

Dr Olwen Griffith

Principal, Blackwater Integrated College

I had been watching the campaign for Rowallane Integrated College because I was a vice-principal in an integrated college and I thought starting a new school as principal would be exciting. At my first meeting with the governors, we had wonderful plans for lessons, trips and activities....then I drove away and suddenly thought, "We don't have a school. We don't even have a stick of chalk!" We didn't have a building until the August; we opened in September 2006 in a former hospital, with Baroness Blood, the US Consul and the media in attendance. The next St Patrick's Day I found myself in the White House with two students and the following year I took two students to the American Ireland Fund dinner in Boston. It's an amazing thing for twelve year olds to do: stand up in front of hundreds of people and talk about integrated education.

I was watching the young people grow and the school grow. We had two wonderful years relying on the IEF for funding, but then the government made it clear they would not support us and asked us to go and talk to other schools about possible future development. Down Academy had transformed to integrated status in 1998 and all the Governors got together and proposed a merger.

They were two very different schools and it's been a challenging but exciting time. We have improving exam results and we have strong links with Lagan College and Shimna Integrated College. We feel it's our responsibility to reach out to people; thanks to an IEF grant we work with local primary schools; that has given us a firm place in the local community.

6/20

The IEF financed Rowallane IC, later providing support and guidance during the merger with Down Academy to form Blackwater IC.

