

<p><b>Subject:</b></p> <p><b>SIXTH FORM – TEMPORARY VARIATION REQUESTS</b></p>	<p><b>Circular Number:</b> 2016/09</p> <p><b>Date of Issue:</b> 19 April 2016 Revised 25 May 2018 Revised 05 June 2019 Revised 25 February 2026</p>
<p><b>Target Audience:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principals and Boards of Governors of all 11-18 Grant-Aided Post-Primary Schools</li> <li>• Principals and Boards of Governors of all 11-16 Grant-Aided Post-Primary Schools</li> <li>• Education Authority</li> <li>• Council for Catholic Maintained Schools</li> <li>• Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta</li> <li>• Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education</li> </ul>	<p><b>Governor Awareness:</b> 11-18 Schools - Essential</p> <p>11-16 Schools - For information only</p>
<p><b>Summary of Contents:</b></p> <p>This Circular advises Principals and Boards of Governors of the arrangements for requesting extra Sixth Form places for schools likely to be oversubscribed when receiving year 13 applications.</p> <p>This circular will apply to admissions taking place in September 2026 <b>and for each subsequent school year</b>. The circular will be re-issued where a change to the process occurs or other updates are required. Until that point the content of the circular continues to apply.</p>	<p><b>Status of Contents:</b> Advice for Principals and Boards of Governors</p> <p><b>Related documents</b> 2013/24 Duty to Verify 2026/03 Temporary Variation Requests</p> <p><b>Superseded Documents:</b> Circular Number 2014/05</p> <p><b>Expiry Date:</b> Not Applicable</p>
<p><b>Enquiries:</b></p> <p>Any enquiries about the contents of this Circular should be addressed to:</p> <p>School Admissions Team Department of Education Rathgael House Balloo Road BANGOR Co Down BT19 7PR</p>	<p><b>DE Website:</b> <a href="http://www.education-ni.gov.uk">www.education-ni.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Tel: 028 9127 9564</p> <p><b>E-Mail:</b> schooladmissionsteam @education-ni.gov.uk</p>

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This circular relates only to schools which require a temporary variation to admit Sixth Form pupils. Schools are under no obligation to seek a temporary variation for extra places for Sixth Form. Schools who can accommodate Sixth Form students within the school's approved enrolment number should do so and do not need to take the actions suggested in this circular.

All information requested on the application form is required for the purpose of processing a temporary variation application in line with statutory requirements within the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. The data will be protected under the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018. It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that they have full authority from each applicant to share personal data on their behalf. The Education Authority has updated the AP1 school application form following the implementation of GDPR on 25 May 2018 and any parent applying for their child's admission to a school will, in signing the AP1 form, provide the school with the authority to share this information with the Department should an application for a temporary variation be required. Where a parent has not filled in an AP1 form, it will be for the school to ensure it secures the appropriate authority.

## Introduction

1. This circular has been produced in order to explain Sixth Form temporary variation policy and procedure.
2. The Department has produced application forms at [Annex B](#) which schools should use when requesting a temporary variation to accommodate Sixth Form pupils. In order to increase the efficiency of the process for schools and applicants, schools seeking a temporary variation for Sixth Form should not depart from the process explained in this circular.
3. This circular should be read in conjunction with circular number 2026/03 entitled "Admission and Enrolment Numbers – Temporary Variation Requests" which sets out the legislative basis for temporary variation requests and some of the key issues schools should consider when requesting a temporary variation including accommodation, area planning and resisting parental pressure.

## Actions Required

4. Schools who will require a temporary variation to provide extra places over and above the approved enrolment number of the school in order to accommodate Sixth Form pupils **must** take a number of steps. In brief however they are as follows:
  - Adopt the admissions criteria addendum set out in Annex A;

- When actual numbers are known after publication of exam results, use pro-formas attached in [Annex B](#) to request additional places for returning and external pupils. Schools requesting places for returning pupils only, should complete Part 1 of the pro-forma. Schools requesting places for returning and external pupils, or external students only, should complete both parts 1 and 2.
5. Please note that the total enrolment figures provided by the school in the pro-formas attached at [Annex B](#) will be confirmed by the Department after the Sixth Form exercise has concluded and used to confirm the school's approved enrolment number for the school year in question. **Please ensure that the Department is kept informed of any changes to this total to ensure that the correct number is confirmed in advance of the annual school census.**

### **Outline of the Extra Sixth Form Places Policy**

6. The Department's policy on extra Sixth Form places is generally to grant places to a school to extend its ability to admit returners, **who meet the school's Sixth Form admissions criteria**, to Year 13. The Department also grants extra Sixth Form places to schools for young people from other schools (i.e. 'externals') who otherwise would not be able to pursue their post-16 course-choices at a suitable school without undertaking an unreasonable journey. Annex A explains how the Department defines a suitable school.
7. **The key test** applied by the Department when deciding whether or not to award additional places to the enrolment number of a school for external pupils seeking a place in that school's Sixth Form is whether or not a pupil can pursue their post-16 course choices at a suitable alternative school with places available without undertaking an unreasonable journey (defined as a journey that cannot be taken within one hour or is further than 15 miles). If this applies it should be indicated by the school in the column entitled '*Why has this place been requested?*' in the pro-forma attached at [Annex B](#) (Part 2). Provision of this information is not mandatory but will significantly reduce time taken to respond to the request. This column should also be used to include any other information that is salient to that pupil's application.

