

COPY OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Cover Note

DP No.	DP 756	
School	Drumahoe Primary School	
Proposal	<i>A statutory nursery unit will be established at Drumahoe Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter.</i>	
Minister's Decision	Approved with modification to implementation date: <i>A statutory nursery unit will be established at Drumahoe Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.</i>	
Date of Decision	13 October 2026	
Minister's Comments		
Additional notes	Approval has been granted subject to the removal of Reception provision from the school's admissions criteria.	
Information redacted	Some information and personal data may have been removed in line with the principles of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Act.	
	Key	Details
	■	redaction
	*	refers to less than five cases where data is considered sensitive
	#	means figure has been suppressed to prevent disclosure of sensitive information under rules of disclosure

From: Jim Lindsay
Area Planning Team

Cleared by Scott Harbinson – 28 September 2026
Cleared by Sharon Smyth – 28 September 2026

Date: 28 September 2026

To: Paul Givan MLA
Minister of Education

Copy distribution below

**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL (DP) 756 – DRUMAHOE PRIMARY SCHOOL
(202-2227) – ESTABLISH A STATUTORY NURSERY UNIT WITH 26 FULL-TIME
PLACES**

Issue: To decide on the following Development Proposal 756 that proposes:

“A statutory nursery unit will be established at Drumahoe Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter.”

Timescale: Routine

Financial/Resource Implications: **Resource**
There would be an additional pressure on the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB). In year cost estimated at £70k, charged against the Department’s ‘New Schools and Units’ fund. Full year cost estimated at £121k charged against the ASB.

Staffing
Additional teaching and non-teaching staff, approximately £80k, would be required with a recruitment process undertaken by the Board of Governors. The cost of staff would be covered through additional LMS funding for the nursery unit.

Capital
No additional accommodation will be required for the nursery unit as Drumahoe Community Pre-school Playgroup currently operates within an adjacent building to Drumahoe

Primary School. Should the development proposal be approved, the nursery unit will be accommodated within a vacant classroom in the school building.

Transport

There are no additional transport costs as the proposal relates to pre-school.

(Cleared by DE Budgeting Team – 29 September 2026)

FOI Implications: This submission is fully disclosable.

Statutory Duty implications: Article 44 of the Education & Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986

Presentational Issues: The decision on this DP may prompt local media interest. If approached, the Press Office will refer to this submission and liaise with officials to provide a response as required

(Cleared by Press Office – 24 September 2026)

Recommendation: It is recommended that you:

- (i) Approve DP 756, with a modification to the implementation date – “A statutory nursery unit will be established at Drumahoe Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter”
- (ii) Agree that approval will be subject to the removal of Reception provision from the school’s admissions criteria.
- (iii) Agree that this submission (with any appropriate redactions) can be published on the Department’s website once the proposer and the EA have been informed of your decision.

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Appendices (attached separately)

Appendix A – Published Development Proposal

Appendix B – Case for Change

Appendix C – DE Policy Team Inputs

Appendix D – ETI Development Proposal Commentary Paper

Appendix E – CSSC Response

Appendix F – Sustainability Assessment

Introduction

1. Development Proposal (DP) 756 has been progressed under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. On 9 April 2026, the Education Authority (EA) as the 'Proposer' published DP 756 relating to Drumahoe Primary School (PS) proposing that:

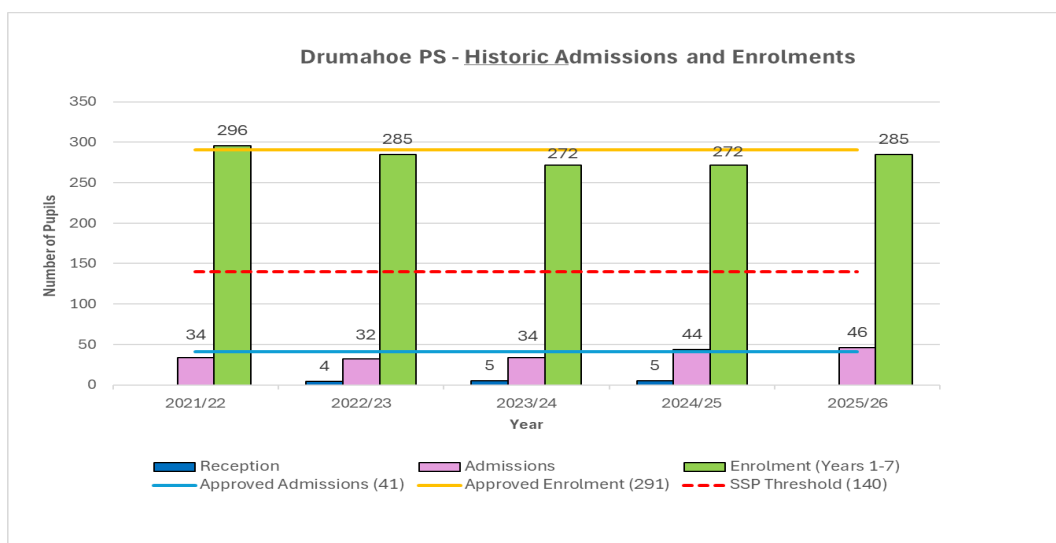
“A statutory nursery unit will be established at Drumahoe Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter”

