

## **Supporting Newcomer Pupils – Public Consultation**

### **Executive summary**

1. This consultation aims to collect your views on how the current Supporting Newcomer Pupils Policy (Newcomer Policy) supports Newcomer children and young people in our schools to thrive and fulfil their potential.
2. Over recent years there has been a significant increase in families from different countries coming to Northern Ireland (NI) and making their home here. This has enriched our society and enabled our school communities to become more diverse and multicultural.
3. The 2009 Newcomer Policy provides a framework to support schools to enable our Newcomer pupils to overcome barriers and to fully participate in the school curriculum. We have many examples of schools that do this really well, however, more can be achieved.
4. The current policy is a decade old so we want to review it to ensure it is effective and reflects current and future needs. To achieve this, we need your comments on how it can be improved.
5. We have already undertaken pre consultation work with Newcomer pupils and their parents, teachers and other key stakeholders including statutory and voluntary sectors. This included gathering evidence on funding arrangements and school support services available to Newcomer pupils and their parents.
6. This consultation paper contains more information about who we spoke to and what they said. It provides background information on the current policy and a summary of the information we have gathered to date through questionnaires, focus groups, and school visits.

## Consultation - How to respond

7. We welcome your views on how we can best support Newcomer pupils and encourage you to respond to this consultation and to share your views on how we can improve the current policy. We are particularly interested in the views of current and former Newcomer pupils and all those involved in their education, including families, school principals, teachers, school support staff and community organisations.
8. The publication of this paper signals the start of a public consultation period that will continue until 15 October 2019. During that time we wish to gather the views of children and young people; parents and guardians; and all those stakeholders and service deliverers who are concerned with the wellbeing of our children and young people, particularly those who are Newcomers.
9. We would strongly encourage you to respond using the online questionnaire which can be accessed via the link below:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/D8DL83H>

Alternatively, responses can also be submitted in writing or by email to:

Address: Additional Educational Needs Team  
Department of Education  
Rathgael House  
43 Balloo Road  
Rathgill  
Bangor  
BT19 7PR

Email: [NewcomerConsultation@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:NewcomerConsultation@education-ni.gov.uk)

All responses must be received **by 5.00 pm on Tuesday 15 October 2019**.

10. When responding to this consultation, please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If responding on

behalf of an organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents and, where applicable, how the views of members were assembled.

11. Any queries about the consultation, or requests for alternative formats, should be directed to the postal address or email address above. You may also contact 028 9127 9921.

### **Freedom of Information, Data Protection and Confidentiality**

12. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case the Department of Education. This includes access to information provided in response to a consultation exercise.
13. DE cannot automatically consider information supplied to it during consultation as confidential if that information is subsequently requested under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. However, if there is a Freedom of Information request for information submitted during this present consultation, the Department will consider carefully whether it should be made public, or treated confidentially.
14. If we are asked to disclose responses under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, we will take any requests for confidentiality into account. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.
15. We will handle any personal data provided during the consultation in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the General Data Protection Regulations.
16. For further information about confidentiality of responses, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office or visit their website at:

<https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/who-we-are/northern-ireland-office/>

## **After the Consultation**

17. The views and comments received during this consultation process will be analysed and inform the development of a revised for Supporting Newcomer Pupils policy.

[\(Hyperlink to Annex A\)](#)

## **Introduction**

18. Over recent years the increase in the number of people from different countries choosing to work and raise their families in NI has allowed our society, including our school communities, to become truly diverse and multicultural. In parallel with increasing economic migration, we have also seen growing numbers of refugees and asylum seeking families choosing to settle here. Our education system has been enriched by their arrival and our schools have responded, creating intercultural atmospheres of warmth, care, understanding and respect; where all our pupils can thrive.
19. Our current Supporting Newcomer Pupils policy (2009) was designed to provide a framework whereby Newcomer pupils are welcomed and valued in our schools; and where they receive the support they need to access the full curriculum. A good education is key to enhancing life chances for every child, with the qualifications they gain in our schools opening doors to broader opportunities for training, employment or further study. Education is also a key enabler in building an inclusive and respectful society; one in which every child and young person belongs and can play their part. In seeking to raise educational standards, it is our job to enable our Newcomer pupils to overcome barriers which could prevent them from reaching their full potential.

