

**EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL NO 757**

**ST PATRICK'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, BURRENREAGH**

Notice is hereby given that a Proposal under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 has been submitted to the Education Authority by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in consultation with the Trustees of St Patrick's Primary School, Burrenreagh to the effect that:

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

A copy of the Proposal and Case for Change may be inspected at the offices of the Education Authority, 40 Academy Street, Belfast, BT1 2NQ, between the hours of 9.00 am and 4.30 pm and [www.eani.org.uk/school-management/area-planning/development-proposals](http://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/area-planning/development-proposals).

Any objections or support to this Proposal should be lodged with the Area Planning Policy Team, Department of Education, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down, BT19 7PR or emailed to [dps@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:dps@education-ni.gov.uk) within two months of the date of publication of this notice. Any letters of objection or support may be published on the Department of Education's website, with appropriate redactions, if they are included in full in the submission on which the outcome of the proposal is decided.

The Department of Education and the Education Authority operate a regime of openness under the Freedom of Information Act. Letters of objection and information supplied to the Department of Education and the Education Authority may be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, if requested. (A fee may be charged for supplying this information.)

**Richard Pengelly**  
**Chief Executive**



**CCMS**  
Council for Catholic  
Maintained Schools

## Castlewellan/Newcastle Area

**St Patrick's PS, Burrenreagh (403-1671)**

### CASE FOR CHANGE

**January 2026**

<b>AREA</b>	Newry, Mourne and Down Local Government District (LGD)
<b>DP NUMBER</b>	757
<b>PROPOSER</b>	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Linen Hill House, 23 Linenhall Street, Lisburn, BT28 1FJ
<b>SCHOOL(S) NAME</b>	St Patrick's Primary School
<b>SCHOOL REFERENCE</b>	403-1671
<b>TYPE</b>	Primary School
<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	Catholic Maintained
<b>PROPOSAL</b>	Proposal to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>discontinue St Patrick's Primary School 31 August 2026 or as soon as possible thereafter.</li> </ul>

#### STATUTORY CONSULTATION

#### EDUCATION AUTHORITY COMMENTARY ON PRE-PUBLICATION STATUTORY CONSULTATION

<b>PROPOSER</b> <b>Provide detail of consultation with the BOGs, teachers and</b>	I confirm that the pre-publication consultation commenced with the Board of Governors (BoG), staff and parent/guardians of St Patrick's PS, 7 November 2025.
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<p><b>parents of the affected school(s) – dates of meetings/letters. Good practice suggests all staff (including non-teaching) should be consulted as well as pupils</b></p> <p><b>Summary and assessment of views received – how were these taken into account before the publication of the DP?</b></p>	<p>The responses to the pre-publication consultation were given due consideration at CCMS’s Education Provision Committee meeting on 28 January 2026. It was determined by CCMS that the proposal should proceed, taking into account all responses received. A copy of the consultation summary is contained in Appendix D.</p>
<p><b>Confirmation by the Proposer</b></p>	<p>I confirm: St Patrick’s PS Board of Governors, staff and parents/guardians were consulted; equality screening of the proposal has been carried out; and the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 (where appropriate) have been considered.</p> <p>NAME: Edel Teague OFFICE HELD: Area Planning Programme Manager</p> <p><b>SIGNED:</b> <i>Edel Teague</i></p> <p><b>DATE:</b> 29 January 2026</p>

**ASSOCIATED PROPOSALS**

<p>DP XXX</p> <p>Published DD/MM/YY</p>	<p>NA</p>
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## Case for Change: Statutory Consultation

### EDUCATION AUTHORITY COMMENTARY ON PRE-PUBLICATION STATUTORY CONSULTATION

*The following is to be completed and signed off by the EA.*

The Education Authority (EA)

I confirm that the schools which the Education Authority consider might be impacted by this proposal were consulted on 2 February 2026 with a return date of 9 March 2026.

Name:	Eve Bremner
Office Held:	Chief Education Officer
Signed:	
Date:	31 March 2026

Provide detail of consultation with schools that may, in the EA's opinion, be affected by the proposal - list of schools, dates of letters issued to schools/meetings.

Summary of views received (number of responses, recurring themes, petitions, community support or opposition).

Responses/Assurances in respect of issues raised during consultation.

Dates of EA meetings eg Strategic Planning and Policy Committee/ Board etc

Details of issues raised by members of EA Board

In accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, a copy of the proposal was sent on 2 February 2026 to schools which, in the opinion of the Education Authority, might be affected by the proposal. A total of 20 local schools which might be affected by the proposal were forwarded a copy of the proposal. Comments were invited from the Boards of Governors and Trustees, to be returned to the Education Authority by 9 March 2026.

The Education Authority received no responses from affected schools.


This development proposal was discussed by the Education Authority's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee at its meeting on 31 March 2026.

### EDUCATION AUTHORITY COMMENTS

In the context of planning on an area basis - what is the EA's view of the proposal, taking into account any pre-publication consultation. Does the EA support the proposal?

The Education Authority supports the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in taking forward Development Proposal 757 to discontinue St Patrick's Primary School, Burrenreagh with effect from 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter.

In consideration of the above, and the Case for Change, the Education Authority is proposing to publish Development Proposal 757 during the week beginning 6 April 2026.

Name:	Eve Bremner
Office Held:	Chief Education Officer
Signed:	
Date:	31 March 2026



	SEN Stage 3	SEN Stage 1 or 2	Free School Meals
St Patrick's PS	*	#	*

Table 1: Details of SEN numbers and FSM in the school

\*refers to less than five cases where data is considered sensitive.

#means figure has been suppressed under rules of disclosure.

The DE Census 2024/25 shows that there are less than five pupils entitled to free school meals in St Patrick's PS (this data is case sensitive).<sup>2</sup> The number of pupils on the special educational needs register in the school (Stages 1-2) has been suppressed under the rules of disclosure and there are fewer than five pupils stated (Stage 3) (this data is case sensitive).

*Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools 2009* (SSP) underpins all work carried out through the area planning process.<sup>3</sup> The aim of area planning is to facilitate the development of a network of viable and sustainable schools that can deliver the Northern Ireland (NI) Curriculum effectively and provide access to education provision appropriate to the needs of pupils.<sup>4</sup> The area planning process aims to ensure every pupil has:

- access to a broad and balanced curriculum with opportunities to realise their potential;
- an education in which the learning outcomes are appropriate to their needs;
- access to quality teaching delivered in a caring and supportive environment; and
- education delivered in modern, well-resourced facilities, suitable for the delivery of education in the twenty-first century.

### 1.1 Strategic Area Plan and Operational Plan 1 – 2022-24 and Operational Plan 2 – 2024-26

The Education Authority (with CCMS) published the *Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision*<sup>5</sup> and *Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Special Education Provision* (the Plans) in June 2022.

Both Plans set 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. Published alongside the plans, the Education Authority published Operational Plan 1: 2022-24. The Operational Plan 1: 2022-24 outlined area planning activity for the first two years of the five year strategy. Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 was published on 16 January 2025, and it included the following workstream as noted in Table 2.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-enrolment-school-level-data-202223>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/area-planning-frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ccea.org.uk/learning-resources/northern-ireland-curriculum-primary>

<sup>5</sup> [Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 - Planning for Sustainable Provision\\_0.pdf \(eani.org.uk\)](https://www.eani.org.uk/Strategic-Area-Plan-2022-27-Planning-for-Sustainable-Provision-0.pdf)

<b>Castlewellan/ Newcastle Area</b>  Primary Provision	<b>Background / Engagement</b>	
	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). The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Education Authority, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta will engage with the Boards of Governors of maintained, controlled/controlled integrated and Irish medium primary schools in the area.	
	<b>Statutory Duty / Ministerial Priority</b>	<b>Key Theme(s)</b>
Primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two year groups Innovative, creative and shared solutions for sustainable provision	Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways Promote cooperation, collaboration and sharing across all sectors Maximise resources and sustainability Inform strategic infrastructure planning and investment	

Table 2: Extract from Operational Plan 2024-26<sup>6</sup>

The proposal is focused on the challenges facing the area, such as providing the best way to address the educational needs of the pupils, given the population. CCMS officers met representatives of St Patrick’s PS, Burrenreagh, and continued dialogue with the Board of Governors, to assess the sustainability of provision and identify any sustainable options available in the area. This document provides a sustainability and area planning assessment.

As part of the area planning process for the Castlewellan/Newcastle area, CCMS has led a series of structured engagements to assess the sustainability of provision and explore potential options. Initial discussions focused on analysing enrolment trends, demographic projections, and school capacity data across the area. This was followed by a collaborative review of strategic options, including amalgamation, federation, and transformation, all considered within the framework of the Sustainable Schools Policy. Further engagement took place with sectoral partners, including the Education Authority, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, to explore cross-sectoral models and potential area solutions. Despite thorough consideration, no sustainable options were identified that would adequately address the significant challenges facing St Patrick’s Primary School, Burrenreagh, particularly in relation to enrolment trends, financial viability, and the quality of educational experience.

Following these engagements with the Board of Governors and sectoral partners, CCMS proceeded to pre-publication consultation on the future of provision at St Patrick’s PS, Burrenreagh.

<sup>6</sup> Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 Primary, Special and Post Primary Schools (including Specialist Provision) p68.

## 2. SUPPORTING STATISTICS TO EXPLAIN/HIGHLIGHT THE EVIDENCE OF NEED FOR CHANGE

### 2.1 Historic Enrolments in St Patrick's PS

The approved enrolment number for St Patrick's PS is 95 and its approved admissions number is 14. As Table 3 indicates, the pupil enrolment in the school was 65 in 2015/16 and 11 in 2025/26 (including pupils with a statement of educational needs). There is no indication the enrolment in St Patrick's PS will increase to reach the recommended minimum threshold of 105 pupils detailed in the Department of Education's (DE's) SSP 2009.<sup>7</sup>

St Patrick's PS Burrenreagh									
Year	Rec	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Total (Yr 1-Yr 7)
2015/16	4	6	10	10	11	6	12	10	65
2016/17	2	11	6	10	10	13	5	12	67
2017/18	2	6	13	6	10	11	13	5	64
2018/19	2	9	6	14	6	12	10	13	70
2019/20	3	6	9	6	14	6	12	10	63
2020/21	3	6	6	10	7	13	9	11	62
2021/22	1	4	6	5	10	7	11	8	51
2022/23	1	4	4	7	5	9	7	11	47
2023/24	0	3	3	5	5	5	9	7	37
2024/25	2	3	3	3	5	5	4	9	32
2025/26*	0	2	0	1	1	3	0	4	11

Table 3: St Patrick's PS Enrolment Statistics *Source: DE Census*

\*Provided by the school

The admissions number for a school is determined by the number of pupils in the school that do not have a statement of educational needs. The table below demonstrates applications and admissions for the school.

Year	Admission Number	1st Pref Applications	2nd Pref Applications	Total Applications	1st Preference Accepted	2nd Preference Accepted	Total Accepted
2018/19	14	3	0	3	3	0	3
2019/20	14	4	0	4	4	0	4
2020/21	14	3	0	3	3	0	3
2021/22	14	4	1	5	4	1	5
2022/23	14	4	1	5	4	1	5
2023/24	14	0	0	0	0	0	0
2024/25	14	3					3
2025/26	14	1					1

Table 4: St Patrick's PS Admissions Statistics *Source: EA*. Note: In addition to the pupils accepted through the admissions process, there are reception pupils that will move from reception to Y1.

### 2.2 Population

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) predicts a population decrease of

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/schools-future-policy-sustainable-schools\\_p.24](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/schools-future-policy-sustainable-schools_p.24)

children aged 0-15 years, within the Newry, Mourne and Down Local Government District (LGD), of -3.2% (-1,300) between mid-2018 and mid-2028. In addition, NISRA predicts the population of children (4-11 years), in the Newry, Mourne and Down LGD, to decrease by 8.1% (-1,700) mid-2018 to mid-2028. <sup>12</sup>

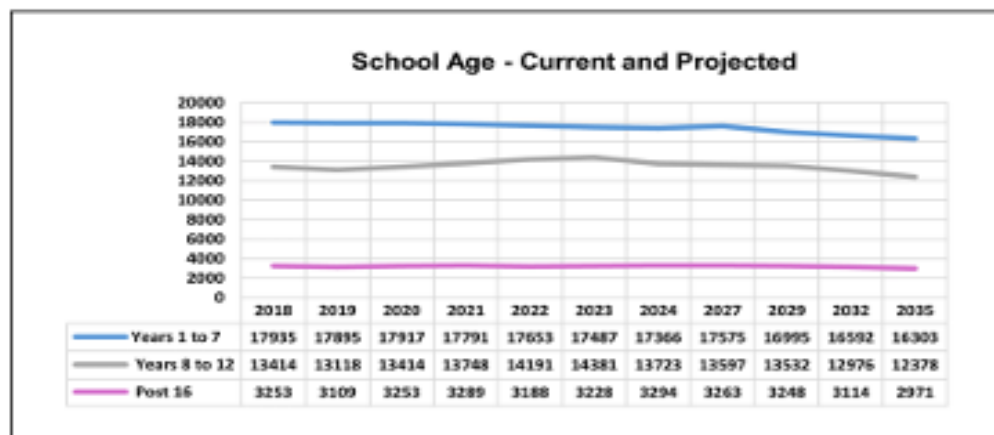


Table 5: Projected demands for school places in Newry, Mourne and Down LGD *Source: NISRA*

The annual number of live births within the local electoral ward area(s) is helpful in predicting trends in a school's future enrolments. The enrolment may be impacted on by various factors including parental choice. As one or more of the wards used may extend beyond the school's traditional catchment area, some children:

- may attend a primary school in a neighbouring ward;
- from outside the ward(s) may attend the primary school;
- may leave the ward(s) before reaching compulsory school age; and
- born outside the ward(s) may take up residence in the ward(s).

Live Births – Ward Areas										
Wards	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Tollymore	68	53	51	49	53	46	48	53	61	44
Murlough	63	52	53	49	59	50	55	49	54	54
Castlewellan	86	71	66	67	59	57	68	64	49	64
Dundrum	67	65	60	40	49	45	50	54	43	48
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>210</b>
Year 1 Start	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27		

Table 6: Resident Live Births by Academic Year in Electoral Ward Areas.

Live births in ward and in the surrounding wards do not indicate any significant increase in the primary school population will occur to the extent St Patrick's PS could meet the recommended minimum threshold (105) for a rural primary school.

The estimated Long-Term Enrolment (LTE) for schools can be used to project the future enrolment for the area. It is calculated by adding Y1 to Y3 in the schools, dividing by three and multiplying by seven. Based on Years 1-3, the LTE for St Patrick's PS is 16 (i.e.  $(2+2+3)/3*7$ ).

The population projections, birth rates in the area and LTE projection are important as they help determine whether there are sufficient pupils to cater for sustainable provision for the area. The data does not suggest there is sufficient demand for St Patrick's PS to meet the recommended sustainable threshold for a rural school.

### 3. SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

The focus of the Area Planning process is embedded in the Sustainable Schools Policy (2009),<sup>8</sup> and applies to primary and post-primary schools. The policy outlines the criteria that school managing authorities should consider when making decisions affecting the best use of resources, to deliver an excellent education to children and young people. The policy sets out six sustainability criteria, and associated indicators, which are identified as the key references for assessing existing and future education provision to ensure it adequately meets the needs of pupils.

#### 3.1 Quality Educational Experience

##### 3.1.1 Composite Classrooms and number of teachers

The SSP indicates the following criteria for a sustainable school: “No more than two composite year groups in a single classroom at primary school level. A minimum of four teachers at a primary school. This recognises both the needs of pupils and the demands on teachers.”<sup>9</sup>

The SSP section on Educational Experience for Children contains the following comments.

