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TransformED

TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING
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New Centre to drive delivery of TransformED

TransformED has reached an important milestone with the creation of the Centre for Educational Excellence and Improvement (CEEI) on 1 September 2026.

The Centre has been established to help turn education reform into real improvements for schools, teachers and pupils across Northern Ireland.

Many organisations already provide support to schools, but this can sometimes feel complex or disconnected. The role of CEEI is to bring these strands together, helping to ensure that schools receive clear, consistent and high-quality support.

What will schools notice?

Schools will continue to work with familiar organisations such as the EA, CCMS and other sectoral bodies. However, over the coming year, schools will begin to see CEEI taking a lead role in driving and coordinating key areas of education reform. The aim is to make support for schools simpler, better connected and more focused on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Key priorities for 2026/27

The Centre's initial priorities include:

- Curriculum Reform: supporting preparation for the phased introduction of the new curriculum from September 2028.
- Teacher Professional Learning: strengthening professional learning opportunities throughout teachers' careers, including enhanced induction and subject-specific support.
- Leadership Development: new programmes and pathways for aspiring, middle and senior leaders.
- School Improvement: introducing the new Supporting Success Programme which replaces the Formal Intervention Process with a more collaborative approach.
- Assessment and Qualifications Reform: supporting assessment reforms and overseeing the review of GCSEs, A Levels and vocational qualifications.
- Evidence, Research and Evaluation: ensuring that policy and practice are informed by what works.

Looking ahead

CEEI will play a central role in supporting schools through a period of significant change. By bringing together expertise and support in one place, it aims to make improvement efforts more coordinated, reduce duplication and help ensure that every child and young person has the opportunity to succeed.

FIND OUT MORE

Further details on the Centre can be accessed at Northern Ireland Centre for Educational Excellence and Improvement (CEEI)



TransformED

INVESTING IN THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Welcome to the fifth edition of TransformED Magazine. There has been a lot happening across our education system in recent months, with plenty of discussion about how we can best support our schools, teachers and young people.

The strong engagement we have seen in recent months demonstrates the value of listening to those who know our schools best as we work together to shape the future of education. Most notably, our public consultation on the proposed new Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028 closed on 30 September, having received more than 4,000 responses from teachers, school leaders, parents, pupils and organisations. I want to thank everyone who took the time to contribute, including the more than 800 school leaders who participated in our six regional roadshow events.

TransformED is not a quick fix or a passing initiative; it is a long-term strategy grounded in evidence and designed to raise standards for every child and young person. Great schools are built on great teaching, and by investing in our teachers, leaders, and collaborative networks, we are building a stronger, more confident education system for Northern Ireland. I hope you find this edition informative as we continue this journey together.

Paul Givan
Education Minister

Over the past year, there has been plenty of discussion about different parts of **TransformED**. From curriculum reform and qualifications to school improvement and assessment, debate and challenge are both welcome and important. Good reform depends on listening to practitioners and testing ideas.

But amid those discussions, it is important not to lose sight of what **TransformED** is really about. At its heart, **TransformED** is an education improvement strategy. Its purpose is simple: to raise standards and improve outcomes for all children and young people.

The strategy recognises a truth that every teacher already knows: great schools are built on great teaching. Research consistently shows that the quality of teaching is the single most important factor in determining how well pupils achieve. That is why such a significant part of **TransformED** is focused on supporting teachers and school leaders to develop their knowledge, skills and expertise.

In fact, more than half of the actions within **TransformED** relate directly to renewed investment in teacher professional learning and development. This includes enhanced support for newly qualified teachers, new leadership development opportunities, strengthened professional learning programmes and a clearer pathway for development throughout a teacher's career.

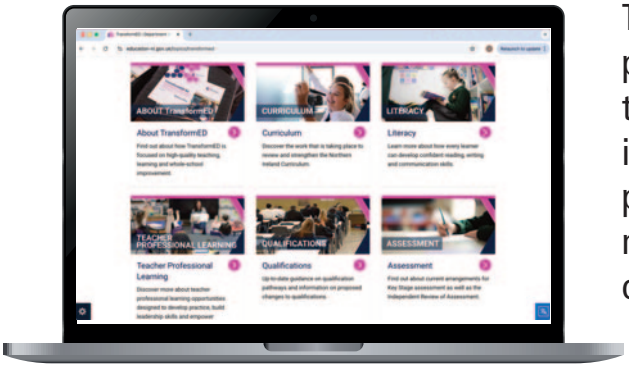
The recently published **Leading Together for Excellence** strategy sets out this vision. It places professional learning at the centre of education reform and recognises that investing in teachers is one of the most effective ways to improve outcomes for learners.

