COPY OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Cover Note

<table>
<tr><td>DP No.</td><td colspan="2">DP 760</td></tr>
<tr><td>School</td><td colspan="2">Wallace High School Preparatory Department</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">“The Wallace High School Preparatory Department will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.”</td></tr>
<tr><td>Minister’s Decision</td><td colspan="2">APPROVED</td></tr>
<tr><td>Date of Decision</td><td colspan="2">17/11/2026</td></tr>
<tr><td>Minister’s Comments</td><td colspan="2">I approve the recommendation in the submission</td></tr>
<tr><td>Additional notes</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Information redacted</td><td colspan="2">Some information and personal data may have been removed in line with the principles of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Act.</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Key</td><td>Details</td></tr>
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CM Ref: ED1/26/52761

From: Clare Foley
Area Planning Policy Team (East Region)
(cleared by Scott Harbinson 11/11/2026)
(cleared by Sharon Smyth 16/11/2026)

Date: 11 NOVEMBER 2026

To: Paul Givan MLA
Minister for Education

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL (DP) 760 – TO DISCONTINUE WALLACE HIGH SCHOOL (HS) PREPARATORY DEPARTMENT

Issue:	DP 760 – The Wallace High School Preparatory Department will discontinue with effect from August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.
Timescale:	**Routine**
Financial/Resource Implications:	Capital No capital costs associated with this proposal. Financial Implications Staff – Teaching staff are afforded employment protection under the School Re-organisation Agreement 2013/2. Non-teaching staff will be afforded employment protection under the Collective Agreement (JNC Circular 224). Transport -Transport is not provided to children attending Preparatory schools.
FOI Implications:	The contents of this submission are likely to be fully disclosable and will be published on the Department's website (subject to appropriate redactions) once a decision is taken on the proposal.
Statutory Duty Implications:	Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 Article 44 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986
Presentational Issues:	Your decision is likely to attract media interest. In the event of any queries, Press Office will liaise with officials and

	draw upon the content of this submission as necessary. Cleared by press Office 16/11/2026 AC.
Recommendation:	It is recommended that you: - i. Approve DP 760 which proposes that "Wallace High School Preparatory School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter." ii. Agree that this submission (with appropriate redactions) will be published on the Department's website once the school has been informed of your decision.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A Copy of published Development Proposal DP 760

APPENDIX B Case for Change for DP 760

APPENDIX C Key Statistical Information and Data

APPENDIX D Statutory Objection Period Response

APPENDIX E Education & Training Inspectorate Comments

APPENDIX F DE Policy Team Responses

INTRODUCTION

1. On 10 September 2026 the Education Authority (EA), on behalf of the Board of Governors (BoG) of Wallace High School (HS) published Development Proposal (DP) 760 which proposes that: -

   'The Wallace High School Preparatory Department will discontinue to effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.'

2. The two-month statutory objection period for the proposal ran from 10 September 2026 to 10 November 2026. A copy of the published DP and the proposer's Case for Change (CfC) are reproduced at **Appendix A and B** respectively. The associated Equality Screening is included in the CfC.

Preparatory School Legislative Arrangements

3. From a legislative perspective, preparatory departments are governed by the grammar schools to which they are attached. These departments are classified as part of the grammar school, whether the school is voluntary or controlled.

4. Wallace HS is a Voluntary Grammar School (VGS) which has responsibility for the management of Wallace HS Preparatory Department (Wallace Prep) and as such its BoG is the relevant body to bring forward a proposal. Article 14(2) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (the 1986 Order) is the applicable legislation in the context of the DP process.

5. More details relating to Legislative Arrangements for Preparatory schools can be found in **Appendix C**.

BACKGROUND

6. Wallace Prep is a co-educational voluntary preparatory school located at 12A Clonevin Park, Lisburn on the same site as Wallace HS.

7. In 2025/26 Wallace Prep had: -
   - 52 pupils enrolled across Year 1 (Y1) – Y7;
   - Five pupils admitted to Y1;
   - No pupils entitled to Free School Meals (FSME);
   - [redacted] pupils with a Statement of Special Education Need (SEN); and
   - 23 Protestant pupils, four Catholic pupils and 25 pupils designating as 'Other' enrolled.

