

COPY OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Cover Note

DP No.	DP 757	
School	St Patrick's Primary School, Burrenreagh	
	<i>"St Patrick's Primary School, Burrenreagh, will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter."</i>	
Minister's Decision	Approved	
Date of Decision	22/06/26	
Minister's Comments	Recommendation to approve the DP to close the school is approved.	
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
	■ or [REDACTION]	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

From: CLARE FOLEY
Area Planning Policy Team (East Region)
(Cleared by Scott Harbinson – 19 June 2026)
(Cleared by Sharon Smyth – 19 June 2026)

Area Planning Team (East Region)

Date: 19 June 2026

To: Paul Givan MLA
Minister for Education

**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL (DP) 757 ST PATRICK’S PRIMARY SCHOOL,
 BURRENREAGH**

Issue:	To decide on DP 757: <i>St Patrick’s Primary School, Burrenreagh, will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter.</i>
Timescale:	URGENT – the proposal is for closure this summer. There are currently only 11 pupils enrolled at St Patrick’s Primary School.
Financial / Resource Implications:	<p><u>Capital:</u> None.</p> <p><u>Resource:</u></p> <p>Staffing - The actual cost of redundancy for each individual staff member will vary depending on their age, salary, years of service etc. However, based on spend in 2025/26 the average cost of a teaching exit was estimated at £40.1k and a non-teaching exit was estimated at £26.3k.</p> <p>Transport - Home to school transport will be provided in accordance with the EA’s Home to School Transport Policy. However, given the low number of pupils attending the school this is not expected to be significant.</p> <p>Finance – The school currently holds a deficit. At 31 March 2026, St Patrick’s PS held a provisional closing budget deficit of -£547,332. The school’s deficit in the previous year, at 31 March 2025, was -£376,016.</p>
FOI Implications:	The content of this submission is likely to be fully disclosable and will be published on the Department’s

	website (subject to appropriate redactions) once a decision is taken on the proposal.
Statutory Duty Implications:	<p>The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016</p> <p>Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998</p> <p>The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016</p> <p>Article 44 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986</p>
Presentational Issues:	<p>It is likely that there will be local media and political interest in your decision. Should any queries arise the Press Office can refer to this submission and liaise with officials.</p> <p>(Cleared with the Press Office)</p>
Recommendation:	<p>It is recommended that you:</p> <p>(i) Consider approving DP 757 that: -</p> <p><i>St Patrick's Primary School, Burrenreagh, will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter.</i></p> <p>(ii) If DP 757 is approved, agree that this submission (with appropriate redactions) can be made available on the Department's website once the Proposer, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), and the Education Authority (EA) have been notified.</p>
NOTES	<p>It is essential that the appendices are read in full alongside this submission, as they contain substantive supporting evidence and detailed analysis which are critical to the overall assessment.</p>

