

COPY OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Cover Note

DP No.	DP 748	
School	Hollybank Primary School	
Proposal	<i>A statutory nursery unit will be established at Hollybank Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2025, or as soon as possible thereafter.</i>	
Minister's Decision	Approve	
Date of Decision	21/10/2025	
Minister's Comments	Content	
Additional notes		
Information redacted	Some information and personal data may have been removed in line with the principles of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Act.	
	Key	Details
	■	redaction
	*	refers to less than five cases where data is considered sensitive
	#	means figure has been suppressed to prevent disclosure of sensitive information under rules of disclosure

CM ref: ED1/25/163247

From: Eamonn Broderick
Area Planning and Policy Team (Northern Region)
(Cleared by Heather Cousins – 2 September 2025)
(Cleared by DE Budgeting Team – 3 September 2025)

Date: 03 September 2025

To: Paul Givan MLA
Minister of Education

Copy distribution below

**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL (DP) 748 – HOLLYBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL
(301-6038) – ESTABLISH A STATUTORY NURSERY UNIT (NU) WITH 26 FULL-TIME
PLACES**

Issue: To decide on the following Development Proposal (DP) 748:

“A statutory nursery unit will be established at Hollybank Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2025, or as soon as possible thereafter.”

Timescale: Urgent

Financial/Resource Implications: **Resource** - There would be an additional pressure on the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB). In Year cost estimated at £66k, charged against the Department’s ‘New Schools and Units’ fund. Full Year cost estimated at £114k charged against the ASB.

Staffing - Additional teaching and non-teaching staff, approximately £80,000 would be required with a recruitment process undertaken by the Board of Governors. The cost of staff would be covered through LMS funding.

Capital - No additional accommodation will be required for the nursery unit as Hollybank Pre-school Playgroup currently operates within Hollybank Primary School’s building. Should the development proposal be approved, the nursery unit will continue to operate within the school.

Transport - There are no additional transport costs as the proposal relates to pre-school.

FOI Implications: The content of this submission is likely to be fully disclosable.

Statutory Duty implications: Article 44 of the Education & Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

Presentational Issues: The decision on this DP may prompt local media interest. If approached, the Press Office will refer to this submission and liaise with officials to provide a response as required (*cleared by Press Office*).

Recommendation: Taking account of all the evidence and information provided it is recommended that you:

- (i) Approve DP 748 – “A statutory nursery unit will be established at Hollybank Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2025, or as soon as possible thereafter”
- (ii) Agree that this submission (with appropriate redactions) will be published on the Department’s website once the school and the EA have been informed of your decision.

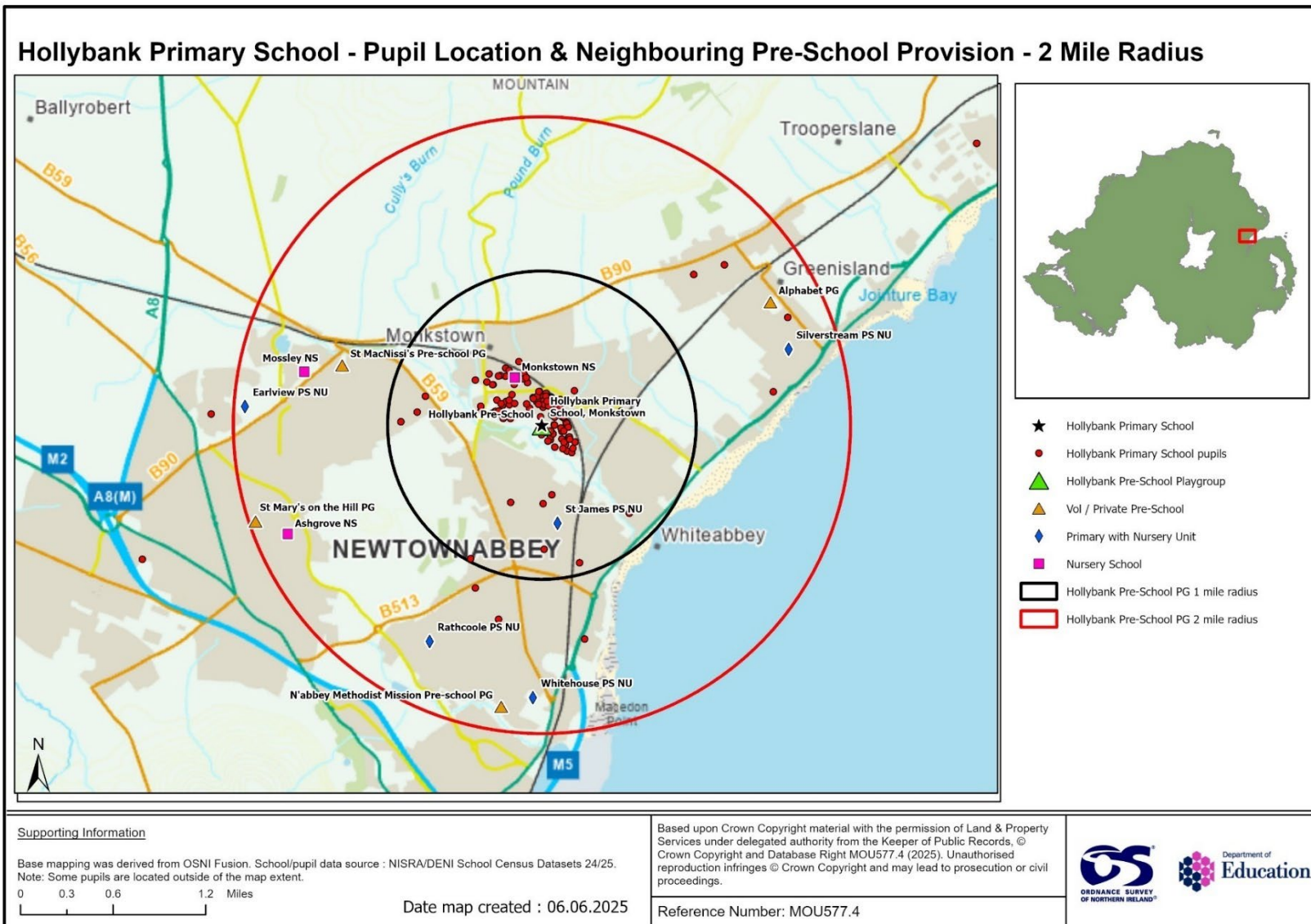
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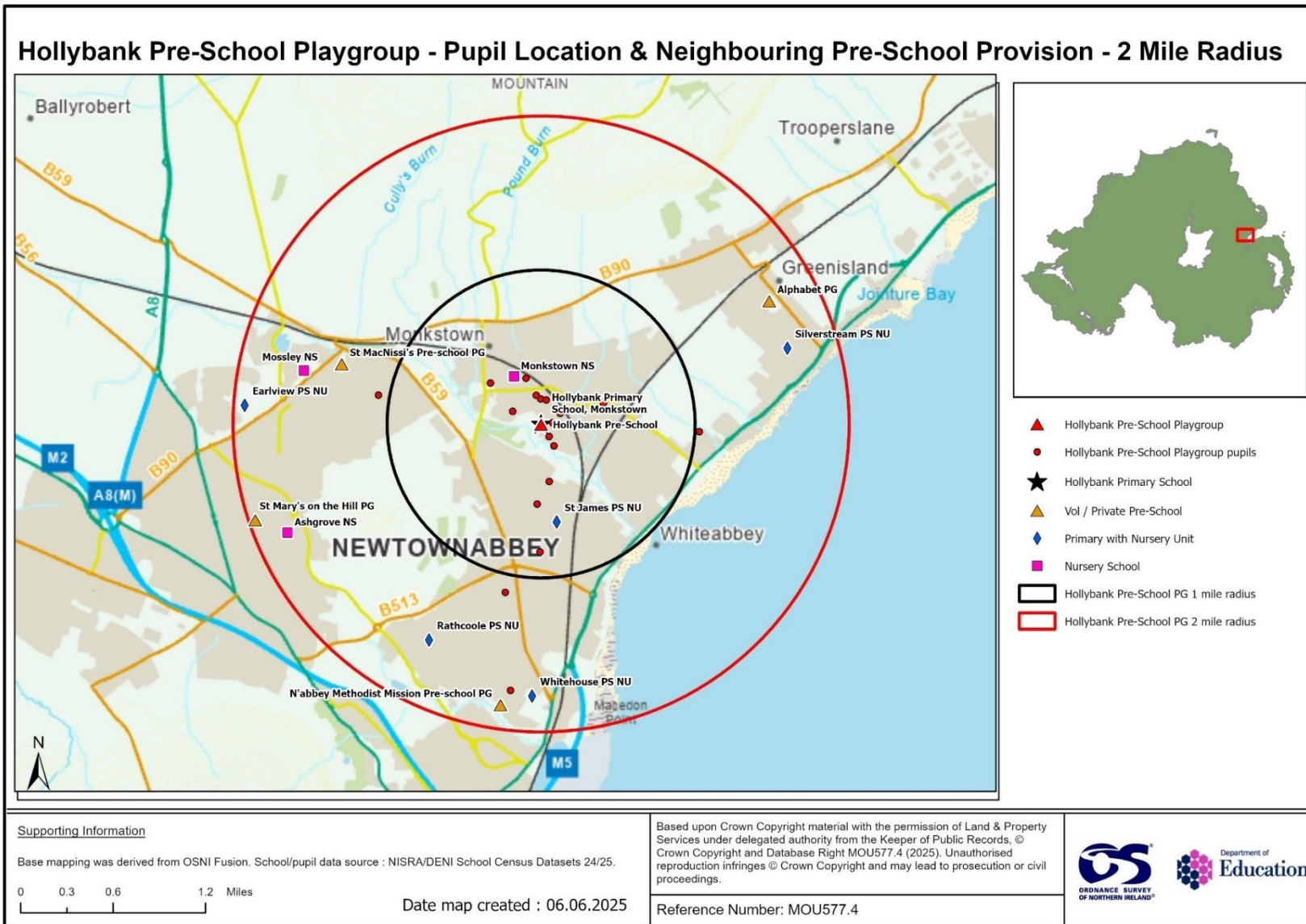
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	Copy of Development Proposal 748
APPENDIX B	Case for Change (CfC)
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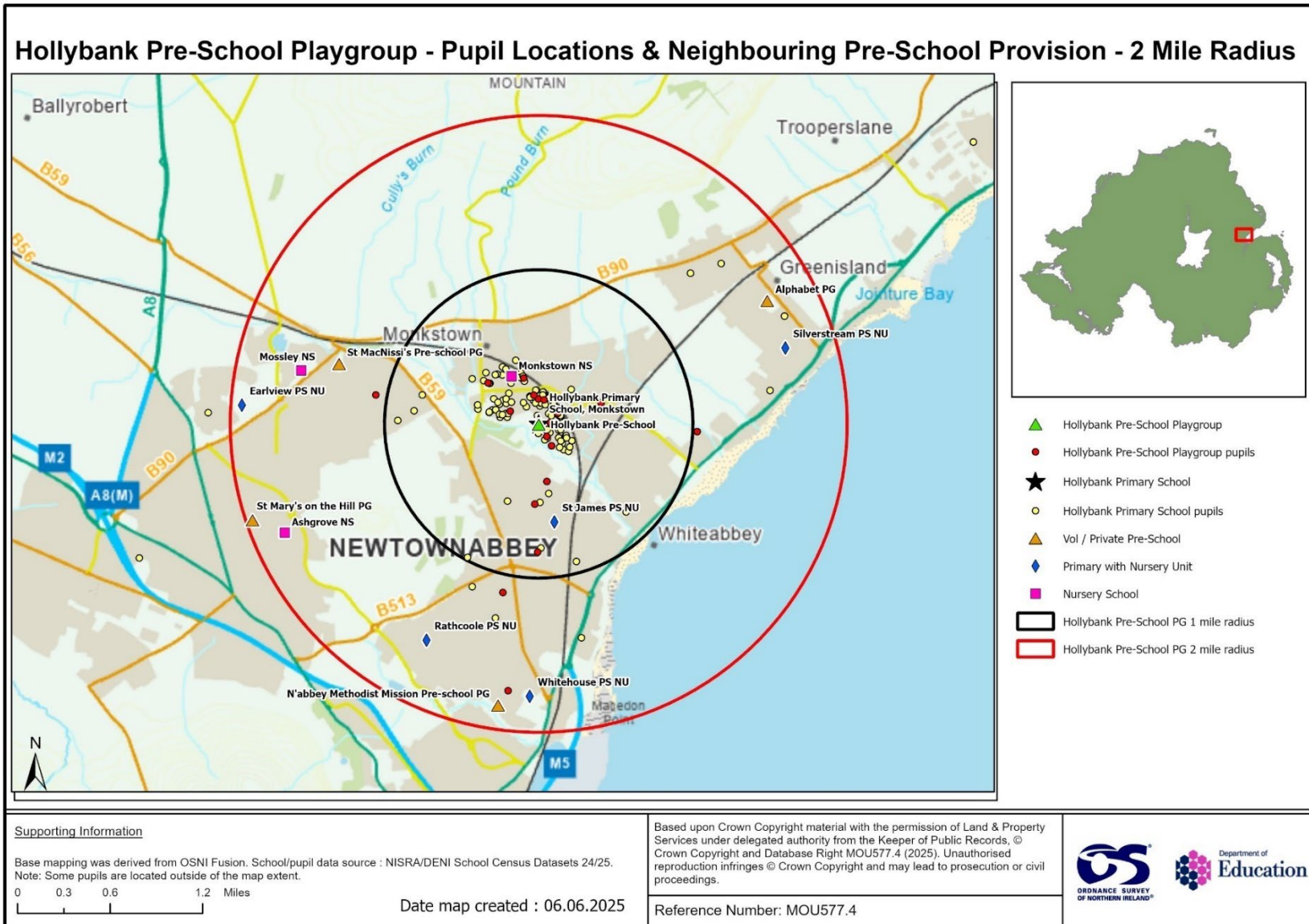
MAP 2: Hollybank PS – Pupil Locations and Neighbouring Pre-school Provision (one and two-mile radius)



