



House of Commons
Northern Ireland Affairs
Committee

**Education funding in
Northern Ireland**

Ninth Report of Session 2017–19

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

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Committee staff

Margaret McKinnon (Clerk), Matthew Congreve (Second Clerk), George James (Committee Specialist), Sam Nariani (Committee Specialist), John Hitchcock (Senior Committee Assistant), Kelly Tunnicliffe (Committee Assistant) and Nina Foster (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 2173; the Committee's email address is northircom@parliament.uk.

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Summary

Education funding is widely recognised as one of the most urgent public service challenges facing Northern Ireland today. While Northern Ireland's schools are highly respected and deliver strong academic outcomes, there is growing concern across the sector that current funding levels are not sufficient to deliver the quality of education that pupils deserve and parents expect. The situation has been exacerbated by the absence of a Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, without which it has not been possible for Northern Ireland to set policy priorities and allocate resources accordingly. Ultimately, it is Northern Ireland's elected representatives who must make the changes the education sector so urgently requires.

In the absence of an Assembly to scrutinise this critical public service, we decided to hold our own inquiry into education funding in Northern Ireland. In our report we make recommendations for how the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) can address the challenges facing education. Our key recommendations are:

The education budget

We recommend that funding for education should increase in line with pupil numbers, to keep pace with the growing demand for school places. This reflects evidence we heard from the Department, the Education Authority, schools and others that school budgets had fallen in real terms at the same time as more children were joining the system.

Future budget allocations should reflect the increasing number of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in the Northern Ireland system. We heard that the number of children being identified with SEND was rapidly increasing, and that this was the fastest-growing area of expenditure for the education sector.

The Common Funding Formula used to determine individual school budgets should be reviewed, as should the proportion of education funding that is delegated directly to schools. Witnesses identified several areas where the formula should be examined—such as the distribution between primary and post-primary schools and the weighting of funding for targeting social deprivation—to ensure that money was being directed where it could do the most good.

The school system

We saw there is a clear need to reduce duplication across the education sector and for consolidation of the school estate. Witnesses were clear that alongside the immediate funding pressures on education, the complicated structure of education in Northern Ireland meant that money was not being spent in the most efficient way. Achieving change will be challenging, and it is important that the wishes of communities and the demand that exists for different types of education in Northern Ireland are understood. We therefore propose that part of the public sector transformation fund included in the 2019–20 draft Northern Ireland Budget be used to run community consultations so that these important conversations can take place.

Actions for the Secretary of State

In the absence of an Assembly, secondary legislation which gives effect to reforms already passed at Stormont should be considered at Westminster. We saw that there was an agreed agenda for change in areas like Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and that the only significant obstacles to implementing these reforms were procedural.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should also enable a new pay deal for Northern Ireland's teachers to be approved in the absence of an Executive. This would correct the unfair situation teachers in Northern Ireland face at present, where their wage scales have remained stagnant as those of counterparts in other parts of the UK have risen. A provisional agreement on pay and conditions has reportedly been reached but still requires formal agreement.

The teachers and school leaders we spoke to described a school system on the brink of a crisis. We believe that these recommendations can address some of the urgent challenges facing Northern Ireland's schools, while making progress towards the longer term goal of a sustainable school system that delivers an outstanding education for every child in Northern Ireland.

1 Introduction and political context

Education funding in Northern Ireland

1. The education budget in Northern Ireland has come under increasing strain in recent years. This pressure has been passed on to schools, with consequences for pupils, parents and staff. The Department of Education (DE) has acknowledged the difficult funding situation, and wrote to schools following the announcement of the 2018–19 budget confirming that the budget allocation was “challenging” and that “it has not been possible to fund the additional pressures facing schools.”¹ School principals themselves have been vocal in drawing attention to the issue; in June 2018, a letter signed by every post-primary principal in Northern Ireland expressed “deep concerns about the crisis facing our education system.”² An October 2018 report by the Northern Ireland Audit Office found that the number of schools in deficit and the total level of deficit across the education sector was increasing.³

2. In normal circumstances the Northern Ireland Department of Education’s budget would be set as part of an overall Northern Ireland Budget and voted on by the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, there has been no functioning Executive or Assembly in Northern Ireland since January 2017, and so Northern Ireland is not able to pass its own budget legislation. As a result, the UK Government has passed several pieces of budget legislation at Westminster.⁴ The absence of MLAs at Stormont means that representatives in Northern Ireland have not been able to scrutinise this legislation.

The Committee’s inquiry

3. Following the passage of the Northern Ireland Budget Act 2018, we agreed that there was a pressing need to examine key departmental budgets, given that there was no way in which democratic scrutiny could be carried out in Northern Ireland.

4. In August 2018 we launched our inquiry into education funding. The purpose of this inquiry was to examine: whether the level of funding allocated to education in Northern Ireland by the Act was adequate; how specific funding earmarked for education under the Confidence and Supply Agreement was being spent; and how education funding could be deployed to ensure the best possible value for money.

5. We began our inquiry with a call for written evidence, and received a large number of submissions. Starting in October we held oral evidence sessions with principals, sectoral bodies, trade unions, the Department, the Education Authority (EA), the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), and the Chair of the 2013 Review of the Common Funding Formula. We also held an outreach event, hosted by Holy Cross College in Strabane, which was attended by more than 40 teachers, principals and other school staff. The conclusions and recommendations of this report are based on

1 Belfast Telegraph, [Education chief’s letter to Northern Ireland schools on 2018–19 budget \[full text\]](#), 13 March 2018

2 BBC News, [NI post-primary principals say education facing ‘crisis’](#), 19 June 2018

3 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018

4 These are, in order of the date they received Royal Assent: The [Northern Ireland Budget Act 2017](#) (16 November 2017); [Northern Ireland \(Anticipation and Adjustments\) Act 2018](#) (28 March 2018); [Northern Ireland Budget Act 2018](#) (20 July 2018); and the [Northern Ireland Budget \(Anticipation and Adjustments\) Act 2019](#) (15 March 2019)

the evidence we received. We would like to thank everyone who engaged with the inquiry, with special thanks to the staff and pupils at Holy Cross for welcoming us into their school and hosting the outreach event.

Political context and decision-making in Northern Ireland

6. Although our inquiry dealt with matters that are usually devolved, many stakeholders welcomed the Committee's engagement with this subject, noting the inability of Northern Ireland representatives to scrutinise public services in the absence of the Stormont institutions. The Department and the EA have continued to oversee education in Northern Ireland in the absence of elected politicians, but as the Permanent Secretary of DE, Derek Baker noted in his evidence to us the political situation has created an accountability gap:

I am accountable to nobody. I do not go to the electorate. I have no Assembly Committee to appear before to account for myself and my decisions. I have no Assembly Public Accounts Committee. There are no Assembly debates going on about education issues. That is quite wrong and I am uncomfortable with it. Personally, I am very uncomfortable with it, because I should not be taking policy decisions and I try not to.⁵

7. During the inquiry witnesses raised a variety of concerns about specific education services and aspects of education—for example school transport and targeting social deprivation—which warrant further investigation. This underlines the importance of re-establishing proper scrutiny mechanisms in Northern Ireland so that bodies like the Northern Ireland Assembly's Education Committee can carry out important work such as this.

8. As long as the Assembly remains absent, the normal routes through which elected representatives would usually scrutinise education in Northern Ireland are unavailable. As a result, it has not been possible to scrutinise properly the delivery of this vital public service, or to hold decision-makers to account. This is an unacceptable state of affairs. We recommend that, as long as the Assembly remains absent, the Department of Education and the Education Authority commit to appearing at our Committee at least annually to provide an update on the state of education funding.

9. Over the course of the inquiry a number of contributors highlighted that the impasse at Stormont was obstructing progress in several areas of education policy.⁶ These included: resolving industrial action over teachers' pay and conditions;⁷ reforming Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision;⁸ and bringing forward future tranches of capital projects.⁹ We explore each of these issues in more detail in this report.

5 [Q359](#)

6 [Q90](#); Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ([EDU0057](#)), p 3; Early Years: the organisation for young children ([EDU0041](#)), p 3; Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education ([EDU0042](#)) p 6; Transferors' Representatives Council ([EDU0039](#)), p 3

7 [Q68](#)

8 [Q239](#)

9 [Q357](#)

10. The absence of politicians to take decisions about the future of education was seen as having led to stagnation in education policy.¹⁰ Teachers and principals at our engagement event told us that MLAs were needed to give policy clear direction and act as accountable representatives which schools could lobby for change.¹¹ In the absence of MLAs, civil servants have been reluctant to take what are sometimes significant and controversial policy decisions. The UK Government passed the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Act in 2018 in an attempt to clarify civil servants' jurisdictions and provide legal justification for civil servants to take decisions in the public interest. However, participants in our engagement event told us that important decisions were still not being taken.¹²

11. There was a clear desire from people across the education sector for effective decision-making so that progress could be made towards key education objectives.¹³ The preferred solution was for a restored Assembly and Executive; however, some witnesses argued for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to take action on certain priority issues, such as implementing secondary legislation arising from SEND reforms previously passed by the Assembly.¹⁴ One of the conclusions arising from our engagement event was that if the Executive is not reconstituted then the Secretary of State should be prepared to take key decisions relating to education.¹⁵

12. The political deadlock at Stormont has meant that the education system has been unable to respond to the urgent challenges facing schools. Educators told us that with no political solution in sight, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should be prepared to take decisions so that the school system can make progress on existing policy priorities. *We recommend that, if the Executive is not reformed by October, the Secretary of State should lay before Parliament those education regulations required by Acts already agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and on which the Department of Education has consulted. The Secretary of State should also be prepared to take further steps, in consultation with the Department of Education and relevant stakeholders in Northern Ireland, when these are necessary to meet key education objectives.*

10 [Q112](#); [Qq145–146](#); Children in Northern Ireland ([EDU0025](#)), p 2–3; Strategic Primary Principals Forum ([EDU0026](#)), p 6; Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 3–4

11 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 3–4

12 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 3

13 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 3–4

14 [Q332–333](#)

15 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 9

2 Education in Northern Ireland

13. In this chapter we consider:

- the structure of the education sector in Northern Ireland, including the characteristics of the several different types of school that exist;
- the institutions which govern and oversee the delivery of education; and
- the creation of the Education Authority (EA), its powers and functions, and its oversight of schools' budgets.

Schools in Northern Ireland

14. Northern Ireland's school system enjoys a strong reputation for delivering a high standard of education. Performance continues to improve despite the challenges facing the sector in recent years. Education Authority figures show that the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C increased in every year between 2012–13 and 2016–17; the improvement was most marked in non-grammar schools, where the proportion rose from 67.2 per cent to 74.4 per cent.¹⁶ The proportion of pupils achieving three or more A*-C grades at A Level has also increased consistently over that period; again the figures show a significant improvement in non-grammar schools from 45.4 per cent to 55 per cent.¹⁷ We heard that Northern Ireland's primary schools are among the best in the world according to international comparisons.¹⁸ Throughout the inquiry we heard consistent praise for the ability and expertise of school leaders and staff for continuing to deliver exceptional education in difficult circumstances.¹⁹ Witnesses' concern was that resource pressures on the school system would put the quality of pupils' education at risk.²⁰

15. The school system in Northern Ireland is complex, comprising several sectors each with their own governance arrangements and ethos. At the primary level, the two largest sectors are Controlled and Catholic Maintained schools: Controlled schools are (with some exceptions) associated with Northern Ireland's Protestant community and Catholic Maintained schools with the Catholic community. Although schools in both sectors have inclusive admissions policies, geographical factors and parental choice mean that in practice the large majority of pupils are drawn from one background. There are a smaller number of Integrated schools, including both Controlled and Grant Maintained Integrated institutions, as well as Irish Medium schools which teach their curriculum in the Irish language.

16. Secondary education includes each of the school types above, as well as Grammar schools which have a selective pupil intake. Grammars make up around a third of all secondary schools in Northern Ireland. Grammars fall into two categories, Controlled and Voluntary, with many of the latter being Catholic Grammars. Northern Ireland also has a number of Special Schools (for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and a small number of fee-paying independent schools.

16 Education Authority, [Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2018](#), 8 April 2019, p 31

17 Education Authority, [Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2018](#), 8 April 2019, p 31

18 [Q235](#)

19 [Q11](#); [Qq132–138](#); [Q235](#); Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 6

20 National Association of Head Teachers ([EDU0038](#)), p 7; Mr Ray Cromie ([EDU0006](#)), p 2

17. During our inquiry we frequently heard that there were too many schools in Northern Ireland, and that this led to duplication of provision and an inefficient use of resources. The Department of Education, the EA, and associated education bodies acknowledged that duplication was an issue, and the Department has a Sustainable Schools Policy and an Area Planning process aimed at supporting changes to education provision and the school estate.²¹ We examine Area Planning and the school estate in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this report.

The Department of Education and associated bodies

18. The Department of Education is ultimately responsible for education policy and delivery in Northern Ireland. However, there are a number of arm's-length bodies and sectoral representative organisations, some of which have a statutory basis or are in some way accountable to DE. The largest of these arm's-length bodies is the Education Authority, which is directly responsible for the efficient and effective delivery of education and youth services. The EA was established by the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014; previously its functions had been delivered by five regional Education and Library Boards (ELBs).²² The EA finances all Controlled schools as well as providing some of the funding for schools in other sectors.²³ It is also the employing authority for teaching staff in the Controlled sector and for non-teaching staff in Catholic Maintained schools. The EA employs 43,000 people, making it the largest employer in Northern Ireland.²⁴ The EA also leads on Area Planning and changes to the school estate, although final decision-making authority remains with DE. Other arm's-length bodies accountable to DE include the Education and Training Inspectorate, which is the inspection body for schools, and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, which advises DE on the school curriculum, conducts and moderates exams and maintains qualification standards.