### **What is a Newcomer pupil?**

20. DE's Supporting Newcomer Pupils policy (Newcomer policy) currently defines a Newcomer pupil as *"A child or young person who has enrolled in a school but who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher."*

### **How many Newcomer pupils are in our schools?**

21. There are currently over 16,000 Newcomer pupils enrolled in our schools, which represents 4.4% of total school enrolments<sup>1</sup>. The majority (over 10,000) of these pupils are in primary schools and the number of Newcomer pupils is

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<sup>1</sup> Source: School Census October 2018

increasing by approximately 1,000 each year. Newcomer pupils here have a diverse range of cultures and languages.

### **Strategic Context – alignment with the draft Programme for Government 2016-2021, the draft Children and Young People’s Strategy and DE’s corporate vision and goals**

22. DE’s Business Plan for 2019/20 sets out two key areas of focus, namely the draft Programme for Government (PfG)<sup>2</sup> and draft Children and Young People’s Strategy<sup>3</sup>. Although not yet finalised, these already provide a clear sense of direction to guide the Department’s work going forward; and we have sought to align this policy review with the latest drafts of both documents.
23. While DE has a role to play in various PfG Outcomes and Indicators, its main focus is on **Outcome 12: We give our children and young people the best start in life**. The work of the Newcomer Policy Review also aligns with **Outcome 3: We have a more equal society**.

### **Draft Children and Young People’s Strategy**

24. The Children’s Services Co-operation Act (2015) requires all government Departments to co-operate to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people in NI and the Executive to adopt a strategy which would provide a framework around which Departments would achieve and report progress on improvements.
25. DE leads on the development of the Children and Young People’s Strategy (the Strategy) that links directly to the draft PfG Outcomes and is the NI Executive’s plan to make life better for all children and young people.
26. The strategy aims to improve the wellbeing of children and young people across eight outcomes as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/programme-government>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/consultations/children-and-young-peoples-strategy-2017-2027>

1. Children and young people are physically and mentally healthy;
2. Children and young people enjoy play and leisure;
3. Children and young people learn and achieve;
4. Children and young people live in safety and with stability;
5. Children and young people experience economic and environmental wellbeing;
6. Children and young people make a positive contribution to society;
7. Children and young people living in a society that respects their rights; and
8. Children and young people living in a society in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.

The Newcomer Policy Review contributes to a number of these outcomes.

### **DE's Vision and Corporate Goals**

27. Our vision is for: "An education system that is recognised internationally for the quality of its teaching and learning, for the achievements of its young people and for a focus on meeting their needs."

28. Our Corporate Goals<sup>4</sup> are as follows:

1. Improving the wellbeing of children and young people – through ensuring that all of our children and young people grow up in a society that provides the support they need to achieve their potential.
2. Raising standards for all – through high quality early years provision, excellent teaching and learning in the classroom and effective provision of youth and other children's services, ensuring that all young people enjoy and do well in their learning and their achievements and attainment are appropriately recognised and celebrated, including through qualifications.
3. Closing the performance gap, increasing access and equality – addressing the underachievement that can hold our children and young people back;

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/about-department-education>

ensuring that young people who face barriers or are at risk of social exclusion are supported to achieve to their full potential; and ensuring that our services are planned effectively on an area basis to provide children and young people with full access to high quality learning experiences, both in school and out of school.

4. Developing the education workforce – recognising the particular professional role of early years’ providers, teachers and school leaders in delivering an effective, age-appropriate curriculum and raising standards and also the important role of other education professionals and those who support them.
  5. Improving the learning environment – making sure that strategic investment supports the delivery of the area plans; that the premises in which young people grow and learn are safe, fit for purpose and conducive to learning; and that the environment provides opportunities for sharing and for building a more cohesive society.
  6. Delivering high quality education services – ensuring that the arrangements for governing and managing education are modern, accountable and child-centred and that education services are delivered efficiently and effectively in support of schools.
29. Through this policy review, we want to learn from and build on the many positive outcomes Newcomer pupils experience while also addressing areas of concern and barriers to achieving the draft PfG outcome “giving our children and young people the best start in life”.

