



CCMS
Council for Catholic
Maintained Schools

Independent Review of Education:

A Council Perspective

January 2022

Contents

1. Introduction	5
Context	5-7
2. Executive Summary	8
3. Building a long term vision	9
Strategic focus	9
Ad hoc and short-term approaches to policy formulation and implementation	9
Unwillingness to deviate from England	9
Political support for a diverse education system	10
Dated enabling legislation	10
Nature of where communities are based	10
Transforming education	10-11
4. A single system of education	12
CCMS's role	12
Change	12-13
The ESA model	13-14
5. Challenges and opportunities	15
Diversity of school types – parental and pupil choice	15-16
Faith based education systems	16-17
Diversity in our society	17
Strength in Diversity	17-18
Duplication – Schools / Further Education	18-19
Academic selection – Social disadvantage, disproportionate social mix and impact on non-selective post-primary schools	19-20
Competition between schools	20
Changing demographics	21-22
Communities that value education	22
Extended Schools/Community Use of Schools	22-23
COVID-19	23-24
6. Special Educational Needs	25
Rising demand	25
Rising Costs	25
Accessing Support	25-26
Local Provision	26
7. Valuing achievement	27
Primary school attainment	27
GCSEs	27-28
The gender gap	28

The impact of academic selection	28
Underachievement	28
Academic and vocational parity	29
Academic focus	29
Value of vocational routes	29
Challenges	30
Data development and metrics	31
8. Inspection and school improvement	32-33
9. Investing in People	34
Highly qualified workforce	34
Terms and Conditions – Jordanstown Agreement	34
Teachers’ Pay	35
Pay flexibility	36
Middle management	36
Teaching Principals	36
Refreshing the workforce	36-37
Securing & Developing Effective Leaders	37
The Northern Ireland Substitute Teachers Register - NISTR	37
Flexible Deployment of Teachers	38
Governance	39
10. Finance	40-42
Funding per pupil	43
The school estate – quality, fitness for purpose, sustainability and lack of investment	44
Capital investment	44
Education funding at the heart of Government thinking	44-15
Implement the recommendations made in the past	44-15
Funding that supports the alignment of policies	45-46
Funding everyone equally but adding value to those that need it	46
Establishing the cost of educating a child	46-47
Local Management of Schools (LMS)	47-48
Funding an administration that is fit for purpose and can serve schools’ needs	48
11. Sustainable schools	49
Planning legacy	49
Area planning	49-50
Barriers to progress in area planning	50-51
Jointly-managed schools	51-52
12. CCMS – contributing to improvement	53

Legislative Functions.....	53
The Critical Friend	53
The Challenge Function	54
The School Inspection Process	54
An Advocate for Catholic Education	54
A Multi-disciplinary Approach	54
Raising standards	54-56
Area Planning	57-60
Our people – our most important resource	60
Recruitment	61
Supporting leadership	61
Performance Review and Staff Development scheme (PRSD)	61-62
Flexible Deployment of Teachers	62
NISTR	62
Health and Wellbeing	63
Employee relations	63
School management structures	64
Managing Finances	64-65
The journey continues	65

1. INTRODUCTION

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (the Council) supports the efforts of the review panel. However, in order to give confidence to its work the panel must have high ambitions to bring about change. There is a review weariness within the public service generally and particularly within education. Everyone involved in this review must believe that it can and will change things for the better.

The Council welcomes the opportunity to put forward its view on areas where you requested CCMS insight. These include:

- Our vision for and reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of the current system;
- CCMS's experience of improving standards;
- Our views on
 - our legislative duties;
 - a 'single education system';
 - jointly-managed schools;
 - the ESA model; and
 - how CCMS's role and the delivery of education may be impacted by changing demography, increasing pluralisation/secularisation and results of the next census.

Council has endeavoured to reflect on these areas throughout the submission and CCMS will provide any further information that panel may additionally request.

Context

What is best for our children and young people must be at the heart of all considerations in this review and recommendations for change should focus on how the system can better deliver improved outcomes for all our learners. However, it is an unreasonable expectation that everything can be addressed in one fell swoop. The first challenge for the Review Panel will be to establish the priorities, and within that to never lose sight of the needs of the most vulnerable in our society. The Council starts from the position where we must close the gaps in attainment, always looking to the needs of those most vulnerable.

In reflecting our views we will seek to build on the achievements and successes of the Catholic maintained sector since CCMS was established by the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989.

As an Arm's Length Body of the Department of Education, CCMS's work links directly to the strategic priorities of the Department of Education which are derived from the draft Strategy for Children and Young People and the draft Programme for Government Outcomes Framework (2016 - 2021).

During its 30 plus years of existence, the question arises as to whether CCMS has made a difference to the quality of education provided in Catholic maintained schools. Obviously, the credit for improved educational provision in Catholic maintained schools must go to the Governors, Senior Leadership and teaching staff in Catholic maintained schools. However,

CCMS from an organisational perspective, has made its own valuable contribution which we will outline later in the submission.

The Council wants an education system that is always and in every way, learner-centred: education that is tailored to promote the dignity, self-esteem and full development of each and every young person; and, strengthening all schools' distinctive and positive contribution to building a fair, diverse and just society. We believe education provided by schools that are rooted in a faith-based tradition is inclusive, respectful and welcoming of people of all beliefs, encouraging the development of all in their own faith and promoting listening, mutual understanding, trust, healing, peace and reconciliation.

Catholic schools work alongside home, school and parish communities to support and promote these distinctive values underpinning Catholic education. They reflect a philosophy in the work that staff and governors undertake on behalf of our children, young people and their families. CCMS, alongside Trustees, promotes the unique role that Catholic education plays in contributing to the Common Good and the development of a fair, inclusive and just society.

Catholic schools promote a culture of respect where people of diverse identities are recognised, welcomed, respected and cherished. Through Shared Education projects our schools aim to deliver educational benefits and promote equality of opportunity, and good relations and community cohesion.

We believe that education remains a key lever of supporting change and in improving outcomes that are beneficial to our economy and society. It is with those ambitions ever present that we present our submission with a vision for how education might be changed to make a positive difference for everyone, irrespective of the background they come to this review from.

All in the Catholic maintained sector are committed to working proactively with our partners in education during this time of significant change and challenge. However, challenges also bring opportunities and we are open to change and ready to adapt so that we can respond effectively to what lies ahead and continue to make a positive difference to our children and young people. We will be flexible, constructive and supportive of change to ensure that we provide the best possible future for every child in our shared society.

The Council hopes that this review will enable a culture of excellence in education and that the recommendations will provide for a world-class education system where everyone, whatever their background, has the opportunity to achieve their full potential and live a more fulfilled life. We share the belief with all of our partners in education that we should seek to build on the many strengths of our education system and that the distinctive and positive contribution that our school communities contribute can be harnessed to build a more productive economy.

In approaching this review the Council and the staff of CCMS will:

- Act with concern and sensitivity for the most vulnerable in our society;
- Respect those who learn and work in our schools; those in our school communities; and all of our partners across the education system;

- Take a collaborative approach with the leaders and managers of our schools, with the trustees and with our partners in the education system and be prepared to work in partnership to improve the educational outcomes for young people and to develop more models of collaborative education provision;
- Ensure equity for all who learn and work in our schools and advocate for an equitable distribution of resources across the education system;
- Be inclusive and respectful of diversity;
- Trust, enable and empower leaders, teachers and other professionals to make their own decisions in the best interests of learners and aspire to developing their capacity to deliver the high quality education service we want for everyone; and
- Work in partnership with key stakeholders to improve learning and teaching.

2. Executive Summary

The Council believes that education is a critical component to creating and sustaining a fair and inclusive society and to building a productive, skills based economy. As such, the Northern Ireland education system has a critical role to play in contributing to the realisation of this vision.

Our education system continues to equip our young people with the knowledge and skills they need to make their journey in life. The world in which we live is an ever changing and challenging place. The past two years has demonstrated the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had not just on education but throughout society on a worldwide scale.

Emerging from COVID, or learning to live with COVID will be a challenge for us all. As educators, we need to be cognisant of the impact that COVID has had, not only on children and young people, but on staff and local school communities. Partnership working has been a strong component of the education sector's response to managing COVID. This review provides an opportunity to reflect on how employers, schools and other stakeholders have worked together through a rapidly evolving situation to ensure that children and young people are supported to realise their goals.

In this submission, Council articulates its vision for a high quality education system that is diverse, yet inclusive. This is certainly not an insular perspective, as Council believes that there is a place for faith-based education in any balanced and integrated modern society at peace with itself. This belief not only encapsulates the desire to achieve societal wellbeing, but values the individual learner and supports the Common Good.

Catholic schools continue to enjoy wide spread support and confidence. They make this decision because they wish to see their children educated within an integrated values-led curriculum, which promotes critical thinking within a moral framework that underpins high quality learning and teaching with exceptional levels of pastoral care.

Catholic education and its purpose and contribution to the education system is essential in a functional, pluralistic society. Indeed, Catholic schools have a very positive contribution to make in contributing to a high-achieving, inclusive education system in Northern Ireland.

3. Building a long-term vision

Politicians need to unite around a long-term vision for education.

Strategic focus

The move towards three-year budgets is welcome and politicians need to unite around securing the best financial settlement for education. Years of underinvestment in education, allied to rising costs, have created an education system “on its financial knees”. We need all politicians to work collectively to secure as much additional investment in the shorter term; but to develop a clear strategy to address the systemic underinvestment in schools and the entire education system. This longer-term vision must be shared across the political divide – we need to see party political interests put aside for the collective good of all of our young people who constitute our future communities and who will drive the economy forward.

Strategically, education can be a positive lever supporting cross-departmental outcomes e.g. economic, health and justice strategies. The longer-term focus will give politicians and educators the chance to work in partnership to drive excellence for all who enter our education system.

Ad hoc and short-term approaches to policy formulation and implementation

The rotational nature of government means different political parties may hold the ministerial brief for education. This can make any long-term, coherent, cohesive approach to education policy very challenging, with new ministers free to undo what had been put in place in a previous mandate, before/without any assessment of its efficacy.

Unwillingness to deviate from England

There is evidence from previous education reviews, policy divergence and grading changes across the three-country GCSE/GCE jurisdictions (England, Wales & NI) and the recent challenges of qualification grading in Covid restrictions, of political and system reticence about diverging from policy in England in the qualifications domain. This paralyses Northern Ireland’s ability to design a qualification system that meets the very specific needs of our society and economy. This remains a fear in Northern Ireland despite divergence in Wales and discrete education and qualification systems in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland.

Political support for a diverse education system

The diversity within the Northern Ireland education system is a strength, not a weakness. In terms of moving towards building an inclusive, yet diverse society, education is a powerful tool to bring about this change and realise this vision. An important component of our education system is faith based education. Catholic schools themselves continue to not only improve the life chances of so many young people, but they also facilitate and encourage mutual respect, community cohesion and shared, partnership working.

Dated enabling legislation

Much work in education and understanding of statutory roles is linked back to the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989. This is in need of significant update to reflect the current educational context and in terms of content in relation to governance structures, area planning, consultation mechanisms, transformation protocols, application of the Sustainable Schools Policy across all sectors and limited collaborative strategic options. The system has relied on a series of Judicial Reviews to clarify many aspects in relation to the order's operation and this needs reform. More information is contained in relevant sections throughout this submission.

Nature of where communities are based

The Council appreciates that had it a blank page to plan our schools estate we would be unlikely to design the distribution of schools we currently have. As noted in the section on area planning, we have a historical legacy of small schools dotted across Northern Ireland across a range of sectors. The majority of our most unsustainable schools are located in rural areas. It is much harder to redesign what we have as this is perceived as 'removing' provision or challenging communities to look at cross-sectoral solutions.

It is a challenge for school communities to look at the needs of their area rather than focus on an individual institution. This is also a challenge for our political representatives who, when working with constituency interests, may find it difficult to align with executive agreed education policy. It is important that all stakeholders recognise the challenges the education system faces, the difficult decisions that must be made and the need for coherence behind the agreed policies for improving education in Northern Ireland.

The data on educational underachievement shows that it is not a religious divide that disadvantages our young people most but a socio-economic one.

Disadvantaged communities on all sides of the political divide are those that most need supported to achieve educationally. In any change to the education system, it is vital that all political parties agree a way forward for education that will be allowed to embed with appropriate review irrespective of which party would take on the education ministerial brief.

Transforming education

To transform and improve our education system then its purpose and aspired outcomes need to be agreed across stakeholders, and this agreed vision needs to be upheld as we face the challenges of the future.

Vision: A system that takes a longitudinal and rational approach to policy development

Education is a lifelong process but progress can depend on a positive start on the journey. Planning for education in Northern Ireland should be: research and evidence based; built on international good practice; focused on the specific needs of Northern Ireland; based on a long term vision to meet the future needs of our learners; agreed with cross-party support for the direction of travel to ensure embedding of change and that progress can be made across changing ministerial allocations; monitored longitudinally to support strategic planning in years to come.

The Council wants to see a system that takes a longitudinal, evidence-based and rational approach to policy development that will, in turn, lead to “making change happen”.

4. A single system of education

There has been much discussion regarding what a “single education system” is with a suggestion that this single system will provide the cure for all that is wrong with education and society. A society is reflective of more than just its education system. It is contradictory to argue that our education system does *not* reflect a maturing and diverse society by suggesting that diversity can only be achieved and appreciated if we *remove* the diversity of choice that currently exists. Northern Ireland does have a single education system – but it is a system that has diverse, but inter-connected parts to that system.

We have a system that allows for expression of parental choice and different school ethos and approaches to exist within a single departmentally funded system with a common skills based educational curriculum delivered by all schools. All schools are provided with technological systems and support via a single provider ensuring access for all. All schools are inspected by the same Educational and Training Inspectorate with a common inspection process in place regardless of which sector a school is part of.

The diversity of schools within this system is a strength and this is discussed further in section 5.

Catholic schools are an integral part of this diverse education system. They are inclusive and sit at the centre of communities of learning and are intrinsically linked to a local, national and global community through the network of Catholic education.

CCMS's role

CCMS has a role and responsibilities that are distinct from other organisations, with a particular focus on raising standards within Catholic maintained schools alongside the specific statutory responsibilities outlined in the 1989 Order. CCMS advocates and supports Catholic maintained schools and seeks to lead, empower and influence Catholic maintained schools to provide that distinctive and positive contribution to local communities and to enabling all our young people to reach their potential. CCMS challenges our delivery partners in the Department of Education (DE) and the Education Authority (EA) to ensure the needs of our schools are appropriately met e.g. capital funding, minor works and school improvement.

CCMS works in partnership and collaboration with other education organisations whether that be in working alongside DE, EA and other sectoral partners and as part of the Management Side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee; CCMS leadership and participation in area planning structures; and, in partnership working alongside DE, ETI and EA across a range of educational issues.