19. There are also organisations for specific school sectors, some of which are statutory bodies with specific responsibilities. For example, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has a statutory role as the employing authority for teaching staff in Catholic Maintained schools and advises on Area Planning with regard to those schools. The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), meanwhile, facilitates the development of Integrated schools and integrated education. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta promotes and supports Irish-medium education. Other organisations are non-statutory, but act as advocates or representatives for their sectors when dealing with DE and the EA. Examples include the Governing Bodies Association, which represents Voluntary Grammar schools, and the Controlled Schools Support Council, which is an advocacy body for schools in the Controlled sector.

The Education Authority

20. The role of the Education Authority is crucial within the current education structure. The EA has: a budget of approximately £1.8 billion; funds over 1,000 schools; and is the managing authority for over 500 Controlled schools. It also takes the lead in implementing key strategic policies such as the school improvement policy *Every School a Good School*

21 [Q2, Q12; Q337](#)

22 [Education Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2014](#), Section 1

23 Education Authority, [Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2018](#), 8 April 2019, p 4

24 Education Authority, [Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2018](#), 8 April 2019, p 4

and Area Planning. It is the employing authority for teachers and staff in Controlled schools and non-teaching staff in Catholic Maintained schools, and is Northern Ireland's biggest employer with 43,000 staff in total. It provides school transport and school meals and is responsible for assessing the needs of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and providing them with appropriate support.²⁵ The EA is still a relatively new organisation, having been established formally in April 2015 through the amalgamation of five regional ELBs. Since then it has acquired new areas of responsibility: for example, in April 2017 the administration of the funding of Voluntary Grammar/Grant Maintained Integrated schools transferred from DE to the EA.²⁶

21. During the years prior to the establishment of the EA there was debate around what the remit and powers of the organisation should be, and this contributed to a degree of uncertainty during its set-up and early years of operation. The Permanent Secretary of DE, Derek Baker, told us:

It is fair to say that the Education Authority probably had a difficult gestation and birth. From original concept to the creation of the body it took far too long and that was a direct consequence of political discussions about its role, its scope and its functions and the absence of political agreement. The five legacy Education and Library Boards died a death of 1,000 cuts during that period, and a lot of expertise, corporate experience and corporate knowledge was lost in the process [...] It had a very difficult job bringing what were five different processes together into a coherent regional service.²⁷

22. The EA has overspent its block grant in every year since its creation. The Northern Ireland Audit Office reports that in 2017–18 this overspend was £16.6m, with £12.7m of that amount coming from Special Educational Needs.²⁸ The EA set out some of the challenges it faced in trying to control costs:

Over 90% of the EA cost base is related to ongoing and unavoidable demand for policy, statute and contract based services and over 80% of costs relate to staff. This means that any further significant in year savings cannot be achieved without changes to policy, legislation or contracts and staffing which can take time and be costly. In addition, EA must provide for growing demand for statutory and other services, must meet statutory based timescales, and only has access to funding for voluntary redundancy (including Investing in the Teacher Workforce).²⁹

The EA explained some of the steps they had taken to save money, including reducing staff numbers.³⁰

23. A number of contributors to the inquiry told us there had been a loss of capacity and local expertise at the EA during the process of its transition from the ELBs. Dr Graham Gault, Principal of Maghaberry Primary School, told us “There has been a big loss of intellectual capacity and experience. While we have not lost any key areas of service, we

25 Education Authority ([EDU0044](#)), p 4–5

26 Department of Education, [Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2018](#), 3 July 2018, p 28 [Q387](#)

28 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Education Authority Annual Report and Accounts 2017–18: Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General to the Northern Ireland Assembly](#), 11 April 2019, p 1

29 Education Authority ([EDU0044](#))

30 [Q77](#)

have definitely lost capacity.”³¹ Witnesses attributed this to both a lack of funding and the recent reorganisation of the old ELBs into the EA. Barry Mulholland of the Controlled Schools Support Council told us “[The EA] has not the capacity, because it has not the budget. [...] There is just not enough money in the system at this time.”³² In addition, some witnesses told us that it was not always clear where responsibility lay for certain functions within the EA.³³

24. We heard both positive and negative feedback from stakeholders about their relationship with the EA. Dr Gault described the staff he had worked with as “outstanding individuals working within what I believe is a broken system,”³⁴ and Jo McColgan, Principal of Ashfield Boys’ High School said he had an “excellent relationship ... with the SEN department.”³⁵ Some of the participants at our engagement event, however, told us that the EA had become “more procedural,” and that previously strong local relationships had been disrupted.³⁶ The trade unions and sectoral bodies we spoke to said that their relationship with senior EA officials remained good, but agreed that it was more difficult than before for schools and teachers to access support than had previously been the case.³⁷

25. Several schools told us they were not clear about the EA’s vision for the education sector. One participant at our engagement event remarked that “we need a strategic vision. No-one is thinking about how money could be best spent,” while another described the EA’s vision as “a moveable feast.”³⁸ Some said communication was the key issue. One contributor said that “The EA wants to move things forward, but they are not bringing schools with them. There is a lack of trust between people who are making decisions and those who implement them.”³⁹ Other witnesses suggested that this was an issue that went beyond the EA. The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, Koulla Yiasouma, said that there was a general lack of consensus around the future of education.⁴⁰

26. Some witnesses said that it was hard to scrutinise the EA’s spending because of a lack of publicly available information.⁴¹ The EA publishes a breakdown of its spending as part of its annual report, but witnesses said this did not contain the detail necessary to demonstrate whether it was offering value for money. Geri Cameron, the president of the National Association of Head Teachers Northern Ireland told us: “We want to be able to demonstrate that it is value for money—or it is not, and it is reviewed and changed—but we are not able to get that transparency.”⁴² She said that her union had submitted Freedom

31 [Q117](#)

32 [Q133](#)

33 [Q219](#)

34 [Q117](#)

35 [Q119](#)

36 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 4

37 [Q219](#)

38 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 3

39 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 3

40 [Q278](#)

41 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 4

42 [Q223](#)

of Information requests seeking more detailed information about EA spending, but that the responses did not contain the detail needed to judge whether the EA was delivering effectively.⁴³

27. A further concern related to the EA's responsibility for overseeing schools' management of their finances. We heard that the EA has limited powers to intervene or penalise poor budget management. The EA has the power to restrict or suspend a school's delegated authority to manage its own budget.⁴⁴ However, these sanctions have never been applied, and the Northern Ireland Audit Office concluded in its *Financial Health of Schools* report that "there are no real consequences for, or deterrents against, schools who do not undertake effective financial management of their budget."⁴⁵

28. The EA told us it had taken steps to address budget deficits. In January 2018 it rejected the budget plans of 632 schools, on the grounds that those schools were "unable to demonstrate they could live within their budget allocations for 2017–18."⁴⁶ However, EA officials said they were mindful of the challenging financial contest facing schools. The then Director of Education John Collings told us

One of the things we are saying to school leaders [...] is sometimes you can only do what you can do and sometimes enough is enough. It would be inappropriate, for example, to be challenging a school so hard that they had no other choice than to increase class sizes to 35 or 40 or beyond 40. That is not acceptable and we would not ask schools to do that.⁴⁷

We also heard about the work the EA has done with schools to identify and work with schools whose finances are most at risk, and to help reduce costs where possible.⁴⁸

29. Sir Robert Salisbury, Chair of the 2013 review of the Common Funding Formula, told us that during the review process some schools had shown "a fairly lax attitude to keeping in budget," and that there had been "very little intervention from the then library boards."⁴⁹ The Salisbury Review recommended more proactive intervention where budgets were not being properly managed.⁵⁰ However, the NIAO noted in its *Financial Health of Schools* report that despite the problem of deficits persisting sanction powers had not been used.⁵¹ The Department, in its most recent update on its response to the Salisbury Review, set out the work the EA had done to identify and support schools whose finances are at risk, but did not make any comment on the EA's sanction powers.⁵²

30. DE told us that the EA was due for its first quinquennial review in the next 12 months, and that it held regular accountability meetings at an official level.⁵³ However, people outside the Department told us that it was difficult to measure the EA's performance at

43 [Q223](#)

44 [Education \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998](#), Article 55; [Education and Libraries \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2003](#), Article 5

45 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 27

46 BBC News, [Budget plans refused for 632 NI schools](#), 24 January 2018

47 [Q11](#)

48 [Q11](#)

49 [Q275](#)

50 Department of Education, [An Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme](#), January 2013, p 48–51

51 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 27

52 Department of Education, [Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme: Update on recommendations at 30 September 2018](#), 14 March 2019, p 13

53 [Q387](#)

the present time.⁵⁴ Geri Cameron told us there was “no assessment of whether we have improved service delivery and whether we have saved any money,” and that when the EA was established “there was not any baseline assessment of what [it] should look like or did look like at that particular moment in time.”⁵⁵

31. We heard concerns about the support provided to schools by the Education Authority following the amalgamation of the Education and Library Boards. Issues raised included a lack of staffing capacity and expertise, a lack of clarity around responsibilities within the organisation, and the EA’s limited oversight of schools’ financial management. The upcoming review of the Education Authority is timely, and will provide an opportunity to evaluate its work. Given the EA’s importance within the sector we expect the Department and the EA to take a proactive approach to addressing the concerns raised in this report. *As part of its five year review of the Education Authority, the Department of Education should specifically examine: whether: the EA has sufficient resource and capacity to perform its functions; the EA’s services are delivering value for money when compared to the previous regional model; decision-making within the organisation is sufficiently transparent; the EA has sufficient powers to hold schools accountable for the way they manage their finances; the EA is making sufficient use of those powers. In responding to this report, the Department should set out the terms of reference for the review.*

Procurement

32. Some aspects of the EA’s work were frequently raised as causes of concern. Two areas stood out in particular: centralised procurement and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision. We examine the issue of procurement below, and return to SEND to consider it in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this report.

33. The EA runs centralised procurement services for all Controlled and Maintained schools, covering both equipment and contracted services such as maintenance. Schools in the Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated sectors have greater financial independence, and are able to procure their own equipment and services rather than going through the EA. The EA is one of Northern Ireland’s six Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) which provide professional procurement services for a particular sector, and which were recently subject to a public sector-wide review. DE notes that the EA failed its CoPE accreditation in 2017–18.⁵⁶ The review made seven recommendations for the EA to address:

- Operations and Estates Directorate should develop the governance structures, processes and documentation to support the effective management of change (Critical);
- Operations and Estates Directorate should capture the risk of delay in recruiting the Head of Procurement and develop appropriate contingency plans. (Critical);

54 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#))

55 [Q220](#)

56 Department of Education, [Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2018](#), 3 July 2019

- The CoPE should record the risk of non-compliance of contract management on goods and services contracts, consider whether any immediate mitigating actions are needed, and put plans in place to see that the new organisation and supporting processes are implemented (Critical);
- EA would benefit from the development of a training strategy to identify any staff skills gap and ensure personal and professional development needs are met (Recommended);
- The CoPE should issue instructions to those schools not yet using iProcurement, so that all procurement activity can be captured on eTendersNI (Essential);
- The CoPE should develop its risk management identification, escalation and reporting processes (Critical); and
- The CoPE should record in the risk register the internal audit control compliance risk it is currently exposed to and should introduce short term mitigating control actions (Critical).⁵⁷

The EA reports that all six of these seven recommendations deemed ‘Essential’ or ‘Critical’ have been addressed, while work is ongoing to address the one outstanding recommendation that the EA develop a training strategy to identify skills gaps among its staff.⁵⁸

34. School principals gave numerous examples of goods which were more expensive to purchase through the central procurement process than elsewhere, but which they were nevertheless required to buy through the EA. Jo McColgan, Principal of Ashfield Boys High School, a Controlled school, said:

I needed to purchase lighting equipment for an A-level class. To go through the procurement list, it was £320. I was able to get the exact same piece of equipment with extras, through Amazon, for £54 but I was not allowed to buy it. I had to go through the list.