### **The Current Policy**

30. The ‘Every School a Good School: Supporting Newcomers Policy’ (the Policy) was published in April 2009 and requires all schools to provide equity of access and provision.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/Newcomer-policy.pdf>



31. The Policy recognises that '*significant difficulty with the language of instruction presents a barrier to learning for Newcomer pupils and seeks to develop the capacity of schools to respond*'. It states that DE's policy is to support the Education Authority (EA) and schools in:

*"... welcoming Newcomer pupils into their school communities, so that they are assisted in their acquisition of the language of instruction, whether it be English or Irish, in an inclusive manner, to enable them to access the curriculum in particular and partake in every aspect of school life."*

32. The overall aim is to build capacity and skills of the school workforce to support Newcomer pupils now and into the future. The Policy states that this will be achieved through:

- (i) A broad, consistent regional framework; and
- (ii) A flexible, responsive approach at school level.

33. This policy is currently delivered through the EA's Intercultural Education Service (IES) and the additional funding provided through the Common Funding Formula (CFF) to support Newcomer pupils. It is these two elements of the policy that are being looked at specifically as part of this public consultation.

### **Current Guidelines for Schools**

34. To support implementation of the Newcomer Policy, DE published guidelines for schools in August 2010:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/Newcomer-guidelines-for-schools.pdf>

35. These guidelines advise school Principals and Boards of Governors on the criteria for designating a pupil as a Newcomer and provide guidance on good practice in using the additional funding allocated to schools to effectively support Newcomer pupils.

36. The IES aims to build the capacity of schools to support current and future Newcomer children (and also Traveller and Roma children) and to facilitate service development planning. It aims to strengthen and improve support to pupils, by ensuring a consistent level of support and specialist advice is provided to all grant-aided and special schools. Further details on the service provided by IES are included at Annex F<sup>5</sup>.

### **Criteria for Newcomer Pupil Designation**

37. Under the current policy, a child can initially be designated as a Newcomer pupil for funding purposes if:
- i. the child was born in a country other than the UK and needs to learn the language of instruction (including basic communication and comprehension) whether that is English or Irish, and does not have a language in common with the teacher. The child does not normally speak English or Irish at home; and/or
  - ii. the child was born in the UK but does not have the satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum, and the wider environment, and does not have a language in common with the teacher. The child does not normally speak English or Irish at home<sup>6</sup>.
38. Thereafter, in line with the Newcomer Guidelines for Schools, schools must ensure that an assessment is carried out annually and documented to provide evidence as to whether or not entitlement to the additional Newcomer funding continues to apply. It is recommended that criteria used during this annual assessment are based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages<sup>7</sup>, as well as other assessment data. Pupils transferring to post-primary school will automatically be designated Newcomers, even if an annual assessment is due, as they may require additional support in Year 8 to adapt to the extended curriculum.

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<sup>5</sup> This can be found in the Supporting Newcomer Pupils consultation paper: supplementary information

<sup>6</sup> 'Every School a Good School: Supporting Newcomers Policy' (April 2009) para 21.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>

39. The EA's Internal Audit Service verifies the school census data; which includes verification that Newcomer designation pro-forma are completed, annual assessments completed (where appropriate), and provides an annual audit report on the school census data, identifying the over- and under- statement of Newcomer designations. The variations are low – in 2016/17 an under-statement of 26 Newcomer pupils (out of 14,000) was identified regionally. DE statistics on length of Newcomer designation are included in Annex G<sup>8</sup>.

### **Pre consultation activity**

40. The following paragraphs outline the pre consultation activity to gather evidence and inform this consultation paper and questions.

### **Analysis of evidence gathered through surveys and focus groups**

41. DE worked with a Review Reference Group and a Review Steering Group (see Annex H and Annex I respectively<sup>9</sup>) to identify the best ways to engage with teachers, Newcomer pupils and parents. Evidence was gathered from Newcomer pupils, families of Newcomer pupils and schools through focus groups, school visits and online questionnaires. Three different questionnaires were available for completion aimed at teachers, Newcomer pupils, and parents of Newcomer pupils. There were 109 responses from schools to the online questionnaire, three focus groups were held for teachers and nine school visits were carried out.
42. In relation to the online questionnaires, 231 parent questionnaires and 511 pupil questionnaires were completed in a variety of languages including Tetum, Arabic, Polish, Portuguese, and 10 other languages spoken by Newcomer pupils. A number of focus groups were also held with parents and pupils. These were arranged with the assistance of The Executive Office Racial Equality Sub Group, the Refugee and Asylum Forum, the Review Reference Group, and teachers who had attended the school focus group meetings. Many of the parent and pupil sessions were hosted and facilitated directly by the pupils'