Ultimately, **TransformED** is not simply about changing policies or processes. It is about building a stronger and more confident workforce. By supporting the people who work in classrooms, lead schools and help young people learn every day, the strategy aims to deliver lasting improvements across the education system.

Because when teachers thrive, learners thrive too.

FIND OUT MORE

Read Leading Together for Excellence: A TransformED NI Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning



TransformED
INFORMATION HUB

The **TransformED** hub is packed with guidance, timelines, background information, videos and practical tools. Much new material has been added over recent months.

The hub is a valuable resource for keeping up to date with developments and understanding how **TransformED** is supporting lasting improvements across our education system. Whether you want to explore the implementation roadmap, read the latest policy updates or access professional learning materials, you'll find it on the website.

Click here to access.

STEPPING UP:
NEW LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2026/27



Great schools need great leaders. That's why the Department of Education and the Education Authority have launched a new Leadership Development Programme for 2026/27, offering support for teachers and leaders at different stages of their careers.

Whether you're taking your first steps into leadership or already leading a school, the programme provides opportunities to develop your knowledge, skills and confidence, helping you make an even greater impact for children and young people.

The programme is part of the wider **TransformED** reforms and supports the ambition set out in the new teacher professional learning strategy, Leading Together for Excellence.

This year's offer focuses on support for both new and experienced leaders. Looking ahead, a dedicated programme for senior leaders and a replacement for the Professional Qualification for Headship are also planned.

Together, these programmes will create a clear leadership pathway, supporting teachers as they progress through their careers and helping to build a strong pipeline of future school leaders across Northern Ireland.

School leadership has one of the greatest influences on the quality of teaching and learning. Investing in leadership development is therefore an investment in better outcomes for all children and young people.

FIND OUT MORE

Further details on the Leadership Development Programme for 2026/27, including available programmes and application information, can be accessed at Leadership Development Programme



SUPPORTING SUCCESS:
A NEW APPROACH TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Schools across Northern Ireland play a vital role in improving outcomes and life chances for children and young people. While every school is responsible for its own improvement, some schools benefit from additional support to help address specific challenges and strengthen their capacity to improve.

That is why the Department of Education has introduced Supporting Success, a new school improvement programme that replaces the former Formal Intervention Process. Developed as part of **TransformED**, the programme represents a significant shift to a more collaborative, supportive and evidence-informed approach to improvement.

At the heart of Supporting Success is a simple principle: lasting improvement is not something that is done to schools, but something that is achieved with schools through effective collaboration and shared accountability. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model, the programme works in partnership with school leaders to identify priorities, develop tailored improvement plans and coordinate the support needed to achieve sustainable change.

Each participating school will be assigned a Strategic Coordinator and a System Leader Partner, providing a single point of contact and access to experienced leadership expertise. Schools can also draw upon a wide range of support, including professional learning, leadership development, governance support, curriculum expertise and specialist services.

The programme is built around four key principles:

- School ownership of improvement.
- Partnership and collaboration.
- Tailored, evidence-informed support.
- Building sustainable capacity.

Importantly, the focus is not simply on addressing immediate issues. Supporting Success aims to strengthen leadership, teaching, governance and organisational capacity so that schools can continue to improve long after their participation in the programme has ended.

By bringing together expertise from across the education system and placing schools at the centre of the improvement process, Supporting Success marks a new chapter in school improvement, focused on partnership, capacity-building and better outcomes for every learner.

KEY STAGE ASSESSMENTS PROVIDE FIRST CLEAR PICTURE IN A GENERATION

Northern Ireland's new Key Stage assessments have provided the first consistent system-wide measure of literacy and numeracy standards in almost 20 years.

Over 12,000 pupils from 358 schools took part in the assessments in March 2026, giving our education system an important new baseline against which future progress can be measured.

The results show that most pupils are achieving the expected standard. However, the findings also highlight significant challenges. By the end of primary school, almost 3 in 10 are not reaching the expected standard in literacy or numeracy. By Key Stage 3, almost one-third of pupils fall below the expected level in numeracy.

Perhaps the most concerning finding is the attainment gap linked to disadvantage. Pupils entitled to Free School Meals were substantially less likely to achieve the expected standard, with the gap widening as pupils move through school. It is highly significant that more than 40% of pupils entitled to Free School Meals are not at the expected levels in literacy and numeracy by the end of primary school, and over half are not at the expected level in numeracy by the end of Key Stage 3.



These outcomes correlate strongly with what teachers themselves told us when they reported Key Stage outcomes in 2024/5. They further correlate with the PISA 2025 data which show a decline in outcomes in both literacy and numeracy across the past decade. It is clear there are significant challenges in both literacy and numeracy.

