



VISION 2030

May 2026

Integrated Education Support Programme

(2026-2029)



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Vision 2030: Integrated Education Support Programme (2026-2029)

1. Overview of the Programme

The Integrated Education Support Programme is a structured three year programme designed to guide schools that wish to become Integrated. It has been developed by the Department of Education in partnership with Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and the Education Authority (EA). It is anticipated that the programme will run each year, subject to demand from schools. Given its innovative nature, the programme's content and structure will be reviewed before any future iterations are delivered .

Integrated schools are funded via the Common Funding Formula under the statutory Common Funding Scheme on the same basis as all other grant aided schools in Northern Ireland. This ensures parity of treatment across school sectors, with core funding allocations driven by pupil numbers and assessed need rather than school designation. The Integrated Education support programme is therefore intended to complement this existing funding framework by providing targeted support to assist schools to develop and sustain integrated education, while operating within the same financial arrangements that apply to all schools.

The programme provides a clear pathway as outlined in Transforming Together – Understanding the Pathway to Integrated Education (available [here](#)) from early exploration through to opening as an Integrated school. It offers schools the opportunity to understand the implications of becoming Integrated, build a strong evidence base for a Development Proposal, and develop the ethos and operational requirements of Integrated Education including the requirement for reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons.

Schools accepted onto the first cohort of the programme will commence activities in September 2026 and progress through four phases:

Exploring Transformation	Phase 1 School communities, primarily supported by NICIE and the EA assisted by other support bodies, will carry out a more in-depth exploration of Transformation before deciding whether to formally initiate the statutory Transformation process.
The Statutory Transformation Process	Phase 2 This phase covers the period from the initiation of the statutory process, and the resolution to hold a parental ballot, to the decision on a Development Proposal to transform a school to Integrated status.
Preparing for Transformation to Integrated Status	Phase 3 This is a key planning year leading up to the approved implementation date for Transformation in which the school will begin to formalise key arrangements, including promotional activities to announce the school's new vision, making changes to the school's admissions criteria and develop governance arrangements to reflect its eventual move to Integrated status.
Post Transformation – Delivering Transformation to Integrated Status	Phase 4 Post Transformation, schools will continue to develop and strengthen their Integrated ethos and engage in a process of monitoring and evaluation with NICIE and the EA.

If approved, the school opens as Integrated from the first day of the next academic year, 2029 for the first cohort of schools.

Both change in status of a single school (Transformation) and amalgamation of two or more schools to create a new Integrated school are supported within the programme.

2. Programme Purpose

The programme aims to ensure that schools:

- Have access to comprehensive guidance and support at each stage.
- Engage meaningfully with staff, parents, pupils and the wider community.
- Understand and meet the statutory requirements for Integrated Education under the Integrated Education Act 2022.
- Implement thoughtful and planned cultural and curricular change.
- Build a robust Case for Change supported by evidence of demand, sustainability and readiness.
- Are prepared to deliver Integrated Education with clear plans for ethos, governance, diversity and curriculum.

It includes mandatory training sessions, school-based engagement (including whole school development days), professional learning and ongoing monitoring and evaluation involving NICIE and the EA.

3. Eligibility to Apply

All grant aided schools may apply except:

- Special schools and hospital schools.
- Schools with an approved Development Proposal to close.
- Voluntary schools where Trustees have issued notice of intention to discontinue unless withdrawn.

Applications are particularly welcomed from groups of two or more primary schools within five miles of one another or post primary schools within 10 miles of each other seeking to make a joint proposal for Integrated provision. This is especially encouraged for Controlled and Catholic Maintained schools working together to create a shared identity and secure rural provision. The pathway and additional support requirements for these collaborative projects will be explored with the schools and their relevant managing authorities.

Programme Entry

Priority will be given to schools that meet all of the following:

- Are not in formal intervention.
- Have a sustainable enrolment or are within Sustainable Schools policy parameters*.
- Have higher pupil numbers relative to minimum sustainability thresholds.
- Have higher proportions of pupils from the minority community.

*If the Programme is undersubscribed the Department may lower the level for a particular school/s, where amalgamation is being proposed .

Schools not accepted may reapply in future years or may proceed outside the programme using the Department's general guidance but will not be able to avail of Departmental funding.

Programme Entry Enrolment Thresholds

- Rural primary: 95 pupils.
- Urban primary: 126 pupils.
- Post primary without sixth form: 450 pupils.
- Post primary with sixth form: 450 in years 8 to 12 and 90 in years 13 to 14.

For amalgamating schools, sustainability is assessed on the projected size of the new school.