Teachers in small schools face problems of having less scope for professional interaction and mutual support. The school is unlikely to provide a wide programme of extra-curricular activities and will have a smaller range of teacher specialisms e.g. music.

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.<sup>10</sup>

The ETI Chief Inspector’s Report 2014-2016 made the following comments.

When the composite class spans more than two-year groups, ensuring adequate progression in learning and planning to meet individual needs across a wider range of abilities and stages of development can be more challenging for the teacher. It may also limit opportunities for the children to develop socially and emotionally with those of a similar age and stage.<sup>11</sup>

St Patrick’s PS is currently operating as a three class base primary school. It anticipates that composite classes of more than two year groups in a class will continue in upcoming years. This proposal minimises the possibility of any composite classes of more than two year groups in a class for the pupils in the area.

##### 3.1.2 The standards and the quality of learning and teaching at St Patrick’s PS

In March 2019, ETI carried out an inspection in St Patrick’s PS. However, as the inspection was conducted during Action Short of Strike and non-cooperation by the teachers in inspection, the report was unable to give an overall effectiveness level for the school. It concluded “Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by the staff, the ETI is unable to assure parents/carers, the wider

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<sup>8</sup> Schools for the Future – A Policy for Sustainable Schools (DENI 2009)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/schools-future-policy-sustainable-schools>  
Schools for the Future – A Policy for Sustainable Schools (DENI 2009) (p.47)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/schools-future-policy-sustainable-schools> (p.20)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/chief-inspectors-report-2014-2016> (p.11)

school community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the children. The school is a high priority for future inspection with no further notice.”<sup>12</sup>

An inspection carried out in February 2014<sup>13</sup> concluded that in most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school was satisfactory; the strengths outweighed the areas for improvement. The key areas for improvement identified the need for:

- the leadership and management to develop a more rigorous approach to self evaluation to promote school improvement in which targets are focused sharply on measurable outcomes in the children’s learning; and
- the teachers to plan more systematically to progress the children’s learning, including their use of assessment to inform future planning.<sup>14</sup>

The February 2016 inspection noted:

- The improved confidence and capacity of the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators in leading and managing their respective areas of responsibility through action planning that is based on critical self-evaluation and underpinned by continuing professional development.
- There is effective oversight of the children’s standards in literacy and numeracy through: a more rigorous approach to the analysis of the school’s internal performance data; regular book reviews; a review of the teachers’ planning; and, direct engagement with the children through literacy and numeracy focus groups.
- The link governors are better informed on the children’s standards of attainment in literacy and numeracy and are able to provide a more robust challenge function.
- There is a consistent approach to literacy and numeracy planning throughout the school; the long term plans provide a better overview for progression in learning while the short term plans and evaluations of the children’s progress, guide the staff more effectively in their day to day work.
- The improved quality of teaching and learning observed during the follow-up process which was effective in most of the lessons observed.<sup>15</sup>

The 2016 inspection concluded:

The school has demonstrated the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will continue to monitor how the school sustains improvement.<sup>16</sup>

## 3.2 Enrolment Trends

### 3.2.1 The enrolment trend in the school in the past three years and projected demand in the area

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<sup>12</sup> St Patrick’s PS, Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection (Involving Action Short of Strike) in March 2019 [https://www.etini.gov.uk/files/etini/publications/asos-sustaining-improvement-inspection-st-patricks-primary-school-burrenreagh-castlewellan-county-down-403-1671\\_0.pdf](https://www.etini.gov.uk/files/etini/publications/asos-sustaining-improvement-inspection-st-patricks-primary-school-burrenreagh-castlewellan-county-down-403-1671_0.pdf) .

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/inspection-reports-primary/inspection-reports-primary-2014/primaryinspection-st-patricks-primary-school-castlewellan-co-down.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/inspection-reports/inspection-reports-primary/inspection-reports-primary-2014/primaryinspection-st-patricks-primary-school-castlewellan-co-down.pdf> p.2

<sup>15</sup> [www.etini.gov.uk/files/etini/publications/follow-up-inspection-st-patricks-primary-school-burrenreagh-castlewellan-county-down.pdf](http://www.etini.gov.uk/files/etini/publications/follow-up-inspection-st-patricks-primary-school-burrenreagh-castlewellan-county-down.pdf) p.2-3

<sup>16</sup> [www.etini.gov.uk/files/etini/publications/follow-up-inspection-st-patricks-primary-school-burrenreagh-castlewellan-county-down.pdf](http://www.etini.gov.uk/files/etini/publications/follow-up-inspection-st-patricks-primary-school-burrenreagh-castlewellan-county-down.pdf) p.3

Sections 2.1 and 2.2 highlight the enrolment trends and projected enrolment for the school. Table 3 demonstrates the enrolment figures for St Patrick's PS remain consistently below the recommended minimum threshold of 105 contained within the SSP. CCMS is of the view there is insufficient evidence of a potential increase in demand to meet the sustainability enrolment threshold in St Patrick's PS.

### **3.3 Financial Position**

#### **3.3.1 Small Schools Support Factor**

Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) Common Funding Formula, the level of funding is determined by pupil numbers. All schools receive delegated budgets and have authority to determine expenditure from these budgets. Guidance for controlled and maintained schools requires that they should not accumulate surpluses or deficits in excess of 5% of their delegated budget or £75,000, whichever is the lesser unless they are being accumulated for specific purposes detailed in their financial plans and approved by the EA.<sup>17</sup>

The Small Schools Support Factor is a lump sum equivalent to 1.0 times the salary of a teacher on point UPS 1 of the Teachers' Upper Pay Scale, allocated to schools of up to 100 pupils tapering to zero at 300 pupils. Small Schools Support funding is intended to target more resources towards smaller schools to facilitate the delivery of the curriculum.

The Primary Principal's Release factor is intended to provide resources to help ensure that at least two days per week release from teaching duties is available for principals of smaller primary schools. This release from classroom duties aims to allow these principals to concentrate on their leadership, management, and administrative duties. Primary schools with enrolments of up to 100 pupils will receive a maximum lump sum amount as determined by the Department, tapering to zero at 300 pupils.

#### **3.3.2 St Patrick's PS annual finances**

St Patrick's PS received the full entitlement of £51,829 of Small School Support Factor for 2024/25. The school received the full entitlement of £16,420 of Primary Principal's Release Time Factor for 2024/25.

Table 7 below provides information from the school's 3-year financial plan 2025-28 in Appendix B. Appendix A is the Annual Area Profile for the school. A financial deficit of £553,228 at the end of the 2025/26 financial year is projected to increase to a deficit of £751,972 in 2026/27. The plan indicates the deficit will increase to £966,824 at the end of the 2027/28 financial year. These calculations are based on pupil enrolments of 28 in October 2025, 24 in October 2026 and 24 in October 2027.

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<sup>17</sup> GUIDANCE ON FINANCIAL AND MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONTROLLED AND MAINTAINED SCHOOLS FUNDED UNDER THE COMMON FUNDING SCHEME

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
<b>Anticipated Enrolment</b>	28	24	24
<b>Planned Teaching Complement</b>	4.0	4.0	4.0
<b>Total Budget (£)</b>	<b>213,719</b>	<b>193,143</b>	<b>179,425</b>
<b>Opening Cumulative Surplus/deficit (£)</b>	<b>(376,016)</b>	<b>(553,228)</b>	<b>(751,972)</b>
<b>Total Expenditure (£)</b>	392,655	390,162	392,553
<b>In Year Surplus/Deficit (£)</b>	<b>(177,212)</b>	<b>(198,744)</b>	<b>(214,852)</b>
<b>Closing Balance (£)</b>	<b>(553,228)</b>	<b>(751,972)</b>	<b>(966,824)</b>
<b>% Deficit/surplus</b>	<b>333%</b>	<b>207%</b>	<b>168%</b>
<b>Pupil/Teacher ratio</b>	7.0	6.0	6.0

Table 7: St Patrick's PS Financial Plan 2025/28

The school's annual finances indicate that it cannot live within its delegated budget. The school's financial trends indicate that it will not be able to live within its annually delegated budget with the 3 year financial plan. The school's three-year financial plan based upon realistic assumptions, indicate that the deficit cannot be substantially reduced or recovered.

In 2024/25, the average calculated cost per pupil across all primary schools was £4,400. The average for schools of 104 pupils and below was approximately £5,800 per pupil and for schools of 105 and above it was approximately £4,300. In EA outturn figures, the average cost per pupil in St Patrick's PS for 2024/25 was £8,780.

### 3.4 Leadership and management by the Board of Governors and principal at St Patrick's PS

#### 3.4.1 ETI Report

**The Report of an Inspection in February 2016 included the following comments.**

- The improved confidence and capacity of the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators in leading and managing their respective areas of responsibility through action planning that is based on critical self-evaluation and underpinned by continuing professional development.
- There is effective oversight of the children's standards in literacy and numeracy through: a more rigorous approach to the analysis of the school's internal performance data; regular book reviews; a review of the teachers' planning; and, direct engagement with the children through literacy and numeracy focus groups.
- The link governors are better informed on the children's standards of attainment in literacy and numeracy and are able to provide a more robust challenge function.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> [www.etini.gov.uk/files/etini/publications/follow-up-inspection-st-patricks-primary-school-burrenreagh-castlewellan-county-down.pdf](http://www.etini.gov.uk/files/etini/publications/follow-up-inspection-st-patricks-primary-school-burrenreagh-castlewellan-county-down.pdf) p.3

### 3.4.2 Composition of Board of Governors

The Board of Governors benefit from a wide range of skills and include the school principal and representation from parents/guardians, teachers, Trustees, and the Department of Education.

### 3.5 Accessibility

The school is accessible to the pupils in the local area. There are also alternative schools nearby which are accessible. This proposal takes account of demand for provision in the area and available places nearby.

#### 3.5.1 Distance and capacity in nearest schools

From/To	Distance	Approved enrolment	Actual enrolment	Supernumerary pupils	Available places
St Mary's PS Newcastle	3.4 miles	319	325	34	28
St Joseph's PS Carncaville	2.7 miles	194	196	17	15
St Malachy's PS Castlewellan	1.9 miles	350	357	42	35
St Mary's PS Aughlisnafin	4.5 miles	169	84	*	!
Newcastle PS	3.6 miles	198	166	13	45
All Children IPS, Newcastle	4.6 miles	203	213	16	6
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	2.3 miles	135	123	7	19
Annsborough IPS	3.3 miles	85	34	*	!
St Malachy's PS, Kilcoo	3.8 miles	165	151	5	19
St Matthew's PS, Magheramayo	4.3 miles	87	86	5	6

Table 8: Available places in the area 2024/25

\* When calculating the unfilled places, the Department of Education excludes supernumerary pupils from the calculation. Consequently, the unfilled places added to the enrolment may not match the approved enrolment number.

i Denotes omission of figures to avoid possible identification of individuals.

Table 8 demonstrates available places in the area. If a school has no available spaces, they would be supported to accept pupils through the TV process if St Patrick's PS closed and parental preference was for those schools.

### 3.6 Links with the Community

Details of community links, provided by the school, is included in Appendix C.

## 4. AREA PLANNING IMPACT

### 4.1 Outline the Area Planning context and how this proposal will contribute to the delivery of education provision within the area. How does the proposal align with the current Area Plan, its key strategic themes and actions outlined in the Annual Action Plan?

The DE's vision in the SSP 2009 is for an educationally sustainable schools' estate planned on an area basis, with a focus on sharing and collaboration.<sup>19</sup> The operational planning process provides a framework for early consideration of emerging problems and possible remedial action to address questions of sustainability. The primary objective of the SSP policy is to ensure that all pupils get a first-class education in fit for purpose facilities, regardless of background or where they live. It focuses on the long-term viability of educational provision making best use of the resources available for education. This policy drives the area planning process to ensure there is a network of strong, viable schools to meet the educational needs of pupils.

In October 2016, with the publication of the draft Education Authority's *Providing Pathways - Strategic Area Plan for School provision 2017-2020*, the then Education Minister made a statement that included the following:

The Sustainable Schools Policy, which is implemented through the Area Planning process, focuses on providing children and young people with high quality education that meets their needs and enables them to achieve their full potential.

The educational experience of our children and young people is greatly enhanced when they attend schools that are educationally and financially viable. The Sustainable Schools Policy is a framework for assessment of the sustainability of primary and post-primary schools. The six criteria and supporting indicators clearly illustrate what a sustainable educational experience should look like. Schools must: deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, offer extensive extracurricular activities, have high quality pastoral care systems and have the confidence of the communities they serve.

In primary schools, pupils should be in a class with no more than two year groups but ideally they should be in single year group classes. They should be able to interact with peer groups and have the best chances to prepare for successful transition to post primary school.

However, there are still a significant number of schools that are struggling, for a wide range of reasons, to deliver the best for their pupils. This is particularly evident in the primary sector and, despite the best effort of teachers, it becomes harder to deliver a high-quality education if pupils are taught in composite classes. We have too many small primary schools with more than two-year groups in a single class.<sup>20</sup>

9<sup>th</sup> August 2021, the Education Minister set the priorities for the next Regional Area Plan.

It is incumbent upon the managing authorities and sectoral body representatives to scope and bring forward proposals to address the issue of primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two year groups. Despite the best

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/sustainable-schools>.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=2016-10-17.5.1>

Ministerial Statement on Draft Area Plan - 17 October 2016.

efforts of teachers, it becomes more difficult to deliver a high quality education if pupils are taught in composite classes of more than two year groups. I would like to see shared solutions coming forward which maintain education provision in communities where unsustainable schools exist and this focus should be on creating a vibrant sustainable primary school where each pupil is in a class with a single year group.<sup>21</sup>

CCMS has a statutory duty to promote and co-ordinate, in consultation with Trustees, the planning of Catholic maintained schools. CCMS, in taking forward The Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 outlined area planning activity for the second two years of the five year strategy, which included *“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). The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Education Authority, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta will engage with the Boards of Governors of maintained, controlled/controlled integrated and Irish medium primary schools in the area.”*<sup>22</sup> The key themes are *“Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways. Maximise resources and sustainability. Inform strategic infrastructure planning and investment”*.<sup>23</sup>

This proposal maintains and enhances strong educational provision within the area and meets the Minister’s priorities.

**4.2 Specify links to other proposals. Provide detail on other DPs (including those in planning and not yet published) that could impact on education provision in the area, affecting consideration of this proposal and outline any reason for not bringing them forward together.** The proposal to close St Patrick’s PS is not linked to any other proposals.

**4.3 What other options/size were explored and why was this the most appropriate area solution?**

The alternative options explored are listed below.

**4.3.1 Do nothing - maintain the status quo**

This option would result in no change to the status of the school. It would not meet the key themes detailed in Operational Plan 2.

**4.3.2 Cross-sectoral options**

**4.3.2.1 Shared education option**

St Patrick’s PS is not in a shared education partnership. However, shared education activities do not provide the basis for sustainable provision.

**4.3.2.2 Shared campus option**

The DE Shared Campus Programme opened in 2014. The last call for applications closed in January 2017. The programme encouraged schools to apply, with a partner school, to share a campus, or joint facilities, whilst retaining their individual identity. Guidance from DE outlined that proposals needed to meet the six criteria in the *Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools (SSP)* for each school involved in a proposal. Where this was not the case, a rationale was to be evident,

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<sup>21</sup> Setting the Priorities for the Next Regional Area Plan for the Education Sector in Northern Ireland. 9 August 2021. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/ministerial-statement-setting-priorities-next-regional-area-plan-9-august-2021>

<sup>22</sup> Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 Primary, Special and Post Primary Schools (including Specialist Provision) p111.