### **Eligibility for transport assistance**

8. Under the current home to school transport policy as set out in Circular 1996/41 (as amended) on the Department's website, schools and parents of children seeking admission to a school's Sixth Form should note that eligibility for transport assistance is determined solely on two criteria, that is, "distance" and "suitable school". Individual subjects are not taken into consideration when determining eligibility.

## Other Key Considerations

9. **As with all temporary variation requests, when requesting extra places for Sixth Form it is the responsibility of the requesting school to ensure that it can safely and effectively accommodate the numbers for whom it is requesting extra places within existing accommodation.**
10. An extra place that would have been awarded to a returning pupil had they achieved the necessary grades, cannot be transferred to an external applicant, should that returner not achieve the grades. All extra places for external applicants must be the subject of an application to the Department (as set out in [Annex B](#) (part 2)).

## Unlawful Admissions

11. Exceeding the approved admissions or enrolment numbers of the school by the admission of an additional pupil or pupils without the Department's prior approval is an unlawful act, the Department, Education Authority and the Boards of Governors of schools must act accordingly. Further information on unlawful admissions can be found in circular number 2026/03.
12. Further to paragraph 11 **all pupils admitted unlawfully may be weighted 'zero' for LMS purposes.**

## Post 16 courses

13. **All schools who offer post 16 courses**, even those who do not wish to request additional Sixth Form places, should forward a list of these courses to [schooladmissionsteam@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:schooladmissionsteam@education-ni.gov.uk) by 31 July of the school year preceding the proposed Sixth Form admissions in order that the Department can establish what courses are available in each area. This list should make clear any constraints, such as timetabling issues, which preclude certain combinations of subjects from being studied together. **If a school does not respond by this date it will not be considered as an alternative setting for pupils in the area.**

## Collaborative Arrangements

14. In line with the Sustainable School Policy in relation to the Entitlement Framework, where collaborative arrangements between schools exist, it is anticipated that pupils in Key Stage 4 and post-16 should spend at least 80% of their time at the school at which they are registered i.e. their home school. Where a pupil is completing their courses between two separate schools, the Department will only grant an additional place for the pupil at the school at which they will be completing the majority of their courses.

## **Contacts**

15. Should you have any queries please contact the Department using the contact information provided on the cover page of this circular. Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C Boyd", enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

**Craig Boyd**  
**School Admissions Team**

**ADDENDUM TO SIXTH FORM ADMISSIONS CRITERIA****Criteria for all extra places made available by the Department of Education for admission into Year 13 (Sixth Form).**

The Department of Education may, in response to a request from a school, increase the number of pupils that the school can admit to its Year 13. Places that become available in this way shall be allocated only to pupils who meet the basic eligibility criteria for Sixth Form study (as set out below) and shall be allocated in the order determined by the criteria to be applied in the order set down.

1. Pupils who have most recently completed Year 12 in [school name].
2. Pupils from other schools where admission has been agreed and additional places granted by the Department of Education.\*

\*Parents should note how the Department of Education (DE) will, in response to a school's request, temporarily increase a school's enrolment number in order to allow extra post -16 pupils to enrol. DE will only increase the school's enrolment number if it is content that each external pupil for whom a place is requested would not be able to pursue their post-16 course-choices at another suitable school without undertaking an unreasonable journey (i.e. a journey, that by public transport, would be over an hour from where the young person lives or is further than 15 miles distance). If DE finds that no other suitable school may provide all of the post-16 courses that the pupil wishes to pursue - then DE will agree a school's request for an extra place.

**NOTES:**

1. If the Board of Governors of an 11-18 school wishes to maximise the number of additional places they can be granted under the extra Sixth Form places policy then they should publish the proposed criterion as an appendage to the existing Sixth Form criteria. It is entirely a matter for the Board of Governors of the school to decide if they want to use the addendum. **If they do not publish the addendum, the school cannot apply to the Department for additional Sixth Form places.**

2. The recommended criterion should be appended to the school's existing Sixth Form admissions criteria. **Please note it is only by using the precise wording provided and as an appendage to the existing criteria that the text is recommended.** The wording assumes that the addendum will be listed directly underneath the school's post 16 criteria.
3. The addendum will not affect the basic eligibility criteria that the school applies in order to consider applicants eligible for Sixth Form admissions, prior to any question of admissions priority. It also does not affect the admissions criteria by which the school determines the admissions priority of applicants for places available within the approved enrolment number. It still remains the case that at all times it is entirely the choice of a school whether or not to request any extra places or none.
4. The criteria addendum states that the Department will consider what suitable alternatives are available to a pupil for whom an additional place is sought. To determine suitability, the Department first considers all schools to be one of 4 types: (i) denominational (ii) non-denominational (iii) Integrated; and (iv) Irish-medium. A school requesting an extra place for a post-16 pupil will belong to one of these 4 types and the Department will consider any other school from this same type as suitable for the pupil. The Department will also consider as suitable for the pupil any school of the same type as that attended by the child in Year 12.