2. The two-month statutory objection period commenced on the date of publication and concluded on 9 June 2026. A copy of the published proposal and the proposer's supporting Case for Change (CfC) are reproduced respectively at **Appendices A and B**.

Background

3. Drumahoe PS is a Controlled urban primary school situated in the village of Drumahoe, County Londonderry in the Derry City and Strabane Local Government District (LGD). It has approved admissions and enrolment numbers of 41 and 290 respectively. It operated a reception class from 2022 to 2024; however, no reception class operated in the 2025/26 academic year. Should the proposal to establish a nursery unit be approved, reception class provision will cease.
4. The school operates two Specialist Provision Classes; an Autism Specialist Class (ASC) for pupils in Years 1-4 and a learning Support Centre (LSC) for Years 5-7.
5. **Chart 1** below illustrates the actual admissions and enrolment trends of Drumahoe PS over the past five years and shows that enrolment has remained broadly stable, while admissions have increased during that period. There was an actual enrolment of 285 pupils (including supernumerary) in 2025/26, including 46 pupils in Year 1.
6. At the conclusion of the primary admissions process for 2026/27 the school received 44 first preference applications to Year 1 for September 2026. In 2025/26 Drumahoe PS had 30 available places, 53 (18.6%) pupils were entitled to Free Schools Meals (FSM), and 25 (8.7%) pupils had a statement of Special Educational Need (SEN).

Chart 1: Historic Admissions and Enrolment at Drumahoe PS



Source – DE Census data
 Figures include Supernumerary pupils

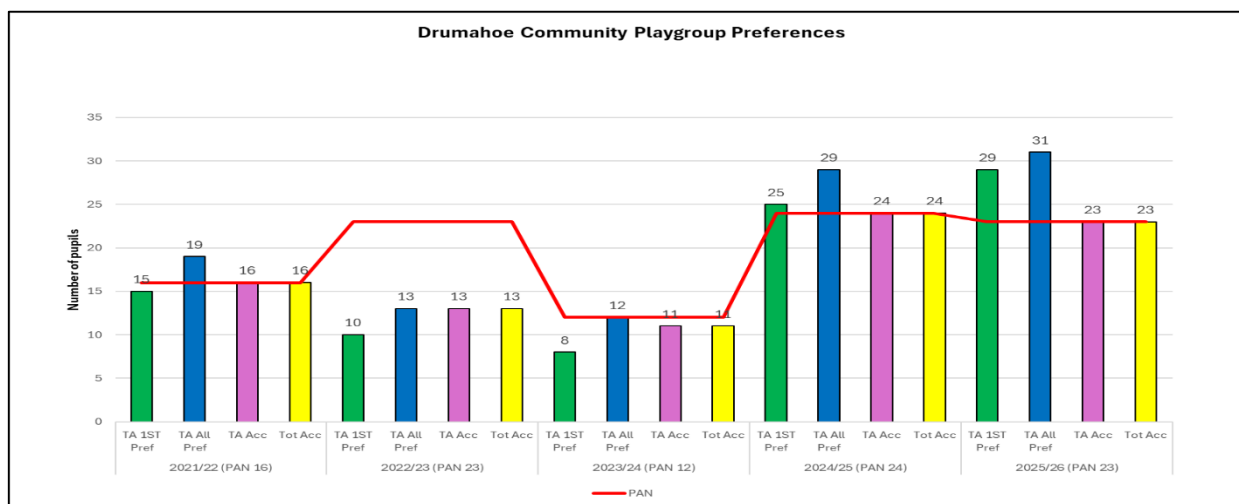
NB - Children who attend a reception class in a given year and wish to continue their Year one education at the same school the following year, are not required to complete an application for re-admission on transfer to Year one at the same school in the following school year and are therefore not included in the Year one admission figures provided by the EA

