



Centre for Educational
Excellence & Improvement
Northern Ireland



Introduction

In March 2025, the Department of Education launched TransformED NI, its flagship programme to enhance teaching and learning across Northern Ireland. As the most significant programme of education reform in many years, TransformED aims to ensure that every learner benefits from consistently high-quality, evidence-informed education.

The programme is built around six interconnected foundations that research identifies as critical to high-performing education systems:

- Teacher professional learning
- Curriculum
- Assessment
- Qualifications
- School improvement
- Tackling educational disadvantage

As TransformED moves from design into implementation, strengthening delivery and impact becomes increasingly important. To support this next phase, the Department has established a dedicated Northern Ireland Centre for Educational Excellence and Improvement from 1 September 2026.

The Centre will provide strategic leadership and drive implementation across key areas of the TransformED programme, including:

- Curriculum implementation and support
- Professional learning
- Leadership development
- School improvement support
- Assessment and qualifications policy
- Evidence, research and evaluation

Through this work, the Centre will play a pivotal role in translating the ambitions of TransformED into improved educational outcomes for children and young people across Northern Ireland.

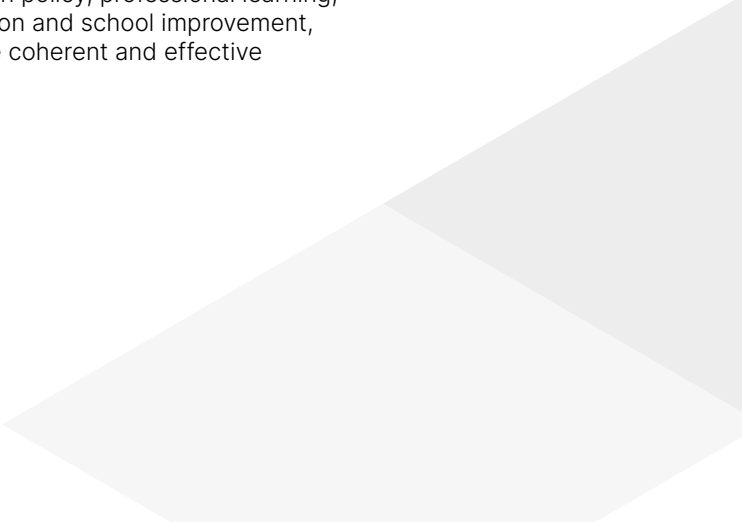
Vision and Purpose

The Centre for Educational Excellence and Improvement will support the transition of TransformED from policy development to effective implementation. Its vision is to help build an excellent, equitable and coherent education system in which every educator is supported to excel and every learner is enabled to thrive.

Northern Ireland benefits from a highly skilled education workforce and a range of organisations providing curriculum, professional learning, school improvement, assessment and qualifications support. While these organisations make a valuable contribution, support can sometimes be fragmented across programmes and providers, resulting in duplication, inconsistent messaging and varying levels of access for schools.

Professional learning, school improvement and curriculum support are not always sufficiently connected to one another or aligned to wider system priorities. Similarly, evidence from research, evaluation, inspection and professional practice is not always brought together in a way that enables it to inform policy and practice quickly and consistently.

The Centre will address these challenges by providing a stronger focus for coordination, expertise and implementation. Working in partnership with schools, delivery organisations and the wider education sector, it will help ensure that support is aligned, evidence-informed and focused on improving outcomes for all learners. Through this role, the Centre will strengthen the connections between policy, professional learning, curriculum implementation and school improvement, helping to create a more coherent and effective education system.

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Roles and Responsibilities

In the longer-term, the Centre will become Northern Ireland's hub for curriculum, professional learning, educational expertise and school improvement.

As it develops, the Centre will bring together the coordination, commissioning and, where appropriate, direct delivery of services that support teaching, learning and improvement across the education system. Its role will be to ensure that support for schools is coherent, evidence-informed and aligned with the priorities of TransformED.

The Centre will work in partnership with key delivery organisations, including EA, CCMS, CCEA, sectoral bodies, universities and other providers. It will commission services where others are best placed to deliver them, while directly leading selected Northern Ireland-wide programmes and initiatives where this will add value.

