

## COPY OF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

### Cover Note

<b>DP No.</b>	DP 259 (WELB)	
<b>School(s)</b>	St Francis of Assisi PS (2032600)	
<b>Proposal</b>	Closure	
<b>Minister's Decision</b>	Approve	
<b>Date of Decision</b>	29/09/2014	
<b>Minister's Comments</b>	Agree to recommendation – press info amended	
<b>Additional Notes</b>	Please note the draft press release has been amended and a copy of the final press release can be found at <a href="http://www.deni.gov.uk/news/news-de-011014-odowd-approves-changes.htm">http://www.deni.gov.uk/news/news-de-011014-odowd-approves-changes.htm</a>	
<b>Information Redacted</b>	Some information and personal data may have been removed in line with the principles of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Act.	
	<b>Key</b>	<b>Details</b>
	■	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:** Dorina Edgar  
Area Planning Policy Team

TRIM ref: DE1/14/165920

**DATE:** 24 September 2014

**To:** JOHN O'DOWD, MLA

see copy distribution below

**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL NO. 259 (WELB) – PROPOSED CLOSURE OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI PRIMARY SCHOOL, CASTLEDERG**

**Objective** To provide you with background briefing and recommendation on Development Proposal (DP) no. 259.

**Issue:** It has been proposed that St Francis of Assisi Primary School, Castlederg would close from 31 August 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter.

**Timescale:** Routine

**Financial / Resource Implications:** St Francis of Assisi Primary School had a cumulative surplus of £27,000 at March 2013 and a 'provisional' surplus of £11,000 at March 2014 (upon audit confirmation). WELB considers the three year financial plan unacceptable (based on optimistic enrolments & excluding various costs) and expresses the view that if forecasts are not achieved the position could move into irrecoverable deficit. Any closing deficit will have to be written off in full from ELB Centre Funds.

CCMS has been unable to quantify the teaching redundancy costs associated with the closure at this time. There are currently two teachers and five non-teaching members of staff in the school.

**FOI Implications:** The content of this submission is likely to be fully disclosable.

**Presentational Issues:** This will be of interest to media in the Co Tyrone area. One press release dealing with this DP and the DP for Envagh is attached for your approval.

**Recommendation:** That you approve the DP due to the steady decline in enrolments making the school no longer sustainable.

It is also requested that you agree:-

- the wording of the DP decision letter (Appendix F)
- the press release (Appendix G)
- that this submission (with any appropriate redactions)

**may be published on the DE website.**

## Background

On 8 May 2014, the Western Education and Library Board (WELB), at the request of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), published Development Proposal (DP) No. 259, proposing that St Francis of Assisi Primary School would close from 31 August 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter. The statutory two month objection period ended on 8 July 2014. A copy of the proposal is attached at **Appendix A**.

2 There are two maintained Primary schools located within a five mile radius<sup>1</sup> of St Francis of Assisi PS. These are St Patrick's PS, Castlederg, and St Eugene's PS, Victoria Bridge with 76 unfilled places in total in 2013/14. There are a further 130 unfilled places in two further schools, St Caireall's PS, Castlederg and St Columba's PS, Clady. Both schools are within 7.5 miles of St Francis of Assisi PS.

3 CCMS initiated a consultation regarding the future of this school in light of the Sustainable Schools Policy and the ongoing Area Planning process. CCMS's rationale in bringing forward the DP is set out in **Appendix C** and statistical information relating to the proposal is provided at **Appendix D** below. The main points may be summarised as follows:-

- Enrolments indicate that the school is not viable. There was one pupil in the Primary 1 intake at the school in the 2013/14 school year and the enrolment has reduced to 15 pupils. This is significantly below the minimum enrolment threshold of 105 for rural Primary schools specified in the *Policy for Sustainable Schools*.
- Enrolments have been very low for a number of years.
- There is spare capacity (76 places) at two other local Catholic Maintained schools within a five mile radius and a further 130 places in two other Catholic Maintained schools within a 7.5 mile radius.
- ETI supports the proposal to close.
- A deficit of -£3,709 is forecast by March 2016.
- There are sufficient unfilled places locally to accommodate the St Francis of Assisi pupils.

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<sup>1</sup> Straight line distance. Distances by road are provided in Appendix D.