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<sup>8</sup> This can be found in the Supporting Newcomer Pupils consultation paper: supplementary information

<sup>9</sup> These can be found in the Supporting Newcomer Pupils consultation paper: supplementary information

schools or via other community support organisations. All of the information gathered through the questionnaires, focus groups, and school visits has informed this public consultation paper.

43. Further information on the engagement events, including detailed summaries of the evidence gathered during the focus groups are included at Annexes B, C and D<sup>10</sup>.

### **Issues for Schools**

44. The evidence gathered from schools to date suggests that the current 'one-size-fits-all' payment provided as part of the CFF fails to adequately address the wide variations in need among Newcomer pupils.
45. Some schools, who have engaged with our evidence gathering to date, have expressed the view that children entering post-primary schools without adequate language skills to engage in the curriculum face a significantly greater level of challenge than those arriving in primary schools. They noted that in primary schools, the development of language and comprehension skills is a core element of learning for every pupil.
46. In addition to the differing complexities of teaching Newcomers in a primary or post-primary setting, all schools have flagged a particular concern regarding the challenges of trying to address the learning needs of pupils who have suffered protracted breaks in their education. These pupils, in addition to any language related challenges, are often entering schools at an educational baseline several years behind their peers. Throughout the rest of this paper we refer to children and young people in this category as pupils who have had an 'interrupted education'.

### **Funding and Accountability**

47. Newcomer pupils attract additional funding under the CFF to the value of 0.5 of the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) cash value for each Newcomer pupil.

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<sup>10</sup> These can be found in the Supporting Newcomer Pupils consultation paper: supplementary information

Because the Newcomer factor is based on the AWPU, the value of the factor increases or decreases with the AWPU cash value (e.g. the Newcomer factor for both the nursery and primary and post-primary funding streams increased by £58 per pupil in 2019/20). Eligibility for funding continues for at least the following three years of the child's school life, beginning when the child is first recorded as a Newcomer pupil in the annual school census.

48. For 2019/20, 706 out of 1,092 schools are in receipt of Newcomer funding. The average number of Newcomer pupils for schools in the nursery and primary funding stream (with Newcomer pupils) is 25 and the average number of Newcomer pupils for schools in the post-primary funding stream is 19. That said, within this cohort, there are schools with a significant proportion of Newcomer pupils. The budget allocation for the Newcomer factor is increasing, year-on-year, with the additional numbers of Newcomer pupils. In 2019/20, the total allocation under the CFF for Newcomers is £16.5m (a 13% increase from 2018/19 level of £14.5m). This represents 1.34% of the total Aggregated Schools Budget.
49. Since the Newcomer factor is part of each school's CFF delegated budget allocation, it is for each school and Board of Governors to determine how best to use this funding. That is, presently there is no requirement for schools to report to the EA, as their Funding Authority, on how this funding is spent. Although there is no formal monitoring of how the Newcomer funding is spent in schools, there is some evidence in Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) school inspection reports of good practice in schools. That said, staff from IES, who work closely with schools in supporting Newcomer pupils, have advised that in their experience the support for Newcomers varies from school to school.
50. In light of the wider pressures on school budgets, along with the quantum of funding (£16.5m ), it is important to ensure that CFF funding provided to meet the differentiated need of Newcomers pupils is used for its intended purpose and that an assessment of enhanced individual outcomes is obtained.

