we only had one humble room at that stage but it all made us feel so special and it's something the children always remember and talk about. I was also taken to the House of Lords to tell people about integrated education and our school.

When you start something like this the energy and commitment is incredible. On the first day as the children were brought to school by their families, the sense of excitement in the playground, the buzz, was amazing. Youngsters were running around this tiny square of ground and it was a joyous occasion. Then the parents left; the cars drove away; the children came in and sat down quietly and looked at me standing in front of them in our new school and I realised it was the first day of these children's education – it was all beginning.

9/20

The IEF has supported Rowandale IPS from its inception, including purchasing the site and this year enabling the opening of a new playgroup through the IPIS grants scheme.