## **Alternative provision**

4 There are currently 76 spare places in Catholic Maintained schools locally within a five mile radius. There is a further 130 places within two further schools within a 7.5 mile radius. This is set out in detail in Appendix D below.

## **Financial Position**

5 Whilst St Francis of Assisi PS had a cumulative surplus of £11k at March 2014 (subject to receipt in the Department of an audited outturn statement) the WELB projects that the school that the school will no longer be financially viable with a forecast deficit of -£7k at March 2016. The draft 3-year financial plan concludes that the school would recover to hold a surplus of £3k at March 2017. However the Funding Authority (the WELB) considers these financial plans unacceptable as they are based on highly optimistic enrolment forecasts and exclude costs in a number of areas, areas which are currently provided by volunteers working on an unpaid basis.

6 The WELB has expressed a view that if forecast enrolments were not to be achieved and if the above mentioned costs were included in school expenditure, the position could move into an irrecoverable deficit.

## **WELB Area Plan – Primary Schools**

7 The WELB Primary Area Plan, published in 23 June 2014, includes the following commentary has been provided regarding St Francis of Assisi PS:-

*A number of issues in the school/local area have been identified.*

- *More than 2 composite classes in a single classroom.*
- *2 teachers in 2013/14.*
- *School's enrolment for 2013/14, 15 pupils, is below the minimum enrolment threshold detailed in the Sustainable Schools Policy.*
- *The school cannot live within its delegated budget.*

## **Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)**

8 Given that the enrolment has decreased significantly over the past six years from 45 to 15 children, ETI supports the proposal “to close St Francis of Assisi, Castlederg with effect from 31 August 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter “

## **Consultation**

9 WELB has confirmed that it has fulfilled its statutory duty in relation to consultation and has consulted with all schools likely, in its opinion, to be affected by the Development Proposal.

10 Proof of CCMS consultation has been supplied.

## **Letters of Support and Objection**

11 The Department has not received any letters of support for this proposal.

12 The Department received two letters objecting to the proposal, one from the Parish Priest of Ardstraw West & Castlederg, and one from a member of St Francis of Assisi PS Board of Governors.

13 Both Micheala Boyle MLA and Joe Byrne MLA have previously written to you to voice their concerns on the threat of closure of the school (COR 965/2013 & INV 606/2013).

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

14 Enrolments in St Francis of Assisi PS have been in decline for a number of years with no expected prospect of recovery. There are 206 places at alternative schools within 7.5 miles of the school.

15 The proposal arises from the work undertaken by the CCMS and is reflected in the WELB primary area plan.

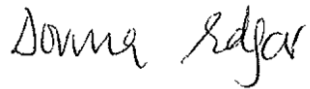
16 The WELB projects that while the school is in surplus in March 2014 it will fall into deficit by 2016/17. WELB feels that if target enrolments are not met and all costs included then the school could move into an irrecoverable deficit.

17 In the circumstances, closure appears to be in the best educational interests of the children concerned and you are therefore asked to approve this proposal and agree issue of the attached draft Approval Letter and Press Release.

18 Attached for your consideration are the following:-

- Appendix A: Published Development Proposal No. 259
- Appendix B: Maps of Area
- Appendix C: CCMS Comment
- Appendix D: Analysis of Proposal

Appendix E: Department of Education and ETI comment  
Appendix F: Draft Decision Letter  
Appendix G: Draft Press Release



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Published Development Proposal

WESTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL NO. 259

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI PRIMARY SCHOOL, CASTLEDERG

Notice is hereby given that a proposal under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, as amended by Article 145 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, and as amended by Article 24 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003, has been submitted to the Western Education and Library Board by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools on behalf of the Trustees of the Parish of Castlederg.

The proposal is to the effect that:

**St Francis of Assisi Primary School, Castlederg, will close with effect from 31 August 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter.**

In pursuance of Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 as amended by Article 145 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989, and as amended by Article 24 of the Education and Libraries (NI) 2003, this proposal has been submitted by the Board to the Department of Education for approval.

A copy of this proposal can be inspected at the Headquarters Office of the Western Education and Library Board, 1 Hospital Road, Omagh and [www.welbni.org](http://www.welbni.org) (under publications).

Any comments or objections to this proposal should be made in writing, within a period of two months from this date, to the Area Planning Policy Team, Department of Education, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down, BT19 7PR.