51. Many schools raised a specific concern over current CFF-linked funding arrangements. Specifically, when a Newcomer pupil is enrolled at a school, the school must immediately begin to support that pupil, and their learning needs. The CFF funding mechanism determines a school's budget for the following financial year and this can lead to a delay before the school receives any additional resource. However, within the overall Common Funding Scheme (CFS), schools can engage with the EA, as schools' Funding Authority, to seek centre support from the Funding Authority's Contingency Provision to address pupil number adjustments or circumstances which the Funding Authority judges exceptional and which give rise to unexpected and significant increased expenditure not covered elsewhere in the CFS. With school budgets under pressure, any inflexibility or lag was cited as a major challenge to the provision of timely support for Newcomer arrivals, particularly where those arrivals have more complex learning needs.
52. Another issue which schools, who have engaged with us to date, have raised is the instance whereby a school's Newcomer pupil numbers are small. In such instances, the CFF funding provided can be insufficient to allow for the school to obtain adequate additional support to make a meaningful difference to their pupils' learning outcomes. On the other end of the scale, there is a small cohort of schools with significant numbers of Newcomer pupils and which may not be adversely impacted by a maximum level of Newcomer funding.

#### Options to consider / comment on

53. Funding options to consider in relation to the various issues outlined above include:
- remove the current Newcomer funding from the CFF budget allocation process and create a separate earmarked funding mechanism outside the CFF. This options suffers from the practical issues, including additional resource requirements, which would likely arise from attempting to direct funding at the individual needs of over 16,000 pupils in over 700 schools;
  - reduce the amount which is funded via the CFF and use the difference to create a separate earmarked fund to more directly target the needs of

those pupils which need a greater degree of support over and above that provided through the CFF (e.g. pupils in schools with a large number of language groups represented);

- clarification within the CFS document about instances in which the Funding Authority's Contingency Fund may be used to address areas of differentiated need not met by the current year's CFF due to timing issues;
- introduce a minimum level of Newcomer funding which a school can expect to receive, provided said school has at least one Newcomer pupil. This would mean removing the Newcomer Factor from the AWPU funding;
- introduce a cap for the Newcomer factor. Again, to make this change it would be necessary to decouple the Newcomer Factor from the AWPU; and
- in addition to the abovementioned options, feedback is sought from stakeholders about reporting requirements to encourage Principals and Boards of Governors to give more focus to how this funding is utilised and provide the Funding Authority with adequate assurance.

### **Duration of Support**

54. Under the current policy, schools automatically receive the Newcomer premium for a period of three years following the pupil's registration at the school. It will also automatically extend for a fourth year if the pupil is transferring to post-primary school at the end of their third year. Beyond this, the funding can be extended for individual pupils on the basis of a school-led assessment of their competence in English.
55. Research suggests that a pupil of average ability will normally take 5-7 years to become fully grounded and competent in a completely new language. In England, additional funding for pupils who are classified as "English as an Additional Language" (EAL) pupils is currently limited to the first three years following a child's entry into the school system. The criteria for eligibility for EAL support is very different and much wider than that used to designate Newcomer pupils in NI, making it difficult to draw a direct comparison.

56. Currently over 1,633 pupils have been designated as Newcomers for more than five years with 692 retaining their designation for seven years or more. While there may be valid reasons why many of these children remain designated for this protracted period, it is a concern that even with additional support, they have still failed to acquire the required standard of English (or Irish, if placed in an Irish medium school).
57. A variation on the current model might be to cap automatic Newcomer support at five years but to develop an externally assessed 'exceptional circumstances' mechanism for those pupils who still require additional support after this period.

### **Support for Home Languages**

58. Newcomer pupils and their teachers reported a variety of approaches within schools to supporting pupils' home languages. Language skills are desirable and advantageous, in the longer term, to the future employment of Newcomer pupils and to our own economy. These skills also form an important part of their cultural identity and heritage.

### **Best Practice in Schools**

59. A significant number of teachers who participated in the focus groups noted that they appreciated the opportunity to share practice and to hear about how colleagues in other schools dealt with issues that were familiar to all teachers supporting Newcomer pupils. ETI is currently carrying out an evaluation of best practice in a number of schools and a report will be published soon.

### **Issues raised by Parents and Pupils**

#### Positive experiences of the education system

60. It is very important to note that many Newcomers pupils and parents told us about positive experiences of schools, including the welcoming environment in schools and the excellent progress made by pupils. Parents, in general, reported very



positive experiences with teachers and pupils also generally reported feeling content and well supported by their school. It was noted on a number of different occasions that everyone is treated equally and that teachers had been very helpful in promptly addressing any issues that arose. Many parents stated that they were very happy and had no complaints when it came to their child's experience of education. These views suggests that, overall, the current system is working well for many Newcomer pupils.

