

Contents

Appendix A – Published DP.....	2
Appendix B Case for Change.....	3
Appendix C – DE Policy Team input.....	31
Appendix D – ETI Input.....	36
Appendix E – CSSC Response.....	40
Appendix F - Statutory Objection Period Responses Summary.....	42
Appendix G – Snapshot of provision	48
Appendix H - Sustainability Assessment	51
Appendix I - Assessment of Statutory Considerations	57
Other Considerations	59

Appendix A – Published DP

EDUCATION AUTHORITY

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL NO 759

BALLYCARRY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Notice is hereby given that a Proposal under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 has been submitted by the Education Authority to the effect that:

Ballycarry Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027, 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, 17 Lough Road, Antrim, BT41 4DH, between the hours of 9.00 am and 4.30 pm and <https://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 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

Appendix B Case for Change

Area Planning Case for Change

Ballycarry Primary School

Development Proposal 759

Proposal to Discontinue

Case for Change: Supporting Information - Summary/Overview	
Area Planning District	Mid and East Antrim
Development Proposal Number	759
Proposer	Education Authority
School(s) Name	Ballycarry Primary School
School(s) Reference	301-0809
Sector	Primary
Management	Controlled
Development Proposal Publication Date	Week commencing 11 May 2026
Proposal	Ballycarry Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter

Case for Change: Statutory Consultation

Note: It may be necessary for documentary evidence to be provided to show that the statutory procedures have been followed. It is essential that relevant parties retain this information.

The following is to be completed by the Proposer and signed off by them.

EDUCATION AUTHORITY COMMENTARY ON PRE-PUBLICATION STATUTORY CONSULTATION

Proposer

Provide detail of consultation with the Board of Governors, teachers and 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.

Summary and assessment of views received – how were these taken into account before publication of the DP?

In accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 the Education Authority undertook pre-publication consultation from 20 January 2026 to 24 March 2026. Staff, governors and parents/guardians of Ballycarry Primary School were notified of the launch of the pre-publication consultation with the publication of a suite of documents on the Education Authority's website on 20 January 2026 (consultation document, narrated PowerPoint presentation, easy read version and video and consultation response form).

A total of 22 affected schools were notified on 20 January 2026 of the pre-publication consultation on the proposal to discontinue Ballycarry Primary School with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter on 20 January 2026 (via letter).

Staff, governors and parents/guardians were invited to attend virtual pre-publication consultation meetings which were held on:

- Staff: 21 January 2026 – 3.15 pm
- Governors: 21 January 2026 – 5.00 pm
- Parents/Guardians: 21 January 2026 – 7.30 pm

A pre-publication consultation document and response form were available on the Education Authority's website for the period 20 January 2026 to 24 March 2026.

The Education Authority received a total of 141 responses, including one response from an affected school and a response from the Controlled Schools' Support Council.

The information below provides a summary of overall responses and emerging themes of responses received.

Ballycarry Primary School - Pre-Publication Consultation Responses

Respondent	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Total
Board of Governors – Ballycarry PS		1		1
Governor – Ballycarry PS		2		2
Co-Principals, Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff – Ballycarry PS		4		4
Parents and Guardians – Ballycarry PS		37		37
Pupils, children/young people		4		4
Others – including current and past pupils and Ballycarry Community	3	80		83
Presbyterian Church		2		2
Union		1		1
Political Representatives		5		5
Affected Schools		1		1
Controlled Schools' Support Council			1	1
Total	3	137	1	141

Do not support the proposal – summary comments

- The school provides high quality education with excellent academic standards and a broad range of extra-curricular activities.
- Quote from a pupil: *It is the best school in the world.*
- Standardised test scores are consistently higher than average.
- The school provides a supportive and nurturing environment for pupils and excellent support for children with additional needs.
- The teachers and staff are dedicated professionals who know each child as an individual, their strengths, their struggles and their potential. They provide an education nurturing not only academic achievement but character and confidence.
- Pastoral excellence is a defining strength of the school.
- The children thrive in smaller class settings.
- A number of pupils have moved to Ballycarry PS because they have struggled with larger class sizes in other schools.
- The emotional toll on young children who may be required to leave a school where they feel safe and valued should not be underestimated.
- Low numbers should not automatically signal the end of a school that is delivering quality education and serving as a vital part of the community.
- A QUB 2022 study demonstrates: rural pupils perform better academically; smaller schools strengthen community relations; children thrive in stable, small-scale environments; travel barriers reduce educational participation; small schools can identify and meet needs earlier and more effectively.
- The consultation document suggests that pupils of Ballycarry PS are limited in accessing the full range of learning opportunities. This is not correct as there is an abundance of opportunities for pupils at the school.
- Disagree with the consultation document which references smaller numbers in a year group offers fewer opportunities for extra-curricular activity. This is not correct as the school offers a wide range of extra-

	curricular activities, these include: gardening club, drama club, multi-sports, piano lessons, football, hockey, breakfast and afterschool clubs. • The school is notable for being an exemplar of how the Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language is consistently embedded in the curriculum. • The consultation document references an out of date ETI report. • Feel the Education Authority has mis-managed the budget. By not allowing nursery or specialist provision at the school the Education Authority has limited the growth of the school. • The strong relationships between staff and pupils create a safe and inclusive environment, which is especially important for children with additional needs. • Ballycarry PS is suited for a specialist provision: space, demand, and suitability all exist. Given that the Education Authority publicly claims SEN is a priority, its continual refusal to approve it here is both contradictory and negligent. • Enrolment figures have been limited not by demand but by the absence of a nursery unit. A nursery unit would attract more families. • The school has been severely affected by a lack of pre-school provision in the village. Parents must take their children out of the village for pre-school tend to continue their schooling collectively with friends. • The proposal is a reckless decision being proposed by the Education Authority and is removing parental choice. It is simply a money saving exercise which strips parents of the right to choose the best learning environment. • A 'nearest school policy' if implemented would address many areas but the Education Authority pride themselves on valuing 'parental choice'. If there was no choice, and a requirement to apply for your nearest school - the country would be full of manageable schools with local children, better peer to peer relationships and better community links overall. • Closing the school would increase transport costs. Many children walk or cycle to school, they cannot jump on public transport to another school. • The school is a vital part of the village life with close community links and participation in community events. • Ballycarry PS has a long and valued history within the village. Its identity is closely linked with the Ulster-Scots heritage of the area and it serves not only as an education setting but also as a cultural cornerstone. • The village is currently experiencing growth as new housing developments attract more families to the area. Removing the local school at this time would be detrimental to the long-term sustainability of the community. • The proposal to close Ballycarry PS is discriminatory to people of Ulster-Scots heritage, and those of a Protestant background. • Acknowledge that some parents in the area have chosen alternative schools. • Object that the pre-publication consultation was at short notice and a time restrictive for staff, governor and busy parents. • The timing of the consultation was at the same time as the admission process opened and it is felt that this was calculated. • Urge the Education Authority to put a pause on this process for at least one year to give the school and local community an opportunity to reverse the enrolment trends and put the school back on a sustainable footing. Support the proposal • Unfortunately, the only option is to close the school. The two closest schools will provide greater educational opportunities.
--	---

	- It is not practical for Ballycarry PS to remain as is due to having two local primary schools so close by with more modern facilities. However, Ballycarry PS would be a perfect location for a SEN school. There is plenty of ground for development and it means that local children with SEN do not have to travel out of the area. Section 75 - summary comments 20 responses commented on Section 75. These comments and all responses have been taken into account when assessing the equality impact of the proposal. - Equality law concerning Ulster-Scots is not a straightforward issue. When the announcement of national minority status in Parliament, it was stated: "The recognition of Ulster Scots is without prejudice as to whether they meet the definition of a 'racial group' under the Equality Act 2010, as only the courts can rule on this matter." - Given the school's Ulster-Scots heritage and position within the controlled sector, the Education Authority must demonstrate how its duties under Section 75 have been met. - The school currently supports children with any kind of disability and to take this away would seriously impact the mental health of the children. - If children have to travel a few miles to the local school, this makes life harder for those who have other children or elderly dependants. They will be forced to drive their children to school and not everyone has access to a car. - By closing this school, you're disadvantaging those with disabilities, those from a minority ethnic background, and those who have religious beliefs, and value the quality of Christian assemblies and religious education available at Ballycarry PS. - Many children with autism will be negatively affected by this decision - Changing routines is very difficult on people with autism and can negatively impact their development								
Confirmation by the Proposer	I confirm that the Board of Governors, Staff and Parents/Guardians of Ballycarry Primary School were consulted on 20 January 2026 to 24 March 2026 and Equality Screening of the proposal has been carried out and the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (where appropriate) have been considered. <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Name:</td><td>Eve Bremner</td></tr> <tr> <td>Office Held:</td><td>Chief Education Officer</td></tr> <tr> <td>Signed:</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Date:</td><td>5 May 2026</td></tr> </table>	Name:	Eve Bremner	Office Held:	Chief Education Officer	Signed:		Date:	5 May 2026
Name:	Eve Bremner								
Office Held:	Chief Education Officer								
Signed:									
Date:	5 May 2026								
Associated Proposals	N/A								

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 20 January 2026 with a return date of 24 March 2026.

Name:	Eve Bremner
Office Held:	Chief Education Officer
Signed:	
Date:	5 May 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.

In accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, a copy of the proposal was sent on 20 January 2026 to schools which, in the opinion of the Education Authority, might be affected by the proposal. A total of 22 local schools which might be affected by the proposal were forwarded correspondence. Comments were invited from the Boards of Governors and Trustees, to be returned to the Education Authority by 24 March 2026.

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

The Education Authority received one response from an affected school and one response was received from the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC).

Responses/Assurances in respect of issues raised during consultation.

Glynn PS does not support the proposal – summary comments

- Express a profound regret regarding the proposal.
- A village school is an integral part of the local community – closure would be a disservice to the community.
- Every child, and family, in the school community is unique, valuable, and known personally by their teachers and peers.
- The dedication, loyalty, and care exhibited by the staff at Ballycarry PS cannot be quantified merely in financial terms. Their commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive educational environment far outweighs the stark financial facts.
- Children who are educated together in their village school develop a strong sense of belonging and responsibility towards their surroundings and community. This sense of community is essential for nurturing future generations who will care for and contribute positively to their local area.

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

Details of issues raised by members of EA Board

CSSC note the proposal – summary comments

- Notes the decline in population in the area within which Ballycarry PS is situated and the impact this has had on the enrolment of the school.
- Acknowledges that it has not been possible to identify a sustainable solution for the school.

	• Recognises the uncertainty this process brings for pupils, their parents and staff and seeks assurance that the Education Authority will endeavour to ensure that parents and staff are fully informed of the implications and supported throughout the process. • Requests that the educational experiences of pupils and the welfare of pupils and staff are paramount in the Education Authority's consideration of this matter. The development proposal was discussed by the Education Authority's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee at its meeting on 5 May 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? <table border="1" data-bbox="225 954 627 1220"> <tr> <td>Name:</td><td>Eve Bremner</td></tr> <tr> <td>Office Held:</td><td>Chief Education Officer</td></tr> <tr> <td>Signed:</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Date:</td><td>5 May 2026</td></tr> </table>	Name:	Eve Bremner	Office Held:	Chief Education Officer	Signed:		Date:	5 May 2026	The Education Authority, as the proposer, supports Development Proposal 759 to discontinue Ballycarry Primary School with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter. Pre-publication consultation was undertaken with governors, staff and parents/guardians outlining the Education Authority's Case for Change detailing the rationale for the proposal. During the pre-publication consultations undertaken with staff, governors, parents/guardians the following recurring themes emerged: Nursery Provision A high percentage of respondents cited a refusal by the Education Authority to support a statutory nursery and/or the absence of preschool provision in the village as a contributing factor to the school's low enrolment. The Education Authority, in considering a statutory nursery unit be established, the demand for 26 nursery places would have to be determined. However, based on the year admission numbers to Ballycarry Primary School the school would not have the numbers to sustain a nursery unit. Specialist Provision A large number of respondents referenced their support and the willingness of Ballycarry Primary School to establish Specialist Provision classes at the school. SEN and specialist provision classes are a priority for the Education Authority. However, in the establishment of specialist provision classes, schools with an enrolment of fewer than 40 pupils are not being considered for specialist provision. Unfortunately, Ballycarry Primary School falls within this category. Quality of Education Many of those consulted expressed high levels of confidence in the quality of education offered in Ballycarry Primary School. The Education Authority recognises the high-quality work that is undertaken in Ballycarry Primary School, however, the Case for Change details the rationale under educational impact and the Sustainable Schools Policy recommends "no more than two composite year groups in a single classroom at primary school level".
Name:	Eve Bremner								
Office Held:	Chief Education Officer								
Signed:									
Date:	5 May 2026								

Children with Special Educational Needs

Parents expressed concerns about the continuation of services to support children with special educational needs. The support which the Education Authority provides for the pupils will continue regardless of the school they attend, to ensure that the needs of all children are met. The statutory rights of children are the same irrespective of the school they attend.