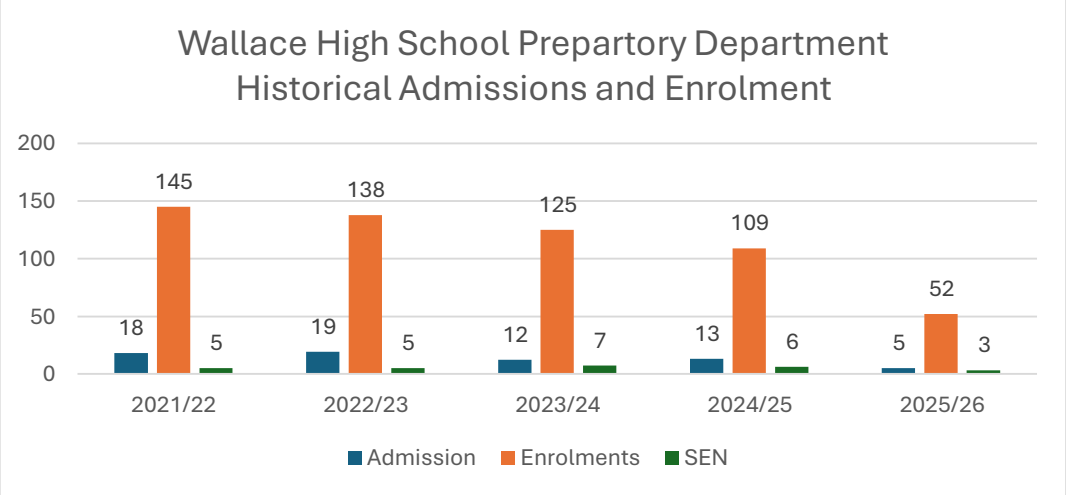
8. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and the BoG of Wallace Prep have confirmed that for the 2026/27 academic year, annual census figures show enrolment has fallen to six pupils, all of whom are in Year 7.

Admissions & Enrolment

9. Preparatory Schools do not have approved admissions or enrolment numbers.

10. **Chart 1** shows the historical trend of admissions and enrolment for Wallace Prep. The enrolment decreased from 145 in 2021/22 to 52 in 2025/26. Admissions reduced from 18 to just five over the same period.

Chart 1: Historical Admissions and Enrolments



Source: Schools Census

Area

11. The EA published an addendum to its second operational plan (OP2) in May 2026 which featured a short-term workstream for Wallace Prep *stating "The Wallace High School Preparatory Department is experiencing low pupil numbers. At September 2024, the school had an enrolment of 109 pupils. Wallace High School as the school's Board of Governors is proposing the discontinuance of the preparatory department."*

12. The Department of Education's (the 'Department') latest School Population Projections 2024/25 based forecast a continuing decline in the school-age population over the next decade to 2034/35 which is in line with NISRA 2022-based population projections[1].

[1] SNPP22_SYA_Age_Bands.xlsx

13. A detailed consideration of the area context is set out at **Appendix C.** This shows that Wallace Prep is situated in the Lisburn and Castlereagh Local Government District (LGD) where NISRA figures for Schools Age Population - Current and Projected Enrolments (taken from OP2), show that for Years 1-7 the figures will peak in 2027 at 13044 then face a decline to 12,622 by 2035.

Neighbouring Provision

14. **Table 1** (in Appendix C) provides a snapshot of all primary provision in the area based on the schools illustrated in **Map 1** alternative Preparatory Provision within a seven-mile radius and **Map 2** alternative primary provision within a two-mile radius. Distances by road may vary from the mapping radius and associated journey times will also be impacted by a range of factors including traffic volumes.

15. There are 16 alternative primary schools within a two-mile radius of Wallace Prep, these include Controlled, Maintained, Integrated and one alternative Preparatory school. There are an additional three alternative Preparatory schools within a seven-mile radius.

16. Of the 15 alternative grant-aided primary schools (excluding Friends' Prep) in 2025/26 there were 607 available places across these schools. Eleven of the 15 schools were undersubscribed at first preference applications for 2026/27.

17. However, it is recognised that parents may wish to continue with Preparatory School provision. There are four alternative Preparatory schools within a seven-mile mapping radius, the closest provision is at Friends' School Preparatory Department, Lisburn (0.5 miles). Other schools include: -
    - Inchmarlo Preparatory School;
    - Victoria College Preparatory Department; and
    - Methodist College Preparatory Department

18. Preparatory schools do not have approved admissions or enrolment numbers. In 2025/26 there were 519 pupils enrolled across the four alternative preparatory schools.

19. Neighbouring provision is considered in greater detail in **Appendix C**.

CASE FOR CHANGE

20. The CfC sets out the BoG justification for the proposed closure of Wallace Prep, including the key factors underpinning the proposal.