A core responsibility of the Centre will be to strengthen collaboration across the system, building on existing strengths while reducing duplication, addressing gaps in provision and clarifying roles and responsibilities. In doing so, it will help create a more connected and effective infrastructure for curriculum implementation, professional learning, leadership development and school improvement.

What Schools Can Expect in 2026–27

Schools will continue to receive support through existing arrangements. Day-to-day support and services provided by EA, CCMS and other sectoral organisations will remain in place, and schools should continue to access these services and contacts in the usual way.

At the same time, schools will begin to see the Centre playing a more visible role in leading and coordinating the implementation of TransformED. During 2026–27, the Centre will oversee the rollout of the new curriculum, associated resources and professional learning, while also providing and co-ordinating leadership development and school improvement support.

As the year progresses, schools will experience a more coordinated and coherent support offer, with stronger links between curriculum, professional learning, leadership and school improvement. The aim is to make support easier to access, better aligned to school needs and more closely connected to the wider priorities of TransformED.

Priorities for 2026–27

The Centre's initial priorities will be curriculum reform, teacher professional learning, leadership development, school improvement, assessment and qualifications reform, and the use of evidence and research to drive improvement across the education system.

Curriculum Reform

The Centre will lead the implementation of curriculum reform, helping schools prepare for the phased introduction of the new Northern Ireland Curriculum from September 2028. During 2026–27, the focus will be on consultation, planning and preparation.

Key activities will include consultation on the new statutory curriculum and Religious Education syllabus; publication of pedagogical principles; development of a new numeracy framework and literacy and numeracy strategies; and the creation of curriculum resources, professional learning programmes and a dedicated digital platform. The Centre will also support the development of curriculum guidance for special schools and Irish-medium education. The aim is to ensure that schools are well informed, well supported and fully prepared for implementation.

Teacher Professional Learning

The Centre will work closely with EA and other partners to provide a coherent programme of professional learning throughout teachers' careers.

During 2026–27, this will include continued investment through the Teacher Professional Learning Fund, enhanced induction and early career support, subject-specific professional learning, collaborative learning networks and the development of a digital professional learning platform. The focus will be on ensuring that all teachers have access to high-quality, evidence-informed professional learning that supports both classroom practice and curriculum reform.

Leadership Development

Developing strong leadership at all levels will be a key priority. The Centre will support aspiring leaders, middle leaders and experienced principals through a strengthened leadership development offer.

This will include new leadership programmes, revised leadership pathways and the piloting of a new qualification for headship. The aim is to build leadership capacity across the system and support school leaders in driving improvement and managing change effectively.

School Improvement and Support

Working closely with EA, CCMS and other partners, the Centre will strengthen school improvement support across Northern Ireland.

A major focus will be the introduction of the new FocusED Support Partnership, replacing the Formal Intervention Process with a more tailored and collaborative approach for schools requiring additional support. The Centre will also coordinate the Leaders of Education programme and support the development of a new School Excellence Framework, providing greater clarity about effective school performance and improvement.

By bringing together leadership expertise, professional learning and curriculum support around identified school priorities, the Centre will help schools build their capacity to improve, evaluate impact and sustain progress over time.

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Assessment and Qualifications Reform

The Centre will provide strategic oversight of CCEA's implementation of assessment and qualifications reform.

Priorities during 2026–27 include supporting the delivery of the Assessment Reform Programme, strengthening assessment practice in schools, introducing phonics and multiplication checks, expanding Computer Adaptive Assessments, and overseeing the development of revised qualification frameworks for GCSEs, A Levels and a review of vocational qualifications delivered in schools. The aim is to ensure that assessment and qualifications support high standards, improved learning and successful progression for all learners.

Evidence, Research and Evaluation

Evidence and research will underpin all aspects of the Centre's work. The Centre will bring together learning from research, evaluation, inspection and professional practice to inform policy, professional learning and school improvement.

By translating evidence into practical support and identifying lessons from implementation across the system, the Centre will help ensure that reform is grounded in what works and delivers lasting improvements for schools and learners.

Together, these priorities will support the successful implementation of TransformED and help create a more connected, coherent and high-performing education system in which all schools are supported to improve and all learners can thrive.

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