Health and Wellbeing

Throughout the pre-publication consultation, the health and wellbeing of staff and pupils was raised as an issue. The Education Authority in taking forward the proposal, if approved, will work with staff, parents, pupils and schools to endeavour to ensure that all are supported throughout the process.

Children not attending their nearest school

Some respondents expressed frustration about the number of children from the village who do not attend Ballycarry Primary School, instead travelling to attend neighbouring schools. Some respondents suggested that a policy should be implemented whereby pupils must attend their nearest school. The Education Authority, where there is capacity and alternative options for parents, cannot dictate which school a parent should send their child to. A Policy whereby pupils must attend their nearest school would require the support of parents and a change to current legislation.

Enrolment Numbers

Many of the arguments in support of the school refer to the size of the school as a significant driver rather than the quality of education. However, the Sustainable Schools Policy is underwritten by ministerial priorities, one of which is, 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. In Ballycarry Primary School, Years 1, 2, and 3 pupils are taught in the same classroom.

Queens University Study Report – Small School Rural Community Study

Respondents referenced the above report citing the benefits of small rural primary schools.

The Study Report is based on the findings from five case studies and should be considered in the context of the key findings outlining strengths and challenges.

Transport

The issue of transport and the potential increased travelling distance, should the school close, was identified as a concern. The Education Authority in taking forward the proposal, if approved, will work parents and the Education Authority's Transport Service. Any transport arrangements will be in accordance with transport regulations.

Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

The Education Authority has a statutory duty under the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and delivering public services. The areas from which Ballycarry Primary School attracts pupils is, according to the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, defined as rural. The discontinuance of Ballycarry Primary School will have an impact on the local area. The provision of home-to-school transport will provide for the safe transportation of pupils from the area to their nearest school. Transport will be provided for children who meet the eligibility criteria.

Ulster-Scots Tradition

A number of respondents referenced the strong Ulster-Scots tradition that exists in Ballycarry Primary School and the potential loss of cultural capital due to the proposed closure of the school. The Education Authority notes that the closure of a school is a great loss to the community it serves. However, in considering alternative provision, there are available places in controlled schools within a similar catchment area as Ballycarry Primary School.

Impact on the Local Community and Controlled Provision in the Area

The impact on the local community was a thread throughout the responses received. The Education Authority is committed to securing sustainable controlled primary provision for all parents who wish to access it in every area in Northern Ireland. In some areas, where there is over-provision of school places when compared to the demographic need for controlled provision, the Education Authority needs to reduce the number of places so that provision matches the need. In some cases, this results in the closure of small, unsustainable schools, thereby consolidating provision in other local controlled providers with available places

While the Education Authority recognises the important role Ballycarry Primary School plays in the community and its close links with the church, in proposing the school's closure, the Education Authority seeks to strengthen controlled primary provision in the area. The Case for Change outlines the rationale for the proposed discontinuance.

The pre-publication consultation was undertaken in accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. The on-line session provided the Education Authority the opportunity to outline the rationale for the proposal and the opportunity for staff, governors and parents/guardians to ask questions and make comments. The pre-publication consultation documentation was available on the Education Authority's website for a nine week period (20 January 2026 – 24 March 2026) (eight weeks plus an additional week taking account of the mid-term break).

	The Education Authority will, 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. In consideration of the above, and the Case for Change, the Education Authority is proposing to publish Development Proposal 759 the week beginning 11 May 2026.
--	--

Area Planning: Lower Larne Lough – Overview of Controlled Primary School Provision

On 29 June 2022, the Education Authority published the Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision and on 16 January 2025 published Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 for Primary, Special and Post Primary Schools (including Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools). Within the actions for the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Area, the Education Authority included the following as a short term workstream:

Lower Larne Lough Area Controlled Primary Provision	Background / Engagement	
	The Education Authority is proposing to review controlled 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 Education Authority is and will continue to engage with the Boards of Governors on primary school provision in the area.	
	Statutory Duty / Ministerial Priority	Key Theme(s)
	Primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two year-groups	Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways Maximise resources and sustainability

The controlled primary schools within the Lower Larne Lough area are Ballycarry Primary School, Islandmagee Primary School and Whitehead Primary School. Map 1 below shows the primary schools in the wider area and the pupil distribution for the three controlled primary schools in Lower Larne Lough.

The Education Authority in reviewing controlled primary school provision in the Lower Larne Lough area to address sustainability focused on the school which fell below the Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools' minimum threshold of 105 pupils for a rural primary school. At the Department of Education's 2025/26 census, Ballycarry Primary School had 30 pupils, while Islandmagee Primary School and Whitehead Primary School had enrolments of 132 and 319 respectfully.

The Education Authority engaged with Ballycarry Primary School to consider and discuss sustainable controlled provision for the area. The Education Authority undertook an analysis of the area considering: pupil distribution, location of schools, finances and availability of places, on an individual school basis and on an area basis.

Map 1



Map 1 above shows the pupil distribution of Ballycarry Primary School, Islandmagee Primary School and Whitehead Primary School. Islandmagee Primary School and Whitehead Primary School have identifiable catchment areas with the Ballycarry Primary School area having an overlap of all three schools.

The Education Authority in reviewing sustainable provision for the Lower Larne Lough area noted the large number of pupils currently travelling from Ballycarry village to attend both Whitehead Primary School and Islandmagee Primary School, the projected decrease in population for the area, no Year 1 applications for the 2026/27 school year and the availability of places in other schools.

In considering all the information available, the Education Authority is publishing Development Proposal 759 that:

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

1 INTRODUCTION

Before arriving at a final recommendation on the future primary provision at Ballycarry Primary School, the Education Authority sought the views of those most directly involved at a local level. The Education Authority engaged in pre-publication consultation with the Board of Governors, parents and staff of Ballycarry Primary School and Trustees, Board of Governors, and other interested parties in the local community from 20 January 2026 – 24 March 2026.

1.1 Vision

The aim of the Education Authority is to facilitate the development of a network of viable and sustainable schools that can deliver the Northern Ireland Curriculum effectively and provide access to a range of education provision that is appropriate to the needs of children and young people. The Education Authority is committed to excellence in the delivery of education so that every pupil can realise their potential and contribute to a caring, inclusive, and progressive society.

In striving to realise this aspiration, the Education Authority aims to ensure that every pupil has:

- access to a broad and balanced curriculum with opportunities to realise his or her 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.

1.2 Education Authority Position

On 29 June 2022, the Education Authority published the Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision, and on 16 January 2025 published Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 for Primary, Special and Post Primary Schools (including Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools). Within the actions for the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Area, the Education Authority included the following as a short term workstream:

Lower Larne Lough Area Controlled Primary Provision	Background / Engagement	
	The Education Authority is proposing to review controlled 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 Education Authority is and will continue to engage with the Boards of Governors on primary school provision in the area.	
	Statutory Duty / Ministerial Priority	Key Theme(s)
	Primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two year-groups	Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways Maximise resources and sustainability

At the meeting of the Education Authority's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee on 5 May 2026, it was agreed to publish Development Proposal 759 that:

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

1.3 Nature of the Education Authority's Recommendation

The Education Authority has met with the Board of Governors and Principal to discuss all options and, based on available information, the Education Authority is taking forward a development proposal for the discontinuance of Ballycarry Primary School.

Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 describes the process regarding the discontinuance of a school. This process requires the publication of a development proposal.

Therefore, as part of the pre-publication consultation on the Development Proposal, the Education Authority sought any objections and/or other comments on the proposed discontinuance of Ballycarry Primary School from the Board of Governors, teaching staff, non-teaching staff and parents of children attending the school, as well as from other schools that may be affected by this proposal.

The pre-publication consultation process and a summary of comments is included in pages 3 to 11 of this Case for Change.

2 BACKGROUND

Ballycarry Primary School is a controlled primary school situated in the village of Ballycarry, County Antrim. The pupils attending the school come from the village and surrounding rural area.

The school has an approved admissions number of 17 pupils and an approved enrolment number of 116 pupils. Ballycarry Primary School currently has 30 pupils enrolled at the school. Over the past number of years, the school has experienced a downturn in enrolment numbers.

Ballycarry Primary School currently operates with 3.4 teachers, including co-principals, with composite classes for Years 1, 2 and 3, Years 4 and 5, and Years 6 and 7.

Table 1, below, details the historical and current enrolment figures.

Table 1: Enrolment Statistics: Ballycarry Primary School								
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Total (Years 1-7)
2018/19	11	4	20	12	11	9	3	70
2019/20	4	11	4	18	12	9	9	67
2020/21	5	4	10	4	17	12	9	61
2021/22	4	7	4	8	4	16	14	57
2022/23	5	5	7	5	9	4	15	50
2023/24	4	5	4	7	5	9	4	38
2024/25	2	4	5	5	7	6	10	39
2025/26	0	2	5	6	5	7	5	30

Over the last eight years, the enrolment has declined from a high of 70 pupils in 2018/19 to the current enrolment of 30 pupils in 2025/26.

Table 2 lists the schools closest to Ballycarry Primary School.

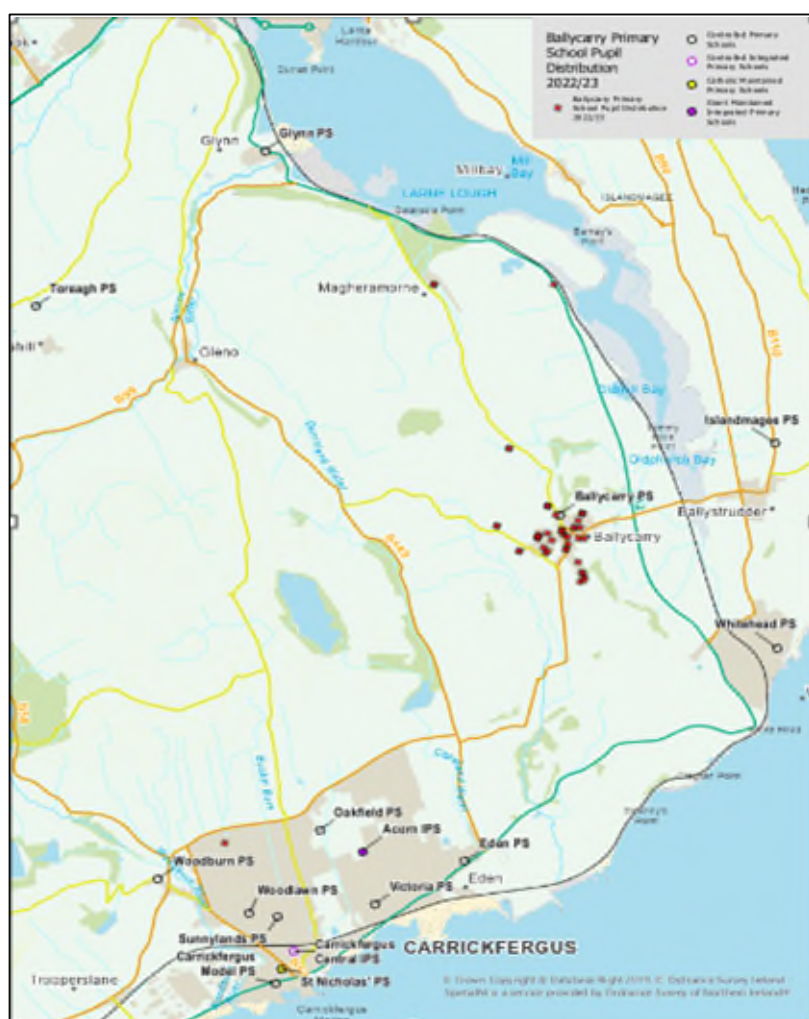
Table 2: Local Schools - Distance from Ballycarry PS					
	Distance (miles) from Ballycarry PS	Sector	Enrolment 2025/26	Approved Enrolment Number 2025/26	Available Places 2025/26
Islandmagee PS	2.5	Controlled	132	145	13
Whitehead PS	3.0	Controlled	319	390	71
Eden PS	3.9	Controlled	194	213	19
Glynn PS	4.7	Controlled	85	103	18
Oakfield PS	4.7	Controlled	237	369	132
Victoria PS	5.3	Controlled	388	575	189
Acorn IPS	5.3	Grant Maintained Integrated	195	203	8
Sunnylands PS	5.7	Controlled	183	290	107
Carrickfergus Model PS	5.9	Controlled	384	406	22
Central IPS, Carrickfergus	5.9	Controlled Integrated	131	175	44
St Nicholas' PS*	5.9	Maintained	120	232	112
Woodburn PS	6.0	Controlled	178	203	25
Woodlawn PS*	6.0	Controlled	124	310	186
Toreagh PS	6.1	Controlled	110	105	0