**ANNEX B**

**TEMPORARY VARIATION APPLICATION – EXTRA SIXTH FORM PLACES**

This pro-forma should be completed and sent to School Admissions Team in the Department of Education as soon as exam results are published and provisional numbers are known.

<b>School Name:</b>	_____	<b>Ref No:</b>	_____
<b>Address:</b>	_____ _____ _____		
<b>School E-mail:</b>	_____		
<b>Contact Name:*</b>	_____		
<b>Contact Telephone Number</b>	_____		
<b>Contact E-mail</b>	_____		

**\*Please provide the contact name and number (provide a mobile number if necessary) of an officer from the school who is familiar with the school’s request and who can be contacted between the hours of 09.00-17.00 Monday-Friday from the point at which the request is made until it is responded to by the Department. Provide more than one number if possible.**

## PART 1

**Declaration:**

[Insert name of school] requires [insert number of places] extra places to accommodate **returning** pupils to Sixth Form and/or [insert number of places] extra places to accommodate **external** pupils to Sixth Form. The additional places requested are required for pupils who meet the school's post-16 eligibility criteria.

The Board of Governors of the school is content that all these additional pupils can be safely accommodated within the school's existing accommodation and understands that no additional accommodation will be provided as a result of the Department's approval of this temporary variation request.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**(Principal/Chair of Board of Governors – please delete as appropriate)**

TEMPORARY VARIATION APPLICATION – EXTRA SIXTH FORM PLACES

**PART 2**

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Ref No: \_\_\_\_\_

**EXTRA PLACES FOR APPLICANTS JOINING YEAR 13 FROM ANOTHER INSTITUTION AND WHO MEET POST-16 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

Note – The Department will process requests for external applicants as fast as possible. **No admission that is contingent on the award of an extra place should be offered until the Department has responded to this request.**

Name and address of applicant	School previously attended	The Post-16 courses the applicant wishes to pursue	Why has this place been requested? Why is this pupil unable to continue their studies at another school?*	DE decision (for official use only)

\* For instance if you **already know** that a pupil for whom you are requesting a place cannot pursue their post-16 course-choices at an alternative suitable school with places available without undertaking an unreasonable journey (i.e. a journey that by public transport would be over an hour from where the young person lives) you could indicate that here. You should also make clear why the pupil cannot complete their studies at other schools in the area that offer the same courses – for instance if the pupil has not met the entrance criteria for those schools.

TEMPORARY VARIATION APPLICATION – EXTRA SIXTH FORM PLACES

**PART 2 – continued**

**School Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Ref No:** \_\_\_\_\_

Name and address of applicant	School previously attended	The Post-16 courses the applicant wishes to pursue	Why has this place been requested? Why is this pupil unable to continue their studies at another school?*	DE decision (for official use only)

\* For instance if you **already know** that a pupil for whom you are requesting a place cannot pursue their post-16 course-choices at an alternative suitable school with places available without undertaking an unreasonable journey (i.e. a journey that by public transport would be over an hour from where the young person lives) you could indicate that here. You should also make clear why the pupil cannot complete their studies at other schools in the area that offer the same courses – for instance if the pupil has not met the entrance criteria for those schools.

**SIXTH FORM TEMPORARY VARIATIONS – THE PROCESS**

**A school wishing to apply for a temporary variation for Sixth Form must have adopted the recommended criterion as set out in Annex A of this circular.**



**MAY/JUNE**

**All schools who offer post 16 courses**, even those who do not wish to request additional Sixth Form places, should forward a list of these courses to [schooladmissionsteam@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:schooladmissionsteam@education-ni.gov.uk) by 30 June, of the school year preceding the proposed Sixth Form admissions, in order that the Department can establish what courses are available in each area.

**AUGUST**

In August when exam results and, therefore, provisional numbers, are known, if a school requires additional places for returning and/or external pupils it should complete the 'Temporary Variation Application – Extra Sixth Form Places' pro-forma attached at Annex B and send it to the Department using the contact details provided below.

Completed forms can be e-mailed to [schooladmissionsteam@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:schooladmissionsteam@education-ni.gov.uk) or posted to School Admissions Team, Department of Education, Room F28, Rathgael House, 43 Balloo Road, Bangor, BT19 7PR. All such requests will be promptly acknowledged by the Department.



**AUGUST/SEPTEMBER**

The school can admit all returning pupils already covered by the application pro-forma.

The school **must await the Department's response** to their request for additional external pupils before the admission of any such pupils.



**SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER**

School Admissions Team will use the information provided on the application pro-forma to establish if additional places can be granted and provisional numbers will be agreed with the school.

The Department will seek final confirmation of numbers and the **final approved enrolment number for the school** will be confirmed in writing with the school. This is an important step in the process to enable the school census to be taken forward accurately.