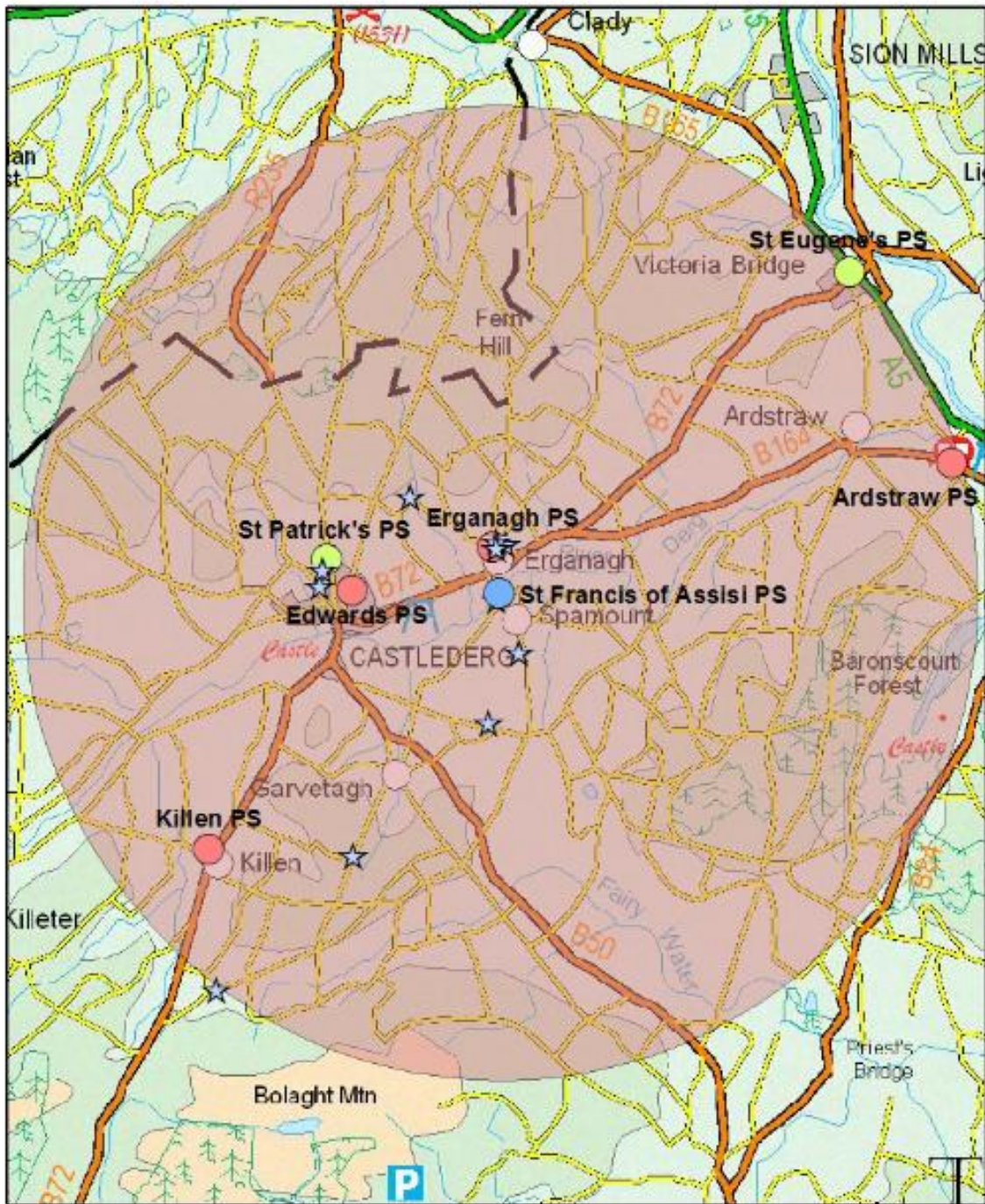
The Department of Education and the Education and Library Boards operate a regime of openness under the Freedom of Information Act and letters of objection and information supplied to the Department are open to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, if requested. (A fee may be charged for supplying this information).