Change

The financial implications of any different type of single education system need to be established so that they can be clearly understood. With the same number of children still needing to be educated, this poses the question as to “ how would that reduce the number

of schools, teachers and support services needed?” If all schools were deemed to be of a generic type tomorrow, that would still mean that there are unsustainable schools, an inequity in pupil spend, significant financial challenges and an ageing schools estate all of which would remain to be addressed. If academic selection, which is discussed further later, remained it would require schools of a different type and the likelihood that transport to a further school of that type would be provided. How would a structurally different type of single system improve educational outcomes and prospects for our young people and deal with the challenge of underachievement in Northern Ireland?

The ESA model

The system has seen the challenges faced with the merging of the five Education and Library Boards into the Education Authority. This remains a process of change for EA as it continues its journey of transformation. The establishment of EA has centralised a range of services and has combined educational services alongside the logistics side of education provision – e.g. transport, school maintenance, canteen services. The EA remit ranges from providing milk and meals to managing the admissions process, managing the third level student grant function for the DfE, community use of schools, youth services, provision for Special Educational Needs, being the managing authority for controlled schools and the planning authority with overall responsibility for progression of area planning proposals from all sectors including controlled.

The establishment of EA followed initial plans for establishing ESA, a single education and skills authority and was part of the Review of Public Administration tasked with dealing with the number of public bodies in Northern Ireland. This process was, as titled, a review of administration. Its focus was not a review of what was needed to best deliver for education. Schools were not asked what they needed nor involved in designing the new administrative model that was brought forward. In any future consideration it is crucial to co-design with the education sector what is needed and ask how it would best contribute to a better standard of education serving the needs of all our children and young people.

EA’s budget is stretched and the size of the organisation has added additional challenge to the system in terms of progression of certain areas of work, for example, procurement, area planning, minor works, SEN provision. It could be asked “can EA be the service provider for all sectors whilst being the managing authority for one of those sectors?” Can it fully support school improvement whilst dealing with the challenges of the logistical aspects of its work?

The education system has lost many of the services that provided support to schools many of which were strengths of the system. Subject specific specialist guidance, advice and support is no longer available since the removal of the Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS). The Regional Training Unit (RTU) no longer exists to provide important school leadership development and training opportunities. It should be considered whether we require a different mechanism specifically to support school improvement and teacher/principal development perhaps regaining some of the approaches that previously existed. This could work alongside a different role for the ETI with a different approach to inspections which looks at evaluating learning from best practice for the system as a whole whilst reflecting the context of individual schools.

There are significant challenges in education in Northern Ireland. Many have been well documented in previous reviews of education. Not everything can be addressed immediately. Key priorities must be established for what is needed to improve our education provision to ensure that progress can be made. The focus of any educational change must be on establishing educational priorities that will improve educational outcomes and the life chances and opportunities for all our children and young people. We must look to the needs of the most vulnerable in society and focus on what can be done to deal with underachievement and the attainment gap.

Vision: A high quality education system that is diverse, yet inclusive

Our education system will support the delivery of excellent educational outcomes that improve the life chances of all our children and young people as well as support the growth and sustainability of a strong economy.

5. Challenges and opportunities

Diversity of school types – parental and pupil choice

The current system in Northern Ireland reflects the importance of parental preference and the strength that diversity brings to education. It allows for expression of parental choice and differing school ethos and approaches to exist within a single system.

The Council recognises the key role that parents play in the education of their children. This is demonstrated by the commitment the Council demonstrates to ensuring that parental preferences are respected and that an education system exists which meets the needs of all children. This is based on the following principles:

- a) That parents have the right to express their preference as to the primary school they wish their children to attend (Open Enrolment in Primary Schools. DE Circular: 2016/17).
- b) That parents have a right to expect the government to support schools that have an ethos which is in keeping with their religious or other beliefs.
- c) That parents can express a preference for their child to attend a school that provides an education which is in keeping with their religious or other beliefs.

In addition, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) produced a document entitled “[42 Rights for Children](#)” in which was stated;

“.... your education should help you to develop respect for your parents, for your own cultural background and national values...” (Right 29)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 14 outlines the requirement to

“respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion...and the rights and duties of parents/guardians to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.”

In expressing their preference for schools, parents are increasingly coming to recognise that Catholic schools are both diverse and inclusive and that the Catholic sector in Northern Ireland is part of an Education family that is worldwide. Catholic schools continue to play an important role in building and enhancing local communities and in providing an inclusive education environment that welcomes each young person, irrespective of their background, culture or creed. As society in Northern Ireland is becoming more secular and pluralised, there still remains an important place for faith based education and Catholic schools play a key role in breaking down barriers and division alongside being active contributors to building stronger communities, society and the economy. Parents from all backgrounds – religious, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic – are recognising the value of Catholic education for their children and, in increasing numbers, children from diverse backgrounds are attending Catholic schools.

Catholic schools are and always have been inclusive in the true sense of the word. 44% of primary and 29% of post-primary schools in Northern Ireland are Catholic maintained schools - when added to Catholic managed voluntary grammar figures, the total enrolment of pupils attending Catholic schools equates to 44.7% of the school age population. Places within Catholic schools remain in demand. 53% of all newcomer children attend Catholic schools, arguably making them amongst the most diverse schools in the country. In a diverse culture, Catholic schools are very much valued. The inclusive nature of Catholic education itself supports mutual understanding between those from diverse backgrounds and fosters and builds trust and respect with a common goal of creating a better society for everyone. Catholic schools continue to support peace and reconciliation throughout Northern Ireland and play an important and effective role in building an inclusive and shared future for all.

Catholic schools openly and warmly welcome pupils from other Christian and non-Christian traditions as well as those who do not identify as having any religious faith. It remains an important part of the vision of Catholic schools to work with the families of pupils from other religious traditions and cultures to support the development of their understanding of their own faiths.

The link between families, the school, the local parish and the wider diocesan structures creates a strong bond of community and fellowship that supports all young people to develop, learn and be the best that they can be. Catholic schools are also particularly welcoming to other schools within local learning communities. That community dimension and welcoming environment lies at the heart of the Catholic school. The opportunities provided via shared education partnerships and programmes delivers tangible educational and social benefits to learners in not only the Catholic school but other schools from other sectors.

The Council believes that Catholic schools always have been naturally integrated, catering as they do for children with a wide range of abilities and from diverse backgrounds – religious, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic. They continue to be an important contributor to building peaceful and vibrant communities as well as underpinning the growth of a strong economy.

Faith based education systems

Catholic schools possess a particular ethos central to every aspect of the life and work of the school, in a safe, welcoming and loving environment

They not only strive for standards of excellence by setting high expectations and aspirations, but they also have a long tradition of providing education to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in society and the need for such provision is arguably greater now than ever before.

Catholic schools aim to develop the whole child physically, mentally and spiritually and to provide pupils with a moral compass to navigate their way through the many challenges and dilemmas they will face as they develop into adults. Respect for the importance of human

dignity and worth is instilled in our pupils from the earliest stages of their educational development.

Every child is welcomed and the greatest respect is shown to all, and every effort made to accommodate, those who wish to worship in their own traditions. Pupils in Northern Ireland from all cultures and ethnicities are now found in Catholic schools here and are welcomed and valued.

Many of the pupils entering our schools now present with increasing complex special needs. Many schools have prioritised staff professional development in the area of SEN to ensure that teachers are skilled to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children in our society. The teachers within Catholic schools approach the nurture and care of these pupils with the innate belief that every child should be cherished, protected and supported and that children who face barriers to learning require teachers who value them and are committed to helping them reach their full potential. Given that there has been a steady upward trend in the proportion of children with SEN in Northern Ireland – compounded by the pandemic, Catholic Schools are naturally placed, through the prioritisation of training/in-school support to help shape SEN provision, and remove barriers to learning allowing all children showcase their talents and value to society.

Diversity in our society

As our society develops and changes, the next schools' census may show a decrease in the numbers wishing to identify themselves with a particular religious faith. Council believes that the previous preoccupation on the Catholic / Protestant identity is a legacy of the past and that our schools are well placed to provide for the increasing diversity. In an ever more diverse society we are reminded that all in Northern Ireland have more in common than what divides us.

However, Catholic schools, continue to be chosen by parents because of their inclusive pastoral ethos, excellent leadership and the high quality of education provision. They continue to receive applications from parents across all parts of our communities who want to ensure their children get the highest quality education.

Strength in Diversity

One of the strengths of the Northern Ireland education system is the diversity in terms of choice of school. Catholic schools and schools from other sectors (Controlled, Grammar, Integrated, Irish-Medium) all work together to cultivate an education system that enables young people to be facilitated and supported to fulfil their potential. Indeed, right across the education sector, we continue to see the positive changes that many governors, principals, staff, children and young people are building through shared education programmes and partnerships. All of our schools in Northern Ireland have a vital role to play in breaking down barriers, ending divisions and in promoting a unified, shared society. In progressing this vision, Catholic schools have been at the forefront in building these partnerships with schools from other sectors.

It is therefore very concerning that the draft Integrated Education Bill, having recently progressed through the Consideration Stage in the Assembly, will effectively create a two tiered education system in Northern Ireland, prioritising integrated education and effectively integrated schools above all other schools. Notwithstanding the significant absence of meaningful consultation prior to the development of the draft Bill, the timing of this legislation is problematic. Given the significance of the independent Review of Education, Council firmly believes that it is appropriate that future models of educational provision are examined through this review process. This is what political parties agreed within the New Decade New Approach Agreement in January 2020. It is unhelpful therefore for such a draft Bill to be progressed into legislation given the significant support for the independent review, and in advance of the review panel completing its work and making its recommendations.

The out-workings of this draft Bill and its consequences on the entire education system are far reaching. In creating this two tiered education system, this Bill would in effect create a more unequal system. It would provide strategic support and advantage to integrated education (and integrated schools) which simply do not apply to other sectors.

There will also be consequences on CCMS as an Employing and Managing Authority with regards to the Integrated Education Bill viz a viz the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989. Further examination will be required to analyse the impact and effect of any new legislation with regards to CCMS's statutory duties.

Catholic schools have been at the forefront of tackling disadvantage and in healing the divisions of our society. They do this by positively engaging with all schools within local communities to encourage peace, partnership working and understanding. This is strengthened by the underlying philosophy and ethos of Catholic education in promoting the core message of respect for diversity and inclusion throughout our society. Schools do not need to have the designation "integrated" in order to progress these ideals.

Vision: Diversity of school types – Including Catholic / other faith based / integrated schools – A place for faith based schools

Diversity is a strength within the Northern Ireland education system. The Council recognises the right of different sectors to exist within our system, and for the rights of parents to be able to articulate a preference for a particular school within a particular sector. This right to exist within an increasingly pluralist and secular society must also be afforded to faith based education.

Duplication – Schools / Further Education

Competition in our education system for students and funding, outcomes focused accountability metrics, and a 14-19 policy which is split across two government Departments (Education and Economy) are all encouraging duplication in the 14-19 space.

14-19 learning is fragmented with a proliferation of qualifications of different types and size, from a range of providers. Schools are now delivering qualifications that were once the

domain of Further Education colleges – hairdressing, plumbing, joinery, catering, etc. Further Education colleges are offering GCSEs and A levels.

The Entitlement Framework (EF) policy was introduced to ensure a breadth of general and applied qualification offer in schools with a view to encouraging collaboration and sharing with colleges, and neighbouring schools through Area Learning Communities. This has not been the longer-term outworking of the EF policy. Rather individual institutions are striving to provide the full curricular offer in-house.

This area needs significant review to reduce the number of qualifications available and ensure that those offered in NI are of value to our young people in terms of the learning and skills gained and the progression offered. Consideration is also needed as to what type of institution provides the best, most appropriate learning experience for the young person and where different qualification types are most appropriately resourced and provided. This is more challenging in areas with fewer educational providers.

The current model has an impact on young people's choices at age 16 with some routes perceived as 'better' than others despite all offering valuable progression routes and some being more appropriate to suit varying types of learners. Higher Education also has an important role to play in delivering the best possible education to our young people.

An agreed policy approach across schools, FE and HE is required to reduce the current duplication of provision at all levels. This is discussed further in section 9 and is an area where a cohesive approach is required to best support all learners.

Academic selection – Social disadvantage, disproportionate social mix and impact on non-selective post-primary schools

The system of education in Northern Ireland is rightly diverse yet within the diversity there is a core of inequality, impacting disproportionately on non-selective schools.

At primary level, access to education is provided across all sectors on an equitable basis. However, at post-primary level there is a systemic inequality whereby access to the majority of grammar schools is by way of academic selection which impacts negatively on other schools at both primary and post-primary. At primary level the continuation of a high stakes test at 11 impacts disproportionately on the teaching of the statutory curriculum and in terms of children feeling the label of 'failure.'

Economic disadvantage in terms of free school meal entitlement differs significantly by school type. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals are under-represented in grammar schools. Grammar schools (13.7%) and pre-school settings (22.1%) have the lowest proportions of free school meal entitled pupils, whereas non-grammar (37.1%) and special (50.9%) have the highest. This level of inequality is inappropriate educationally in that it reduces diversity in schools (DENI Census 2020/21).

The higher concentration of disadvantaged pupils in non-selective schools has a significant impact on curricular offer and academic outcomes, as well as on other contributing factors

such as school attendance. In addition, the high results among the top performers in NI masks a long tail of underachievement. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that the selective system presents “clear structural challenges to equity.”

The Department of Education published research into the effects of the Selection System in Northern Ireland in September 2000. Whilst there have been changes since, this research by Gallagher and Smith identified several strengths and weaknesses in the selective system which remain. Key concerns were:

- i. The intensive focused teaching and learning arising from test preparation does not provide primary school pupils with the full entitlement of the common curriculum.
- ii. The test’s very negative impact on many children.
- iii. The clear link between social disadvantage and lower rates of participation in grammar schools.
- iv. The benefit of attending a grammar school, in that it adds almost 16 GCSE points to a pupil’s achievement at age sixteen.

(Gallagher and Smith, The Effects of the Selective System of Secondary Education in Northern Ireland Department of Education, September 2000).

The NEU published response to the panel states that academic selection at aged 10/11 is an unnecessary fault-line in our schooling system. The expansion of grammar schooling to around 46% of the post-primary level cohort places unfair pressures on other post-primary schools. The original intent of grammar schools was to focus on the top 25% of primary school pupils as determined by test at 10/11.

Competition between schools

Competition between schools does not support a collaborative approach to education and challenges the philosophy that young people should be able to attend their local school, which will provide high quality education, no matter where they live. This has particular impact on non-selective post-primary schools in a population decline.

Selective schools will rank order, in some way, applications depending on achievement in a transfer test. With over-subscribed schools required to admit up to their admissions number, selective schools apply their admissions criteria in relation to the transfer test rank order whether that achievement is lower (or higher) than previous years. In a time of demographic decline over-subscribed schools will fill their enrolment and this can result in significant challenges for many non-selective schools in terms of enrolment, finance, staffing, curricular offer and special needs numbers. Every time the percentage of children entering grammar schools rises, that equates to a significant drop in income for non-selective schools, leading to increasing deficits.