Drumahoe Community Pre-school Playgroup (PG)

7. Drumahoe Community Pre-school PG is a voluntary (non-statutory) playgroup which is located on the site of Drumahoe PS and currently operates separately, within an adjacent building, with its own management committee and staff. The Published Admission Numbers (PAN) of the pre-school has fluctuated over the years (as shown in [Chart 2](#) below). In the past two years the pre-school has been over-subscribed with first preference applications and is also oversubscribed for the 2026/27 year.
8. The current pre-school setting at Drumahoe Community Pre-school PG was approved to move to full-time provision from September 2025, in line with Tranche One of the Pre-school Standardisation Programme.
9. Over the past number of years Drumahoe Community Pre-School PG has experienced fluctuations in numbers and staffing and has engaged with Drumahoe PS on the continued provision of pre-school education in the area. The current Management Committee of Drumahoe Community Pre-School PG has advised that it will stand down on a date to be agreed pending the outcome of this proposal, citing difficulties in attracting and retaining staff, the burden of operational and management responsibilities falling to a small number of staff, and the condition of the building.
10. In consideration of the above, the proposal is in effect, a change in management of pre-school provision in the area.

11. Drumahoe Community Pre-school PG had 23 pupils enrolled for the 2025/26 year, filling all its pre-approved funded places for that year. **Chart 2** below illustrates that Drumahoe Pre-school PG filled its PAN in the last two years, with only one year (2022/23) being considerably below.

Chart 2 - Drumahoe Community Pre-school PG Historical Preferences and PAN



Source: School Census

PAN – Published Admissions Number

TA – Target Age

12. Drumahoe Community Pre-school Playgroup, was allocated an additional funded place in 2026/27 in response to local demand, increasing its provision from 23 to 24 places. At the conclusion of the pre-school admissions process for September 2026/27, EA data shows that a total of 27 first-preference applications were received for the playgroup's 24 approved places, all of which were filled.

Area Context

13. On the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 the Altnagelvin 3 Super Output Area (SOA) in which both the primary school and playgroup are located is ranked 178 out of 890 (with 1 being most deprived and 890 least deprived).

Strategic Area Plan (2022-27) & Operational Plan 2 (2024-26)

14. In taking forward Area Planning activity for the next five years, 2022-27, The *Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision* was published by the EA on 29 June 2022. It sets out the strategic direction on how the future educational needs of children and young people will be addressed through area solutions, consistent with relevant policies and Ministerial Priorities.
15. Operational Plan 2 (OP2): 2024-26, was published by the EA on 16 January 2025 followed by the publication of an Addendum on 11 November 2025. The proposal for Drumahoe PS was identified as an additional Short Term work stream within that Addendum under the Key Theme “*Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways.*”

16. OP2 highlights a declining population trend within the Derry City and Strabane LGD. Births have fallen from 2,187 in 2011/12 to 1,824 in 2021/22 and are projected to continue declining. The school-age population (Years 1-7) is forecast to decrease from 12,142 in 2022 to 11,216 by 2035, representing a 7.6% reduction.
17. **MAP 1:** Drumahoe PS – Pupil Location and Neighbouring Primary Provision illustrates the location of Drumahoe PS and the neighbouring primary provision within a two-mile radius. **Map 2:** Drumahoe Community Pre-School Playgroup – Pupil Locations and Neighbouring Pre-School Provision shows that the nearest primary provision with a statutory nursery unit (within a one-mile radius) is Ashlea PS. Ashlea PS is a Controlled school with approved admissions and enrolment numbers of 20 and 140 respectively. It provides 26 full-time (F/T) statutory pre-school education places. In 2025/26, the school's actual enrolment was 72 and the enrolment for the nursery unit was 25.
18. The four next closest primary schools with statutory nursery units are located within a one and two-mile radius of Drumahoe PS and all of which, in the past four years, have filled or been close to filling all their F/T statutory pre-school places, with a small number of underage children being accepted in Oakgrove Integrated Nursery Unit (NU).