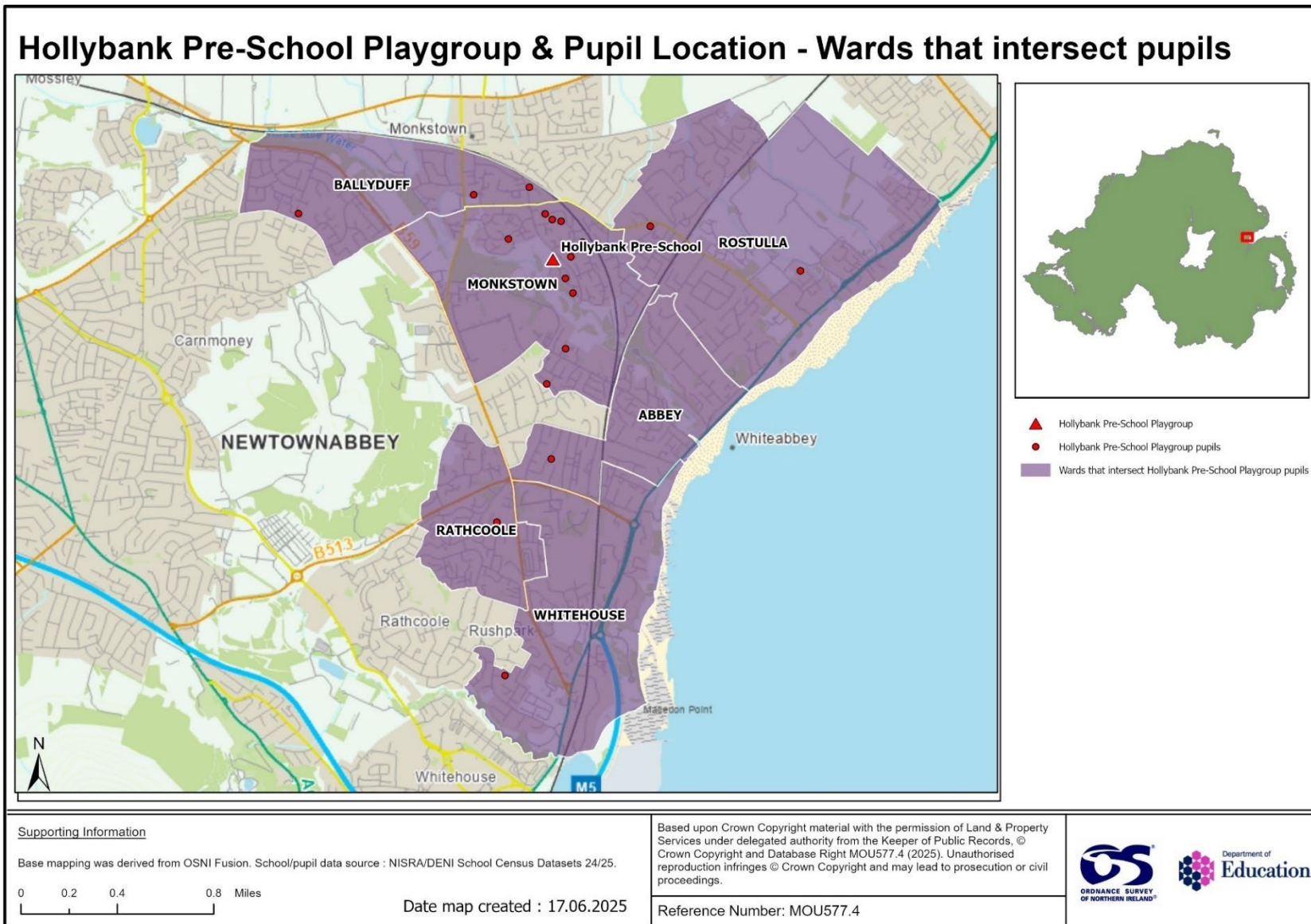
MAP 3: Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup – Pupil Locations and Neighbouring Pre-School Provision (one and two-mile radius)



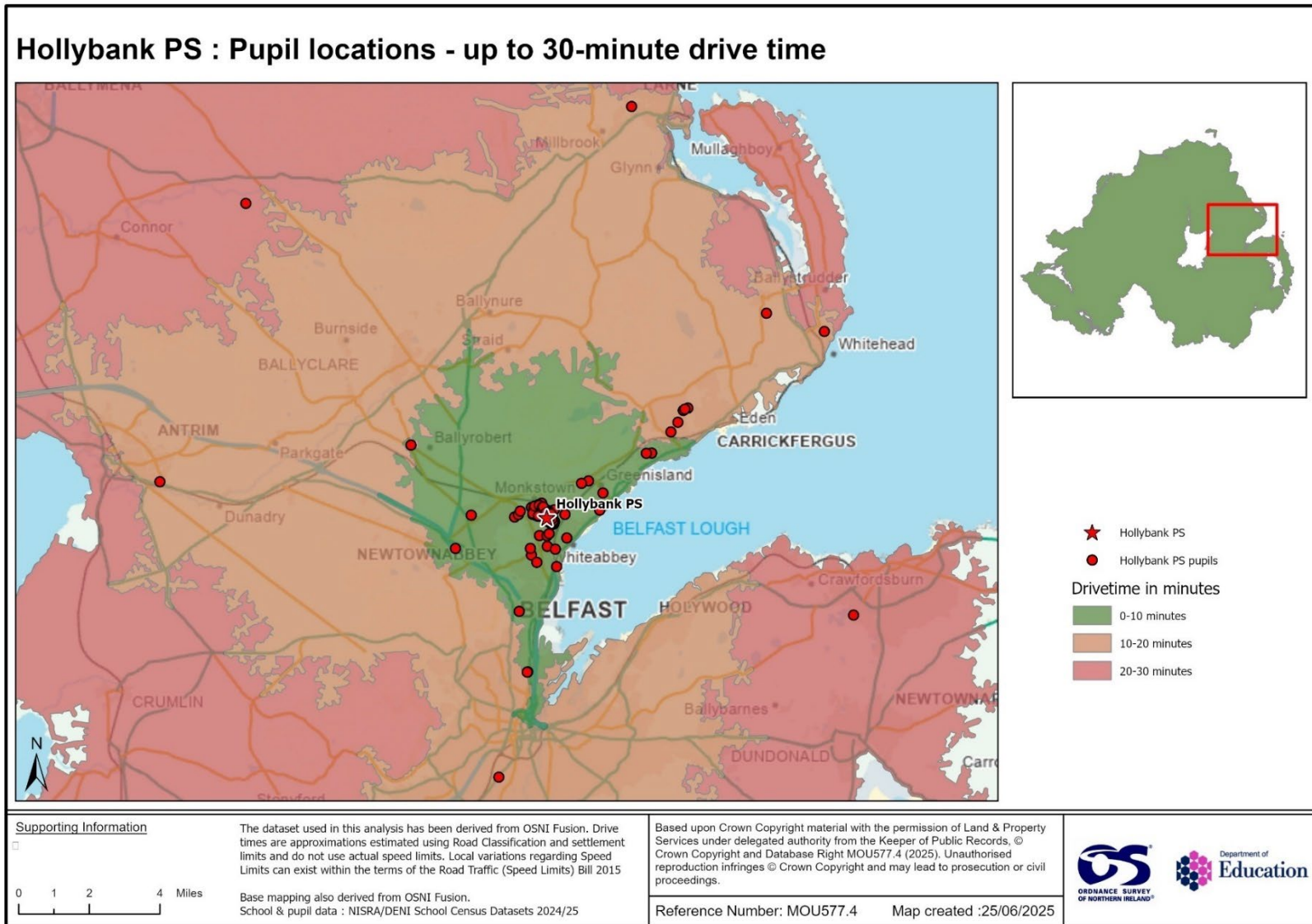
MAP 4: Hollybank PS and Pre-School Playgroup - Pupil Locations & Neighbouring Pre-School Provision (one and two-mile radius)



MAP 5: Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup and Pupil Locations – Wards that intersect pupils



MAP 6: Hollybank PS – Pupil Locations – Up to 30-minute drive time



INTRODUCTION

1. On 13 March 2025, the Education Authority (EA) published Development Proposal (DP) 748 for Hollybank Primary School (PS) proposing that:

“A statutory nursery unit will be established at Hollybank Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2025, or as soon as possible thereafter”

2. The two-month statutory objection period for the proposal ran from 13 March 2025 until the 13 May 2025. A copy of the published proposal and supporting Case for Change (CfC) are attached at **Appendices A and B** respectively.