To give you another simple example, I needed a new washing machine for hospitality and home economics. To go through the procurement list it was £349. I was able to buy a better machine from a local well-known high street supplier at £190. Those two pieces alone would have had a saving of £425, but I am not allowed to do that. It gets worse. Ink cartridges for computers and printers I was able to get for £6,000 less than procurement.⁵⁹

35. The cost of maintenance services was similarly high. A principal at our engagement event told us that “the cost of fixing a window is £30 for a local contractor, but £200 through the EA contractor.”⁶⁰ In its recent report on the Financial Health of Schools, the Northern Ireland Audit Office reported similar concerns:

57 [Letter from the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education to the Chair](#), 29 April 2019

58 [Letter from the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education to the Chair](#), 29 April 2019

59 [Q99](#)

60 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 4

One school told us that it was able to carpet a classroom from parent/teacher funds for considerably less than the price paid for other classrooms via central procurement. Another school told us that it had arranged its own cleaning contract and halved the price of the EA contract, saving around £30,000.⁶¹

36. Some principals in Controlled and Maintained schools said they would like to have greater freedom to procure goods and services for themselves. Jo McColgan told us:

I know what my school needs. I know where those resources need to go [...] give us the autonomy to do that and we will make real savings.⁶²

Principals from the Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated Sectors said they benefited from being able to manage their own procurement. Deirdre Gillespie, Principal of St Mary's Grammar, explained:

We are our own employing authority and therefore we have the autonomy to procure our own services and goods. I have worked in the system for a Controlled Grammar school where that was not the case, and I have certainly found having the autonomy to procure our own services and goods to be a much more flexible system, which allows savings to be incurred.⁶³

37. Not all schools shared the same view however. The trade unions we spoke to suggested that decentralising procurement responsibilities would substantially increase schools' workloads.⁶⁴ Witnesses acknowledged that there were some areas of procurement where bulk purchasing or standardisation of a product or service were beneficial. Justin McCamphill of the NASUWT union gave the example of C2K, the IT network for Northern Ireland's schools:

Every school in Northern Ireland is on the same managed network, which has large efficiencies in terms of purchasing power for the EA and for the transfer of information between schools. For example, if a teacher goes from one school to another, they keep the same email address. I can see the efficiencies that are there. You might say, 'Well, schools might be able to buy their own system,' but once you are down to a school with four or five teachers, putting in a server, putting in a network and paying for maintenance and upkeep, you are not necessarily going to get those savings. You suddenly then have a very fragmented system.⁶⁵

This discussion was part of a wider debate around the proportion of funding—and associated responsibilities—allocated to schools, which we discuss in Chapter 3.

38. The Permanent Secretary told us some of the reasons why central procurement could be expensive:

61 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 35

62 [Q99](#)

63 [Q96](#)

64 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 2; [Q244](#)

65 [Q244](#)

The Education Authority has to enter into contracts and there is a whole raft of issues that may not occur to individual schools or individual principals around insurance, indemnity, compliance, and, dare I say it, EU public procurement legislation, which feeds through and is transposed into national legislation, which the Education Authority has to take account of.⁶⁶

Reacting to some of the examples that had been shared with the Committee, however, he said that he had “heard enough of those stories to be concerned” and that the Department had begun a review of procurement.⁶⁷ DE’s Finance Director Gary Fair told us that a Procurement Strategy for school maintenance work contracts was currently being drafted, with a view to appointing a new contractor in late 2020 or early 2021.⁶⁸

39. We welcome the ongoing review into procurement, which was a priority concern for many of the Controlled and Maintained schools we spoke to. We believe there is scope for substantial savings in this area and expect that this review will allow these to be promptly realised. *Once the review of procurement is complete, the Department should update this Committee (or the relevant Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly if it is constituted) with its findings and its plan for implementation.*

66 [Q388](#)

67 [Q388](#)

68 Department of Education ([EDU0065](#))

3 The education budget and school funding

40. In this chapter we consider:

- the budget allocation for the Department of Education, and whether this is sufficient to meet key education objectives;
- how two specific funding streams—the Confidence and Supply Agreement and the Fresh Start Agreement—have been used to fund education;
- the Common Funding Formula used to determine individual schools’ budgets, and proposals for how it could be changed to distribute funding more fairly and efficiently;
- the case for delegating more of the education budget to schools directly.

The Department of Education Budget

41. The Department of Education’s budget is set as part of the Northern Ireland Budget, which sets out allocations for each of the departments in Northern Ireland. In normal circumstances the Budget is agreed by the Assembly, but since the collapse of the institutions at Stormont the UK Government has passed budget legislation for Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State has told the House that as part of this process:

I have engaged intensively with the Northern Ireland Civil Service to understand the needs of departments as they continue to manage public services in the absence of an Executive. I have reflected too on the various views on budget priorities submitted to me over the course of the past year and discussed the budget situation with the main political parties in Northern Ireland.⁶⁹

The Permanent Secretary described the Budget negotiation process. He told us that his Department had gone through a “fairly intensive” process with the Northern Ireland Department of Finance (DoF), as well as bilateral engagement with the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and further discussions with the DoF, NIO and UK Treasury.⁷⁰

42. In 2018–19 DE’s starting Resource DEL was £1.98 billion.⁷¹ This was an increase of 4.3 per cent on the 2017–18 baseline figure. However, the Department was allocated an additional £80 million during the 2017–18 monitoring round. Once this money is included the 2018–19 budget only represented a 0.6 per cent increase on the previous year’s allocation, and a reduction in real terms.⁷² It was, however, a slight increase in education spending relative to other departments: DE’s budget made up 18 per cent of the

69 HC Deb, [28 February 2019](#), Col 23WS

70 [Q364](#)

71 Department of Finance, [Northern Ireland Estimates 2018–19](#), July 2018, p 88

72 Department of Finance, [Northern Ireland Estimates 2017–18](#), November 2017, p 88; Department of Finance, [Northern Ireland Spring Supplementary Estimates 2017–18](#), March 2018, p 88

Northern Ireland budget in 2018–19 compared to 17.8 per cent in 2017–18.⁷³ The Spring Supplementary Estimates published in February 2019 revised the total budget for 2018–19 upwards to £2.03 billion.⁷⁴

43. The Department’s capital budget for 2018–19 was £164.4 million, which was increased to £174 million in the Spring Supplementary Estimates.⁷⁵ This was a 1.3 per cent increase on the 2017–18 capital budget. Over and above this budget, £500 million of funding from the Fresh Start Agreement has been earmarked for spending on shared education and housing capital projects over the next ten years.⁷⁶ We examine this spending in greater detail in Chapter 4.

44. In February 2019 the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland published a Written Statement setting out draft 2019–20 budget allocations for departments in Northern Ireland.⁷⁷ Although these allocations are only provisional, they nevertheless give an indication of each department’s likely budget, and enable departments to make some decisions about their spending plans. The provisional Resource DEL for DE is £2.04 billion. The Northern Ireland Office has stated that this is a 1.1 per cent increase in the education budget, but the Permanent Secretary confirmed this was a cut in real terms.⁷⁸ The draft Capital DEL budget for 2019–20 is £152.7 million: this is 14 per cent lower than the previous year’s allocation (once in-year adjustments are included) but again excludes money from Fresh Start, £56.9 million of which was included in the draft 2019–20 budget.

45. Both the Department and the Education Authority told us that the level of education funding was insufficient. The Permanent Secretary summarised the position in his evidence:

We have had a combination of a perfect storm over about a decade: flat cash, rising costs and rising service demands. Last year, when the Northern Ireland Audit Office looked at school finances, it euphemistically made the point that schools’ finances have reached a “tipping point.” What they really meant was, ‘It cannot go on like this, because we are in something of a crisis.’ I am not understating the position we are in; it really is very, very difficult.⁷⁹

He told us that the pressure on budgets was likely to continue, and that DE was facing unfunded pressures of £54 million in the next financial year.⁸⁰ The EA states that the spending power of the education budget had fallen by £240 million since 2010–11,⁸¹ and that “we have insufficient funds to run the system as it is currently configured.”⁸² The vast majority of witnesses to the inquiry echoed these concerns. Barry Mulholland of the Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC) told us:

73 Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service, [We don’t need no education](#), 27 November 2018

74 Department of Finance, [Northern Ireland Spring Supplementary Estimates 2018–19](#), February 2019, p 72

75 Department of Finance, [Northern Ireland Estimates 2018–19](#), July 2018, p 89; Department of Finance, [Northern Ireland Spring Supplementary Estimates 2018–19](#), February 2019, p 73

76 HM Government, [A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan](#), 17 November 2015, p 24

77 HC Deb, [28 February 2019](#), Col 1370WS

78 Northern Ireland Office, [Secretary of State sets out draft budget for Northern Ireland](#), 28 February 2019; [Q365](#)

79 [Q355](#)

80 [Q365](#)

81 Education Authority, [Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2018](#), 9 April 2019, p 16

82 [Qq6, 11](#)

Truth be told, there is not enough money in the education budget. The Department does not have enough to give to schools. The Department does not have enough to give to the Education Authority. The Education Authority does not have enough in order to run the services the way they would want to run the services in support of schools.⁸³

46. We heard that although the education budget had been protected from direct reductions, the sector was subject to increasing cost pressures and its budget was failing to keep pace. One factor was demographic change: we heard that the school population had increased by 2.5% since 2011.⁸⁴ The CSSC described the impact:

There were 2,000 extra pupils in the system last year. That hit schools hard, because when it came to the establishment of the AWPU [Age Weighted Pupil Unit] there was the same quantum of money to be divided amongst a greater number of pupils, resulting in the allocation per primary school going down by £56 per head and for post-primary going down by something in the region of £26 per head.⁸⁵

Spending on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEN or SEND) has also risen in recent years. We examine this in detail in Chapter 5 of this report.

47. Changes to legislation have also increased schools' costs. The Governing Bodies Association told us that since 2010 schools had needed to meet the cost of increases to the National Living Wage, a 3.4 per cent rise in employers' National Insurance Contributions and increases to contributions to teachers' and local government pension schemes.⁸⁶ The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy has also created costs for schools. Altogether DE estimates that these measures cost the sector around £70 million.⁸⁷

48. Although the majority of evidence we received suggested that there is not enough money in the system, many contributions acknowledged that the structure of the education system contributes significantly to the strain on education, and some stakeholders told us that if the system was organised differently it ought to be possible to properly resource education at current funding levels. Sir Robert Salisbury told us:

We felt that there was clearly enough money in the system [...] but because of the nature of the schools in Northern Ireland and the historic structure, the money is spread too thinly.⁸⁸

The Integrated Education Fund made a similar case in its written evidence, noting that measured on a per pupil basis, funding in Northern Ireland is high by both UK and OECD standards. They wrote that:

Throwing more money at the financial problems facing our schools would only serve to temporarily mask and perpetuate the structural inefficiencies underlying these problems.⁸⁹

83 [Q132](#)

84 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 10

85 [Q131](#)

86 Governing Bodies Association ([EDU0045](#)), p 6

87 Department of Education ([EDU0058](#)), p 4

88 [Q256](#)

89 Integrated Education Fund ([EDU0021](#))

49. In the future Northern Ireland’s block grant will increase as a result of decisions taken in the UK’s Autumn 2018 Budget. In his statement, the Chancellor confirmed that Barnett consequentials arising from the decisions taken in the Budget would result in Northern Ireland receiving an extra £320 million in 2020–21. He added that there were “much larger sums to come” as part of the upcoming Spending Review.⁹⁰ The devolved administrations have discretion to spend their block grant on areas of devolved responsibility as they deem appropriate.⁹¹ However, in the absence of an elected Executive and Assembly it is not clear how decisions about the allocation of future funding will be made.

50. In a statement accompanying the draft 2019–20 budget allocations, the Secretary of State set out the Government’s position that “it would not be appropriate for the UK Government to seek to take fundamental decisions about service delivery and transformation.” She nevertheless added that the Government needed to secure public services and enable departments to meet urgent pressures in health and education.⁹²

51. We heard a consistent message that the education budget is not sufficient to meet rising pressures on schools while the system remains in its current form. Independent of this issue, however, there is a clear need to properly fund the existing education system to meet rising demand so that the current generation of children receive the excellent education they deserve. We recommend that future budget allocations to the Department of Education rise not only in line with inflation, but in proportion to the number of pupils in the school system in order to reflect increasing pupil numbers and the associated demand for additional staff. We examine the organisation of the school estate and make further recommendations in Chapter 4.

52. We welcome the announcement in the 2018 Budget Statement that Northern Ireland will receive additional funding in 2020–21 and in the upcoming Spending Review. However, in the absence of functioning devolved institutions it is not clear how Northern Ireland can exercise its usual discretion in the way this money will be spent. The Northern Ireland Office should, in responding to this report, explain how decisions will be taken on how the Barnett consequentials arising from the 2018 UK Budget will be spent. The Secretary of State should be prepared to authorise the allocation of funds to areas of acute public service need, consulting with the Department of Finance and the major political parties in Northern Ireland to ensure there is consensus for such an approach.