*schools with specialist provision classes

Table 2 shows that there is capacity within other local schools. The nearest controlled primary schools, Islandmagee Primary School, Whitehead Primary School and Eden Primary School have a total of 103 available places.

Map 2 below shows the location of the nearest primary schools and pupil distribution for Ballycarry Primary School.

Map 2



In consideration of the distance of the local schools, home-to-school transport arrangements will be implemented within transport regulations.

3 SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

The main focus of the Area Planning process is embedded in the ‘Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools’ (Sustainable Schools Policy) first published in 2009 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 in order 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 of Education

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) conducted a follow-up inspection of Ballycarry Primary School in March 2014, the report can be accessed by the link: [ETI Report](#)

The inspection report stated that:

“The quality of education provided by this school is now good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.”

3.2 Stable Enrolment Trends

Ballycarry Primary School has experienced a downturn in pupil numbers over the past number of years, see Table 1 above. In the 2024/25 Department of Education census, the school’s enrolment number was 39 pupils and has subsequently fallen to 30 pupils for September 2025. The current enrolment falls well below the Department of Education’s minimum enrolment threshold for a rural primary school which is 105 pupils.

The continued low enrolment number will provide further challenges in relation to composite classes and finances as there are more than two year groups within a single classroom as the school operates as a three classroom school.

The ETI follow-up inspection of March 2014 noted:

“It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.”

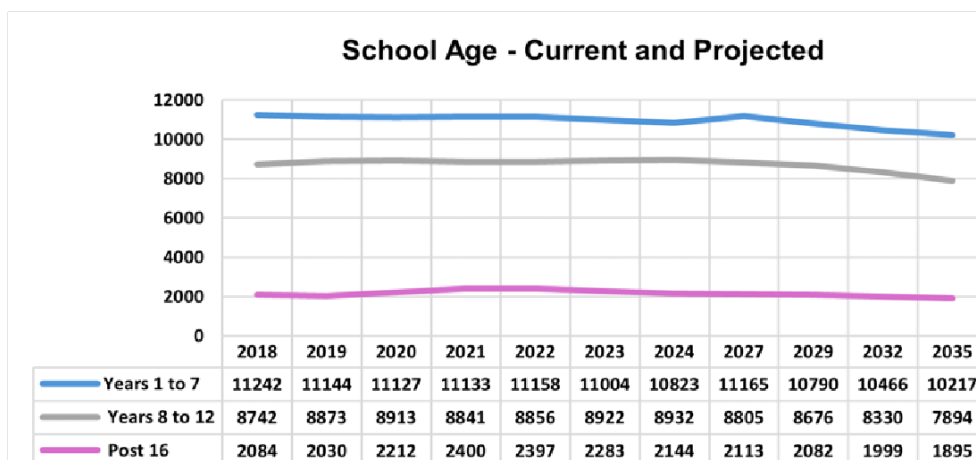
3.2.1 Population Change

Table 3 below shows the live births from 2016 to 2023 in the electoral ward from which the majority of the pupils of Ballycarry Primary School are drawn.

Table 3: Live Births								
Ward	Resident Live Births 2016	Resident Live Births 2017	Resident Live Births 2018	Resident Live Births 2019	Resident Live Births 2020	Resident Live Births 2021	Resident Live Births 2022	Resident Live Births 2023
Ballycarry and Glynn	40	49	47	50	39	37	19	42
Year 1 start	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Ballycarry Primary School Year 1 Admission	4	5	4	2	0	-	-	-

The figures show that while the birth rate is showing a decline in numbers which is reflective in the admission numbers for Ballycarry Primary School, this decline is also reflective of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency projections for the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area, as shown in Graph 1 below. The number of primary school aged children in the borough council area is projected to fall from 11,242 in 2018 to 10,217 at 2035, a projected decline of 1,025 pupils.

Graph 1: Historic, Current and Projected School Age Pupils in Attendance at Primary and Post Primary Schools in the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area



3.3 Sound Financial Position

Ballycarry Primary School does not currently operate within its in-year budget. The school had a deficit carryover of **-£409,833** at 31 March 2025. The school's three year financial plan 2025-28 shows a projected deficit of **-£917,664** at the end of the 2028 financial year.

The school has a Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) of 8.6, compared to an average PTR in the primary sector of 22-23.

Table 4: Projected Financial Position – Ballycarry Primary School

Year	Surplus/Deficit
2024/25	-£409,833
2025/26	-£553,804
2026/27	-£732,226
2027/28	-£917,664

3.3.1 Small Schools Support

The Small Schools Support factor is intended to target more resources towards smaller primary schools to facilitate the delivery of the curriculum. The amount to be allocated to eligible schools is determined by the number of pupils in the school. A lump sum equivalent to 1.0 times the salary (inclusive of employee and employer contributions) of a teacher on point UPS 1 of the Teachers' Upper Pay Scale as at October 2017, will be allocated to schools of up to 100 pupils tapering to zero at 300 pupils.

Ballycarry Primary School receives the maximum amount of £60,463 small schools support factor. In addition to this, recurrent savings per annum of £16,420 for principal release days and £6,988 for premises funding could be realised.

Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) Common Funding Formula, the level of funding is determined by pupil numbers. In a declining enrolment it is more challenging to live within the budget allocation.

3.4 Strong Leadership and Management

The ETI report from March 2014 noted the following improvements in the school's leadership and management:

- *"The clear overview of progression, continuity and connections in the children's learning informed by detailed and informative long and medium term planning;*
- *the more focused learning intentions and effective differentiation in the teaching and learning identified more clearly through the teachers short term planning and evaluations;*
- *continuity of support for children identified with additional needs as a result of a more collegial whole staff approach....."*

The focused ETI inspection of Ballycarry Primary School in October 2011 highlighted strengths in the pastoral care.

3.5 Accessibility

The school can be accessed by car and bus. The majority of pupils attending the school are from the local area.

Any home-to-school transport arrangements will be in accordance with current transport regulations.

3.6 Strong Links with the Community

Ballycarry Primary School has wide and varied involvement with the local community. The three ministers of the local churches are school governors and regularly attend school events, leading assemblies and playing a substantial role in supporting the day-to-day life of the school.

The school participates in the outdoor village nativity, providing costumes for the play and decorations for the tree and the school choir attends the church lunch group at Christmas. The school has taken part in the Broadisland Gathering and regularly takes part in events organised by the local Community Association.

The school attends the annual community remembrance service with the children reading out 'The Names of the Fallen' from the village. A wreath is laid by the principal and children. Children distribute gifts to local senior citizens after the school harvest service.

Pupils pay tribute to and remember historical figures from the local community. The General Steele fund is a local fund raised in memory of General Sir James Stuart Steele who went to school in this village and who opened the present school building. Following discussions and negotiations, grants are often made for school events or projects. The school operates a house system named Brice, Orr and Steele, named after three local historical figures.

Ballycarry Primary School has a very motivated group of parents, known as 'The Friends of Ballycarry Primary School', who coordinate events throughout the year that provides many fundraising opportunities. Local businesses have always supported the school in all its endeavours, providing gifts for the children and items for ballots. The school enjoys a positive relationship with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, local playgroups, churches and Salt Factory Sports Summer Scheme.

The school is an accredited Forest School and has attained a Sustrans Silver Level for excellence in sustainable travel.

4 AREA PLANNING IMPACT

The proposal aligns with the key themes of Area Planning. The Area Plan for Northern Ireland 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. It sets out the key priorities and objectives in providing access to a network of sustainable schools for the Education Authority, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectoral bodies in the light of Department of Education policy, in particular the need to raise standards and close the attainment gap through a network of sustainable schools. The focus of the plan is on the best educational interests of children and young people.

Since 2011, statutory planning authorities and school managing authorities have been engaged in implementing the objectives of the Sustainable Schools Policy through Area Planning. The first four objectives are:

- ensure that the excellent quality of education available to some young people is made available to all, in both urban and rural settings, in accessible, modern, fit-for-purpose accommodation;
- improve outcomes for all but, in particular, to provide additional support to those who require it, including those children with special educational needs, to realise their full potential;
- encourage schools to co-operate in sharing best practice to support children with special educational needs and those with other barriers to learning; and
- sustain strong, successful and viable schools, well-led by their governors representing local stakeholders, principals and their staff, to be the centre of the education system, supported by effective administrative and strategic direction.

As detailed above, Area Planning is focused on the Sustainable Schools Policy. The then Education Minister, Michelle McIlveen, in her statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 9 August 2021 set out three over-arching Area Planning priorities to be the core focus of the Strategic Area Plan for 2022-27. The issues to be addressed are:

- Primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two year groups.
- Post-primary schools that are failing to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils in years 8-12.
- Sixth forms with fewer than 100 pupils that cannot offer a full range of courses.

The Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision and Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 for Primary, Special and Post Primary Schools (including Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools), identified the Lower Larne Lough area under the statutory duty/ministerial priority 'Primary pupils being taught in composite classes of no more than two year groups'.

As a result, the Education Authority engaged with the Board of Governors of Ballycarry Primary School and discussions focused on the current position of the school and sustainable options for the school. Discussion focused on the options below:

4.1 Do Nothing

This option would result in no change to the current provision. In consideration of Operational Plan 2: 2024-26, the downturn in enrolment numbers and the school's financial position, do nothing is not an option.

4.2 Shared Education

Ballycarry Primary School is not currently involved in any shared education partnership.

As the Education Authority has a duty to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education, the Education Authority discussed the potential for sustainable shared education.

However, collaboration would not improve the sustainability of Ballycarry Primary School.

4.3 Transformation to Integrated Status

The Education Authority discussed the potential of transforming to integrated status with the governors of Ballycarry Primary School. The Education Authority does not consider that transformation for Ballycarry Primary School would provide for a sustainable school.

The Education Authority advised the school of the options for the Board of Governors should it wish to independently explore transformation to integrated status.

4.4 Federation

A federation would involve local schools coming together either through a collaboration or federation. A collaboration would provide each school with its own governing body, own budget, with representatives on a joint committee. The schools would share a principal, common goals and joint committee recommendations but it would be up to the individual governing bodies to authorise decisions/plans. A federation would provide for a single governing body with common goals and, while each school would receive individual budgets, these could be used to pool budgets across the schools in the federation.