The results underline the need for sustained investment in education and support **TransformED's** focus on literacy, numeracy, curriculum, assessment and teacher professional learning, alongside improvements to support for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

At a Glance: Key Stage Outcomes

Skill	Key Stage	Expected Level	% below expected Level	% at or above expected Level	% above expected Level
English Literacy	Key Stage 1	Level 2	20.4%	79.6%	21.5%
	Key Stage 2	Level 4	27.0%	73.0%	20.0%
	Key Stage 3	Level 5	27.9%	72.1%	29.2%
Numeracy	Key Stage 1	Level 2	22.0%	78.0%	28.1%
	Key Stage 2	Level 4	26.9%	73.1%	28.5%
	Key Stage 3	Level 5	32.2%	67.8%	23.0%

Why It Matters

These assessments provide a valuable benchmark for Northern Ireland's education system. They confirm that many pupils are achieving well, but they also highlight the urgent need to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged learners.

The results will help shape future support, intervention and investment across the education system.

FURTHER READING:

Written Ministerial Statement - Publication of Key Stage Assessment Outcomes | Department of Education

CURRICULUM CONSULTATION



Thank you for having your say

The public consultation on the proposed new Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028 closed on 30 September 2026, marking an important milestone in the **TransformED** programme.

We are delighted to have received more than 4,000 response from teachers, school leaders, parents, pupils, organisations and members of the public. Early analysis indicates that there is strong support for the overall direction of the proposals and a shared ambition to provide all children and young people with a curriculum that is relevant, engaging and fit for the future.

In addition to the survey, officials engaged extensively with stakeholders, meeting more than 800 school leaders through six regional roadshow events, consulting with sectoral bodies and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers and hearing directly from young people through commissioned engagement activities and discussions with the Youth Assembly.

A huge thank you goes to all the schools and teachers who took the time to participate. Your feedback, insights and professional expertise will play a vital role in shaping the next stage of curriculum development.

While the response has been positive, consultees have also highlighted areas where further consideration is needed.

Over the coming weeks, the Department will work closely with teachers and subject specialists to review this feedback and make amendments to the frameworks.

Alongside this, work continues on the development of the Irish-medium curriculum strands and a dedicated Special School Curriculum, ensuring that the needs of all learners are fully reflected in the final curriculum.

The feedback received through the consultation represents an invaluable contribution to this process. We look forward to continuing to work with schools and practitioners as we move towards the next stage of curriculum reform.

CONSULTATION **IN NUMBERS**

6 ROADSHOWS FOR **854** SCHOOL LEADERS

4,333 RESPONSES (INCLUDING **3,600** TEACHERS)







THE SCIENCE OF READING:
Evidence should inform how we teach reading

Recent commentary has suggested that there is 'no one way' to teach children to read and that the Department of Education's proposed approach is simply 'phonics only'. Both claims require careful examination.



It is certainly true that there is no preferred programme or commercial scheme that all schools must adopt. Effective teachers may use different resources and adapt their practice to meet the needs of their pupils. However, it does not follow that all approaches to teaching reading are equally effective, nor that all are equally supported by evidence.

Reading is not a biologically primary skill: it does not develop organically from the environment for most children, unlike spoken language, which most children acquire naturally through exposure and interaction. Over several decades, a substantial body of international research, often referred to as the Science of Reading, has transformed our understanding of how children learn to read.

Drawing on evidence from cognitive psychology, linguistics, neuroscience and education, this research has consistently shown that successful reading depends on high-quality, explicit instruction. It is essential that approaches to teaching reading are informed by the best available evidence about how children learn and how teachers can support that learning most effectively.

There is therefore an important distinction between saying that there is no single programme for teaching reading and suggesting that there is no evidence about how reading should be taught. Programmes may differ, but the evidence base about effective reading instruction is now substantial and continues to grow.

The Department's work on literacy is being led by highly respected local academic, Dr Geraldine Magennis Clarke, who is on secondment from St Mary's University College and has been providing professional learning and support to schools across Northern Ireland.

THE SCIENCE OF READING IS MORE THAN PHONICS

Importantly, the Science of Reading is not solely about phonics. That is absolutely not the position taken by the Department of Education's Strong Foundations: Literacy Framework for Primary Schools.

While the Framework recognises the importance of systematic phonics and secure decoding skills, it is explicit that literacy encompasses far more than this.

It sets out a comprehensive approach to developing children's oracy, reading and writing, underpinned by rich language development, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. It is also very clear that oracy is a foundational element of all literacy and learning, enhancing vocabulary, reasoning and critical thinking across the curriculum.