Neighbouring Pre-School Provision

19. **Map 2:** Drumahoe Community Pre-School Playgroup – Pupil Locations and Neighbouring Pre-School Provision illustrates the nearest alternative pre-school provision within a one and two-mile radius of Drumahoe PS, including nursery schools, primary schools with nursery units and playgroups.
20. **Table 1** shows that there are two nursery units (at Ashlea PS and Glendermott PS) and no other pre-school provision within one mile of Drumahoe PS. Within a two-mile radius there are two nursery schools, five primary schools with a nursery unit and one voluntary/private pre-school setting.

Table 1 - Neighbouring Pre-school Provision within two-miles

DE Ref	School	Distance (2 mile radius)	Number of places									
			2021/22		2022/23		2023/24		2024/25		2025/26	
Nursery School			f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t
2116233	Lisnagelvin NS *	1.09	27	54	27	54	27	53	28	52	55	0
2116348	Trench Road NS	1.35	52	0	53	0	52	0	54	0	55	0
Nursery Unit			f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t	f/t	p/t
2016124	Ashlea PS	0.51	26	0	26	0	26	0	26	0	25	0
2032212	Glendermott PS	0.92	28	0	26	0	27	0	25	0	26	0
2036288	Good Shepherd PS	1.59	53	0	52	0	52	0	52	0	52	0
2010382	Ebrington PS	1.79	53	0	52	0	50	0	60	0	52	0
2066558	Oakgrove IPS	1.83	0	54	0	54	0	54	0	52	49	0
Voluntary/Private Pre-School			T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F
2BB0565	Chapel Road Community PG	1.49	21	20	24	24	23	23	23	23	21	21

* Standardised from September 2025 **f/t** = full time **p/t** = part time **T** = Total **F** = Funded

21. The nearest voluntary/private pre-school, Chapel Road Community PG (2.1 miles from Drumahoe PS), has been consistently under-subscribed with Target Age first preference applications over the past five years. However, the level of available capacity, ranging from 1 to 14 places annually, would be insufficient to accommodate all children who could be displaced if Drumahoe Community Pre-school PG were to close.
22. Lisnagelvin Nursery School (NS) was amalgamated for Standardisation from September 2025, reducing from 78 places (26 F/T and 52 P/T) to 52 F/T places.
23. Within the 2-mile radius of Drumahoe PS, there were no surplus pre-school places in 2025/26. For 2026/27, demand exceeds capacity, with 133 first-preference applications for 128 funded places. This includes the additional funded place allocated to Drumahoe Community Pre-school Playgroup.

Case for Change (CfC)

24. The supporting CfC is reproduced in full at **Appendix B**. It sets out the rationale for the proposal with some key assertions highlighted below:
 - Drumahoe Community PG has been one of the main providers of pre-school provision in the area for over 20 years and is located in the grounds of Drumahoe PS;
 - Over the past number of years, it has experienced fluctuations in numbers and staffing and has engaged with Drumahoe PS on the continued provision of pre-school education in the area.
 - The management committee of Drumahoe Community PG has advised that it will stand down on a date to be agreed pending the outcome of this proposal. Should this proposal not be approved this will result in a shortfall of pre-school provision in the local area;
 - While there are sufficient providers in the area, the impact of standardisation has resulted in an increase in demand;
 - This proposal will ensure all parents in the area, who wish to, will be able to avail of pre-school education;
 - In effect the proposal is a change in management of pre-school provision in the Drumahoe area;
 - This proposal will contribute to the Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. The Programme for Government 2024-2027 details nine 'immediate priorities' with one of these being 'Deliver More Affordable, Accessible, High-Quality Early Learning and Childcare'; and
 - Approval of the nursery unit provision would be supportive of Minister of Education's commitment to early years education.
25. The EA, as the proposer, supports the proposal making the following key points:
 - Drumahoe Community Pre-School PG received Ministerial approval under the "Standardisation Programme" to deliver full-time (22.5 hours per week) funded pre-school education from September 2025.

- The proposal would directly replace the existing Playgroup provision, resulting in a small increase of three nursery places in the area which is not expected to have an adverse impact on existing local pre-school settings.
- There were no surplus pre-school places within a two-mile radius of Drumahoe PS in 2025/26.

Statutory DP Processes

Pre-publication consultation

26. The CfC confirms that the EA undertook a pre-publication consultation via an online questionnaire with the Board of Governors (BoG), staff and parents/guardians of Drumahoe PS from 6 November 2025 to 15 January 2026. Of the 95 responses received, 80 supported the proposal and 15 opposed it.
27. In accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, the EA consulted schools which, in its view, may be affected by the proposal. A total of 45 local schools and pre-school settings were forwarded correspondence on 6 November 2025 and were invited to reply by 15 January 2025.
28. Two responses were received from affected schools and one from the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) during the pre-consultation period. Details of the pre-consultation are included in the CfC at **Appendix B**.

