

## COPY OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

### Cover Note

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>DP No.</b>               | DP 759                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                           |
| <b>School</b>               | Ballycarry Primary School                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                           |
| <b>Proposal</b>             | <b>“Ballycarry Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter”.</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                           |
| <b>Ministers Decision</b>   | Approve                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                           |
| <b>Date of Decision</b>     | 30 July 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                           |
| <b>Ministers Comments</b>   | Content to approve recommendations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                           |
| <b>Additional notes</b>     | It should be noted that a typographical error in paragraph 35 resulted in the number of responses being understated in the submission. The correct figures are, 25 responses, including 24 objections (inclusive of the CSSC response). Details of the 24 objections were provided to the Minister at Appendix F, with the CSSC response included at Appendix E. Therefore, the Minister was provided with details of all responses received and the typographical error had no material impact on the Minister's consideration of the proposal or subsequent decision. |                                                                                                           |
| <b>Information redacted</b> | Some information and personal data may have been removed in line with the principles of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Act.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                           |
|                             | <b>Key</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Details</b>                                                                                            |
|                             | ■                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | redaction                                                                                                 |
|                             | *                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | refers to less than five cases where data is considered sensitive                                         |
|                             | #                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | means figure has been suppressed to prevent disclosure of sensitive information under rules of disclosure |

CM REF: ED1/26/89186

From: Elaine Armstrong  
Area Planning Policy Team  
(Cleared by Scott Harbinson 29 July 2026)  
(Cleared by Sharon Smyth 29 July 2026)

Date: 29 July 2026

To: Paul Givan MLA  
Minister of Education

Copy distribution below

## DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL 759 – BALLYCARRY PRIMARY SCHOOL

**Issue:** To decide on Development Proposal 759 that proposes:

***“Ballycarry Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter”.***

**Timescale:** Routine

**Financial/Resource Implications:**

### Budget

Closure will result in annual operational savings including £66,550 (Small Schools Support factor) and £16,420 (Primary Principal's Release Time). Additional operational savings are unquantified at this time.

### Capital/ Resource

There are no resource or capital costs.

### Staffing

Teaching and non-teaching staff would be afforded employment protection under the respective school Re-organisation Arrangements and are eligible for re-deployment under transfer redundancy arrangements. Staff unsuccessful in gaining redeployment or employment will be treated as supernumerary. Based on spend in 2025/26, the average teaching exit was estimated at £40.1k and non-teaching at £26.3k.

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>FOI Implications:</b>           | This submission is fully disclosable.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Statutory Duty Implications</b> | <p>Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016</p> <p>Article 44 of the Education &amp; Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986</p> <p>Section 75 (Northern Ireland) Act 1998</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Presentational Issues:</b>      | The decision on this DP will generate significant local media and political interest. Press Office will refer to this submission and liaise with officials to draw up appropriate responses to media enquiries as required. (Cleared by Press Office AC 29/07/2026)                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Recommendation</b>              | <p><b>It is recommended that you:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>(i) Approve DP 759, to discontinue Ballycarry Primary School with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter;</b></li> <li><b>(ii) Agree that this submission (with appropriate redactions) can be made available on the Department's website once the Education Authority and the school have been informed.</b></li> </ul> |

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A – Copy of Published DP**

**Appendix B – Case for Change**

**Appendix C – DE Policy Team Inputs**

**Appendix D – ETI Input**

**Appendix E – CSSC Response**

**Appendix F – Statutory Objection Responses Summary**

**Appendix G - Ballycarry Primary School Snapshot - All Primary School Provision  
- 5 mile radius**

**Appendix H – Sustainability Assessment**

**Appendix I – Statutory & Other Considerations**

## Introduction

1. Development Proposal (DP) 759 has been progressed under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. On 14 May 2026, the Education Authority (EA) as ‘the Proposer’, published DP 759 relating to Ballycarry Primary School (PS) proposing that:

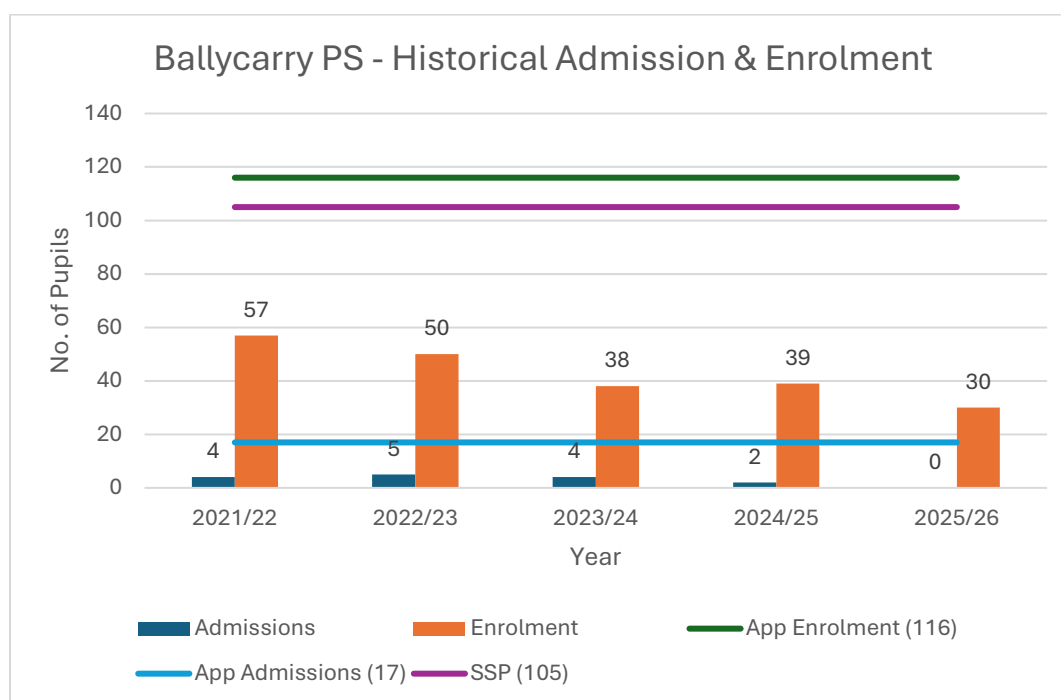
***“Ballycarry Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter”.***