Prioritisation

If there are more applicants than there are places available, applications will be considered as follows:

- Where two or more schools are located within the same locality and are no more than five miles for primary schools or 15 miles for post primary schools from each other indicate their intention to Transform together to become a single Integrated school, the Department will give additional priority to their joint application for entry to the Programme. Joint applications from schools in the Controlled and Catholic Maintained sectors are particularly welcomed.
- The school has an actual enrolment above the recommended minimum number of the Sustainable Schools Policy (i.e. 105 in a rural primary school, 140 in an urban primary school, 500 in years 8 to 12 in a post primary school and 100 in years 13 and 14 combined).

- In the event there are still more applicants than places available, the percentage of pupils from the minority religion, compared to the school's total enrolment, will be used to rank applicants with the highest in rank order being accepted onto the Programme.

4. Support Funding Available

Schools accepted onto the programme may apply for dedicated support funding each year with the support of NICIE and the EA.

Subject to annual budget availability, funding will be provided to:

- Pay for any parental ballot.
- Provide substitute cover linked to Case for Change development, curriculum review or visits to other Integrated schools.
- Provide staff and governor training.
- Support the role of an Integration Coordinator.
- Purchase resources reflecting cultural diversity including library materials, sporting equipment or musical instruments.
- Support changes related to ethos including signage.

5. Year 1: Exploring what Integrated status means for your school

Year 1 focuses on understanding Integrated Education, gathering information and assessing readiness before a formal decision to proceed.

Key Activities

- **Information and Training**

Schools participate in workshops and online modules on topics such as exploring the rationale for Integrated education in your context, understanding what acquiring Integrated status means, engaging parents, developing a three year Integration Plan, building pupil voice and planning for Integrated Education.

- **Stakeholder Engagement**

Schools undertake extensive engagement with staff, parents, pupils and the local community. This includes letters, information events, discussions on implications for ethos and curriculum, and opportunities to listen to concerns. Schools are encouraged to identify strengths, consider the impact of change and assess the level of support.

- **Pupil Voice**

Schools must create meaningful avenues for children and young people to express their views and consider how pupils' perspectives inform future decisions.

- **Baseline Assessment**

Using the Framework for Integrated Education (here), schools carry out a comprehensive self-evaluation covering ethos, curriculum, leadership, community links and diversity. This forms the evidence base for understanding their starting point towards meeting the statutory definition of Integrated Education.

- **Draft Case for Change and Three year Integration Plan**

Schools begin preparing these documents which will ultimately support a Development Proposal that evidences the schools ability to meet the

statutory definition of Integrated Education after acquiring integrated status. The three year Integration Plan includes plans for ethos and curriculum change, leadership development, community engagement and operational adaptations. It typically comprises four main elements:

- Baseline assessment.
- Outlining the rationale for Integrated Education in your context.
- Three year strategic plan.
- Annual action plan.

NICIE and the EA provide continuous support including monitoring progress, offering advice and providing templates.

Checkpoint and Decision to Proceed

NICIE and the EA consider whether the school is ready to continue to Year 2. Their recommendation goes to the Department for consideration and approval.

6. Year 2: The statutory process - How Integrated Status is achieved

Year 2 covers the formal processes leading to the Departmental decision which will include all or some of the key activities listed below.

Key Activities

- **Parental ballot**

The Board of Governors passes a resolution to hold a parental ballot or receives a request from parents representing 20% of the pupils why are

currently registered at the school. Civica administers the secret ballot and Information is provided to all eligible voters including implications of the change and draft planning documents. If the ballot meets required turnout and is passed, the school must proceed to a Development Proposal.

- **Production of a Development Proposal and Case for Change**

EA and NICIE will assist the Board of Governors with the writing of both documents which are submitted to the EA in late October to early November. EA carries out pre-publication consultation with affected schools, publishes the proposal and starts the two month statutory objection period.

- **Evaluation of the development proposal by the Department**

The Department considers all evidence associated with the Development Proposal including:

- Planning and engagement.
- Ability to provide Integrated Education.
- Sustainability.
- Demand.
- Area planning context.

- **Decision**

It is expected that a decision will issue by the end of June. If approved, the change in status generally takes effect from the first day of the next academic year. For cohort 1 this could be 1st September 2029.

7. Year 3: Preparing for Integrated Status

Year 3 focuses on implementing change and preparing for operation as an Integrated school.

Key Activities

- **On-going monitoring and review of the Integrated Plan**

Changes to ethos, curriculum, extracurricular offer and community links will continue to be implemented and evaluated, supported by EA and NICIE.