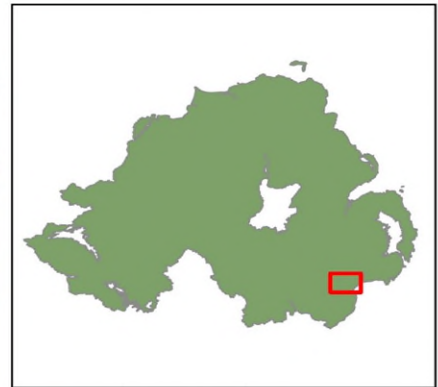
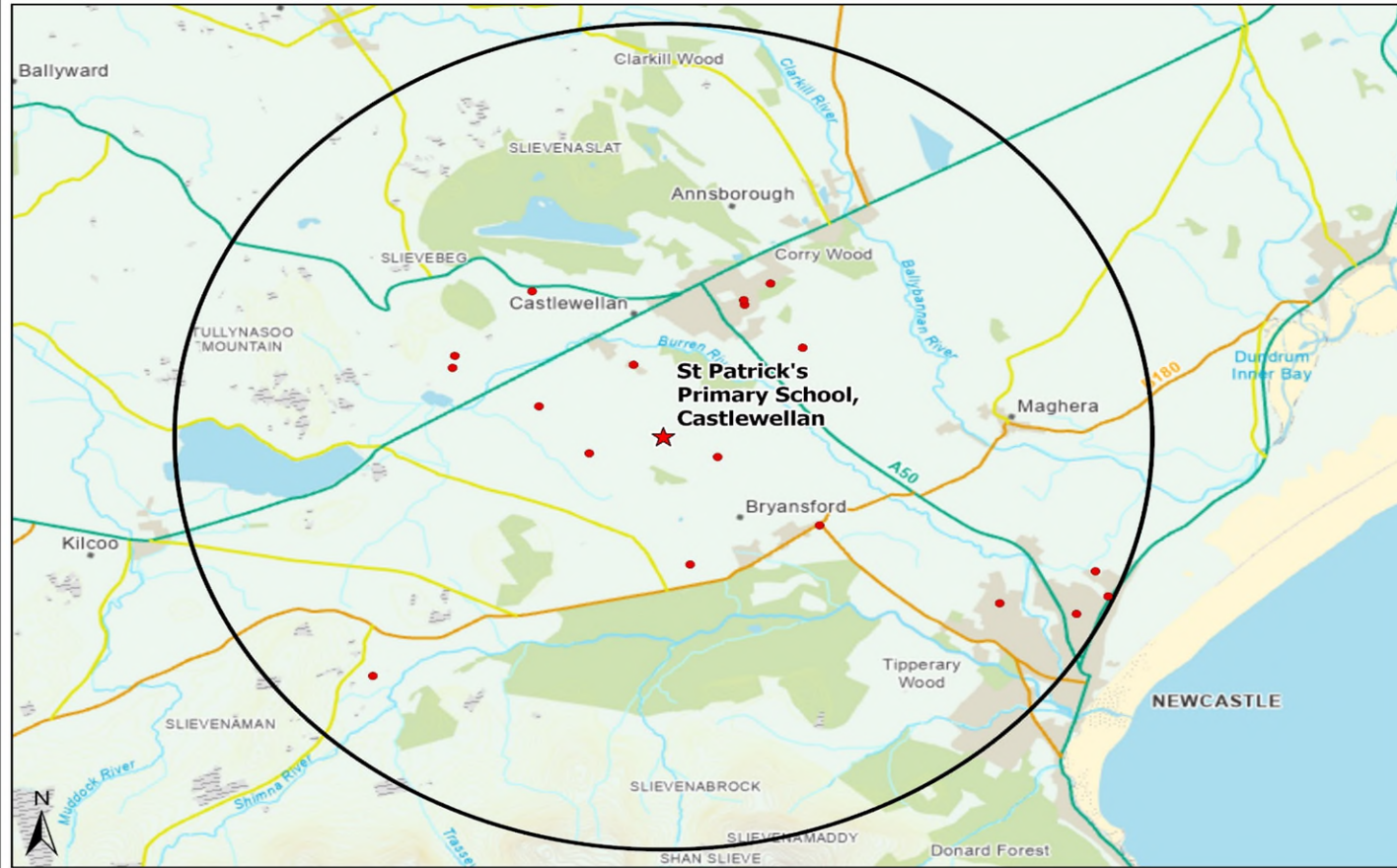
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Appendices

- Appendix A: Copy of Development Proposal 757**
- Appendix B: Case for Change for DP 757**
- Appendix C: Key Statistical / Assessment Data**
- Appendix D: Education & Training Inspectorate Comments**
- Appendix E: DE Policy Team Comments**

St Patrick's Primary School & Pupil Location - 3 Mile Radius



- ★ St Patrick's Primary School
- St Patrick's PS pupils
- St Patrick's PS 3 mile radius