Schools’ budgets

53. As DE’s budget has come under pressure, schools’ own budget positions have generally deteriorated. In October 2018 the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) published a report on *The Financial Health of Schools*, which analysed the budget positions of Northern Ireland’s schools in detail.⁹³ The NIAO’s report found that over the last five years the number of Controlled and Maintained schools with a budget deficit had increased, from 19 per cent of schools in 2012–13 to 31 per cent in 2016–17.⁹⁴ Altogether the accumulated value of deficits in these schools rose from £14.8 million to £32 million over the same

90 HC Deb, [29 October 2018](#), Col 664

91 HM Treasury, [Block Grant Transparency: December 2018 publication](#), December 2018, p 2

92 HC Deb, [28 February 2019](#), Col 23WS

93 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018

94 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 13

period.⁹⁵ The report also noted that 2017–18 was the first year in which accumulated school deficits exceeded accumulated school surpluses.⁹⁶ A similar pattern was seen in Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated schools, where the proportion of schools in deficit increased from 23 per cent in 2012–13 to 33 per cent in 2016–17.⁹⁷ Some of the principals we spoke to gave examples of their own schools' worsening budget positions. Jo McColgan, Principal of Ashfield Boys' High School, a Controlled school, said that:

Although the outcomes in my own school have improved significantly over the past three years in relation to all headline targets, we have gone from a £4,000 surplus to a £136,000 deficit. I fear that, while our agreed three-year budget takes us back to the surplus, it is based on losing another three members of staff.⁹⁸

54. While schools' financial positions generally trended downwards, the situation varies significantly from school to school. The NIAO noted that some schools consistently run surpluses, and that 18 Controlled or Maintained schools had in fact increased their surpluses year on year between 2012–13 and 2016–17. Altogether, these schools' surpluses increased from £1.3 million to £3.1 million over this period, an increase of 138.5 per cent.⁹⁹ At the opposite end of the scale, 14 Controlled or Maintained schools saw their deficits increase year on year, with their accumulated deficit rising from £3.7 million in 2012–13 to £12.7 million in 2016–17, an increase of 243.2 per cent.¹⁰⁰ Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated schools also showed some variation: the NIAO found that 47 of the 59 schools in these categories had been in surplus in each of the last four years; however, 13 had been in deficit over the same period and one Grammar had a deficit of £7.1 million.¹⁰¹

55. The budget positions of schools varied to some extent based on the school sector and school type. The NIAO found that the schools with the largest deficits and the largest surpluses tended to be post-primary schools: all seven of the schools with deficits in excess of £1 million were post-primaries, and the largest surplus in a post-primary school was £1 million, twice the level of the largest primary surplus. The NIAO also found that in the Controlled and Maintained sectors, the largest surpluses were likely to be at schools with high pupil enrolments, while the largest deficits were in smaller schools.¹⁰²

56. Both the Department and the EA have acknowledged the pressure schools are under, and in response the EA established a Surpluses and Deficits Working Group in 2015. The NIAO's report, however, noted that:

Implementation of the Working Group's action plan, which included 37 action points, has been slow. Only four of the 25 action points, which should have been addressed by 31 March 2017, were addressed by September 2017. The EA advised that 29 of the 37 action points had been implemented by April 2018.¹⁰³

95 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 14

96 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 16

97 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 22

98 [Q95](#)

99 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 16

100 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 17

101 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 22–24

102 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 20

103 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 3

The EA told us about some of the steps they were taking to help schools with deficits in their oral evidence. The EA's Director of Finance and ICT, Joyce Bill, told us that the EA had used this year's financial planning process as a "health check" with schools.¹⁰⁴ The EA's annual report says that it has "developed benchmarks using similar families of schools and has worked with a range of schools to develop scenarios and options to reduce costs."¹⁰⁵

The budgeting process

57. Alongside the pressures caused by smaller budget allocations, schools reported difficulties caused by the absence of an Executive and by the processes the Education Authority uses to allocate school budgets. Schools told us that these made it harder for them to manage their own budgets and for the education sector to plan for the future.

58. Several witnesses told us that in the absence of an Executive the education budget was being set on a rolling year-to-year basis.¹⁰⁶ Principals at our engagement event in Strabane explained that this made it difficult for schools to make long term spending commitments, because they could not guarantee the continuation of the necessary funding in future years:

We're expected to budget plan, but I have no idea what my budget will be next year. You have to build a curriculum. You have to look at the needs of the children: what subjects do you need, and then what teachers do you put in front of them to teach those subjects.¹⁰⁷

Witnesses agreed that a similar problem existed at the sectoral level, and restricted central authorities' ability to strategically manage education.¹⁰⁸ A participant at our engagement event stated:

Reacting on an annual basis to funding means there is no long term strategic planning. Schools are living hand to mouth, which means we can't plan for an effective education system in the future.¹⁰⁹

59. Other issues related to the way the EA calculates and allocates school budgets. For example, we learned that a school's per-pupil funding in a given year is based on the previous year's enrolment rather than the current year's.¹¹⁰ The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education wrote that this could be a particular problem for schools which had recently proceeded with a development proposal:

When such a school has a successful development proposal for growth, the present in-year growth policy means that they will not receive funding for these children until the next financial year, meaning that the school is

104 [Q11](#)

105 Education Authority, [Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2018](#), 9 April 2019, p 57

106 [Q181](#)

107 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)) p 2

108 [Q224](#); Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ([EDU0057](#)), p 2

109 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)) p 2

110 Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta ([EDU0028](#)), p 4

essentially educating these children for free for the majority of the academic year. This has a knock-on effect for all other children in the school and for future years. This funding mechanism needs to be reviewed urgently.¹¹¹

One principal at our engagement event said that the way budgets are calculated means that changes to the number of children eligible for free school meals on a school's roll can have dramatic effects on its finances. The principal told us that a 2 per cent change in the proportion of eligible children saw their budget reduce by £180,000.¹¹²

60. In the absence of an Assembly the education budget has been set on a rolling annual basis, with the consequence that schools and sectoral bodies have not been able to plan for the future of education. This has been an obstacle to investment and improvement in children's education. We recognise the UK Government's reservations about setting long-term budgets while there is the prospect of the Assembly being restored. However, we believe that it is not in the long term interests of education for the current uncertainty to continue. *The UK Government should work with the Department of Education and Department of Finance as part of the upcoming Spending Review to produce provisional three-year budget allocations for the Department of Education.*

Consequences of budget pressures

61. Over the course of our inquiry we heard many examples of the difficult decisions school leaders were being forced to take as a result of budget pressures. For example, witnesses told us that the vast majority of schools' budgets were spent on staff, and therefore reducing staff numbers or hours was often the only way to achieve significant savings. Graham Gault stated that "95% of my budget is spent on staff and I am not overstaffed; I am understaffed."¹¹³ A participant in our engagement event told us that support roles tended to be the first cut, describing "a wipe out of classroom assistants," over the last year "because principals couldn't afford to pay for them."¹¹⁴ Schools confirmed that further budget pressures would leave them with no choice but to cut classroom teacher numbers as well. The Principal of St Patrick's College wrote that "with current cuts in budget I potentially will have to reduce my teaching complement by 10 teachers from the current 84. This would make it impossible to deliver a curriculum in our school."¹¹⁵

62. One consequence of falling staff numbers has been increasing class sizes and a rise in the pupil-to-teacher ratio. A joint submission from three teaching unions noted that many larger primary schools had Key Stage 1 classes at the legal limit of 30 pupils, and that at Key Stage 2 class sizes could rise as high as 35 pupils, compared to the OECD average of 21.¹¹⁶ Heather Murray, Principal of Millington Primary School, stated that her

111 Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education ([EDU0042](#)), p 6

112 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)) p 2

113 [Q92](#)

114 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 7

115 St Patrick's College ([EDU0049](#))

116 Irish National Teachers Organisation, National Education Union and the Ulster Teachers Union ([EDU0053](#)), p 2

school had 15 classes with 33 or more children.¹¹⁷ The pressure continued into secondary schools, especially in practical subjects where class sizes are limited to for health and safety reasons.¹¹⁸

63. Post-primary schools gave evidence that the difficulty of maintaining adequate staff numbers made it difficult to maintain a broad curriculum offer. In Northern Ireland the Entitlement Framework is supposed to guarantee access to a broad and balanced range of subjects in Key Stages 4 and 5. The Controlled Schools Support Council told us that “The Entitlement Framework is an aspiration now in many schools.”¹¹⁹ We also heard that the pressure on staff numbers and the curriculum offer could be self-reinforcing. Nigel Frith, Principal of Drumragh Integrated College, said:

If we are losing students, then ultimately we are losing funding, which means we are losing more staff, and so the thing begins to replicate in a negative way.¹²⁰

64. Although staff cuts were the most commonly cited consequence of pressure on school budgets, schools and teachers gave numerous examples of other impacts, including:

- shortening the school day for some pupils;¹²¹
- introduction of composite classes (where children from different year groups are taught together);¹²²
- cutting back on books and other equipment;¹²³
- reduced access to, or cancellation of, extra-curricular activities and school visits;¹²⁴
- reduced maintenance budgets, which in some cases have resulted in classrooms being closed for health and safety reasons;¹²⁵ and
- schools seeking or receiving donations from parents, ranging from donations for extracurricular activities that were previously free (e.g. sports days) to providing stationery and even toilet roll.¹²⁶

The Confidence and Supply Agreement and the Fresh Start Agreement

65. In recent years, education is one of a number of sectors that has received supplementary funding from the UK Government under the 2017 Confidence and Supply Agreement and the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement. Figure 1 shows how this money has been directed to date.

117 [Q142](#)

118 [Q98](#)

119 [Q142](#)

120 [Q98](#)

121 Friends' School Lisburn ([EDU0047](#))

122 St Patrick's Primary School ([EDU0019](#))

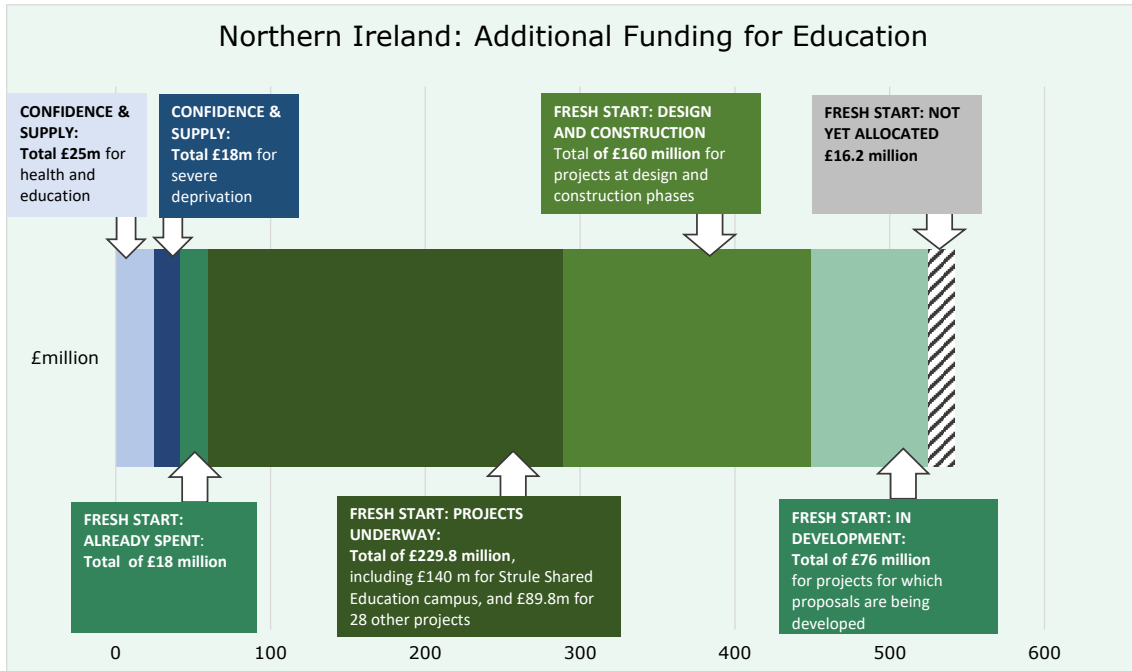
123 St Kieran's PS ([EDU0002](#)); Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 35

124 [Qq142](#), [144](#)

125 Council for Catholic Maintained Schools ([EDU0056](#)), p 9; St Patrick's College ([EDU0049](#))

126 [Q92](#); Parentkind, [Northern Ireland Parents' views on school and education: Findings from the 2018 Northern Ireland survey](#), November 2018, p 2; Controlled Schools Support Council ([EDU0037](#)), p 6

Figure 1: Funding for education from the Confidence & Supply Agreement and the Fresh Start Agreement



Source: House of Commons Scrutiny Unit

66. The Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) was finalised in November 2015, as the culmination of talks on implementing the 2014 Stormont House Agreement. As part of the FSA, the UK Government agreed to provide up to £500 million of new capital funding over 10 years to support shared and integrated education projects.¹²⁷ This funding is over and above DE's own capital allocation and is accounted for separately in the Northern Ireland Budget.

67. Following the June 2017 General Election, the Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party signed a Confidence and Supply Agreement (CSA).¹²⁸ The agreement included a package of financial support for Northern Ireland, including “an additional £50 million per year for 2 years to enable the Executive to address immediate pressures in health and education.”¹²⁹ At the time of the agreement, no more detail was made available about how this money would be spent.