Equality Impact Assessment

29. The CfC confirms that Equality screening of the proposal was carried out and the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (where appropriate) have been considered. In relation to Section 75, 20 responses were received. The EA asserts that these comments and all responses were considered when assessing the equality impact of the proposal.

Two-Month Statutory Objection Period

30. The proposal was published on 9 April 2026, and the two-month statutory objection period ran until 9 June 2026. No objections were received during this period. One response supporting the proposal was received from the CSSC (included in full at **Appendix E**). A summary of the key points raised is set out below.

CSSC Comments

- If approved, the proposal would retain existing pre-school provision, address local demand and strengthen the sustainability of Drumahoe PS.
- The proposal aligns with the intentions of the Department's Pre-School Standardisation Programme.
- As all pre-school provision in the area has adopted the standardised model, resulting in a reduction in the number of available places, retaining existing provision at Drumahoe would help address this shortfall. CSSC further notes that approval would provide for a small increase in pre-school provision in the area.
- The proposal should have minimal financial impact as Drumahoe PS already has the physical capacity to accommodate pre-school provision.

Sustainability Summary

31. The SSP does not apply to pre-school provision; however, the sustainability of the host school has been considered as part of this submission.
32. The sustainability assessment of Drumahoe PS (detailed in full at **Appendix G**) indicates that the school provides a high-quality educational experience, supported by a positive ETI inspection outcome, strong leadership and management, extensive SEN provision, a broad extracurricular programme, and strong pastoral care arrangements.
33. Enrolment remains well above the SSP recommended minimum threshold for an urban primary school, with increasing admissions and first preference applications demonstrating continued parental demand. The school is highly accessible to its pupil population and maintains strong links with the local community and pre-school sector.
34. The school's financial sustainability is an area of concern. Of an annual budget of circa £1m, the school has an annual recurring deficit of circa £200k. The school is projected to reach an accumulated deficit of almost £1 million by March 2027. The school is working with the EA's Local Management of Schools (LMS) team to manage its in-year spend and reduce its projected deficit.

Policy Context – Early Years

35. The Department's Early Years policy seeks to ensure access to pre-school education for all target-age children whose families wish to avail of it, while retaining existing good-quality provision where possible. All funded pre-school settings are open to all children irrespective of their background and operate under the same inspection and curriculum requirements. Current policy includes a moratorium on new or additional full-time pre-school provision, with which this proposal complies. The importance of early years and early intervention is recognised within the former draft Programme for Government 2021, the

Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 and the Programme for Government 2024-2027, particularly in improving outcomes for children experiencing disadvantage.

36. Since the [Standardisation Programme](#) began, an additional 2,200 full-time funded pre-school places have been approved to transition from September 2025 and a further 2,000 from September 2026. Implementation will continue on a phased basis and remains subject to Executive agreement and funding.
37. The out-workings of the Standardisation programme may result in additional provision being required however, this is not indicated by the EA at this time and the Department can only consider the current context when making recommendations in respect of this proposal.

Assessment of Need for Pre-school Provision in the Area

38. In determining the need for pre-school education provision, the Department generally assumes a level of provision at 95% of target age children, predicated on the application rate for pre-school education places, which is c.93%, however the level of provision within local areas may be higher or lower, based on historic patterns of demand and assessment of ongoing need.
39. The levels of provision within a two-mile and five-mile radius of Drumahoe PS are set out in Table 2 and Table 3 below respectively.

Table 2 - Level of Provision within a two-mile radius

Year	Statutory places	Non-statutory places	Reception places	Total pre-school provision	P1 places	Level of pre-school provision (%age of P1 places)	Underage children in statutory places
2022/23	338	36	4	374	391	95.7%	10
2023/24	338	36	5	374	392	95.4%	29
2024/25	338	46	5	384	363	105.8%	12
2025/26	312*	44	0	356	414	86.0%	15
Proposed 2026/27	338**	21***	0	359	414	86.7%	-

Source: School Census and EA

*The statutory figure in 2025/26 reflects a reduction of 26 places in Lisnagelvin NS due to their amalgamation from 78 places to 52 places under Amalgamation for Standardisation.