2. The statutory two-month objection period commenced on the date of publication and concluded on 15 July 2026. A copy of the published proposal and the proposer’s supporting Case for Change (CfC) for DP 759 are reproduced respectively at **Appendices A and B**.
3. **Map 1** illustrates the location of the school and pupil locations along with the neighbouring primary provision within a five-mile mapping radius. **Map 2** illustrates a drive time map up to 30 minutes from Ballycarry PS. **Map 3** illustrates the wards in which Ballycarry PS pupils reside and **Map 4** illustrates the nearest Controlled provision to Ballycarry PS along with pupil locations.

## Background

4. Ballycarry PS is a Controlled rural primary school located at Hillhead Road, Carrickfergus, in the Mid and East Antrim Local Government District (LGD). It has approved admissions and enrolment numbers of 17 and 116 respectively.
5. **Chart 1** below illustrates the actual admissions and enrolment trends of Ballycarry PS over the last five years and shows that both have decreased. There were only 30 pupils enrolled in 2025/26. The latest information provided by the EA shows that the school received no first preference applications to Year 1 for September 2026, and it is noted that the school admitted no pupils in 2025/26 into Year 1. In 2025/26 Ballycarry PS has 87 available places, nine (5.33%) pupils were entitled to Free School Meals (FSM), and [REDACTED] pupil had a statement of Special Educational Need (SEN).
6. The school’s actual admissions and enrolment numbers have been significantly below its approved numbers and also significantly below the Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) recommended minimum threshold of 105 for a sustainable rural primary school in each of the past five years.

**Chart 1– Ballycarry PS – Historical Admissions and Enrolment Numbers**



Source – DE Census data  
Figures include Supernumerary pupils

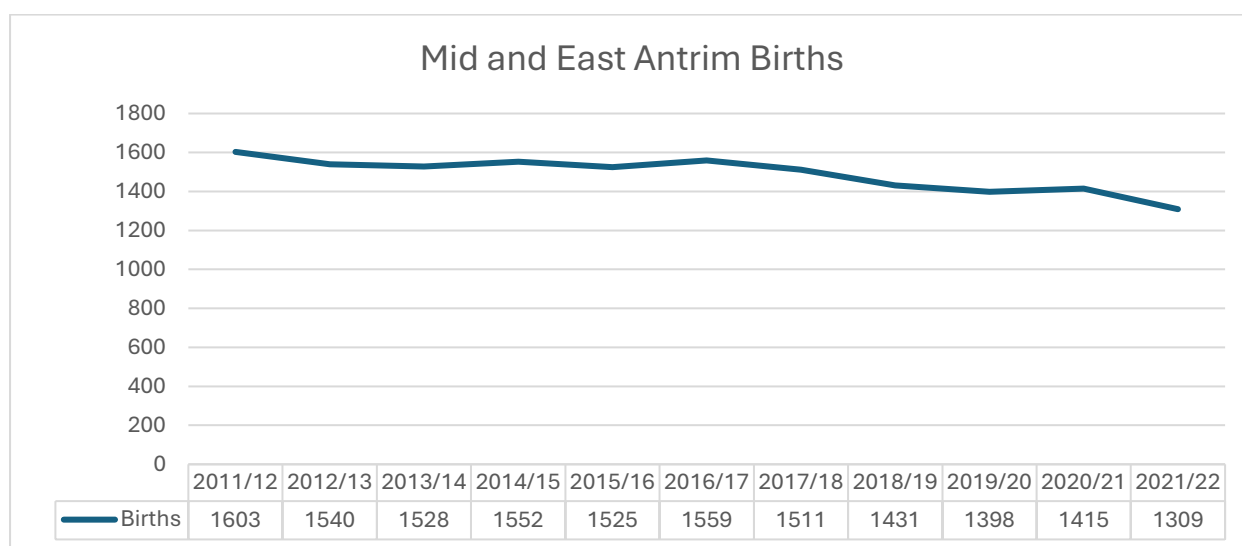
## Area Context

- On the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017, the Ballycarry Super Output area (SOA), in which Ballycarry PS is situated, is ranked 612 out of 890 (1 being most deprived and 890 least deprived).