### Admissions

61. Parents reported a wide range of experiences of the school admissions process. Parents who had arrived as part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) reported that their key workers had been very helpful in navigating the school admissions process on their behalf, but other Newcomer parents reported frustrating experiences including being turned away from schools and given no further information on how to proceed in identifying a suitable place. In several cases, this had resulted in children being left for months without a school place.
  
62. While many parents reported positive and straightforward experiences of the school admissions process, a significant number reported less positive experiences. The difficulties these parents have reported include:
  - a lack of basic information to allow them to understand the education system in NI including admissions, school types, post-primary transfer arrangements, etc.;
  - finding the system impossible to navigate alone and
  - being completely reliant on community support organisations to guide them through the process.
  
63. For refugee and asylum seeking families, there were particular issues about temporary housing arrangements which meant that children would be settled in one school and then the family would receive a permanent housing allocation in a different location, meaning that the children either had to move school or had to travel some distance to continue attending their original school.

### English language support

64. Experiences of English language support varied widely among participants. While many participants reported positive experiences of receiving additional highly effective English language support, and many pupils reported good progress in acquiring English, a number of parents expressed concerns around the support available. Some families reported that they had relied on private tutors and local volunteers to provide adequate additional English language support. Many parents expressed a desire for their children to have even more English language support and most reported being unaware that schools are resourced to provide additional support to Newcomer pupils.

### Support across the curriculum

65. Some parents expressed concern that while their children were being well supported to learn English, they were not being pushed enough in other subjects and as a result were not reaching their potential in these areas.

### Parental engagement / involvement in education

66. Many parents expressed frustration that they were unable to be fully involved in their child's education, despite a strong desire to do so, due to the language barrier. While some parents reported that their child's school communicated with them in their home language, this was not the experience of most parents who relied on friends or community support organisations to translate school communications. This was the case even amongst VPRS parents who reported missing out on events, trips etc., due to the fact that their key worker is only available once a week and they had no other way of translating notes and letters.
67. Many parents expressed a strong desire to support their child's education, a sense of frustration at being unable to do so and an awareness that their limited ability to provide support could be hindering their child's progress. Homework clubs were suggested by many parents as a way of offering support and assistance to both children and parents.

68. Many parents reported that their children acted as interpreters during interactions with teachers and with school staff, something they felt was an example of poor practice.

### Homework

69. Newcomer pupils felt at a disadvantage when it came to completing homework as their parents were unable to offer support. Some pupils suggested that they should receive extra time and support for homework. Others noted that some schools and community organisations offered after-school homework clubs specifically catering for Newcomer pupils and these were felt to be of great benefit.

### Knowledge of the education system

70. Many parents expressed a frustration regarding the lack of clear, easily accessible information on the education system in NI, and in particular understanding the different types of schools in NI and the main differences between them.

### Transport

71. A number of parents reported being refused free school transport due to there being available school places at a closer school, despite the fact that the closer schools had previously refused admission. Some parents also raised concerns about their children being placed in schools far from home, as it then created transport issues for parents when children needed to be collected early.

### Special Educational Needs (SEN)

72. A number of Newcomer parents expressed concerns about SEN provision. This took two forms:

- concerns that the school was suggesting their child might have SEN needs and require further assessment and
- concerns that they already knew their child had SEN needs but that the child's school was slow or unwilling to accept this and provide additional support.

73. In each case, parents felt that language barriers (both parental and pupil) hindered effective communication with the school on this complex issue and the prompt assessment of any SEN.
74. Newcomer parents, understandably, had limited knowledge of SEN support available in NI or the process by which a pupil's SEN would be assessed. In the absence of easily accessible information, those parents were often anxious to avoid any discussion which, as they perceived it, might jeopardise their child's place in a mainstream school.
75. Several parents noted that their child had come to NI with a pre-existing diagnosis of SEN from their home country. They were concerned that these diagnoses were not recognised in NI and that this had led to lengthy delays for re-assessment before any extra support was offered to meet their child's learning needs. In one case raised, a parent reported their child, who they described as having significant and obvious SEN, had to attend a mainstream school for two years before their assessment was completed and they were offered a place in a nearby special school.