Barry Mulholland Cert Ed., DASE, M.Ed., MBA  
Chief Executive  
Western Education & Library Board  
1 Hospital Road  
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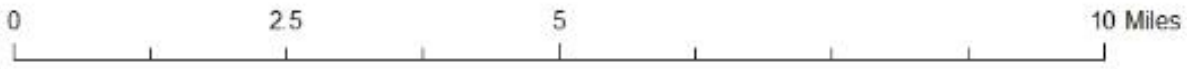


Maps of Area

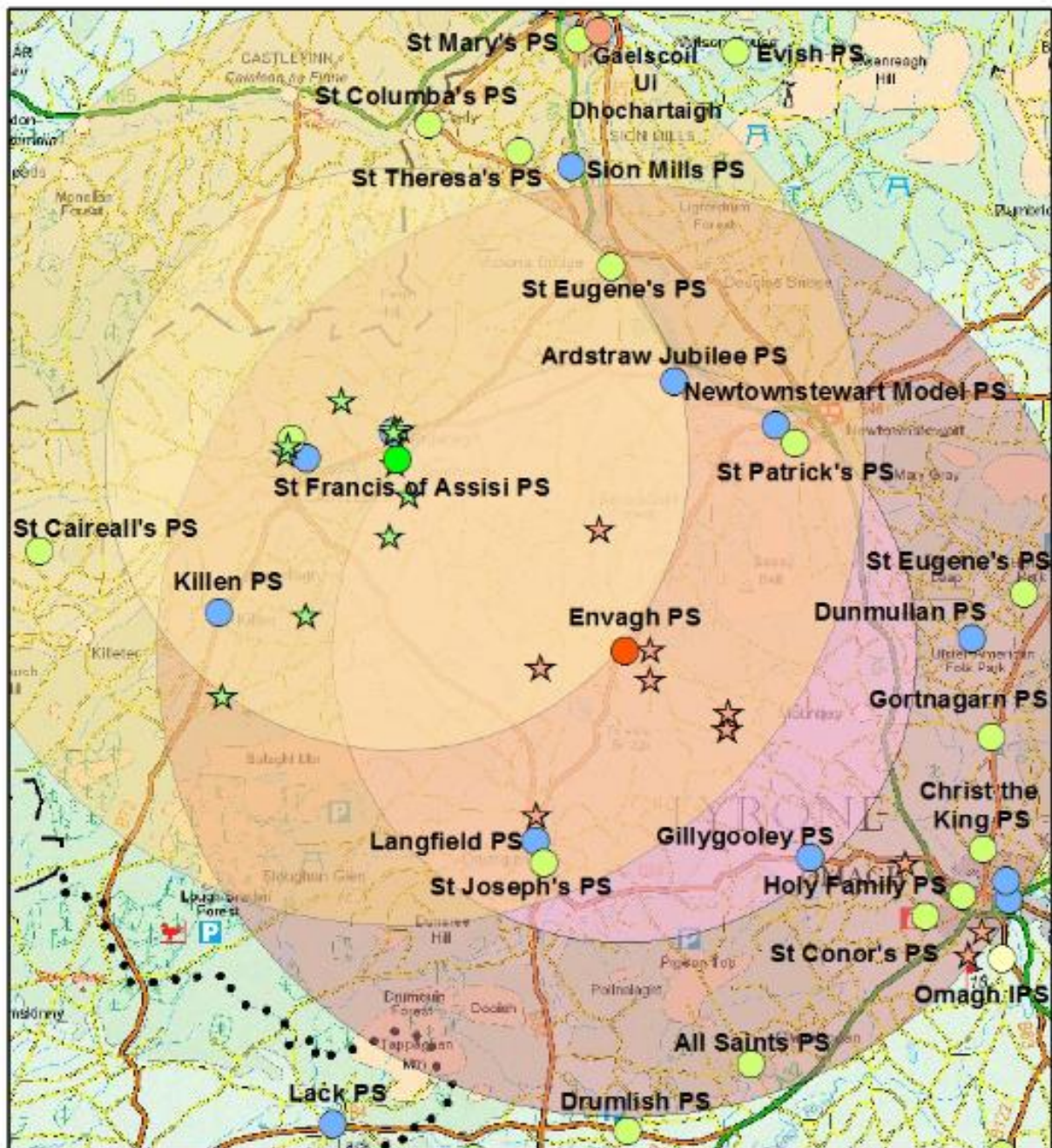
**St Francis of Assisi PS**



- St Francis of Assisi PS
- Maintained PS
- Controlled PS
- 5 Mile Buffer
- ★ St Francis Of Assisi Pupils

