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Circular 2020-21 TL038

To: Parents/Guardians of all enrolled students
Cc: Bursar

May 2021

Development Proposal

As you are aware at Blackwater IC we have been working closely with Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), Integrated Education Fund (IEF) and a steering group made up of local people, some of whom are parents and staff at Blackwater IC, in relation to Educational Area Planning.

At present our current site has had very limited investment required to modernise and we believe our students deserve the best education possible in the best facilities possible. We are aware there is very strong parental demand and support for Integrated Education in NI including the Mid Down area and we are convinced that the proposal being put forward will assist in meeting this demand. With our current site not being placed in a site to allow for expansion or any outdoor facilities we are engaging with interested parties to try and create a better alternative for both the students of Blackwater IC and the prospective students of the future who wish to send their child to an 11-18 Integrated Post Primary College.

Working with all interested parties a local steering group have put together a Case for Change which will be sent out by the Education Authority to all locally affected schools on Thursday 6th May and will go forward for public consultation later in May 2021. This process was initially due to take place in 2020 but due to Covid-19 the publication has been delayed. Alongside the Case for Change will be Development Proposals that will include the formation of a new school that will be referred to in the interim as Mid Down Integrated College from September 2023 and also a proposal for the closure of Blackwater Integrated College from September 2023. At this stage, if successful all Blackwater students and staff would transfer across to the new College. The College will be for 11-19 provision and will offer the post 16 provision that is not currently available at Blackwater IC.

What is very important to remember throughout this process is that if the new College is not approved then Blackwater IC will remain as it currently is and continue to exist as an excellent Integrated College serving the local area. The Development Proposal to close Blackwater IC is only relevant if the new College approval is granted.

Any changes will be carefully managed if the proposal is successful and the process may take some time to get approval and become a reality. It is our priority that students currently at Blackwater IC will not be disadvantaged in any way by future developments and they will be provided with additional curriculum opportunities moving forward with the formation of a 6th form.

There may be press and political interest in this project but we know following consultation with parents and interested local parties that the desire is very strong for Integrated Education to grow in the Mid Down area and we believe this proposal will allow that to happen.

As always if you have any questions at all please do not hesitate to contact us directly on 02844612115 or via email at info@blackwateric.downpatrick.ni.sch.uk and we will be happy to answer all queries.

Throughout this process we will continue to keep parents, students and staff fully informed of the proposal and once it goes public we would encourage all parents and students to support the proposal through the consultation process. We will give more details of how to do this when required.

Stephen Taylor
Principal

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