BACKGROUND

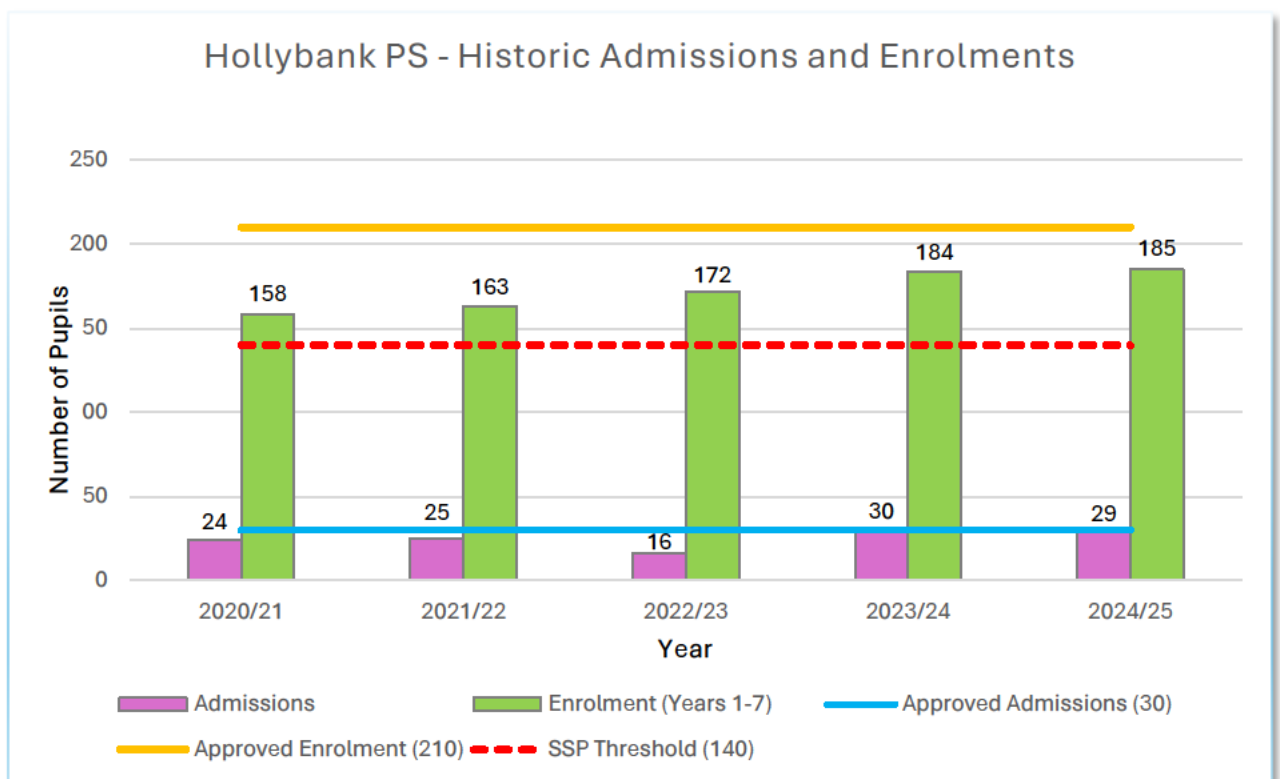
3. Hollybank PS is a Controlled co-educational primary school situated in the Monkstown Estate, Newtownabbey. It has approved admission and enrolment numbers of 30 and 210 respectively.
4. In 2024/25, there was an actual enrolment of 185 including 29 pupils in Year 1. There were 27 pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and 89 pupils (48.1%) entitled to Free Schools Meals (FSM).
5. Hollybank Pre-school Playgroup (PG) is a voluntary (non-statutory) playgroup which operates in the building of Hollybank PS. The approved admissions (Published Admission Numbers – PAN) in the pre-school have fluctuated over the years (as shown in **Chart 2**), however, for 2024/25 the pre-school had 21 funded part-time (PT) places. In each of the past five years the pre-school has been over-subscribed or close to its PAN with first preference applications. The PAN for 2024/25 was increased by two places in October 2024, from 19 to 21, to accommodate children moving into the area after the close of the admissions process.
6. The current pre-school setting at Hollybank Pre-School PG was approved to move to full time provision from September 2025 in line with Tranche One of the Pre-school Standardisation Programme.
7. Over the past number of years, the Management Committee of Hollybank Pre-School PG has faced a number of challenges, all of which it has overcome with the exception of one, that of staffing. Through no fault of either the committee nor the community, Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup has been unable to recruit staff in accordance with the North Eastern Health and Social Services criteria.
8. The current Management Committee of Hollybank Pre-School PG has advised that it will stand down on a date to be agreed pending the outcome of this proposal. Should this proposal not be approved this will result in a shortfall of pre-school provision in the local area.

- In consideration of the above, the proposal for the establishment of a 26 full-time nursery unit at Hollybank PS with effect from 1 September 2025 will ensure all parents in the area that want to avail of pre-school education will have the opportunity to do so within an accessible travelling distance. In effect the proposal is a change in management of pre-school provision in the area.

Admissions and Enrolment

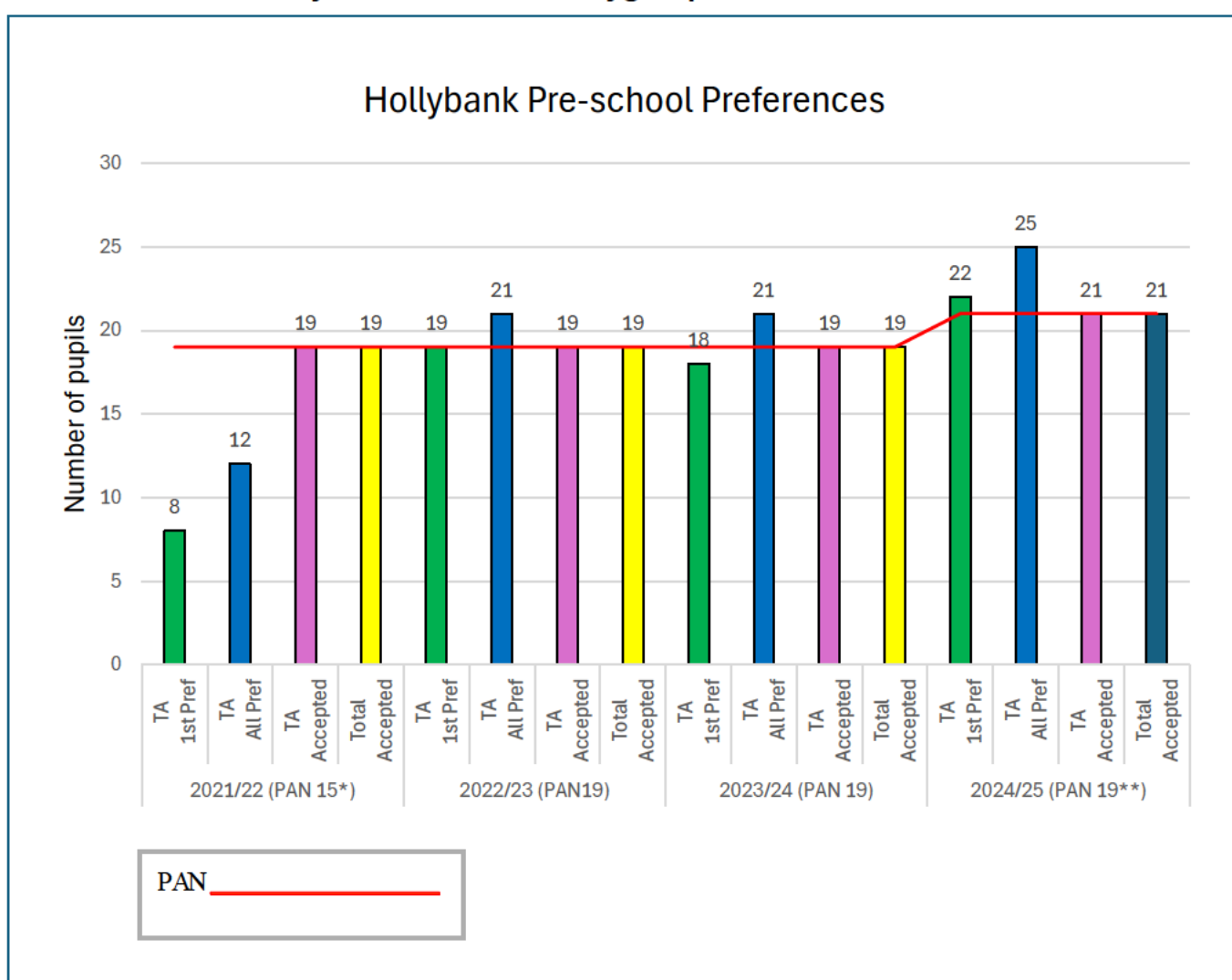
- Hollybank PS has approved admissions and enrolment numbers of 30 and 210 respectively. In 2024/25, there are 185 pupils enrolled at the school in Years 1-7 (including Supernumerary) with an intake of 29 pupils to Year 1. The figures include 27 pupils (14.6%) with a Statement of SEN. There were 52 available places that pupils could apply for through the competitive admissions process.
- Chart 1** below shows the number of pupils attending Hollybank PS in each of the last five years (including those with SEN). The school’s enrolment is above the Sustainable School’s Policy (SSP) recommended minimum enrolment of 140 pupils for a sustainable urban primary school. The school is below its approved enrolment (210) however this has been steadily increasing over the past five years reaching 185 pupils in 2024/25. At the conclusion of the primary admissions process for 2025/26 there were 22 first preference applications for Year 1 in September 2025.

Chart 1: Historic Admissions and Enrolment at Hollybank PS



12. Hollybank Pre-school PG has 21 pupils enrolled for the 2024/25 year, filling all its pre-approved funded places for that year.
13. From September 2022, the urban/rural definitions used in the SSP reflect those used by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and under the NISRA definition, Hollybank PS and Pre-school PG are located in an urban area.
14. **Chart 2** below illustrates that Hollybank Pre-school PG filled its PAN in the last four years.

Chart 2 - Hollybank Pre-school Playgroup Historical Preferences and PAN



Source: School Census

PAN – Published Admissions Number

*PAN adjusted to 19 to accommodate pupils after the admissions process closed

**PAN adjusted to 21 to accommodate pupils after the admissions process closed

15. EA data for 2025/26 shows a total of 15 first preference applications were received for the playgroup for the 21 approved places at the conclusion of the Pre-School Admissions process and all 15 were accepted.

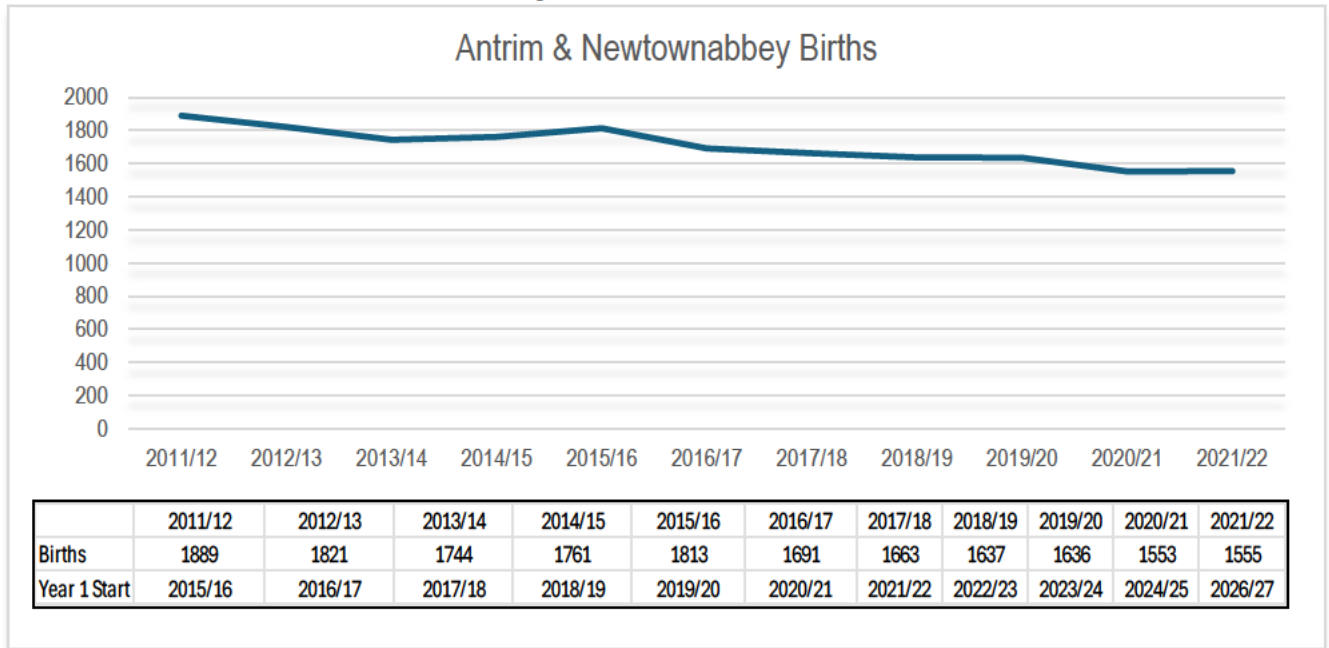
AREA CONTEXT

16. On the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 the Monkstown_1 Super Output Area (SOA) in which both the primary school and playgroup are located is ranked 117 out of 890 (with 1 being most deprived and 890 least deprived).