Changing demographics

There is a population decline forecast across a number of areas in Northern Ireland over the next 20 years. The population decline and falling enrolments impact most severely on non-selective schools due to the requirement that selective schools apply admissions criteria to the point of meeting their approved enrolments. The absorption of decreases in enrolment due to declining birth rates results in non-selective schools being impacted disproportionately, during any period of sustained population drop. Between 2002 and 2017 the population of pupils in post-primary schools dropped by 10%, 15,202 pupils. This drop in numbers was absorbed totally by non-selective schools and during that period 34 non-selective schools were closed.

At a time of huge financial pressure, such a diversion of funds from the non-selective sector destabilises those schools and potentially heightens the risk of staffing reduction in non-selective schools. Falling enrolments will also impact on cohort range, curricular offer, and finances.

It needs to be considered how the system as a whole should flex at a time of demographic decline to ensure non-selective schools are not impacted disproportionately. When demographics decline, schools do not have their admissions numbers reduced and oversubscribed schools continue to benefit, to the disadvantage of undersubscribed schools who bear the brunt of any demographic downturn. There are a few oversubscribed schools that are not academically selective, however, a high proportion of oversubscribed schools do use academic selection.

If a percentage decline is anticipated this population data should be factored into approved admissions numbers and should be reflected in consideration of temporary variation requests to mitigate against over-subscription having a negative impact on the wider system and disadvantaging non-selective schools.

DE Guidance to Schools on the process of Transfer from Primary to Post-Primary school (September 2016) recommends that Boards of Governors of post-primary schools draw up their admissions criteria from a menu of recommended criteria. The Council subscribes to the Department's guidance on this matter.

However it is clear that some grammar schools recruit from an extraordinary wider geographical area. The Council believes that all children have a right to access the highest quality of education, irrespective of which school they attend. Consequently, admissions criteria used by all post-primary schools should be fair and give each child the opportunity to reach his/her full potential.

The Council recognises that academic selection is a very contentious issue and has stated its opposition to the continuance of academic selection. While it recognises that parents may wish to choose academic selection, it works collaboratively with the Catholic voluntary sector to find creative and imaginative post-primary area planning solutions and to ensure

access for all pupils to the full Entitlement Framework in the post-primary phase. This has resulted in area-based solutions creating all ability schools in Armagh, Carnlough, Coleraine and Strabane.

While the academic selection debate continues, and with an impending population decline, the Council again argues that all post-primary schools should be adequately funded so that high-quality education is accessible to all children and calls for an agile approach to spreading the impact of falling population across post-primary provision is established.

Vision: Reduce competition and ensure no child gets left behind

All pupils should be attending well-staffed, well-equipped, sustainable schools delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. Our vision is for all young people to be enabled to meet their potential through access to a high quality education irrespective of location, socio-economic background, ability, gender, etc.

We want to see a system that does not have our children and young people negatively labelled at 11 or 16 due to exam performance nor has our education providers competing for children. We hope for a cohesive 14-19 educational landscape. We want each young person to go to their local school that is supported to be a high quality performing and sustainable school and we envision local educational providers working effectively and collaboratively within their area learning communities to reduce duplication of offer and competition.

Communities that value education

The value placed on education is not universal across our society. There are historical challenges due to varying attitudes to education over the decades, e.g. in areas with previously 'guaranteed' work in local factories where earlier generations left school at a younger age to take up employment. The removal of many of the large historical employers has left communities where generations had not stayed on in school needing to find alternative routes of progression and this has had a legacy impact on achievement. Likewise, there are areas of disadvantage where parents did not have a positive educational journey and this can have impact on their children's educational progression.

Conversely it can be shown that where communities value education, with parental and community support and motivation, this produces positive results.

Extended Schools/Community Use of Schools

Schools need to be viewed as much more than a school building and should be strongly linked back to the parish and community with schools embracing extended schools and outreach opportunities. Schools contribute so much more to children, communities and the wider society than just education. Many schools provide counselling services for pupils, provide wrap around care for pupils that assist parents with childcare arrangements and run

parenting support courses. Schools are often key players in support provision for children and families involved with Social Services – schools are often the single consistent player in social service involvement with children.

Many schools have a range of educational, recreational, and sporting facilities which can be used to meet a variety of needs not only for pupils, but for their parents, families and local communities. This can be facilitated after school hours and during holiday periods when school facilities would often lie idle.

The Council believes that the school is a central part of the community it serves and that community, parental and family involvement in schools brings a range of benefits and can have a positive impact on the educational achievement of children and young people. Many of our schools are the hub of the community, providing not just a physical resource for community use, but also acting as the lynch pin that binds the community together. CCMS is therefore committed to assisting its schools in developing stronger links with the communities they serve.

The strength of the relationship between schools and their local communities is an important element in building the wider education fabric. Parents, pupils and community members are key parts of a community of learners. Catholic schools have always been rooted in their local community – that relationship between the home, the parish and the school still remains strong today and is an important element in Catholic schools delivering high quality education alongside developing and maintaining the local relationships – where local communities take pride and show passion in their local school.

Vision: Schools that are rooted in and support our local communities / SEN / EAL Children / CLA / SS & Welfare, contributing to the fabric of society

Catholic education is rooted in the local community and the local parish. It is also outreaching in terms of building relationships with other schools from different sectors at a local level e.g. shared education.

The Council wants to see education valued by all as a means to equipping young people with the skills, attitudes and values to become confident, capable, critical and discerning thinkers who are ready to shape society and contribute to the Common Good.

Covid 19

Whilst the impact on children's learning resulting from the pandemic is not fully known, there has to be a recognition that the disruption to learning as a result of lockdowns, and the continued impact of children and staff being out of school due to illness and self-isolation, is a reality. In the longer term, a balance needs to be struck between continuing with a recovery curriculum that supports children to close any gaps that may exist in their learning,

whilst also providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge needed as they move through their educational journey. There will need to be a longer-term strategy put in place to address the various, increasingly complex needs arising from this disruption, that are becoming clearer as children return to school. This strategy will need to address not just educational 'catchup,' but also provide structured, funded supports for children's well-being and mental health and staff well-being and mental health.

There have been many challenges arising from Covid for the education sector, but there have also been incidental learnings that could shape future good practice in schools. The most obvious here are in terms of Information Technology and its uses in schools. It will be important that moving forward, the wider education sector identifies those positives and that they are appropriately embedded and resourced in schools.

6. Special Educational Needs

Rising demand

Repeated reports by a variety of bodies such as the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), CCMS and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) continually highlight the increasing numbers of pupils with varying degrees of SEN and/or disability in schools. The NIAO report of 2019-20 indicates a 36% increase in children with a statement over the previous 9 years. The same report highlights the fact that 5.5% of the school population have a statement whilst the Department of Education anticipates that the figure should only be 2%. The continual rise in numbers brings with it many challenges to the effectiveness and quality of the provision that can be put in place to support those children with SEN. The NICCY Report, 'Too Little Too Late', March 2020) made the following comment, 'The review found a system under extreme pressure.'

Rising Costs

The rising expenditure associated with SEN provision is not sustainable moving forward. The 2019-20 NIAO report identifies an expenditure of £320m on SEN. £95m of that expenditure is on provision of Classroom and General Assistants. Significant questions exist around the lack of measures regarding the effectiveness of the provisions being put in place in schools particularly considering the huge financial commitment in place to support those measures. Given the figures involved, it is surprising that schools report a lack of funding to meet the needs of all of the children with SEN. Due to industrial action in schools, and then the impact of Covid, on inspection processes, ETI have been unable for a number of years, to effectively review best practice in terms of SEN provision in schools. This limits both sharing of good practice and identification of improvements that could be made to overall provision. As a result, it is very difficult to demonstrate value for money and that children with SEN are receiving the help and support they deserve.

Accessing Support

The difficulties in accessing pupil support services is regularly highlighted as a block to early intervention and appropriate and timely intervention of much needed supports for pupils with SEN. Already long waiting lists to access diagnostic services have been further increased due to Covid restrictions on services. It is clear from the length of waiting lists that demand outweighs supply. The inability of the Education Authority to meet the 26-week statutory assessment timeframe is widely known. In 2019-20, 85% of all assessments exceeded the 26-week statutory timeframe (NIAO Report 2019-20). It is very clear that there needs to be a significant review of processes and procedures relating to the statutory assessment process. The high level of bureaucracy involved in the process of accessing special provision, or the statutory assessment process, is a barrier to prompt supports being put in place for children. Often, schools report that delays in accessing diagnosis and appropriate supports mean that the school is left trying to meet children's needs without the necessary

external supports the individual child requires. These, and many other issues, have been recognised by the EA and they are actively addressing these issues in partnership with other external bodies such as DE, CCMS, ETI, etc through the SEND Programme Board. It is hoped that this ongoing review and associated actions will bring about improvements within the system and for all concerned. In moving forward SMART targets need to be set that will bring about measurable improvement in set timescales.

Given the increasingly complex conditions that pupils are presenting with in mainstream settings, schools report limited access to specialist training for existing staff and the difficulties in employing specialist staff who can meet the needs of those particular children. The role of SENCo in the school setting is increasingly complex. It attracts a very significant workload, which presents challenges in many school settings where the SENCo may well have a full-time teaching role in addition to their SENCo duties. Teachers report increasing amounts of time are being spent dealing with SEN issues in class which may then have a detrimental impact on the efficient discharge of education to the whole class.

Local Provision

There are a wide range of school-based issues that present difficulties for pupils and staff alike. The CCMS report, A Call for Change: [A Call for Change meeting the needs of pupils with SEN](#) identified issues such as the quality and physical condition of accommodation for children with SEN in some schools. In many cases, this was described as, 'inappropriate and in need of urgent review.' It also highlighted that access to specialist provision for some children means travelling long distances. There is an increasing number of Learning Support Units being attached to schools. However, many of those are added on to existing school buildings or making use of available spaces, often not in easily accessible areas of the school.

Vision: Delivering on previous SEN commitments

Unfortunately, the most recent reports are regularly highlighting issues that have been identified and raised on previous occasions. The fact that they have not been addressed is of major concern. Given the increasingly finite financial resource that will be available to SEN provision, it is of the utmost importance that these issues are addressed to ensure children are receiving the support they deserve and equity with children who do not have identified special educational needs. Children need delivery on the recommendations that a variety of reports have previously made, to ensure fit for purpose SEN provision is in place.

7. Valuing Achievement

It has long been recognised that educational attainment in Northern Ireland is a contrasting mixture of excellent performance by some pupils at GCSE and A-Level whilst there continues to be an unacceptable level of educational underachievement for others. This issue was identified in the Fair Start Report (2021) where they stated, 'Good results can mask underachievement in schools.'

Primary school attainment

The lack of a consistent set of measures for use by primary schools means that there is very little data available regarding pupil attainment at the end of their primary school education. Due to industrial action, the majority of primary schools no longer report on end of Key Stage levels. The participation of some schools in certain international studies demonstrates that NI pupils aged 9-10 (P6) consistently perform well in terms of comparative outcomes in Maths and Science (TIMMS) and PIRLS (Literacy).

The outcomes from TIMMS 2019 show that NI pupils significantly outperformed 51 of the 58 countries who participated in the study in Maths (consistent with previous year's position). Performance of these pupils was only significantly outperformed by 5 of the other countries. In Science, only 18 countries outperformed pupils in NI. In the most recently available outcomes from PIRLS (2016), Northern Ireland pupils significantly outperformed pupils in 41 of 49 of the other participating countries. These 2016 results demonstrated a consistent level of performance from the previous testing cycle (cycle of testing is every 5 years.). It is of interest that there is a gender equality in TIMMS performance outcomes in NI, but a gender imbalance in PIRLS performance where girls perform better. Primary school practitioners often reflect on the fact that TIMMS and PIRLS testing occurs at a time in Primary Six when many primary school pupils are involved in preparation for transfer tests. Often this preparation involves a very specific shifting of the curriculum to focus on Numeracy and Literacy learning and teaching. There is no research to show whether the strong outcomes are influenced by the nature of pupil's experiences in school at that time and whether that is positively skewing the level of performance of NI pupils.

GCSEs

Outcomes of GCSEs provide consistent comparative data that continues to highlight underachievement and a gap in performance between groups of pupils in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report, "Closing the Gap", May 2021, indicated that whilst performance of all pupils had improved in recent years, 'the attainment gap between non-Free School Meals Entitlement (FSME) and FSME pupils increase as they progress through compulsory education.' The same report states that, 'there is a consistent gap in examination performance at age 16 between non-FSME pupils and FSME pupils.' Data presented within this report shows that in 2018-19 academic year, 49.5% of school leavers with FSME achieve at least 5 GCSE's, A*-C/or equivalent, including GCSEs in English and Maths compared to a target of 60%. Furthermore, in the same school year,

there is a 29 percentage points gap in attainment between non-FSME and FSME school leavers as measured by the proportion of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (or equivalent) including GCSEs in English and Maths. Of concern is that the gap for the same measure in the academic year 2005-06 was 32.1 percentage points. After significant financial input (£913m between 2005-06 and 2019-20) to support Targeting Social Need (TSN) alongside other additional interventions, e.g. Extended Schools Funding, there has not been a significant reduction in the attainment gap. The NIAO report refers to the fact that schools were not required to spend TSN funding solely on supporting pupils in their school from socially deprived areas. This begs the question if the funding is being directed to those most in need? The return of an investment at this level is remarkably poor.

The gender gap

There is also gender difference in performance in Northern Ireland, with girls outperforming boys. Underperformance of Protestant working class boys in comparison to other groups, highlighted in the Fair Start Report and many other pieces of research, has been recognised for many years. Importantly, the Fair Start Report, whilst highlighting the fact that Protestant FSME boys not achieving 5+ A*-C including English and Maths is higher than the percentage of Catholic boys, references that underperformance by working class boys is evident in all communities.

The impact of academic selection

The influence of the transfer test and academic selection has been consistently identified as contributing to the gap in performance and attainment for some pupils. There is a well-established link to progression to selective schools being significantly higher for children not in receipt of FSME. The NISRA School Meals in Northern Ireland 2020-21 Statistical Bulletin indicated that only 13.7% of pupils attending grammar schools had FSME. This compares to 37.1% of pupils in non-grammar post-primary schools, 28.5% of pupils in primary and preparatory settings and 35.4% of pupils in nursery settings.

Underachievement

The increasing improvement in performance by all pupils and the work being done in our schools needs to be recognised and celebrated whilst keeping in mind the need to address the tail of underachievement that exists. We need to support all our young people, especially those most disadvantaged so that no child is left behind. We also need to provide the appropriate funding to meet the needs of all our children, with additional targeted funding for those with specific need that helps to bring about change.

Vision: Outcomes that prepare children for adulthood, society and the economy and that respond to changing needs and advances in technology.