21. The BoG concluded that the Preparatory Department is no longer sustainable, reflecting a sharp decline in enrolment, particularly in the early years, and a rapidly worsening financial position. Numbers more than halved within a year, resulting in very small and composite classes, while financial projections indicated significant and growing deficits. The Board also considered the broader challenges facing the preparatory sector, including declining enrolments, demographic pressures and the introduction of VAT on school fees. While recognising the Preparatory Department's long history and valued contribution to the school community, the Board considered that closure was necessary to safeguard the educational provision and financial sustainability of Wallace HS as a whole.

22. A fuller summary of the proposer's rationale for this proposal can be found in **Appendix C**.

Equality screening and Rural Needs assessment

23. The CfC has confirmed the BoG, as proposer, undertook Equality Screening and, where appropriate, the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 in accordance with the Department's DP Guidance and concluded that "*Following consideration of the evidence, it was unanimously agreed that the Board of Governors were satisfied that there is no significant adverse impact requiring a full an EQIA [Equality Impact Assessment].*"

STATUTORY DP PROCESSES

Pre-publication consultation

24. The CfC confirms that the necessary consultations were carried out in accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

25. In line with statutory requirements, the BoG undertook an eight-week pre-publication consultation between 16 October and 19 December 2025. Engagement included information sessions for staff and parents, alongside consultation with pupils through the Senior School Student Executive Council and a subsequent paper-based exercise. While 70% of respondents who expressed a formal view opposed the proposal and 30% supported it, the BoG considered all consultation responses and concluded that the issues raised did not alter its assessment of the school's sustainability, enrolment trends or financial position. The Board therefore determined that it remained appropriate to proceed with the DP for Ministerial consideration.

EA Pre-Consultation

26. In accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, on 21 April 2026 the EA sent a copy of the proposal to schools, and on 20 May 2026 to preparatory schools which in their view might be impacted by the proposal. A total of 55 local schools were provided with a copy of the proposal and the BoGs and Trustees were invited to comment by 19 May or 19 June 2026 for preparatory schools.

27. The CfC states that the EA received no responses from affected schools, one response was received from a parent and one from a 'constituent'. Details of the EA's pre-consultation are included in the CfC at **Appendix B**.

EA Comments

28. Commentary provided by the EA states *"The EA acknowledges the management authority responsibility of The Wallace High School to take forward Development Proposal 760 for the discontinuance of Wallace High School Preparatory Department with effect from 31 August 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.*

29. *The Board of Governors have explored other options, as outlined in the Case for Change, but are of the view that the continuation of the current position at The Wallace High School Preparatory Department is neither educationally nor financially viable.*

30. *The EA acknowledges the impact the discontinuance of The Wallace High School Preparatory School will have on the parents and pupils; however, it is noted that there are available places in the Lisburn and Belfast areas."*

Two-month statutory objection period

31. The Department's two-month statutory objection period commenced on the date of publication, 10 September 2026, and concluded on 10 November 2026. The Department received one response from the Wallace HS BoG which provided updated information in support of the proposal. No objections were received. The BoG response is attached in full at **Appendix D** and a summary of the key issues detailed below:
    - Since the CfC was prepared the position with Wallace Prep has changed materially;
    - At October 2026 census, six P7 pupils remain enrolled in the Department;
    - The P7 class is taught by two teachers, each of whom work a three-day week;

- The projected deficit for the 2025/26 financial year is [redacted] and the projected deficit for the 2026/27 financial year to **31 August 2027 only** is [redacted]. Currently there is no projected enrolment beyond that date; and
- The school has not yet set fees for the 2027/28 academic year; however, these will have to be set at a level which reflects the financial realities and running costs of Preparatory Department provision.

SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

Summary of Sustainability Assessment

32. The Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) does not apply to Preparatory provision which is only partially funded and operates without approved admissions or enrolment numbers. However, the SSP framework is being applied (as per the Department's DP Guidance) as a robust method of assessing such provision albeit that there is no requirement to meet the minimum thresholds. Details of the sustainability assessment are available at **Appendix C.**

33. The sustainability of preparatory provision is a matter of concern, particularly around the issue of low admissions and enrolment numbers. The SSP highlights the difficulties which small schools can encounter and the detrimental impact on pupils' education experience. Wallace Prep has experienced a decrease in its overall enrolment numbers for a number of years, but this increased significantly in 2026 as there are only six remaining pupils, all in Year 7.

34. Financially the Wallace Prep operates as a department within the overall Grammar school. Information provided by the school shows the department has faced an increasing deficit from [redacted] in 2023/24 to [redacted] in 2024/25. Projections for the next seven years show this is likely to increase and this would have a negative impact on Wallace High School. The BoG have confirmed that the projected deficit for 2025/26 financial year is [redacted].