<sup>23</sup> Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 Primary, Special and Post Primary Schools (including Specialist Provision) p111.

including an explanation, as to how the proposal would contribute to the delivery of sustainable provision in an area. Currently, there is no call from DE for any further Shared Education Campuses, so this is not an option available at present.

#### **4.3.2.3 Jointly managed school option**

A jointly managed faith school is where a school is established by two or more faith groups. This is an option that would be led by the trustees of the schools involved. CCMS has advised the school Board of Governors to contact the trustee should the school Board of Governors wish to pursue this matter further. CCMS is not aware of any discussions between the schools in the area on this option, and there is no evidence of any demand or desire for this option.

#### **4.3.2.4 Integrated school option**

As a result of the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which came into force on 26 October 2022, integrated education is the education together of:

- i. those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons;
- ii. those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not; and
- iii. those of different abilities.

If the school wishes to explore integrated provision more fully, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) can support this. CCMS has advised the school BoG to contact NICIE should the school wish to pursue this option any further. There is no evidence of any demand for integrated education through discussions at APLG or with the BoG. CCMS would not support a proposal for St Patrick's PS to transform to Integrated status as the school does not meet the required sustainability threshold.

#### **4.3.3 Amalgamation of St Patrick's PS with another CCMS school**

CCMS's assessment of a potential amalgamation for any school is based on a number of factors, including geographical proximity, existing links between schools, schools of a similar size, and a shared commitment to addressing sustainability. Some key elements are detailed below.

##### **4.3.3.1 Distance**

Amalgamations of primary schools are usually between schools in one parish or area. In rural areas, the distance between amalgamating schools, in a parish or area, depends on their geographical span. In one example, there was 7.9 miles between two schools. Distance between schools in the parish/area would not have ruled out an amalgamation.

##### **4.3.3.2 Links**

For an amalgamation to have a strong basis for success, it is helpful if the schools involved have substantial links with each other.

##### **4.3.3.3 Shared commitment**

An amalgamation requires participating schools to have a shared commitment to address the sustainability of maintained provision in an area/parish. Amalgamations are complex and require a strong commitment from participating schools to jointly addressing sustainability. Schools must be open to the potential that a newly amalgamated school may not be located on their particular site.

While an amalgamation of CCMS schools in the area could potentially require capital investment to provide suitable accommodation for pupils, there is currently no specific amalgamation proposal under consideration. As such, capital requirements cannot be assessed at this stage.

#### **4.3.3.4 Disruption in the area**

The challenges associated with a potential amalgamation include the potential (or lack of) community buy in and disruption to a significant number of pupils/staff. It is CCMS's assessment is there is not a suitable school for a potential amalgamation with St Patrick's PS. Furthermore, Department of Education guidance indicates that schools involved in an amalgamation should be of similar size, which is not the case in this instance.

#### **4.3.4 Federation**

The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 makes provision for Federations through: 'Management of voluntary schools

11 (3) Two or more maintained primary schools, \*other than nursery schools, may be grouped under one Board of Governors where the trustees or Board of Governors of each school so requests and—  
(a) in the case of Catholic maintained schools, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, with the approval of the Department, so determines.'

This would require agreement between CCMS, St Patrick's Primary School and another primary school in the area to 'federate' with one Board of Governors and one Principal over both schools. Both schools would remain under their own identity and budget. Both schools are required to be sustainable for this to be an option.

Schools in a federation continue to be individual schools and keep their existing category and character and in particular, do not gain, lose or change their religious character, foundation or Trust status through membership of a federation. Each school retains its own budget, within one governing body as with amalgamations, key consideration for federations includes the following considerations:

##### **4.3.4.1 Shared commitment**

It would be helpful if there is a shared commitment to addressing sustainability of maintained schools in the area/parish.

##### **4.3.4.2 Links**

It would be helpful if schools involved have substantial links with each other, to have a strong basis for a successful federation.

##### **4.3.4.3 Partner school and sustainability**

A partner school is required for a federation. Some further considerations would be.

- What would this mean educationally and financially for both schools?
- What would this look like, and does it address the sustainability challenges raised throughout correspondence with the Board of Governors and within the consultation documentation?
- What would it mean for the pupil numbers in each school; the numbers of teachers; and the number of composite classes across the schools?

CCMS discussed federation with the St Patrick's PS Board of Governors. Challenges relate to the educational and financial aspects of how a federation would address the sustainability of provision in the area. For example: how would each school benefit if schools shared a principal and how would a shared Board of Governors assist in eliminating sustainability challenges at St Patrick's PS. Based on a review of the challenges associated with a potential sustainable federation, it is CCMS's assessment a federation does not address the sustainability challenges in the area.

#### **4.3.4 Discontinuance of St Patrick's PS**

In considering the future of St Patrick's PS, there is no evidence at this point of any other option that would be a more appropriate area planning solution for provision in the area. CCMS recognises the

commitment of the governors and staff but current circumstances would not provide for a sustainable school. It is recognised that despite the school's best efforts, it continues to face sustainability challenges. This option increases the sustainability of other schools and helps to maintain provision for this rural area. It also increases access to sustainable provision, with transport assistance for those eligible.

In consideration of the options above, CCMS proposes that St Patrick's PS discontinues with effect from 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter. CCMS considers the proposal to discontinue provision at St Patrick's PS would not impact significantly on other schools. Given the capacity in the area, any displacement of pupils can be managed within existing provision, based on current parental/guardian preference.

#### **4.3.5 Conclusion**

The pre-publication consultation process to discontinue St Patrick's PS commenced 7 November 2025. The purpose of the pre-publication consultation was to facilitate meaningful responses to CCMS' recommended option. It provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to present their views and contribute evidence to be considered as part of the process, including alternative sustainable options. Consultation responses are presented in Appendix D.

Following analysis of consultation feedback and review of sustainability evidence, CCMS's Education Provision Committee met on 28 January 2026 and approved proceeding to a Development Proposal for the discontinuance of St Patrick's Primary School with a revised implementation date of 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter. EPC determined that the updated date more accurately reflects the significant sustainability challenges facing the school, including its 2025/26 enrolment of 11 pupils and the absence of any demonstrable trend toward recovery.

#### **4.4 What is the potential impact on other schools, what account has been taken of this?**

It is anticipated there will not be a significant impact on other schools in the area from either maintained, controlled or integrated sectors. The analysis of the demand for places in detailed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2.

### **5. RATIONALE FOR PROPOSAL**

#### **5.1 Explain the objectives of the proposal and the desired outcomes if approved – for example to reduce number of available places or to increase enrolment to meet demand. Detail how this aligns to Departmental policies and consideration given to Statutory Duties.**

The proposed discontinuance of St Patrick's Primary School will support an area planning solution for the area in that it is addressing issues of sustainability, ensuring that school places are located as required and is consistent with Every School a Good School,<sup>24</sup> the Sustainable Schools Policy<sup>25</sup>, 'Providing Pathways'<sup>26</sup> and the 'Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision'.<sup>27</sup> The proposal will meet the educational needs of pupils. It will also continue to provide additional support to those who require it, ensuring those pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) realise their full potential. Pupils with SEN will continue to have their special educational requirements met, supported by Children and Young People Services (CYPS). Sections 1-4 outline how the proposal will contribute to the delivery of education provision within the area.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/every-school-good-school-esags>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/schools-future-policy-sustainable-schools>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.eani.org.uk/publications/providing-pathways-strategic-area-plan-2017-2020>

<sup>27</sup> Planning for Sustainable Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 Primary and Post-Primary Schools 29 June 2022

## 5.2 Equality Duty

Equality screening of the proposal has been carried out in advance of the pre-publication consultation and has been reviewed in light of responses to the consultation. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: A Guide for Public Authorities advises:

The first duty is the Equality of Opportunity duty, which requires public authorities in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the nine equality categories of persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependants and persons without.<sup>28</sup>

Stakeholders were requested, as part of their response to the proposal, to consider the following questions.

- a. Are there any data needs or issues in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories that have not been identified in Equality Screening consultation document? If so, what are they? Please provide details.
- b. Are there any adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in the Equality Screening document? If so, what are they?
- c. Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts that have been identified by CCMS or that you have identified.

The responses are recorded in the consultation summary and reflected in the updated Equality screening document. The evidence received to date suggests that there are no major impacts on the protected groups within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The updated screening document is included in Appendix F .

## 5.3 Voice of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 12 (1) of the UNCRC 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.<sup>29</sup>

CCMS's practice regarding consultation with primary school pupils is 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.

## 5.4 Rural Needs Act 2016

Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 ('the Act') requires public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or reviewing a policy, strategy or plan and when designing or delivering a public service. The obligation to "have regard to" in section 1 of the Rural Needs Act only imposes an obligation on the CCMS to consider the relevant issues, not to give them any particular weight. The areas from which each school attract pupils is, according to the

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<sup>28</sup><https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf>

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: A Guide for Public Authorities p7.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child p5.

Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, defined as rural.<sup>30</sup> CCMS has considered the relevant issues prior to the pre-publication consultation and has reviewed them in light of the responses received.

This document considers the potential of options to maintain primary school provision on the St Patrick's PS site. These include cross-sectoral options such as shared education/shared campus and other options such as amalgamation, integrated education and maintaining the status quo. There is no evidence any of these options could provide sustainable education. The options were discussed with the Board of Governors of the school and were part of the consultation with staff, Board of Governors, parents/guardians and pupils of St Patrick's PS. This ensured information was received from the impacted stakeholders on all matters, including rural needs.

The consultees were asked to consider the following questions as part of their response to the consultation.

- I. Are there any data needs or issues in relation to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment that have not been identified? If so, what are they? Please provide details.
- II. Are there any adverse impacts in relation to rural needs that have not been identified in the Rural Needs Impact Assessment? If so, what are they?
- III. Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts that have been identified by CCMS or that you have identified.

The responses are recorded in the consultation summary and reflected in the updated Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

Due consideration was given to the balance between meeting the requirements of the SSP, for the school and for wider educational provision, and proposing the closure of the school. There is no evidence the enrolment, financial and educational aspects of the school can be satisfactorily addressed, to ensure it would be a sustainable option for provision in the area.

The provision of home-to-school transport<sup>31</sup> will ensure transport of pupils from the area to another school. Transport will be provided for pupils who live more than two miles from their nearest suitable school. This mitigates the impact of the closure of the school on pupils access to a suitable school

The intention of this proposal is to advance the aspirations, aims and objectives of the SSP: "It is important that children in rural communities have access to a quality education in cost effective provision."<sup>32</sup> The proposal meets this requirement.

## **6. EDUCATIONAL IMPACT**

### **6.1 What are the educational benefits of this proposal?**

CCMS, in taking forward a proposal for the discontinuance of St Patrick's PS, has identified the sustainability challenges of the school. The SSP notes that in order to have a quality educational experience, indicators show that there should be no more than two composite year groups in a single classroom.<sup>33</sup> The Education Minister, in a statement for setting the priorities for the current regional Area Plan for the education sector in Northern Ireland spoke of the need to address the issue of primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two year groups.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> [https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/documents/ur\\_report.pdf](https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/documents/ur_report.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/pupil-applications-and-grants/home-to-school-transport-0>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/a-policy-for-sustainable-schools.pdf> p27.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/a-policy-for-sustainable-schools.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/official-report/written-ministerial-statements-2017-2022/departments-of-education---setting-the-priorities-for-the-next-regional-area-plan-for-the-education-sector-in-northern-ireland/>

The Education and Training Inspectorate identifies difficulties in ‘two composite year groups in a single classroom’. The Chief Inspector’s Report 2014-16 stated that it is more difficult for a teacher to ensure adequate learning progression and meet all learners’ needs in composite classes spanning more than two year groups. It also suggested that such classes can limit children’s opportunities for social and emotional development with peers. This was further reinforced in the Education and Training Inspectorate’s Chief Inspector’s Report 2016-2018 which noted that too many schools are too small to provide adequately for their pupils, particularly primary schools with more than two year groups in composite classes.

The SSP specifies a minimum of four teachers in a school to recognise the needs of the pupils and demands on teachers. There is no indication that the pattern of low enrolment at St Patrick’s PS will change in the future. The discontinuance of provision at St Patrick’s PS will facilitate pupils benefitting educationally as a result of:

- greater opportunities for pupils to be taught in their own age groups;
- increased number of classes of no more than two-year groups;
- additional potential for appropriate levels of differentiation in teaching and learning;
- increased opportunities for peer group interaction;
- increased opportunity for pupils to be with those of a similar age and stage;
- improved chances for participation in a wider range of extra-curricular activities;
- additional opportunities for specialist teaching and professional development of staff; and
- potentially decreased workload for teachers.

## **6.2 Provision of high-quality education should be the desired outcome of all proposals - outline how this proposal aims to achieve this outcome.**

If St Patrick’s PS were to cease provision, the pupils would be afforded the opportunity to enrol in schools with fewer sustainability challenges.

A sustainable school can allow for efficient use of educational resources including the deployment of teaching and support staff. It can also provide increased opportunities for the professional development of all staff as a larger staffing complement allows for increased interaction with peers and can facilitate more opportunities for training/development.

The SSP recognises the importance of having a system of sustainable schools. “A general principle of the education system is that, so far as it 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.”<sup>48</sup> The SSP also makes the following comment “The costs associated with providing additional support to smaller schools or schools which are considered non-sustainable inevitably means that there is less funding available to distribute across all schools.”<sup>49</sup>

Planning for Sustainable Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 notes that the objectives of Area Planning are set out in the Department of Education’s Area Planning Guidance and that the system should:

- maximise the use and sharing of the existing schools’ estate including potential for collaborative models of shared and/or co-located facilities (including colocation of mainstream and special schools); and
- maximise the impact of available resources by reducing duplication of provision and the number of available places.<sup>35</sup>

### **6.3 Outline how the proposal will benefit children and young people in the school(s) and in the area overall.**

This proposal would benefit pupils, as it will add to the longer-term viability of school provision for the area. The SSP's primary objective is to ensure that all children get a first class education in fit for purpose facilities, regardless of background or where they live.<sup>36</sup> This proposal would progress the development of a network of viable schools to meet the educational needs of pupils. Section 6.1 outlines the educational benefits that will be available to the pupils in a larger school.

Considering the requirement to make the best use of resources, this proposal, along with others like it, increase the availability of resources for the system. This will provide greater opportunity to improve educational provision. This meets the objective of the Strategic Area Plan 2022-27, "maximise the impact of available resources by reducing duplication of provision and the number of available places."<sup>37</sup>

### **6.4 Provide details of how the specific requirements of pupils with SEN will be catered for under the new arrangements.**

Account will be taken of all pupils, who would move, if provision ceased at St Patrick's PS and particularly those with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Provision for pupils with SEN may be enhanced in a larger school with teachers responsible for one area of coordination, e.g. SENCO. If this proposal is approved, CCMS, in liaison with the EA and the schools involved, would ensure the following steps are taken.

- Assistance for pupils, as required, in managing the transition to a new setting.
- Continued appropriate placement for pupils with a statement of special educational needs, and assistance for these pupils in managing the transition to a new setting.
- Early and confidential transfer of statements and Individual Education Plans (IEP) to the new school.
- Consideration, as necessary, of the facilities and equipment required to support pupils with SEN.
- Consideration, as necessary, of Specialist Provision where appropriate.

Any transport arrangement will be in accordance with transport policy. Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs will receive transport assistance where a special transport need has been identified and who are attending their nearest suitable school.