68. The Department confirmed that £483.8 million of the £500 million FSA capital funding had been committed to projects so far.¹³⁰ When DE gave evidence in March 2019 just £18 million of the FSA budget had been spent; however, we were told that this was due to the long lead time associated with new capital projects, and that this delay had been exacerbated by the requirement that the FSA money be spent on entirely new

127 HM Government, [A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan](#), 17 November 2015, p 24

128 UK Government, [Agreement between the Conservative and Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party on support for the Government in Parliament](#), 26 June 2017

129 HM Government, [UK Government Financial Support for Northern Ireland](#), 26 June 2017, p 3

130 [Q336](#)

projects.¹³¹ The Permanent Secretary described the process of getting projects approved as “a slightly sticky process ... it has not all gone smoothly.”¹³² Although the majority of FSA funding for 2016–17 and 2017–18 was not spent, DE has secured approval for £91 million of funding to be carried over to the end of the current spending review period (2020–21), meaning that money has not been lost.¹³³ The 2018 UK Budget announced £300 million of FSA funding would be spent “to increase the provision of shared and integrated education and shared housing in Northern Ireland.”¹³⁴ This funding covered 23 newly announced projects and additional funding for 13 that had previously been announced.¹³⁵

69. Many of the schools we spoke to said it was not clear how the money received under the CSA would be spent. Nigel Frith said, “I do not know which schools are going to benefit from that money.”¹³⁶ Several written submissions called for greater clarity on how it would be spent.¹³⁷ Participants in our engagement event were not aware that their schools had directly benefited at all: one told us that “not one penny has made it into schools’ budgets.”¹³⁸

70. Some contributors had specific recommendations for how the CSA money should be spent. Some believed it would be most effective if delegated directly to schools.¹³⁹ Others suggested that it be targeted at school transformation, with the EA proposing that an “Education Transformation Fund” be established using funding from CSA and other sources.¹⁴⁰ Deirdre Gillespie, Principal of St Mary’s Grammar, said it should be used “not on a sectoral basis but a systems basis, to bring about a programme of transformation of our education system.”¹⁴¹ One attendee at our engagement event noted that the CSA money was only guaranteed for the duration of the current parliament, and therefore could not be spent on longer term commitments (e.g. pay increases for staff).¹⁴²

71. The Department confirmed that it had received £5 million of CSA money in 2017–18, and that this had been used “to meet education funding pressures.”¹⁴³ DE received a further £20 million in 2018–19, which the Permanent Secretary said had been used to make up what would otherwise have been a shortfall compared to the previous year’s budget, in effect meaning “that we would not have to make £20 million of cuts.”¹⁴⁴ He added that DE had been allocated a further £16.5 million for 2018–19 from a different strand of the CSA aimed at tackling social deprivation, and that this had been used for specific projects like Sure Start and Nurture Units.¹⁴⁵ The evidence shows that the CSA

131 [Q336](#)

132 [Q336](#)

133 [Q336](#)

134 HM Treasury, [Budget 2018](#), HC 1629, p 71; further details were announced on 23 November

135 HM Treasury press release, [£66 million for shared and integrated education in Northern Ireland](#), 23 November 2019

136 [Q115](#)

137 Strandtown Primary School ([EDU0022](#)); Controlled Schools’ Support Council ([EDU0037](#)); Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education ([EDU0042](#)); Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, National Education Union and the Ulster Teachers Union ([EDU0053](#))

138 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 2

139 Holy Family Primary and Nursery School Derry ([EDU0018](#)); St Anne’s Primary School ([EDU0008](#))

140 Education Authority ([EDU0044](#)), p 13

141 [Q124](#)

142 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 2

143 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ([EDU0057](#)) p 22

144 [Q340](#)

145 [Qq 340–341](#)

was used to prevent service cuts which otherwise might have been necessary, rather than spent on new services or resources. This may explain why some schools felt they had not seen the impact of this funding.

72. The non-recurring nature of the CSA funding may explain why DE chose to use it to mitigate immediate budget pressures, rather than for anything that might generate longer term spending commitments. A joint submission from three teaching unions acknowledged that:

The amounts of money available from this source are not large enough or accompanied with any surety into the future so therefore DE have little choice but to use them in the manner they have chosen to do at present.”¹⁴⁶

The temporary nature of the CSA raises a concern that, if this funding is not available in future years, then some of the cuts which were prevented in 2017–18 and 2018–19 might become unavoidable. The Permanent Secretary revealed what this might mean in practice when he explained how the CSA funding had been used so far:

If we had not received that total of £36.5 million of confidence and supply money, we would have had to make £36.5 million of cuts in the current financial year. To give the Committee a little bit of context, £36.5 million of cuts would equate to more than the entirety of what we spend on youth services.¹⁴⁷

73. **Many of the teachers and principals we spoke to did not know how the Department of Education had spent the money obtained through the Confidence and Supply Agreement, and some believed they had not benefitted from this funding at all. *The Department should proactively contact schools to set out how the 2019–20 allocation of Confidence and Supply funding is spent and make this information clearly available to the general public so that decisions on this spending can be properly scrutinised.***

74. **We heard that Confidence and Supply money was largely used to maintain existing provision, and that without it further cuts would have been necessary. This raises the alarming prospect that once the deal expires there will be a substantial funding gap that threatens the continuation of vital programmes. *We recommend that, in anticipation of the end of the current Confidence and Supply Agreement funding period, Ministers say how they will respond to the exhaustion of the additional funding for the programmes supported by the Agreement in 2017–18 and 2018–19.***

75. **We welcome the Government’s decision to allow unspent money from the first two years of the Fresh Start Agreement to be carried over into future years. The long-term nature of capital projects means it may be necessary to allow further money to be carried over to avoid it being lost. *The Government should continue to allow underspends in Fresh Start funding to be carried over into future years, as it did in 2016–17 and 2017–18.***

146 Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, National Education Union and the Ulster Teachers Union ([EDU0053](#))

147 [Q340](#)

The Common Funding Scheme

76. The scheme used for allocating education funding in Northern Ireland is known as the Common Funding Scheme. The Scheme uses a calculation—the Common Funding Formula (CFF)—to determine funding for each school in Northern Ireland. The scheme is based on the following key principles:

- Sustainable schools should be funded according to the relative need of their pupils, and in a way that enables the effects of social disadvantage to be substantially reduced;
- Sustainable schools should be funded on a consistent and fair basis, taking full account of the needs of pupils;
- The formula should support schools in delivering the curriculum;
- The formula should underpin and reinforce wider education policy and objectives; and
- The formula should be as transparent and comprehensible as possible and predictable in its outcome.¹⁴⁸

The CFF is divided into two funding streams: one for nursery and primary and one for post-primary. The calculations for each strand differ slightly: for example, the value of the Age-Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) is higher for post-primary schools than primaries. There are also schools which are not funded under the formula, such as special schools which have their own distinct arrangements (described in Chapter 5 of this report).

77. The Age-Weighted Pupil Unit is the largest element of the CFF: in 2018–19 AWPU's made up 73.8 per cent of primary schools' CFF allocation and 83.8 per cent of post-primary funding.¹⁴⁹ Each pupil attending a school entitles that school to a sum of money, equal to a default cash value that is weighted according to the child's age and whether they are a part-time or full time pupil.¹⁵⁰ The default cash value does not remain the same from year to year however; rather, it is calculated by taking the total level of funding left in the funding stream once all non-AWPU factors have been deducted and dividing it by the number of AWPU's (i.e. the number of pupils) in the system.¹⁵¹ This means that although the AWPU is a per-pupil payment the amount of money in the system does not increase as the number of pupils increases.¹⁵² The Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC) told us that the value of the AWPU was £56 lower per primary pupil and £15 lower per post-primary pupil in 2017–18 compared with 2016–17, because an extra 2,000 pupils were in the system that year.¹⁵³

78. Alongside the AWPU, the formula includes a number of specific factors linked to the specific characteristics of a school or its pupils. Examples include:

- Premises factor: based on the size of the school premises and the number of Full-Time Equivalent pupils;

148 Department of Education, [Common Funding Scheme 2018–19](#), 14 November 2019, p 3

149 Department of Education, [Common Funding Formula 2018–19](#), 14 November 2018, p-101, 120

150 Department of Education, [Common Funding Scheme 2018–19](#), 14 November 2018, p 103

151 Department of Education, [Common Funding Scheme 2018–19](#), 14 November 2018, p 9

152 Mr Ray Cromie ([EDU0006](#))

153 Controlled Schools Support Council ([EDU0037](#)) p 4; [Q131](#)

- Targeting Social Need factor: based on the percentage of pupils with a parent receiving Job Seekers Allowance or who are entitled to Free School Meals;
- Small Schools Support factor: a lump sum paid to schools with a small number of pupils;
- Support for children with particular characteristics, e.g. looked after children and children of service personnel; and
- Support for Special Units and Irish-medium Units within schools.¹⁵⁴

79. Many witnesses said a complete review of the Common Funding Formula was required. The CSSC wrote that “there are elements of the existing formula that are not functioning correctly,”¹⁵⁵ while the CCMS called for a “root and branch review.”¹⁵⁶ The Northern Ireland Audit Office, in its *Financial Health of Schools* report, recommended a “fundamental review” of school funding arrangements.¹⁵⁷

80. An independent review of the Common Funding Formula was carried out in 2013, and chaired by Sir Robert Salisbury.¹⁵⁸ The review made a number of recommendations, several of which—such as directly targeting more funding at children from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds—were accepted by DE and have since been implemented.¹⁵⁹ Other recommendations, such as the removal of small school support factors and creation of a new Small Schools Policy, were not accepted.¹⁶⁰ We heard that the Department had conducted an internal review in 2017 that made similar recommendations.¹⁶¹ Although the Department’s update demonstrated some progress, we heard from witnesses that a number of sensible recommendations from various reviews of education had not been implemented.¹⁶² The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, Koulla Yiasouma, told us that some proposals did not have political support or the support of parents and communities.¹⁶³ DE told us that a further review of the formula was underway, but the Permanent Secretary noted that a Minister would need to authorise changes to the formula.¹⁶⁴

81. Witnesses raised a number of specific problems with the Common Funding Formula. One common criticism was that the formula allocates too many resources to small schools, which without that funding would be unsustainable.¹⁶⁵ Sir Robert Salisbury described the anomalies this could create:

Some primary schools we looked at in very affluent areas, because they were small schools and received very generous small school allowance,

154 Department of Education, [Common Funding Scheme 2018–19](#), 14 November 2018

155 Controlled Schools Support Council ([EDU0037](#)), p 10

156 Council for Catholic Maintained Schools ([EDU0056](#)) p 14

157 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2019, p 40

158 Department of Education, [An Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme](#), January 2013

159 Department of Education, [Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme: Update on recommendations at 30 September 2018](#), 14 March 2019, p 20

160 Department of Education, [Department’s response to independent review of the common funding scheme](#), 1 June 2013, p 9

161 [Q267](#)

162 [Q123](#); Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 3

163 [Q267](#)

164 [Q359](#)

165 Council for Catholic Maintained Schools ([EDU0056](#)), p 16; St Columbanus’ College ([EDU0015](#))

were receiving £14,200 per pupil, while other schools in tougher areas—socioeconomically deprived areas—were sometimes receiving not much over £3,000 per student. You have this enormous anomaly that was linked to the needs of the institution rather than the needs of the children in it.¹⁶⁶

A 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee report on the Sustainability of Schools said it was “concerned that the Department cannot demonstrate that the £36 million investment in small schools represents value for money.”¹⁶⁷ We consider the issue of small schools further in Chapter 4.

82. Another common concern was the balance of funding between the two funding streams: the nursery and primary stream and the post-primary stream. A number of primary principals felt that too little money was directed to primary education.¹⁶⁸ Graham Gault said that a child in the first year of their post-primary education was worth £1,300 more to their school than in their last year of primary education.¹⁶⁹ The Strategic Primary Principals Forum made the case that investment in children’s education at an earlier age had positive effects in the long term, and others said that the Department’s policy of early intervention in areas like identifying Special Educational Needs needed to be matched by increased funding for primaries.¹⁷⁰ The Salisbury Review recommended that in the medium to long term more resources should be directed at primary education.¹⁷¹

83. Some contributors to the inquiry also raised the Targeting Social Need (TSN) element of the formula, arguing it diverted disproportionate levels of funding to schools with high proportions of Free School Meal Eligible (FSME) pupils, to the extent that schools with lower proportions of FSME pupils were under-funded.¹⁷² Graham Gault told us:

The current distribution of funding uses free school meals, which is a very blunt measure of need, to distribute money. The disparity in funding between schools with very few free school meals and schools with a large number of free schools meals is very significant. I would argue that, in educational terms, a child is a child and that money needs to be distributed more equitably.¹⁷³

Centrally-held funding

84. A more general concern shared by a number of witnesses was that too much of the education budget in Northern Ireland was controlled centrally rather than delegated to schools. We heard that, in total, 59 per cent of the education budget was delegated to schools for them to spend as they deem appropriate, while 41 per cent is spent on centrally funded services such as school transport and Special Educational Needs and Disability

166 [Q256](#)

167 Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee, [Report on Department of Education: Sustainability of Schools](#), 2 March 2016, p 15; N.B. Updated figures from the Northern Ireland Audit Office give the amount spent on small school support factors in 2016–17 as £25 million (See Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2019, p 37)

168 Brackenagh West Primary School ([EDU0016](#)); St Anne’s Primary School ([EDU0008](#)); Strategic Primary Principals Forum ([EDU0026](#)) Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2019, p 36

169 [Q92](#); [Q124](#)

170 Strategic Primary Principals Forum ([EDU0026](#)); St Anne’s Primary School ([EDU0008](#))

171 Department of Education, [An Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme](#), January 2013, p xii

172 Mr Chris Currie ([EDU0001](#)); Mr Ray Cromie ([EDU0006](#)); Controlled Schools Support Council ([EDU0037](#))

173 [Q123](#)

(SEND) services. This balance of delegated and centrally held spending is very different to other parts of the UK, where over 90 per cent of the education budget is delegated to schools.¹⁷⁴ The INTO, NEU and UTU unions suggested that the proportion of the budget dedicated to schools in Northern Ireland could be increased to 70 per cent “within a relatively short timescale.”¹⁷⁵

85. A number of Controlled and Maintained schools argued that principals were best placed to understand the needs of their school and so could spend money more appropriately and efficiently than central agencies. One area where schools commonly favoured more autonomy was procurement (see paragraphs 32 to 39).¹⁷⁶ Jo McColgan told us:

I know what my school needs. I know where those resources need to go, yes, with all levels of accountability, but give us the autonomy to be able to do that and we will make real savings.¹⁷⁷