35. When assessed against the SSP criteria, an analysis of the evidence suggests that Wallace Prep is unable to meet all the criteria and indicators of the SSP in full. Current pressures on enrolment and finances may impact the quality of education, by restricting the full range of curricular and extra-curricular activities that can be provided.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Area Impact

36. The closure of Wallace Prep is unlikely to cause any negative impact on alternative primary schools in the area. As it now appears that all remaining

pupils are in the final year of their primary education, there will be no pupils transferring at 31 August 2027 should the proposal be approved.

37. The evidence above shows there is preparatory provision available in Lisburn and in the Greater Belfast area should future parents wish to continue their child/children's education in that sector. There is also alternative provision available within a two-mile radius in the Controlled, Catholic Maintained and Integrated sectors.

Educational Impact

38. The SSP states that small schools often face challenges in providing the full curriculum and an educational environment which maximises opportunities for pupils, the pressures become even more evident at a time of falling rolls.

39. Smaller pupil numbers correspond to a small number of staff which means everyone, including principals, has a full range of roles and teach for significant hours. A sustainable school can allow for efficient use of educational resources including the deployment of teaching and support staff. It can also provide increased opportunities for the professional development of all staff as a larger staffing complement allows for increased interaction with peers and can facilitate more opportunities for training/development.

40. The ETI advised that from September 2026 there are only six pupils at Wallace Prep, however, there are no concerns regarding the current provision.

Article 44 of the Education and Libraries Order 1986

41. Wallace Prep has experienced sustained declining enrolment. Evidence provided by the BoG indicates that the decline in pupil numbers is unlikely to be reversed without incurring further significant financial losses, raising concerns regarding the long-term viability of the provision. While the precise financial impact of discontinuance cannot be quantified due to a range of variables, including parental preferences for future educational provision, the relatively small number of pupils currently enrolled means that any impact on the overall education budget is expected to be limited. On balance, the proposal is considered consistent with the need to secure the effective and efficient use of resources.

42. Further information can be found at **Appendix C** in the 'Other Considerations' section.

Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 - Section 52 Considerations

43. Climate change implications have been considered in accordance with section 52 of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022[2].

44. Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposal, any climate change implications are considered to be limited and do not affect the recommendation.

RESOURCES

Financial Implications

45. The CfC asserts that *"Any financial implications up to the date of discontinuance would be managed through Wallace High School's normal financial processes. If approved, the budget relating to the Prep Department would no longer form part of Wallace High School's financial planning, and any remaining financial matters would be managed by WHS in line with standard procedures."*

Accommodation

46. There will be no resource requirements in terms of accommodation with this proposal and future use of the Preparatory Department accommodation would be a matter for the BoG should the proposal be approved.

Staffing

47. The CfC notes that, at September 2025, the staffing complement was two full time and five part-time teachers for an overall FTE [full-time equivalent] of 5.1 staff. Teaching staff are afforded employment protection under the School Re-organisation Agreement 2013/2. Non-teaching staff will be afforded employment protection under the Collective Agreement (JNC Circular 224). The BoG will meet with staff to discuss options should the DP be approved.

CONCLUSION

48. A central aim of Area Planning is to achieve a network of viable and sustainable schools that are of the right type, right size, located in the right place and have a focus on raising standards. The SSP, implemented through Area Planning, is clear that the core issue for a school's sustainability must be the continuing provision of a high-quality education for children. Generally, it is acknowledged that as numbers in a school decline, the challenges it must overcome in order to provide a high-quality education rise.

[2] Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

49. The number of children accessing preparatory education provision in Wallace Prep is significantly below the SSP recommended enrolment for an Urban PS (140). A school with only six pupils, all of whom are in Year 7, is facing significant educational and financial sustainability challenges.

50. The CfC notes that the BoG of Wallace HS considered the consultation responses received alongside the evidence regarding enrolment, sustainability and finance. The BoG considered that the concerns raised did not alter the overall position and that it remained appropriate to bring forward a proposal for the closure for Ministerial consideration.

51. Within a seven-mile radius of Wallace Prep there are four alternative Preparatory Schools and within a two-mile radius there are 15 grant-aided schools including Controlled, Maintained and Integrated schools. However, the current pupils will not require alternative provision as they complete their primary provision at the end of 2026/27 year.

52. No objections to the proposal were received during the statutory objection period.

53. The closure of any school is a difficult and emotive decision, however, the evidence supporting DP 760 is compelling, not least the fact that the six remaining pupils will transfer to post-primary education at the end of June leaving no pupils enrolled at the school.