**The proposed 2026/27 statutory figure includes the additional 26 places that Drumahoe PS are proposing.

***The proposed 2026/27 non-statutory figure reflects the reduction of 23 places associated with the closure of Drumahoe Community Pre-school PG. (The playgroup had 23 approved places in 2025/26)

Table 3 - Level of Provision within a five-mile radius

Year	Statutory places	Non-statutory places	Reception places	Total pre-school provision	P1 places	Level of pre-school provision (%age of P1 places)	Underage children in statutory places
2022/23	1222	108	5	1330	1280	103.9%	90
2023/24	1170*	102	7	1272	1243	102.3%	83
2024/25	1196**	93	7	1289	1148	112.3%	48
2025/26	1170***	88	1	1258	1218	103.3%	60
Proposed 2026/27	1196****	65*****	-	1261	1218	103.5%	-

Source: School Census and EA

*The statutory figure for 2023/24 reflects a reduction of 26 places in both The Academy Nursery School and Belmont Nursery School due to Amalgamation through Standardisation.

**The statutory figure in 2024/25 reflects an increase of 26 places due to DP685 Gaelscoil na Daroige

***The statutory figure in 2025/26 reflects a reduction of 26 places in Lisnagelvin NS due to Amalgamation through Standardisation.

****The proposed statutory figure includes the additional 26 places that Drumahoe PS are proposing.

*****The proposed non-statutory figure reflects the reduction of 23 places associated with the closure of Drumahoe Community Pre-school PG (The playgroup had 23 approved places in 2025/26).

40. Within the two-mile radius, provision has been around or above the 95% planning figure in three of the last four years but fell to 86.0% in 2025/26. This primarily reflects the reduction of 26 places at Lisnagelvin NS, from 78 to 52, and an increase in the local P1 cohort.
41. Substantial numbers of penultimate-age children have accessed funded places within the two-mile radius over the past four years, which would normally indicate over-provision. However, most were enrolled at Lisnagelvin NS and Oakgrove IPS NU. Following the reduction at Lisnagelvin NS, no penultimate-age children accessed a funded place there in 2025/26 and overall provision in the area is now below the planning figure.
42. If the Drumahoe PS proposal is approved and Drumahoe Community Pre-school PG closes, this would result in a net increase of three places based on the Playgroup's 23 approved places in 2025/26 or two places based on the revised number of 24 for 2026/27. Provision within two miles would rise marginally from 86.0% to 86.7%, remaining 34 places below the 95% planning figure based on 2025/26 P1 figures. If the proposal is not approved and the non-statutory provider closes, provision would fall to 80.4%, 60 places below the planning figure.
43. Within the five-mile radius, provision has remained above the 95% planning figure throughout the last four years, ranging from 102.3% to 112.3%. Changes reflect reductions at The Academy NS, Belmont NS and Lisnagelvin NS through Amalgamation for Standardisation, and the establishment of statutory provision at Gaelscoil na Daroige through DP685 in 2024/25.
44. Significant numbers of penultimate-age children have also accessed funded provision within five miles. While these numbers have declined following reductions in statutory nursery enrolments, they remain significant, indicating that

sufficient provision continues to be available across the wider area. Approval of the proposal could result in increased penultimate-age uptake within the wider area.

45. If approved, alongside the closure of Drumahoe Community Pre-school PG, the proposal would increase provision within five miles by three places, from 103.3% to 103.5%, representing 104 places above the planning figure based on 2025/26 P1 figures. If the proposal is not approved and the non-statutory provider closes, provision would fall to 101.4%, still above the planning figure.
46. Overall, the data indicates sufficient provision within the wider five-mile area. However, the position is materially different within the immediate two-mile area: without the proposal and assuming closure of the existing non-statutory provider, provision would fall to 80.4%, 60 places below the planning figure.

Resource implications

Finance

47. The pre-school pupils enrolled in Drumahoe Community Pre-School PG are currently PEG funded therefore, the establishment of statutory provision would be an additional cost to the ASB but this pressure should be offset by a reduced pressure on funding needed for non-statutory provision.
48. Any new provision (including new nursery units) opening during the year are a pressure for the Department's "New Schools & Units" fund. A new 26 full-time NU is likely to create a funding need of around £70k – based on past costs for such units opening during the financial year – for the period from opening to the end of that financial year. Full year costs to the ASB are likely to be circa £121k (for new provision, not previously funded).

Staffing

49. Additional teaching and non-teaching staff, approximately £80,000, would be required, with a recruitment process undertaken by the BoG. The cost of staff would be covered through LMS funding for the nursery unit.