86. Principals from Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated schools stated that their schools were not subject to the same restrictions as Controlled or Maintained institutions, and that this autonomy enabled them to spend money on their schools’ priorities while also giving them greater control over procurement. Deirdre Gillespie said:

I have certainly found having the autonomy to procure our own services and goods to be a much more flexible system, which allows savings to be incurred. I very much support the view that more money should be going centrally into schools, but schools should have the autonomy to procure their own services and goods.¹⁷⁸

Principals also pointed out that alongside their relative autonomy there came a stricter requirement for financial discipline. Nigel Frith explained:

Yes, we have the freedom to go and find the best deals for ourselves, and we do that routinely. However, in terms of the ability to carry a deficit, under the Education Authority umbrella we would be permitted to carry a deficit of up to 5% or £75,000. [...] A Grant-Maintained Integrated school is managed directly by a bank manager, who is not tolerant of any kind of deficit and we do not have the facility to run 5%, £75,000 or anything else. We have bank managers saying to us, “Are you balancing your books or not?”¹⁷⁹

87. Several witnesses from the Controlled and Maintained sectors were cautious about the prospect of increasing schools’ delegated budgets. We heard that some areas of central spending, such as school transport, would be difficult for schools to manage, and that smaller schools in particular would not necessarily have the staffing capacity or the

174 National Association of Head Teachers ([EDU0059](#)) p 2

175 Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, National Education Union and the Ulster Teachers Union ([EDU0053](#)), p 7

176 APTIS: the Association of Principals in Integrated Schools ([EDU0032](#)); Holy Family Primary and Nursery School ([EDU0018](#)); National Association of Head Teachers ([EDU0038](#)), p 8; Principal Marie Lindsay ([EDU0048](#)); St Patrick’s Primary School ([EDU0019](#)), p 1; St Patrick’s College ([EDU0049](#)), p 1; Transferors Representatives Council ([EDU0039](#)); [Qq120](#), [123](#)

177 [Q99](#)

178 [Q96](#)

179 [Q97](#)

specialist skills to take on additional financial responsibilities.¹⁸⁰ The NASUWT union noted that a large proportion of the centrally held budget was spent on areas like transport, free school meals and special school budgets, where schools had shown little appetite to manage their own spending. Once these were removed, they said, “there is actually not that much money left that is being spent at EA level.”¹⁸¹ They suggested that realistically only around 5 per cent of the money currently spent centrally could be delegated to schools.¹⁸²

88. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) also stressed the importance of funding for the administration of education, which it said was “a necessary expense that should be recognised as adding value to the delivery of education in its fullest sense.”¹⁸³ The CCMS warned against delegating additional resources if this came at the expense of essential administrative services.¹⁸⁴ The EA reports that only 1 per cent of its budget is spent on central administration, and that it has already made staff reductions in order to try to cope with budget pressures.¹⁸⁵

89. A further concern about central spending was the number of central initiatives, many of which were seen as poor value for money.¹⁸⁶ A principal who attended our engagement event in Strabane told us that “some of the things that 40 per cent is being spent on shouldn’t exist.”¹⁸⁷ Geri Cameron, President of the National Association of Head Teachers Northern Ireland, said that there was a lack of information available to demonstrate whether central spending provided value for money, and that greater transparency was needed regarding DE and EA spending.¹⁸⁸ In 2013 the Salisbury Review recommended that DE review all earmarked funding initiatives.¹⁸⁹ The Department reported that between 2015–16 and 2017–18 the number of earmarked funding budget lines fell from more than 90 to 30; altogether the amount of earmarked funding fell from £170 million to £70 million.¹⁹⁰

90. We heard a number of concerns about the way school budgets are allocated through the Common Funding Formula. In current circumstances it is more important than ever to ensure that funding is being directed where it can do the most good. The Department of Education should carry out a review of the Common Funding Formula to identify whether a fairer and more efficient balance of funding can be achieved. The review should examine the balance of funding across key stages, funding that targets social deprivation and funding for smaller schools, and whether the current balance between money held centrally and money delegated directly to schools achieves the best possible value for money. The Department should complete this review by the end of the financial year.

91. Many schools told us that too great a proportion of funding was held centrally, and they wanted to see an increase in their delegated budgets. Not all schools shared this

180 [Q212](#)

181 [Q212](#)

182 [Q247](#)

183 Council for Catholic Maintained Schools ([EDU0056](#)), p 15

184 Council for Catholic Maintained Schools ([EDU0056](#)), p 15

185 Education Authority ([EDU0044](#)), p6–7

186 Grosvenor Grammar School ([EDU0030](#))

187 [Q123](#); Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 2

188 [Q223](#)

189 Department of Education, [An Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme](#), January 2013, p vii

190 Department of Education, [Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme: Update on recommendations at 30 September 2018](#), 19 March 2019, p 17

view however, and it was acknowledged that any delegation of functions would bring additional responsibilities that some schools would neither want nor have capacity to manage. Nevertheless, we heard that the proportion of the budget held centrally could be reduced by around 5 per cent. *We recommend that there is merit in revisiting proposals to give Controlled and Maintained schools greater financial flexibility where they desire to do so. We recommend that, starting with the next annual budget cycle, the Department pilot arrangements through which Controlled and Maintained schools can gain greater financial freedoms in the same vein as Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated schools.*

4 Area Planning and the school estate

92. In this chapter we consider:

- the school estate in Northern Ireland, including the number and type of schools and the quality of buildings;
- current policy for transforming the school estate, including the Sustainable Schools Policy and Area Planning;
- progress on school transformation and capital projects in the absence of an Executive.

The Northern Ireland School Estate

93. As we noted in Chapter 2, the Northern Ireland school system is complex and comprises many different types of school. Several witnesses told us that this led to unnecessary duplication of provision, and that there were too many schools in Northern Ireland. Deirdre Gillespie explained:

We have a fragmented system of education in Northern Ireland, which is far too costly. We have five competing sectors, duplication across the sectors, lack of co-operation and lack of co-ordination, and it is leading to the pressure pot of an unsustainable system. We have financially and educationally unviable schools in Northern Ireland. We have far too many schools in Northern Ireland, and we are not able to release the money that we need for viable schools, because we have not tackled the elephant in the room, which is about area-based planning.¹⁹¹

Sir Robert Salisbury gave us a typical example of duplication:

Omagh, where I live, has six post-primary schools with six principals, six building costs and six staffing costs. Retford in Nottinghamshire, with a similar population, has two. If you replicate that across the whole of Northern Ireland, you have your funding crisis in one view.¹⁹²

94. A particular concern we heard was that there were a large number of small schools and schools which did not have sustainable enrolments.¹⁹³ Witnesses pointed out that some of these schools had an important role in serving rural communities, but there was nevertheless an acknowledgement that there was a large amount of wasted capacity in the system.¹⁹⁴ Several witnesses took the view that there were a significant number of schools that were not viable without direct support, either because they were not financially sustainable or because they were unable to offer the expected curriculum.¹⁹⁵ The most commonly given examples of unviable schools were small primary schools and small sixth forms.¹⁹⁶

191 [Q109](#)

192 [Q256](#)

193 [Q256](#); Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ([EDU0057](#)), p 3

194 [Q261](#)

195 [Q109](#)

196 Association of School and College Leaders ([EDU0009](#))

95. The quality of the school estate was another key concern for several witnesses. Witnesses described classrooms which were too small or outdated.¹⁹⁷ Some schools gave evidence that they had been using temporary mobile classrooms on a permanent basis, in one case for 30 years.¹⁹⁸ We also heard that facilities for certain subjects, like music and physical education, were often inadequate.¹⁹⁹ Witnesses told us that the school maintenance budget had come under pressure, and that the condition of some schools had deteriorated as a result. One principal wrote that she had needed to close three classrooms due to health and safety concerns, as it had not been possible to secure funding for repairs through the Minor Works Programme. She argued that it was a “false economy” to defer maintenance spending as the deterioration of buildings would increase costs in the long run.²⁰⁰

96. The Department and the Education Authority shared these concerns about the structure of the school system. The Permanent Secretary of the Department, Derek Baker, said:

Were we starting afresh with a blank page, we would not have the estate that we currently have for schools. We have too many small schools—we probably have too many small primary schools, and probably too many small sixth forms.²⁰¹

97. The existence of so many types of school partly stems from Northern Ireland’s divided past, but also reflects the demand that exists for different models of education. Many parents make a choice to send their child to a school with a particular ethos, be that an Integrated school or an Irish medium one. Selective education, meanwhile, remains a mainstay of the Northern Ireland system, whereas it is rare in England and non-existent in Scotland and Wales. Deirdre Gillespie stated that, “while there is an appetite for integrated education, there is likewise an appetite for non-integrated education in Northern Ireland.” She added that many parents and children preferred a Grammar school education, regardless of background.²⁰²

98. We heard examples of excellent education being delivered in all sectors, and witnesses—while acknowledging the structural difficulties in the school system—generally did not express a preference for a particular model of provision. The Integrated Education Fund argued strongly for developing integrated education, for both economic and social reasons.²⁰³ However, others believed that both integrated education and shared education—in which schools from different sectors share resources and collaborate to deliver the curriculum—was a valuable approach.²⁰⁴ Koulla Yiasouma shared her concerns about the attainment gap between selective schools in the Grammar sector and non-selective schools.²⁰⁵

99. Many witnesses concluded that there was a need for fundamental transformation of the way education in Northern Ireland is organised, and reorganisation of the school

197 APTIS: the Association of Principals in Integrated Schools ([EDU0032](#))

198 St Kieran’s PS ([EDU0002](#))

199 Council for Catholic Maintained Schools ([EDU0056](#))

200 St Patrick’s College ([EDU0049](#)), p 1

201 [Q337](#)

202 [Q114](#)

203 Integrated Education Fund ([EDU0021](#))

204 [Qq114–116](#)

205 [Qq252–254](#)

estate.²⁰⁶ However, it was acknowledged that this would involve difficult conversations with parents, schools and communities. Koulla Yiasouma, said a long-term conversation was needed about reform:

The nearest school should be the very best school and it should provide the same quality of education as any other school. That will require a conversation in Northern Ireland, inclusive of all the people in Northern Ireland, including the children and young people.

If you look at what has happened with healthcare in Northern Ireland [...] 10 years ago it would have been unconscionable to close the local hospital. All these reform processes—Transforming Your Care, Bengoa and Donaldson—have got people to the place, “If I have to go a little bit further to get a better level of healthcare, then maybe my local hospital should provide different sorts of services”. We are getting there. That is part of a conversation we need to have.²⁰⁷

Nigel Frith, Principal of Drumragh Integrated College, suggested that this change did not necessarily have to come at the expense of community choice, acknowledging that “some communities may be ready for integrated education; some may not.”²⁰⁸ He said:

The Department should say to every community, ‘Would you like integrated education or quality shared education? It is an either/or. Let’s go down one of these pathways, begin somewhere and begin the journey towards reconciliation.’ [...] What is unacceptable is the lack of vision to say it is an either/or, and we will resource either, whatever the community believes is right for them.²⁰⁹

100. A number of witnesses stressed the importance of constructive engagement with schools and communities when taking decisions on how education is delivered. The CCMS said it was important to “win the hearts and minds of the communities, the parents, political partners and everybody who would have a vested interest in a particular school.”²¹⁰ The Northern Ireland Community Relations Council gave evidence that:

Where schools are at risk of being closed or new schools are planned, local communities should be kept fully informed of the opportunity for possible collaborations. Wide scale direct debate with parents and children should be encouraged and facilitated at area-based planning level.²¹¹

Previous research carried out by Professor Tony Gallagher for the Northern Ireland Assembly’s Education Committee found that DE was fulfilling its duty to consult with relevant stakeholders, but expressed concern that “The consultation process appears to have had limited impact on official recommendations or final decisions.”²¹²

206 Association of School and College Leaders ([EDU0009](#)); Council for Catholic Maintained Schools ([EDU0056](#)); Education Authority ([EDU0044](#)); Integrated Education Fund ([EDU0021](#))

207 [Qq252–253](#)

208 [Q114](#)

209 [Q114](#)

210 [Q127](#)

211 Northern Ireland Community Relations Council ([EDU0051](#)), p 2

212 Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education, [Position Paper: Area Planning](#), Annex 1

101. The EA noted that it was easier to win support for proposals when they could clearly demonstrate new investment and a clear timetable. John Collings, the then Director of Education, said:

I can have a very different kind of conversation with governors, local community leaders, local politicians and school leaders if we are talking about change that is accompanied by a significant amount of capital investment in a new school in a new area, which sustains the local community engagement, rather than a school potentially going on a waiting list, which is going to be five to 10 years.²¹³

102. The NIAO has also argued for the importance of sectoral engagement, reporting that “Without full participation of all major education sectors, Area Planning will not produce solutions which are complete and appropriate to all localities.” Its Sustainability of Schools report found that the Irish-medium and Voluntary Sectors were not as closely involved in planning decisions as other sectors.²¹⁴

103. There is widespread agreement that the way education in Northern Ireland is organised does not make the best use of resources. We heard that better allocation of resources could improve the quality of education for all children, and there remains scope for change while continuing to meet the demand for different models of education that exists in the province. *Based on the evidence we received, we believe that a broad ambition for the education sector should be to consolidate the school estate so that resources can be concentrated in fewer schools, giving greater scope for an enriched, broadened school experience. The Department and the Education Authority should use this as its guiding principle when taking decisions about school provision.*