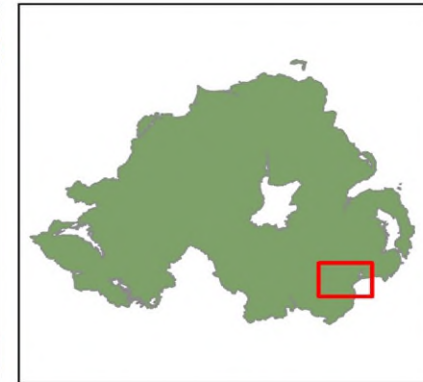
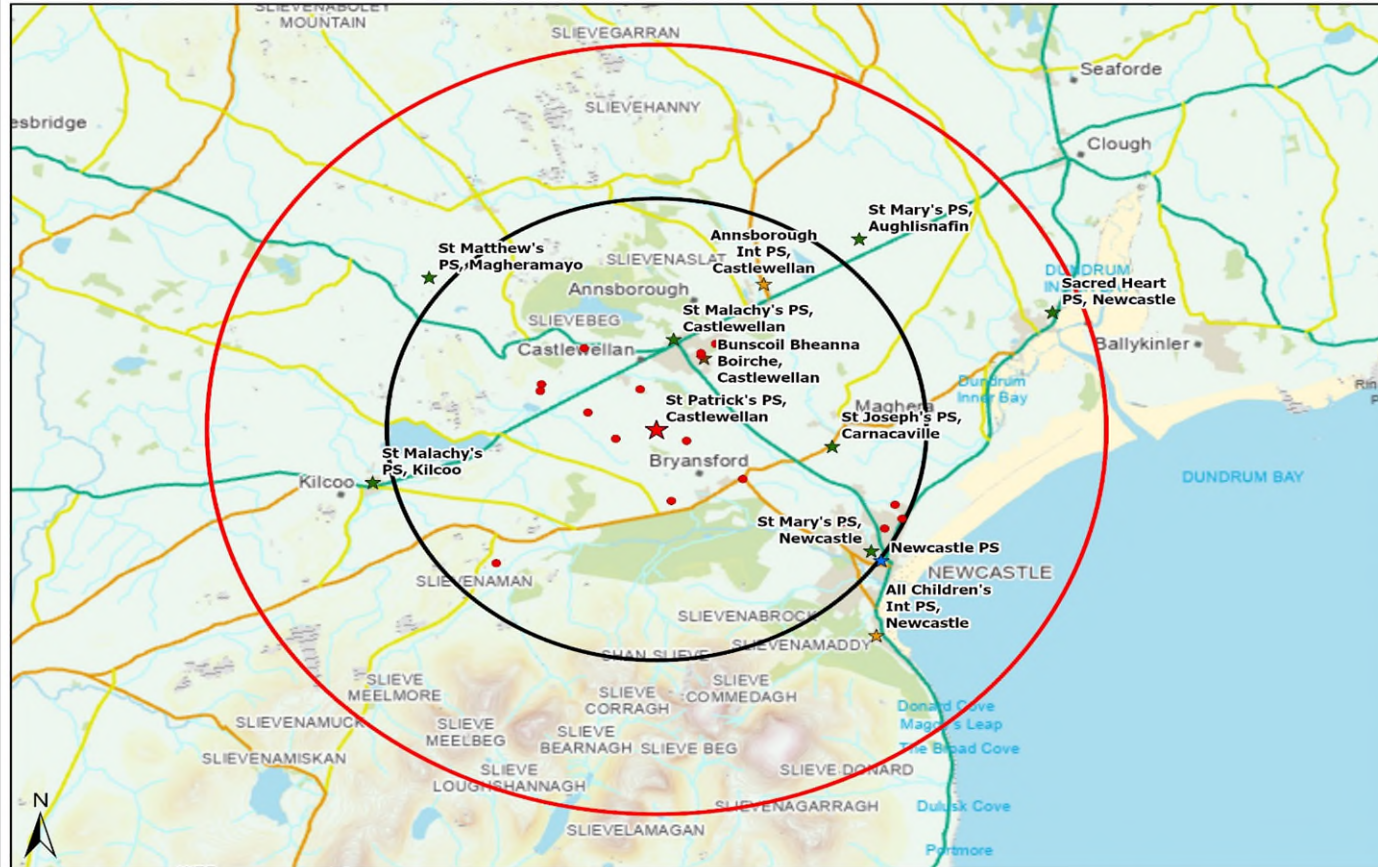
Supporting Information
 Base mapping was derived from OSNI Fusion. Data source NISRA/DENI School Census Datasets 2025/26.
 0 0.42 0.85 1.7 Miles
 Map created :02/04/2026

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MAP 2

St Patrick's Primary School & Pupil Location - Neighbouring Primary Provision - 3 & 5 Mile Radius



- ★ St Patrick's Primary School
- St Patrick's PS pupils
- ★ Controlled
- ★ Controlled Integrated
- ★ Other Maintained
- ★ RC Maintained
- St Patrick's PS 3 mile radius
- St Patrick's PS 5 mile radius

Supporting Information

Base mapping was derived from OSNI Fusion. Data source NISRA/DENI School Census Datasets 2025/26.



Map created :02/04/2026

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Reference Number: MOU577.4



INTRODUCTION

1. On 8 April 2026 the Education Authority (EA), at the request of Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), published Development Proposal (DP) 757 proposing to discontinue St Patrick's Primary School (PS) Burrenreagh, with effect from 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter.
2. On 28 January 2026 the CCMS Education Provision Committee had determined that the DP for a proposed closure from 31 August 2027 should be brought forward to 31 August 2026, to reflect the urgency of the sustainability challenges and to reflect the educational interests of pupils.
3. The statutory two-month objection period ended on 8 June 2026. A copy of the published DP and the supporting Case for Change (CfC) are attached at **Appendices A and B** respectively.