## **7. IMPLEMENTATION PLANS (IF THE PROPOSAL IS APPROVED)**

**Note: The timeline should be considered in advance of DP publication, this will impact on when the DP should be published to allow sufficient time from decision to implementation.**

### **7.1 Outline all actions required to deliver the proposal if approved. Does the implementation date reflect this, is it deliverable? If phasing is being proposed explain why it is necessary?**

An implementation date of 31 August 2026 has been selected following EPC review on 28 January 2026. This revised date reflects the need to address the school's acute sustainability challenges in a timely manner, while still ensuring sufficient time for orderly transition arrangements, including parental engagement, SEN transfer planning and coordination with receiving schools. No phasing is being proposed. If a development proposal is approved, the following steps would be taken.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/sustainable-schools>.

<sup>37</sup> Planning for Sustainable Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 p8.

- CCMS adviser/s would support St Patrick's PS and receiving schools in making transitional arrangements.
- Parents/guardians would have the opportunity to visit alternative schools.
- Meetings with SEN co-ordinators would be organised to facilitate the efficient and effective transfer of SEN pupils.
- Administration of admissions documentation would be organised.
- There would be sufficient time for the school to liaise with the EA and CCMS regarding the transfer of school assets and the secure storage of documents.

**7.2 Depending on type of proposal, this could include arrangements for pupils transferring to other school(s), maintaining continuity for examination classes, applications for additional accommodation and timeframe for delivery which takes account of time needed to secure all the necessary approvals to allow accommodation to be provided.**

There will be places available for the pupils of the area, should the development proposal proceed.

**7.3 Details of any arrangements for Shared Education Partnerships and how they would be impacted should be included in this section.**

St Patrick's PS is not in a shared education partnership. Should the proposal for closure of the school be approved, CCMS would work with neighbouring schools to support the transition of pupils who would be continuing primary education. Following this, CCMS and EA officers would support any receiving schools to develop existing or new shared education partnerships within the local area.

**7.4 Will there be composite classes, or will they be removed; will the school operate a double entry?**

This proposal means the pupils in the area would have a greater opportunity to attend a school which does not have more than two-year groups in one class.

**7.5 How will the School/EA ensure that the education of the children is protected during / after the proposed change?**

Measures will be put in place to protect the educational and pastoral needs of the pupils during the transfer to another school. Once the receiving schools know the particular nature of the pupils' needs, they can be proactive and prepare to offer the required support for the pupils.

The staff in the receiving schools would have expertise in catering for pupils with special educational needs. Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) would set out the nature of support pupils require. PLPs will transfer across to the new school with the pupils and would remain in place.

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

**Detail finance/resource implications (both capital and recurrent) of the proposal and approximate costs where available.**

**8.1 Is the proposal cost effective?**

**Finance – Budget position, impact on budget, cost of proposal**

This proposal is cost effective and will strengthen provision in the area as the other nearby schools would benefit from the additional pupils. If approved, there would be savings made upon closure of St Patrick's PS. Savings would accrue from the following main sources: reduction of building maintenance costs (including any potential future minor and major capital works); removal of small school support funding; and removal of principal release funding; and removal of provision which is not as cost effective as a school with fewer sustainability challenges.

## **8.2 Staffing – Additional teaching staff required, cost / redeployment, redundancy cost**

It is not possible to predict the number of voluntary redundancies or redeployments in advance of a decision regarding the development proposal. Therefore, it is not possible to cost these accurately at this time. In the event of the closure of the school, employment/deployment opportunities for both teaching and non-teaching staff would be sought in alternative schools.

The permanent teaching staff are afforded employment protection under the School Reorganisation Agreement 2013/2 for two years. The permanent non-teaching staff are afforded employment protection for one year under the Collective Agreement (JNC Circular 224).

## **8.3 Transport – Any additional cost**

The discontinuance of St Patrick's PS would require the provision of transport assistance for certain pupils. Any transport arrangement will be in accordance with transport policy.

**8.4 Accommodation – brief description of current accommodation / site, any capital proposals or minor works applications. Immediate day one minimum capital requirements should the DP be approved, site suitability to support changes, estimated cost and timescales for delivery of changes. Note: Approval of a DP does not automatically attract additional funding or accommodation and that these issues will be dealt with separately by the Department.**

It is anticipated there will be no accommodation requirements, due to the capacity at nearby schools.

## **8.5 Other issues requiring resources**

NA

# APPENDIX A – Annual Area Profile 2023, St Patrick’s PS

## Primary School Annual Area Profile 2023

DE Ref No	School Name	Status	Council Area
4031671	St Patrick's Primary School, Castlewellan	Catholic Maintained	Newry, Mourne and Down

Annual Census Information			
Year	Total pupils Y1-Y7	IMU	FSME % <sup>1</sup>
2019/20	63	0	11.1%
2020/21	62	0	21.0%
2021/22	51	0	23.5%
2022/23	47	0	21.3%
Approved Reception-Year 7 enrolment number			95
Approved Reception-Year 7 admissions number			14
Year 1 Pupils 2022/23			4
First Preferences Applications 2022/23			4

Formal Intervention	
In formal intervention any period 1 April 2022-31 March 2023	

Budgets			
Year	Available Delegated Resources £	Surplus/Deficit £	Surplus/Deficit %
2019/20	236,968	-37,784	-15.94%
2020/21	243,547	-75,660	-31.07%
2021/22	222,925	-68,251	-30.62%

KEY TO SYMBOLS & TEXT USED IN DATA ABOVE	
Symbol/Text	Definition
*	Relates to fewer than 5 cases
#	Means that a figure greater than or equal to 5 had been treated to prevent disclosure of a small number elsewhere
-	School not open in the relevant academic year
Total pupils Year 1-Year 7 includes IMU and statements	
Total pupils, IME, FSME % includes pupils in Year 1-Year 7 classes only	

BOARD OF GOVERNOR'S THREE YEAR  
FINANCIAL PLAN

**APPENDIX B – FINANCIAL PLAN, ST PATRICK'S PS**

**BOARD OF GOVERNOR'S THREE YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN  
FOR THE PERIOD: 2025-28**



**School Details**

School: **St Patrick's Primary  
Castlewellan**

Cost Centre: **21349**

DE Reference: **403-1671**

**Financial Plan 2025-28 Conditions**

The information that follows constitutes the school's 3 Year Financial Plan. In order for this plan to be approved, and budgets allocated to the school, it must be signed by both the Principal and the Chair of the Board of Governors.

Boards of Governors are reminded that, while the legislation provides delegated budgets for them to deploy resources to best effect in delivering the highest possible quality of education, it gives them no authority to exceed the budget delegated to them. Boards of governors cannot spend more than they receive without the advance approval of the EA as Funding Authority, and they must not plan to do so.

If there is any planned or unplanned deviation from the Financial Plan signed by the Principal and Board of Governors, the school must inform the Education Authority at the earliest opportunity. If any deviation from the plan increases net expenditure, approval must be sought from the Education Authority in advance.

The Board of Governors bear the financial and management responsibilities in relation to the delegated budget of the school, and of the need to ensure compliance with current guidance including "Guidance on Financial and Management Arrangements for Controlled and Maintained Schools" (linked below).

The Board of Governors must also understand the need to ensure financial competence within its Board and can confirm that at least one member has under taken appropriate financial training provided by EA (or appropriate other training provider).

[Link:- Guidance on Financial and Management Arrangements for Controlled and Maintained Schools](#)

[Link:- Common Funding Scheme](#)

BOARD OF GOVERNOR'S THREE YEAR  
FINANCIAL PLAN

**BOARD OF GOVERNOR'S THREE YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN  
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[Link:- Common Funding Scheme](#)

BOARD OF GOVERNOR'S THREE YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN

**Pupils & Staffing Numbers 2025-28**

	October 2024	October 2025	October 2026	October 2027
Category	Prior Year	Plan Year 1	Plan Year 2	Plan Year 3
Full Time Equivalent Enrolment (excluding Spec Unit Pupils )	34.0	28.0	24.0	24.0
Planned Teaching Compliment	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Planned Pupil Teacher Ratio	8.5	7.0	6.0	6.0

**Budgetary Position 2025-28**

		2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028
Funding	Column1	Plan Year 1	Plan Year 2	Plan Year 3
Aggregated Schools Budget (Common Funding Formula)		209,766	189,190	175,472
Other Delegated Funding		3,953	3,953	3,953
Split Site Funding Requested		-	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>213,719</b>	<b>193,143</b>	<b>179,425</b>

**Planned Income & Expenditure 2025-28**

		2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028
Category		Plan Year 1	Plan Year 2	Plan Year 3
Income		(1,724)	(1,724)	(1,724)
Staff Costs - Teaching		308,464	313,242	315,453
Staff Costs - Non Teaching		54,929	53,900	53,900
Staff Costs - Other		200	200	200
Accommodation		8,377	8,377	8,377
Repairs & Maintenance		2,643	2,669	2,696
Operating Costs		15,034	15,184	15,336

BOARD OF GOVERNOR'S THREE YEAR  
FINANCIAL PLAN

School:

**St Patrick's Primary  
Castlewellan**

Non Capital Purchases		3,008 38 38
Capital Expenditure		-
<b>Net In-Year (Surplus) / Deficit</b>		<b>390,931 391,886 394,277</b>

BOARD OF GOVERNOR'S THREE YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN

School:

**St Patrick's Primary  
Castlewellan**

**Forecast Surplus / Deficit Position 2025-28**

**2025-2026 2026-2027 2027-2028**

<b>As at 31st March</b>	<b>Plan Year 1</b>	<b>Plan Year 2</b>	<b>Plan Year 3</b>
Opening Cumulative Surplus / (Deficit)			(376,016) (553,228) (751,972)
Net In-Year Surplus / (Deficit)			(177,212) (198,744) (214,852)
Closing Cumulative Surplus / (Deficit)			(553,228) (751,972) (966,824)
% Carry Over			333% 207% 168%

**School Category**

**1a**

## **APPENDIX C – School links to the community<sup>38</sup>**

This is an area in which our school continues to improve.

St. Patrick's P.S. has a strong support group formed mainly of parents – Friends of Burrenreagh. This group provides numerous community opportunities and fundraising for St. Patrick's P.S. both in school and in local community establishments in Castlewellan and Newcastle. We belong to the Parish of Maghera, and our children make the sacraments in the Church of Our lady of the Assumption. Our parish priest and parents attend services within the school several times each year. We are also in the fortunate position that we are able to maintain close links with the other neighbouring Parish of Kilmegan. Funfit, a local business joins us every week to help further develop the children fitness skills. They also ran our Summer Fit Camp during the summer holidays. We also have strong historic links to sporting communities in the local area - Bryansford / Leitrim GAC, Castlewellan FC / Newcastle Athletics Club etc. taking part in a number of organised activities run by these Clubs.

St. Patrick's P.S. are also able to avail of close links with local businesses in both towns and countryside at all times of the year, with businesses keen to sponsor raffles and prizes. Strong links have been forged with local playgroups, primary and secondary schools for both children and staff. The Primary 6 and 7 children visit local open days and staff from local schools visit to talk to the transition year children about their school and what it offers.

Staff attend clusters in local primary schools to disseminate good practice, and they visit local playgroups to increase our visibility in the district.

Children attend open days and events occurring as joint initiatives along with other opportunities, such as Engineering Ireland initiatives and events run by Newry and Mourne District Council. We also host a number of local secondary students throughout the year on work experience.

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<sup>38</sup> Provided by the school. Not verified by CCMS

## APPENDIX D – Consultation Summary



**CCMS**  
Council for Catholic  
Maintained Schools

ST PATRICK’S PRIMARY SCHOOL (403-1671)

PROPOSAL – Discontinue provision at St Patrick’s PS (503-1318) on 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.

SUMMARY OF PRE-PUBLICATION CONSULTATION

JANUARY 2026

Below is a summary of the responses to the pre-publication consultation on the proposal to:

- discontinue St Patrick’s PS (403-1671) on 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Pre-publication consultation with the stakeholders of the school was online, in that all stakeholders had access to materials online and there was an on-line meeting with staff, parents and governors. Stakeholders had the option to respond online, by email or by sending a letter to CCMS. CCMS officers also made themselves available to respond to questions from stakeholders.

The pre-publication consultation process with staff, governors and parents/guardians commenced on 7 November 2025. In advance of this, the draft pre-publication consultation booklet, Rural Needs Impact Assessment and Equality Screening were issued to the Board of Governors for review for accuracy. CCMS met with school stakeholders (staff, Board of Governors and parents/guardians) on 17 November 2025 via Microsoft Teams for an information meeting. The pre-publication consultation closed 19 December 2025. The electronic pre-publication documents, listed below, were activated 7 November 2025 in a section of the CCMS website (accessible to school stakeholders only).

Consultation was carried out by means of the following documents.

1. Pre-publication consultation booklet.
2. Rural Needs Impact Assessment.
3. Equality Screening.
4. Frequently asked questions and answers sheet.
5. Consultation response form.
6. Narrated PowerPoint presentation.

**Table 1 - Summary of responses received in the online/written consultation 7 November 2025 to 19 December 2025.**

Respondents	Parent/ Guardian*	Teaching Staff**	Non-Teaching Staff**	Governor*	Other*	Pupil*	Total*
Agree with proposal	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Conditional Agreement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disagree with proposal	11	2	3	1	4	1	20
Neutral	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total number of responses received</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>23</b>

\*This is the number of responses counted and is based on the responses received in Microsoft Forms, emails received, letters and templates. Some individual respondees have submitted more than one response.

\* *Governors sent a collective response.*

\* *Collective response from P1-P7 pupils.*

\* *Responses designated as ‘Other’ did not include details of the respondent’s capacity.*

The key points made in the pre-publication consultation responses are noted below (broken down by themes).

### **Quality Educational Experience**

The following points reflect the key comments made by respondents about the quality of Education in the school.

Responses consistently highlighted the benefits of small class sizes, strong pastoral care and a family-like ethos. Stakeholders emphasised the breadth of curriculum, including swimming, languages, and eco initiatives, as well as the nurturing environment that supports confidence and creativity.

**CCMS Comment:** CCMS acknowledges the emphasis on personalised education and pastoral care. However, the Sustainable Schools Policy requires schools to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum with adequate peer interaction. With enrolment at 11 and persistent composite classes, these conditions cannot be met. Discontinuance will allow pupils access to sustainable provision with greater curriculum breadth and peer engagement

### **SEN and Inclusion**

Many respondents stressed that children with additional needs thrive in Burrenreagh's small setting, benefiting from individualised attention and strong relationships. Concerns were raised about transitions to larger schools, potential loss of classroom assistants, and continuity of SEN provision.

**CCMS Comment:** CCMS recognises the importance of inclusive education. While Burrenreagh provides strong pastoral care, sustainability challenges limit its ability to maintain specialist SEN provision. Receiving schools can offer dedicated SENCO roles and broader resources, ensuring continuity of support during transition.

### **Community Links**

The following points reflect the key comments made by respondents about the strong links the school has with the community.

The school was described as a cornerstone of rural life, hosting intergenerational activities and reducing isolation. Closure is seen as accelerating rural decline and eroding local identity, with fears about the loss of a vital social hub for families and older residents.

**CCMS Comment:** CCMS values the cultural and social role of rural schools. However, sustainability criteria must guide decisions. With enrolment at 11 and projected decline, maintaining provision is not viable. CCMS will work with EA and local partners to explore community use of facilities during transition.

### **Community health and Wellbeing Linkages**

Stakeholders explicitly connect school-based community activities (e.g., crochet club) to public health goals on social isolation and mental health in rural areas; loss seen as detrimental.

**CCMS Comment:** While decisions prioritise sustainable schooling, signposting to other local venues will maintain social connections.