104. Ultimately these decisions are for the people of Northern Ireland to take, and no single approach will be right for every community. Consultation is therefore an essential part of this process, so that parents and communities are truly included in these decisions and their concerns respected. *The Department of Education should use part of the public sector transformation fund allocated in the 2019–20 draft budget to run community consultations on school provision, so that communities have a real stake in decision-making rooted in their desired outcomes.*

Area Planning policy

105. Area Planning is the strategic process used to manage the Northern Ireland school estate. It is part of the Department of Education’s Sustainable Schools Policy, published in 2009.²¹⁵ The Sustainable Schools Policy lists six criteria for a sustainable school, one of which is “Stable Enrolment Trends.” The policy sets minimum enrolment requirements for new schools: 140 for a primary in an urban area (referring to schools in the Belfast and Derry City Council Areas); 105 for a primary in a rural area; 500 for years 8–12 in a post-primary; and 100 for a new sixth form.²¹⁶ The policy says that primary schools should be reviewed when their enrolment falls below 60, and post-primaries when enrolment falls below 300, although it does not require that action be taken in either case.²¹⁷ EA figures

213 Q8

214 Northern Ireland Audit Office, *Sustainability of Schools*, 30 June 2015 p 36

215 Department of Education, *Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools*, 14 January 2009

216 Department of Education, *Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools*, 14 January 2009, p 34–35

217 Department of Education, *Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools*, 14 January 2009, p 22, 25

show that 36 per cent of rural primaries have fewer than 105 pupils, 21 per cent of urban primary schools have fewer than 140 pupils, and 47 per cent of post-primaries have fewer than 500 pupils.²¹⁸

106. We also heard examples of schools which were oversubscribed. Geri Cameron of the NAHT explained that:

The geographical distribution is very uneven. There are parts of Northern Ireland where it is impossible to get a child into a parent's first or second-choice school."²¹⁹

In some cases schools' lack of capacity was linked to staffing or demographic pressures: Comber Primary explained that although their school had surplus places overall, budget pressures had reduced their staff numbers, and this meant they were not able to accept new students into P2 or P3 classes. They pointed out that this deprived the school of a potential source of income.²²⁰

107. The Department measures the number of surplus places in the Northern Ireland school system. In 2014–15 it estimated that there were 71,540 surplus places in the system, of which 49 per cent were in Catholic Maintained schools and 45 per cent in Controlled Schools.²²¹ However, the accuracy of DE's calculations was questioned by the Northern Ireland Public Accounts Committee, and some witnesses believed the official figure was too high.²²² Geri Cameron told us that "There may well be some empty school desks, but there are not as many as there were in the past."²²³ The Northern Ireland Audit Office's own estimate is that there were 35,910 available places in primary schools and 13,718 in post-primary schools in 2017–18.²²⁴ DE has begun work to review the way it measures capacity in the school system, with a view to resetting schools' approved admission numbers.²²⁵

108. As noted above, witnesses broadly acknowledged the need for changes to the organisation of Northern Ireland's school estate. The EA stated that this was a key challenge for the sector, explaining:

In many areas there are too many school places for the size of the population, and in others there are not enough, or they are not of the right type. Investment in Area Planning will be needed to address this.²²⁶

However, some witnesses felt that Area Planning could not make progress because there was insufficient capital budget to support it. Gerry Campbell of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools told us that without capital funding to support transformation, it could be difficult to win support for change from schools and local communities and that, at the moment, "capital investment is not running concurrently alongside and parallel

218 Education Authority, [Providing Pathways: Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017–2020](#), April 2017, p 40–41

219 [Q235](#)

220 Strategic Primary Principals Forum ([EDU0026](#))

221 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Department of Education: Sustainability of Schools](#), 30 June 2015, p 25

222 Northern Ireland Public Accounts Committee, [Report on Department of Education: Sustainability of Schools](#), 2 March 2016, p 6; [Q131](#)

223 [Q235](#)

224 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2019, p 38

225 [Letter from the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education to the Chair](#), 29 April 2019

226 Education Authority ([EDU0044](#)), p 8

with the reorganisation of schools.”²²⁷ We also heard that there was a perception that integrated education had received more capital investment than other sectors, and some witnesses stressed that investment should be based on objective need.²²⁸

109. Other witnesses had more fundamental concerns about the rationale behind the current Area Planning approach and the way change had been managed. Geri Cameron questioned the evidence base behind some decisions:

We would contend that the Department is not looking at whether or not it is viable to close small rural schools, for example. Is that a cost-saving exercise? Has amalgamating two schools that fall below the sustainability level in terms of the set criteria been costed? Is it viable? Is it something that is going to do what it sets out to do? We are not aware that the Department is doing that.²²⁹

110. Some of our witnesses cautioned against what they saw as an assumption within the Area Planning process that larger schools delivered the best and most cost-effective education. Sir Gerry Loughran of the Governing Bodies Association²³⁰ made the point that Northern Ireland is a largely rural community, and that the definition of sustainability should therefore be different from other parts of the UK.²³¹ Koulla Yiasouma expressed concern that under the Sustainable Schools Policy there was a risk that only very large schools would qualify as sustainable, and that this “may have a detrimental impact on education in rural areas.”²³² A previous review of the Area Planning process carried out for the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Committee by Professor Tony Gallagher argued “there is little or no correlation between school size and performance levels.”²³³

111. The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 requires that a Development Proposal (DP) must be approved before significant changes can be made to education provision in an area, including opening or closing schools or making significant changes to a school’s enrolment.²³⁴ DPs are usually brought forward by the relevant planning authority, although in some sectors parent groups or boards of governors may bring forward proposals.²³⁵ Following a statutory consultation process and objection period, the Department decides whether to approve the proposal. In the past decisions on DPs were made by Ministers; however, in the absence of an Executive the Permanent Secretary has taken decisions on proposals, based on analysis by departmental officials.²³⁶ DE confirmed that the Permanent Secretary had taken 33 decisions on DPs in 2017–18 and 19 decisions in 2018–19.²³⁷

227 [Q127](#)

228 [Qq130–131](#)

229 [Q235](#)

230 Sir Gerry was also a member of the EA Board, but appeared in his role as Vice Chairman of the Governing Bodies Association

231 [Q182](#)

232 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ([EDU0057](#))

233 Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education, [Position Paper: Area Planning](#), Annex 1

234 [Education and Libraries \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1986](#), Article 14

235 Department of Education, [Guidance on the Publication of a Development Proposal \(Replacement for Circular DE 2014/21\)](#), 14 September 2018, p 17

236 Department of Education, [Publication of a Development Proposal](#), 26 September 2014, p 28; Department of Education, [Guidance on the Publication of a Development Proposal \(Replacement for Circular DE 2014/21\)](#), 14 September 2018, p 28

237 Department of Education, [Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2018](#), 3 July 2018, p 26; [Letter from the Permanent Secretary to the Chair](#), 29 April 2019

112. We heard that progress on Development Proposals could be slow. The Department previously had a target for progressing DPs of six weeks from the end of the statutory consultation period. It has stated in its annual reports that a large number of proposals have been initiated in recent years (for example, 55 in 2015–16) and that consequently this target had often been missed.²³⁸ Koulla Yiasouma said that “we have a process in place that is far too slow.” We heard that delays can lead to schools operating on split sites for a prolonged period, a situation which we heard can create significant costs.²³⁹ The Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee previously identified schools where a closure had been proposed but where no final decision had been taken, leading those schools to “wither on the vine” as they struggled to retain or attract pupils.²⁴⁰ The Permanent Secretary acknowledged that there were delays in the Area Planning process and decision-making, and told us “we are not moving ahead fast enough and we need to accelerate the pace and tempo.”²⁴¹

113. The Permanent Secretary raised a related problem concerning Major Capital Works funding. This is one of three main strands through which capital works in schools are funded (together with the Schools Enhancement Programme and the Minor Works Programme). Major Works refer to new builds, extensions or refurbishments costing more than £500,000. The Department normally announces a new tranche of capital projects each year (except for Controlled Schools, where the EA is responsible for capital works). The Permanent Secretary stated that as existing projects near completion he might need to consider whether to issue a call for new projects, but that the criteria for these would normally be set by a Minister. He explained:

It is the criteria bit that gets a bit tricky for me, because it could take me into the territory of policy decisions and ministerial decisions, and I do not want to go there. On the other hand, it is a good thing to have a pipeline of major capital projects, because there is such a long lead time for these and we need to get those going. My disposition would be towards issuing a new call for capital projects sometime this calendar year, but I will have to give careful thought to the criteria.

114. Departments in Northern Ireland have been without ministerial direction for more than two and a half years. The Department of Education has judged—in our view correctly—that it should still take decisions on school Development Proposals. Throughout our inquiry we heard consistent evidence on the urgent need for improvements to Northern Ireland’s school estate. This is clearly an immediate strategic priority for the sector. *We recommend that, if no Executive is formed by October, the Department of Education should issue a call for new capital projects, consulting with key stakeholders and the political parties to ensure widespread confidence in its approach.*

238 Department of Education, [Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016](#), 1 July 2016, p 44

239 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 3–4

240 Northern Ireland Public Accounts Committee, [Report on Department of Education: Sustainability of Schools](#), 2 March 2016, p 11

241 [Q337](#)

5 Special Educational Needs and Disability

115. In this chapter we consider:

- the increasing demand for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) support, and the pressure this is placing on the education budget and on schools;
- the process by which children with SEND are identified, assessed and given SEND statements so that they can receive support;
- proposed changes to SEND education; and
- funding arrangements for special schools.

SEND in Northern Ireland

116. One of the greatest pressures on the education budget in recent years has been the rising level of spending on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision. In its 2017 report on *Special Educational Needs* the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) reported that spending by the Education Authority on SEND had grown by 30 per cent between 2011–12 and 2015–16.²⁴² The Department of Finance has estimated that demand for support creates £10 million of additional demand on the education budget each year.²⁴³ In its most recent annual report the EA reported a 4 per cent increase in SEND related budget pressures between 2016–17 and 2017–18. It said that it had overspent its SEND budget by £12.7 million, making this by far the largest part of the Authority's £17.6 million overspend.²⁴⁴

117. The rising cost of SEND provision reflects the increasing prevalence of children presenting with SEND in the school system. The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People told us that there were 2,800 additional pupils with special needs—of whom 800 had special needs statements—in 2017–18 compared with the previous year.²⁴⁵ The Commissioner reported that altogether there are 79,000 pupils in Northern Ireland with some form of special needs, 23 per cent of the school population.²⁴⁶ The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) told us that the number of children with SEND was rising more quickly in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK.²⁴⁷

118. Pupils with SEND can be educated either in mainstream schools or in one of Northern Ireland's 39 special schools. Mainstream schools often have special units attached to them, where pupils with SEND are given specific support. Mainstream schools receive funding for their special units as part of the Common Funding Scheme, and also receive funding for costs associated with meeting the stated needs of individual children.²⁴⁸ Special

242 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Special Educational Needs](#), 27 June 2017, p 24

243 Department of Finance, [Briefing on Northern Ireland Budgetary Outlook 2018–20](#), December 2017, p 65

244 Education Authority, [Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2018](#), 8 April 2019, p 16

245 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ([EDU0057](#)), p 41

246 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ([EDU0057](#)), p 33

247 National Association of Head Teachers NI ([EDU0038](#)), p 10

248 Department of Education, [Common Funding Scheme 2018–19](#), 14 November 2018, p 44

schools' budgets are not calculated using the Common Funding Formula, but are paid by DE from the General Schools Budget and based on historical funding patterns.²⁴⁹ We examine special school funding later in this chapter.