The Framework recognises that successful reading depends not only on decoding words accurately, but also on understanding language, acquiring knowledge and making meaning from text. These elements work together and should not be viewed in isolation.

The Framework's message is therefore not that phonics is enough, but that phonics is an essential foundation within a comprehensive, research-informed approach to literacy.

DECODING AND COMPREHENSION: BOTH MATTER

Indeed, one of the strengths of the Framework is that it rejects the false choice between phonics and broader literacy.

Children must learn to decode words accurately and fluently, but they must also develop the language, background knowledge and comprehension skills needed to understand, analyse and enjoy what they read. Neither is sufficient without the other.

A child may be able to decode text accurately but struggle to understand it if they lack the necessary vocabulary or background knowledge. Equally, strong language knowledge alone cannot compensate for weaknesses in decoding. Effective literacy instruction therefore develops both dimensions together.

By bringing together these elements, the Framework aims to ensure that all children develop not only the ability to read accurately and fluently, but also the knowledge, confidence and understanding needed to engage successfully with increasingly complex tasks.

PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT WITHIN AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED FRAMEWORK

The Framework does not prescribe a particular commercial programme, nor does it attempt to diminish professional judgement.

Rather, it establishes clear evidence-based principles that schools can use to evaluate and strengthen their literacy provision. As the accompanying guidance makes clear, the goal is a coherent whole-school approach to literacy development that is grounded in research while responsive to the needs of individual pupils and school contexts.

Teachers rightly retain flexibility in how they teach, but that flexibility should operate within an understanding of what research tells us about effective literacy instruction.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE TELLS US

There is, therefore, a crucial difference between saying that there is no single programme for teaching reading and suggesting that there is no evidence about how reading should be taught.

The evidence increasingly points towards the importance of structured, systematic and evidence-informed literacy instruction.

It also highlights the importance of rich oral language, vocabulary development, reading fluency, knowledge-building and comprehension. The Science of Reading is therefore best understood as a broad body of evidence about how children become successful readers, rather than a narrow advocacy of phonics alone.

The challenge for schools is to ensure that their chosen approaches reflect these principles and are implemented consistently and effectively. The Department is supporting them to do so through professional development and resources.

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE LITERACY

The Strong Foundations: Literacy Framework for Primary Schools combines professional flexibility with a clear commitment to evidence-informed practice.

It seeks to support schools in developing coherent approaches to literacy that are grounded in the best available evidence while remaining responsive to local context and pupil need.

Its message is straightforward: literacy is not just phonics, but neither can effective literacy teaching ignore what the evidence tells us about how children learn to read.

FURTHER READING

- Strong Foundations: Literacy Framework for Primary Schools and supporting guidance: DE Literacy Framework
- Guidelines to Support a Coherent Approach to Literacy Development: DE Literacy Guidelines
- Jennifer Buckingham, An investigation of literacy instruction and policy in the United Kingdom and Ireland: To investigate literacy instruction and policy in the UK and Ireland - Churchill Trust
- Range of Literacy Webinars on areas such as the Science of Reading, whole class guided reading and reading for pleasure.

STARTING OUT?

SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

Starting your teaching career is an exciting milestone, but it can also bring new challenges as you begin to translate what you learned in training into everyday classroom practice.

To help early career teachers make a confident start, the 2026/27 Teacher Induction Programme offers a wide range of practical support, professional learning opportunities and guidance throughout the induction year.

A key new feature is the Northern Ireland Teacher Induction Digital Online Platform, providing flexible access to learning modules on how pupils learn, literacy, thinking skills and meeting different learning needs.

The programme also includes:

- Face-to-face professional learning sessions.



- Live webinars on literacy, numeracy, behaviour management and digital learning.
- Additional support for special schools and the Irish-medium sector.
- Guidance from experienced teacher tutors.

The programme provides a foundation for lifelong professional learning, helping teachers develop their skills and make a positive difference for every learner.

FIND OUT MORE

Further information, including registration details for Early Career Teachers and Teacher Tutors, is available at Teacher Induction Leaflet

FACTS NOT FICTION

As with any major reform programme, **TransformED** has prompted debate and discussion. That is both expected and welcome.

Good education policy should be informed by evidence, challenged by constructive scrutiny and shaped by professional dialogue. However, some of the claims made about **TransformED** are based on misunderstandings about what the programme is, what it proposes and why change is needed.

A new factsheet addresses ten common myths about **TransformED**, helping readers to look beyond the headlines and engage in informed, evidence-based discussion about achieving better outcomes for all children and young people in Northern Ireland.

The factsheet addresses some of the most common misconceptions and is worth taking time to read. Click here to access.