BACKGROUND

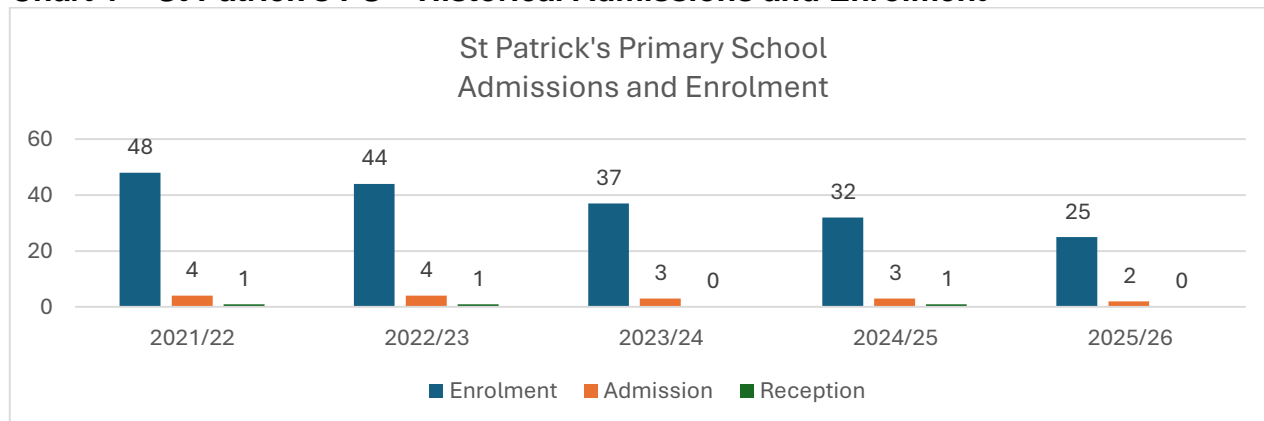
4. St Patrick's PS is a co-educational Catholic Maintained primary school situated on the Burrenreagh Road, near Castlewellan as illustrated by **Map 1**. The children attending the school come from a rural catchment area. In 2025/26 almost all pupils enrolled lived within a three-mile radius of the school.
5. The 2025/26 verified census data for the school shows: -
 - 25* pupils enrolled including * supernumerary pupil(s);
 - * pupils are entitled to Free School Meals (FSM);
 - Two pupils were enrolled in Year 1; and
 - All 25 pupils designate as Roman Catholic.

* CCMS has advised that the number of pupils currently enrolled at the school has since fallen to 11 pupils.

Admissions and Enrolment

6. The approved admissions and enrolment numbers for St Patrick's PS are 14 and 95 respectively. At the time of school census, in 2025/26 there were 71 available places that children could apply for through the competitive admissions process.
7. **Chart 1** illustrates the pattern of admissions and enrolment at St Patrick's PS. The school's enrolment has fallen year on year since 2021/22. The number of pupils admitted each year has been consistently below the approved admissions number and the school's overall enrolment is significantly below the Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) minimum recommended enrolment of 105 for a sustainable rural primary school. There were no applications for Y1 in 2026/27.

Chart 1 – St Patrick’s PS – Historical Admissions and Enrolment



Source DE Verified Census Data

Area Context

8. St Patrick’s PS is located in the Newry, Mourne and Down Local Government District (LGD). On the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 the Tollymore 1 Super Output Area (SOA), in which the school is situated, is placed 375 out of 890 (1 being the most deprived and 890 least deprived).
9. Statistics produced by the department indicate a declining trend in the primary school population by 20.4% in the 10 years to the 2033/34 academic year (Chart 2 in **Appendix C**). The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) also predict that the population of children aged 04-11, within the Newry, Mourne and Down LGD, will decrease by 8.08% between mid-2018 and mid-2028¹. It will fall by a further 3.87% by 2042.