However, a federation would not improve the sustainability of Ballycarry Primary School.

4.5 Amalgamation

An amalgamation is when two or more schools close and a new school is established on a single site – the location of the new school is usually based on where the largest cohort of pupils reside along with the potential for reusing one of the existing school sites.

DE policy (Circular 2018/15) advises that amalgamating schools should be of a similar size. The circular states that: *'....it should also be helpful to those who are considering a DP to amalgamate two or more schools of a similar size to create a new school regardless of management type'*.

An amalgamation for Ballycarry Primary School would not satisfy the requirements of the Department of Education's policy. An amalgamation was not a suitable option for Ballycarry Primary School. Table 2, above, identifies the schools within the area where there are available places with the potential to accommodate pupils from Ballycarry Primary School in the event of discontinuance of education at Ballycarry Primary School.

4.6 Discontinue

In considering the future of Ballycarry Primary School, the above options would not provide for a sustainable provision for the school.

There are a number of alternative controlled primary schools in the area with available places. The next closest controlled schools, Islandmagee Primary School 2.5 miles away, Whitehead Primary School 3 miles away, and Eden Primary School 3.9 miles away have a total 103 available places. Ballycarry PS currently has an enrolment of 30 pupils. Table 2, above, provides a list of schools within the wider area with available places.

In discussions with the Board of Governors, 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 do not provide a sustainable provision for pupils currently attending Ballycarry Primary School.

In consideration of the options above, the Education Authority recommends that Ballycarry Primary School discontinues with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.

5 RATIONALE FOR PROPOSAL

Ballycarry Primary School's enrolment has dropped considerably over the past number of years, from 70 pupils in 2018/19 to 30 pupils in the current school year. The school received no applications during the 2026/27 admissions process.

The school was identified in the Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision and Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 for Primary, Special and Post Primary Schools (including Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools) *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)'*.

Over the last number of years, the school has experienced a larger number of pupils transferring to post-primary than the number of pupils being admitted into Year 1, resulting in the continued decline in enrolment numbers. 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 Special Educational Needs realise their full potential. Pupils with Special Educational Needs will continue to have their special educational requirements met within local schools, supported by Children and Young People Services.

Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 places a statutory duty on the Education Authority to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and designing and delivering public services. The areas from which Ballycarry Primary School attracts pupils is, according to the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, defined as rural. The discontinuance of Ballycarry Primary School will have an impact on the local area. The provision of home-to-school transport will provide for the safe transportation of pupils from the area to their nearest school. Transport will be provided for children who meet the eligibility criteria.

6 EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

The aim of Area Planning is to ensure that all primary and post-primary pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their educational needs in a school that is educationally and financially viable and sustainable.

Area Planning contributes to school improvement through evaluating the best use of resources within the system to ensure that available provision can meet the needs of all pupils. The educational experience of pupils is linked to the resources available to the school, which are in turn reflective of admissions and enrolment numbers. Ballycarry Primary School has a declining enrolment and has FTE of 3.4 teachers. This means that resources available to the school are also declining.

In order to implement the Northern Ireland Curriculum, a school should have, in each year group, sufficient pupils to ensure appropriate personal development and mutual understanding between children. Where a school has a falling enrolment, it can be challenging to attract sufficient resources to ensure a high-quality educational experience.

6.1 Composite Classes

For a quality educational experience, the Sustainable Schools Policy recommends “*no more than two composite year groups in a single classroom at primary school level*”. This has been identified by the Minister of Education as one of the ministerial priorities for the Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision and Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 for Primary, Special and Post Primary Schools (including Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools) ‘*to address primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two year-groups.*’

Ballycarry Primary School operates three composite year groups in a single classroom as outlined in Table 5, below.

Table 5: Composite Classes – Ballycarry Primary School		
	Year Group	Number of Pupils
Classroom 1	Year 1	0
	Year 2	2
	Year 3	4
Classroom 2	Year 4	7
	Year 5	5
Classroom 3	Year 6	7
	Year 7	5

The Education and Training Inspectorate also identifies difficulties in ‘*two composite year groups in a single classroom*’. The **Chief Inspector’s Report 2014-16**¹ 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**² which noted that too many schools are too small to provide adequately

¹ Chief Inspector’s Report 2014-2016 www.etini.gov.uk/publications/chief-inspectors-report-2014-2016

² Chief Inspector’s Report 2016-2019 www.etini.gov.uk/publications/chief-inspectors-report-2016-2018

for their pupils, particularly primary schools with more than two year groups in composite classes.

The Education Authority, in proposing the discontinuance of Ballycarry Primary School, will provide places for pupils in their nearest suitable school thereby ensuring access to the Northern Ireland Curriculum in a more sustainable primary school. It would mean the relocated Ballycarry Primary School pupils would be taught in classes with an adequate number of peers and this will allow for improved social interaction between the pupils. The Sustainable Schools Policy has set 105 as a minimum enrolment for sustainability; this number equates to an admissions number of 15 per year group. In a systematic review of international research on the impact of class size on academic achievement, 2018, **Campbell Collaboration**³ found that the evidence suggests at best a small effect on reading achievement and a negative, but statistically insignificant, effect on mathematics, for smaller classes.

6.2 Curricular Provision

The Northern Ireland Curriculum has at its heart the development of a range of skills and personal capabilities.

The named Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities skills in the Northern Ireland Curriculum are:

- Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making
- Self-Management
- Working with Others
- Managing Information
- Being Creative.

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.

Curriculum guidance from CCEA⁴ 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.

While the pupils in Ballycarry Primary School have opportunities to work with pupils from their own and other age groups, they are limited in accessing the full range of learning opportunities. It is very difficult for pupils to develop an understanding of group dynamics without the experience of working in a range of different peer groups and different roles within those groups. In extremely small class groups, it is very challenging to ensure that pupils can access these opportunities and even then, they will be limited to a small number of children with whom to work, even when cross-age interactions are considered. Working in larger and different groups in primary school is an important foundation for some children as they progress to

³ Campbell Collaboration Filges, T. et al (2018) Small class sizes for improving student achievement in primary and secondary schools: a systematic review. Campbell Systematic Reviews 14:1:4 1-108
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.4073/csr.2018.10>

⁴ 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

larger post primary settings. This is further noted, in the Sustainable Schools Policy, which outlines that smaller numbers of children in each year group limits the opportunities for children to work alongside their peers.

6.3 Extra-curricular activities

The Sustainable Schools Policy outlines that smaller numbers of pupils in each year group offers fewer opportunities for extra-curricular activities. Access to a full range of extra-curricular activities in a smaller school may only be achieved through the members of staff taking on multiple commitments in addition to teaching composite groups during the school day. Due to the falling enrolment in the school, the Education Authority does not deem it reasonable or sustainable for the small number of staff in the school to maintain curricular and extra-curricular provision which would be equitable to those offered by larger schools.

6.4 Challenges for Staff

Ballycarry Primary School is led by two teaching co-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 would be more widely distributed amongst the staff team.

The Sustainable Schools Policy highlights that a small school will also potentially have a smaller range of teacher specialisms, for example, music. Supporting areas of learning in which there is no specialist lead in the school can place additional pressure on the teaching staff. The Education Authority is also mindful of the professional isolation some teachers experience in small schools. The Sustainable Schools Policy notes that *'Teachers in small schools also face problems of having less scope for professional interaction and mutual support.'* The Department of Education strategy **Learning Leaders**⁵ highlights the value of collaborative planning of learning and teaching, and stresses the importance of ensuring opportunities for professional dialogue; the Sustainable Schools Policy highlights that these opportunities are significantly reduced in small schools.

6.5 Educational Provision

The Education Authority recognises the generational learning and teaching provided by Ballycarry Primary School. However, the Education Authority 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. In proposing the discontinuance of Ballycarry Primary School, the pupils will have access to high quality learning and teaching in their nearest suitable school. Pupils from Ballycarry Primary School who have special educational requirements will continue to have these needs met within the local schools and supported through the Education Authority's Children and Young People's Service.

⁵ Learning Leaders www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/strategy-document-english.pdf

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The proposal is for the discontinuance of Ballycarry Primary School with effect from 31 August 2027. There will be a cost saving in the recurrent costs of operating a school.

<i>Finance</i>	The operation cost of Ballycarry Primary School will be a cost saving inclusive of a saving of £60,463 small schools support factor.
<i>Staffing</i>	The teaching staff is afforded employment protection under the School Re-organisation Agreement 2013/2 for two years. The non-teaching staff will be afforded employment protection for one year under the Collective Agreement (JNC Circular 224). The Education Authority will meet with staff to discuss options should the development proposal be approved and an action plan implemented for the discontinuance of the school.
<i>Transport</i>	Any transport arrangements will be in accordance with transport regulations.
<i>Accommodation</i>	No additional accommodation needs.

8 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (IF THE PROPOSAL IS APPROVED)

The proposal is being brought forward under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. The implementation date for the proposal is 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter. The timetable, pending approval from the Education Committee, for the consultation process is:

Development Proposal Timeline	
Proposal: Ballycarry Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter	Proposed Timeline
Consultation with Governors, Staff, Parents – (8 week period plus an additional week for mid-term) Consultation Responses to be forwarded to the Education Authority Responses will be considered, and a Case for Change document compiled before submission to the Education Authority's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee. A deputation may request to attend the Strategic Planning and Policy Committee or the Board meeting in accordance with the Education Authority's Standing Orders.	20 January 2026 – 24 March 2026
Consultation with other affected schools - (8 week period plus an additional week for mid-term) Consultation Responses to be forwarded to the Education Authority Responses will be considered and a Case for Change document compiled before submission to the Education Authority's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee	20 January 2026 – 24 March 2026
Strategic Planning and Policy Committee to seek Approval to Publish Case for Change to be taken to the 5 May 2026 Education Authority's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee for consideration If approved to publish, a Development Proposal will be published in the local newspapers which begins the start of a two-month statutory objection period	5 May 2026
Statutory Objection Period (2 months) Objections/comments to be forwarded to the Department of Education	May 2026 – July 2026
Await Ministerial/Department of Education Decision	October 2026
Implementation If approved, the Development Proposal would take effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter	

Appendix C – DE Policy Team input

Finance Return to APPT

Please see Financial Monitoring Teams' comments on **DP 759**:

Proposal: To Close this School

301-0809 Ballycarry Primary School

The school's provisional Deficit position as of 31 March 2026 is **-£530,209**.

The school's Deficit in the previous year, up to 31 March 2025 was **-£409,833**.

Based on the Interim Common Funding Formula (CFF) allocations, the school received a total CFF budget of **£229,145** in the 2026-27 financial year for **30¹** FTE pupils, which generates a per capita of **£7,638**. The average for all primary schools is **£4,426**.

The total Free School Meals Entitlement for the school is **7⁶** pupils, which represents **23.33%** 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.

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

⁶ 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).

Factor	2026-27 £	2025-26 £	2024-25 £
Premises Area	6,988	6,988	6,988
Premises FTE	2,670	3,421	3,298
TSN – Social Deprivation	4,295	5,522	6,136
TSN – Additional Social Deprivation	222	277	292
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	11,423	11,037	14,997
Pupil AWPU	103,773	130,324	115,696
Children Looked After	4,804	4,641	0

Total School Funding	229,145	251,093	227,655
-----------------------------	----------------	----------------	----------------

Pupil FTE (no.)	30.00	39.00	38.00
Per Capita	£7,638	£6,438	£5,991

Composite Directorate response, including nil returns by **12th June 2026** to developmentproposal.inputs@education-ni.gov.uk and **Roy Livingstone**.