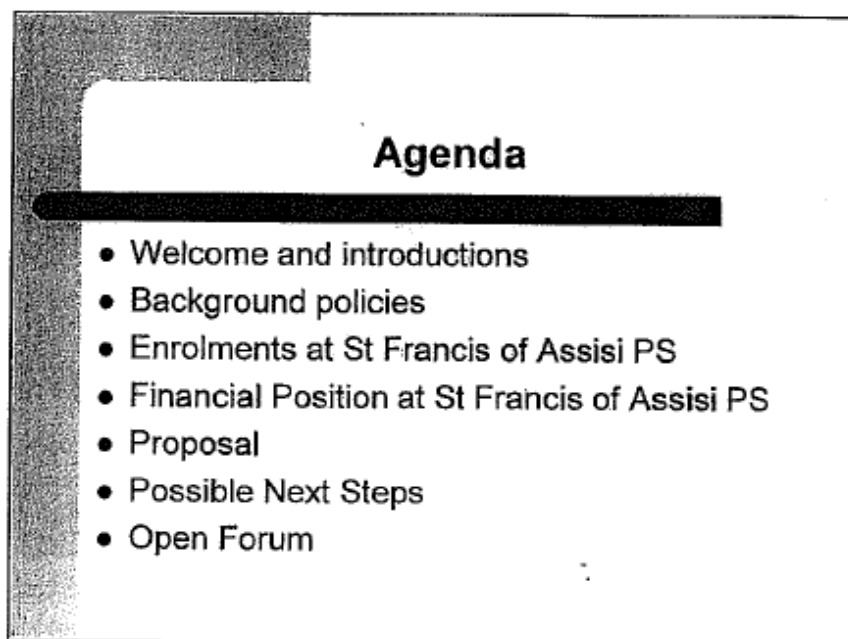
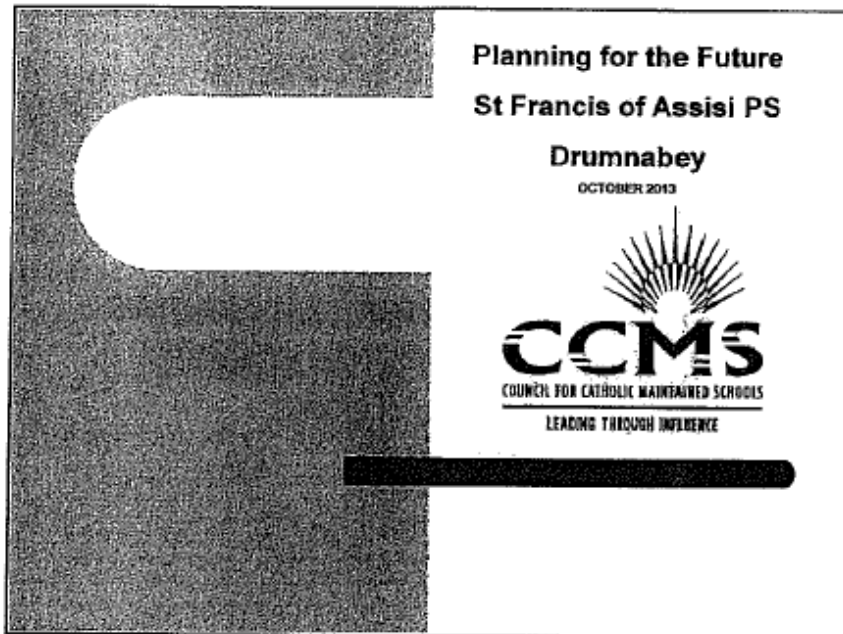


## The Location of Envagh PS and St Francis of Assisi PS



**CCMS Comment**

CCMS has provided a commentary to explain the background to this proposal. The slides used in the CCMS presentation are reproduced below.