TABLE 1				
Age Range	2018	2028	2028	2043
4-11 Total	21,281	19,561	19,561	18,803
% Reduction		8.08%		3.87%

Source: NISRA

10. The EA’s second Strategic Area Plan² (SAP2) is supported by an Operational Plan (OP2) which outlines the Area Planning activity to be taken forward in the second two years (2024-26) of the programme broken down by LGD.
11. OP2 features a Short-term Work Stream for Primary School provision in the Castlewellan / Newcastle which states that **“The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Education Authority, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta propose to review primary school provision in the area to address sustainability, oversubscription, composite classes and consolidate provision to provide where possible to 7, 14 or 21 classroom school(s).”**

¹ [SNPP18 SYA Age Bands.xlsx](#)

12. Provision at St Patrick's PS, Burrenreagh was reviewed under this workstream.

Summary of Alternative Provision

13. Table 2 (**Appendix C**) shows that within a five-mile radius of St Patrick's PS there are 12 primary schools (including St Patricks PS) overall. In relation to Catholic-Maintained provision there are seven alternative schools; the closest are St Malachy's PS Castlewellan (1.19 miles), St Joseph's PS Carnacaville (1.97 miles) and St Mary's PS Newcastle (2.86 miles). In 2025/26 all three schools had available places, totalling 107 places.
14. Within the five-mile radius there is also one controlled school; two controlled integrated; and one Irish-Medium school as shown in **MAP 2**. In 2025/26 there were 2136 approved places, with 1837 pupils enrolled, which resulted in 450 available places.
15. Overall, there are 379 available places in the area across all 11 alternative primary schools. The eight Catholic Maintained PS's have a total of 328 available places. There are also places available in Controlled, Integrated and Irish-medium provision.
16. There were two schools in 2026/27 oversubscribed at first preference applications – one Catholic-Maintained school and one Irish-Medium school.
17. Full assessment information regarding alternative provision can be found at **Appendix C**.

CASE FOR CHANGE

18. The CfC sets out CCMS's rationale for the proposed closure of St Patrick's PS on grounds of unsustainability and a need to rationalise Catholic Maintained provision in the Castlewellan / Newcastle area. The CfC can be read in full at **Appendix B**.
19. CCMS assessed the current school provision at St Patrick's PS, Burrenreagh against the SSP criteria and indicators and highlighted the following issues: -
 - St Patrick's PS is currently operating as a three-class base and it anticipates that classes of more than two year groups will continue in upcoming years;
 - The enrolment remains consistently below the recommended minimum threshold of 105 for a rural primary school (currently 11 pupils). CCMS is of the view there is insufficient evidence of a potential increase in demand to meet SSP threshold;
 - St Patrick's PS's 3-Year financial plan shows a deficit of -£553,228 at the end of the 2025/26 financial year which is projected to increase to -£751,972 by the end of 2026/27.

- The BoG benefits from a wide range of skills and include the Principal and representation from parents/guardians, teachers, Trustees and the Department of Education; and
 - The school is accessible to pupils, however, there are also alternative schools nearby which are accessible.
20. It is asserted that the alternative options for provision were explored by the Board of Governors (BoG) and CCMS - Do Nothing; Cross Sectoral Options (Shared Education; Shared Campus; Jointly Managed School; Transformation to Integrated Status); Amalgamation; Federation; and Discontinue (paragraphs 4.3.1.– 4.3.5. of the CfC at **Appendix B**), however following consideration of the options the CCMS decided to proceed with the discontinuance of St Patrick’s PS stating that “*there is no evidence at this point of any other option that would be a more appropriate area planning solution for provision in this area*”. CCMS acknowledged the commitment of the governors and staff but said despite the school’s best efforts, it continued to face sustainability challenges.

STATUTORY DP PROCESSES

CCMS Consultation

21. In accordance with Article 14 of The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, CCMS has confirmed that the pre-consultation process with staff, governors and parents/ guardians commenced on 7 November 2005 and ran until 19 December 2025.
22. Of the 23 responses received, one was in support and 22 disagreed with the proposal for closure. Full details of the Proposer pre-consultation can be found in the CfC (**Appendix B**) at Appendix D – Consultation Summary. Some of the key issues/ assertions raised against the proposal were: -
- Responses consistently highlighted the benefits of small class sizes, strong pastoral care and a family like ethos.
 - Children with additional needs thrive in Burrenreagh’s small setting, there are concerns about transitions to larger schools.
 - The school is the cornerstone of rural life, hosting intergenerational activities. Closure is seen as accelerating rural decline with fears about the loss of a vital social hub for families.
 - Parents report withdrawal of breakfast / afterschool clubs have a negative impact on childcare and employment.
 - Concerns that receiving schools may not take siblings together. CCMS and EA will liaise with receiving schools to minimise sibling separation and will use Temporary Variation (TV) applications to support coherent placement.