TITLE & Proposal	DP 759– To discontinue Ballycarry Primary School with effect from 31 August 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter.
Ref Number:	DP 759 – School Reference Number 301-0809
Education Authority Recommendation:	The Education Authority, as the proposer, supports Development Proposal 759 to discontinue Ballycarry Primary

	School with effect from 31 August 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter. Enrolments: Ballycarry Primary School has an approved admissions number of 17 pupils and an approved enrolment number of 116 pupils. Over the last eight years, the enrolment has declined from a high of 70 pupils in 2018/19 to the current enrolment of 30 pupils in 2025/26. In the 2024/25 Department of Education census, the school's enrolment number was 39 pupils and has subsequently fallen to 30 pupils for September 2025. The current enrolment falls well below the Department of Education's minimum enrolment threshold for a rural primary school which is 105 pupils. The continued low enrolment number will provide further challenges in relation to composite classes and finances as there are more than two year groups within a single classroom as the school operates as a three classroom school, with composite classes for Years 1, 2 and 3, Years 4 and 5, and Years 6 and 7. Ballycarry Primary School currently operates with 3.4 teachers, including co-principals,
--	---

EWD INPUT:

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.	
TNT Use Only	
Have any redundancies been effected at the school?	Yes. 1 in 2012, 1 in 2013 and 1 in 2019.

Pupil Support Team Input

We note that there are three children looked after attending the school.

It is widely accepted that children looked after are some of the most vulnerable children in our society, with many suffering trauma, neglect, and/or abuse. They often have very complex needs, including cognitive difficulties linked to developmental trauma. A lot of times, given a high frequency of placement moves, school is a key element of stability for them and presents the opportunity to form key relationships with peers and members of staff in a warm, welcoming, and nurturing environment.

Therefore, it is of vital importance to consider the specific needs of children looked after in any significant changes to their school environment and provide targeted and timely support to manage their needs. For example, the DE/DoH A Life Deserved Strategy has a central principle of ensuring stability is prioritised for children looked after, both in terms of their home and school placements.'

TRANSPORT AND FOOD IN SCHOOLS INPUT TO DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL (DP)

DP Title & Number: DP 759 - Ballycarry Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Response due date: 12 June 2026

Transport and Food in Schools Input:

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.

SEN Directorate Input to Development Proposal (DP) Submission

SEN Directorate Input

It is noted in the Case for Change (CfC) that in consideration of the options, the Education Authority proposes that Ballycarry Primary School discontinues with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter. It is also noted that in 2025/26 there were 30 pupils in the school and there are currently no pupils enrolled in Year 1. The CfC also notes that Ballycarry Primary School has an enrolment of less than 40 pupils, schools with an enrolment of less than 40 pupils are not being considered for Specialist Provision.

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 Practice⁷, 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 advises that ‘Pupils from Ballycarry Primary School who have special educational requirements will continue to have these needs met within the local schools and supported through the Education Authority’s Children and Young People’s Service’.

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.

⁷ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/special-educational-needs-code-practice>

Appendix D – ETI Input

ETI Development Proposal Commentary Paper

Date of last ETI report: September 2019

DP: 759

Web link: [Report of an Inspection \(Involving Action Short of Strike\) in September 2019](#)

Date⁸: 11 June 2026

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

Based on a district inspector visit in June 2026,

Enrolment:

- there are currently 28 children enrolled across three composite classes;
- there are no year 1 children currently and none expected to enrol in September 2026;
- there are five children altogether (two in year 2 and three in year 3 – all girls) in the year 2/3 composite class and the staff suspect that the year 3 girls will move to another school at the end of this school year;
- there are 11 children (six in year 4 and five in year 5) in the year 4/5 composite class;
- in the year 6/7 composite class, there are 12 children, with the five year 7 children leaving at the end of June;
- the staff expect the current year 6 children to stay for year 7; and
- the total enrolment anticipated for September 2026, as long as no other children leave, is 20 children.

Staffing:

- the long-term principal is on a phased retirement and in school two days per week;
- on the other three days, a full-time co-principal/SENCo provides leadership; and
- there are two other class teachers.

⁸ 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 for any new inspection reports that may have published after this date.

Provision and standards:

- lessons in the three composite classes were observed and all were effective;
- the quality of the work in the children's books is good and there is evidence of regular marking for improvement by the teachers;
- with the caveat that the sample size is very small, the evidence of standardised testing presented by the school indicates that the children are achieving well and in line with, or above, expectation; and
- while special events, after-school clubs and educational visits are continuing, there is a concern that the small classes and peer groups will give the children limited opportunities for peer interaction.

School improvement:

- the co-principals and two other teachers have maintained a one-year school development plan and key action plans for embedding the impact of professional learning (on the science of learning), in line with TransformEd priorities, in the interests of the children; and reviewing the school's values, in line with the Empowering Improvement Inspection Framework.

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

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.

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

The proposed closure will give children access to wider educational opportunities, alongside their peers and not in composite classes.

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

The staff are planning for 2026-27. If the decision is made to close the school, it must be done in a timely fashion so that parents can be supported to find a placement for their child.

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.	✓	.	
	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.		No – three teachers, as well as the principal for two days per week, the principal, are currently employed and the current FTE is 2.8 teachers.	
	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.			✓
	1.7 The range of curricular and extra-curricular activities available for children including career guidance, physical education, music, art, drama and science.	✓		
	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.		While the classrooms are maintained well and new outdoor equipment has been provided, the buildings require significant work both outside and inside.	
	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.		No	

6. Summary of impact of the proposal

The proposed closure will give children access to wider educational opportunities, alongside their peers and not in composite classes. The closest alternative primary schools include Whitehead (3 miles away), Islandmagee (4.5 miles away) and Glynn (4.7 miles away), so distances are not an insurmountable barrier. It will be crucial to minimise disruption by securing places in alternative local primary schools in good time for all of the children affected by the proposed closure.

Appendix E – CSSC Response



Controlled Schools' Support Council
2nd floor, Main Building
Stranmillis University College
Belfast, BT9 5DY
T: 028 9531 3030
E info@csscni.org.uk

23 June 2026

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Development Proposal 759 Ballycarry Primary School

The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) notes the Education Authority's proposal to discontinue Ballycarry Primary School with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter. CSSC has engaged with Ballycarry Primary School and controlled primary schools within the surrounding area and welcomes the opportunity to make representation in the interests of the controlled sector.

CSSC acknowledges the strong support expressed throughout the consultation process for the continuation of Ballycarry Primary School, particularly in relation to the quality of education provided, the nurturing environment for pupils and the important role the school plays within the local community. Council recognises the contribution the school has made to generations of children and families and its significance within the rural village context.

CSSC also notes that respondents raised a number of factors which they believe have contributed to declining enrolment, including the absence of nursery provision and specialist provision classes. Council acknowledges the efforts of the Principal and Board of Governors to sustain and develop the school in challenging circumstances.

In considering this proposal, CSSC has taken account of the Sustainable Schools Policy which emphasises the importance of schools being educationally and financially viable, delivering an appropriate curriculum and operating within recommended class structures. Council notes that Ballycarry Primary School, with a very low enrolment and composite classes across more than two-year groups, falls significantly below the sustainability thresholds set out in policy for primary provision.

CSSC further notes that the Education Authority has identified alternative controlled primary provision within a reasonable catchment area, with sufficient capacity to accommodate pupils currently enrolled at Ballycarry Primary School.

While the discontinuation of any long-established school is regrettable, particularly where there is clear community attachment, CSSC recognises the importance of ensuring that controlled provision across an area is sustainable and capable of meeting the needs of all pupils into the future.

CSSC would welcome timely consideration of this proposal in order to minimise uncertainty for pupils, parents, staff and the wider community.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Mark Baker', with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Mark Baker

Chief Executive

Appendix F - Statutory Objection Period Responses Summary

1. Former Teacher	Objects to the proposal. The case for retaining Ballycarry PS highlights significant geographical, educational, and community factors. The village's steep access roads and limited gritting often isolate it in winter, preventing many children from attending local schooling and forcing them elsewhere, where they may miss out on activities and struggle academically; by contrast, those who attend Ballycarry often thrive, achieving strong academic results and secondary school success. The school's small size and composite classes foster close teacher-pupil relationships, early identification of needs, and a supportive, nurturing environment with minimal behavioural issues. It also delivers a rich, locally grounded curriculum, including Ulster Scots and village heritage, strengthening identity and community ties. Concerns are raised about accessibility to alternative schools, particularly for families without transport, and the loss of independence for children who currently walk or cycle. With ongoing housing development and a growing population, there is a clear demand for school places that nearby schools cannot meet. The school also plays a central role in community life, supported by parents and residents, and its closure is seen as a potential loss of vital educational provision, social cohesion, and future capacity in the area.
2. Parent	Objects to the proposal, emphasising its vital role in supporting children's emotional wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable pupils such as those in foster care and those with additional needs. Drawing on personal experience, they highlight the school's exceptional, inclusive teaching, which has enabled their children to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally despite challenges such as hearing impairments and medical conditions. The school's nurturing environment, individualised support, and strong staff commitment have helped build confidence, independence, and successful transitions to secondary education. The close proximity of the school also promotes daily routines, physical wellbeing, and independence for pupils, while fostering a strong sense of community among families. Closing the school would not only disrupt education but also remove a crucial support network, with potentially lasting negative impacts on vulnerable children and the wider community.
3. Teacher	Objects to the proposal. Ballycarry PS delivers a high standard of education, with strong academic outcomes and a wide range of extracurricular opportunities, reflected in many former pupils achieving leadership roles such as Head Boy or Head Girl in post-primary schools. The school consistently attains above average results in English and Mathematics and provides a safe, nurturing environment with excellent support for children with additional needs. It is a central part of the village community, actively participating in local events and fostering strong connections. Many pupils can travel to school independently by walking, cycling, or scooting an achievement recognised through national awards. Concerns are raised that access to alternative schools would pose significant challenges for some families.
4. Journalist	Ballycarry PS should stay open. Here's why-the numbers add up. No fewer than 14 potential P1 pupils are queueing up at the playground gates with more in the pipeline. The facility is a vital cog in the cocktail which makes a living, vibrant diverse community. In a lifetime in journalism I have rarely an issue which has engendered such passion and support in the village.

5. Grandparent	Objects to the proposal, arguing that it meets or exceeds nearly all Sustainable Schools Policy criteria, particularly in delivering high-quality education, strong leadership, accessibility, and deep community links, while questioning the accuracy of enrolment and financial assessments. They criticise the consultation process as inadequate and biased, suggesting decisions were predetermined and that the Education Authority has contributed to enrolment issues by denying a nursery unit. Evidence is presented of excellent educational outcomes, including above-average test scores, strong extracurricular provision, and pupils frequently progressing to leadership roles in secondary schools. The school is described as exceptionally well managed, inclusive, and responsive to individual needs, with small class sizes enabling tailored support and strong relationships. Its central location allows easy access, promotes sustainability, and supports pupils' wellbeing, while closure would negatively impact children especially those with additional needs and disrupt established support systems. The school's strong community integration and the village's growing population are highlighted as further reasons to retain it and that closure would be short-sighted, harmful, and unjustified.
6. Grandparent	Express strong concern about the potential closure of the Ballycarry PS and to urge that it remains open. The school is widely recognised for its dedicated staff, who provide exceptional support, nurture pupils' confidence, and ensure every child thrives academically, socially, and emotionally. Research, including Professor Carl Bagley's 2025 Queen's University Belfast study, highlights the significant value of small rural schools, noting their strong community ties, ability to meet individual pupil needs, and the benefits of smaller class sizes, while also acknowledging that such schools often face disproportionate closure risks. The school is an important part of the community, and its loss would have lasting negative impacts on children and families, including future pupils such as my grandchild due in 2026.
7. Former Pupil	Objects to the proposed closure of Ballycarry PS. Drawing on both personal experience and the achievements of former pupils asserts the school has a long standing record of delivering high quality education, enabling students to succeed academically and progress to further and higher education and a range of professional careers. This success is supported by small class sizes, dedicated staff, and a nurturing environment that promotes wellbeing and strong academic outcomes. States that the lower enrolment is largely due to limited local nursery provision. The school is financially stable and located within a growing village with increasing numbers of young families. It is well-led, supported by an active community, and provides an accessible, inclusive setting, particularly benefiting children with additional needs. Closure would place unnecessary strain on families, increase travel risks, disrupt staff and pupils, and weaken the social fabric of the village. Rather than closing, the school should be supported and promoted as a sustainable and vital community asset.
8. Grandparents and Business owners	Lifelong residents, local business owners, and grandparents of children who have attended Ballycarry PS . Expresses strong objection to its proposed closure. The school has been central to our family across generations, providing stability, particularly for vulnerable children, and playing an irreplaceable role in the community. Believes the school clearly meets the SSP criteria, delivering high-quality education, strong leadership, financial stability, accessibility, and deep community integration. The only cited weakness is enrolment trends and has been artificially created by the EA through refusal of preschool and specialist