### **Wraparound Care and Working Families**

Parents report withdrawal of breakfast/afterschool/phonics clubs and the resulting impact on childcare and employment. They link closure of community activity (e.g., crochet club) to rural isolation and mental health.

**CCMS Comment:** CCMS will work with EA/receiving schools/local providers to explore access to wraparound care based on demand to support continuity for working families.

### **Accessibility and Transport**

The following points reflect the key comments made by respondents about the accessibility of the school.

Stakeholders highlighted longer travel distances, increased congestion and financial burdens for families if closure proceeds. Limited public transport options were noted as a particular challenge for rural households.

**CCMS Comment:** CCMS will liaise with EA to ensure transport assistance for eligible pupils. This mitigates rural travel concerns and supports equitable access to education.

### **Capacity and Housing Growth**

Respondents referenced housing developments in Castlewellan, Bryansford and Leitrim, questioning whether nearby schools can absorb additional pupils. Concerns were raised about oversubscription in nearby schools and the ability to secure places in preferred options.

**CCMS Comment:** CCMS has reviewed demographic data and housing trends. Evidence does not indicate sufficient growth to meet SSP thresholds. Nearby schools have capacity to accommodate pupils, ensuring access to sustainable provision.

### **Leadership, Governance and Communication**

The following points reflect the key comments made by respondents about the leadership, governance and communication.

Some respondents expressed concerns about the school's ability to promote itself and maintain stability, noting this may have influenced enrolment trends.

**CCMS Comment:** These factors do not alter the fundamental sustainability challenges. CCMS will maintain engagement with the Board of Governors and parents throughout any transition.

### **Operational Queries (Short-term Operations and Estate)**

Respondents questioned thresholds for keeping a building open with very low enrolment, teacher workload, and whether staff would be redeployed. Concerns extended to site ownership, maintenance scheduling, and safety/security of any vacated premises, citing risks to both resources and community safety.

**CCMS Comment:** CCMS will track enrolment/utilisation and, if discontinuance proceeds, manage staff deployment and estate matters (ownership, maintenance, security) with Trustees and EA in line with policy.

### **Alternative Options Suggested**

Suggestions included establishing nursery or preschool provision, creating a specialist SPIMS unit, or repurposing the site for SEN provision. Respondents argued these options could sustain enrolment and meet unmet local needs.

**CCMS Comment:** Suggestions such as nursery/preschool or specialist provision have been noted. However, any option must meet the sustainability criteria set out in the Sustainable Schools Policy. With an enrolment of only 11 pupils and a projected deficit approaching £1m by 2027/28, CCMS is of the view that these alternatives do not offer sustainable provision.

### **Pupil Voice and Wellbeing**

Children describe a strong sense of belonging, daily routines (including prayer), and anxiety around change. They value small classes for relationships, confidence and participation, as well as outdoor learning and enrichment (French, swimming, Fun Fit, Reading Eggs/Mathletics).

**CCMS Comment:** Transition planning will address emotional wellbeing, continuity of routines with tailored induction by receiving schools.

### **Admissions Assurance and Sibling Placement**

Concerns that receiving schools may not take siblings together; reports of one child being offered a place and another not. Stakeholders seek clarity on process and use of Temporary Variation where appropriate.

**CCMS Comment:** CCMS will liaise with EA/receiving schools to minimise sibling separation and consider Temporary Variation applications to support coherent placement.

### **Process Confidence (Consultation and Predetermination)**

One response alleged predetermination and questioned the integrity of the consultation process. Others expressed frustration about perceived futility and poor communication.

**CCMS Comment:** Decision-making remains evidence-based within statutory frameworks.

## **Section 75**

The following points reflect the key comments made by respondents about equality considerations.

One respondent expressed concern that school placement processes disadvantage “white, married, working-class” families, alleging that preference is given to non-nationals, single parents, and unemployed applicants. The comment suggests that closing Burrenreagh removes a school perceived as accepting all applicants without prejudice, forcing families to seek places in schools they did not choose and where they feel less likely to be accepted. The respondent also emphasised Burrenreagh’s Catholic ethos and its role in providing religious-based care, which they valued more than other schools.

**CCMS Comment:** CCMS notes concerns regarding equality and admissions raised under Section 75. CCMS confirms that all Equality Screening considerations have been carried out in line with statutory guidance. Admissions criteria guidance for all schools are set by the Department of Education and applied consistently across sectors. CCMS does not discriminate based on race, marital status, or employment status. The proposal to discontinue Burrenreagh is based on sustainability criteria under the Sustainable Schools Policy (enrolment trends, financial viability, educational

experience). CCMS remains committed to ensuring Catholic ethos provision within the area. If the proposal is progressed, CCMS will work with parents to secure places in alternative Catholic schools.

### **Rural Needs**

The following points reflect the key comments made by respondents about rural needs.

The dominant theme emerging from the responses is the critical role of rural schools in sustaining community life and identity. Respondents emphasise that schools are not just educational institutions but hubs for social interaction, intergenerational activities, and local cohesion. Closure is perceived as the ultimate erosion of rural infrastructure, particularly in areas where other community facilities (church, post office) have already disappeared. There is strong concern about rural isolation, mental health impacts, and the loss of spaces for cultural and social engagement.

### **CCMS Comment:**

CCMS acknowledges the depth of concern expressed regarding rural sustainability and community cohesion. While the statutory duty under the Rural Needs Act requires consideration of rural impacts, CCMS must balance these with demographic trends, educational standards, and resource allocation. The feedback will inform further analysis of community infrastructure implications, transport logistics, and potential mitigation measures.

## **Appendix E – Pupil Voice**

### **Response from Pupils (P1–P7) Regarding the Potential Closure of St Patrick’s Primary School**

The pupils of St Patrick’s Primary School wish to share their thoughts and feelings concerning the possible closure of their school. Many children are aware of the uncertainty surrounding the school’s future, having overheard discussions among peers. They have expressed concerns to staff about what this might mean for them and their friends. Both the children and their families feel a strong connection to the school and the local community and would be devastated if the school closed.

As a collective, the pupils wish to highlight the following positive attributes about our school:

- **Strong Relationships with Staff**  
The children value the close relationships they have with teachers and classroom assistants. They appreciate the benefits of small class sizes, which allow for more individual attention and support.
- **Enjoyment of Learning and Activities**  
Pupils enjoy the learning tasks provided and take pride in their progress. They particularly appreciate the outdoor spaces and hope these can be further developed. They also value the additional opportunities offered, such as French lessons, Fun Fit coaching, swimming sessions, library van visits, and GAA coaching. Online learning resources like *Reading Eggs* and *Mathletics* are also well received.
- **Friendship and Community Spirit**  
Small class sizes foster strong friendships and a caring environment where pupils work together to prevent problems before they arise. One child summed up the collective feeling by saying she loves that the school feels like a family and that her favourite part of the day is when everyone prays together.

The pupils believe that closure would deprive them of this inclusive atmosphere and the strong ethos that defines St Patrick’s Primary School.

# Appendix F - Equality and Human Rights Screening Template

## PART 1 - POLICY INFORMATION

**Note:** This proposal is at publication stage and the information contained is based on information gathered to date. The responses to the pre-publication consultation have been analysed and this document reviewed in light of responses received.

### Policy Title

Proposal to discontinue St Patrick's Primary School Burrenreagh 31 August 2026 or as soon as possible thereafter.

### Proposal amended:

Following EPC review on 28 January 2026, and consideration of the school's sustainability position, including an enrolment of 11 pupils in 2025/26, the implementation date has been revised from 31 August 2027 to 31 August 2026 to reflect the urgent sustainability challenges.

The proposal complies with the following policies and guidance:

- Department of Education Area Planning Guidance 2022-2027;
- 'Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools' (Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP)) 2009;
- Every School a Good School (ESAGS) (2009);
- 'Providing Pathways' 2017-20 Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-20;
- Planning for Sustainable Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 Primary and Post-Primary Schools 29 June 2022;
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1990);
- Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998);
- Rural Needs Act (2016); and
- The Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

### 1.1. Description of policy or decision

Aim of policy

The aim of the policy is to improve educational sustainability in the area. The policy is being carried out in line with the above policies and guidance, in particular, the terms of reference for area planning, *Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools* and *Every School a Good School*.

The outcome is to ensure:

- every learner fulfils his or her full potential at each stage of development;
- efficient and effective provision of education;
- improved educational outcomes for pupils;
- provision of a broad and balanced curriculum;
- a network of sustainable schools within reasonable traveling distances;
- an enhanced quality of provision and the raising of standards; and
- a reduction in duplication of provision.

One impact of this proposal is to advance the aspirations, aims and objectives of the SSP, "*It is important that children in rural communities have access to a quality education in cost effective provision.*" (p27).

The implementation date has been updated following EPC consideration on 28 January 2026, reflecting the severity of the sustainability challenges facing the school.

### 1.2. Who are the main stakeholders impacted? (Internal and external as well as actual and potential)

The main stakeholders are as follows.

- The Down and Connor Diocese.
- The St Macnissi's Educational Trust.
- Staff, Board of Governors, parents, pupils and future pupils.
- Schools in the area.
- CCMS.
- The Education Authority.
- The Department of Education.

**1.3. Is the policy likely to impact people living in rural areas?**

Yes	x
No	

*If yes, please complete the rural sections of the template*

**1.4. Other policies or decisions with a bearing on this policy or decision?**

- Review of SEN and Inclusion (2012).<sup>39</sup>
- EA Transport Policy.<sup>40</sup>
- Terms and Conditions of Employment (Staff).<sup>41</sup>

**PART 2 – EVIDENCE AND MITIGATION**

**2.1. What information did you use to inform this screening? E.g. census data, Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs), consultation reports, service level data?**

- Census data. DE Statistics in relation to gender, religion, ethnic origin are available from DE Statistics. The source is - <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/school-enrolments>
- Consultation with St Patrick’s BoG prior to pre-publication consultation processes.
- Pre-publication consultation with parents, guardians, governors, staff and pupils.
- Information relating to Section 75 from Department of Education in relation to: gender; religion; and ethnic origin. There are available from the DE website statistic section. <https://education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/school-enrolments>

**2.2. Quantitative Data**

**What is the profile of the people that are impacted by this policy or decision?**

*Please provide a statistic breakdown of the people impacted by this policy or decision. Note, if the policy or decision impacts both staff and service users, please provide data on both.*

<b>Section 75 Group</b>	<b>Make up of affected groups?</b> <i>Note: Census Data recorded below has 32 pupils. Since Census data completed, an additional pupil has joined the school.</i>
<b>Age</b>	Children primarily aged 4-11 and parents of these children. The most recent available census (2024/25) recorded 32 pupils aged 4-11 (there were also 2 reception pupils). Staff – Information on the age profile of staff is not available at school level.
<b>Dependents</b>	Children primarily aged 4-11 and parents/carers of these 32 children. Staff – Information on the dependents of staff not available at school level.
<b>Disability</b>	The most recent available census (2024/25) recorded that fewer than five pupils have a statement of educational needs. Staff – Information on staff disabilities not available at school level.
<b>Religious Belief</b>	The most recent available census (2024/25) recorded no pupils from a Protestant background attend the school. The number of pupils recorded from a Catholic background has been suppressed by DE (DE statistics) to prevent the disclosure of information about identifiable individuals. The majority of the pupils are from a Catholic background. Staff – Information on the religious beliefs of staff members is not available at school level.
<b>Gender</b>	The most recent available census (2024/25) recorded 17 pupils as male and 17 pupils as female (includes 2 reception pupils).
<b>Marital Status</b>	There is no data held on the marital status of the parents. Staff – Information on the marital status of staff not available at school level.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/review-sen-and-inclusion-ministerial-presentation-education-committee>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.eani.org.uk/financial-help/home-to-school-transport>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/overview-teachers-terms-and-conditions>

<b>Political Opinion</b>	There is no data available on the political opinion of those affected by this proposal.
<b>Ethnicity</b>	The most recent available census (2024/25), classified 33 pupils as white (excluding members of the travelling community) and one as other.
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	There is no information available on the sexual orientation of those affected by this proposal.
<b>Rural Impacts</b>	All 34 pupils (including 2 reception pupils) are attending a school which serves a rural area. The staff are working in a school which serves a rural area.

### 2.3. Qualitative Data

#### What are the needs and experiences of the groups that are impacted by this policy or decision?

*Are there different needs and experiences for any of the equality groups and what equality issues emerge from this?*

The SSP specifies a minimum of four teachers in a school to recognise the needs of the pupils and demands on teachers. There is no indication that the pattern of low enrolment at St Patrick's PS will change in the future. The discontinuance of provision at St Patrick's PS will ensure pupils benefit educationally because they are more likely to:

- be taught in a class with fewer year groups in one classroom;
- have increased peer interaction;
- participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities; and
- benefit from a wider range of specialist teachers.

If the school were to close all the pupils attending the school at the time of closure would transfer to another school. The details of available provision are included in the pre-publication document, along with the implementation plan.

A sustainable school can allow for efficient use of educational resources including the deployment of teaching and support staff. It can also provide increased opportunities for the professional development of all staff as a larger staffing complement allows for increased interaction with peers and can facilitate more opportunities for training/development.

<b>Section 75 Group</b>	<b>What are the needs and experiences of the groups as they relate to the policy or decision?</b>
<b>Age</b>	The pupils in the school are all under 11 years old. Any change to provision will impact them to a degree either negatively or positively as they would have to change school. Pupils may experience both positive and negative impacts. The educational benefits of the proposal are noted in the Case for Change (Section 6) document as are the steps that would be taken to ensure a smooth transition (Section 7) for pupils if the proposal was approved.
<b>Dependents</b>	The proposal to close the school will impact primarily of those with dependents. If the proposal is approved parents/guardians of pupils in the school will be required to identify alternative schools for their dependents. This proposal means that parents/guardians have opportunities for their children to attend a school with fewer sustainability challenges.  Information is not available regarding staff with dependents.
<b>Disability</b>	Information on staff regarding disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is not available.  There is no evidence there would be any negative impact from this proposal on pupils or staff regarding disability. Pupils with a disability may need to travel further to school, given the proposal to close the school. The entitlement to additional support and reasonable adjustments based on the pupils' educational needs will not change. This proposal will ensure pupils have

	<p>opportunities to be educated in a school with fewer sustainability challenges. Transport assistance may be provided for pupils with a statement of special educational needs if they: have been identified as having a special transport need identified during their statutory assessment process; and are attending their nearest, suitable grant-aided school or provision. Examples of a special transport need would include where a pupil's mobility is impaired and their ability to walk longer distances is restricted, or they require the use of a wheelchair, or a pupil has a medical condition/severe learning difficulty which means they require transport assistance to facilitate their attendance at school.</p> <p>"Nearest, suitable" means the closest school/provision to your home that the Education Authority believes is suitable for your child. Where parents choose to enrol their child somewhere further away, this could render their child ineligible for transport assistance.</p> <p>The DE Policy Team has previously confirmed <i>"Attendance at a sustainable school underpins the fundamental principles of the special educational needs (SEN) Code of Practice which focuses on the continuum of needs and a continuum of provision which may be made in a variety of forms. Children with SEN require the greatest possible access to a broad and balanced education, including the Northern Ireland Curriculum."</i></p>
<b>Religious Belief</b>	<p>There is no evidence there would be any negative impact from this proposal on pupils or staff according to religious belief. If the proposal to close the CCMS school in Bureneagh is approved pupils will be supported to access an alternative CCMS school if they choose to. If pupils who are Catholic attend a school from another sector, it will be for the school to determine the support provided for the pupils.</p>
<b>Gender</b>	<p>There is no evidence there would be any negative impact from this proposal on pupils or staff according to their gender. The positive impact for pupils, regardless of their gender, is included in the Case for Change document and throughout this screening document.</p>
<b>Marital Status</b>	<p>Information on the marital status of staff is not available. It is not anticipated there would be any negative impact from this proposal depending on the marital status of the parent/guardian. The positive impact for pupils, regardless of the parents' marital status, is included in the Case for Change document and throughout this screening document.</p>
<b>Political Opinion</b>	<p>There is no evidence there would be any negative impact on people according to their political opinion. The positive impacts, regardless of political opinion, are detailed in the Case for Change document and throughout this screening document.</p>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<p>There is no evidence there would be any negative impact on people according to their ethnicity. The positive impacts, regardless of political opinion, are detailed in the Case for Change document and throughout this screening document.</p>
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<p>The proposal will not have an impact on individuals based on their sexual orientation.</p>

## What are the social and economic impacts of the policy of people living in rural areas?

Please consider positive and negative impacts around issues such as access to education or youth provision, transport, broadband accessibility and employment impacts

<b>Rural Impacts</b>	Please see Rural Needs Impact Assessment.
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## 2.4. Policy / Decision changes

**Based on the equality issues that have been identified, what changes (mitigation) can you make to the policy in order to better promote equality of opportunity?**

<p><i>In developing the policy or decision, what changes did you make, or do you intend to make to address any equality issues that you identified?</i></p> <p>Currently there are a number of schools in Northern Ireland that do not meet the SSP. The challenge is to create a network of schools located in the right places to meet demand. The intention of this proposal is to advance the aspirations, aims and objectives of the SSP: "It is important that children in rural communities have access to a</p>
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quality education in cost effective provision.”<sup>42</sup> The proposal meets this requirement and it benefits people in each of the equality groups. In relation to additional resources, this will be a matter for any receiving schools dependent on the number of additional pupils that move to that school, any special needs of the pupils, and in line with how they make resourcing decisions generally. Schools can address an increase in their numbers, within the approved admissions/enrolment number for a school.

