

**STATEMENT FROM THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF LURGAN COLLEGE IN
RELATION TO THE EA CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF CRAIGAVON
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**

The Board of Governors of Lurgan College has discussed and reviewed the EA Consultation document at great length at our recent meetings and we wholeheartedly and unanimously agree with the Headmaster, Mr Robinson, in relation to his educational views regarding the EA's preferred option for the future of Craigavon Senior High School. It was helpful for him to detail so clearly the range of educational issues arising from the decision which the community are being asked to make. As with all parties involved in this decision, we know that a solution has to be found urgently to address the accommodation and financial problems being experienced at Craigavon Senior High and the negative impact this has on the children who attend that school.

We are keen to thank publicly the principals and staff of Craigavon Senior High for the dedication they have shown over many years to the children in the Lurgan campus whilst working under such challenging conditions. The vision and leadership of the new principal, Mrs Ruth Harkness, for the future of Craigavon Senior High, should be very reassuring for any parent with a child currently in the system. The provision, in due course, of a sustainable 14-19 school will provide four years of educational stability in a supportive school setting.

We appreciate that this is a very emotive issue for all parties but, as well as being on the Board of Governors of Lurgan College, we are also parents, grandparents, past pupils and staff with a personal investment in the future educational prospects of **all** our children and we have approached our deliberations with this as our only focus.

The recent headlines regarding the trauma and burn-out caused to thousands of 10/11 year olds doing the AQE transfer tests was a stark reminder to each of us that children (and parents) in Craigavon have been spared this stress since the introduction of the 'Dickson Plan', some 50 years ago with academic selection deferred until age 14. The P6 and P7 years in all primary schools, which are feeders into the Junior High Schools, have been able to experience a broad and varied curriculum, uninterrupted by the additional pressure from parents to support pupils entering AQE tests.

It is important that all children continue to benefit from a seamless Primary to Junior High School education up to age 14 which is the essence of the current system.

The governors considered the 11-16 option over several meetings and we unanimously rejected it for the following reasons:

- An 11-16 school would mean that only some pupils would transfer and the remaining pupils are not afforded a fresh start;
- An 11-16 school in Lurgan with the same intake as Craigavon Senior High at GCSE level could not offer the broad range of subjects that the pupils should have access to. This is the same issue that exists currently in the Lurgan campus;
- If Craigavon Senior High School loses the Lurgan intake it has the real potential to render the school financially and educationally unsustainable, thereby endangering the Dickson Plan;
- Junior High Schools are an integral part of the Dickson Plan and offer pupils a dedicated Key Stage 3 education by experienced staff. Pupils are also afforded opportunities to hold positions of leadership and responsibility at Key Stage 3 not usually possible in an 11-16 school. As governors, parents, past pupils and staff, we greatly value the 11-14 Junior High School ethos and the expertise of the teaching staff and would not want it to be affected in any way.

We have also looked at the educational benefits and opportunities that will arise for Lurgan pupils of Craigavon Senior High on a single site and these have convinced us that this is the best way forward. We understand that transporting Lurgan pupils to the better facilities at the Portadown Campus is controversial but we believe it is in the best educational interests of the pupils.

Our reasons in support of the EA recommendation that Lurgan pupils relocate to better facilities at the Portadown Campus are as follows:

- This option retains the Dickson Plan for all the pupils in the Lurgan area and allows **all** pupils to transfer at age 14 to an appropriate educational pathway.
- Pupils will be offered a wider range of appropriate courses and after-school activities.
- Craigavon Senior High on a single site will be financially and educationally sustainable with 600+ pupils, providing certainty for the future;

- The numbers within a single site Craigavon Senior High will justify the provision of a new build 14-19 school in due course.
- Existing staff at Craigavon Senior High school will be able to operate effectively on a single site from Day 1 to achieve the best possible outcomes for all our children.
- We are extremely conscious of the very real concerns held by parents of the most vulnerable children and would want these addressed with appropriate provision.

The governors would urge the community to carefully consider the points we have made and support the EA's proposal to provide for appropriate educational pathways for **every** child in our community at age 14.