	provision, undermining the school's natural growth. As the heart of the village, its closure would cause significant and lasting damage to families, local life, and community cohesion; therefore, we firmly reject the proposal and call for it to be reconsidered with fairness and genuine regard for the community it serves.
9. Parent	Objects to the proposal, highlighting the school's consistently high standards of education and strong pastoral care. All my children thrived at the school, achieving excellent transfer test results, reflecting the high quality of teaching and encouragement to reach full potential. The small school environment ensures every child is known, valued, and supported, which is particularly important for confidence and mental wellbeing. This is especially evident in my son with ASD and ADHD, who has been successfully supported without the need for intensive interventions, benefiting from personalised teaching and close collaboration between staff and parents. The school also plays a vital role within the local community, fostering strong connections and a sense of belonging, and its potential closure exacerbates ongoing uncertainty and would be a significant loss to both families and the wider village.
10. Parent	Objects to the proposal. The key concerns raised centre on both the process and substance of the proposed closure of Ballycarry PS. The consultation is viewed as flawed, with inadequate notice, limited accessibility, reliance on outdated evidence, and a strong perception that the outcome was predetermined, undermining trust and meaningful parental engagement. The financial case for closure is challenged as misleading and influenced by prior EA decisions that constrained the school's growth, including the refusal of a nursery unit and SPIM provision despite clear demand, alongside capital investments that contradict closure plans. The school is presented as delivering high-quality education, strong leadership, excellent pastoral care, and above-average academic outcomes, while being highly accessible and deeply embedded in the local community. Concerns are also raised about the negative impact closure would have on pupils' wellbeing, particularly vulnerable children, as well as on community cohesion and future demand given local development. Finally, there are concerns about whether equality obligations have been properly met, particularly in relation to the school's Ulster Scots and controlled sector context.
11. Parent	Same as point 10.
12. MLA	Objects to the proposal and raises strong concerns that the proposed closure of Ballycarry PS fails to properly consider its educational quality, community value, and the impact on families. It argues that the consultation process was inadequate, poorly timed, and appeared predetermined, relying on outdated evidence and including inaccurate claims about the school's provision. The financial case is challenged as misleading, highlighting how previous EA decisions such as refusing a nursery unit and specialist provision have limited enrolment growth, while recent capital investment contradicts the rationale for closure. The school is described as delivering high-quality education, strong leadership, excellent pastoral care, and above-average academic outcomes, while being highly accessible and deeply embedded in the local community. The closure is seen as likely to harm pupil wellbeing, place additional burdens on families, weaken community cohesion, and threaten the long-term sustainability of the village, with insufficient consideration given to equality impacts.

13. Resident	Objects to the proposal and highlights serious concerns about the proposed closure of the school, emphasising the significant negative impact it would have on pupils' wellbeing, family life, and the wider community. The school is valued for its nurturing environment, providing emotional stability, strong relationships, and a sense of belonging that would be disrupted if children were moved to unfamiliar settings, potentially harming their mental health. Practical issues are also raised, including the lack of safe and accessible transport to alternative schools, with long and hazardous travel routes creating barriers to attendance for many families. Additionally, nearby schools already face larger class sizes and may not be equipped to support all pupils' needs, risking a decline in educational quality. Beyond education, the school is seen as central to community life, supporting local cohesion, sustaining village identity, and enabling families to remain.
14. Parent/Former pupil	Objects to the proposed closure of Ballycarry PS, emphasising its vital role at the heart of the village across generations and the significant negative impact closure would have on pupils, families, and the wider community. Key concerns include the loss of a close-knit, supportive environment that fosters strong relationships and community cohesion, despite the school's consistently high academic standards and successful progression of pupils. Argues that enrolment figures are artificially suppressed due to the long-standing refusal to approve a nursery unit, limiting growth potential rather than reflecting true demand. It also highlights the school's stable financial management, strong leadership, accessibility, and central role in community life. Overall, the proposal is seen as failing to recognise the school's educational quality, sustainability potential, and broader social value, and urges the EA to reconsider the decision.
15. Parent	Strongly opposes the proposed closure of Ballycarry PS, arguing that the school meets most Sustainable Schools policy criteria particularly in educational quality, leadership, accessibility, community links, and overall value to pupils. Concerns about enrolment and finances are attributed largely to mismanagement by the EA. Criticises the consultation process as inadequate, poorly timed, and lacking transparency, and highlights inconsistencies and inaccuracies within the proposal. A central argument is that EA decisions such as refusing a nursery unit and specialist provision, while simultaneously investing in school upgrades have hindered the school's growth and contributed to its current position. Emphasises the school's strong academic outcomes, high-quality pastoral care, small class benefits, and extensive extracurricular and community engagement, alongside its importance to the local village and future demand due to population growth. Concludes that closure would harm children's wellbeing, reduce parental choice, and damage the community, urging the Minister to reject the proposal and instead support the school's development.
16. Pupil	Expresses love for Ballycarry PS and asks for it to remain open. Highlights the kindness and support of the teachers, particularly in helping with learning, and describes the enjoyment from activities like gardening club, outdoor learning, and PE. Values the school's small, friendly environment where everyone is included and bullying is not tolerated. Upset about the proposed closure, does not want to move to a larger school, and fears it would not feel the same, urging decision-makers to keep the school open.

17. Resident	Strongly objects to the proposed closure of Ballycarry Ps by emphasising its deep historical, cultural, and community significance. Highlights the school's long-standing presence dating back over two centuries and its role in preserving the Ulster Scots heritage and identity of the area. Argues that closure would not only disrupt children's education but also undermine the heart of the community, weaken local identity, and damage cultural traditions that are actively taught in the school. Concerns are raised about future population growth and housing developments, suggesting that enrolment may increase if given time. Points to environmental impacts and loss of accessibility if children must travel further. Overall, the objection stresses that the school is vital to community cohesion, heritage preservation, and rural sustainability, and should be supported rather than closed.
18. Parent	Objects to the proposal. Has two children at the school and believes the education is of the highest standard, with love care and support from each teacher. Small classes allow for individual attention and composite classes allow children to work at a higher level if they are ready. The school is the heart of the community. Closing the school would have an impact in transport costs and those without access to a car would be stuck. The village continues to grow with other local schools near capacity. A lot of work was put into the pre school to be shut down and asks why the EA refused a SEN unit. Feels more time should have been afforded to parent to process the information during the process and that a face to face meeting with the Minister would have been more appropriate.
19. Grandparent	Strongly objects to the proposed closure of Ballycarry PS, highlighting serious concerns about accessibility, safety, and community impact. They argue that the nearest alternative schools are difficult and dangerous to reach without transport. Emphasise how the school provides a welcoming, supportive environment where children thrive academically and emotionally, with caring staff and valuable extracurricular activities. The school is also described as a central part of village life, contributing to community events and traditions. Closing the school would negatively affect current and future pupils but also the wider community and its sense of identity.
20. Community Trust	On behalf of a community trust, strongly objects to the proposed closure of Ballycarry PS, emphasising its valuable role in supporting the local community and expressing appreciation for the school's staff and contributions. They raise serious concerns about the consultation process, suggesting it lacks transparency and may be predetermined, particularly due to limited engagement, short notice, and reliance on outdated inspection data. Highlights previous decisions by the EA such as refusing a nursery and special needs provision which are believed to have hindered the school's growth. Argues that closing the school would have a devastating impact on the village, especially given ongoing population growth, and would result in a significant loss of heritage, identity, and community cohesion, urging instead that the school be supported and allowed to develop.
21. Residents	Strongly objects to the proposed closure of Ballycarry PS, arguing that it is a high-performing, community-centred rural school that remains viable and sustainable. Highlights the school's strong academic outcomes, excellent leadership, and unique learning environment, including forest school provision, as key strengths. They contend that declining enrolment has been artificially caused by EA decisions, specifically the refusal to provide a nursery unit and specialist provision rather than a lack of local demand, which is expected to grow due to

	ongoing housing developments and rising birth rates. Concerns are also raised about accessibility, noting the absence of public transport and the increased burden and environmental impact of travelling to alternative schools. The school is described as vital to community life, cultural heritage, and family wellbeing. Argue that the EA has not fully applied rural school protections or explored alternative solutions, and they urge withdrawal of the proposal in favour of measures to restore enrolment and support the school's future.
22. Church	Objects to the proposed closure of Ballycarry PS, arguing that the consultation process appears to have been a formality, with community concerns acknowledged but ultimately dismissed. They contend that the school's challenges stem from a long-term lack of investment and support from the EA and the Department, rather than any failure of the school itself. The objection questions why alternative options, such as developing the site for Special Educational Needs provision, were not explored in partnership with governors and the local community. Concerns are also raised about inconsistencies in enrolment and vacancy data for neighbouring schools, the ability of those schools to accommodate Ballycarry pupils, and what is seen as poor strategic planning in the area. Believes the closure will reduce parental choice, negatively affect pupils moving from a small school environment, and have a damaging impact on Ballycarry's community identity, heritage, and village life.
23. Governor	Objects to the proposed closure, emphasising the school's deep historical and community significance. He argues that Ballycarry PS provides a high-quality education through dedicated staff who know and support each child individually, creating a nurturing environment that larger schools may struggle to replicate. While acknowledging low enrolment numbers, he contends that pupil numbers alone should not determine the school's future, particularly as the building remains in good condition and well equipped. Raises concerns about the negative impact on children who would be forced to move schools, the difficult choices facing parents, and the loss of a valued community hub. Urges decision-makers to look beyond financial and numerical considerations and recognise the long-term social, educational, and community costs of closing a school that has served Ballycarry for generations.
24. Parent	Objects to the proposed closure, highlighting the school's central role in the local community and its contribution to fostering strong relationships, values, and a sense of belonging. Argues that enrolment figures alone do not reflect the school's value, noting that pupil numbers have been adversely affected by decisions outside the school's control, including the refusal of a SPiM and nursery provision. Emphasises that the school remains financially stable, well maintained, and suitably equipped for modern education. The objection urges decision-makers to consider the wider social and community benefits of the school, stressing that its impact extends beyond academic outcomes and plays an important role in supporting families, community cohesion, and the development of future generations.