The pre-publication consultation that commenced in November 2025 generated a number of key points from consultees in relation to equality. A summary of these is noted below.

**Religious Belief**

Respondents highlighted Burrenreagh’s Catholic ethos and expressed concern that closure would remove a valued faith-based provision, impacting cultural and religious identity.

**CCMS Response:** CCMS confirms that Catholic ethos provision will remain available in the area. If the proposal is approved, CCMS will work with parents to secure places in alternative Catholic schools and support continuity of faith-based education.

**Disability / Dependents**

Families raised concerns about SEN pupils losing individualised support and the impact on working parents due to loss of wraparound care.

**CCMS Response:** CCMS will liaise with EA and receiving schools to ensure SEN pupils have tailored transition plans and access to specialist provision. Wraparound care options will be explored with local providers to support working families.

**Section 75 Equality Concerns**

One respondent alleged that admissions processes disadvantage certain family types and expressed fears about discrimination in other schools.

**CCMS Response:** CCMS confirms that all Equality Screening considerations have been carried out in line with statutory guidance. Admissions criteria are set by the Department of Education and applied consistently across sectors. CCMS does not discriminate based on race, marital status, or employment status. The proposal is based solely on sustainability criteria under SSP.

CCMS’s Education Provision Committee reviewed the sustainability evidence (including the 2025/26 enrolment of 11 pupils) and agreed that the proposal should proceed with a revised implementation date of 31 August 2026. This Equality Screening has been updated to reflect the amended timeline.

**Based on the rural impacts that you have identified, what changes (mitigation) can you make to the policy?**

Please see the Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

**PART 3 – GOOD RELATIONS**

**3.1. Are there any changes to the policy or decision that you would make to better promote good relations?**

GROUP	Impact on Good Relations	Policy / Decision Changes
Religion	N/A	
Ethnicity	N/A	
Political Opinion	N/A	

## PART 4 – SEC 75 EQUALITY SCREENING DECISION

### This section is only relevant to the Section 75 Equality Duties

#### 4.1. How would you categorise the impacts of the policy or decision?

*Please refer to guidance notes on categorising impacts*

**Please select:**

Major Impact	
Minor Impact	X
No Impact	

#### 4.2. Does the policy or decision require a full Equality Impact Assessment?

**Please select:**

Yes	
No	X

*Please provide reasons for your decision*

This proposal improves the educational opportunities for the pupils in the area. The benefits of this proposal are detailed in section 6 of the pre-publication document and in this screening document.

One minor impact is that pupils with a disability may need to travel further to a school, given the proposal to close the school. The entitlement to additional support and reasonable adjustments based on the pupils' educational needs will not change. This proposal will ensure pupils with a disability have opportunities to be educated in a school with fewer sustainability challenges.

The provision of an estate of sustainable schools improves the provision across Northern Ireland. If the proposal is approved CCMS and the school representatives will work closely with the Education Authority, and other agencies as required to meet the needs of transferring pupils.

## PART 5 – DISABILITY DUTIES

#### 5.1. Does the policy or decision encourage the participation of disabled people in public life? Or is there anything you can do within the policy or decision to encourage participation of disabled people in public life?

<i>How does the policy encourage the participation of disabled people in public life?</i>	<i>Is there anything further you can do to encourage the participation of disabled people in public life?</i>
Where pupils have a disability, their ability to attend a school with fewer sustainability challenges may have a number of pastoral and educational benefits for them. They will be exposed to a wider range of peers, with the certainty a sustainable school admissions/ enrolment number provides. This exposure to a wider range of peers would encourage participation in public life.	Expanded pupil opportunity in a school with fewer sustainability challenges will, over time, encourage the participation of disabled people in public life.

#### 5.2. Does the policy or decision promote positive attitudes towards disabled people? Or is there anything you can do within the policy or decision to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people?

<i>How does the policy promote positive attitudes towards disabled people?</i>	<i>Is there anything further you can do to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people?</i>

<p>Where there are disabled pupils, they will be exposed to a wider range of peers, with the certainty a sustainable school admissions/ enrolment number provides. Pupils, whether they have a disability or not, will benefit from pupils with a disability being in their school.</p> <p>This proposal facilitates a greater opportunity for pupils to attend a school with less sustainability challenges.</p>	Not through this proposal.
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## PART 6 – HUMAN RIGHTS

### 6.1. Are Human Rights Relevant?

Article		Relevant Yes/No
<b>Article 2:</b>	Right to Life	No
<b>Article 3:</b>	Right to freedom from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment	No
<b>Article 4:</b>	Right to freedom from slavery, servitude & forced compulsory labour.	No
<b>Article 5:</b>	Right to liberty and security of person.	No
<b>Article 6:</b>	Right to a fair & public trial in a reasonable time	No
<b>Article 7:</b>	Right to freedom from retrospective criminal law & no punishment without law	No
<b>Article 8:</b>	Right to respect for private & family life, home & correspondence.	No
<b>Article 9:</b>	Right to freedom of thought, conscience & religion.	No
<b>Article 10:</b>	Right to freedom of expression.	No
<b>Article 11:</b>	Right to freedom of assembly & association	No
<b>Article 12:</b>	Right to marry & found a family.	No
<b>Article 14:</b>	Prohibition of discrimination in the enjoyment of the convention rights	No
<b>Protocol 1, Article 1</b>	Right to a peaceful enjoyment of possessions & protection of property	No
<b>Protocol 1, Article 2</b>	Right of access to education	Yes

*If you answered 'no' to all human rights considerations, please go to section 7 – monitoring*

**6.2. If you have answered yes to any of the Articles, does the policy or decision have a potential positive impact or does it potentially interfere with anyone’s Human Rights?**

Article number	Positive impact or potential interference?	How?	Any legal issues arise?
Protocol 1, Article 2	Positive impact.	Increased access to more sustainable education in the area, with increased numbers in an alternative suitable school and transport assistance for those that are eligible.	No.

**PART 7 – MONITORING**

**7.1. What data will you collect to monitor the impact of the policy in terms of equality of opportunity, disability duties or human rights compliance?**

Section 75	Disability Duties	Human Rights
One year after the implementation, CCMS will write to the Board of Governors of receiving schools and request information as to whether there was any unforeseen impact in relation to the protected categories. If there is an unforeseen impact, this information will be utilised to improve future projects.	One year after the implementation, CCMS will write to the Board of Governors of receiving schools and request information as to whether there was any unforeseen impact in relation to Disability Duties. If there is an unforeseen impact, this information will be utilised to improve future projects.	One year after the implementation, CCMS will write to the Board of Governors of receiving schools and request information as to whether there was any unforeseen impact in relation to Human Rights. If there is an unforeseen impact, this information will be utilised to improve future projects.

## Appendix G - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

### SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

**Update following EPC meeting (28 January 2026):**

EPC reviewed the sustainability position of St Patrick's PS, including its 2025/26 enrolment of 11 pupils, and agreed to revise the implementation date from 31 August 2027 to 31 August 2026 to reflect the urgency of the sustainability challenges identified.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service		<input type="checkbox"/>				
Delivering a Public Service		<input type="checkbox"/>				

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Proposal to discontinue St Patrick's Primary School 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter. This revised date was agreed by EPC on 28 January 2026 following review of sustainability evidence, including the school's enrolment of 11 pupils in 2025/26.

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The aim of this policy is to ensure all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum in a school that is educationally and financially viable and sustainable. The proposal supports the aims of the Department of Education Sustainable Schools Policy (2009) to ensure all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs in sustainable schools within a diverse system of education.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).	<input type="checkbox"/>
A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.*

NA

*Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.*

NA

*Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.*

NA

## SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes

No

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

There are several potential impacts on people in this rural area if the proposal was approved.

Potential impacts include.

- The closure of a school building if an alternative community use cannot be found.
- Some pupils may not be able to access extra-curricular activities which take place beyond the school day, due to transport restrictions.

In addition, pupils would be afforded the opportunity to enrol in schools with fewer sustainability challenges which could ensure the following benefits.

- Greater opportunities for pupils to be taught in their own age groups.
- Increased number of classes of no more than two-year groups.
- Additional potential for appropriate levels of differentiation in teaching and learning.
- Increased opportunities for peer group interaction.
- Improved opportunities for participation in extra-curricular activities, particularly team-based sports.
- Additional opportunities for specialist teaching and professional development of staff in a larger school with increased staff numbers.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas *differently* from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

This proposal may impact on pupils in this rural area differently from urban areas as pupils may have to travel further, if they wish to attend their nearest maintained school.<sup>43</sup>

In a rural area, due to increased distances required to travel to school, limitations on transport could negatively impact pupils' ability to attend morning clubs or after school activities.

In a rural area, there is less potential for the availability of classes before school, afterschool classes and afterschool activities. There is potentially less availability of childcare arrangements, and this impacts parental preference for schools.

The facilities available in the area may decrease if the school building is not maintained for community use.

The pre-publication consultation that commenced in November 2025 generated a number of key points from consultees in relation to how this policy affects people in a rural area differently. A summary of these are noted below.

### **Transport and Infrastructure:**

It was suggested that families in Burrenreagh face longer travel distances and limited public transport options compared to urban areas. Closure may exacerbate rural isolation, particularly for households without private transport.

**CCMS Response:** CCMS will liaise with the Education Authority to ensure transport assistance for eligible pupils and review transport requirements if the proposal proceeds.

<sup>43</sup> Travel to and from School by Pupils in Northern Ireland 2021/22.

**Childcare Integration:**

It was stated that wraparound care and breakfast/after-school clubs linked to Burrenreagh will be lost, creating challenges for working families. Rural areas have fewer alternative childcare options than urban settings.

**CCMS Response:** Families can be signposted to Early Years and local childcare partnerships and encourage receiving schools may have wraparound and breakfast school provision.

**Community Cohesion:**

Respondents state that the school is a focal point for social interaction and cultural activities. Closure risks eroding rural identity and reducing opportunities for intergenerational engagement.

**CCMS Response:** CCMS will liaise with the Education Authority and signpost community representatives to appropriate bodies (e.g., Trustees) regarding potential community use of facilities.

**Housing Growth and Capacity:**

Stakeholders raised concerns about oversubscription in nearby schools and the ability to accommodate pupils amid housing developments.

**CCMS Response:** CCMS has reviewed demographic data. Evidence indicates nearby schools have capacity to accommodate pupils, ensuring access to sustainable provision.

The proposal to discontinue the school is based on educational sustainability criteria under the Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP), including persistently low enrolment and limited capacity to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum. These factors present significant challenges to maintaining high-quality educational provision, regardless of geographic or political context. The proposal seeks to balance educational need with community sensitivity, and every effort will be made to support pupils and families through a respectful and inclusive transition process.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development Agri-Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state) <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural

NA

areas.

## SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes  No  If the response is **NO** GO TO Section 3E.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input type="checkbox"/>

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

CCMS has been in discussions and correspondence with the Board of Governors about the options available to the school. CCMS has sought feedback from the Board of Governors regarding any options they wish considered. Some options raised with the school are led by other educational bodies, e.g. joint faith school integrated education. In these cases CCMS signposted the Board of Governors to the relevant contacts.

CCMS carried out pre-publication consultation in November 2025 with St Patrick's PS stakeholders and are now proposing to discontinue St Patrick's Primary School 31 August 2026 or as soon as possible thereafter. The rural needs impact assessment was reviewed after the consultation There was a number of responses from the local community, and these are reflected in the consultation summary and any associated documentation.

Census data (<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/statistics>, <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/>) was used to determine past enrolment and future projected enrolment in the area.

The Sustainable Schools Policy (2009) <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/sustainable-schools> details the educational, social and economic arguments for change.

The DE Policy Team has previously confirmed "Attendance at a sustainable school underpins the fundamental principles of the special educational needs (SEN) Code of Practice which focuses on the continuum of needs and a continuum of provision which may be made in a variety of forms. Children with SEN require the greatest possible access to abroad and balanced education, including the Northern Ireland Curriculum."  
<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/dp-610-barnish-primary-school-0> p74.

The Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision sets the strategic direction of Area Planning for the five years and spans the academic years 2022-2027. This proposal is in line with the current strategic direction for sustainable provision. <https://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/area-planning/strategic-area-plans-2022-27>

Following review of the pre-publication consultation feedback and sustainability evidence — including the 2025/26 enrolment of 11 pupils and the projected inability to reach SSP thresholds — EPC agreed that the

proposal should proceed with a revised implementation date of 31 August 2026. The RNIA has been updated to reflect this amendment.

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

CCMS and the other Education Public Authorities (Department of Education/Education Authority) have identified the need for all children to have access to a high-quality educational experience, through a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs, in educationally and financially viable schools, within a diverse system of education.

The then Education Minister, in a statement setting the priorities for the education sector in Northern Ireland advised, "It is incumbent upon the managing authorities and sectoral body representatives to scope and bring forward proposals to address the issue of primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two-year groups. Despite the best efforts of teachers, it becomes more difficult to deliver a high-quality education if pupils are taught in composite classes of more than two year groups." <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/ministerial-statement-setting-priorities-next-regional-area-plan-9-august-2021>

The number of pupils in the school has been under 50 or under since 2022/23. There are composite classes of more than two-year groups in a class.

The ETI Chief Inspector's Report 2014-2016 (p11) comments.

"When the composite class spans more than two-year groups, ensuring adequate progression in learning and planning to meet individual needs across a wider range of abilities and stages of development can be more challenging for the teacher. It may also limit opportunities for the children to develop socially and emotionally with those of a similar age and stage."

Pupils, where there are no suitable schools within 2 miles of their home, require transport assistance.