Strategic Area Plan (2022-27) & Operational Plan 2 (2022-24)

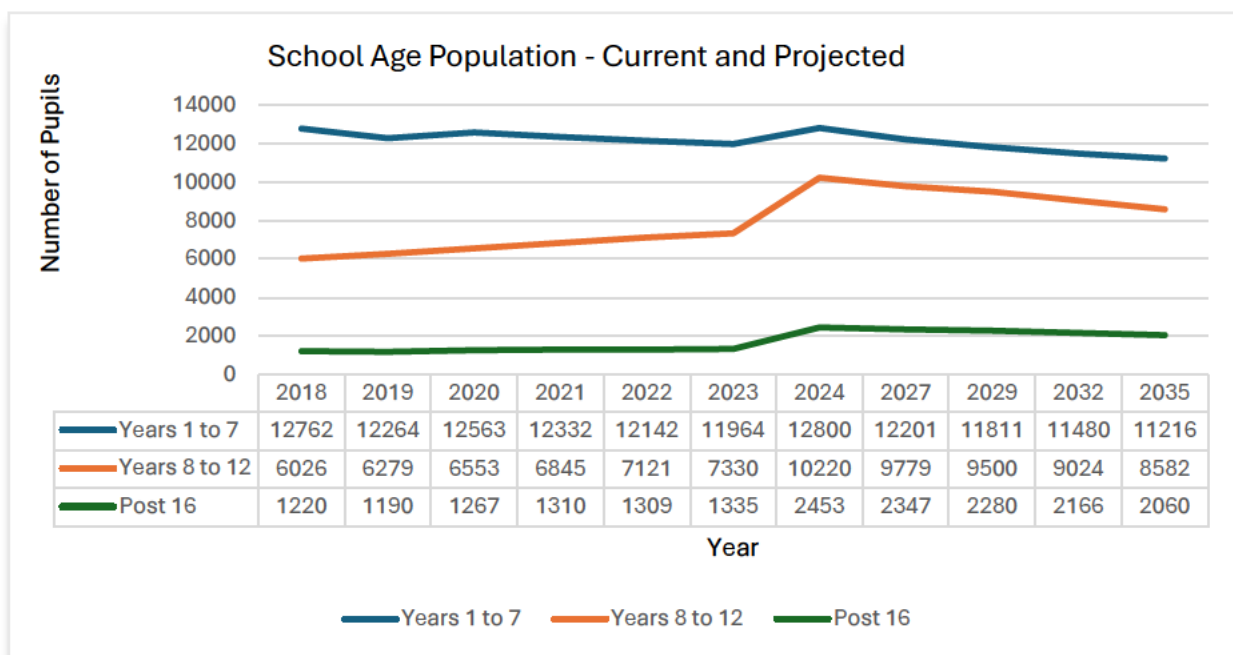
17. In taking forward Area Planning activity for the next five years, 2022-27, The *Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision* was published by the EA on 29 June 2022. It sets out the strategic direction on how the future educational needs of children and young people will be addressed through area solutions, consistent with relevant policies and Ministerial Priorities. Operational Plan 1 (OP1) was published by the EA on the 1 September 2022 and outlined the area planning activities that will be taken forward in the first two years of the strategic plan (1 September 2022 – 31 August 2024).
18. Operational Plan 2 (OP2) 2024-26, was published by the EA on 16 January 2025, and includes a short-term work stream with a key theme “Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways and inform strategic infrastructure planning and investment”.
19. OP2 includes population projections provided by the NISRA. Considering the Antrim and Newtownabbey LGD, in which the school is located, it shows a declining birth trend (**Chart 3**). While **Chart 3** shows peak and troughs, since 2011/12, the overall number of births have fallen from 1,889 to 1,555 in 2021/22, with a sharp decline between 2015/16 and 2021/22. This downward trend is projected to continue for primary and post-primary age pupils as presented in **Chart 4**. **Chart 4** shows school age population from 2018 to 2035 and illustrates a reduction in the school age population for Years 1-7 from 12,142 (2022) to 11,216 (2035) representing a 7.6% decline.

Chart 3 – Antrim and Newtownabbey Births



Source: NISRA

Chart 4 – Antrim and Newtownabbey – School Age Population



Source: Departmental Census Data/ NISRA

20. **Table 1** below, reproduced from the CfC, shows the births within the two main catchment areas (Ballyduff and Monkstown wards) of Hollybank Pre-school PG between 2014 and 2021. The fluctuation and overall decline in births within these

two wards are reflective of the birth trends in the wider Antrim and Newtownabbey LGD. **Map 5** illustrates the Wards that intersect the pupils of Hollybank Pre-school PG in 2024/25.

Table 1: Ward births

Ward	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ballyduff	31	26	28	31	25	35	29	24
Monkstown	45	53	30	30	41	39	39	35
Total	76	79	58	61	66	74	68	59
Pre-school Admission	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Year 1 Admission	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27

21. **Map 1** illustrates the location of Hollybank PS and the neighbouring primary provision within a two-mile radius. **Map 2** shows that the nearest primary provision with a statutory nursery unit (within a one-mile radius) is St James PS. St James PS is a Catholic Maintained (CM) school which has approved admissions and enrolment numbers of 55 and 387 respectively. It provides 52 full-time (F/T) statutory pre-school education places. In 2024/25, the school's actual enrolment was 195 and the enrolment for the nursery unit was 53. St James NU was Standardised in 2023/24 as part of the Pilot Standardisation programme, reducing from 78 places (26 F/T and 52 P/T) to its current provision of 52 F/T places.
22. The four next closest primary schools with statutory nursery units are located within a one and two-mile radius of Hollybank PS and all of which, in the past four years, have filled or been close to filling all their F/T statutory pre-school places, with a very small number of underage children being accepted in Rathcoole NU and Silverstream NU.
23. **Table 2**, below, shows a snapshot of the neighbouring primary provision within a two-mile radius of Hollybank PS. It shows there are 14 neighbouring primary schools, with five having a statutory nursery unit.

Table 2 – Neighbouring Primary Provision

Primary School	Management type	Approved Admissions 2024/25	Approved Enrolment 2024/25	Actual Admissions 2024/25	Actual Enrolment 2024/25	Available places 2024/25
King's Park PS	Controlled	60	425	29	283	152
Whiteabbey PS	Controlled	59	414	57	422	5
Abbots Cross PS	Controlled	60	420	39	296	150
Mossley PS	Controlled	87	610	71	544	88
Rathcoole PS *	Controlled	30	210	21	117	136
Silverstream PS *	Controlled	30	210	17	117	99
Carnmoney PS	Controlled	60	448	50	379	90
Greenisland PS	Controlled	57	401	57	410	1
Ashgrove PS	Controlled	53	374	57	376	19
Whitehouse PS *	Controlled	58	406	56	381	47
Earlview PS *	Controlled	30	221	18	161	74
St James PS *	Maintained	55	387	29	195	204
St MacNissi's PS	Maintained	30	210	25	179	34
St Mary's-on-the-Hill PS	Maintained	60	420	44	352	93
Total		729	5156	570	4212	1192

*School with statutory nursery unit

Neighbouring Pre-School Provision

24. **Map 3** illustrates the nearest alternative pre-school provision within a one and two-mile radius of Hollybank PS, including nursery schools, primary schools with nursery units (NU) and playgroups. Further details are set out in **Table 3**, below.
25. **Table 3** shows that there is one nursery school (Monkstown NS) and no other pre-school provision within one mile of Hollybank PS. Within a two-mile radius there are two nursery schools, five primary schools with a nursery unit and four voluntary/private pre-school settings.

Table 3 - Neighbouring Pre-school Provision within two-miles

DE Ref No	School	Distance (1 and 2 mile radius)	2020/21		2021/22		2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
			Number of places									
Nursery School			f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t
311-6219	Monkstown NS	0.36	26	52	26	52	27	52	26	52	26	52
311-6162	Mossley NS *	1.58	26	52	26	52	26	52	26	52	26	52
311-6214	Ashgrove NS	1.79	26	52	27	51	26	50	27	52	26	52
Nursery Unit												
301-0895	Rathcoole PS	1.58	51	0	51	0	51	0	51	0	48	0
301-6005	Silverstream PS	1.67	26	0	26	0	26	0	25	0	27	0
301-0827	Whitehouse PS	1.79	52	0	53	0	52	0	53	0	52	0
301-6249	Earlview PS	1.93	26	0	27	0	26	0	26	0	27	0
303-6100	St James PS **	2	27	52	26	52	26	52	53	0	53	0
Voluntary/Private Pre-School			T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F
3BB-0246	St MacNissi's	1.37	24	24	24	24	19	19	24	24	24	24
3AB-0353	Alphabet Playgroup *	1.68	25	22	33	21	26	26	26	26	26	26
3AB-0092	N'abbey Methodist Mission	1.84	23	10	20	14	17	14	19	16	13	9
3BB-0247	St Mary's on the Hill	1.9	24	24	20	20	17	11	15	13	11	11

* Standardised from September 2025

** Standardised from September 2023 (Standardisation Pilot)

f/t = full time p/t = part time

T = Total F = Funded

26. The Department notes that St MacNissi's Pre-school Centre, Newtownabbey, is the closest voluntary pre-school provision at 1.9 miles (by road) from Hollybank PS. **Table 4** below shows that St MacNissi's Pre-school Centre was over-subscribed with first preference applications and filled its PAN in the past three years.

Table 4: St MacNissi's Pre-school Centre (closest voluntary pre-school)

Year	PAN	TA 1 st Pref	TA All Pref	TA Accepted	Total Accepted
2021/22	24	23	23	23	23
2022/23	24	18	18	18	18
2023/24	24	30	32	24	24
2024/25	24	31	34	24	24
2025/26	24	27	24	24	24

27. The Pre-School Education Group (PEG) report within the CfC that *"Hollybank Pre-school playgroup is the only voluntary/ private setting in the local area and have already expressed that they intend to stand down from the PSEP. The setting currently has 21 funded pre-school places for the 2024/25 academic year; the setting has a registration number of 21 places."*
28. The closest statutory pre-school providers that offer P/T provision are Monkstown NS and Ashgrove NS, both with 52 P/T places, however both have filled and been close to filling their P/T places in the past four years. It is noted that whilst they have filled all their places for September 2025, this includes a number of underage children (20).
29. The PEG state that there is *"sufficient capacity to meet current demand for pre-school provision within the area and the change is replacement with the proposed nursery being established providing a small increase to the area."*
30. It is noted from the PEG report in the CfC that Mount St Nicholas PG (9 funded places), Carrickfergus, located 5.5 miles from Hollybank PS withdrew for 2024/25 and has subsequently closed. Rainbow PG (13 funded places), also located in Carrickfergus, at 6.2 miles from Hollybank PS closed in June 2025. The closure of which will result in the removal of 22 P/T places from the wider area. In addition to this, under the Standardisation Programme, Mossley NS (1.58 miles away) will change from 26 F/T and 52 P/T places to 52 F/T places from September 2025, removing 26 P/T places. Sunnylands NS, whilst 6 miles away, has been approved to transition from 104 P/T places to 52 F/T places removing a further 52 P/T places.

CASE FOR CHANGE (CfC)

31. The supporting CfC is reproduced in full at **Appendix B**. It sets out the rationale for the proposal with some key assertions highlighted below:
- Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup is one of the main providers of pre-school provision in the area for almost a decade and is located in the building of Hollybank PS;
 - Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup has been unable to recruit staff in accordance with the North Eastern Health and Social Services criteria;
 - The Management Committee of the Pre-School Playgroup will stand down on a date to be agreed pending the outcome of this proposal;
 - Should this proposal not be approved this will result in a shortfall of pre-school provision in the local area;
 - Establishment of a 26 full-time nursery unit at Hollybank PS will ensure all parents in the area that want to avail of pre-school education will have the opportunity to do so within an accessible travelling distance;
 - In effect this proposal is a change in management of pre-school provision in the area;
 - The proposal would contribute to the Programme for Government Outcome 12 as it targets education in an economically and educationally deprived District Electoral Area (DEA);
 - Approval of the nursery unit provision would be supportive of the Programme for Government and the Minister of Education's commitment to early years education.