We need to support all our young people, especially those most disadvantaged, so that no child is left behind. We also need to provide the appropriate funding to meet the needs of all our children, with additional targeted funding for those with specific need.

If schools are to prepare our children to allow them to contribute positively to the future economy and workplace then they need to be places of learning that can respond to changing skillsets, needs and technological advances. In our ever changing world, our education system needs to be learner-centric, developing each child's unique potential and preparing children for life. Teachers and schools will need to be fully resourced to allow that flexibility and evolution of learning to take place.

Academic and vocational parity

Academic focus

Our current system is very focused on academic achievement, with system metrics based on A*-C achievement in GCSE/GCEs or equivalents. Qualifications outcomes/metrics are used as a proxy to measure all aspects of the education system – performance of teachers, performance of schools, league tables, school comparisons, ETI findings, regional system comparisons, etc. None of these were envisioned as uses for the qualifications when introduced 35 and 70 years ago. Their use now for these purposes can cause perverse behaviours in the system where the focus is on the measured outcome rather than what qualification is best for the individual learner's needs and progression.

The current system takes no account of the different starting points across our range of learners and the value added by their schools which we refer to throughout the submission. It measures endpoint outcomes only. Due to the system reporting focusing on metrics of A*-C this suggests to learners and stakeholders that grades below a C are not of value to a learner despite the progression they may demonstrate. This is despite the awarding process for general qualifications, with the achievement bell curve, meaning that across a cohort the full range of grades will be awarded and therefore there will always be those achieving grades below a C. It would be reasonable to assume that was the general qualification (GQ) attainment to get to the stage where 100% were achieving grades C or above this grade would also be devalued.

Value of vocational routes

Vocational qualifications (VQs), most of which have a competency-based assessment model and reward achievement at levels 1, 2 and 3 are not equally valued despite the valuable learning pathways they provide. There remains limited understanding outside the school system how Level 1 and 2 outcomes map on to GCSE attainment, which can mean parental reluctance for young people to choose routes other than GCSEs and A levels that could provide excellent progression opportunities.

Challenges

We need to query what achievement currently means in NI. With the focus on exam achievement at GCSE/ A level or equivalents and our system metrics, we have students leaving school after 12/14 years of full-time education perceived as (and believing themselves to be) failures.

There is a disconnect between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 in that we have a skills based statutory curriculum, however, when students reach year 11 the focus becomes one of exam and qualification preparation.

There is a tension between qualifications and skills. The concern as to whether a particular skill can be measured often drives qualification design more than what the student needs to be able to actually do having completed a course of study. Whilst this may make a qualification more robust from a learning perspective it can make it less valid in terms of the learning and skills assessed being those most appropriate.

International education systems show the value of a strong vocational pathway and learning from countries where this is the case needs to inform the findings of the Review.

NI needs to consider what we see as the actual purpose of education and, following that, of our qualifications here. What do we need the system to do to best provide for our learners and our economy? What does a quality education system look like? What are our goals for education here reflecting the opportunities and challenges ahead? What ways can this be achieved based on international best practice so as to design a system based on learning from other jurisdictions and meeting the specific needs of NI.

Vision: A system where all levels, progression routes and types of achievement are valued and understood.

Our vision is a system where all levels and types of achievement are understood and valued, where the focus on the endpoint outcome is removed and the value-added by a school is recognised, where the efforts the learner took on their journey are rewarded and appreciated, and where different routes through education vocational/ academic/ combination are equally valued as important positive progression routes to continuing learning or employment.

We hope to see the DE and DfE work on a 14-19 Framework approved and embedded to transform the 14-19 landscape. This however needs to be supported by a review of our qualifications offer and a change to the education system metrics to incorporate a more holistic approach to recognising progress and achievement.

Data development and metrics

There is a need to develop a mechanism to gather system wide longitudinal data to track children through their educational journey

The first point at which the education system in NI has cross-cohort, external, independent data on educational outcomes is at 16. Schools individually have a wealth of data which they use to inform their planning and curricular offer but this is not available to the system as a whole. Therefore, DE has no longitudinal data that can be interrogated to review our different educational phases, progress made, value-added or upon which to formulate evidence-based educational policy

As noted in the section on inspection, this process at post-primary often returns to 'measurable' outcomes, i.e. qualification results, which do not always evidence the value added and the significant impact of a school on the pupil's educational progression in other ways. As this is the only data available system-wide it becomes the focus, missing the progress made.

Vision: A holistic and inclusive approach to metrics & measurements with recognition of value added that drives policy development

There is a need to establish a basket of measures that recognises and rewards a range of achievement, with accountability measures that are broader, more holistic, provide valid system information on value-added rather than on the endpoint and do not infer there is good and bad achievement. Some of the detailed information that is held in individual schools needs to be incorporated into a central repository that can be used to track the learner journey so as to provide a valid and robust basis on which to formulate educational policy.

8. Inspection and school improvement

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has a statutory duty to monitor, inspect and report on the standard of education and the professional practice of teachers under Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. One of the key roles of the ETI is to promote the highest possible standards of leadership, learning and teaching, in our pre-school, nursery, primary and post-primary schools. Alongside this, the ETI promotes the dissemination of good and innovative practice identified across the education sector, through inspection and evaluative work. In addition, ETI have a vital role to play in the monitoring of safeguarding practices in educational settings. Whilst inspections may be challenging for schools, there is an acceptance that the roles identified above are important in terms of ensuring the highest possible learning experiences for all our children.

Due to lengthy industrial action, including action short of strike (ASOS), and now the ongoing impact of Covid, the usual inspection cycle has been hugely impacted upon. During that period of ASOS, the vast majority of schools have only engaged with ETI in terms of inspection of safeguarding arrangements. As a result, a significant amount of schools have not had a full inspection for many years. In such instances, inspection findings report that no comment can be made on the educational provision in the school or on the school's ability to self-evaluate for improvement. In terms of measurable outcomes, there is now limited external, independent evidence to comment on the quality of education in a significant majority of educational settings in Northern Ireland. The Chief Inspector's Report, November 2016, stated that in the period 2014-2016, 84% of pre-school settings, 79% of primary schools and 86% of post-primary schools inspected had either high level capacity or have capacity to identify and bring about improvement. Given the circumstances mentioned above it is extremely unlikely that such definitive data is currently available about schools.

In addition, it is unclear how this lengthy backlog of inspections will be addressed. It is clear that there needs to be a rebuilding of working relationships between ETI and the various educational sectors. A further impact of the above set of circumstances is that many of our school leaders appointed in the last four to five years, and many of our teaching staff have never experienced an inspection.

ETI have been sensitive to many of the potential impacts that ASOS had on school development planning processes and staff and curriculum development, but their duty to inspect remains in place. The pausing of the normal inspection routines during Covid is further evidence of the awareness ETI have about the environment and experiences schools are dealing with. In the first term of the 2021/22 academic year, a limited number of Monitoring Inspections and a small number of Follow Up inspections have taken place. District Inspectors have also been carrying out pastoral visits to schools and ETI have been engaged in evaluation of programmes such as the Engage Programme.

ETI have also launched several potentially impactful engagements with schools, notably the 'Empowering Improvement Programme' and a consultation with stakeholders to shape the nature of future inspection processes. The Empowering Improvement Programme is specifically aimed at middle leadership in schools with the focus of developing middle

leaders' skills in terms of self-evaluation of provision leading to school improvement. In the absence of professional development opportunities for teachers through the reduction in services such as Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS), this programme has great potential. One of the possible weaknesses of our inspection process is that significant time can elapse between formal inspections in individual schools. If excellent practice in self-evaluation can be embedded in schools there is a much greater chance that regular review of the quality of learning and teaching in each school will happen naturally, not just in line with the inspection cycle. By December 2021, ETI indicated that they have had expressions of interest in participating in this programme from 917 settings.

Stakeholder engagement to shape future inspection processes has been well received by schools. ETI report that by December 2021, 500 schools have expressed interest in engaging in the consultation.

CCMS has always fully supported the Education & Training Inspectorate in these roles and encourages schools to engage fully in the inspection process, to see a school inspection as an opportunity for the school to be evaluated by an independent, critical friend.

CCMS maintains healthy, working relationships with ETI and is always eager and willing to contribute constructively to any initiatives designed to bring about school improvement, improve the inspection process and the relationships which exist between ETI and schools.

Vision: A different way of inspecting schools

The inspection processes should reflect the context of individual schools and that a one size fits all approach is not an appropriate way to measure the impact that individual schools are having on their pupils. Schools would see it as a positive if inspection processes measured the value that has been added by the individual school, reflecting the initial baseline of pupils entering each individual school setting.

9. Investing in people

Highly qualified workforce

In Northern Ireland 75% of pupils are taught in a school where the school leader has completed a post graduate qualification; the international average is 54%. We have a highly qualified workforce which enables 85% of pupils to be taught Maths and Science by a teacher with a degree qualification when the international average is 56%. We have a steady supply of enthusiastic aspiring teachers in Initial Teacher Training that is the envy of many other jurisdictions and we have little if any recruitment and retention challenges.

However, whilst improving since the pay deal of January 2020, we have a profession that could be characterised as disenchanted and feeling undervalued. Our teachers are our most precious resource and the profession holds the key to delivering much of the system change that is required.

This review must aspire to addressing the conditions that led to over 10 years of industrial action and the loss of professional development and confidence. We must ask ourselves, why, when we have such highly qualified leaders and teachers, we do not trust them to think for themselves and make the decisions they need to make for the children in front of them.

Terms and Conditions – Jordanstown Agreement

We have Terms and Conditions of Employment that are almost 40 years old. They speak to teaching as it was prior to 1986 and certainly before the innovations flowing from and since the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989. The role of the teacher has evolved and the nature of the job is now very different, yet teachers' Terms and Conditions have failed to keep pace. We have an unwieldy negotiating machinery, of which the employers are a part, which is reluctant and slow to embrace change.

We need an earnest and honest review of the 'Jordanstown Agreement' with an ambition to new Terms and Conditions that are capable of addressing the needs of a modern curriculum, provide more flexible working patterns and deliver a work life balance that gives teachers fulfilment and job satisfaction. Most of all, we need Terms and Conditions of employment that value and develop teachers as the vocationally called professionals they set out to be.

This extends also to the workload of school leaders and specifically the issue of the contractual hours of our Principals. We know that our school leaders live and breathe the job but it should not be the default expectation that they do so. Performance in the job should not come at the expense of family life, health or well-being. The Council is concerned that more and more school leaders are choosing to retire early or are being forced to retire on health grounds because of our failure to tackle the issue of their workload.

Teachers' Pay

Linked to any review of Terms and Conditions are the issues of pay and reward. In Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, we do not face the recruitment and retention challenges faced in other parts of the UK. Teaching is regarded as a worthwhile profession and we have a healthy supply of young and aspiring teachers. We can still say, despite the many challenges of modern day society, that leading and teaching in our schools is to our teachers more than just a job. It is a vocation that requires much more than the ability to raise academic standards and provide high quality learning and teaching, which our teachers do very well. The pupils in our schools get to experience teachers who are wholly committed to the pursuit of genuine excellence whilst being committed to the mission, vision, values, and ethos of their schools. We have talented, dedicated and vocationally called people who set the benchmark for those in their care, in terms of their own values, interpersonal relationships and commitment. Our teachers are faithfully committed to the ideal that no child should ever be left behind and they strive to educate and inspire every young person to develop themselves to their fullest potential so that they can contribute to building the society and economy of our shared future.

And yet, or perhaps because of that commitment to vocation, the issue of teachers' pay has not been addressed in any meaningful or challenging way. The approach to pay negotiations can be viewed as one dimensional; at worst almost lazy. That is not a criticism of any particular constituents, be they management or Trade Union side, it is merely a reflection of the reality where it is easier to negotiate over a quantum expressed as a percentage than it is to tackle the nature of the job and the rewards and the efficiencies that should go with it.

The Council recognises that there is not a bottomless pit but we do need to develop a culture and an expectation of honest review where, when additional funding is not available, reward and efficiencies are looked at in other ways.

It would be reasonable to start with an evaluation of the teachers' pay scales. They are unnecessarily long and need to strike a rate for the value we place on the job, rather than reward length of service with little more than a nod to exceptional teaching over the final three increments - of themselves a bureaucratic burden on teachers and leaders alike.

The salary attached to a classroom teacher with no additional duties ranges from £24k to just over £40k, achieved in 9 increments by annual progression over 12 years. Can we justify a differential of over £16k pa between two teachers doing the same job, in the same school, with the same pupils, in rooms beside each other?

Similarly the structures around the pay of school leaders need review. The absence of a clear understanding and commitment on the part of Governors and employers that the review of leadership pay falls to them means that discussions around pay must be led by the school leaders themselves. Given the financial context outlined, it is not surprising that leaders are often unwilling to open these discussions resulting in them not being reviewed for some time. This is unfair and contributes, albeit unintentionally, to a sense that we do not value our school leaders. The system must remove the 'ad hocery' and inequalities in pay

between principals in the different phases. Reward should recognise school size but where there is no difference in school size there should be no difference in pay as essentially all carry the same responsibilities. We must ensure consistency of treatment, reflecting the value and reward that we have for our school leaders.

Pay flexibility

The rigidity in the determination of teachers' pay at school level affords little opportunity for schools to attract the best teachers where they are needed most. If we are serious about closing the gap(s) for all children, we must have a strategy to attract the people that will deliver it. We have schools where the challenges are greater than others. We have schools that struggle to recruit qualified professionals in some subject areas and those that require particular leadership qualities and skills. We also have schools that perhaps require short term interventions, where individuals will have to be particularly resilient. We must find a way to reward the best teachers for doing the most challenging jobs.

Middle management

The range of duties, the salaries and the time provided for whole school leadership roles require urgent review, with no serious developmental work in this area for over 30 years. There is a lack of clear guidance around the nature and purpose of the various roles, the numbers of such roles that a school might require, and the worth that these posts have to the career development of teachers.

Teaching Principals

Council believes that the demands of modern school leadership cannot be delivered easily as part of a dual role. However, we have failed to deal with the reality that we still have teaching principals. Whilst a necessity in some cases, we have too many in the system. Where they are required, we must adequately fund non-teaching time for teaching principals and nursery principals. Nursery principals also need access to administrative support systems such as SIMs.

In dealing with the workload issue we should look for more opportunity to share leadership arrangements across networks of small but sustainable schools. One lever for achieving this might be an invest to save initiative focussed on releasing, through some sort of incentivised severance scheme, a cohort of principals who might consider early retirement. This would be linked to the suppression of posts at that level in favour of taking other teaching principals out of teaching to lead teaching and learning across two or more schools.