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

NA

## SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Firstly, CCMS considered the types of questions included in the RNIA Guidance. A response to each of these considerations is included below the questions. For those in Burrenreagh who choose to continue to receive primary school education in the area, there is alternative maintained schools and schools of other sectors with available spaces. The answers to the questions below are based on pupils at St Patrick's PS continuing primary school education within a Catholic maintained school, in the event of St Patrick's PS closing.

### **Is there appropriate infrastructure in place to allow people to access the service?**

Yes. Transport assistance to a new suitable school will be available where a pupil lives more than two miles from their nearest suitable school.

### **Could it cost people disproportionately to access the service?**

No, transport assistance is provided in Northern Ireland and prevents disproportionate costs associated with transport to school.

### **Could there be a disproportionate impact on people from rural areas that rely on public transport?**

No. The transport assistance policy ensures access to transport assistance where a pupils lives more than 2 miles from a suitable school.

### **Could there be a disproportionate impact on people from rural areas who do not have access to high quality broadband?**

No. This proposal does not impact people in terms of their access to broadband.

### **Could there be a disproportionate impact on people from rural areas whose access to mobile communications is variable?**

No. This proposal does not impact people in terms of their access to mobile communications.

### **Could the policy have different outcomes for people in a rural area as opposed to being in an urban area due to lower population densities?**

Yes. This is covered in Section 2C.

### **Could there be a disproportionate impact on people operating business in rural areas?**

No. However, it is possible there will be a small impact on businesses in the Burrenreagh area, due to the number of pupils going to another school site.

### **Will the policy impact on people travelling to rural areas for recreation or tourism?**

It is not anticipated the policy will have any impact on this.

### **Could there be a disproportionate impact on people in rural areas travelling longer distances for employment?**

There could be an impact on individuals, depending on what their arrangements are for leaving their children to school. The impact is not disproportionate, and in line with other rural areas where there aren't sufficient pupils attending a school for sustainable provision.

### **Could there be a disproportionate impact on people in rural areas due to childcare arrangements?**

No. There may be an impact on some due to childcare arrangements, however this would not be disproportionate.

**Will the policy affect people in rural areas disproportionately? For example – seasonal workers, farmers, farm families, older people, younger people or people with disabilities that do not have access to transport?**

No. Attending a sustainable school may require travelling a larger distance for some pupils. Transport assistance would be provided where pupils live more than two miles from their nearest suitable school.

There are five or fewer pupils in the school with a statement of educational needs. The DE Policy Team has previously confirmed “Attendance at a sustainable school underpins the fundamental principles of the special educational needs (SEN) Code of Practice which focuses on the continuum of needs and a continuum of provision which may be made in a variety of forms. Children with SEN require the greatest possible access to broad and balanced education, including the Northern Ireland Curriculum.” This proposal helps strengthen the sustainability of rural educational provision in the wider area. This proposal meets the needs of pupils, from a rural area, with SEN.

The proposal increases the opportunity for pupils to attend a school with a minimum of 4 teachers. In line with the SSP, four teachers in a school recognises the needs of the pupils and demands on teachers. It provides additional opportunities for specialist teaching and professional development of staff when staff are employed in other schools.

There is a potential for the building to continue to be used for community purposes.

This proposal may impact on some pupils participation in after school activities in a new school. This would result in having to travel further to school and/or dependence on home to school transport.

*Planning for Sustainable Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 Primary and Post-Primary Schools* has a mission to find solutions to deliver sustainable education in rural areas.<sup>44</sup> This proposal helps strengthen the sustainability of provision in this rural area.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/area-planning/strategic-area-plans-2022-27>

## SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes  No

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **5C**.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The basis for sustainable school provision in Northern Ireland is the Sustainable Schools Policy (2009) <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/sustainable-schools> and this proposal is in line with this policy, having reviewed the potential solutions for sustainable provision. The development of this policy, and this proposal, has the needs of pupils in rural areas in mind.

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 in detail 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.

This proposal has the potential to strengthen rural education provision for the area.

If the response to Section **5A** was **YES** GO TO Section **6A**.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

NA

## SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

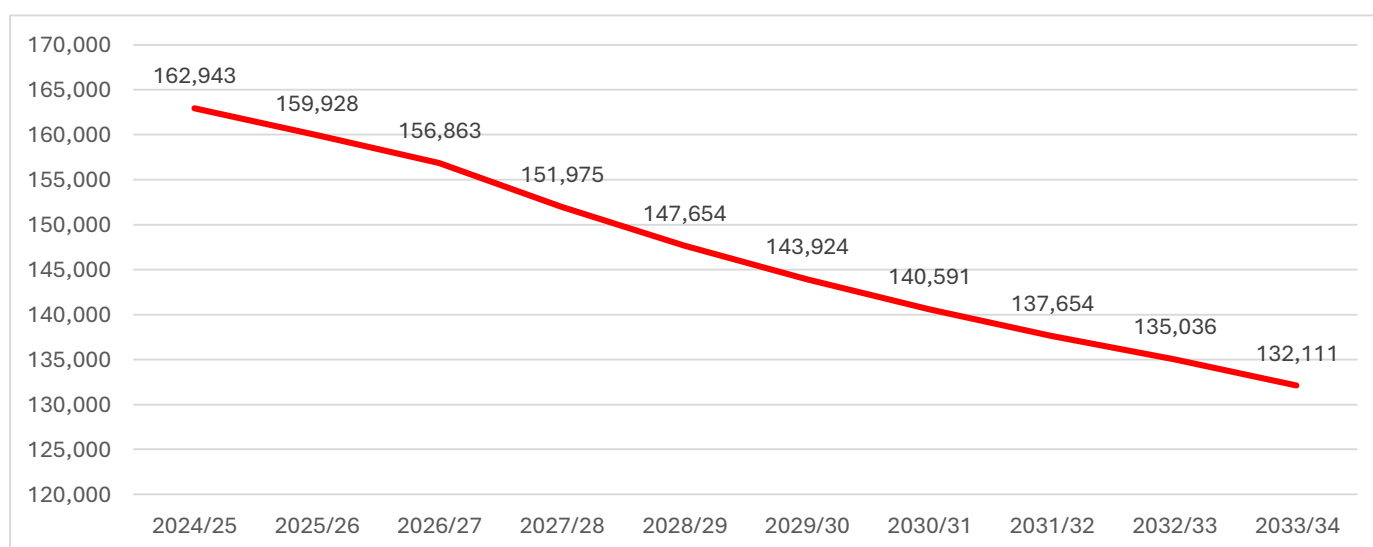
I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Philip Cunningham	
Position/Grade:	Area Planning Officer	
Division/Branch	Area Planning	
Signature:	Phillip Cunningham	
Date:	29/01/26	
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Edel Teague	
Position/Grade:	Programme Manager	
Division/Branch:	Area Planning	
Signature:	Edel Teague	
Date:	29/01/26	

## KEY STATISTICAL/ASSESSMENT DATA

### Population Projections

1. The declining trend in the primary school population is also supported by school phase projections produced by the Department, as set out below. Overall, the primary school population is expected to decrease by 20.4% in the 10 years to the 2033/34 academic year.

**Chart 2 – Primary School Population Projections 2023/24**



### Alternative Primary Provision

2. **Table 1** provides a snapshot of all primary provision within a five-mile mapping radius of St Patrick's PS, distances by road may vary as illustrated in **Map 2**. The snapshot details the admission and enrolment data and the latest Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) Report for each of the neighbouring schools.

### Alternative Catholic Maintained Provision

3. There are seven alternative Catholic Maintained primary schools in the area. The combined approved admissions and enrolment of the seven neighbouring schools is 203 and 1,420 respectively. In 2025/26 the actual admissions and enrolments were 165 and 1,281 respectively (including supernumerary pupils) with 257 available places.
4. The closest three schools to St Patrick's PS 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 of these schools had available places, totalling 107 places.
5. While five of the Catholic Maintained schools have enrolments above the SSP thresholds, St Matthew's PS, Magheramayo and St Mary's, Aughlisnafin have enrolments below the SSP recommended minimum of 105 pupils for a rural primary school. All of the schools, except St Malachy's PS, Kilcoo, were undersubscribed with first preference applications for 2026/27.

### ***Alternative Controlled Provision***

6. There is one Controlled primary school, Newcastle PS (3.02 miles) which has approved admissions and enrolment of 28 and 198. In 2025/26 the actual admissions at Newcastle PS was 20 pupils at Y1 and a total enrolment of 170 (including supernumerary pupils), resulting in 41 available places. The enrolment is above the SSP minimum recommended enrolment of 140 for an Urban primary school. The school was undersubscribed with first preference applications for 2026/27.

### ***Alternative Integrated Education Provision***

7. There are two Controlled Integrated primary schools (IPS) within a five-mile radius of St Patrick's PS, which together have an approved admissions of 41 and an approved enrolment of 288. In 2025/26 All Children's IPS had an actual admission of 24 pupils and an enrolment of 199 (including supernumerary pupils) which is above the SSP threshold for the Urban school, however, Annsborough IPS had three pupils in Y1 and an enrolment of 29 pupils which is significantly below the SSP threshold. There were 69 available places in the Integrated schools in this area. Both schools were undersubscribed with first preference applications for 2026/27.

### ***Alternative Irish-medium Provision***

8. There is one Irish-medium primary school in the area with approved admission and enrolment figures of 21 and 135 respectively in 2025/26. Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellan is 1.07 miles from St Patrick's PS and in 2025/26 had actual admissions of 24 pupils in Y1 and a total enrolment of 133 (including supernumerary pupils) resulting in 12 available places. The enrolment is above the SSP threshold for a rural primary school and in 2026/27 the school was oversubscribed with first preference applications. Following the approval of DP 558 in 2019 the approved enrolment of Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche is being increased on a phased basis and in 2026/27 will be 140.

### ***Reception Pupils***

9. There are four primary schools in the area admitting reception pupils. St Joseph's PS, Carnacaville (7 pupils); St Mary's PS, Aughlisfin (4 pupils) and the two Integrated schools (9 pupils).

**TABLE 2 – SNAPSHOT**

**St Patrick's Primary School - All Primary School Provision - 5 mile radius**

DE Ref Number	School Name & Postcode	Urban / Rural	Lookup Distance	Distance in miles from St Patrick's PS - as per Google maps	2025/26 & 2026/27 Approved Enrolment Number	2023/24 Actual Y1-Y7 Enrolment (includes supernumerary pupils)	2024/25 Actual Y1-Y7 Enrolment (includes supernumerary pupils)	2025/26 Actual Y1-Y7 Enrolment (includes supernumerary pupils)	2025/26 Supernumerary Pupils	2025/26 Available Places	2025/26 Actual Y1 Admissions (includes supernumerary pupils)	2025/26 & 2026/27 Approved Admissions Number	2026/27 Y1 Total First Preference Applications	2026/27 Over/Under Subscribed at First Preference	ETI reports publication date / Overall assessment
4031671	St Patrick's PS, Burrenreagh, BT31 9HH	Rural			95	37	32	25	*	71	2	14	0	U - 14	March 2019 - ASOS Feb 2016 - Has demonstrated the capacity to identify and bring about improvement
<b>Sub total</b>					95	37	32	25	*	71	2	14	0		
<b>Catholic Maintained</b>															
4036454	St Malachy's PS, Castlewellan, BT31 9DN	Rural	1.19	1.9	350	360	357	358	54	46	50	50	42	U - 8	Oct 2017 - Continues to demonstrate a high level of capacity for sustained improvement
4031663	St Joseph's PS, Carnacaville, BT33 0JS	Rural	1.97	2.7	194	188	185	183	18	22	30	28	12	U -16	May 2017 - ASOS Feb 2011 - Very good
4036635	St Mary's PS, Newcastle, BT33 0BA	Urban	2.86	3.7	319	326	325	311	31	39	37	46	42	U - 4	June 2017 - ASOS March 2010 - Good
5031653	St Matthew's PS, Magheramayo, BT31 9AZ	Rural	3.21	4.3	87	89	86	80	*	11	11	12	8	U - 4	March 2017 - Continues to demonstrate a high level of capacity for sustained improvement
4036036	St Malachy's PS, Kilcoo, BT34 5HU	Rural	3.23	3.8	165	156	151	154	6	17	21	24	28	O - 4	Jan 2025 - New Style Report Oct 2013 - Very good

DE Ref Number	School Name & Postcode	Urban / Rural	Lookup Distance	Distance in miles from St Patrick's PS - as per Google maps	2025/26 & 2026/27 Approved Enrolment Number	2023/24 Actual Y1-Y7 Enrolment (includes supernumerary pupils)	2024/25 Actual Y1-Y7 Enrolment (includes supernumerary pupils)	2025/26 Actual Y1-Y7 Enrolment (includes supernumerary pupils)	2025/26 Supernumerary Pupils	2025/26 Available Places	2025/26 Actual Y1 Admissions (includes supernumerary pupils)	2025/26 & 2026/27 Approved Admissions Number	2026/27 Y1 Total First Preference Applications	2026/27 Over/Under Subscribed at First Preference	ETI reports publication date / Overall assessment
4033002	St Mary's PS, Aughlisnafin, BT31 9JP	Rural	3.35	4.5	169	81	83	70	6	101	6	24	0	U - 24	May 2018 - ASOS June 2015 - Good
4036133	Sacred Heart PS, Dundrum. BT33 0LU	Rural	4.66	6.1	136	122	129	125	10	21	10	19	12	U - 7	Sep 2025 - New Style Report May 2017 - Continues to demonstrate the capacity to identify and bring about improvement
<b>Sub total</b>					<b>1420</b>	<b>1322</b>	<b>1316</b>	<b>1281</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>144</b>		
<b>Controlled</b>															
4011698	Newcastle PS, BT33 0AS	Urban	3.02	4.2	198	174	166	170	13	41	20	28	13	U - 15	Jan 2019 - ASOS May 2012 - Good
<b>Sub total</b>					<b>198</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>13</b>		
<b>Integrated</b>															
4053009	Annsborough IPS, Castlewellan. BT31 9NN	Rural	2.23	3.3	85	30	33	29	*	56	3	12	5	U - 7	Nov 2024 - New Style Report March 2015 - Good
4056541	All Children's IPS, Newcastle, BT33 0HD	Urban	3.63	5.2	203	206	203	199	16	13	24	29	12	U - 17	Jan 2018 - ASOS Sep 2011 - Good
<b>Sub total</b>					<b>288</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>17</b>		
<b>Other Maintained</b>															
4046648	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellan, BT31 9EB	Rural	1.07	2.4	25/26 - 135 26/27 - 140	131	123	133	10	12	24	21	25	O - 4	Oct 2017 - ASOS Nov 2010 - Good
<b>Sub total</b>					<b>25/26 - 135 26/27 - 140</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>25</b>		
<b>Grand total</b>					<b>25/26 - 2136 26/27 - 2141</b>	<b>1900</b>	<b>1873</b>	<b>1837</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>199</b>		

ASOS - Action Short of  
Strike

The actual enrolment and admissions numbers include supernumerary pupils, however, exclude reception pupils (as per annual Census information).

1st Pref. applications exclude reception & statemented pupils. 1st prefs. as at 23.3.2026 (conclusion of the Primary School Admissions process for the 2026/27 school year), provided by the EA PS Admissions Office.

St Joseph's PS, Carnacaville (4031663) has 7 reception age pupils in the 2025/26 School Year.

St Mary's PS, Aughlisnafin (4033002) has 4 reception age pupils in the 2025/26 School Year.

Annsborough Integrated PS, Castlewellan (4053009) has 2 reception age pupils in the 2025/26 School Year.

All Children's Integrated PS, Newcastle (4056541) has 7 reception age pupils in the 2025/26 School Year.