## Strategic Area Plan (2022-27) & Operational Plan 2

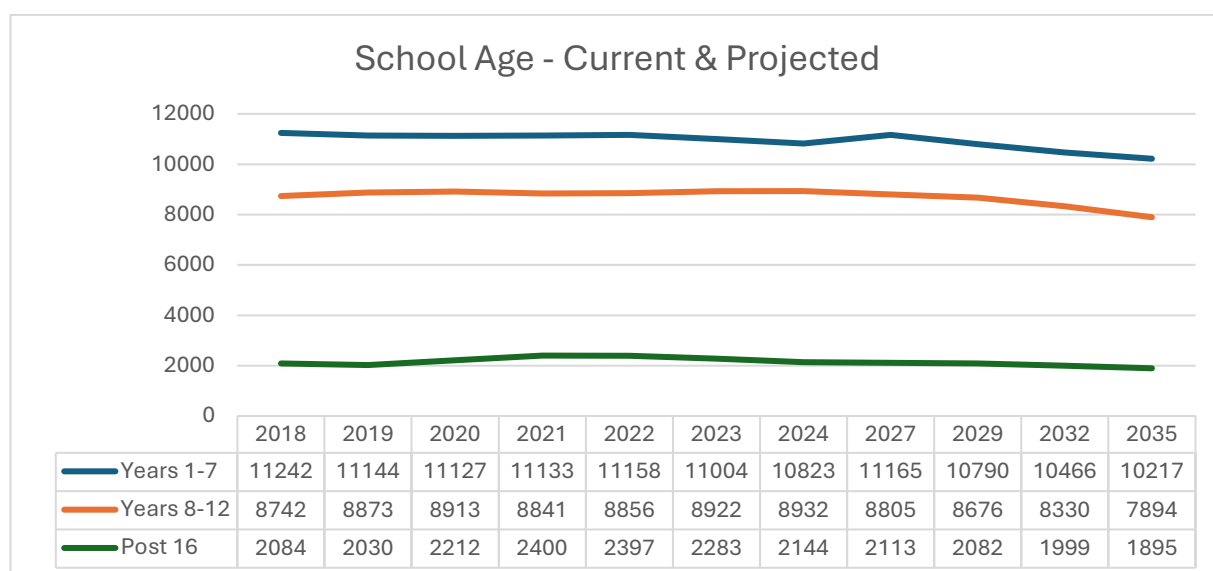
- In taking forward Area Planning activity for the five years, 2022-27, The *Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision* was published by the EA on 29 June 2022. It sets out the strategic direction on how the future educational needs of children and young people will be addressed through area solutions, consistent with relevant policies and Ministerial Priorities.
- This DP for the proposed discontinuance of Ballycarry PS, is not referenced in Operational Plan 2 (OP2) by name but there is a short-term work stream for the Lower Larne Lough Area for Controlled provision with the key theme of “Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways” and “Maximise resources and sustainability.”
- OP2 includes population projections provided by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) for the Mid and East Antrim LGD. [Chart 2](#) shows a declining trend in births (births data based on academic birth year not the calendar year). While [Chart 2](#) shows the peaks and troughs, since 2011/12 the numbers have fallen from 1,603 to 1,309 in 2021/22. This downward trend is projected to continue for primary and post primary age pupils as presented in [Chart 3](#).

**Chart 2 – Mid and East Antrim Births**



Source (NISRA)

**Chart 3 – Mid and East Antrim– School Age Population**



Source (DE Census Data / NISRA)

## Neighbouring Primary Provision

11. **Table 1 (Appendix G)** provides a snapshot of neighbouring provision within a five-mile mapping radius of Ballycarry PS, detailing the admissions and enrolment data and the latest Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) inspection assessment of each school. Distances by road may vary from the mapping distance. Due to Action Short of Strike (ASOS) a number of ETI reports are dated and recent reports may have been impacted.

### **Neighbouring Controlled Primary Provision**

12. **Table 1 (Appendix G)** and [Map 1](#) illustrate that there are 10 neighbouring Controlled primary schools within a five-mile mapping radius of Ballycarry PS. For 2025/26 these schools had a combined approved admissions and enrolment of 380 and 2651 respectively. In 2025/26 they had a combined actual admission and enrolment of 235 and 1944 (including supernumerary), with 852 available places. Two of the schools (Glynn PS and Woodlawn PS) are below their approved admissions and enrolment numbers and their respective SSP thresholds.
13. At the close of the 2026/27 admissions process, Ballycarry PS had no first preference applications for Year 1, and all the other schools in the area were also undersubscribed at first preference. In total (including Ballycarry PS) there were 237 first preference applications for the 397 approved admission places.

### **Neighbouring Integrated Provision**

14. **Table 1 (Appendix G)** illustrates there two Integrated primary school (IPS) within a five-mile mapping radius of Ballycarry PS. One is a Grant Maintained IPS and the other is a Controlled IPS. Both schools have a combined approved admissions and enrolment of 54 and 378 respectively. In 2025/26 the schools admitted 47 pupils into Year 1 and had an actual enrolment of 326 pupils with 79 available places. Both school's enrolments are below their approved numbers however, only Acorn IPS exceeds the SSP threshold (140) for a sustainable urban primary school.
15. In terms of first preference applications, at the close of the 2026/27 admissions process, these schools received 31 applications for the 54 approved places.

### **Neighbouring Catholic Maintained Provision**

16. **Table 1 (Appendix G)** illustrates there is one Catholic Maintained (CM) primary school within a five-mile mapping radius of Ballycarry PS. St Nicholas' PS has approved admissions and enrolment numbers of 30 and 210 respectively. In 2025/26 it had an actual admission and enrolment of 16 and 120 with 105 available places. At the close of the 2026/27 admissions process the school received five applications.

### **Summary of Provision**

17. Across the 14 primary schools (including Ballycarry PS), in 2025/26 there were 2420 pupils (includes supernumerary) enrolled in a total of 3355 approved places resulting in 1123 available places. There were 298 Year 1 pupils enrolled in the 481 approved Year 1 places with all schools being undersubscribed at first preference applications for the 2026/27 academic year.
18. In 2025/26 five of the 14 primary schools had actual enrolments below the recommended minimum SSP threshold and only one school met its approved enrolment numbers (Toreagh PS).
19. There are five rural and nine urban primary school with a total of 1123 available places (210 at rural schools (including Ballycarry PS) and 913 at urban schools.) There is a

trend of declining demographics in the area, and it is likely that such over provision in schools cannot be sustained indefinitely and therefore, rationalisation of the school estate in this particular area is required.