Refreshing the workforce

Despite the fact that we have a steady and reliable pool of young aspiring teachers we show little staff turnover or refreshing of the workforce. The teachers we need, who bring new ideas and energy to the role, are not getting meaningful opportunity to gain employment and

continuous professional development upon graduation. For a significant number of our young teachers Early Professional Development (EPD) can only be acquired in a piecemeal way through a series of short term temporary placements across a number of schools. Our best graduates should be fast-tracked into the schools where they are needed most. A previous investment in the teaching workforce that sought to bring in teachers who would not otherwise have secured employment was positive but unfortunately short lived and not supported with a long term embedding strategy.

Securing & Developing Effective Leaders

Arguably the single most influential factor in ensuring that pupils enjoy a positive experience of high quality learning in a safe, supportive environment is the leadership in place within our schools. School principals are the most important lever to school improvement and the drive to raise standards. They set the example for everyone else in terms of their own values, interpersonal relationships and commitment to education. The principal is instrumental in creating the atmosphere within the school and anyone taking on this role needs to articulate and live out the vision and values consistent with the school's identity. We must ensure that we first create the aspiration to leadership and then that we appoint, support and develop leadership of the highest quality.

Leading any school is a unique vocation. It requires much more than an ability to raise academic standards and provide high quality learning and teaching. Our school leaders need to believe in the mission and values of their schools and they should be people of humility, integrity, credibility and empathy. They must be capable of practicing distributive leadership, understanding how to build a school community, embedding a culture of leadership which allows staff, pupils and parents to show leadership and take ownership of the school's ethos and values.

Years of austerity, a burgeoning but seldom reviewed workload attached to middle management roles, the withdrawal of the leadership development provided through RTU and to an extent PQH, and ten years of difficult industrial action during which all lost sight of the vocation that teaching should be, have combined to deliver unintended and unwelcome outcomes for school leadership.

Firstly, we must address a serious lack of leadership development opportunities. The nature of the job / role has changed and in some cases is not properly rewarded. School management structures and the associated rewards do not support the nurturing of leadership aspirations at every level. There is not a collective and shared view on the concept of leadership and management structures and, whilst anecdotal, we get a sense that as budgets tighten, some schools have begun to reduce expenditure on TLAs. This has the effect of pushing the workload pressures upwards making the roles even less attractive and mitigating against any aspiration into management roles. Again, as fewer people take these roles on yet more workload is pushed upwards. It would be interesting to contrast the current expenditure on middle management roles with that of say 5, 10, 15 and 20 years ago.

Council believes that the system is not doing well enough in terms of developing our future and aspiring leaders. This starts with Initial Training where the expectation and aspiration to leadership should be inculcated in all trainee teachers; it must be seen to be a normal expectation that teachers will take on these roles. All those that support schools need to be challenged to develop guidelines and support processes that are useful and relevant to schools in determining their management structures. Governors and school leaders need to give serious thought to how they create sustainable succession plans. We need to look at creating development opportunities for those teachers who cannot get the experience in their own schools; secondment to support agencies and within and around the school system through flexible voluntary programmes. All need to be involved and support the EA as it takes responsibility for providing leadership development programmes aimed at reenergising teachers so that they feel encouraged and able to take on these demanding roles. Finally, we need to evaluate whether the reward system (pay and time) remains appropriate to the role we are asking of our middle leaders.

The Northern Ireland Substitute Teachers Register - NISTR

Schools have increasing need for short term staffing needs through sickness absence, maternity cover, secondments, flexible working practices and short term funding. Schools have access to high quality teaching staff through the Northern Ireland Substitute Teachers Register, but there are difficulties that both schools and substitute teachers encounter with the way in which the register is used by some. The Council recognises those frustrations in responding adaptively to emerging staffing needs. We welcome EA's review of NISTR and will work with them to challenge schools to ensure that appropriate use is made of substitute teachers, and that fixed term contracts are properly and appropriately recruited.

Flexible Deployment of Teachers

Council recognises the primacy of other sectors and the Boards of Governors within them in managing their own staff. Nonetheless, we would be keen to work with our colleagues across other sectors to develop a scheme to encourage and develop a flexible approach to the deployment of teachers across our schools. Such an approach could be used to address the personal, professional and welfare needs of many staff whose travel arrangements or caring responsibilities make their current position challenging, for whom their professional expertise and aspirations are not best met within their current setting, or where relationships or conflict are creating difficulties. Such an approach could widen the opportunities for redeployments and embed in our family of schools a collegiate approach to addressing staffing issues.

In pursuance of this goal, Council has been consulting with the Trustees of Catholic schools to explore solutions to the challenge of ensuring that the ethos of a school is preserved through the appointment of its teachers. This includes a review that is currently ongoing, of the import the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order and the use of the Article 71 'exception' of teachers from that Order.

Governance

Council recognises and appreciates the important role of Governors in supporting our schools and our school leaders. All must work to ensure that the right governance is in place and nurture and further develop the relationships between staff, leadership and governance to create the context in which governors can act as a critical friend. All must ensure that governors are well informed about their school, have a focus on school improvement and self-evaluation and can provide robust challenge and support to the school leadership.

We aspire to greater delegation of autonomy that allows for local well-informed decision making that is in the interests of the children and the staff that they are directly responsible for.

Vision: High quality governance and leadership and a workforce that is professionalised, empowered, trusted and valued

We must create a culture in which our schools and to a degree the support systems behind them, are trusted and valued. We must break free from centralised or rigid control and develop instead a narrative and systems that secure the appointment, training and ongoing support of high quality professional people. When we get those professionals in place we must ensure that the support behind them recognises them as such and we must aspire through everything we do to 're-professionalising the profession'.

There are opportunities to be explored by bringing innovative thinking to pay discussions. We must challenge ourselves to think differently about how we use the budget in ways that enhance the recruitment and retention of the very best leaders and teachers where they are needed most.

We should consider narrower pay scales that strike a rate for teachers but which give a degree more autonomy to local, well-informed decision making around recruitment, reward and retention. We should expect that some posts will come with a premium attached and work to create the conditions that recognise that.

10. Finance

The Council believes that the Education Authority is best placed to articulate on behalf of all partners in education the financial context and constraints. The Council will therefore focus its submission on the impact that financial constraint is having on its schools, pupils, teachers and principals.

The financial health of any school determines its ability to manage its budget to secure statutory outcomes and appropriately meet the educational needs of its pupils. Most schools receive a delegated budget and have the authority to determine expenditure from this, with the management type having a considerable bearing on the level of delegation or the autonomy bestowed on school leaders to direct expenditure according to their own schools' needs. Guidance for both controlled and maintained schools requires that they should not accumulate surpluses or deficits in excess of 5% of their delegated budget or £75,000, whichever is the lesser. EA has a budget of just over £2.1 billion, over 80% of which is delegated directly to schools.

Over recent years it has been argued that the total amount of money awarded to Education was not going to support schools to deliver at the same level. This has been due to many factors including:

- The structure of the education system, including a number of systemic matters that needed to be addressed.
- Significant and on-going reductions in the spending power of DE budgets (which have declined by well over £200 million in the last 10 years).
- A failure to secure sufficient additional funding in year.
- Over 90% of services are driven by statutory or policy requirements.

In 2015, the then Chief Executive of EA, stated that the immediate future did not see a relaxation or relief from these financial cuts. He suggested that the education system in Northern Ireland was facing a £350 million funding gap by 2019/20. He also pointed out that almost 400 schools would be in budget deficit by 2018 – the highest number ever. He highlighted that the education budget overall had fallen behind the rate of inflation since the start of the last decade and there had been a 10% real-term reduction – of around £200 million – in the education budget in the 5 years since 2010. He estimated that EA would need £2.19 billion by 2019-20 to meet the demand from schools. These challenges have continued and are exemplified by the rapid decline in the numbers of schools operating in surplus in the years since 2015 [Figure 1].

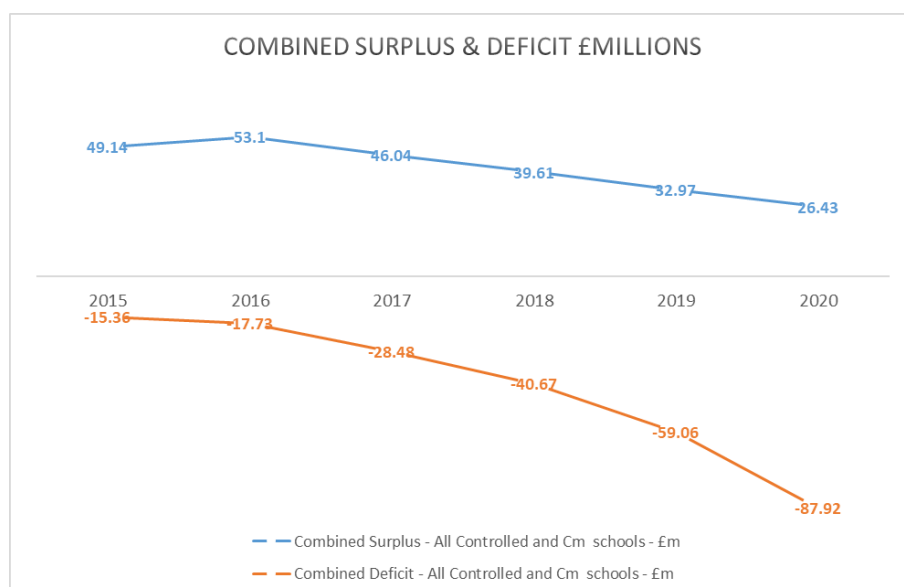


Fig 1. Combined Surplus and Deficit £Millions – Figures for controlled schools include a small number of controlled grammar and ‘other maintained’ schools – Source data – EA 2021

With such pressures and an ever increasing burden of costs, year on year schools see their budgets being sliced ever more thinly that, when viewed in the round, reflect real terms cuts in the allocations per pupil. Even when pupil numbers have been increasing in nursery and primary schools, the overall school budget has not received investment reflective of this increasing demand. No one could argue that this is beneficial to pupils across the system.

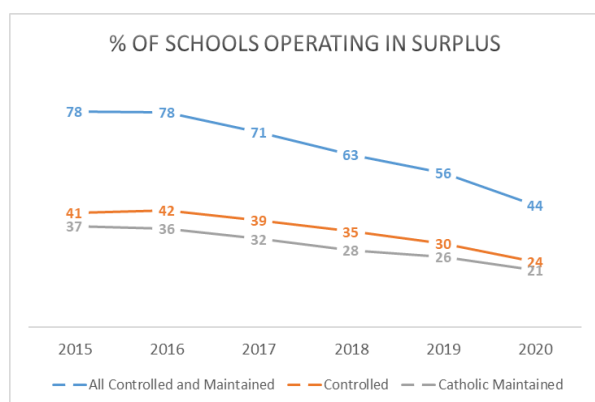


Fig 2. Percentage of Schools Operating in Surplus – Data for controlled schools includes a small number of controlled grammar and ‘other maintained’ schools – Source data – EA 2021

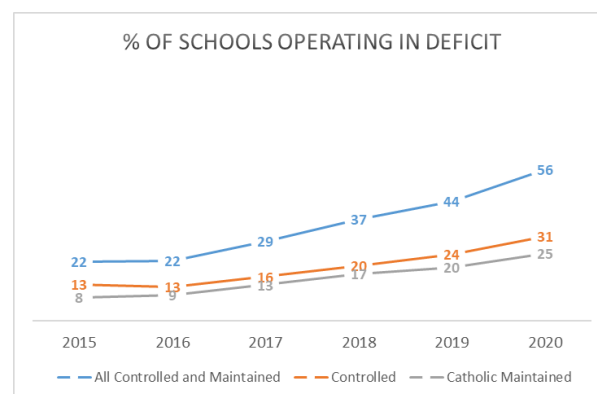


Fig 3. Percentage of Schools Operating in Deficit – Data for controlled schools includes a small number of controlled grammar and ‘other maintained’ schools – Source data – EA 2021

More recently EA has been informing schools that budget plans could not be approved where schools could not demonstrate that they could live within their budget. EA has warned that “whilst they could not approve many schools’ budgets, they would continue to work with these schools”; that EA “simply could not continue to run the education system as it is currently configured without additional funding”, and that “there is not enough money to keep the system going the way we’ve been used to it over the last few years.” These

comments can be exemplified by the rising numbers of schools unable to manage in year where deficits are increasing to the point of being wholly irrecoverable.

In many cases, schools must commit to expenditures and develop three year plans that do not meet the criteria as laid out above in terms of 5% variation of either surplus or deficit. There is recognition that many of the schools can make no further cuts to educational provision, without having a significantly negative impact on the running of the school or the educational experience of the children. Often these are schools that are full to capacity, an indicator that the associated budget allocation is not fit for purpose.

EA is also under financial pressure due to the rapid increase in spending on support for pupils with special educational needs. In the space of just two years spending rose by over £40 million from £188 million in 2014-15 to £229 million in 2016-17 and it continues to rise.

Funding per pupil

The tables below show average number of pupils, schools, spend per pupil and staff costs per pupil as well as pupil teacher ratios (PTR) for schools of different size bands compared to the overall NI averages. Smaller schools result in larger costs per pupil and staff costs per pupil. Information is based on 2018 EA data tables and is also available in the [DE Sustainability Baseline Report NI Level Analyses](#) .

Primary					
Pupil Number Range	Average Number of Pupils	Number of Schools	Spend per Pupil (£)	Average Staff Cost per Pupil	Pupil Teacher Ratio
0-75	50	127	5,088	4,615	15.6
75-150	107	212	3,482	3,168	20.0
150-225	187	164	3,194	2,923	22.0
225-300	259	75	3,115	2,858	22.4
300-375	341	57	2,962	2,706	22.9
375-450	410	69	2,850	2,609	24.2
450-525	480	31	3,053	2,778	22.7
>525	764	46	2,828	2,257	24.1
Overall	220	781	3,501	3,192	20.9

Table 1: Primary – Funding per Pupil

The average PTRs in Northern Ireland are 20.9 for primary schools and 14.8 in post-primary schools. The optimum PTR, in terms of educational need, may exist within a range. There can, however, be a point at which high PTRs result in reduced attainment, adversely affecting teaching styles and pupil behaviour. The same impacts can be seen for low PTRs,

which may also be associated with limited curricular offers and negative impact on pupils' social development.

Post-primary					
Pupil Number Range	Average Number of Pupils	Number of Schools	Spend per Pupil (£)	Average Staff Cost per Pupil	Pupil Teacher Ratio
0-200	155	14	6,912	6,009	10.6
200-400	307	25	5,178	4,420	14.4
400-600	510	33	4,747	4,065	15.3
600-800	709	29	4,550	3,939	15.8
800-1000	898	14	4,535	3,916	15.5
1000	1275	16	4,392	3,789	15.9
Overall	607	134	4,956	4,087	14.8

Table 2: Post-Primary Funding per Pupil

The school estate – quality, fitness for purpose, sustainability and lack of investment

All of our children and young people have a right to expect at least two things:

- Access to high quality education.
- School provision in buildings which are modern and fit for purpose.