Accommodation

50. No additional accommodation will be required for the nursery unit as, should the development proposal be approved, the EA has confirmed that the proposed nursery unit would be accommodated within a current vacant classroom in the school. The classroom can be accessed via its own entrance and has a kitchen area within the classroom.
51. The EA has also confirmed that the current accommodation from which the pre-school operates is a mobile unit of significant age and which was subject to fire damage some years ago. While refurbishment work was undertaken the building continues to require major upgrade works. Should the proposal to establish a nursery unit be approved the former pre-school mobile will no longer be in use.

Conclusion

52. The proposal arises from the planned withdrawal of Drumahoe Community Pre-School PG and would replace existing non-statutory provision with statutory provision at Drumahoe PS, rather than create a significant level of new provision. The existing playgroup had 23 approved places in 2025/26 and 24 places in 2026/27, while the proposed nursery unit would provide 26 places. Approval would therefore result in a small net increase and maintain access to existing full-time provision that would otherwise be at risk.
53. In considering the proposal, the Department must have regard to Article 44 of the Education & Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and the need to secure efficient provision and avoid unreasonable public expenditure. This includes maximising places for target-age children and avoiding unnecessary over-provision, which can result in penultimate-age children accessing statutory pre-school places. Significant numbers of penultimate-age children have accessed funded places within the wider five-mile area in recent years, indicating that sufficient provision has historically been available. However, numbers have reduced following decreases in provision at The Academy NS, Belmont NS and Lisnagelvin NS through the Pre-School Standardisation Programme. While provision within five miles remains above the Department's planning figure, provision within two miles is currently below it and, if the proposal is not approved and the existing playgroup closes, this shortfall would increase further.
54. Approval could result in some increase in penultimate-age children accessing funded places in the wider area. However, this risk must be balanced against the local shortfall, the planned withdrawal of the existing provider and the fact that the proposal would add only three funded places overall. The proposal is therefore considered a proportionate response to the identified local need rather than material additional provision.
55. The proposal is supported by the EA and the Pre-School Education Group. Given that the proposal primarily replaces existing provision at the same location, with only a small net increase in funded places, and that local statutory settings have generally operated at or close to capacity, the Department considers that approval is unlikely to have a material adverse impact on neighbouring providers.
56. The Department is also satisfied that it does not constitute new or additional full-time provision for the purposes of the current moratorium but replaces existing funded full-time provision through a change in management type.
57. The proposal would provide a longer-term solution by relocating provision from an ageing mobile unit into available accommodation within Drumahoe PS, requiring no additional accommodation or capital investment. Statutory provision would create an estimated additional pressure on the Aggregated Schools Budget of approximately £70,000 in the opening financial year and £121,000 for a full year, offset to some extent by reduced pressure on non-statutory funding. Additional staffing costs, estimated in the Case for Change at approximately

£80,000, would be met through additional funding for the nursery unit within the school's LMS budget.

58. Although Drumahoe PS has a significant financial deficit and is working with the EA's LMS team to address its financial position, the proposal requires no capital investment and would make use of existing accommodation. The school otherwise demonstrates healthy enrolment, positive admissions trends and sufficient accommodation
59. On balance, the Department considers the proposal a reasonable and proportionate response to the planned withdrawal of the existing provider. While provision remains sufficient across the wider five-mile area and there is some risk of increased penultimate-age enrolments, this is balanced by under-provision within the immediate two-mile area and the risk of further loss of local provision. Approval would maintain local access and continuity, meet demonstrated demand and result in only two additional funded places compared to 2026/27 approved places. The Department is therefore satisfied that approval is consistent with its statutory responsibilities and wider early years policy objectives and is unlikely to have a material detrimental impact on other providers or the wider Pre-School Education Programme.

Recommendation

60. Taking account of all the evidence and information provided, and given that the proposed implementation date of 1 September 2026 has passed and the primary admissions process for the 2026/27 academic year has concluded, it is recommended that you:
 - (i) Approve DP 756, with a modification to the implementation date, that:

“A statutory nursery unit will be established at Drumahoe Primary School to provide 26 full-time nursery places with effect from 1 September 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter”
 - (ii) Agree that approval will be subject to the removal of Reception provision from the school's admissions criteria.
 - (iii) Agree that this submission (with any appropriate redactions) can be published on the Department's website once the proposer and the EA have been informed of your decision.