### **Case for Change (CfC)**

20. The CfC sets out the EA's rationale for the proposed closure of Ballycarry PS. Key points are as follows:
- The school's enrolment has declined over the years. It has dropped from 70 pupils (2018/19) to 30 pupils (2025/26).
  - Zero Year 1 applications for 2026/27, indicating no new intake.
  - Ballycarry PS is significantly under the SSP recommended minimum enrolment of 105 pupils.
  - The school was identified in the Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 with an action for the Lower Larne Lough area *'The Education Authority is proposing to review of controlled primary school provision in the area to address sustainability, composite classes and consolidate provision to provide where possible to 7, 14 or 21 classroom school(s)'*.
  - The low enrolment numbers will continue to place increased pressure on the already strained financial resources of the school and also on the teaching staff.
  - The proposal will meet the outcomes for all, including additional support to those who require it, ensuring those children with SEN realise their full potential.

### **Alternative Options**

21. The CfC details the following alternative options that the EA explored with stakeholders:
- Do Nothing
  - Shared Education
  - Transformation to Integrated Status
  - Federation
  - Amalgamation
  - Discontinue
22. The EA advised the school of the option to independently explore Transformation to Integrated status, should the BoG wish to consider this.
23. The CfC states that *'In considering the future of Ballycarry Primary School, all other options for the school did not provide for a sustainable provision for the school'*.
24. The CfC highlights there are a number of alternative Controlled primary schools in the area with available places. The EA acknowledges *"there was disappointment that the work of the governors could not provide a sustainable solution for the school. The Education Authority recognises the commitment of the governors, but the current circumstances would not provide for sustainable provision for pupils currently attending Ballycarry Primary School"*.

25. In consideration of the alternative options explored, the EA recommended that Ballycarry PS will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.
26. Following consideration of all consultation feedback received, and having reviewed the options available, the EA's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee (SPPC)<sup>1</sup> discussed the proposal on 5 May 2026, and it was agreed to publish DP 759.

## **Statutory DP Process**

### **Pre-publication Consultation**

27. The CfC advises that the EA undertook pre-publication consultation from 20 January to 24 March 2026. Staff, governors and parents/guardians of Ballycarry PS were notified of its launch with the publication of a suite of documents on the EA's website on 20 January 2026. Staff, governors and parents/guardians were invited to attend virtual pre-publication consultation meetings which were held on 21 January 2026.
28. In accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 the EA, before submitting a proposal to the Department, is obliged to consult with the BoG, teachers and parents/guardians of any school or schools which would, in the opinion of the EA, be affected by the proposal. A total of 22 local schools which might be affected by the proposal were forwarded correspondence.
29. The EA received a total of 141 responses with 137 objecting to the proposal and one from the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) which neither agreed nor disagreed.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

30. The Department's guidance on DPs requires Equality screening to be carried out by the proposer at the earliest possible stage. The CfC confirms that Equality screening of the proposal and statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (where appropriate) have been considered.
31. 20 of the responses received during the pre-publication consultation commented on Section 75 issues. The EA asserts that these comments and all responses have been taken into account when assessing the equality impact of the proposal. A copy of the Equality Screening Template is available on the EA's website. The screening determines that there will be a minor impact and states "*The EA will work with parents and the school to mitigate any factors which they consider disadvantage the pupils e.g. in securing admission to a suitable school; the provision of transport and uniform support in accordance with current policies and induction support for pupils who may find the change of school a challenging experience*".

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/Strategic%20Planning%20and%20Policy%20Committee%20Minutes%20-%2005%20May%202026.pdf>

## EA Comments

32. The EA, as the proposer, supports DP 759 to discontinue Ballycarry PS with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.
33. The EA states that while it *“recognises the important role Ballycarry Primary School plays in the community and its close links with the community, in proposing the school’s closure, the Education Authority seeks to strengthen controlled primary provision in the area”, and “should the proposal be approved, liaise with the parents, local schools, managing authorities and the Department of Education to ensure that pupils affected by the proposal be accommodated, where possible and within current guidance/policies. Area Planning officers will work with Ballycarry Primary School and receiver primary schools to support pupils, parents and school through the transition.”*

## Two-Month Statutory Objection Period

34. The two-month statutory objection period for DP 759 commenced on 14 May 2026 and concluded on 15 July 2026.
35. There was a total of 24 responses received in relation to DP 759 - 23 objected to the proposal, and there was one response from the CSSC which neither supported nor objected to the proposal. All the responses objecting to the proposal were from staff, local residents, parents, parents of past pupils, past pupils, and MLAs. The main themes of the objections to the proposal are set out below and a summary of all the responses received can be found at **Appendix F**.
36. The responses overwhelmingly object to the proposed closure and consistently highlight the school's strong educational performance, nurturing environment, and importance to the local community. Respondents describe high standards of teaching, above-average academic outcomes, strong pastoral care, and the benefits of small class sizes, which allow personalised support, early identification of special educational needs, and positive outcomes for children, particularly those with additional educational, medical, or emotional needs.
37. A recurring theme is the school's central role within Ballycarry village, and the school is described as the heart of the community, supporting social cohesion, local identity, intergenerational connections, and cultural heritage, including its contribution to Ulster Scots traditions. Many express concern that closure would weaken community life, reduce parental choice, disrupt support networks, and adversely affect children's wellbeing and sense of belonging. The school's accessibility, which allows many pupils to walk or cycle to school, is also viewed as a significant benefit.
38. There are widespread concerns regarding the practical implications of closure. Many responses argue that alternative schools are less accessible, particularly for families without private transport, and that longer journeys could create safety, financial, and attendance challenges. Several responses also suggest that other local schools may struggle to accommodate additional pupils. Responses further note ongoing housing developments and population growth in the area, arguing that future demand for school places is likely to increase rather than decline.