STATUTORY DP PROCESSES

Pre-publication consultation

32. The CfC confirms that the EA carried out a pre-publication consultation with the Board of Governors (BoG), staff and parents/ guardians of Hollybank PS from 7 November 2024 to 16 January 2025 for the establishment of a part-time statutory nursery unit to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2025, or as soon as possible thereafter.
33. In accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, the EA consulted schools which, in its view, may be affected by the proposal. A total of 58 local schools and pre-school settings were forwarded correspondence on 7 November 2024 and were invited to reply by 16 January 2025.
34. One response was received from an affected school and one from the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) during the pre-consultation period. Details of the pre-consultation are included in the CfC at **Appendix B**.
35. A summary of the comments are set out below:

In support of the proposal

- CSSC notes that while there is currently no unmet need in the area, standardisation of pre-school session times will reduce the number of available places in the local area over time. CSSC also notes that the proposal represents a small increase to the current provision.
- There is a real need for this provision as has been proven by the current unit using the school.
- There is a need for more nursery provision in the Monkstown area. Early years education is crucial for a child's development.
- The strong and experienced leadership team at the school would continue the success of the existing pre-school and provide a sustainable nursery unit for the community. Facilities in Hollybank PS are perfect for incorporating a nursery.
- With the provision of a nursery unit, 26 children from the local community will be able to access a pre-school place which is an essential introduction for 3–4-year-olds beginning their learning journey.
- With the growth in new housing in the area and an increased need of special needs it is essential that families needing to access both nursery and special needs have access to both of these resources on one site.
- Additional nursery provision in the Monkstown/ Jordanstown area would be welcomed as many children are unable to access nursery provision and have to choose playgroup or private childcare provision instead.

Not in support of the proposal

- A neighbouring nursery that had their application for two full time classes recently declined would find it difficult to support this proposal for another nursery class.

Section 75 Comments

36. The Department's guidance on DPs requires Equality screening to be carried out by the proposer at the earliest possible stage. The CfC confirms that Equality screening of the proposal was carried out and the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (where appropriate) have been considered. In relation to Section 75, three responses were received, as follows:
 - The current provision and the primary school are inclusive of all, and include people from different ethnic backgrounds, beliefs, and special needs.

- Positivity and inclusion of all children of different backgrounds and promoting more understanding between different beliefs and backgrounds leading to acceptance of those of a different background.
- Due to the growth of newcomers within the Monkstown, Jordanstown, Greenisland, Whiteabbey and Newtownabbey area, this will have a positive impact on the area providing new opportunities for communities and cultures to mix effectively in a safe and neutral environment.

EA and PEG Comments

37. The EA, as the proposer, supports the proposal making the following points:
- The proposal is a result of notification of the stepping down of Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup. On 19 December 2024, Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup received Ministerial approval under the “Standardisation Programme” to deliver full-time (22.5 hours per week) funded pre-school education from September 2025. This proposal reflects the full-time approval.
 - The proposal of the nursery unit provision is in keeping with the Minister of Education’s commitment to early years education - Pre-School Education Programme – Standardisation and the draft Programme for Government.
 - DP 748 was discussed by the PEG at its meeting on 5 December 2024 and commented as follows *“It is important that the EA and the PEG support the Department in fulfilling its statutory duty by striving to meet demonstrated demand in an area for pre-school education for those parents/carers who want it for their children. In this context, PEG supports the DP on the basis of demonstrated demand as evidenced by the number of 1st preference applications and that it is a replacement of the existing funded non-statutory pre-school provision within the school’s grounds.”*

Two-Month Statutory Objection Period

38. The proposal was published on 13 March 2025, and the two-month statutory objection period ran until 13 May 2025. During this period, the Department received only one response, which was from the CSSC, providing their support for the proposal.

CSSC Comments

The CCSC response is included in full at **Appendix C**; the key points are detailed below:

- Notes that this proposal seeks to replace and retain existing provision provided by the former Hollybank Pre-school playgroup located on the site of the primary school and notes the decision taken by the playgroup to discontinue provision.

- Notes that Hollybank Pre-school playgroup received 22 first preference applications for September 2024, demonstrating need for provision in this community.
- Understands that the proposal will result in a small increase to provision in the locality but must be considered in the context of the Pre-School Standardisation Programme, which will, over time, reduce the number of available places in the area as the programme seeks to deliver the Minister of Education’s commitment to standardise pre-school education to 22.5 hours per week for all children aged 3-4 years old.

SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

39. The SSP does not apply to pre-school provision. However, it is important when considering the establishment of statutory pre-school provision that the host school is assessed.
40. The Department’s SSP sets out six criteria supported by quantitative and qualitative indicators, which provide the framework for considering a school’s long-term sustainability. The primary objective of this policy is to ensure that all children and young people receive a high-quality education in schools that are educationally and financially viable in the longer term. An assessment of Hollybank PS against the six SSP criteria and their associated indicators is set out below.

Criterion 1: Quality Education Experience

41. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a Monitoring Inspection of Hollybank PS in February 2017 and identified areas for improvement as follows:
 - continue to raise the standards of the children’s literacy skills and the integration of reading, writing, talking and listening to real life and meaningful contexts across the curriculum; and
 - focus more consistently the evaluations of learning and teaching at all levels on the outcomes for the children.
42. It is noted that these areas of improvement would be reflected in future inspection arrangements. There have been no further inspections to date.
43. A focussed ETI inspection in April 2010, whilst dated by 15 years, found the *“quality of provision for English and literacy is good; The overall quality of the provision for mathematics is satisfactory. The quality of the teaching ranged from satisfactory, in a minority (13%) of the lessons, to outstanding, in a minority (13%) of the lessons observed. In almost two-thirds of the teaching of the lessons observed, the quality of the teaching was very good or better.”*

44. ETI input does not include any evidence that this criterion is being fully met.

Teaching Staff

45. In 2024/25, the school employed 10.2 full-time equivalent teaching staff which is well above the minimum of four teachers at primary school level as recommended in the SSP.

Special Educational Needs

46. In 2024/25 there were 27 pupils enrolled at Hollybank PS with a Statement of SEN and also 23 pupils at SEN stages 1 or 2.
47. ETI input notes Hollybank PS operates with two Specialist Provision classes (Junior Hive and Hollybank Hive) designated as Specialist Provision for Learning (SPLs), which opened in November 2020 and November 2022. Verified 2024/25 school census data indicates that the two Specialist Provision classes have a combined enrolment of 15 pupils.
48. ETI input states *“the newly appointed staff in the school’s two SPiMS classes have been upskilled and have shared key aspects of their training with the mainstream staff.”*
49. The ETI Focussed Inspection report of April 2010, although dated by 15 years, states *“the quality of the provision for children with special educational needs is very good”* and *“high priority is given to early identification and intervention, and appropriate screening and diagnostic tests are used to identify the children’s learning difficulties or delays and to inform the individual educational plans.”* It further adds that *“the children’s needs are met through additional support teaching in withdrawal sessions involving individual and small groups.”* The report concluded that the strengths of the school include *“the high quality of the provision for the children who require additional support with aspects of their learning.”*

Extra-Curricular Activities

50. The school website details a wide range of after school activities available to its pupils, such as, art, scripture union, football, hockey, basketball, boxing, table tennis, violin, drumming, recorder, ICT, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art & Maths, gardening, French and ECO and AQE clubs.
51. The school also offers Wrap-Around-Care, which includes the Wide-Awake Club at £1 per day from 8am where the pupils can play games, read, draw and socialise with their peers before heading to class for breakfast at 8:50am. The 2-3 Club (£4 per day) offers play and craft activities for P1 – P3 pupils waiting for older siblings, whilst the Hollybank Hub operates for all children after school where they can participate in a range of activities and complete their homework with adult support at a cost of £6 per day.

Physical Environment

52. Hollybank PS is a modern building set on the edge of Monkstown Wood. The CfC states *“that the school is currently undergoing refurbishment works to provide a covered play area and a hygiene room.”* The EA has confirmed that a business case to the value of £227,517.07 for Hollybank PS was approved in July 2023 for the refurbishment of pupil toilets (within the foundation/KS1 area) and provision of a covered play area. These works relate to Specialist Provision classes established within the school over the last five years (**Appendix D**).

The accommodation consists of:

- Two Specialist Provision classes for SEN pupils P1-P7, with mainstream integration
- Hollybank Pre-school setting
- A modern computer suite
- Two educational support rooms
- A nurture Nest and purpose sensory suite
- An interactive Foundation Stage suite
- A library
- A parent meeting room
- A multi-purpose hall

Outdoors:

- An outdoor classroom, a full-size football pitch, a sports field, adventure playground, zoned playground with water, sensory, games and sand areas, a gardening area with raised beds and a polytunnel, outdoor reading, writing and sensory dens and a bike track.

Pastoral Care

53. The 2010 ETI Inspection Report, although very dated, stated that *“the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. Among the strengths are the welcoming, inclusive and supportive ethos throughout the school, the effective strategies to promote positive behaviour and the consultation with the children in the compilation of class rules. Individual merit systems, for example, the ‘Principal’s Tea Party’ are in place and are highly valued by the children; there is clear evidence that the reward system has a positive impact on the children’s motivation, confidence and self-esteem. The relationships between the children and the staff are very positive. The staff give generously of their time to the broad range of after school activities provided for the children. The school is very well maintained; the staff make very effective use of all the available space both indoors and outdoors to create a bright and attractive learning environment. The highly dedicated and hard-working support staff contribute effectively to the children’s learning and well-being.”*

54. The ETI input to this DP indicates that the school is meeting this criterion based on recent visits to the Specialist Provision classes.

Criterion 2: Stable Enrolment Trends

55. The SSP recommends a minimum enrolment threshold of 140 pupils for a sustainable and viable urban primary school. The current approved admissions and enrolment numbers at Hollybank PS are 30 and 210 respectively. In 2024/25, there are 185 enrolled at the school in Years 1-7 including 29 pupils in Year 1. The current enrolment includes 27 pupils with SEN.
56. **Chart 1** and **Table 5** show that admissions to the school have fluctuated over the past five years and while they have been below the school's approved admissions number (30), with the exception of 2023/24, there has been an overall rise in admissions during this period.
57. The school's enrolment has risen steadily, from 158 to 185 (including SEN) over the last five years and has remained above the recommended minimum enrolment of 140 for a sustainable urban primary school.

Table 5: Hollybank PS – Historical Admissions and Enrolments

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Approved Enrolment: 210					
Number of pupils in year 1	24	25	16	30	29
Number of pupils in year 2	20	23	24	18	27
Number of pupils in year 3	19	22	24	25	18
Number of pupils in year 4	28	21	23	25	28
Number of pupils in year 5	25	31	22	24	28
Number of pupils in year 6	14	26	33	26	24
Number of pupils in year 7	28	15	30	36	31
Total pupils	158	163	172	184	185

Source: Schools +
Figures include SEN

Temporary Variations (TVs)

58. If a school receives more applications for admission than it has places available, it can request a TV of its admissions and/or enrolment number from the Department's School Admissions Team (SAT). Hollybank PS has not required applied for any TVs in the last 5 years.
59. **Table 6** below shows the pattern of applications to the school. The table illustrates that the school has been undersubscribed with first preference applications in each of the past five years. Whilst first preference applications have fluctuated and the school has been undersubscribed, there has been an overall rise in first preference applications during this period, peaking at 28 in 2023/24 and 2024/25, however data at the conclusion of the 2025/26 primary admissions process indicates a decrease in applications (22) for Year 1 in September 2025.

Table 6: Hollybank PS – Application Trends

Year	Approved Admissions	First Preference Applications	Total Applications (all preferences)
2021/22	30	19	19
2022/23	30	14	14
2023/24	30	28	28
2024/25	30	28	28
2025/26 *	30	22	22

*Position at the conclusion of the primary schools' admissions process for September 2025

Criterion 3: Sound Financial Position

60. Hollybank PS **provisional** surplus position at 31 March 2025 is **£15,607**. In the previous year the school's surplus at 31 March 2024 was **£686**.
61. As stated in the EA's guidance on Financial Management Arrangements for Controlled and Maintained Schools funded under the Common Funding Scheme, schools in a deficit or surplus position must not exceed an upper limit of 5% of the school's budget or £75,000, whichever is lesser. Hollybank PS is within this tolerance.
62. The school received a total Common Funding Formula budget of **£776,100** in the **2024-25 financial year** for **184¹** full-time equivalent (FTE) pupils, which generates a per capita of £4,218. The average for all primary schools is £3,938. The total Free School Meals Entitlement for the school is **106** pupils, which represents **57.61%** of the total FTE, which places the school in **Band 3** for funding purposes.
63. The school received £35,503 for Small Schools Support funding which represents 68.5% of the maximum funding for this factor, within the Nursery and Primary funding stream. The school also received £11,248 in respect of Primary Principals' Release Time which represents 68.5% of the total available.