#### Interrupted education

76. Refugee and asylum seeking parents and parents from Roma backgrounds reported concerns about their children's interrupted education and the severe impact that this can have on their future. Parents expressed a desire for much more support for children who had interrupted education (and sometimes no previous experience of education), particularly those who were of post-primary age.

#### Post-primary transfer

77. Many parents expressed concerns about the post-primary transfer test, including a lack of information on the test and its implications and the differences between selective and non-selective schools.

### Home language / community language

78. Many pupils reported difficulties in communicating in their home language and progressively forgetting it as they improved their English. This was raised by both parents and pupils as a concern which, in some cases, was leading to problems communicating within the family.

### Bullying and discrimination

79. Many parents reported that their children experienced bullying and discrimination at school. Some reported that their school had dealt with this issue very well while some reported that the school had not dealt with the issue effectively.

### Examinations

80. Many pupils said that they would like the opportunity to study their home language at school and to gain a qualification in it. Pupils also said that they were not given enough extra time in examinations to make up for their difficulties in English.

## Options for Change

81. In consideration of the evidence gathered to date we believe an updated Newcomer policy should involve the following elements:
- a. Recognition of three categories of Newcomer pupil:
    - i. Primary school Newcomers;
    - ii. Post-primary Newcomers; and
    - iii. Newcomers with interrupted education.
  - b. Funding for all Newcomer pupils should last for a period of five years, unless there are exceptional circumstances.
  - c. Where a school identifies a child as having an interrupted education, it will be provided with a higher level of support to help it to meet this pupil's needs.
  - d. There should be a minimum level of funding for each school with Newcomer pupils. A maximum funding level for individual schools should also be considered.
  - e. To enhance the flexibility of Newcomer funding, and its visibility as additional funding provided to enhance Newcomer pupils' learning experiences and outcomes, funding should be removed from the CFF. This would allow for extra resource to be provided rapidly, on a pro-rata basis, dependent on the date of each pupil's school admission.
  - f. To enhance accountability and also to help better demonstrate the positive impact that Newcomer funding provides, all schools will be required to report annually on how they have spent their Newcomer funding.
  - g. In recognition of the need to build teachers' expertise in meeting the needs of Newcomer pupils, the EA will provide and signpost teachers to relevant advice, training and support. The EA should also look to develop peer support networks among schools with Newcomer pupils.

## Public Consultation Response Form

82. We would strongly encourage you to respond using the online questionnaire which can be accessed via the link below:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/D8DL83H>

83. If, however, you are responding in writing or by e-mail, please answer the questions listed below and submit your views to either of the following addresses:

Address:     Additional Educational Needs Team  
              Department of Education  
              Rathgael House  
              43 Balloo Road  
              Rathgill  
              Bangor  
              BT19 7PR

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All responses must be received **by 5.00 pm on Tuesday 15 October 2019.**

## **CONSULTATION QUESTIONS**

**Question 1:** How could the current policy be improved to ensure that Newcomer pupils receive effective and timely support to achieve their full potential?

**Question 2:** What additional support services should be available to schools with Newcomer pupils?

**Question 3:** How could schools best be supported and encouraged to embrace and share best practice in supporting Newcomer pupils?

**Question 4:** In your experience, are Newcomer pupils given opportunities to maintain their home language(s) in school? What are the difficulties / challenges in facilitating this?

**Question 5:** Should schools be required to report on how they use their Newcomer funding? If so, how do we ensure this reporting remains proportionate to the amount of funding received?

**Question 6:** Should there be different levels of funding depending on whether the pupil is at primary school or post-primary school? Should there be additional funding provided to help support pupils who have experienced disruption to their education (i.e. those pupils who have been out of school for a long time or who have never been to school before)?

**Question 7:** Should there be a limit on the maximum amount of total Newcomer funding a school can receive? Should there be a minimum amount of total Newcomer funding that a school can receive (this could benefit schools with very low numbers of Newcomer pupils)?

**Question 8:** Should there be a limit to the number of years that a pupil is eligible for Newcomer funding? What would be reasonable and how could ongoing need be assessed / shown?

**Question 9:** Do you have any additional comments?