39. It should be noted, however, that new housing developments do not necessarily translate into reliable evidence of the need for school places, as matters such as age demographics of those who may move into a development and expressions of parental preference for types of education provision will have a bearing on demand and the type of provision being sought.
40. A significant number of responses challenge both the rationale for closure and the consultation process. Contributors frequently argue that enrolment difficulties have been exacerbated by previous EA decisions, particularly the refusal to establish nursery and specialist provision. They also question the robustness of the consultation, citing concerns about transparency, timing, accessibility, use of outdated evidence, and a perceived predetermined outcome. Many therefore conclude that closure is neither justified nor sustainable and instead advocate for measures to support and develop the school's future.

### **CSSC response**

41. The response from the CSSC is set out in full at **Appendix E**. The key points raised are as follows:
- The CSSC acknowledges the strong community support for Ballycarry PS, particularly its high-quality education, nurturing environment, and important role within the rural community.
  - It recognises concerns raised about declining enrolment, including the impact of the lack of nursery and specialist provision, and commends the efforts of school leadership to sustain the school.
  - CSSC concludes that the school's very low enrolment and use of composite classes place it well below the sustainability thresholds set out in the SSP.
  - While noting the regret associated with closing a long-established school, CSSC emphasises the need for a sustainable and viable controlled school network, pointing out that alternative provision with sufficient capacity exists nearby, and calls for a timely decision to reduce uncertainty for all stakeholders.

## **Sustainability Summary**

42. The sustainability assessment of Ballycarry PS (detailed in full at [Appendix H](#)) indicates that the school faces significant and compounding challenges to its long-term viability. The assessment highlights weaknesses across several critical areas, most notably quality of educational experience, stable enrolment trends and sound financial position. The school is operating with very low and declining enrolments, including the absence of Year 1 admissions in recent years, and is well below both its approved enrolment and the SSP recommended minimum threshold for a sustainable rural primary school. This has led to extensive use of composite classes and staffing levels that fall below SSP guidance, placing increasing pressure on teaching staff and limiting pupils' educational and extra-curricular opportunities.
43. Financial sustainability represents a particular concern. The school is operating significantly outside permitted budget tolerance levels, with an escalating deficit and a three-year financial projection indicating a position that is not sustainable, even with maximum Small Schools Support and other supplementary funding in place. This level of financial reliance highlights the structural challenges associated with maintaining provision at the current scale.
44. While strong community links and local support remain a notable strength, and accessibility is not considered a limiting factor due to the availability and proximity of alternative school provision, these positive elements are insufficient to offset the educational, demographic, and financial pressures identified. In addition, the impact of industrial action on the most recent ETI inspection means that key judgements on leadership and educational quality could not be fully determined, further limiting assurance regarding the school's capacity to secure improvement.
45. Taken together, the evidence indicates that Ballycarry PS is not meeting multiple sustainability indicators set out in the SSP and faces ongoing decline without realistic prospects for recovery. The assessment therefore concludes that the school's current position presents significant concerns in relation to long-term educational and financial sustainability.

## **Area Planning Impact**

46. A range of options were considered for the future of Ballycarry PS (as set out at paragraph [21](#)), none of which was considered to provide sustainable provision at the school, and the option to discontinue the school was the preferred/selected option.
47. There are 852 available places across the 10 Controlled schools within a five-mile radius of Ballycarry PS, with 102 places between the two closest schools (Islandmagee PS and Whitehead PS). If the discontinuance of Ballycarry was approved, the potential dispersal of pupils to Whitehead PS and Islandmagee PS would give these two schools the opportunity to increase their enrolment and reduce available places ensuring a more efficient use of the Controlled school estate, depending on parental preference. The EA asserts that DP 759 aligns with the key themes of Area Planning which aims to ensure that all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs in sustainable schools within a diverse system of education.

48. ETI input states *“Whitehead Primary School was inspected in June 2026. There are many strengths in the provision at this school and, due to the demographic downturn in the number of children of primary school age, the school has additional capacity.”*
49. **Table 1** below details the number and percentage of primary school aged pupils for 2025/26 by school management type, within a five-mile mapping radius of Ballycarry PS. This demonstrates that parental preference is for Controlled provision (84.51%). Analysing the schools in this area, it is clear there are more places available than what is required, as detailed in **Table 1 (Appendix G)**.

**Table 1–Pupils, by School Management Type, within 5-miles of Ballycarry PS**

| Management Type       | Number of Children | Percentage |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Catholic Maintained   | 93                 | 3.33%      |
| Controlled            | 2357               | 84.51%     |
| Controlled Integrated | 120                | 4.30%      |
| GMI                   | 219                | 7.85%      |
| Grand Total           | 2789               | 100.00%    |

50. **Map 4** illustrates the catchment patterns of Ballycarry PS, Islandmagee PS, and Whitehead PS which demonstrates Ballycarry PS draws pupils primarily from the rural area surrounding Ballycarry village, forming a compact and locally focused catchment with some overlap into the hinterland shared with Whitehead PS. Islandmagee PS, by contrast, exhibits a linear and geographically defined catchment that follows the Islandmagee peninsula, and minimal overlap with neighbouring schools. Whitehead PS serves the most urbanised population of the three, with a dense cluster of pupils centred on Whitehead town and extending slightly toward Carrickfergus and the surrounding rural fringe. These patterns highlight that there are already some pupils in the area of Ballycarry travelling to other schools due to parental preference which has ultimately hindered the school from growing/attracting pupils.