## **Purpose of Meeting**

To consider the future of the educational provision for children attending St Francis of Assisi Primary School

## **Background**



- BAIN REPORT – Strategic Review of Education 2006
- SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE – A policy for the Sustainability of Schools 2009
- VIABILITY AUDITS - (Minister for Education) 2012
- WELB – Putting Pupils First – Shaping Our Future [Strategic Area Plan] March 2013
- SALISBURY REPORT – 2013

## **Bain Report 60 + Recommendations**

- **Recommendation 8a..**

*"the minimum enrolment for a new primary school should be 140 in urban areas and 105 in rural areas. When the enrolment in an existing school falls below the relevant level, the future of the school should be reviewed."*

## **Sustainable Schools Policy January 2009**

*" The demographic downturn being experienced in recent years presents the education system with a major challenge of ensuring schools remain educationally and financially viable."*

## **Sustainable Schools Policy – 6 Criteria for Sustainability**

1. Quality educational experiences
2. Stable enrolment trends
3. Sound financial position
4. Strong leadership (by Principal and B.o.G.)
5. Accessibility
6. Strong links to the community

## **MINISTER'S VIABILITY AUDITS**

- Methodology – data collected on the first three indicators identified in the Sustainable Schools Policy, i.e.
  1. Quality Educational Experiences
  2. Stable Enrolment Trends
  3. Strong Financial PositionData was obtained for all schools and used to identify VIABILITY STRESSES

## The Audit of St Francis of Assisi PS

### Quality Educational Experiences

No Stress \*

Stable Enrolment Trend

Stress

Sound Financial Position

Stress

[based on April 12 budget plan with a 60k deficit at the end of the 15/16 financial year]

## Quality Educational Experiences [Sustainable Schools Policy]

- **\*Indicator 1.2.** *"No more than two composite year groups in a single classroom at primary level."*
- **\*Indicator 1.3.** *"A minimum of four teachers at primary school. This recognises both the needs of pupils and the demands on teachers."*

## Enrolment Stress

### Enrolment trends at St Francis of Assisi PS

08/09:	45
09/10:	32
10/11:	30
11/12:	31
12/13:	15
13/14:	15

## Present Financial Position

The most recent budget plan predicts a carry-over of **£11608** at the end of 13/14, then deficits of **£4221** at the end of 14/15, **£7672** at the end of 15/16 and **£3709** at the end of 16/17.

**The annual expenditure is c £131k**



## Overview of school funding

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A school's budget is derived from:

1. The number of pupils [AWPUs]
2. Targeting social need
3. Premises area
4. Small schools support
5. Primary Principals Release Time
6. Incidentals

## Projected v Actual enrolments

[April 12 LMS statement]

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- October 12: Projected 19    Actual 15
- October 13: Projected 21    Actual 15

## Projected enrolments [Oct 13 LMS statement]

- October 14    Projected 20    Actual ?
- October 15    Projected 22    Actual ?

## Salisbury Report January 2013

### Recommendation 25

*"Small school support factors should be removed from the Common Formula Funding."*

*St Francis of Assisi receives 42K SSS and 16K for principal release time. [AWPU total £32k]*

## **A *sound* financial position?**

- Accuracy of projected and future long term enrolment figures.
- Proposed funding changes
- Potential impact of current stringent cost-cutting measures

## **Relative pupil costs 13/14**

- School A                    £1.1m / 407 = £2700
- School B                    £962k / 370 = £2600
- School C                    £526k / 173 = £3000
- School D                    £217k / 54 = £4000
- School E                    £179k / 26 = £6900
- School F                    £171k / 22 = £7800
- St Francis of Assisi    £135k / 15 = £9000

## **Proposal**

### **To cease educational provision in St Francis of Assisi PS with effect from 31 August 2014**

Children will transfer to the school of the parents' choice (Transport will be the responsibility of WELB)  
Employment issues will be dealt with by C.C.M.S. for teaching staff and by WELB for non-teaching staff.

## **Possible Next Steps**

- Response to CCMS consultation within one month
- Possible Publication of Development Proposal for public consultation (minimum 2 months)
- Ministerial Decision
- [If proposal upheld] Implementation of closure to best meet the needs of the pupils.
- Consultation with BoG, WELB and parents to ensure smooth transition

**Analysis of Proposal****Quality Educational Experience**

The school was inspected in October 2006. The overall conclusion regarding the quality of education was very good.