RECOMMENDATION

54. It is recommended that you: -

(i) Approve DP 760 which proposes that: -

"*Wallace High School Preparatory School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter."*

(ii) Agree that this submission (with appropriate redactions) will be published on the Department's website once the Board of Governors and the EA have been informed of your decision.

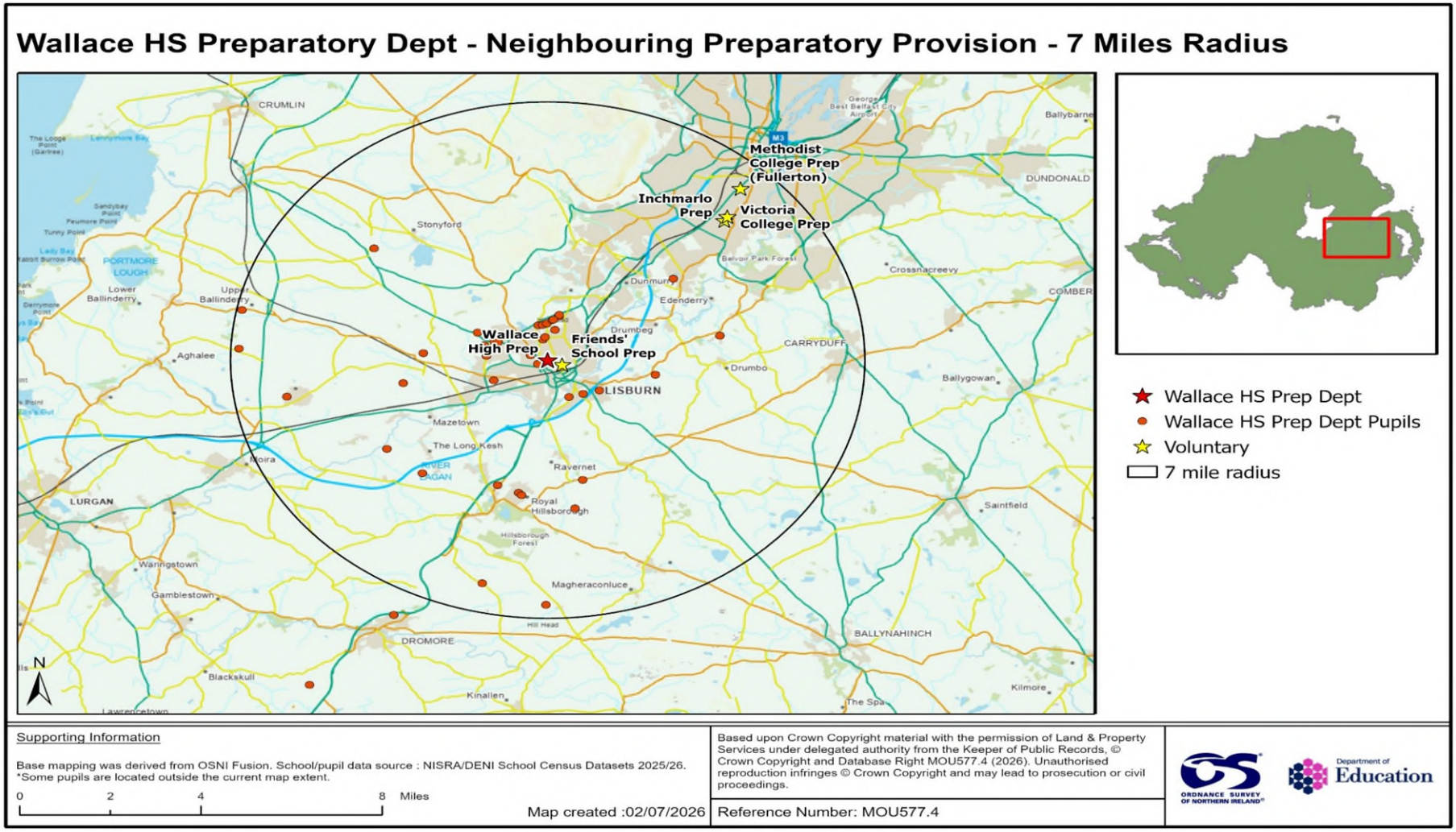


Clare Foley

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Scott Harbinson
Elaine Armstrong
Jim Lindsay
Craig Boyd
APPT Correspondence
Press Office

Map 1: Wallace High School Preparatory Department and Neighbouring Preparatory Provision at 7 miles radius



Map 2 Wallace HS Preparatory Department – Neighbouring Primary Provision at 2 miles radius