¹ The school's funding allocation is based on the previous year's census data (e.g. the October 2023 census data was used to determine the 2024-25 CFF allocation). **The census data on the Schools+ database relates to an academic year, as opposed to the financial year.** In addition, differences between funded pupils and total pupils within the census count may occur for a number of reasons, including, but not limited to, zero rated pupils, some reception pupils, and over age pupils (paragraph 7 of Annex B to the Common Funding Scheme refers).

64. It is stated in the CfC that the school operates within its in-year budget. The school's three-year financial plan projects a surplus of £264,271 by March 2027. The Department notes however that the latest Monthly Expenditure Monthly Return (MEMR) for June 2025 shows the school in a provisional deficit of circa £41k.

Criterion 4: Strong Leadership and Management

65. The April 2010 ETI inspection report, although very dated, noted new management structures and the development of new middle management roles and responsibilities implemented by the Principal. It was further noted that the Principal encourages a collegiate approach to decision-making within the school and provides effective support and guidance in the professional development of the staff.
66. The Monitoring Inspection of February 2017 states in the Key Findings "*The new senior leadership team and co-ordinators evaluate priority areas through the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data and, identify low and underachievement. The relevant staff development in guided reading has resulted in a consistent approach to the planning and evaluation of reading sessions across the key stages.*"
67. ETI input states that this criterion is being met, however information regarding "Pupil behaviour, expulsions, suspensions and non-attendance as well as positive behaviours such as involvement in school management (e.g. buddying and mentoring schemes)" is "*Not known at this time.*"
68. It also notes there is a school development plan in place and progress is being made to achieve the plan's aims and objectives.

Criterion 5: Accessibility

69. **Map 2** shows that the majority of Hollybank PS pupils live within a one-mile radius of the school and **Map 6** illustrates that all the pupils are within the maximum travel time of 30 minutes, as set out in the SSP, with the majority of pupils living within less than a 10-minute drive to the school.
70. **Chart 5** and **Table 7** displays the grouped travel distance of pupils for Hollybank PS (as the crow flies) for the 2024/25 academic year. It illustrates that 87.57% of the pupils travel less than two miles and 7.57% travel between two and five miles, and a very small percentage (4.32%) travelling more than five miles. It should be noted that one pupil's address could not be verified.

Chart 5 - Hollybank PS – Pupil travel distance (2024/25)

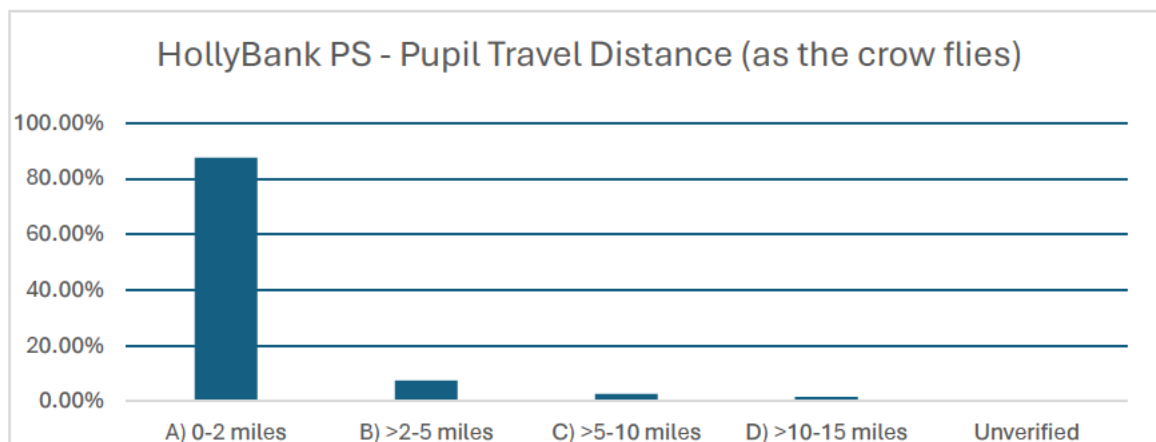


Table 7 – Hollybank PS – Grouped Pupil travel (distance as the crow flies)

Distance	Number of pupils	Percentage
A) 0-2 miles	162	87.57%
B) >2-5 miles	14	7.57%
C) >5-10 miles	5	2.70%
D) >10-15 miles	3	1.62%
Unverified	1	0.54%
Grand Total	185	100.00%

71. The school can be accessed by foot, car and bus. The school’s prospectus states that the school benefits from being close to major bus routes, train lines and the local university campus.

Criterion 6: Strong Links with the Community

72. The CfC asserts that the school has well established links within the community and works closely with Hollybank Pre-School with learning communities such as NEST (Newtownabbey Empowering Schools Together) and THRIVE (a collaboration of local parents, schools, community groups, statutory and voluntary organisations working together to help children and young people in Rathcoole and Monkstown). Monkstown Village Initiatives work closely with the school on a range of projects such as transition, Stress Beat programme, TLG (Transforming Lives for Good) coaching and a community/school family liaison partnership. The school has worked with the pre-school to establish a new Parent, Teacher and Friends Association who support fundraising and pupil events, and the committee is comprised of school and pre-school members.
73. The April 2010 inspection noted *“There is a strong sense of community within the school and the parents are encouraged at every opportunity to become involved in the school events and in supporting their children’s learning.”*

74. ETI input indicates that this criterion has been met, stating “*The school has strong connections within and beyond the local community, notably with the THRIVE and NEST initiatives in Newtownabbey. The principal is an active member of the East Antrim Primary Principals’ Group.*”

SUSTAINABILITY SUMMARY

75. The ETI inspection carried out in April 2010 assessed the quality of education provided by the school as “good” - however, this was 15 years ago and due to industrial action short of strike ETI input indicates that there is no recent information available to demonstrate the standards and quality of learning and teaching at the school due to the impact of industrial action of staff.
76. The school’s enrolment is above the minimum enrolment threshold as set out in the SSP. Although enrolment is below its approved number (210), it has been steadily increasing over the past five years, reaching 185 pupils (including SEN) in 2024/25. Data at the conclusion of the 2025/26 admissions process indicates that a total of 22 applications have been accepted for September 2025 into Year 1. Whilst there has been a fall in applications from 2024/25 (28) there has been an overall increase in first preference applications since 2021/22.
77. The school has recorded a surplus budget position of £686 at 31 March 2024, with a provisional surplus of £15,606 at 31 March 2025, which shows prudent financial management, however the EA’s latest MEMR for June 2025 indicates that the school has a provisional deficit of approximately £41k. There is no information at this stage to indicate why this has occurred.
78. The school is accessible to its pupils by foot, car and bus with the majority of its pupils living within a one-mile radius of the school and are within a ten-minute drive time with the remaining pupils living within a three-mile radius and travel of less than 30 minutes, as illustrated in **Maps 2 and 6**.
79. The school has strong established links with the community as evidenced in the CfC.
80. In summary, despite the current absence of up-to-date evidence regarding the quality of the educational experience and the effectiveness of leadership and management at Hollybank PS, the school is presently meeting the SSP criteria and can be regarded as a sustainable school. The Department would encourage the school to continue exercising prudent financial management to ensure the ongoing financial stability of the school.
81. The ETI update states “*This development proposal will ensure that families in the locality have access to full-time pre-school provision, with no financial impact regarding accommodation and resources.*”

Policy Context – Early Years

82. The Department aims to ensure that at least one year of pre-school education is available for every target age child whose family wants it. It is also the Department's practice, where possible, not to displace good quality pre-school education provision already in existence with pre-school education provision in an alternative setting.
83. All funded pre-school education settings regardless of location and management type are accessible to children from all backgrounds and are subject to the same inspection standards. All pre-school education settings follow the same curricular guidance, the broad framework of which ensures equality of opportunity, pointing to staff acknowledging and respecting the culture, beliefs and lifestyles of the families of all children. However, it is acknowledged that parents state preferences for pre-school education provision taking into account a wide range of factors, and in some cases, parents may have a preference for pre-school education in schools with a particular management type.
84. The Department's Learning to Learn Policy (A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, published on 7 October 2013) has, among its key actions, placed a moratorium on any new or additional full-time provision or conversion from part-time to full-time (defined as over 4.5 hours) in advance of a review of the current levels of full-time provision, existing research and the needs of children being served by it. The proposal is in line with the current moratorium.
85. The importance of early years can be seen across various outcomes in the former draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2021; the main Outcome associated with early years was 'Our children and young people have the best start in life'. The Executive's Children and Young People's Strategy (CYPS) 2020-2030 was published in December 2020. This is the strategic framework through which departments will improve the well-being of our children and young people and deliver the PfG Outcome. On 5 September 2024, the Executive agreed a draft PfG 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. The PfG further acknowledges that 'early years intervention provides the best long-term outcomes for our children, particularly those facing disadvantage. Early years intervention can make a long-term difference to a child's communication skills and their educational and health outcomes. The PfG was published on 3 March 2025.

Current Policy Direction - Standardisation

86. In September 2022, the former Minister for Education, Michelle McIlveen, MLA, indicated her intention to standardise the session length for funded pre-school education provision. This is in line with both the Fair Start Report, which includes an action that *"DE should standardise the length of pre-school education day to at least 4.5 hours per day, including access to free school meals for eligible children, thereby improving equality of provision"* and the New Decade New Approach Deal (NDNA) commitment: 'The Executive will publish a Childcare Strategy and will give immediate priority to developing arrangements to deliver

extended, affordable, responsive, high quality provision of early education and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4’.

87. The CfC asserts statutory nursery provision would also provide a seamless transition through to primary education which is a key aspiration in the Fair Start Final Report and Action Plan (2021). It notes “We want a seamless journey from pregnancy to pre-school, school and beyond, where every child is provided with the appropriate level of support needed in a timely and appropriate manner in order to realise their potential.’
88. You made a written statement to the Assembly setting out your vision and a package of measures in respect of Early Learning and Childcare on 23 May 2024. Among the measures, you have allocated £5m in the current year to begin the transition process to 22.5 hours, with an additional 2,200 full-time places expected to be in place by September 2025.
89. The recently published PfG specifies that ‘all children in their pre-school year should be provided with a full-time place of 22.5 hours’. It states that ‘*we will invest in taking steps to ensure we can deliver long-term change and to stabilise core services.*’ *This will lead to a standardised provision of 22.5 funded pre-school hours a week*’.
90. Implementation of a standardised session length will be on a phased basis and subject to Executive agreement and funding.
91. The out-workings of the standardisation programme may result in additional provision being required however, this work is at a formative stage and the Department can only consider the current context when making recommendations in respect of this proposal.

Level of need for Pre-School Provision in the Area

92. In determining the need for pre-school education provision, the Department generally assumes a level of provision at 95% of target age children, predicated on the application rate for pre-school education places which is approximately 93%; however, the level of provision within local areas may be higher or lower based on historic patterns of demand and assessment of ongoing need.
93. The current level of pre-school education provision within both a two-mile and five-mile radius of the school is used as an indicator of current capacity to meet the need for pre-school education provision and is considered alongside other factors such as population projections to determine the likely future need for additional pre-school education provision in the area.
94. **Tables 8 and 9** below show the number of pre-school education places and associated percentages measured against the Year One enrolments over the past five academic years using school census data in a two and five-mile radius, respectively, of Hollybank PS.

Table 8: Level of Provision – two-mile radius of Hollybank PS

Year	Statutory places	Non-statutory places	Reception places	Total pre-school provision	P1 places	Level of pre-school provision (%age of P1 places)	Underage children in statutory places
2021/22	468	96	0	564	609	92.6%	39
2022/23	468	89	0	557	603	92.4%	54
2023/24	442*	98	0	540	577	93.6%	16
2024/25	442	91	0	533	592	90.0%	26
Projected 2025/26	416**	91	0	507	592	85.6%	-
Proposed 2025/26	442***	70	0	512	592	86.5%	-

Source: School Census and provisional EA data

*The statutory figure in 2023/24 reflects a reduction of 26 places in St James PS & NU due to their transition from 78 places to 52 places under Amalgamation for Standardisation.