The Council recognises that many of our school buildings, across all sectors, are old and not fit for purpose. The approaches to learning and teaching have changed dramatically in the last 30 years, however, the quality and suitability of our school buildings has not kept pace.

As outlined in the area planning section, we have a significant number of unsustainable schools with enrolments impacting on finance, curricular offer and school resilience. This also can impact on capital investment in a school as the protocols for capital calls require a school to be sustainable and have an actual enrolment within 10% of its approved enrolment. In many circumstances, this can mean that schools that could become sustainable if they received a new build, are condemned to remain unsustainable as they cannot access investment and are competing with neighbouring, newer schools. This is a vicious cycle for unsustainable schools with poor buildings: poor buildings limit applications, low enrolment then means schools are precluded from investment. This system is spiralling some schools into failure.

We have an ageing schools estate with a maintenance programme that cannot keep up with the work that is needed and an ever growing list of minor works requests from schools. At the minor works call in 2017, 6,500 applications were received with 500 prioritised initially. Since then schools have submitted a number of unavoidable minor works applications that will have required prioritisation.

Capital investment

Where capital investment is awarded via the capital call or school enhancement programme (SEP) it can be a very slow process to get through the scoping and business case approval phases to begin the actual build. Rationalised schools who have participated in the area planning process have significant delays in receiving the investment and accommodation updates required to implement changes as envisioned in their approved development proposals. This acts as a disincentive to other schools to participate in an area planning process

The Council has a vision for improved education provision through reorganisation of the current schools' estate, with each school a positive learning environment, fit for purpose for the needs of its school community, with well-resourced class rooms and outside space, with investment to update the crumbling schools estate and to encourage communities to choose their local school and enable it to be the heart of the community.

The Council believes that the Department must embark on a programme of major works which combines replacing old and out of date school buildings with a modernisation of existing facilities. They must also look at accelerating the process from approval of investment to implementation on site.

Finance will be put forward as a barrier to such action. However, the Council is of the view that the modernisation of the school estate can be achieved. It may be a long-term undertaking but Council strongly believes it is necessary.

Education funding at the heart of Government thinking

The Council has long stated its belief that education is transformative and as such it should be at the centre of political thinking and any Programme for Government. The prize is a more inclusive, settled and prosperous society, less reliant on external financial support and more confident in its ability to use our many strengths collaboratively and generously for the benefit of all. The building blocks to that aspiration, our children and young people, are already in our schools and it is therefore critical that that Government works as a cohesive Executive administration to ensure that resources are directed in a way that supports delivery and the transformation of our current arrangements.

The Independent Review makes the realisation of this goal both possible and practical and is therefore both timely and welcome.

Implement the recommendations made in the past

The Council believes that the Review Panel will find there to be little which has not been said in previous reports. There has been a plethora of reviews with the promise of improvement but little delivered. None more so than in the area of education funding which has been in terminal decline for over two decades.

In 2018, in its report on the Financial Health of Schools [NIAO Financial Health of Schools](#) the NIAO found anecdotal evidence that the Common Funding Scheme (CFS) allocation of funding for additional circumstances (such as small schools, Targeting Social Need and Newcomers) may be skewing the funding provided to schools and contributing to the build-up of large surpluses at some schools, while the number of schools in deficit is increasing. The IAS recommended that the Department should consider undertaking a review of the CFS. Some schools felt that medium-size schools lose out as they do not qualify for the Small Schools Support Factor and at the same time do not benefit from the funding associated with having a large number of pupils

A number of studies, including ‘An Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme’ [An Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme](#) issued in 2013, indicated the need for rationalisation of the schools’ estate, given the number of small schools in Northern Ireland and the additional funding they attract. The schools visited felt that “rationalisation of the schools’ estate would free up more funds”, for distribution to sustainable schools. The review recommended that the small school support factors should be removed, combined with a Small Schools Policy and funding for strategically important small schools outside the formula.

The same review (2013) recommended that we consider targeting funding and resources at the collective needs of statemented pupils within a school, rather than allocating physical resources or services to individual children, irrespective of circumstance.

Council recognises the significant impactful work of school leaders and staff who attempt to ameliorate the negative impact of budget constraints at a significant risk to their own health and wellbeing. There is emerging evidence that school leadership and teachers are being placed under extreme stress managing school budgets. The administration must make provision for additional designated resource to take account of this pressure.

Funding that supports the alignment of policies

The evidence is very clear that there has been little discernible change in a range of equality differentials in Northern Ireland over the past forty years. It is clear to the Council that to make a difference there will need to be a ‘whole Government’ approach; a major re-alignment of budget allocations and reporting; in-depth analysis of relevant data to identify baseline positions; a tracking of progress through much tighter service alignment through embracing outcomes; adherence to a duty of collaboration in their progressing; and an honest analysis by politicians and policy makers of our current position. We consider that the Review should include an objective, evidence based analysis of the how formal education and lifelong learning can play a central role in addressing key equality differentials.

CCMS and its school leaders argue that if they are to contribute in a real sense to DE’s ‘Every School a Good School’ (ESaGS) – a policy for school improvement including Count Read Succeed – and the proposed implementation of the Special Education Needs and Disability Order, without impacting the education provision for pupils and staff health and wellbeing, then the financial austerity being levied on schools needs to be addressed immediately. The Council argues that if the present financial climate continues within

schools then good, best and better practice will be impossible to maintain, and pupil provision and staff health and well-being will be adversely impacted.

It is critical that there is greater alignment of policies across all departments to ensure that the methods and priorities for funding are clearly aligned to the delivery of DE and wider Government objectives. There are significant opportunities to ensure greater alignment of policies on provision for Special Needs, academic selection and admissions, home to school transport, staff recruitment, capital investment, area planning and school provision, NI Curriculum, Entitlement Framework and ESaGS policies.

The Council argues that there is a need to consider the full range of policy matters that have a bearing upon schools' financial circumstances, to ensure that the financial management issues for a school are factored into those considerations. The policy matters to be considered include potential changes in the Common Funding Scheme, earmarked funds and transport.

Funding everyone equally but adding value to those that need it

Through the Area Planning process, CCMS is committed to addressing the challenges of educational and financial sustainability. However, this work, which is guided by the Sustainable Schools Policy (2009), is undermined by the continued financial support allocated to schools that are otherwise deemed “unsustainable” through the Small Schools Allowance. There is significant disparity between the intentions of the Sustainable Schools Policy and the Common Funding Formula (CFF). The failure to implement the small schools aspects of the Salisbury Review has provided a financial ‘comfort’ to many schools which cannot offer the broad and balanced curriculum as envisaged in the Bain Review and in the 2006 Education Order.

Establishing the cost of educating a child

We need a system of education that guarantees that all children will be funded to enable their potential to be reached, with additional funds providing support for more targeted interventions, to enable a level playing field for all young people and tackle the tail of underachievement.

A comparison of spending per pupil over time across the four UK nations, carried out by the [Institute of Fiscal Studies](#), noted that school spending per pupil is consistently highest in Scotland and generally lower in Northern Ireland. It reported that in 2021–22, spending per pupil is expected to total £7,600 per pupil in Scotland (including COVID-related spending) and £6,400 in Northern Ireland, with spending per pupil expected to total about £6,700 in England and £6,600 in Wales.

There has been well documented underfunding of schools and the education system for many years. This has brought significant pressure on to schools in terms of the human and practical resources that are available to support children in their learning. Funding must reflect the real cost of educating children as opposed to setting a figure and asking for the

highest quality of education to occur with that resource. A £1m pound house cannot be built with £100k.

Rather than dividing an annually predetermined block grant on the basis of pupil numbers, school funding must be allocated on a planned basis, perhaps three or five yearly, to reflect the actual costs of education a child throughout his/her lifetime at school. It should be done equitably and only in the most exceptional circumstances should a “small school” be allocated additional funding. There is an argument that the school financial year should be brought in line with the academic year, to allow for consistent planning of resource allocation.

With the focus on keeping children with special needs in a mainstream school setting for as long as possible, a school needs to be financially resourced to do this so that appropriate additional teaching/non-teaching support staff can be employed on a planned longer term basis.

Serious consideration should be given to supporting early intervention at nursery and primary school level. As argued elsewhere in this submission, financial resources invested at this stage do, in the long term, result in overall savings.

Local Management of Schools (LMS)

The existing formula funding model does not reflect the changes in the curriculum e.g. advances in technology or the practical curriculum in primary schools. Schools are becoming dependent on too many external sources of income to cover the basics – PTA, etc. We need to be more target specific with allocation of money.

Any solution to the current financial difficulties within the Education system should not be dependent on ad hoc and short lived arrangements. Whilst that type of additional funding would be welcome and is much needed, such arrangements would be transitory. The Council advocates a root and branch overhaul of the Common Funding Scheme with all available resources allocated equitably across the system of schools towards the delivery of objectives centred around the common good, the development of a peaceful, inclusive, settled and prosperous society, which is less reliant on support from the UK or elsewhere and more confident in its ability to use our many strengths collaboratively and generously for the benefit of all.

A forward thinking and properly funded system of education is central to the creation of an inclusive and fair society at peace with itself through a high waged, flexible and productive economy which recognises global, national, regional and local opportunities for our young people.

A review of the Schools’ budget share should be undertaken, including determining ‘an adequate’ Age Weighted Pupil Unit to ensure all schools can deliver the curriculum. The disparity of funding attached to pupils at different stages, eg nursery, primary, KS3, KS4 no longer reflects the changes that exist in the curriculum eg ICT, PE, Play Based Learning. A

root and branch review is required - a significant commitment which must challenge all stakeholders into considering what can and should be achieved with what we know is likely to be continuing financial constraints.

Funding an administration that is fit for purpose and can serve schools' needs

It is right and proper that the greatest proportion of available funding should be delegated to schools. However, there has been too significant a reduction of funding available to the administration of education. It is a necessary expense that should be recognised as adding value to the delivery of education in its fullest sense. School principals and Governors need help and support, staff need development, the schools' fabric needs to be maintained. Too often, the natural instinct is to cut the centre costs in order to protect the delegated funding available to schools.

This should not however be taken to mean that the existing structures should remain intact. The Council and CCMS stand ready to play their part in shaping a leaner, well defined administrative and support system that serves schools operationally and also develops a consistent strategic approach to the challenge of continuous improvement for every child including the most vulnerable of our society.

Equally challenging however, is the question whether taking a 'one size fits all' homogenising approach to all or indeed any of the current administration systems would be of true value to schools, governors, leaders, teachers, and ultimately pupils. To make such recommendations would require an honest evaluation and assessment of the various structures that currently exist, their contribution to raising standards and supporting high quality education, and where improvement could be demonstrated that must be accompanied by a corresponding commitment to redistribute efficiencies back into schools.

Vision: Establish the need and the priorities

At the heart of our thinking must be the ambition to prioritise the needs of those who need our help most, those with Special needs and those coming from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

Council calls for an Executive approach that puts education funding front and centre of Government priorities. To support this, beginning with a baseline assessment of the actual costs of educating a child through its educational journey, Council calls for a root and branch review of the funding mechanisms and formulae that is more than a desktop review of how to distribute the existing funds.

We want to see an investment strategy that supports delivery of a network of accessible and sustainable provision in high quality fit for purpose school buildings.

11. Sustainable schools

The DE Policy for Sustainable Schools (SSP) outlines that quality of educational experience is the focus of school sustainability. It followed from Bain's report looking at the use of resources in education and the need for better strategic planning of and improved sharing and collaboration across the schools' estate. It states that strong, sustainable schools providing quality education and access to the full curriculum are central to the department's educational vision. The minimum thresholds recommended are used to inform the area planning priorities across the education sector.

Planning legacy

The current schools estate in Northern Ireland is reflective of an earlier time with many schools established when all children walked or cycled to school, left school before 16 and sought employment in their local community. Our children and young people live in a very different world today with a much more international vision and access to technology, transport and opportunities that could not have been envisioned a century ago. The challenge is how do we adapt our legacy schools estate to reflect our current context and to ensure equity of access and opportunity to all our children and young people. We have a large number of unsustainable schools in the context of the SSP. The draft [Strategic Area plan](#) recently released for consultation outlines the details

Within the number of unsustainable schools we also have a number of small schools, i.e. significantly below the 105/140/500/600 thresholds. Our small schools are a valuable part of their local communities and their staff work tirelessly to provide the best education they can to those in their charge. However, small schools face particular challenges in providing the full curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities and for schools with a small number of teachers and composite classes of more than two year groups it can be difficult to be as resilient to the challenges in education as a more sustainable school. Falling enrolments also impact on the breadth of educational offer and school finances.

Area planning

Area Planning is about ensuring that the needs of children are met in the most efficient and effective way possible. This can best be achieved through a network of viable and sustainable schools that are of the right type, the right size, located in the right place, at the right time and have a focus on raising standards. The DE [Sustainability Baseline Report](#) (SBR) provides an indication at both LGD and NI level on some of the key challenges facing the system.

The cost per school data in our finance section shows average number of pupils, schools, spend per pupil and staff costs per pupil as well as pupil teacher ratios (PTR) for schools of different size bands and the overall NI average for primary and post-primary provision. It shows that the smaller the school the larger spend per pupil and staff costs per pupil. This raises the question of equity in the system.

The Council views the diversity in the system as one of its strengths as it allows for maximisation of parental choice as well as different approaches to educational challenges to be implemented. Collaborative structures within area planning have been developed in recent years and are now identifying cross-sectoral challenges and opportunities that can be maximised through the strategic area planning process. From a Council perspective a significant strength of the current system is that it enables Trustees of Catholic grammar schools and maintained schools to work together to address sustainability issues at post-primary level.

Options for change in any sector must be cognisant of the 'bigger picture' from an area planning perspective, including consideration of the availability of empty places within the entire school estate. The system must work together efficiently and effectively. Area solutions require consideration of all options, for an area as a whole, in order to address their potential impact and they also require educators to look at educational provision in an area not at the needs of individual institutions and this can be a challenging ask.

Barriers to progress in area planning

Significant work has been carried out by the Department of Education, managing authorities and sectoral bodies on the barriers to area planning and work is underway to address some of these where possible, outwith a review of legislation.

In the 2015 NIAO report into "[Department of Education: Sustainability of Schools](#)" it identified policy conflicts that impact upon area planning. It noted the view that in reviewing the wider policy environment in which the Sustainable School Policy sits, parental preference creates difficulties for the Area Planning process. This is particularly noticeable with the ability of parents to send a child to a preferred school militating against an effective Area Planning policy. It noted this freedom of choice makes it difficult to forecast and plan the future supply and demand for places in any particular school. It outlined the challenge that, because of parental preference, certain schools have suffered falling numbers resulting in other parents becoming reluctant to send their child to these schools leading to their possible demise. It also noted that parental preference can lead to excessive transport costs and that the Bain Review found that many pupils travel long distances to their schools, bypassing nearer suitable schools.