23. Following analysis of the consultation feedback and a review of the sustainability evidence, CCMS's Education Provision Committee met on 28 January 2026 and approved proceeding with a DP to discontinue the current provision at St Patrick's PS.

Education Authority Consultation

24. The EA has confirmed that it has fulfilled its statutory obligations, in accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, in relation to consultation with other schools which, in its opinion, are likely to be affected by the DP and proof of publication has been received. The proposal was forwarded to 20 schools on 2 February 2026 with comments to be returned by 9 March 2026. During this pre-publication consultation the EA received no responses from affected schools.
25. The proposal was discussed by the EA's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee on 31 March 2026.

EDUCATION AUTHORITY VIEW

26. The EA supports the CCMS in taking forward DP 757 to discontinue St Patrick's Primary School, Burrenreagh with effect from 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Two-Month Statutory Objection Period

27. The EA published DP 757 on 8 April 2026. The statutory two-month objection period ended on 8 June 2026. During the objection period the Department received one response from a parent and no letters of support.
28. The response in full, stated: -
- I e-mail to object to the fact that the school has been facilitated to close.
 - I object that there is no written report on what other potential plans could be put in place for the school to remain viable or what other ideas were brought forward.
 - I object that there was no formal face to face meeting with CCMS and parents, despite being requested.
 - I object that school signs were removed, facilitating again no publicity [sic].
 - I object that the remaining pupils have had no offer or support despite CCMS being informed of the detrimental effect this is having on some of the children's health
 - I object to the fact that statements have been released by CCMS reporting 'displaced children will be absorbed into other schools'. Children need proper transitions to schools that suit the child's needs and their parents. If the Department of Education choose to close a school which we have chosen for our children they need to make necessary arrangement to suit each child.
 - I object that when Education Authority have been emailed, they did not reply. Regretfully a formal complaint will follow.

- I object that CCMS have not replied to emails.

Voice of the Child

29. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 12 (1) notes:

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely on all matters affecting the child, the views of the child given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

30. The CfC advised that it is CCMS's practice regarding consultation with primary school pupils to request the professional staff in the school to conduct the consultations. This is because they have the appropriate mechanisms and relationships for consulting young children on subjects that are sensitive. The pupils' consultation responses are included in Appendix E of the CfC.

SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

31. The Department's SSP sets out six criteria supported by quantitative and qualitative indicators which provide the framework for consideration of a school's longer-term sustainability. A full assessment against all six criteria can be found at **Appendix C**. The following is a summary of the sustainability assessment of St Patrick's PS against the six criteria of the SSP.

Sustainability Summary

32. There has been no recent Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) evaluation of the quality of education or the quality of leadership and management at St Patrick's PS, Burrenreagh, due to action short of strike. The evidence demonstrates that although St Patrick's PS has strong links with the community and is considered to be accessible, the school is unable to meet the criteria and indicators of the SSP in full. It has serious deficiencies particularly in relation to Quality Educational Experience, Stable Enrolment Trends and Sound Financial Position. Taking this into account and with no clear prospect of recovery, St Patrick's PS would be considered to be unsustainable.
33. The sustainability of St Patrick's PS is a matter of concern, particularly due to the historically low admissions and enrolment. The SSP highlights the difficulty that small schools can encounter and the detrimental impact on pupils' experience and for teaching staff.
34. The SSP states that there should be no more than two year groups in a single classroom at primary school level and that there should be a minimum of four teachers which recognises both the needs of pupils and the demands on teachers. St Patrick's has at least one class which has more than three-year groups and a recent District Inspection by the ETI shows there are only three Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Teachers including a teaching Principal. The SSP points out that the composite nature of such classes places considerable demands on

teachers in terms of planning, classroom organisation and the monitoring and evaluation of the children's learning. The CfC notes that there are now only 11 pupils enrolled. The smaller number of pupils in each year group limits the opportunities for working alongside peers, social interaction and challenge and participation in extra-curricular activity.

35. The financial management has resulted in a deficit which is significantly outside of the +/- 5% tolerance with a provisional deficit of -£547,332 at 31 March 2026 and the three-year forecast notes that this is likely to increase. The school's three-year financial plan based upon realistic assumptions, show a predicted deficit of -£966,824 by 2027-28, and indicate that the deficit cannot be substantially reduced or recovered.

STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

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 and statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (where appropriate) have been considered by CCMS, and are included at Appendix F and Appendix G respectively in the CfC which can be found at **Appendix B**.

Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 – Summary

37. The Department is required under the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 to have due regard to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas when considering this proposal.
38. St Patrick's PS is situated in a rural area. Concerns raised during the CCMS pre-publication consultation highlighted the potential impact of closure on community cohesion, access to local education and the loss of a local social hub.
39. However, the evidence demonstrates that the school is no longer sustainable in educational or financial terms. The proposal has been considered in the context of rural needs, including:
 - The availability of sufficient places in alternative schools within a reasonable distance;
 - Eligibility for home-to-school transport to support access;
 - Access to broader curricular and extracurricular opportunities in receiving schools; and
 - Arrangements to support staff redeployment.
40. CCMS concluded *"This proposal is focused on improving the quality of educational provision for pupils in this rural area. This proposal addresses school provision which is not sustainable in a rural area. Realistic, innovative, shared and collaborative solutions were explored within CCMS and with the Board of Governors of St Patrick's PS, with a view to determine a viable and sustainable level of quality educational provision. This proposal delivers sustainable education provision in a rural area."*

41. Should the proposal be approved, provision of home to school transport for pupils who live more than two miles from their nearest suitable school will help to mitigate the impact of the closure.

Equality Considerations (Section 75)

42. The screening considered the potential impact across all Section 75 equality categories, including religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, disability and persons with dependants.
43. The CfC indicates that the key findings from the screening concluded that there are no major adverse impacts on any of the Section 75 groups arising from the proposal. It determined that no evidence was identified to suggest that any group would be disproportionately affected, and therefore the proposal does not require a full Equality Impact Assessment.
44. It is asserted in the CfC that the issues raised during the CCMS consultation, including concerns regarding access to school places and fairness within the admissions process, were considered and reflected in the updated Equality Screening.
45. Mitigations were identified to minimise any potential impacts, including:
 - Support for parents to secure appropriate placements in alternative schools, including within the Catholic Maintained sector;
 - Home to school transport assistance, subject to eligibility;
 - Transition planning and support, particularly for vulnerable pupils, including those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), to ensure continuity of provision.

Effective and Efficient Use of Public Funds

46. The Department must have regard to its duty under Article 44 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and Managing Public Money to ensure the effective and efficient use of public funds, including avoiding unreasonable expenditure and maximising the use of available resources.
47. The school's financial position indicates that it is unable to operate within its delegated budget. As at 31 March 2025, it had a deficit of £376,016, significantly exceeding the Department's LMS tolerance of $\pm 5\%$ or £75,000.
48. St Patrick's PS is a very small school and receives the maximum Small Schools Support funding (£66,550), alongside £16,420 for Primary Principals' Release Time.
49. Under the Interim Common Funding Formula, the school received a total budget of £188,900 for 2026–27, equating to £7,556 per pupil based on 25 FTE pupils, compared to a primary school average of £4,426.

50. The CfC considers the proposal cost-effective, noting that closure would strengthen provision locally and generate savings through reduced maintenance costs, removal of small school support and principal release funding, and the cessation of provision that is less cost-effective due to sustainability challenges.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Educational Impact

51. The CfC outlines that CCMS identified sustainability challenges at St Patrick's PS. If provision ceased, pupils would have the opportunity to attend schools with greater sustainability. St Patrick's PS is currently operating with composite classes of more than two-year groups in a class.
52. The CfC confirms that the SSP specifies a minimum of four teachers are required to meet pupil needs and curriculum demands and notes no evidence that low enrolment at St Patrick's PS will improve. It concludes that discontinuance would deliver educational benefits, including greater opportunities for pupils to be taught in their own age group, more classes comprising no more than two year groups, enhanced differentiation in teaching and learning, increased peer interaction with pupils of a similar age and stage, improved access to a wider range of extra-curricular activities, greater opportunities for specialist teaching and staff professional development, and a potentially reduced workload for teachers.
53. Sustainable schools support the efficient use of resources, including staff, and provide greater opportunities for professional development through increased collaboration. It is asserted that this proposal would support a network of viable schools to meet pupils' educational needs.
54. CCMS has confirmed that should the proposal for closure of the school be approved, it would work with neighbouring schools to support the transition of pupils who would be continuing primary education. It has also confirmed that account will be taken of all SEN pupils, who would move. Provision for pupils with SEN may be enhanced in a larger school with teachers responsible for one area of coordination, e.g. SENCO. If approved, appropriate transition arrangements would be put in place to support pupils' educational, social and emotional wellbeing.