## **Educational Impact**

51. In the CfC, the EA cites the SSP and that there should be no more than two composite year groups in a single classroom and a school should have a minimum of four teachers. The CfC also refers to the ETI Chief Inspector’s Report 2014-2016 which stated that *“it is 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.”*
52. The CfC states that *‘In extremely small class groups it is very challenging to ensure that pupils can access opportunities as outlined in CCEA guidance, for example, to learn from and value other people’s ideas, generate possible solutions and communicate with a sense of audience and purpose’.*

53. Curriculum guidance from CCEA<sup>2</sup> highlights that self-management (or self-regulation) is important so that pupils can manage their learning in new situations and in the longer term. To do this they need to experience the different demands of working with peers and children of other age groups, working with friends and working with other people they might not know and to recognise the different ways they need to adapt to new groupings and their own feelings and achievements in the variety of contexts.
54. While the pupils in Ballycarry PS have opportunities to work with pupils from their own and other age groups, they are limited in accessing the full range of learning opportunities.
55. The CfC states that *“the EA in proposing the discontinuance of provision at Ballycarry PS will provide places for pupils at their nearest suitable school thereby ensuring access to the Northern Ireland Curriculum in a more sustainable primary school. It would mean the relocated Ballycarry PS pupils would be taught in classes with an adequate number of peers and this will allow improved social interaction between pupils.”*
56. The EA in the Equality Impact Assessment states that it *“will work with parents and the school to mitigate any factors which they consider disadvantage the pupils e.g. in securing admission to a suitable school; the provision of transport and uniform support in accordance with current policies and induction support for pupils who may find the change of school a challenging experience.”*
57. In relation to challenges for staff the EA states that *“Ballycarry PS is led by two teaching principals, who, in addition to the administration and managerial workload, fulfil a number of other duties. In a larger primary school, the workload associated with responsibilities for curriculum areas such as literacy and numeracy and other co-ordinator roles such as SENCO and Shared Education Co-ordinator would be more widely distributed amongst the staff team.”* The SSP notes that *“teachers in small schools also face problems of having less scope for professional interaction and mutual support”*.
58. The Department’s strategy Learning Leaders<sup>3</sup> highlights the value of collaborative planning of learning and teaching and stresses the importance of ensuring opportunities for professional dialogue; the SSP highlights that these opportunities are significantly reduced in small schools.
59. The EA recognises the generational learning and teaching provided by Ballycarry PS however, it has a duty to ensure that the available resources are used in an appropriate way across the whole system to ensure equitable access to high quality education for all pupils. The CfC also states, *“pupils from Ballycarry PS who have special education*

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<sup>2</sup> Curriculum Guidance CCEA [www.ccea.org.uk/downloads/docs/ccea-asset/Curriculum/Thinking%20Skills%20and%20Personal%20Capabilities%20for%20Key%20Stages%201%20%26amp%3B%202.pdf](http://www.ccea.org.uk/downloads/docs/ccea-asset/Curriculum/Thinking%20Skills%20and%20Personal%20Capabilities%20for%20Key%20Stages%201%20%26amp%3B%202.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/strategy-document-english.pdf>

*requirements will continue to have these needs met within the local schools and supported through the EA's Children and Young People's Service".*

60. ETI input states *"the proposed closure will give children access to wider educational opportunities, alongside their peers and not in composite classes."*

### **Statutory and Other Considerations**

61. Statutory and Other considerations pertaining to the assessment of this DP include:

- Rural Needs Act (2016);
- Article 44 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 (effective and efficient use of public funds;
- Section 75;
- Ulster Scots Tradition; and
- Resource Implications.

62. A full assessment of Statutory and Other considerations can be found at **Appendix I**

### **Conclusion**

63. Having carefully considered all available evidence, including the EA's CfC, statutory consultation feedback, sustainability assessments and relevant legislative duties, it is clear that Ballycarry PS faces significant and persistent challenges to its long-term viability. Enrolment has remained substantially below the SSP minimum threshold for rural primary provision, with no demographic indicators suggesting the potential for sustained recovery. The school continues to operate with a 2.8 FTE structure requiring multiple composite classes, and its financial position has deteriorated to a deficit level far outside acceptable tolerance, indicating pressures that cannot be remedied within current resource parameters.
64. The views expressed during the pre-publication and statutory objection period demonstrate the school's deep-rooted importance within the local community and highlight the positive pastoral and educational experiences many families associate with Ballycarry PS. However, these concerns, while sincerely held and fully acknowledged, do not outweigh the structural sustainability issues evidenced across enrolment, finances, and educational provision. The availability of sufficient alternative Controlled provision within a reasonable travel distance, alongside established transport and transition support arrangements, provides assurance that pupils can continue to access appropriate, high-quality education in nearby schools.
65. Transport assistance and transition arrangements can be put in place to support children and families, ensuring continuity of education and safeguarding pupil well-being throughout the process. Staff will also have access to established mechanisms for redeployment and support.

66. The proposal has been developed and assessed in accordance with statutory duties, including the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and relevant education legislation. Mitigations are available in relation to both pupil transition and staff redeployment. Taken together, the evidence supports the EA's conclusion that discontinuance represents the most sustainable and educationally appropriate way forward.
67. In these circumstances, the Department would be justified in determining that proceeding with discontinuance is in the best educational interests of current and future pupils, ensures the effective use of public resources, and supports the wider strategic planning of the school estate.