- **Admissions criteria**

Amending admissions criteria to reflect commitments to diversity and inclusion. Criteria are submitted to EA in the autumn term for publication.

- **Reconstitution of the Board of governors**

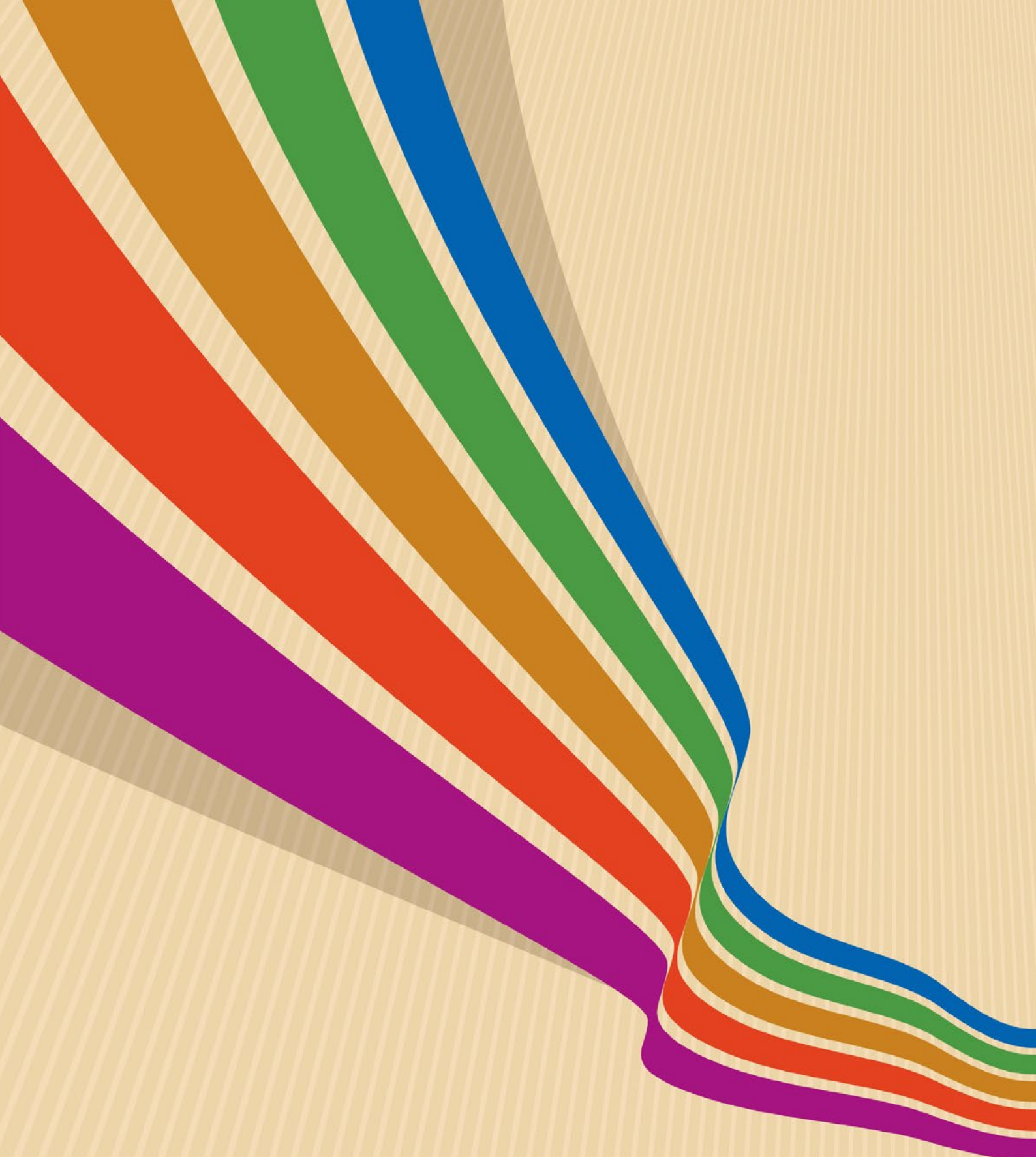
The EA Governance team will advise and assist with preparations for reconstitution of the Board of Governors to meet Integrated governance requirements.

- **Promoting the Integrated school**

This is likely to include a review of the school's name, logo, uniform, signage and branding to communicate the new identity and ensure a diverse intake for the future.

- **Continuing staff professional development**

NICIE and EA will provide/facilitate further professional learning opportunities for all staff which will include access to networks of professional practice within the Integrated sector.



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