Appendix G – Snapshot of provision

Table 1 – Ballycarry Primary School Snapshot - All Primary School Provision - 5 mile radius

Ballycarry Primary School - All Primary School Provision - 5 mile radius															
DE Ref	School Name & Postcode	Urban / Rural	Lookup Distance	Distance in miles from Ballycarry 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 Total First Preference Applications	2026/27 Over/Under Subscribed at First Preference	ETI reports publication date / Overall assessment
3010809	Ballycarry PS BT38 9HE	Rural			116	38	39	30	*	87	0	17	0	U - 17	Sep 2019 - ASOS Mar 2014 - Good
Sub total					116	38	39	30	*	87	0	17	0		
Controlled															
3016705	Islandmagee PS BT40 3RD	Rural	1.63	1.9	145	138	125	132	9	22	19	21	18	U - 3	Feb 2018 - ASOS
3010874	Whitehead PS BT38 9NE	Rural	2.26	3.1	390	366	336	319	9	80	43	56	41	U - 15	June 2026 – New style report – 1 area for action May 2019 - ASOS Nov 2012 - Very good
3010785	Eden PS BT38 7NL	Urban	3.43	3.9	213	207	200	194	8	27	24	30	18	U - 12	Apr 2018 - ASOS May 2011 - Good
3016257	Oakfield PS BT38 7SP	Urban	3.64	4.7	369	226	233	237	13	145	31	53	40	U - 13	April 2019 - Continues to demonstrate the capacity to identify and bring about improvement

DE Ref Number	School Name & Postcode	Urban / Rural	Lookup Distance	Distance in miles from Ballycarry 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 Total First Preference Applications	2026/27 Over/Under Subscribed at First Preference	ETI reports publication date / Overall assessment
3013330	Victoria PS BT38 7EZ	Urban	4.07	5	575	354	371	382	39	232	40	82	48	U - 34	May 2018 - Continues to demonstrate a high level of capacity for sustained improvement
3010808	Glynn PS BT40 3HF	Rural	4.31	4.7	103	87	84	85	*	21	13	15	6	U - 9	Mar 2019 - ASOS Mar 2012 - Very good
3010860	Sunnylands PS BT38 8JJ	Urban	4.57	5.7	238	200	192	183	19	74	15	34	22	U - 12	May 2024 - New style report Mar 2010 - Good
3016225	Woodlawn PS BT38 8EZ	Urban	4.67	6	310	135	129	124	33	219	15	44	14	U - 30	Oct 2022 - Demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement
3013332	Toreagh PS BT40 3DU	Rural	4.89	6.1	105	114	111	110	*	0	15	16	9	U - 7	Sept 2013 - Very good
3010696	Woodburn PS BT38 9AB	Urban	4.92	6	203	197	199	178	7	32	20	29	22	U - 7	Oct 2022 - Demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Sub total					2651	2024	1980	1944	145	852	235	380	238		
Catholic Maintained															
3036563	St Nicholas' PS BT38 8AU	Urban	4.98	5.9	210	131	120	120	15	105	16	30	5	U - 25	Jan 2017 - ASOS Nov 2013 - Very good

Sub total					210	131	120	120	15	105	16	30	5		
Integrated															
3066568	Acorn Integrated PS, BT38 7JL	Urban	3.65	4.9	203	196	193	195	16	24	27	29	19	U - 10	Jun 2017 - ASOS Mar 2014 - Good
3050841	Central Integrated PS, BT38 8AL	Urban	4.76	5.9	175	140	135	131	11	55	20	25	12	U - 13	May 2017 - ASOS Apr 2011 - Good
Sub total					378	336	328	326	27	79	47	54	31		
Grand total					3355	2529	2467	2420	188	1123	298	481	274		

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 23.03.26 (conclusion of the Primary School admissions process for the 2026/27 school year), provided by the EA PS Admissions Office.

Islandmagee Primary School received a new build on a new site, 7 Low Road, which opened in September 2024. This school was an amalgamation of Kilcoan PS and Mullaghduh PS in September 2016.

Central Integrated PS - It transformed to become an Integrated PS in 2021 and no inspections have been carried out at the school since it transformed to controlled integrated status. The inspection reports recorded relate to when it was a controlled school.

Appendix H - Sustainability Assessment

1. 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 primary objective of the policy is to ensure that all children and young people receive a high-quality education in schools that are educationally and financially viable in the longer term. The following is an assessment of Ballycarry PS against the six sustainability criteria and their associated indicators. There are neither formula nor weightings attached to the criteria or indicators.

Criterion 1: Quality Educational Experience

2. The ETI carried out an inspection of Ballycarry PS in September 2019 which was affected by ASOS and so were unable to evaluate the quality of the curriculum; the effectiveness of the guidance and support in bringing about high quality individual learning experiences; and the effectiveness and impact of planning, teaching, learning and assessment in promoting successful learning.
3. ETI input to this DP states *"based on a district inspector visit in June 2026 lessons in the three composite classes were observed and all were effective and with the caveat that the sample size is very small, the evidence of standardised testing presented by the school indicates that the children are achieving well and in line with, or above, expectation"*

Composite Classes and Teaching Staff

4. The SSP states that there should be no more than two composite year groups in a single classroom at primary school level. ETI input indicates that (enrolments at the school have fallen since the school census was completed in October 2025 and) there are currently 28 children enrolled across three composite classes, with the following breakdown:
 - there are five children altogether (two in year 2 and three in year 3)
 - there are 11 children (six in year 4 and five in year 5)
 - in the year 6/7 composite class, there are 12 children, with the five year 7 children leaving at the end of June;
5. The school is therefore operating three composite classes, all of which only contain two year groups, but this is only possible because there are no P1 pupils enrolled.
6. In 2025/26, Ballycarry PS had 2.8 full-time teachers. ETI input indicates that the long-term principal is on a phased retirement and in school two days per week. On the other three days, a full-time co-principal/SENCo provides leadership and there are two other class teachers which is below the minimum of four teachers at primary school level as recommended by the SSP.
7. Ballycarry PS is not meeting the indicators of the criterion for a Quality Educational Experience in full.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

8. In 2025/26, there was ■■■ pupil enrolled at Ballycarry PS with a Statement of SEN and there were ■■■ pupils on the SEN register at stages 1 or 2.
9. During the pre-publication consultation with staff, governors, parents and guardians, parents expressed concerns about the continuation of services to support children with SEN. The EA states that *"the support which they provide for the pupils will continue regardless of the school they attend, to ensure that the needs of all children are met. The statutory rights of children are the same irrespective of the school they attend."*
10. Comments relating to Section 75 issues pertaining to pupils with SEN assert that the proposed changes would have a negative impact on equality of opportunity for those children with a disability. EA comments in the CfC state *"the proposal will meet the outcomes for all, including additional support to those who require it, ensuring those pupils with special educational needs realise their full potential. Pupils with special educational needs will continue to have their special educational requirements met within local schools, supported by Children and Young People Services"*.
11. The Department's SEN Team notes that Ballycarry PS has an enrolment of less than 40 pupils and that schools with an enrolment of less than 40 pupils are not being considered for Specialist Provision. It is also noted that the financial deficit has continued to grow and states *"Attendance at a sustainable school underpins the fundamental principles of the SEN Code of Practice⁹, 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 proposal will meet the educational needs of pupils."*
12. 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.

Pastoral Care

13. There has been no up to date inspection of Ballycarry PS by the ETI and owing to the inspection report of September 2019 being affected by ASOS, it was unable to evaluate fully the outworking of the arrangements for safeguarding in the school. It is, however, noted that during the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding children reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department.

Extra-Curricular Activities

14. The SSP outlines that a smaller number of pupils in each year group offers fewer opportunities for extra-curricular activities. Access to a full range of extra-curricular activities in a smaller school may only be achieved through the members of staff taking on multiple commitments in addition to teaching composite groups during the school day.
15. It is noted in the CfC that due to the falling enrolment in the school, the EA does not deem it reasonable or sustainable for the small number of staff in the school to maintain curricular and extra-curricular provision which would be equitable to those offered by a larger school.

⁹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/special-educational-needs-code-practice>

16. The CfC offers no details on the extra-curricular activities offer by the school, but the school website states that multi-sports runs on Monday afternoons from 2pm-3pm for P1/2/3 pupils and 3pm-4pm for P4/5/6/7 pupils which is provided by an outside agency. Gardening Club runs during school and any pupil wishing to take part can do so.
17. The school runs a breakfast club available from 8am for all pupils at a cost of £2 and there is an option for drop-off which is available from 8.30am at a cost of £1 per child (which does not include breakfast).
18. There is also an after-school club available from 2-4pm on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday for pupils in Years 1-3 at a cost of £2 per child.
19. Consultation responses do refer to a broad range of extra-curricular activities and further mention a drama club and piano lessons.

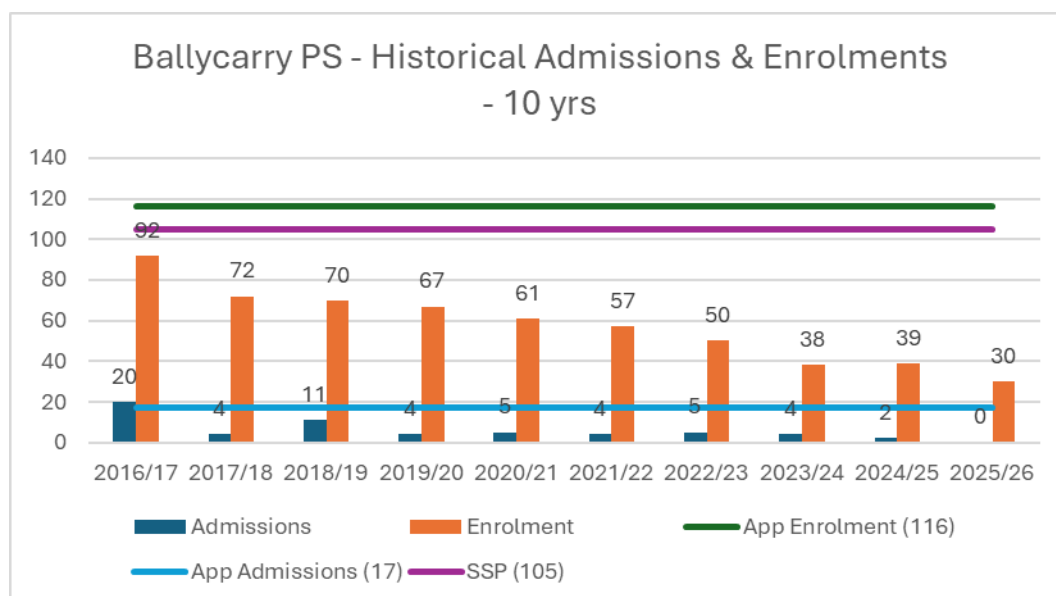
Physical Environment

20. No details are included in the CfC on the physical environment of the school. ETI input states *"While the classrooms are maintained well and new outdoor equipment has been provided, the buildings require significant work both outside and inside."*

Criterion 2: Stable Enrolment Trends

21. Ballycarry PS has approved admissions and enrolment numbers of 17 and 116 respectively. As illustrated in [Chart 1](#) below, the school has experienced an overall downturn in pupil numbers over the last 10 years and has admitted less than its approved admissions number (17) in nine of the past 10 years, with only 2016/17 admitting above its approved admissions (20). 2025/26 data show the school admitted no pupils into Year 1.

Chart 1 – Ballycarry PS – Historical Admissions & Enrolment (10 years)



22. [Chart 1](#) also illustrates that the school has never reached its approved enrolment of 116 in the past 10 years and further illustrates that a maximum enrolment of 92 pupils occurred in 2016/17. The school's enrolment is significantly below both its approved enrolment (116) and the recommended minimum enrolment threshold of 105 for a sustainable rural primary school, as set out in the SSP.
23. [Table 2](#) below shows the pattern of applications to the school. The table illustrates the school has been undersubscribed with first preference applications for the past six years. Figures from the EA, at the conclusion of Stage one of the admissions process for 2026/27, indicate that the school received no first preference applications for admission to Year 1.
24. ETI input states *"there are currently 28 children at the school"* and note *"the staff suspect that the year 3 pupils will move to another school at the end of this school year"* with staff further *"expecting the current year 6 children to stay for year 7"* which would leave a total enrolment anticipated for September 2026, as long as no other children leave, as 20 children."

Table 2– Ballycarry PS First Preferences for Year 1 Admissions

School Year	Approved Admissions	First Preference Applications to Year 1
2022/23	11	5
2023/24	11	3
2024/25	11	1
2025/26	11	0
2026/27	11	0

Source: EA data at conclusion of 2025/26 Admissions process and excludes Reception pupils

Criterion 3: Sound Financial Position

25. The school's **provisional** deficit position as of 31 March 2026 is **-£530,209**. The school's deficit in the previous year, up to 31 March 2025 was **-£409,833**.
26. As stated in the EA's guidance on Financial Management Arrangements for Controlled and Maintained Schools funded under the Common Funding Scheme, schools in a deficit or surplus position must not exceed an upper limit of 5% of the school's budget or £75,000, whichever is lesser. Ballycarry PS is not within this tolerance.
27. All schools receive a delegated budget for the financial year based on verified enrolments as at the October Census prior to the financial year. Based on the Interim Common Funding Formula (CFF) allocations, the school received a total CFF budget of **£229,145** in the 2026-27 financial year for **30¹** FTE pupils, which generates a per capita of **£7,638**. The average for all primary schools is **£4,426**.