### **Recommendation**

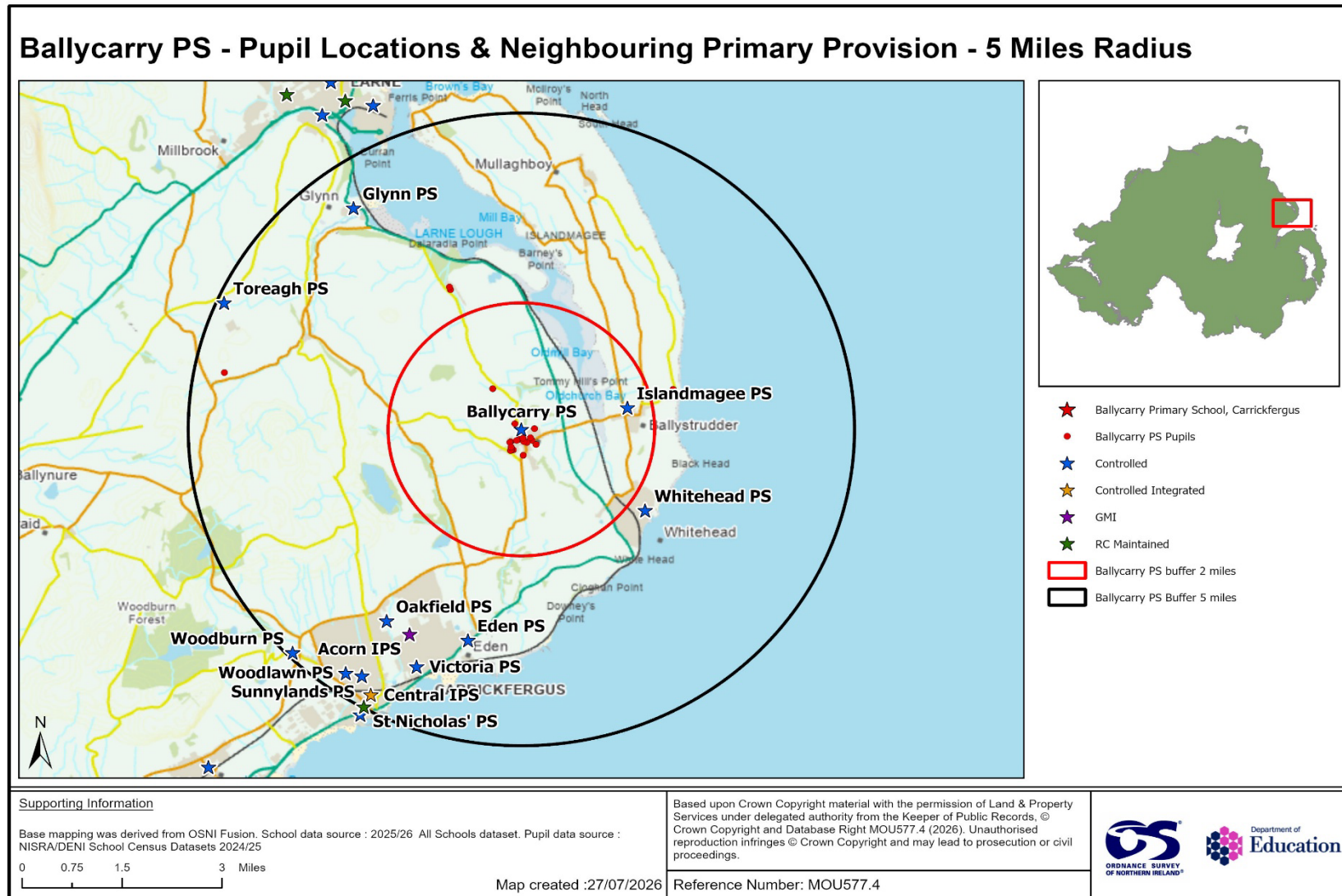
68. Taking into account all of the evidence and information provided in this submission and the associated appendices, it is recommended that you:
- (i) **Approve DP 759, to discontinue Ballycarry Primary School with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter;**
  - (ii) **Agree that this submission (with appropriate redactions) can be made available on the Department's website once the EA and the school has been informed.**