There are a number of structural problems in the operational and policy context of area planning that raise challenges to area planning capacity to address sustainable schools. There is a need to progress on the recommendation of the Independent Review of the Common Funding Formula Scheme as the current mechanism does not encourage smaller schools to address their unsustainability. There continues to be duplication within and across sectors as many small schools are financially sustainable without being sustainable in terms of pupil numbers.

The legal framework surrounding consultation on educational change is tripartite in nature and offers stakeholders three opportunities to comment on a change proposal. This process is the exception in public service planning in NI and can lead to significant delays in the area

planning process. The increased opportunities for challenges to the process add a significant cost either through legal fees, extension to consultation periods and delays to future projects. Similar issues arise due to the legislative process which allows schools to trigger transformation polls. In comparison to what was envisaged with this aspect of the legislation, this process is currently being mostly used by very small schools identified in area planning action plans voting to transform to integrated status after pre-publication consultation and bringing forward development proposals that do not evidence the capacity for a sustainable school.

The legislation in relation to these barriers to change needs review. The Council suggests that there be one consultation stage regarding development proposals within which there is an opportunity for proposers to modify any proposal as a result of the consultation process and that requirements and guidance on sustainability be developed in regard to the initiation of transformation development proposals.

There is also a lack of robust legal/operational frameworks to enable the successful implementation of innovative solutions within and between sector to address sustainable challenges, particularly in rural areas. Opportunities for the largest planning authorities (EA/CCMS) to create innovative solutions must be improved as they have the potential to create the greatest change and this will require legislative changes to enable other models of provision to be established.

Jointly-managed schools

The Department of Education [*Jointly-Managed Schools Curricular 2015/15*](#) provided information to stakeholders interested in establishing this model of provision. Section 4 of the guidance details the legal and operational issues to be considered to realise a jointly-managed school. Section 5.2 outlines that in advance of initiation of the formal development process, it is essential that the key issues outlined in this guidance have been considered and agreed. These areas require agreement prior to considering the proposed closure of the constituent schools and the establishment of a new school.

The Catholic Schools' Trustee Service (CSTS) and the Transferors Representatives' Council (TRC) are currently working on the issues outlined in section 4 of the DE guidance to establish legally, and operationally, how a jointly-managed school could be developed. To date, an approved Ethos document and a set of Criteria for the establishment of such a school have been developed. Work is continuing on developing the concept of a Jointly Managed Church School in a number of areas, including with regard to the legal composition and oversight of such a school. Whilst this work is underway, a Jointly Managed Church School remains a model of provision that cannot formally be progressed. However, the Council looks forward to progressing opportunities in this area when these can be taken forward.

This model does give encouragement that other models of provision can be found and more work is needed to look at legislative and operational guidance for a greater range of

possible solutions within the area planning domain to support options for improving sustainable education provision in an area.

The Council recognises the valuable contribution schools make to their communities and this is particularly the case in rural communities. It is important in considering recommendations for change that, given the urban and rural divide, it is recognised that one size does not fit all. Benefits realised in one area may not be achieved in a different context. The Council recognises that some of our communities have a greater choice of educational provision in their area than others. Any recommendations made on educational provision must ensure they will not disadvantage those who already have limited choices by virtue of their location, context and circumstances.

Vision: Improved education opportunities for pupils through structural reorganisation of schools

The Council wants to see improved education opportunities for pupils through structural reorganisation of schools with a focus on area solutions, supporting rural communities, via cross-sectoral collaboration of educational sectoral bodies.

It also wants to see the related legislation updated in relation to the consultation and transformation processes and the range of collaborative and sectoral solutions that can be available to support sustainability.

12. CCMS - Contributing to improvement

The bulk of the credit for improved educational provision in Catholic maintained schools must go to the Governors, senior leadership and teaching and support staff in those schools as well as to partnerships with parents and the school community. However, CCMS, during its 30 plus years of existence, has contributed significantly to the quality of education provided in our schools in the following ways.

Legislative Functions

CCMS was established through the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 Articles 142 -146 and Schedule 8. Our primary purpose is to assist and challenge Catholic maintained schools to continuously raise standards utilising the philosophy of Catholic education to underpin everything we do.

- We employ approximately 6500 teachers, including principals, across 443 Catholic maintained nursery, primary and post-primary schools.
- We promote and co-ordinate, in consultation with the Trustees of Catholic maintained schools, the planning and provision of Catholic maintained schools.
- We promote the effective management and control of Catholic maintained schools by their Boards of Governors.
- We provide advice and information connected to our statutory duties to the Trustees, boards of governors, principals and staff of Catholic maintained schools.
- We advise the Department and the Education Authority on matters relating to Catholic maintained schools.
- We support the provision of 3-19 education in Catholic maintained schools which are inclusive and welcoming to all.
- We encourage and facilitate Shared, Irish-medium (with 1 Catholic maintained Irish-Medium school, 7 Irish-Medium Units within Catholic maintained primary schools and 3 post-primary Irish-Medium Units) and Integrated Education.
- We work in partnership with a wide range of bodies which include the Department of Education, the Education Authority, the Catholic Schools Trustees Service, sectoral bodies and educational partners.
- We discharge any other functions that are conferred on us by the Education Orders, by the Department of Education or by the Trustees of Catholic maintained schools.

The Critical Friend

We have built up positive working relationships with schools. We see it as part of our role to be a “critical” friend” when issues exist or are developing in a school and believe that it is more likely that we can assist with resolving those issues when we are perceived by the school to be a “friend”.

The Challenge Function

This is a core function for CCMS. The relationships we have established with our colleagues in other organisations, in particular the EA and ETI, mean that information can be brought to our attention from sources other than the school itself and, as a managing / employing authority we do not shy away from challenging our schools in terms of their outcomes.

The School Inspection Process

CCMS Officers are actively involved in the inspection process both before and after the inspection takes place. This is a key aspect of officers' work enabling their hearing first-hand from the reporting Inspector the final evaluation of the school's performance and is especially valuable when there are issues about the quality and effectiveness of the Principal's or teachers' work. When this occurs, CCMS Officers work closely with the Governors, school leadership, EA and ETI to ensure this matter is addressed in a swift and appropriate manner.

Council believes that the involvement of CCMS contributes significantly to successful outcomes both for the individuals concerned and more importantly the children attending the school.

An Advocate for Catholic Education

When schools identify needs such as e.g. staff training or building related challenges, CCMS can exert "pressure" on EA to deliver the required support, investment or training and/or call on other schools to share expertise or provide mentoring for Principals and subject co-ordinators.

A multi-disciplinary approach

CCMS is structured to support schools by taking a combined multi-disciplinary approach to its work. This ensures that the advice, challenge and support is informed by an awareness and more importantly and appreciation of all the factors that may be influencing conditions in a school. Small teams comprising specialists with expertise in Education, Governance, HR, Finance, infrastructure and area planning are able to respond on a tailored basis to each school within their locality. The teams are well known to their schools and this approach allows close relationships that are built on trust and honesty.

Raising standards

The Council is committed to raising standards for all children by supporting schools to address issues within their individual context to address educational inequalities. CCMS works directly with Governors and school leaders to support and, as appropriate challenge their practices and ensure that they have a positive impact on the achievements and standards of the pupils. Raising standards involves schools identifying and addressing low and under-achievement and then demonstrating the progress made by the pupils relative to their individual and varied starting points.

There are many inter-related factors that contribute to low and underachievement including socio-economic status, ethnicity, community and family circumstances, the impact of trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), the impact of transfer from primary to post-primary, working relationships between pupils and their teachers and peer groups. CCMS works actively with school leaders to help ensure that the governance, leadership and staffing structures are in place to enable the fullest range of pastoral, educational and curricular provision is in place to meets the needs of all pupils and raise the standard of attainment across all areas of school life. Schools demonstrate evidence of raising standards through improved attendance, reduced suspensions, development of personal and inter-personal skills, increased participation rates in extra-curricular activities and programmes, improved outcomes in literacy and numeracy, reductions in the percentage of pupils underachieving in relation to expectation, increased staying on rates (from Year 12-13, and Year 13-14), pupils leaving school to access appropriate and progressive pathways in education, training and employment, and the outcomes achieved in public examinations.

	Controlled Post-Primary	Maintained Post-Primary	All Non-Grammar (NI Average)
2014/15			
5+ GCSE A*-C Including English and Mathematics	42.1%	50.8%	46.8%
3+ A Level A*-C	45.4%	50.1%	47.8%
2015/16			
5+ GCSE A*-C Including English and Mathematics	40.6%	52.2%	47%
3+ A Level A*-C	49.9%	52.9%	51.5%
2016/17			
5+ GCSE A*-C Including English and Mathematics	44.1%	55.4%	49.9%
3+ A Level A*-C	48.4%	57.5%	55%
2017/18			
5+ GCSE A*-C Including English and Mathematics	47.8%	57.6%	52.4%
3+ A Level A*-C	52.3%	58.4%	57.2%
2018/19			
5+ GCSE A*-C Including English and Mathematics	47.9%	60.1%	54.8%
3+ A Level A*-C	53.4%	61.0%	58.8%

Table 3: The number of pupils who gain 3 or more A Levels (or equivalents) at grade A* to C.

The table above shows the performance in Catholic maintained post-primary schools over the past five years compared to pupil performance in other sectors (excluding the Grammar School Sector). Over this time period there were approximately 60 CCMS post-primary schools contributing to the data. These schools vary greatly in terms of location (rural, inner-urban, suburban), socio-economic background, size, type (boys, girls and co-educational), and age (11-16 and 11-18). The one thing they have in common is that they

are all-ability and non-selective; all of the pupils are admitted on the basis of non-academic criteria.

Pupil performance is measured by:

- a) The number of pupils who gain 5 or more GCSEs (or equivalents) at grade A* to C including GCSE English and Mathematics.
- b) The number of pupils who gain 3 or more A Levels (or equivalents) at grade A* to C.

At GCSE, over the past 5 years of examination data the performance of pupils in CCMS schools has improved year-on-year by almost 10 percentage points from 50.8% to just over 60%. These outcomes remain consistently around 5% above the NI average for all non-selective schools.

At post-16, there is a similar improvement trend with the percentage of pupils in CCMS schools achieving 3 or more A-Levels (or equivalents) at grades A*-C increasing year-on-year from just over 50% to 61%. These outcomes remain above the NI average for all non-selective schools.

CCMS supports schools with the highest levels of disadvantage in NI. Free school meals uptake at primary level was 10% higher in the maintained sector compared to the controlled sector (55% to 45%/ 20,087-16,128) in 2021/22. At post-primary level the disparity increases with the uptake of free schools meals being 26% higher in the maintained sector (63% to 37%/ 11,715 -6.917).

The table below highlights the outcomes of pupils entitled to FSM

- Data from 2019/20 and 20/21 reflect a combination of centre assessed grades and centre determined grades and therefore are not included above.

The data for the past 3 years shows that the outcomes of FSM pupils in public exams has improved by just over 5%. This indicates a year on year improvement in performance in FSM is in line with the overall performance of pupils.

FSM pupils 5+ inc E&M		Catholic Maintained schools	All non-grammar schools (NI Average)
2016/17	all pupils	55.4	49.9
	FSM	43.2	38.6
2017/18	all pupils	57.6	52.4
	FSM	45.1	41
2018/19	all pupils	60.1	54.8
	FSM	48.4	44

Table 4: Source : Data from 2019/20 and 20/21 data reflect a combination of centre assessed grades and centre determined grades and therefore are not included above.

Area Planning

The Council has not shied away from CCMS's obligations as a Managing Authority to implement the Department of Education's Sustainable Schools Policy (Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools 2009) (SSP) and ensure the development of high quality, sustainable provision.

The table below shows how the number of pupils of compulsory school age has changed over a ten year period with an overall increase in pupil population and sectors retaining similar percentage shares.

Management Type	Number of Pupils 2010/11	Percentage of Total 2010/11	Number of Pupils 2020/21	Percentage of Total 2020/21
Controlled	102,012	42.84	109,311	42.66
Catholic Maintained	112,686	47.33	118,119	46.10
Other Maintained	2,869	1.20	4,689	1.83
Controlled Integrated	5,847	2.46	7,411	2.89
Grant Maintained Integrated	14,688	6.17	16,696	6.52
Total	238,102	100.0	256,226	100.0

Table 4: Pupils of Compulsory School Age by Management Type. Source: [DE summary data](#) (primary yr 1-7, secondary)

Below is a breakdown of pupil population between 2010/11 and 2019/20. Post-primary figures do not include Grammar Schools.

Year	Total Number of funded pre-school places	Total Number of Primary School Pupils	Number of pupils in Catholic Maintained Primary Schools	Total Number of Post primary school Pupils	Number of Pupils in Catholic Maintained Post Primary schools.
2010/11	22,504	154,452	71,007	147,902	41,679
2011/12	23,178	155,694	71,603	146,747	41,154
2012/13	23,440	158,914	72,891	145,658	40,642
2013/14	23,507	162,253	74,252	143,973	39,970
2014/15	24,000	165,548	75,771	142,553	39,347
2015/16	24,000	168,669	77,022	141,112	37,916
2016/17	23,825	171,612	78,451	140,413	37,267
2017/18	23,500	173,744	79,247	140,545	37,075
2018/19	23,567	174,523	79,251	142,239	37,588
2019/20	23,759	173,856	78,967	145,085	38,325

Table 5: Pattern of school enrolments – 2010/11 to 2020/21. Source [DE Summary data](#)

The overall primary school population has increased by 11.1%, with the population in Catholic maintained primary schools increasing by 10.0%. This is alongside a reduction in the number of Catholic maintained primary schools shown in the next table. This could indicate that CCMS has rationalised their schools so that they are in the areas where demand is greatest. CCMS focuses on school provision where it is needed, where it can support schools to be sustainable and, most importantly, where children will have improved access to a high-quality educational experience.

In the period 2013-2021, CCMS has brought forward 47 amalgamations and discontinuances and EA have progressed 30.

The overall post-primary school population has decreased by 1.9% with the population in Catholic maintained post-primary schools decreasing by 8.0%. The Council has demonstrated that it is prepared to address this decrease by rationalising its post-primary schools as indicated in the next table. This has been challenging for the Council, CCMS and trustees and has included a move towards more co-educational schools and a willingness to engage constructively in cross-sectoral projects.

School Type	2010 /11	2011 /12	2012 /13	2013 /14	2014 /15	2015 /16	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20
Controlled Nursery School	65	65	65	64	64	64	64	64	64	64
Catholic Maintained Nursery School	33	32	32	32	32	32	31	31	31	31
Controlled Primary School	383	378	374	370	370	368	366	365	365	361
Catholic Maintained Primary School	396	392	387	384	381	374	370	367	363	360
Controlled Integrated Primary School	18	19	19	19	19	20	22	22	22	22
Grant Maintained Integrated School	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23
Controlled Post-Primary School	57	56	55	53	51	49	49	49	48	48
Catholic Maintained Post- Primary School	71	71	71	68	68	64	64	62	60	57
Controlled Integrated Post-Primary School	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Grant Maintained Post-Primary School	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15

Table 6: Number of Schools in Northern Ireland by Management Type, Source [DE summary data](#)

Over the period covered by the table above the number of Catholic maintained primary schools has fallen by 33 (8.3%) and post-primary schools has reduced by 14(19.7%).