**Enrolment Trends**

The *Policy for Sustainable Schools* states that a rural (outside Belfast and Derry City Council areas) Primary school should have a minimum enrolment of 105 pupils. The enrolment in St Francis of Assisi PS has declined steadily and intakes have been below the minimum threshold over recent years, the following table highlights the very low intakes and corresponding enrolments. Enrolments indicate that the school is not viable. St Francis of Assisi has an approved admissions number of 15 and an approved enrolment number of 104.

**Table 1 Enrolment by Year Group 2013/14**

P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
1	1	5	4	2	2	0	15

**Table 2 Historical intakes and Enrolments**

Year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
<b>Total</b>	32	30	31	15	15
<b>Admissions</b>	5	4	5	1	1

## Accessibility

**Table 3 Alternative Primary Schools to St Francis of Assisi PS**

Ref	School	Distance <sup>2</sup> (miles)	2013/14 Enrolment	Physical Capacity	Spare Capacity
203-2682	St Eugene's PS	5.5	55	97	42
203-2694	St Caireall's PS	7.4	79	190	111
203-2700	St Joseph's PS Drumquin	8.4	115	175	60
203-2730	St Columba's PS	7.3	123	142	19
203-6008	St Patrick's PS	10.9	114	145	31
203-6094	St Patrick's PS Castledearg	2.7	225	259	34
203-6459	St Theresa's PS	8.4	121	165	44

The Sustainable Schools Policy provides a "rule of thumb" home to school travel time of less than 30 minutes (i.e. 1 hour per day in total) for Primary pupils. Travel times in the event of the closure of St Francis of Assisi PS are unlikely to exceed this threshold.

**Table 4 Historical Enrolments of Alternative Primary Schools**

Ref	School	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
2032682	St Eugene's PS	55	57	66	60	55
2032694	St Caireall's PS	88	85	82	90	79
2032700	St Joseph's PS Drumquin	97	103	96	95	115
2032730	St Columba's PS	98	108	105	108	123
2036008	St Patrick's PS N'stewart	142	124	123	113	114
2036094	St Patrick's PS Castledearg	200	195	202	222	225
2036459	St Theresa's PS	131	119	120	117	121

**Table 5 Historical Intakes of Alternative Primary Schools**

Ref	School	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
2032682	St Eugene's PS	11	7	10	7	6
2032694	St Caireall's PS	13	10	8	13	10
2032700	St Joseph's PS Drumquin	18	20	14	19	27
2032730	St Columba's PS	21	22	19	12	26
2036008	St Patrick's PS N'stewart	22	17	14	13	15
2036094	St Patrick's PS Castledearg	33	29	30	34	32
2036459	St Theresa's PS	16	14	17	22	12

<sup>2</sup> Straight-line distances from Google maps

## **Financial Viability**

The WELB projects that while the school is in surplus in March 2014 it will fall into deficit by 2016/17. WELB feels that if target enrolments are not met and all costs included then the school could move into an irrecoverable deficit.

## **Links with the Community**

The Department received two letters objecting to the proposal, one from the Parish Priest of Ardstraw West & Castlederg, and one from a member of St Francis of Assisi PS Board of Governors.

Both Micheala Boyle MLA and Joe Byrne MLA have previously written to voice their concerns on the threat of closure of the school (COR 965/2013 & INV 606/2013)

### Department of Education and ETI comment

#### **School Finance Team**

St Francis of Assisi PS had a cumulative surplus of £27,195, or 17.12% of available delegated resources, at March 2013, the most recent set of finalised data available. The school had a **provisional** surplus at March 2014 of £11,305, or 7.86% of available delegated resources. This figure is considered provisional until receipt in the Department of an audited outturn statement.

A draft three-year financial plan (completed at the end of May 2014) projects that the school's position will move from surplus into deficit during 2014/15; the deficit will increase to exceed -5% at March 2016; but the school will recover to hold a surplus of £3k, or 2% of available delegated resources, at March 2017. The Funding Authority (the WELB) consider these financial plans unacceptable, as they are based on highly optimistic enrolment forecasts and exclude costs in a number of areas, including Assistance for Teaching Principal; substitute teachers; books and practice materials; and school administration, which is currently provided by volunteers working on an unpaid basis. The WELB have expressed a view that if forecast enrolments were not to be achieved and if the abovementioned costs were included in school expenditure, the position could move into an irrecoverable deficit.