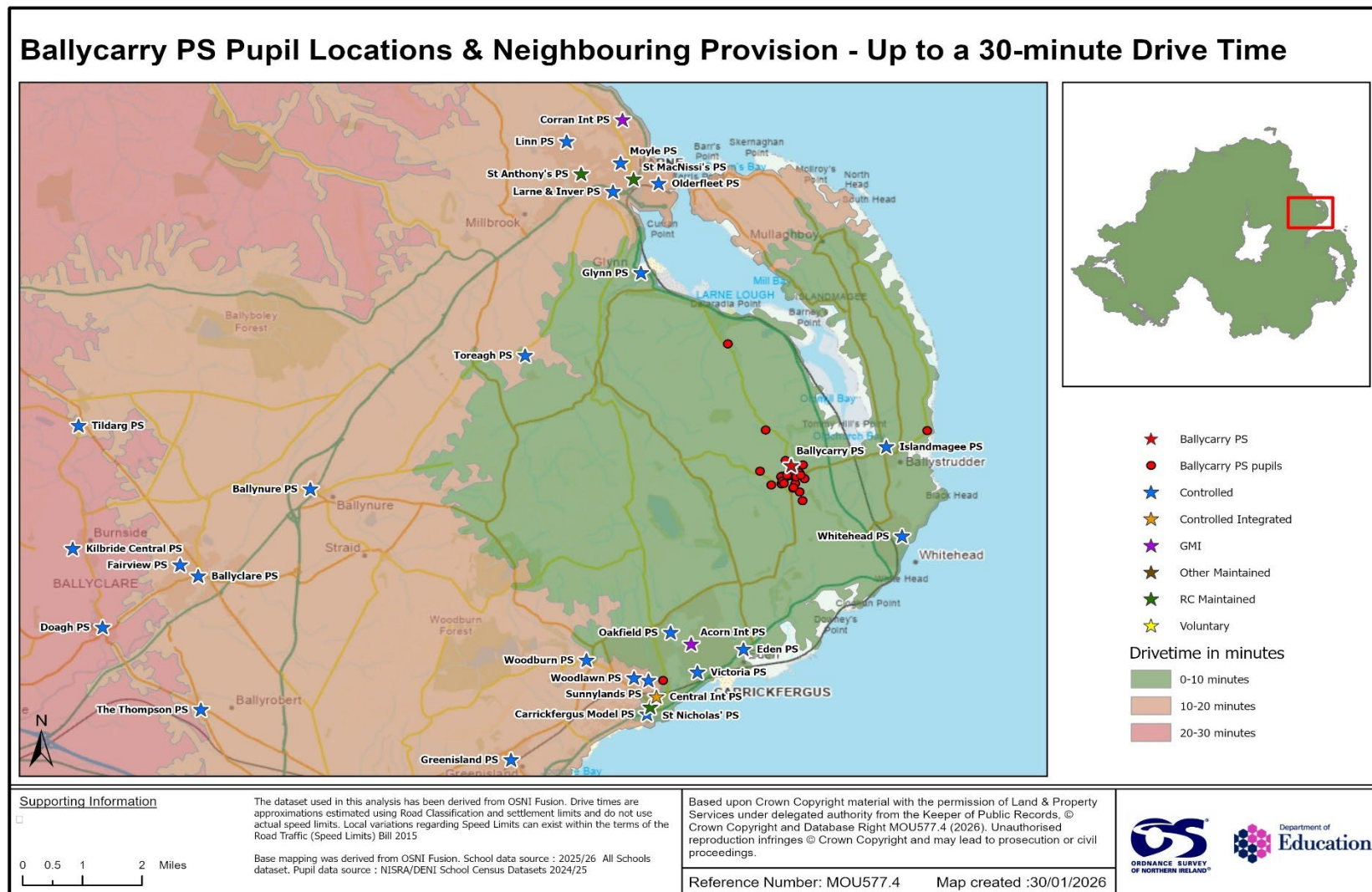
**ELAINE ARMSTRONG**  
**Area Planning Policy Team**  
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cc  
*David Malcolm*  
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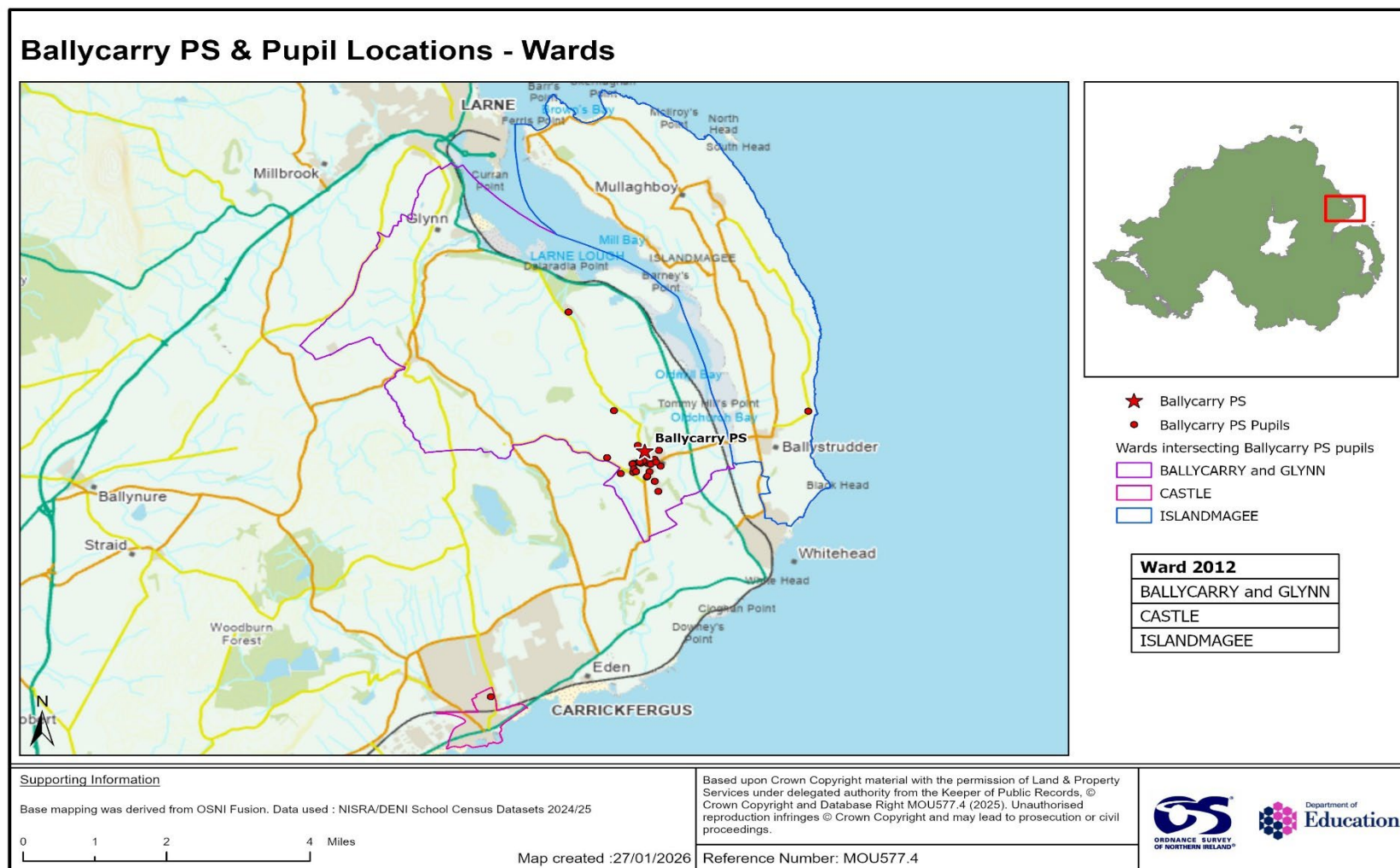
**Map 1: Ballycarry Primary School: Neighbouring Provision (5-mile radius)**



Map 2: Ballycarry Primary School - Pupil Locations (30-minute drive-time buffer)



**Map 3: Ballycarry Primary School Pupil locations & Wards**



**Map 4 – Ballycarry PS - Nearest Controlled provision and pupil locations**