The number of controlled primary schools has fallen by 22 (9.42%) and post-primary schools by 9 (15.7%).

The number of controlled integrated primary schools has increased by 4 (22.2%) with the number of controlled integrated post-primaries and grant maintained integrated primary and post-primary schools remaining constant.

Figures above should be viewed in the context of the overall compulsory school age population.

The Council, CCMS and Catholic school trustees have taken their obligations to area planning in relation to the [Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education \(NICCE\) Post-Primary Review, Catholic Education for All](#), and the Sustainable Schools' policy very seriously as evidenced by the number of projects progressed across maintained primary and Catholic post-primary schools.

From 2005 to 2021, across primary and post-primary and maintained and grammar, there have been 28 amalgamations completed, with one applied for, changing provision across a range of areas including in relation to co-education and academic selection. There have been 50 closures and associated area planning solutions involving expansions and reductions to support projects and, including cross-sectoral and IME projects.

Table 7 below shows area planning activity from 2006 onwards in terms of pupil impact

		Primary	Post-primary	Total
1	Amalgamations	4,570	7,494	12,064
2	Expansion/Closures and right sizing	11770	9,240	21,010
3	Single closures	3528	2636	6,164
4	Academic selection		8987	

Table 7: Pupils impacted by area planning since 2006

1. 12,064 pupils are in more sustainable schools this year due to the amalgamations completed by Trustees and CCMS since 2006.
2. There are 21,010 places for pupils in more sustainable schools this year due to area expansions and closures and enrolment reductions completed by Trustees and CCMS since 2006.
3. Closures since 2006 have removed 6,164 places.
4. 9 post-primary schools with 8,987 pupils in 2021/22 have changed from having fully academically selective admissions criteria to no or partial academically selective criteria since 2006. (Before 2006 CCMS and Trustees also created 5 schools with 5,120 pupils with limited or no academic selection used in the feeder primary schools.)

A review of 13 implemented amalgamations from 2013 to 2019, comparing parent schools and new school, shows in the first year of implementation:

- A reduced total average spend of over £960,000 per school

- A reduced average deficit of around £230,000; and
- A reduced average cost per pupil of over £1,600

A review of 26 school discontinuances from 2013, showed that cumulatively, across the last year of operation, the schools combined had a deficit of over £5 million. The savings per year as a result of the implemented proposals from 2013 to 2021 was £7.3m.

In an effort to address systemic educational inequality, CCMS and Trustees have increased the number of grammar places in the Catholic sector and made these available without the need for academic selection in Armagh, Coleraine, Lurgan, Kilkeel, Portstewart and Omagh. In addition we have created large all ability maintained schools in Ballygawley, Ballycastle, Carnlough, Keady, Maghera and Strabane. The majority of the feeder primary schools in these areas no longer require academic selection. The EA has not re-organised on the same basis as the Catholic sector with only one example (Strabane) of a non-denominational grammar schools or controlled grammar schools merging with/absorbing a controlled school.

Given the central role that Catholic schools play in the life of the communities they serve, the proactive approach taken by CCMS and trustees, which at times can be extremely challenging, underlines further our commitment to ensuring that Catholic maintained schools are sustainable for the future and will be best placed to provide a high quality, broad and balanced education for all children.

Our people – our most important resource

Through the Open Enrolment process, parents are free to express a preference for which school their child attends. If parents express a preference for an education in a Catholic school for their child they expect that the teachers employed by that school are wedded to the ethos, and in the case of teachers employed in Catholic primary schools, are appropriately qualified to deliver the Religious Education programme and assist parents with their child's faith development. Parents should also expect that the people to whom they entrust their child's education are demonstrating empathy and compassion consistent with the Catholic values of the school in every encounter.

Trustees and Governors of Catholic schools have an obligation to support the ethos of the schools and to ensure that the education provided within the schools is in keeping with the schools' missions and values. Potential employees should be able to demonstrate that they have the qualifications, knowledge and skills necessary to meet the requirements to teach in a Catholic school as demonstrated by the Teachers' Certificate in Religious Education (TCRE). Currently all teachers currently employed in Catholic primary and nursery schools are required to hold this Certificate: teachers do not have to be Catholic to acquire this. Teachers in post-primary schools are not required to hold the certificate.

Catholic schools want to employ people who are not only knowledgeable about pedagogy and are experts in their subject but who are willing to be actively supportive of the ethos.

Recruitment

Together with supporting schools in managing their budget, determining the most effective staffing levels, guiding on and supporting flexible working practices, we support schools throughout recruitment exercises.

Our multidisciplinary teams support and advise schools in analysing their teaching needs and in preparing for recruitment exercises, we work with Governors and external panel members to ensure robust analysis of their needs, understanding the challenges and context of their school and focusing on a continued approach to raising standards.

We support schools with recruitment exercises to ensure they can recruit staff with the skills and specialisms that they need and we challenge them to adopt robust processes that will ensure teachers experience a fair, open and transparent recruitment exercise. In doing so we aim to be flexible and adaptive to the needs of schools with a focus on supporting them in making the right decisions on their staffing

To complement this, we have developed a robust process of competency based recruitment for our Leadership posts. We have worked closely with a range of stakeholders to develop, pilot and improve our new recruitment scheme. We will similarly review our recruitment to teaching posts.

Supporting leadership

The Council argues that the context and challenges for each school are unique. Our multidisciplinary teams have a knowledge and understanding of each of our schools. We support newly appointed Principals in developing their understanding of their school to ensure a smooth transition in leadership which is critical to ensuring the continued support to pupils, staff and the whole school community.

Schools can face a crisis in their leadership, for example, as a result of sudden illness or unavoidable absence. Some schools do not have sufficient staffing with leadership ability to ensure that the school can continue to deliver to a high standard. In such cases, CCMS has successfully worked with our family of schools to ensure that leadership can be swiftly put in place in the short term. We continue to develop strategies to ensure robust contingency arrangements are available to our schools, whilst developing the leadership potential within and across our schools. The success of such strategies relies heavily on the knowledge of our multi-disciplinary teams, on our relationships with our schools and on an agile and flexible approach to emerging situations.

Performance Review and Staff Development scheme (PRSD)

PRSD is the agreed Performance Management Scheme for all NI schools. It is one of the many drivers in the process of raising standards and a vehicle for governors and principals

to focus on areas where improvement and development are required. CCMS uses PRSD to support and challenge all schools to continuously raise standards in outcomes for all children. We regard the scheme as integral to the improvement process and an essential part of all schools' cultures as it links closely to the School Development Plan.

It acts as a medium through which we work with school leaders to embed strategic priorities that aim to support school improvement and raising standards and ensuring provision of a broad, balanced, and curriculum that meets the needs and aspirations of all pupils. Council believes that PRSD is most effective when it is valued as integral to supporting effective leadership and teaching. Our officers support this by using a multidisciplinary focus that incorporates education, HR, area planning to the setting of performance targets in a joined up, cohesive approach that reflects strategic priorities.

However, the Council recognises that there are elements of the scheme that need review and overhaul. As the employer of 6,500 teachers and leaders across 443 schools, CCMS stands ready to contribute to that review.

Flexible Deployment of Teachers

CCMS has piloted a scheme to encourage and develop a flexible approach to the deployment of teachers across our schools. In developing the pilot, we relied upon our experience and successes in individual circumstances where we have secured the agreement of schools to allow a teacher to transfer to a more suitable position within another school. The aim of flexible deployment is to address the personal, professional and welfare needs of many staff whose travel arrangements or caring responsibilities make their current position challenging, for whom their professional expertise and aspirations are not best met within their current setting, or where relationships or conflict are creating difficulties.

CCMS has facilitated redeployment of teachers between our schools, and indeed from other sectors, to address critical issues arising. The pilot scheme is aimed at widening the opportunities for such redeployments and to embed in our family of schools a collegiate approach to addressing staffing issues. The pilot has shown some success in redeploying a number of teachers to new positions and feedback from schools has been very positive as to the benefits to both the individual teachers and the participating schools.

NISTR

CCMS is currently working with other sectoral colleagues and Trade Unions to review the use of substitute teachers, to ensure robust processes and practices are in place so that substitute teachers, and teachers on fixed term contracts, are treated fairly, to ensure that schools comply with fair employment requirements and to ensure that schools can access substitute teachers quickly and effectively. CCMS is contributing too, along with our colleagues from Trade Unions and other sectors, the development of an improved system

for registering and booking substitute teachers which will aim to eliminate many of the difficulties and frustrations of both schools and teachers.

Health and Wellbeing

CCMS provides all Principals and Teachers with access to the Employee Assistance Programme and associated services offered by Inspire and we have a longstanding partnership with EA that allows us also to have access to its Healthwell Hub. We offer team building and relationship building programmes to schools, which are often run by Inspire or by CCMS's associate Education and HR specialists. These programmes help schools to try and find a way forward when issues arise such as a breakdown in communication or relationships between staff.

For Critical Incidents (such as death/serious injury of a pupil, teacher, parent etc) we liaise directly with the EA's Critical Incident Team and Inspire and ensure appropriate and timely CCMS help and support is available to our schools.

CCMS offers a range of resources and support services that are easily accessible for teachers that aim to improve their health and well-being. They include the recent introduction of a CCMS Mindfulness Course for Principals which addresses the feedback that principals needed additional support, particularly with the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic. The programme is designed to provide the resources and training for principals to create healthy working environments and change culture through contemplative practice.

Employee relations

The Council recognises the critical importance of supporting schools to ensure their staff are engaged positively in their work. CCMS supports our school Principals, Boards of Governors and Trade Unions to enable the resolution of Employee Relations issues that arise in schools, working together to resolve those quickly. We recognise that this can be a particularly stressful element of the work of Principals and Governors and we work closely with schools to identify and support informal resolutions and, where necessary, to support the implementation of formal procedures. We guide Principals and Governors to ensure they recognise the value of early resolution. We promote and support mediation and assist parties in understanding that process and the benefits, and in making arrangements for it to take place. Where formal procedures are unavoidable or necessary, we support, advise and guide school leaders and governors throughout formal processes.

We have worked hard to cultivate positive working relationships with Trade Unions. This enables us to identify issues at an early stage and to promote early resolution. Our multidisciplinary approach enables all officers working within schools to identify issues early and ensure that the right support is in place. Using our specialist associates, we can tailor programmes of support to address employee relations issues or to support improved relationships on an individual or whole school basis. This might include additional focussed

support through a complex formal procedure or facilitating workshops on a whole school basis to develop and promote positive values and respect within their working environment.

CCMS recognises too that there are a small number of situations in which relationships can become damaged to the extent that they are irrecoverable, which can have a negative impact on those directly involved as well as on their colleagues. We support teachers and school leaders to identify ways in which people can move on from these situations. CCMS has successfully worked, in collaboration with our family of schools, to secure redeployments for staff on a temporary or permanent basis in order to allow relationships to heal, or to enable parties to enjoy a fresh start in a new environment.

School management structures

CCMS provides advice, guidance and support through our multi-disciplinary teams to support school Principals and Governors in the effective development of robust school management structures. Working together we are able to support analysis of the most effective structure to deliver a high quality curriculum and to support the pastoral welfare of pupils, whilst negotiating the sometimes complex staff consultations, both individually and collectively, necessary to effect a smooth transition to a new structure. In working with schools to develop their management structures, CCMS seeks to ensure that our teachers have access to career development and opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

Managing Finances

CCMS assists Catholic maintained schools and colleagues in the EA to ensure the effective management of LMS budgets. Close working relationships with the LMS teams across the EA and the sharing of information ensures that support and intervention is addressed at those schools that require it the most.

The Principals and Governors of Catholic maintained schools are challenged to ensure that robust and adequate steps are taken to address projected budget deficits where that is necessary and appropriate. They are supported through the process of staff reductions when reducing the staffing complement is unavoidable and this process is supported by a highly successful programme of redeployment for teachers who are subject to compulsory redundancy. This enables school leaders and governors to approach a difficult and challenging process with confidence and reassurance.

In tandem with ensuring that schools take the required action to address budgetary concerns, CCMS acts as advocate for schools where that is appropriate. School leaders have to make very difficult choices in the effective use of the limited budgets that are available to them. It is important that schools are supported in defending decisions where they are necessary to ensure the education and welfare of the pupils in their school are properly catered for. CCMS will engage with our colleagues in the EA to provide assurances as to the genuine efforts to address the budget and the genuine need for their current expenditure. Where appropriate and available CCMS can advocate for contingency funding

to address specific need. In many cases CCMS will work to support a longer term and perhaps more manageable approach to addressing deficit.

The value added of this dual approach to challenge and support combined with a proactive approach to the issue of school sustainability has allowed Catholic maintained schools to reduce their percentage share of the combined schools' deficit over the last 10 years. [Figure xx].

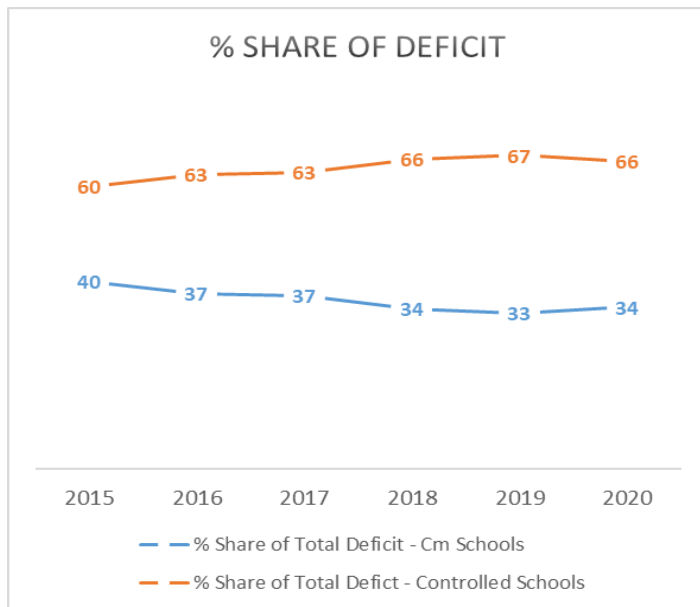


Figure 4: % Share of the combined deficit. For controlled schools data includes a small number of controlled grammar and 'other maintained' schools.

The journey continues...

While CCMS has had considerable success in its work in raising standards in education since its establishment there is still work to be done. We will continue to strive for excellence in our organisation and our schools, through self-evaluation and continuous improvement. There is always more that can be done and we will continue to meet the challenge.

The Council thanks the panel for opportunity to put forward this submission. This can only touch upon some of the high level considerations and we are happy to engage further with the panel on what is contained in the submission and on any other areas they may wish to discuss.