Financial Implications

Staffing

Redundancy

55. The CfC states that it is not possible to predict the number of redundancies or redeployments in advance of a decision on the DP, therefore it is not possible to cost these accurately at this time. In the event of a closure of the school, employment / deployment opportunities for both teaching and non-teaching staff would be sought in alternative schools.

56. The actual cost of redundancy for each individual staff member will vary depending on their age, salary, years of service etc. However, based on spend in 2025/26 the average cost of a teaching exit was estimated at £40.1k and a non-teaching exit was estimated at £26.3k.
57. Permanent teaching staff are afforded employment protection under the Schools Reorganisation 2013/2 for two years. The permanent non-teaching staff will be afforded employment protection for one year under the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) Collective Agreement.
58. The Department's current position on redundancy funding has potential implications in the context of any school closure. There will be no separate earmarked funding for redundancies in 2026/27; instead, any unavoidable redundancy costs must be met from within the EA's block grant. While redeployment of both teaching and non-teaching staff is expected to be the primary mechanism to mitigate compulsory redundancies, where this is not achievable the EA may need to consider meeting redundancy costs directly, subject to statutory and contractual limits and Departmental approval where required. As such, a school closure may give rise to additional financial and workforce pressures, particularly where redeployment opportunities are limited.

Transport

59. Home to school transport will be provided in accordance with the EA's Home to School Transport Policy. However, given the low number of pupils attending the school this is not expected to be significant.

Accommodation

60. As DP 757 relates to a closure there are no associated accommodation costs. The CfC indicates that it is anticipated there will be no accommodation requirements, due to the capacity at nearby schools.

CONCLUSION

61. The SSP, implemented through Area Planning, is clear that the core issue for a school's sustainability must be the continuing provision of a high-quality education for the children. Generally, it is acknowledged that as numbers in a school decline, the challenges it must overcome in order to provide a high-quality education rise. The assessment of St Patrick's PS against the SSP provides evidence that the school has serious deficiencies particularly in relation to Quality of Education, Stable Enrolment Trends and Sound Financial Position.
62. Inspection evidence shows that within a composite class of two-year groups, it is possible for all children to be catered for effectively and make good progress.
63. However, additional factors need to be considered when the composite class spans more than two-year groups. Under these circumstances ensuring

adequate progression in learning and planning to meet, and meeting, the individual needs of children across a wider ability range and stage of development can be more challenging for the teacher.

64. There are also issues relating to opportunities for the children to develop socially and emotionally with children of a similar age, gender and stage of development. The smaller numbers of children in each year group limit the opportunities for working alongside peers, social interaction and challenge, and participation in extra-curricular activities including team-based experiences.
65. The ETI notes that *“Overall, the proposal will result in the children accessing learning within larger schools and may lead to the children having access to a broader range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities”*.
66. The pattern of enrolment as set out in **Chart 1** shows that the school’s enrolment has remained substantially and consistently below its approved numbers in the last five years. There were no applications for 2026/27.
67. The SSP optimum enrolment for a primary school is 210 with seven classes, one for each year group. In recognising rural needs, the minimum threshold recommended is set at 50% of the optimum – 105 (i.e. 15 children per year group). CCMS has advised that there are now only 11 children attending the school, and as a result, the school should discontinue from 31 August 2026 to protect the educational interests of pupils.
68. The closure of any school is a difficult matter, however, the evidence supporting DP 757 is compelling, not least the fact that there are only 11 pupils at the school. There is no indication that the pattern of low enrolment will change in the future. The school has a significant financial deficit which is only expected to increase.
69. There is alternative good quality and sustainable primary provision with available places in the area, which would allow for a smooth transition, and which can provide broader and further educational opportunities for the pupils.
70. Should you approve this proposal, the closure of St Patrick’s PS will help to reduce over provision in the Catholic-Maintained sector and reduce the number of available places and ultimately result in a more efficient use of resources. The potential dispersal of pupils to neighbouring primary schools, subject to parental preference, would contribute to the sustainability of the overall school estate in Newry, Mourne and Down LGD.
71. It is recognised that, as with any school closure, there may be associated workforce implications, including potential redundancy costs where redeployment is not achievable. These would need to be managed within the existing financial framework and in line with Departmental policy.

Recommendation

72. Based on the evidence detailed above, it is recommended that you:

- (i) Consider approving DP 757 as published that: -

St Patrick's PS, Burrenreagh, will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter.

- (ii) If DP 757 is approved, agree that this submission (with appropriate redactions) can be made available on the Department's website once the school (through the Proposer, CCMS) and the Education Authority have been notified.



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