** The projected statutory figure includes an approved reduction of 26 places in Mossley NS effective 2025/26 due to Amalgamation for Standardisation.

***The proposed statutory figure includes the proposed additional 26 places that Hollybank PS are proposing alongside a reduction of 26 places in Mossley NS effective 2025/26 due to Amalgamation for Standardisation.

95. The level of provision within the two-mile radius of Hollybank PS was 90% in the 2024/25 academic year which is below the planning figure of 95%. It has been slightly below the planning figure in each of the past four years, ranging between 90% and 93.6%.
96. Mossley NS has been approved to transition from 78 part time places to 52 full-time places from September 2025 under the Pre-School Standardisation Programme (PSP) Amalgamation for Standardisation programme. This means that the number of places in the area would reduce by 26 between 2024-25 and 2025-26 academic years.
97. The proposal, in regard to Hollybank PS, if approved, would result in an increase of five funded places (21 non-statutory places replaced with 26 statutory places) within the two-mile radius with the proposed closure of Hollybank Pre-School, but due to the changes at Mossley NS, the overall level of statutory provision would remain the same but the overall number of funded places in 2025/26 would still be lower than in previous years.
98. Over the past four years there has been a large number of underage children accessing funded pre-school provision within the two-mile radius of Hollybank PS. This would normally indicate that there is a level overprovision of funded pre-school places in the area. The majority of these places have, however, been accessed in St James PS & NU and Mossley NS. Both of these settings have reduced their enrolment numbers through Amalgamation for Standardisation and it is expected that the numbers of underage children accessing funded pre-school provision will reduce significantly. There is already evidence of this with

St James PS & NU not admitting any underage children in 2023/24 or 2024/25 following the reduction in their PAN.

99. The proposal, if approved, would result in a provision level of 86.5% within a two-mile radius of Hollybank PS which is still well below the planning figure. If the proposal was not approved and the existing non-statutory provider does not close, the level of provision would fall further to 85.6%, or 82.9% if the existing non-statutory provider were to close.

Table 9: Level of Provision – five-mile radius of Hollybank PS

Year	Statutory places	Non-statutory places	Reception places	Total pre-school provision	P1 places	Level of pre-school provision (%age of P1 places)	Underage children in statutory places
2021/22	1196	312	0	1508	1631	92.5%	120
2022/23	1196	291	0	1487	1537	96.7%	135
2023/24	1170	338	0	1508	1507	100.1%	81
2024/25	1170	300*	0	1470	1500	98.0%	130
Projected	1118	287	0	1405	1500	93.6%	
Proposed	1144**	266***	0	1410	1500	94%	-

Source: School Census and provisional EA data

*The non-statutory figure in 2024/25 reflects the closure of Mount St Nicholas PG.

**The proposed statutory figure includes the additional 26 places that Hollybank PS are proposing, an additional 26 places due to the successful outcome of DP 722 from Cliftonville Integrated PS and NU, alongside a reduction of 26 places in Mossley NS and a further reduction of 52 places in Sunnylands NS effective 2025/26 due to Amalgamation for Standardisation.

***The proposed non-statutory figure reflects the reduction of 21 places associated with the closure of Hollybank Pre-school and a further reduction of 13 places with the closure of Rainbow Playgroup.

100. It is important to note that five settings, namely Holywood NS, Tiggers Palace Day Nursery, St Patrick's PS, Holywood PS and Sullivan Upper School have been discounted from the figures in **Table 9** above because whilst they are situated within the 5 miles radius of Hollybank PS, they are also situated across Belfast Lough and are not therefore reflective of the provision in the area.

101. The level of provision within a five-mile radius of Hollybank PS has ranged from 92.5% to 100.1% over the last four years. As highlighted in **paragraph 98**, within a two-mile radius of Hollybank PS, the number of statutory pre-school places available in 2023/24 dropped due to the reduction in provision at St James PS & NU under amalgamation for standardisation. The number of non-statutory pre-school places also dropped in 2024/25 with the closure of Mount St Nicholas PG.

102. Rainbow PG (13 places) also closed at the end of the 2024/25 academic year. There will also be a reduction in the number of pre-school places available in the 2025/26 academic year as a result of Mossley NS and Sunnylands NS reducing their enrolments by 26 and 52 respectively under the PSP amalgamation for standardisation. These reductions will, however, be partially offset by an increase

in provision at Cliftonville Integrated PS & NU of 26 places from September 2025 as a result of the approval to DP722.

103. Similar to the two-mile radius, large numbers of underage children have also accessed funded pre-school education places in the five-mile radius of Hollybank PS in each of the last four years. However, the changes set out in **paragraph 102** above for Mossley NS and Sunnylands NS, due to take effect under the PSP, it is also expected that the numbers of underage children accessing funded pre-school provision will reduce significantly within the five-mile radius.
104. Regardless of whether the proposal is approved, the level of pre-school provision in the two-mile and five-mile radii will fall; the approval of the proposal would slightly reduce the reduction in places (by five), bringing the levels to 86.5% and 94% respectively which are both still below the planning figure. This equates to approximately 50 and 15 funded pre-school places respectively below the planning figure, based on the 2024/25 Primary One figures.

RECENT CHANGES IN PROVISION

105. There have been significant changes to pre-school education provision in this area in recent years as detailed below:
 - In 2023/24 St James PS & NU transitioned from 78 places to 52 places under the PSP
 - In 2024/25 non-statutory setting Mount St Nicholas PG ceased operation. Mount St Nicholas PG had provided 9 funded places in 2023/24.
 - Mossley NS has been approved under the PSP to transition from 76 funded places (52 part-time and 26 full-time) to 52 full-time places from September 2025
 - Sunnylands NS has been approved to transition from 104 part-time places to 52 full-time places from September 2025.
 - Rainbow PG, a non-statutory setting which provided 13 funded places ceased to operate at the end of the 2024/25 academic year.
 - Additional pre-school provision (26 places) will open at Cliftonville IPS Nursery Unit from September 2025 following the successful outcome of DP 722.
106. Seven other settings, namely Hollybank Pre-School (associated with this DP), Alphabet PG, Greendale Day Nursery, Primrose Hill Day Nursery, Mossgrove PS & NU, Carr's Glen PS & NU and Currie PS & NU have been approved to transition to full-time provision effective September 2025, while keeping the number of places available at each setting unchanged. With the exception of

Hollybank Pre-School, which has indicated that it plans to close following a decision on this proposal, there are no planned changes in enrolment numbers at any of these settings.

TEMPORARY FLEXIBILITY

107. There has been only one Temporary Flexibility request approved in the past four years within the five-mile radius of Hollybank PS which was for Gaelscoil Eanna in Glengormley in 2022/23.

RECEPTION PROVISION

108. No primary schools within a five-mile radius of Hollybank PS operate reception classes (**CfC page 14**)

IMPACT ON VOLUNTARY AND PRIVATE SECTOR PROVIDERS

109. The PSEP is a partnership between statutory and voluntary/private pre-school education providers and both sectors are equally valued for their contribution to the education of pre-school children. Both sectors adhere to the same curricular guidelines and are inspected to the same educational standards. In considering DPs for statutory provision, careful consideration is given to the impact of any new provision on existing good quality voluntary/private providers in PSEP. In addition to considering the potential for over provision and duplication, this also considers the potential for a proposal to destabilise provision in an area and considers the preferences of parents who have chosen pre-school provision of other management types in the area.
110. As the proposal is essentially a change in management type from non-statutory to statutory provision with only a marginal increase in the number of funded pre-school places (21 to 26), the Department's Early Years Team (EYT) have no concerns in regard to the potential for the proposal to displace existing funded pre-school provision in the area.
111. The EA in its comments within the **CfC (page 6)** states *"It is important the Education Authority (EA) and the PEG support the Department in fulfilling its statutory duty by striving to meet demonstrated demand in an area for pre-school education for those parents/carers who want it for their children. In this context, PEG supports the DP on the basis of demonstrated demand as evidenced by the number of 1st preference applications and that it is a replacement of the existing funded non-statutory pre-school provision within the school's grounds."*

STANDARDISATION

112. The Minister for Education announced in May 2024 his intention to standardise all pre-school sessions over time to deliver 4.5 hours per day.
113. A setting within the two-mile radius of Hollybank PS, namely St James PS & NU, transitioned to the standardised full-time session length in September 2023 under the Amalgamation for Standardisation Pilot Scheme, reducing their enrolment from 78 places (52 part-time and 26 full-time) to 52 full-time places.
114. A total of nine settings within the five-mile radius of Hollybank PS have been approved to transition to full-time from September 2025. These are listed below:
- Hollybank Preschool Playgroup
 - Alphabet Playgroup
 - Greendale Day Nursery
 - Primrose Hill Day Nursery
 - Mossgrove PS & NU
 - Carr's Glen PS & NU
 - Currie PS & NU
 - Mossley NS
 - Sunnylands NS
115. Both Mossley NS and Sunnylands NS are transitioning to full-time provision through Amalgamation for Standardisation and will also reduce their enrolments from 76 places to 52 full-time places and 104 places to 52 full-time places respectively from September 2025.
116. Hollybank Pre-school Playgroup is one of the settings approved by the Minister to transition to the standardised full-time session length from September 2025. However, the CfC states that the Management Committee of the playgroup have notified the EA PSEP Team of their intention to close once a decision on this proposal has been made (**CfC page 7**). The proposal as published is seeking to establish replacement full-time provision similar to that approved for Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup under the PSP. EYT have considered this in respect of the policy direction for the PSEP and are content that the proposal for full-time statutory pre-school places at Hollybank PS is consistent with the objectives of the pre-school standardisation programme and with the proposed closure of Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup is in effect a change in management type from non-statutory to statutory provision.

EYIPT INPUT

117. Hollybank Pre-School was a recipient of the Department's Pathway Fund in 2024-25, receiving £28,250. As Hollybank Pre-School's Pathway project ceased in June 2025, EYIPT have no policy input to provide in regard to this DP.

ASSESSMENT OF STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

Article 44 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 (Effective and Efficient Use of Public Funds)

118. The Department must be mindful of its duty under Article 44 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and under Managing Public Money to ensure effective and efficient use of public funds. In discharging its duties, the Department must seek to avoid unreasonable public expenditure and to make the best use of resources available to it. This is particularly relevant in the current difficult financial circumstances which are well documented and rehearsed and in which the Department is operating.
119. Article 44 states that *"so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils shall be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents"*.
120. The Department aims to maximise available pre-school places for target age children, avoiding overprovision and the resulting enrolment of children younger than three years and two months in statutory settings. It is evident from **Tables 8 and 9** above that significant numbers of penultimate age children have been accessing funded pre-school education places within the two and five radii of Hollybank PS in each of the last four years.
121. Underage children may only receive a funded pre-school place when places remain available in a statutory pre-school setting after applications from target age children have been considered. It is a strong indicator that sufficient pre-school provision already exists to meet current demand and any increase to this will likely lead to an increase in the numbers of penultimate children accessing funded pre-school provision in the area.
122. Due to continuing decreasing birth rates, increasing numbers of underage children are attending pre-school provision across Northern Ireland. It is anticipated that legislation will ultimately be brought forward to remove all penultimate aged children from pre-school provision. However, until such times as new legislation is introduced, and in line with Article 44, underage figures must continue to be a factor when considering proposals for new or additional statutory nursery provision.
123. The Department notes there is a downward trend in the target age population locally, aligning with the NISRA birth rate and population projections which suggest a decline in the pre-school cohort over time. However, this proposal is

to establish statutory pre-school provision to essentially replace the provision currently being provided by the existing Hollybank Pre-school PG at the school, which is due to cease, therefore, it will not significantly alter the level of provision in the area and would be unlikely to displace other existing provision or increase the number of underage children enrolled in statutory pre-school education places.