Jim Lindsay
Area Planning Policy Team
Ext: 59236
Email: jim.lindsay@education-ni.gov.uk

CC by email

Perm Sec Support

Sharon Smyth

Suzanne Kingon

Paul Brush

Faustina Graham

Scott Harbinson

Clare Foley

Craig Boyd

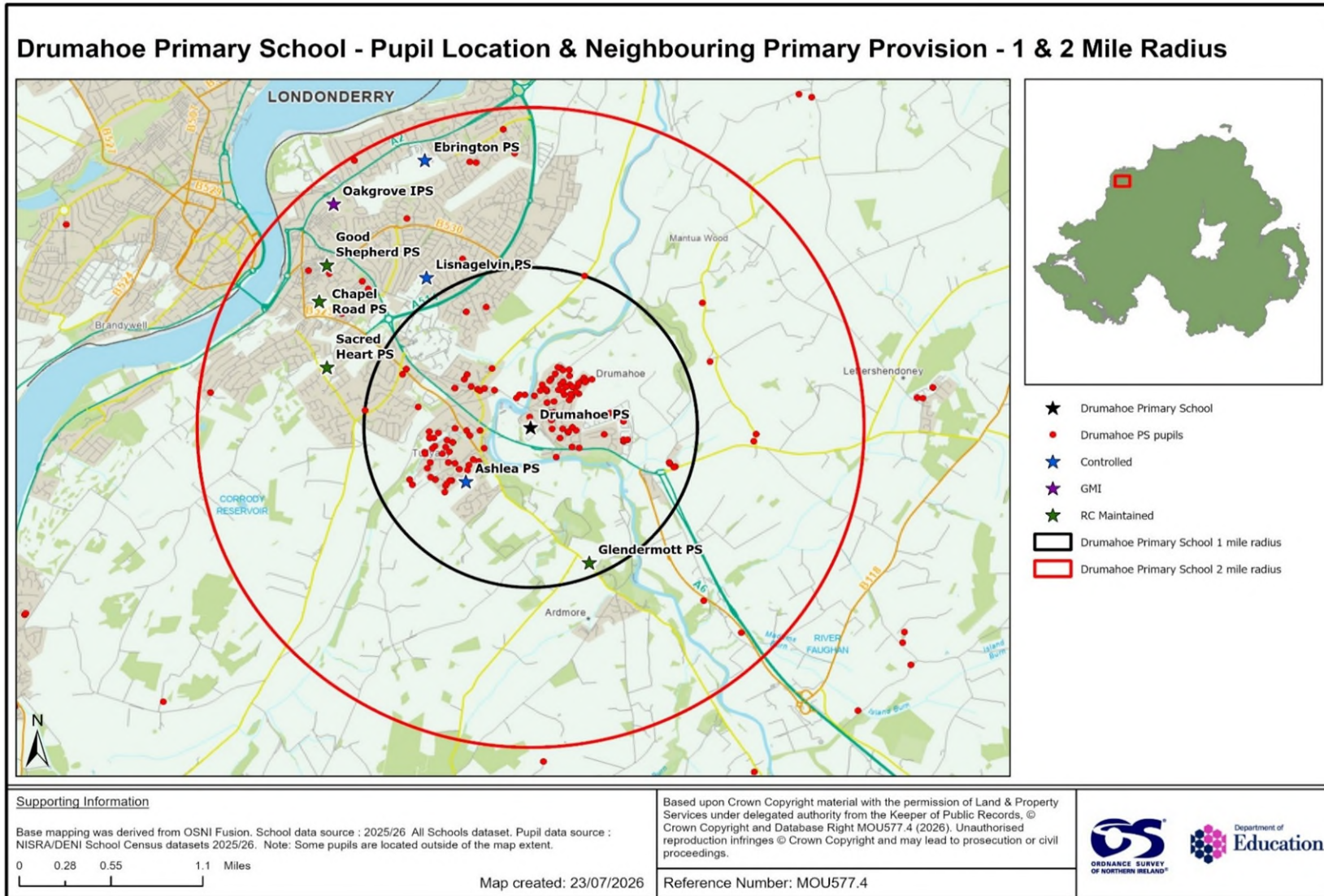
Christine Leacock

Mark McCurdy

APPT Correspondence

Press Office

MAP 1: Drumahoe PS – Pupil Location and Neighbouring Primary Provision



Map 2: Drumahoe Community Pre-School Playgroup – Pupil Locations and Neighbouring Pre-School Provision