St Joseph's PS, Carnacaville (4031663) had 26 reception age prefs for the 2026/27 School Year - it has accepted 16 of these pupils (position at the conclusion of the EA PS Admissions process)

St Mary's PS, Aughlisnafin (4033002) had 2 reception age prefs for the 2026/27 School Year - it has accepted these 2 pupils (position at the conclusion of the EA PS Admissions process).

Annsborough Integrated PS, Castlewellan ( 4053009) had 5 reception age prefs for the 2026/27 School Year - it has accepted these 5 pupils (position at the conclusion of the EA PS Admissions process).

All Children's Integrated PS, Newcastle (4056541) had 11 reception age prefs for the 2026/27 School Year - it has accepted these 11 pupils (position at the conclusion of the EA PS Admissions process).

DP 558 - Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche - Increase approved numbers from 87/15 > 145/21 - approved 23.1.2019. DE School Admissions Team are continuing an annual phase up of the approved enrolment number.

## **SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT**

10. 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. The following is an assessment of St Patrick's PS against the six criteria of the SSP.

### ***CRITERION 1: Quality Education Experience***

11. The ETI carried out an inspection of St Patrick's PS, Burrenreagh in May 2019 which was impacted by Action Short of Strike (ASOS) therefore no assurance could be provided on the quality of education provided. An earlier Inspection report from February 2016, while now dated, found that "*the school has demonstrated the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all learners*".

#### *Special Educational Needs*

12. In 2025/26 the school has \* pupil(s) with a statement of SEN and \* pupils at Stages 1–2 of the SEN Code of Practice. The ETI Report of February 2016 makes no specific comment in relation to SEN provision.

#### *Teaching Staff / Classes*

13. In 2025/26 St Patrick's PS had four full-time equivalent teachers and 25 pupils. The school operated three composite classes, reception – Y2; Y3-Y5 and Y6-Y7. The school is operating with composite classes across more than two-year groups, creating increasing challenges for delivery of the curriculum.
14. At a District Inspection in February 2025 the ETI confirmed there were three Full Time Equivalent teachers including a teaching Principal.

### ***CRITERION 2: Stable Enrolment Trends***

15. St Patrick's PS has an approved enrolment number of 95. **Chart 1** in the submission shows the admission and enrolment for the last five years and shows that historically the school has been undersubscribed. Enrolments have fallen steadily from 2021/22. The school's enrolment is therefore substantially below the recommended minimum enrolment of 105 for a sustainable rural school as set out in the SSP.

### ***CRITERION 3: Financial Position***

16. 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**

17. Based on the Interim Common Funding Formula (CFF) allocations, the school received a total CFF budget of **£188,900** in the 2026-27 financial year for **25<sup>1</sup>** full time equivalent (FTE) pupils, which generates a per capita of **£7,556**. The average for all primary schools is **£4,426**.
18. The total Free School Meals Entitlement for the school is **2<sup>45</sup>** pupils, which represents **8.00%** of the total FTE, which places the school in **Band 1** for funding purposes.
19. The school received **£66,550** for Small Schools Support funding, which represents **100.00%** of the maximum funding for this factor, within the Nursery & Primary funding stream. The school also received **£16,420** in respect of Primary Principals' Release Time.
20. The CfC states that the school's annual finances indicate that it cannot live within its delegated budget. 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.

***CRITERION 4: Leadership and Management by Boards of Governors and Principal***

21. There is no recent evaluation of the leadership at the school. The ETI Inspection Report of February 2016 was written a time of significant change in the BoG and staffing. The CfC simply states that the BoGs benefit from a wide range of skills.

***CRITERION 5: Accessibility***

22. **Map 1** shows the location of 2025/26 pupils at the school, although the number of pupils has since reduced to 11. Almost all the pupils came from within a three-mile radius of the school and in proximity to alternative schools. There are three alternative Catholic Maintained schools within a three-mile radius.

***CRITERION 6: Strong Links with the Community***

23. The CfC states that there is a strong support group formed mainly of parents – Friends of Burrenreagh. They provide community opportunities and funding both within school and in Castlewellan/Newcastle. There are also links with local sporting organisations. Staff attend clusters in local primary schools to disseminate good practice and pupils visit local open days in their transition year.

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<sup>45</sup> The school's funding allocation is based on the previous year's census data (e.g. the October 2025 census data was used to determine the 2026-27 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).

## **STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016**

24. The Rural Development Council's (RDC) *Striking the Balance* report highlights the importance of rural proofing to ensure policy impacts on rural populations are properly considered and that services remain accessible on an equitable basis. The quality of education is a central consideration.
25. The Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) was assessed against the RDC rural proofing checklist, with no adverse impacts identified. It reflects rural needs through a lower enrolment threshold for rural primaries (105 compared to 140 in urban areas), guidance on travel times, and recognition of schools' strong community links.
26. The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 requires public authorities to have due regard to the social and economic needs of rural areas in policy development and service delivery.
27. Revised SSP urban and rural definitions, based on NISRA classifications and effective from 1 September 2022, confirm that St Patrick's PS remains classified as rural.
28. It has been made clear that the SSP is not intended to drive school closures but to support sustainable, high-quality provision. In the CfC CCMS sets out that the proposal seeks to address unsustainable provision and improve educational outcomes in this rural area, following consideration of a range of viable options.
29. The SSP emphasises that strong, sustainable schools delivering high-quality education and access to the full curriculum are central to the Department's vision, with the aim of ensuring equitable provision across rural and urban areas.
30. Consultation feedback highlights the important role of rural schools in supporting community life and cohesion. Concerns focus on the potential impact of closure on rural infrastructure, including increased isolation and reduced community wellbeing.
31. CCMS acknowledged these concerns, noting that while rural impacts must be considered, they must be balanced with demographic trends, educational standards and the efficient use of resources.

### **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**

32. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires designated public authorities, including the Department of Education, EA and CCMS, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across specified categories, and to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

33. Area Planning supports the implementation of the Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP), which seeks to ensure access for all pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum within educationally and financially viable schools.
34. Equality Screening of Area Planning policy (2012 and 2014) concluded that a full Equality Impact Assessment was not required, on the basis that the policy is not expected to have differential impacts at a strategic level. However, it recognised that impacts may arise at a local level and should be considered as part of individual proposals.
35. The CfC confirms that equality screening and Rural Needs Act considerations have been undertaken in line with Departmental guidance on Development Proposals (DE Circular 2017/09).
36. Equality screening for this proposal was carried out and reviewed following consultation. The evidence indicated no significant adverse impacts on Section 75 groups. One response raised concerns regarding perceived disadvantage in school admissions and the potential loss of a school viewed as inclusive and reflective of a Catholic ethos.
37. The proposal is based on SSP sustainability criteria, including enrolment trends, financial viability and educational provision. CCMS has confirmed its commitment to maintaining Catholic education provision in the area and, if progressed, will support parents in securing alternative placements.

## EDUCATION &amp; TRAINING INSPECTORATE RESPONSE

## ETI Development Proposal Commentary Paper

**Date of last ETI report:** March 2019

**DP:** 757

**Web link:** <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/sustaining-improvement-inspection-involving-action-short-strike-st-patricks-primary-5>

**Date<sup>46</sup>:** 1 May 2026

1. Update on relevant/contextual information since the last published inspection report.

The school was led by two acting principals between May 2023 and June 2024. The current principal was appointed in June 2024.

Current staffing comprises a teaching principal, two full-time teachers, one principal release teacher, and two classroom assistants (one part-time and one providing SEN support).

The most recent district visit took place on 19 February 2025, at which time there were 34 pupils enrolled in the school. Pupils were organised into three composite classes: Reception–Y2 (8 pupils), Y3–Y5 (13 pupils), and Y6–Y7 (13 pupils). Since that time, enrolment has continued to fall and stands now at 11.

2. Knowledge of **any contextual information on the quality of education** in the wider local area.

There are ten primary schools within a five-mile radius of St Patrick's Primary School Burrenreagh. These include maintained, controlled, integrated and Irish-medium schools. All but the Irish-medium school have been visited recently through district work; there were no concerns identified in respect of the quality of education during this district work. Four schools have specialist provisions for children with learning needs. Seven of the schools have enrolments of over 105 pupils.

3. Potential benefits/concerns associated with the claims of **educational** benefits for pupils made in the Case for Change.

ETI would agree with the benefits below, as outlined on page 23 of the *Case for Change*, namely:

- increased number of classes of no more than two-year groups; increased opportunities for peer group interaction;

<sup>46</sup> This commentary paper is based on the information and evidence available to ETI on this date. Please check the ETI website [www.etini.gov.uk](http://www.etini.gov.uk) for any new inspection reports that may have published after this date.

- increased opportunity for pupils to be with those of a similar age and stage;
- improved chances for participation in a wider range of extra-curricular activities; and
- additional opportunities for specialist teaching and professional development of staff.

4. Any concerns about the **implementation date or phasing of implementation** should this be applicable (i.e. curricular, EF, accommodation, LSCs, etc).

None.

5. The **SSP Criteria** indicators requiring ETI input (if known and/or for which information is available).

Sustainable Schools Criterion	Indicator	Meets criterion		
		Yes	No (reason(s))	Information not available
Quality Educational Experience	1.1 Attainment levels of pupils, Key Stage tests pending development of new indicators for Primary Schools, GCSE results for Post-Primary Schools.			✓
	1.2 In primary, a single classroom contains no more than <u>two</u> year-groups in a composite class; for example, years 1 and 2.		Two of the three classes in the school contain more than two year groups in a composite class. Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are combined in one class, while Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5 are taught together in another class.	
	1.3 A <u>minimum</u> of four teachers at a primary school. This recognises both the needs of pupils and the demands on teachers.		There are three full-time equivalent teachers, including a teaching principal.	
	1.4 The ability of the school to cater for children with Special Educational Needs.	✓		
	1.5 The ability at post-primary level to be able to provide suitable access to the entitlement framework including, where appropriate, linkages with other schools, the FE sector or other providers.			N/A
	1.6 The standards and the quality of learning and teaching at the school.		Due to small class sizes, the children have limited opportunities to develop their personal capabilities for collaborating and working effectively with others in group settings.	
	1.7 The range of curricular and extra-curricular		There are limited opportunities for children to engage in	

	activities available for children including career guidance, physical education, music, art, drama and science.		extra-curricular activities, including choir and sporting teams, due to the small numbers within the school.	
	1.8 The quality of the <u>physical</u> environment for learning and teaching i.e. the condition, energy and water efficiency and suitability of the buildings.	✓		
	1.9 The quality of, and arrangements for, pastoral care including the active promotion of the principles of social justice in all areas of the formal and informal curriculum.	✓		
Strong Leadership and Management by Boards of Governors and Principals	4.1 Governors' views on the school based on quantitative and qualitative evidence.	✓		
	4.8 There is a school development plan in place and progress is being made to achieve the plan's aims and objectives.	✓		
	4.9 Pupil behaviour, expulsions, suspensions and non-attendance as well as positive behaviours such as involvement in school management (e.g. buddying and mentoring schemes).	✓		
Strong links with the Community	6.1 Degree and quality of parental involvement (schools will be asked to provide evidence on this).			✓
	6.3 Contribution of the school to the community (schools will be asked to provide evidence on this).			✓
	6.4 Presence of other features of provision, e.g. nursery or specialist unit.	✓		

#### 6. Summary of impact of the proposal

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.

Approved by ACI: Nicola Byrne

**DE POLICY TEAM COMMENTS****DP 757 – St Patrick’s PS, Burrenreagh - Directorate returns****Transport and Food in Schools**

Given the numbers involved it would be anticipated that the financial implications for the Transport budget would not be significant. Nil Return from Food In Schools Team.

**Finance Return**

The school’s **provisional** Deficit position as of 31 March 2026 is **£547,332**.

The school’s Deficit in the previous year, up to 31 March 2025 was **£376,016**.

Based on the Interim Common Funding Formula (CFF) allocations, the school received a total CFF budget of **£188,900** in the 2026-27 financial year for **25<sup>1</sup>** FTE pupils, which generates a per capita of **£7,556**. The average for all primary schools is **£4,426**.

The total Free School Meals Entitlement for the school is **2<sup>47</sup>** pupils, which represents **8.00%** of the total FTE, which places the school in **Band 1** for funding purposes.

The school received **£66,550** for Small Schools Support funding, which represents **100.00%** of the maximum funding for this factor, within the Nursery & Primary funding stream.

The school also received **£16,420** in respect of Primary Principals’ Release Time.

All schools receive a delegated budget for the financial year based on verified enrolments as at the October Census prior to the financial year.

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<sup>47</sup> The school’s funding allocation is based on the previous year’s census data (e.g. the October 2025 census data was used to determine the 2026-27 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).

Details of the school's budget allocation from the Common Funding Formula, for the last 3 years, is as follows:

<b>Factor</b>	<b>2026-27 £</b>	<b>2025-26 £</b>	<b>2024-25 £</b>
Premises Area	2,352	2,352	2,352
Premises FTE	2,225	2,982	3,211
TSN – Social Deprivation	1,227	1,841	3,682
TSN – Additional Social Deprivation	63	92	175
Small Schools Support	66,550	60,463	51,829
Primary Principals Release Time	16,420	16,420	16,420
Foundation Stage	12,000	12,000	12,000
Teachers Salary Protection	1,585	0	8,561
Pupil AWPU	86,478	113,616	112,652

<b>Total School Funding</b>	<b>188,900</b>	<b>209,766</b>	<b>210,880</b>
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Pupil FTE (no.)	25	34	37
Per Capita	£7,556	£6,170	£5,699

## Education Workforce Directorate

No issues or concerns have been identified, from a policy perspective, in respect of this development proposal for teaching and non-teaching staff.

Should the case be approved and subsequent staffing issues are identified, assurances should be sought from the Education Authority that any potential impact on terms and conditions of teaching and non-teaching staff is managed in accordance with the following policies:

- **TNC 2024/2** – Workload Agreement: should the Case for Change result in an increase to enrolment in a school, or surrounding schools, assurance should be provided regarding how potential impact on teacher workload, as a result of increased class size, will be managed.
- **TNC 2013/2** – School Reorganisation Agreement and DE Circular 2013/7 – School Reorganisation Allowance : a teacher who suffers a reduction in pay as a result of staff reorganisation or redeployment may be eligible to apply for a school reorganisation allowance;
- **TNC 2010/1** – Procedure for Handling Teacher Redundancy: will apply where a teacher is considered or wishes to be considered for redundancy;
- **JNC 224** – Collective Agreement for School Reorganisations – Employment protection for Support Staff will apply where the Case for Change may impact on the terms and conditions of non-teaching staff.

## SEN Directorate Input

It is noted in the Case for Change (CfC) that in consideration of the options, CCMS proposes that St Patrick's PS discontinues with effect from 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter. It is also noted that in 2025/26 there were 11 pupils in the school in total with 4 due to leave in June 2026. It is also noted that the financial deficit has continued to grow. Attendance at a sustainable school underpins the fundamental principles of the special educational needs (SEN) Code of Practice<sup>48</sup>, which focuses on a continuum of need and a continuum of provision, which may be made in a variety of forms. Children with SEN require the greatest possible access to a broad and balanced education, including the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

The CfC states that 'the number of pupils on the special educational needs register in the school (Stages 1-2) has been suppressed under the rules of disclosure and there are fewer than five pupils statemented (Stage 3)'.

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/special-educational-needs-code-practice>

The CfC does advise that the needs of all those pupils who may have to transfer to another school would be met and in particular those with SEN. It is noted that a plan would be put in place to minimise any disruption to those pupils with SEN.

The SEN Directorate would not oppose this DP, subject to any impact on pupils with SEN being considered and managed effectively and that, each child, should the proposal be approved, is placed in a setting which is appropriate to meet their needs as outlined in their statement of SEN