124. Following the recent reduction in pre-school provision at St James PS & NU through the PSP there is already evidence of a significant reduction in the number of underage children accessing funded pre-school places in the area. With further proposed reductions in the number of funded pre-school places available due to come into effect at Mossley NS and Sunnylands NS in September 2025, it is expected that this recent pattern of reductions in the number of underage children accessing funded places in the area will continue.
125. The CfC states that the recurrent costs associated with the nursery unit will be covered through LMS funding. With regards to staffing, additional teaching and non-teaching staff, approximately £80,000, would be required with a recruitment process undertaken by the BoG. The cost of staff would be covered through LMS funding.
126. Directorate input from Investment and Infrastructure Directorate (IID) indicates that there could be a small capital cost dependent upon what furniture and equipment is required. However, without knowing what agreements would be made by the current provider and the school it would be difficult to comment at this time.
127. The EA has confirmed that a business case for Hollybank PS was approved in July 2023, to the value of £227,517.07, for the refurbishment of pupil toilets (within the foundation/KS1 area) and provision of a covered play area. However, these works relate to Specialist Provision classes established within the school over the last five years and do not relate to this DP.
128. No additional accommodation will be required for the nursery unit as Hollybank Pre-School PG currently operates within Hollybank Primary School's building. Should the DP be approved, the nursery unit will continue to operate within Hollybank PS, therefore no capital cost will be occurred.
129. The per capita figure for Hollybank PS, based on the school's 2024-25 budget allocation is £4,218 which is slightly above the average for all primary schools (£3,938).
130. The pre-school pupils are currently PEG funded, however, the establishment of statutory provision would be an additional cost to the ASB (estimated at £114k). In terms of the overall education budget this pressure should be offset by a reduced pressure on funding needed for non-statutory provision.
131. It is the Department's view that the proposal to establish a statutory nursery unit at Hollybank PS is a cost-effective solution that aligns with the Department's statutory obligations under Article 44 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order

1986 and the principles of Managing Public Money. It replaces existing non-statutory provision with statutory provision, ensuring continuity of service without significantly increasing overall capacity—adding only five additional places.

Section 75 of the NI Act 1998

132. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ('The Act') requires designated public authorities (including: the Department of Education, the EA and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) etc) to carry out all their functions:
- with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in respect of religious belief, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependents and sexual orientation; and
 - to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.
133. The Area Planning process supports the implementation of the Department's SSP, which aims to ensure that all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their educational needs in a school that is educationally and financially viable. Area Planning has been in place since 2011 and has gone through several processes of review and refinement including the publication of the Sustainable Schools Policy User Guide in February 2022 as the framework to help assess whether or not a school is demonstrating a trend of sustainability issues where is facing the risk of unsustainability of what action is required to address this, and the Strategic Area Plan in 2022 covering a five year period as referenced at para 16.
134. The Department conducted Equality Screening i.e. an assessment of a policy's impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations on 'Area-based Planning' in October 2012 and October 2014 with the recommendation that a full equality impact assessment was not required with the following reason stated "The overall policy approach of area-based planning is not expected to have a differential impact on any specific group. It is designed to help support a range of education policies. At local area level proposed changes consistent with an area-based planning approach may have impacts on particular groups and these would need to be considered and addressed, if necessary, before decisions would be made".
135. In considering the EA functions, the CfC confirms that Equality screening of the proposal has been carried out and the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (where appropriate) have been considered. This is in line with the Department's guidance on Development Proposals (DE Circular 2017/09). The area in which Hollybank PS is situated is classified as an urban area. In accordance with the 'Guide to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 for Public Authorities (Revised)' it is not eligible for special consideration. In relation to Section 75, the CfC states "*Three responses commented on Section 75. These comments and all responses have been taken into account when assessing the equality impact of the proposal.*"

Area Planning Impact

136. The CfC states that *“The proposal aligns with the key themes of Area Planning. The Area Plan for Northern Ireland aims to ensure that all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs in sustainable schools within a diverse system of education. It sets out the key priorities and objectives in providing access to a network of sustainable schools for the Education Authority, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectoral bodies in the light of Department of Education policy, in particular the need to raise standards and close the attainment gap through a network of sustainable schools. The focus of the plan is on the best educational interests of children and young people.*

Since 2011, statutory planning authorities and school managing authorities have been engaged in implementing the objectives of the Sustainable Schools Policy through Area Planning. The first four objectives are:

- *ensure that the excellent quality of education available to some young people is made available to all, in both urban and rural settings, in accessible, modern, fit-for-purpose accommodation;*
- *improve outcomes for all but, in particular, to provide additional support to those who require it, including those children with special educational needs, to realise their full potential;*
- *encourage schools to co-operate in sharing best practice to support children with special educational needs and those with other barriers to learning; and*
- *sustain strong, successful and viable schools, well-led by their governors representing local stakeholders, principals and their staff, to be the centre of the education system, supported by effective administrative and strategic direction.”*

137. ETI input states *“There is unlikely to be an adverse impact on other pre-school providers in the area as the demand for places remains high.”*

Educational Impact

138. The Department’s overall policy aim of the Learning to Learn (DENI, 2012) strategy states, all children should have *‘opportunities to achieve their potential through high quality early years education and learning experiences’.*

139. It is stated in the CfC that *“The addition of a full-time nursery unit at Hollybank Primary School will have a positive impact on those parents seeking pre-school education.”*

140. The ETI’s input states *“This development will ensure that families in the locality have access to full-time pre-school provision, with no financial impact regarding accommodation and resources.”*

Implementation Plan

141. The CfC states that if approved, the Development Proposal will take effect from 1 September 2025, or as soon as possible thereafter.
142. The ETI asserts that the implementation may not allow sufficient time to appoint suitable staff and open the new nursery unit in September.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Costs and Staffing

143. The CfC states that the recurrent costs associated with the nursery unit will be covered through LMS funding.
144. It further adds that additional teaching and non-teaching staff, approximately £80,000, would be required with a recruitment process undertaken by the BoG. The cost of staff would be covered through LMS funding.
145. The pre-school pupils enrolled in Hollybank Pre-school Playgroup are currently PEG funded therefore, the establishment of statutory provision would be an additional cost to the ASB but this pressure should be offset by a reduced pressure on funding needed for non-statutory provision.
146. Any new provision (including new nursery units) opening during the year are a pressure for the Department's "New Schools & Units" fund. A new 26 part-time NU is likely to create a funding need of around £66k – based on past costs for such units opening during the financial year – for the period from opening to the end of that financial year. Full year costs to the ASB are likely to be circa £114k (for new provision, not previously funded).

Accommodation

147. No additional accommodation will be required for the nursery unit as Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup currently operates within Hollybank Primary School's building. Should the DP be approved, the nursery unit will continue to operate within Hollybank Primary School's building.

CONCLUSION

148. The Department aims to provide a funded pre-school education place for every target age child whose family want it. It is the Department's practice not to displace good quality pre-school provision already in existence with a pre-school in an alternative setting or management type. Both the statutory and voluntary/private sectors are equally valued as they adhere to the same curricular guidelines and are inspected to the same educational standards.

149. Hollybank Pre-school PG, which currently operates within Hollybank PS, is already in existence as a voluntary/non-statutory pre-school, however over the past number of years the management committee of the Playgroup has faced a number of challenges, all of which it has overcome with the exception of one, that of staffing. Through no fault of either the committee nor the community, the playgroup had been unable to recruit staff in accordance with the North Eastern Health and Social Services criteria and as a result the management committee has indicated its intention to stand down on a date to be agreed pending the outcome of this proposal. The proposal is therefore in effect a proposal to replace the voluntary provision at Hollybank Pre-school Playgroup with statutory provision at Hollybank PS with a slight increase (five places) to the 21 F/T places previously approved under the Standardisation programme from September 2025.
150. The overall level of pre-school provision in the wider area is below the Department's target planning figure, particularly within the two-mile radius of Hollybank PS. The proposal is seeking to provide statutory pre-school provision of a similar size to replace the existing non-statutory provision so, if approved, would not significantly increase provision in the area. It is important also to note the aforementioned reductions in both statutory and non-statutory provision within the area from September 2025 due to the recent closure of some settings and the reduction in enrolments at Mossley NS and Sunnylands NS through amalgamation for standardisation.
151. The CfC is clear that the existing non-statutory provider, Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup will close, which will reduce the current level of provision in the area by a further 21 places if the proposal is not approved. EYT considers therefore that this proposal is about a change in management type and maintaining the current level of pre-school education provision and will not result in any displacement at other existing providers in the area.
152. The EA input has been considered, and they have indicated their support of the DP on the basis of demonstrated demand as evidenced by the number of first preference applications to Hollybank Pre-School PG (19 in 2022/23 and 18 in 2023/24) and that it is a replacement of the existing funded non-statutory pre-school provision currently within the school grounds (**CfC pg 7**). Hollybank Pre-School also received 22 first preference applications in 2024/25 and has been allocated a PAN of 21 by the EA for the 2025/26 academic year and has received 15 first preference applications.
153. It would appear that the uncertainty over the future of Hollybank Pre-School PG appears to have led to a lower rate of applications to the setting for the 2025-26 academic year than in each of the three previous years. However the CfC, together with the population data for the area and the approved reduction of pre-school provision at Mossley NS suggests that this is not likely to be indicative of a longer-term change in demand for provision at the setting; it is anticipated that the rate of applications is likely to recover if the future of pre-school provision at the site is secured.

154. It should also be noted that only the CSSC wrote in support of the proposal and no letters of objection to the proposal were received during the Statutory Objection Period, however during the pre-publication period the CSSC wrote in support of the proposal with only one neighbouring school opposing the proposal.
155. As set out above, Hollybank Pre-School PG received approval from you in December 2024 to transition to full time hours effective from September 2025 under the PSP. The proposal as published is to establish new statutory provision at Hollybank PS providing 26 full-time places.
156. A moratorium on any new or additional full-time pre-school provision as set out in the Learning to Learn Framework remains in place, however EYT is content that the proposal for full-time provision at Hollybank PS does not constitute a request for new or additional full-time provision, but rather a change of management type for existing full time provision; it is therefore considered to be consistent with both the moratorium and the objectives of the pre-school standardisation programme for the provision, if approved, to be approved on a full-time basis.
157. As stated earlier the SSP does not apply to pre-school provision, but it is appropriate to conduct a sustainability assessment to check that the host school at which a statutory NU is to be established is likely to be viable and sufficiently sustainable to deliver good educational outcomes for the children who may attend. Despite the current absence of up-to-date evidence regarding the quality of the educational experience and the effectiveness of leadership and management at Hollybank PS, the school is presently meeting the SSP criteria and can be regarded as a sustainable school.
158. Hollybank Pre-School Playgroup currently provides pre-school provision for the immediate area and acts as a feeder for Hollybank PS and a number of other local schools. It is understandable to see why this proposal has been brought forward and published, as the statutory provision will essentially replace the voluntary provision currently provided by Hollybank Pre-school PG but it is envisaged that it will also contribute to the long-term viability of Hollybank PS.
159. As Minister you have made early learning and childcare a top priority, this is also a key priority in the Northern Ireland Executive Programme for Government. This is a straightforward positive proposal, Hollybank PS is a sustainable school and approval would contribute to its ongoing sustainability and also provide parents in the local area with certainty that there will be access to a nursery for years to come.
160. Having considered all the evidence available, EYT considers that the proposal of establishing a 26-place full-time statutory nursery unit at Hollybank PS to replace existing non-statutory provision **is reasonable** and would be unlikely to have a detrimental impact on other pre-school education provision in the area or have an adverse impact on the stability of the PSEP as a whole. Conversely, given that other pre-school provision in the area will reduce quite considerably from September a loss of provision at Hollybank PS could create difficulty in ensuring that demand for pre-school places in the area can continue to be met.

161. The Department has contacted the EA in relation to the proposed implementation date of 1 September 2025, or as soon as possible thereafter. The EA has confirmed that 1 September 2025, or as soon as possible thereafter is the date for implementation of the nursery unit at Hollybank PS as the pre-school provider is very keen to step down as soon as possible. The EA will work with the school to implement as soon as a decision is made.

RECOMMENDATION

162. Taking account of all the evidence and information provided, it is recommended that you:

(i) Approve DP 748, that:

“A statutory nursery unit will be established at Hollybank Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2025, or as soon as possible thereafter”

(ii) Agree that this submission (with any appropriate redactions) can be published on the Department’s website once the proposer and the EA have been informed of your decision.

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