The 2014/15 allocation to St Francis of Assisi PS for the Small Schools Support Factor is £42,008.

#### Per Capita Allocations

The school's 2014/15 per capita allocation is £7,746; this is substantially higher than the average per capita for a WELB Primary School of £3,188.

#### **Costs**

CCMS have stated that at this stage it is impossible to predict accurately redundancies or redeployments.

#### **ETI input**

#### Development Proposal 259 regarding the closure of St Francis of Assisi PS

#### Educational Provision: St Francis of Assisi PS

The school was inspected in October 2006. The overall conclusion regarding the quality of education was very good.



*Drumnabey Primary School is a small, rural primary school situated in the hamlet of Spamount, approximately two miles north of the town of Castleterg in County Tyrone. Almost all of the children live in the surrounding rural area. The enrolment has remained steady over the past number of years and presently sits at 58. The school has experienced significant staffing changes over the past two years; a new Principal and a new early years teacher took up post in September 2005.*

*There are significant strengths in the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The school has procedures in place which implement fully the guidance outlined in the relevant Department of Education Circulars. In addition, the school gives consistently good attention to promoting the health and well-being of the children.*

*Other strengths of the school include:*

- the caring, family ethos;*
- the excellent working relationships at all levels;*
- the bright and stimulating learning environment;*
- the detailed planning for lessons;*
- the dedicated and conscientious teachers;*
- the quality of the teaching observed, which was consistently sound and, at times, excellent;*
- the standards attained by the children, which are generally well in line with, or better than, their levels of ability;*
- the arrangements to meet the needs of children who experience difficulty with their learning;*
- the commitment, enthusiasm and vision of the Principal;*
- the appropriateness of the school development plan;*
- the well developed culture of self-evaluation; and*
- the support of the parents, the Board of Governors and the wider community for the work of the school.*

*The school has major strengths in its educational and pastoral provision. The educational and pastoral needs of the children are being well met. The parents and local community can have confidence in the school's capacity for sustained self-improvement.*

*No follow-up inspection is required.*

### **ETI Recommendation**

Given that the enrolment has decreased significantly over the past six years from 45 to 15 children, ETI supports the proposal “*to close St Francis of Assisi, Castlederg with effect from 31 August 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter* “.It is evident from the figures supplied by CCMS that the school is not viable under the Schools for the Future – a policy for the sustainability of schools: DE 2009 due to the low and falling enrolment. It will be important that CCMS consult fully with the parents on the process and that they ensure that the children are relocated to schools of their choice in the local area.

**Draft Decision Letter**

**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL NO 259 – PROPOSED CLOSURE OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI PRIMARY SCHOOL, CASTLEDERG**

I refer to the above Development Proposal, published by the Western Education and Library Board on 8 May 2014, proposing that:-

- St Francis of Assisi Primary School, Castlederg should close with effect from 31 August 2015 or as soon as possible thereafter.

The Minister has given very careful consideration to the proposal and has approved the closure of St Francis of Assisi Primary School as set out above.

**Draft Press Release**

**O'Dowd approves changes to primary education in Castlederg, Co Tyrone**

Education Minister, John O'Dowd, has approved the development proposals to close St Francis of Assisi Primary School and Envagh Primary School.

Commenting on the decision, the Minister said: **“St Francis of Assisi and Envagh Primary Schools have provided excellent education to children from the local community, however over the years the schools have suffered from declining enrolments.**

**“Therefore having considered all the relevant information, I have decided to approve the proposals to close St Francis of Assisi and Envagh Primary Schools, Castlederg with effect from 31 August 2015.”**

In conclusion the Minister paid tribute to everyone connected with St Francis of Assisi and Envagh Primary Schools who over many years have shown their commitment and dedication to the schools and its pupils.

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

- On 8 May 2014, the Western Education and Library Board (WELB), at the request of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), published Development Proposal No. 259, proposing that St Francis of Assisi Primary School would close from 31 August 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter. The two-month objection period ended on 8 July 2014.
- At the request of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Western Education and Library Board published Development Proposal No 258 in local newspapers on 8 May 2014, proposing that Envagh Primary School would close from 31 August 2015, or as soon as possible thereafter. The two-month objection period ended on 8 July 2014.