28. The total Free School Meals Entitlement for the school is 7¹⁰ pupils, which represents 23.33% of the total FTE, which places the school in **Band 1** for funding purposes.
29. The school received **£66,550** for Small Schools Support funding, which represents **100%** of the maximum funding for this factor, within the Nursery and Primary funding stream. The school also received **£16,420** in respect of Primary Principals' Release Time.
30. The CfC states that Ballycarry PS does not currently operate within its in-year budget and that the school's three-year financial plan 2025-2028 shows a projected deficit of **-£917,664** at the end of the 2028 financial year.

Criterion 4: Strong Leadership and Management

31. The ETI inspection of Ballycarry PS in September 2019 was affected by ASOS and ETI were unable to evaluate the effectiveness of strategic leadership and governance; the effectiveness and impact of middle leadership; and the effectiveness of action to promote and sustain improvement.
32. It is noted in the inspection that it will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.
33. Input from the ETI as part of the DP states *"the co-principals and two other teachers have maintained a one-year school development plan and key action plans for embedding the impact of professional learning (on the science of learning), in line with TransformEd priorities, in the interests of the children; and reviewing the school's values, in line with the Empowering Improvement Inspection Framework."*

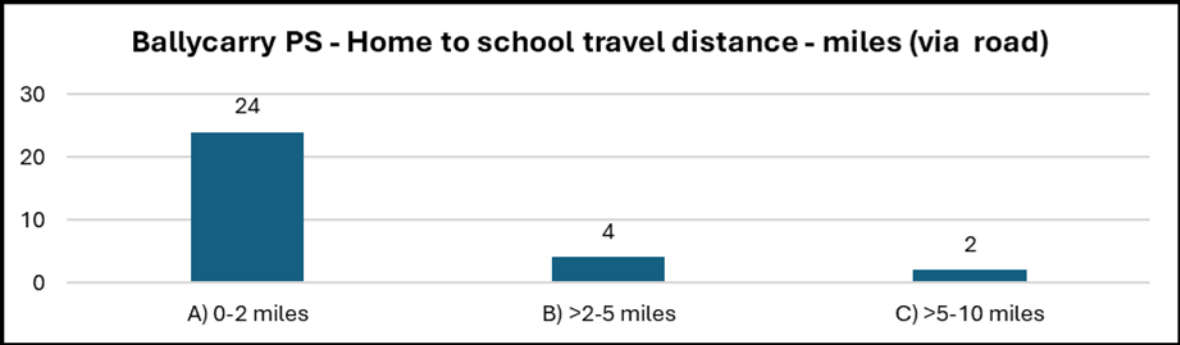
Criterion 5: Accessibility

34. **Map 1** illustrates the locations of the pupils currently attending Ballycarry PS and shows that the majority live within the immediate area and within a 10 minute drive time of the school. The SSP includes guidance on the maximum travel times recommended for primary school pupils of 30 minutes for a single journey, i.e. one hour per day in total.
35. **Map 1** also illustrates the neighbouring primary provision and shows that there are 13 neighbouring schools within 10 minutes' drive time of Ballycarry PS. There are a total of **1036 available places across those 13 schools**.
36. **Map 2** shows the two closest Controlled primary schools (Islandmagee PS and Whitehead PS) are within 5 to 10 minutes' drive time of Ballycarry PS and Table 1 details there is a total of **102 available places** between these schools. This indicates that the schools are within reasonable travel distance as referenced in the SSP, and have available spaces, should parents wish to choose them.

¹⁰ 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).

- 37. The CfC asserts Ballycarry PS can be accessed by car and bus and the majority of pupils attending the school are from the local area, as outlined by **Map 2**.
- 38. Chart 2 – Ballycarry PS – Pupil travelling distance (via road) illustrates Ballycarry PS pupils and the distance they travel to the school. It shows that 24 pupils (80%) attending the school are within two miles travelling distance, four pupils (13.33%) are within five miles, and two pupils (6.67%) are travelling between 5-10 miles.

Chart 2 – Ballycarry PS – Pupil travelling distance (via road)



Source DE census data 2025/26

Criterion 6: Strong Links with the Community

- 39. The CfC asserts that Ballycarry PS has wide and varied involvement with the local community, with Ministers from the local churches being school governors and playing a substantial role in supporting the day to day life of the school. The school participates in the village outdoor nativity and has taken part in the Broadisland Gathering and regularly takes part in events organised by the local Community Association.
- 40. The school attends the annual community remembrance service and children distribute gifts to local senior citizens after the school harvest service.
- 41. The CfC further asserts the school has a very motivated group of parents, known as ‘The Friends of Ballycarry Primary School’, who coordinate events throughout the year that provide many fundraising opportunities. The school enjoys a positive relationship with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, local playgroups, churches and Salt Factory Sports Summer Scheme; is also an accredited Forest School, has attained a Sustrans Silver Level for excellence in sustainable travel and is always supported by local business in its endeavours.

Appendix I - Assessment of Statutory Considerations

Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

42. The Rural Development Council's (RDC) '*Striking the Balance*' report highlights the importance of rural proofing so that regard is given to the impact of a particular policy on rural populations (in comparison to those living in urban areas) and to help identify adjustments which might be made to reflect rural needs and ensure that services are accessible to rural communities on a fair basis. A central concern is the quality of education provided to pupils.
43. The Government's commitment to rural proofing was strengthened with the introduction of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (The Act). The Act requires public authorities to have 'due regard' to consciously consider the needs of people in rural areas when developing policies, strategies and plans and when designing and delivering public services. It defines 'rural needs' as "*the social and economic needs of rural areas*".
44. In former Minister Michelle McIlveen's Written Statement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 9 August 2021, she advised that the SSP is not regarded as a policy for the closure of schools and collaboration within and across sectors is a means of delivering a quality educational experience for all our children and young people in sustainable settings. Although the EA considered other options for the school, they determined that '*in considering the future of Ballycarry PS, all of the options for the school did not provide a sustainable provision for the school*'.
45. The SSP states that '*strong, sustainable schools providing quality education and access to the full curriculum are central to the achievement of the educational vision*'. One of the objectives of the SSP is to ensure that the excellent quality of education available to some young people is made available to all, in both urban and rural settings.
46. 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.
47. The screening template notes that due regard has been given to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and the consideration of the potential transport impact. Such discussions will be held with parents to support them in making informed decisions based on parental choice.
48. The EA comments in the Equality Screening document that there would be a minor impact and states that "*The Education Authority 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. There is alternative Controlled primary provision within a reasonable travel distance which will ensure the local community continues to have access to co-educational controlled primary provision.*"

Effective and Efficient Use of Public Funds

49. The Department must be mindful of its duty under Article 44 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and under Managing Public Money to ensure effective and efficient use of public funds.
50. In discharging its duties, the Department must seek to avoid unreasonable public expenditure and to make the best use of resources available to it. The assessment of Ballycarry PS against the criteria and indicators of the SSP demonstrates that the school is unsustainable and fails to meet a number of the criteria, including Sound Financial Position.
51. Ballycarry PS receives the maximum amount of Small Schools Support funding £66,550 and £16,420 in respect of Primary Principals' Release Time. In 2025/26, Ballycarry PS received a per capita allocation of £7,638 compared to the average for all primary schools of £4,426.
52. The evidence set out above illustrates that Ballycarry PS is in a growing deficit position. The low enrolment will continue to place increased pressure on the already strained financial resources of the school and the teaching staff as evidenced in the CfC which asserts that the school's three-year financial plan shows a projected deficit of **-£917,664** at the end of the 2027/28 financial year.
53. Area Planning of the school estate across Northern Ireland is not solely about the financial health of schools. The focus is the educational experience of children and young people being educated in a school that is educationally and financially viable. Many respondents during the consultation commented on the high quality of education provided at Ballycarry PS but the provision of education at the school comes at a higher cost as outlined above.
54. The continuation of Ballycarry PS must be balanced against the need to avoid unreasonable public expenditure and currently, the school's low enrolment and no evidence of the prospect of reaching the minimum sustainability thresholds, combined with an increasing financial deficit and declining school age population highlights serious concerns about its long-term viability both educationally and financially, especially when there are 10 neighbouring Controlled primary schools in the area with a total of 852 available places.
55. It would represent an inefficient use of public funds to continue sustaining a school that is not meeting the criteria of the SSP.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

56. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ('The Act') requires designated public authorities (including: the Department, the EA and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) etc) to carry out all their functions:
 - with due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in respect of religious belief, political opinion, gender, race, disability, age, marital status, dependents and sexual orientation; and
 - to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.
57. The CfC confirms that Equality screening and statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (where appropriate) have been considered. This is in line with the Department's guidance on DPs. In relation to Section 75, 20 responses were received by the proposer. The Equality Screening document states "*whilst no significant cumulative impact is*

anticipated, this will be kept under review to ensure that any potential emerging impacts are identified and mitigated against at the earliest opportunity. The issues raised helped form the equality screening process and were taken into consideration before a decision was made to publish the proposal to discontinue Ballycarry Primary School with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter."

58. The Equality and Human Rights Screening Template provided by the proposer is available on the EA website and indicates there will be a minor impact in the approval of the DP. It states that *"The Education Authority 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. There is alternative controlled primary provision within a reasonable travel distance which will ensure the local community continues to have access to co-educational controlled primary provision."*

Other Considerations

Ulster-Scots Tradition

59. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is a Council of Europe treaty designed to protect and promote traditional regional and minority languages. The UK has ratified the Charter and has recognised languages such as Ulster Scots, Irish, Scots, Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Cornish under its provisions.
60. Part II of the Charter contains general principles and objectives rather than detailed legal duties. Public authorities are expected to:
- Recognise regional or minority languages as part of cultural wealth.
 - Respect the geographic areas where those languages are used.
 - Promote opportunities to use and learn the language.
 - Facilitate and encourage its use in public and community life.
 - Support teaching, study, and cultural activities connected with the language.
 - Consider the needs and wishes of language communities when making decisions.
61. Part II generally does not create an individual legal right that allows someone to compel a public authority to take a specific action. Instead, it provides a framework of principles that governments should consider and seek to advance.
62. Decision-makers should assess and document the impact of closure on the promotion and use of Ulster Scots language and culture, consistent with the UK's commitments under Part II of the Charter.
63. The Department notes that during the pre-publication and the Statutory Objection Period that a number of respondents referenced the strong Ulster-Scots tradition that exists at Ballycarry PS and the potential loss of cultural capital due to the proposed closure. The Department is aware that the closure of a school is a great loss to the community it serves. However, in considering alternative provision, there are available places in Controlled schools within a similar catchment area as Ballycarry PS.

Resource implications

Finance

64. The CfC advises that the following operational costs of Ballycarry PS will be an annual cost saving inclusive of a saving of £60,463 Small Schools Support factor and £16,420 in respect of Primary Principal's Release Time. There are likely to be other cost savings that will be achieved but they have not been quantified by the EA in the CfC.

Staffing

Should the DP be approved, the teaching staff is afforded employment protection under the School Re-organisation Agreement 2013/2 for two years. The non-teaching staff will be afforded employment protection for one year under the Collective Agreement (JNC Circular 224). The EA will meet with staff to discuss options should the DP be approved and an action plan implemented for the discontinuance of the school. 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.

Transport

65. The provision of home to school transport will provide for the safe transportation of pupils from the area to their nearest school. Any transport arrangements will be in accordance with transport policy/regulations. The Department's Transport and Food in Schools Team has advised that given the numbers involved it would be anticipated that the financial implications for the Transport budget or Food In Schools budget would not be significant.

Accommodation

66. As DP 759 relates to a closure there are no associated accommodation costs.