119. In 2017–18, 30.5 per cent of statemented pupils and 7.5 per cent of all SEND pupils were enrolled in special schools—approximately 5,400 pupils in total. There has been a gradual but noticeable shift towards educating pupils with special needs in mainstream schools in recent years. In 2003–04, 39.6 per cent of SEND pupils were taught in special schools.²⁵⁰ The NASUWT expressed their concern that this trend could be a result of budget pressures:

Pupils may be inappropriately placed in mainstream, not because it is necessarily the best place but because the employing authorities, due to financial considerations, are having to put the responsibility for that provision on schools. Our concern is that when that provision is put in schools—and in most cases it can be delivered in schools—the support is not put there.²⁵¹

120. DE's current Code of Practice sets out a five stage approach for identifying children with SEND, assessing their needs and providing support to meet them. The first three stages happen within schools, while at stages 4 and 5 the Education Authority assesses the child's needs and considers whether to issue a Statement of Special Educational Needs.²⁵² A "statemented" child is entitled to additional resources to support their particular needs, beyond those that would normally be available in mainstream schools. These additional resources are provided by the EA. Up until that point, schools have to make use of their existing budgets to provide any additional support deemed necessary for a pupil.²⁵³

121. Although the overall level of spending on SEND has increased, we heard examples where support for children had been scaled back due to budget pressures within individual schools. Witnesses told us that when schools had to reduce their spend on staffing, classroom assistants were often the first roles to be made redundant, and there was a perception that SEND was a "soft target" for cutbacks.²⁵⁴ Gerry Murphy, Northern Secretary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), gave evidence that statemented children who previously received 25 hours of support from a classroom assistant were now receiving between 10 and 15 hours.²⁵⁵ The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools said that some schools no longer had the budget to appoint a Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO) from within their staffing complement, and that instead principals were carrying out these functions at the expense of other aspects of their work.²⁵⁶ We also heard widespread concern that large numbers of children were not receiving appropriate support. Participants at our engagement event told us there were restrictions in the number of children in a school who could access educational resource centres or referral

249 Department of Education, [Common Funding Scheme 2018–19](#), 14 November 2018, p 6

250 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ([EDU0057](#)), p 40

251 [Q211](#)

252 Department of Education, [Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs](#), September 1998

253 [Q237](#)

254 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 7; [Q211](#)

255 [Q212](#)

256 Council for Catholic Maintained Schools ([EDU0056](#)), p 5

units. One individual said that their school of 1,500 pupils was allowed only one place per year group.²⁵⁷ Another explained, “You could have seven in a class who all need support, but you’re told you can only refer the worst two, so children are left behind.”²⁵⁸

122. Witnesses also raised concerns that the Department and the Education Authority could not demonstrate that their spending on SEND offered value for money. The NIAO found in its report on SEND that neither DE nor the EA had a formal process for monitoring or evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. For example, the report noted that:

The provision of a classroom assistant (at an annual cost of £55 million) is often considered as a key form of support given to children with a statement of SEN yet their impact, or that of any other support provided, has not been evaluated at a strategic level.²⁵⁹

Evidence from the Division of Education & Child Psychology NI (DECP NI) noted that decisions about what kind of support a child should receive were not always evidence-based:

One of my schools spoke to me about a project whereby it ran over 3 years. The school reported that they were bought iPads, inflatables and other items from this project without a rationale as to why or consultation with the school for what they needed to meet pupil need. The school felt the focus of the project was to ‘spend the money’ rather than to help meet the need of the children.²⁶⁰

DECP NI warned that in some cases this lack of an evidence base could lead to children being allocated support that was ineffective or even counterproductive in meeting their needs.²⁶¹ The NIAO also cited research from England which argues that one to one support from a classroom assistant may have a negative impact on SEND pupils’ progress.²⁶²

123. One of the most common issues raised around SEND was the difficulty teachers and parents experience in obtaining statements for children. We heard that the statementing process was lengthy, and that fewer statements were being issued. The statutory time limit for processing a request for a statement is 26 weeks from the date of receiving the request. However, the NIAO’s review of Special Educational Needs found that in 2015–16 only 21 per cent of statements issued met this target.²⁶³ The EA claimed that many delays were due to valid exceptions recognised under the code of practice—for example, delays in receiving relevant advice from a health trust—but did not hold detailed data on the reasons for delays.²⁶⁴ Geri Cameron from the NAHT stated:

257 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 6

258 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 6

259 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Special Educational Needs](#), 27 June 2017, p 24

260 Division of Educational & Child Psychology NI Branch ([EDU0063](#))

261 Division of Educational & Child Psychology NI Branch ([EDU0063](#))

262 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Special Educational Needs](#), 27 June 2017, p 32

263 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Special Educational Needs](#), 27 June 2017, p 2

264 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Special Educational Needs](#), 27 June 2017, p 2

There are a range of professionals who have to submit evidence and advice for that child, and the audit report suggested that there were significant delays in providing that advice so that the statement could be completed. In many cases, it is well beyond the statutory 26 weeks, which is unsatisfactory.²⁶⁵

The Department told us that the new regulations 2016 SEND Act would reduce the time limit within which statements had to be processed.²⁶⁶

124. We heard evidence that, because the statementing process is only the last of several steps towards obtaining SEND support, it could take more than a year to go from a child's needs being identified to support being delivered. One participant in our engagement event explained that:

Referrals are taking much longer. In primaries you have children moving from P1 to P3 without any support, and it's up to classroom teachers to pick things up.²⁶⁷

Geri Cameron told us this created challenges for schools, because until a statement is obtained the needs of children have to be met from within a school's existing resources.²⁶⁸ This could mean that schools are asked to meet the needs of a child whose SEND should entitle them to support—but for whom a statement has not yet been obtained—without having the additional resources required to do so. We heard that this prevented the benefits of identifying a child's needs early from being realised.²⁶⁹

125. The EA said it was trying to “build the capacity of the system to carry out assessments more quickly” but that as part of its reorganisation it had made staff reductions through its Voluntary Exit Scheme.²⁷⁰ They told us that essential staff such as educational psychologists had been retained, but acknowledged that “if you have reductions in your admin support, if you have managers go, there is bound to be a consequence”.²⁷¹ The EA explained that one way they hoped to build capacity was by training staff in schools to carry out part or all of the assessment process.²⁷²

126. Witnesses felt that excessive bureaucracy and high qualifying thresholds for support were other obstacles to obtaining support for children. Trade unions wrote that:

An inordinate amount of principal and Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator [SENCO] time is spent fighting to obtain any kind of support for children with additional educational needs. We are seeing fewer statements of Special Educational Needs in cases where schools and parents see a clear requirement for them, and we are seeing such statements committing less support than is necessary for the child.²⁷³

265 [Q237](#)

266 [Q345](#)

267 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 8

268 [Q237](#)

269 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 8

270 [Qq76–84](#)

271 [Q81](#)

272 [Q79](#)

273 INTO/NEU/UTU ([EDU0053](#)) p 4

An attendee at our engagement event described “a large layer of bureaucracy when you try to access funding for children with long term issues,”²⁷⁴ while a school principal wrote “it does appear to schools that there is a trend to put as many hurdles in front of schools in order to delay the support needed for pupils.”²⁷⁵

127. Witnesses told us that the number of children requiring support with Special Educational Needs and Disability was increasing rapidly, and that this was one of the most significant pressures on the Education Authority’s budget and on individual schools. It is clear that the system does not currently have the resources it needs to meet demand for SEND support. We recommend that future budget allocations to the Department of Education reflect the increasing number of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability in the Northern Ireland school system, so that these children can be identified and assessed at the earliest age possible and appropriate support can be put in place.

Changes to SEND legislation

128. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 was passed by the Assembly in March 2016. This Act brings substantial changes to previous legislation governing SEND. The Act: requires every child with special needs to have a personal learning plan; gives parents and children new rights to appeal EA decisions where the Authority does not change a statement to reflect a change in circumstances; and places a new duty on the EA and health and social services to co-operate when identifying, assessing and providing support to children with SEND.²⁷⁶ However, the Department explained that the more detailed regulations and Code of Practice that would be needed to implement this change could not be taken forward because there was no Assembly in place to approve them.²⁷⁷ The Department has consulted on the draft regulations in the interim, and the Permanent Secretary, Derek Baker, told us that DE would be “ready to go with a code of practice” this calendar year.²⁷⁸ The Children’s Services Co-operation Act 2015 also aims to improve young people’s well-being by improving collaboration between different departments and agencies and through the development of a Children and Young People’s Strategy.²⁷⁹ The Department consulted on a draft Strategy and is currently preparing the final Strategy.²⁸⁰ However, the Strategy cannot be given effect until it is laid before the Assembly.²⁸¹

129. The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, Koulla Yiasouma stated that the new SEND legislation was a way forward, and that “we absolutely need to accelerate the implementation of the SEND Act.” However, she said that lack of funding would continue to be an issue.²⁸² Participants in our engagement event expressed concern that the new legislation was likely to increase schools’ responsibilities but without

274 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 8

275 Mr Ray Cromie ([EDU0006](#)), p 4

276 [Special Educational Needs and Disability Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#)

277 [Q345](#)

278 Department of Education, [New SEN Framework](#), Accessed 14 May 2019; [Q346](#)

279 [Children’s Services Co-operation Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#); Department of Education, [Children and Young People](#), Accessed 24 May 2019

280 Department of Education, [Children and Young People](#), Accessed 24 May 2019

281 [Children’s Services Co-operation Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#); Section 3

282 [Q251](#)

allocating additional resources or training to help them meet those duties.²⁸³ As noted in Chapter 6, however, the Permanent Secretary told us that the Department would fund the cost of teaching cover to enable staff to attend training on the new arrangements.²⁸⁴ The NASUWT confirmed that this training was already being rolled out to SENCOs.²⁸⁵

130. An important feature of the 2016 Act is the duty it places on health and social services to co-operate with education in identifying, assessing and meeting children's needs.²⁸⁶ The Northern Ireland Audit Office noted that some special needs statements are delayed because input from the health service was delayed.²⁸⁷ Principals emphasised the importance of early identification of and support for children's special needs, and that health visitors were in a position to identify SEND before children reached school age.²⁸⁸ Graham Gault, the Principal of Maghaberry Primary School, explained that "right across the Province, schools are finding that children are presenting on their first day with very complex needs that have not been diagnosed or even identified."²⁸⁹

131. Witnesses identified shortcomings in the way children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are supported. Action was being taken to remedy this before the collapse of the Stormont institutions, and the Assembly passed legislation establishing a clear agenda for change. The Department has progressed this work as far as it can, but in the absence of an Assembly work has stalled. *The Secretary of State should lay before Parliament consequential regulations and documents arising from the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and the Children's and Young People's Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 in order to give full effect to those Acts and so improve the support offered to children with SEND.*

Special Schools

132. Special schools are funded differently to other schools in Northern Ireland. Their budgets are not determined by the Common Funding Formula; instead, the EA allocates funding to each school based on historic funding patterns, adjusting for changes in the school's enrolment. Each pupil also receives resources to meet their particular needs, as set out in their individual statements. The Permanent Secretary explained this was because "the needs in those schools are very particular and very varied, and we do not think the common funding formula mechanism would take account of the bespoke needs of all the pupils in those schools."²⁹⁰ He told us that the total amount of money provided to the 39 special schools in 2018–19 was around £110 million.²⁹¹

133. The Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC) wrote that the current arrangements for funding and management of special schools caused some difficulties. For example, they noted that staffing costs are not delegated to special schools, and that Boards of Governors in special schools had no decision making powers over staffing levels. The

283 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 7

284 [Q352](#)

285 [Q239](#)

286 [Special Educational Needs and Disability Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2016](#), Section 4

287 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Special Educational Needs](#), 27 June 2017, p 2

288 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 5

289 [Q119](#)

290 [Q347](#)

291 [Q347](#)

CSSC said it could be difficult to get the EA to agreement to increasing a school's staffing complement.²⁹² Geri Cameron, a principal in a special school, said that as with other centrally held elements of the education budget the budget for special schools was not transparent, and it was difficult to tell whether it provided good value for money.²⁹³

134. The Department told us that work was ongoing to develop a formula for consistent budgeting across special schools, and that consultations had taken place with special schools in November 2018.²⁹⁴

135. The funding arrangements for special schools are not transparent, and it is not possible to tell whether this money is being well spent. While we accept that these schools cannot be funded according to a simple formula, the more transparency the Department is able to provide the better. *In responding to this report, the Department should set out which key factors it considers when determining special school budgets.*

292 Controlled Schools Support Council ([EDU0061](#)), p 4

293 [Q247](#)

294 Department of Education, [Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme - Update on recommendations](#), 14 March 2019, p 17

6 Teachers and pay

136. In this chapter we consider:

- the characteristics of the teaching workforce in Northern Ireland;
- negotiations over teachers' pay and conditions, and industrial action associated with these;
- changes to staff workloads, and consequential effects on health and wellbeing; and
- opportunities for training and Continuing Professional Development.

The teaching workforce in Northern Ireland

137. The teaching workforce in Northern Ireland differs from that of other parts of the UK in some key respects. Teachers in Northern Ireland drop out of the profession at a lower rate, and it is more common for teachers to remain in a single school for a long period. The effect of this trend is that teachers in Northern Ireland are generally older and more experienced than their equivalents in the UK: the median age for a teacher in Northern Ireland is around 4 years higher than in England, and just 11 per cent of the teaching workforce in Northern Ireland is aged under 30 compared with 24 per cent in England.²⁹⁵ Witnesses noted that this meant a greater proportion of teachers in Northern Ireland are at the upper end of the teachers' pay scale, and this means the average teacher in Northern Ireland is relatively expensive to employ.²⁹⁶

138. Northern Ireland has an oversupply of teaching graduates. The Department of Finance has said that the annual intake of new students into teacher training is considerably higher than the number of new teachers required.²⁹⁷ As a result, schools have not found it difficult to recruit, and one participant in our engagement event suggested that the competition for roles meant that the quality of teachers in Northern Ireland was particularly high.²⁹⁸ The EA did tell us that graduates were less likely to take jobs in rural areas, however, and representatives from the Irish-medium sector told us it could be difficult to find STEM teachers for their schools.²⁹⁹

139. We heard some evidence that mobility of labour was relatively low in the teaching market.³⁰⁰ One suggested cause was the existence of different sectors with separate employment requirements. Catholic Maintained nursery and primary schools, for example, require teachers to hold a recognised Certificate in Religious Education.³⁰¹ It was also noted that schools are exempt from the Fair Employment and Treatment

295 Department of Education, [Statistical Bulletin 5/2018, Teacher workforce statistics in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland 2017/18](#), 14 June 2018, p 1; Department for Education, [School workforce in England: November 2017](#), 28 June 2018

296 Governing Bodies Association ([EDU0045](#)), p 5

297 Department of Finance, [Briefing on Northern Ireland Budgetary Outlook 2018–20](#), December 2017, p 38

298 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 6

299 [Q50](#); Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 6

300 [Q286](#)

301 [Q249](#); [Fair Employment and Treatment \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1998](#), Article 71

(Northern Ireland) Order, meaning they are able to consider religious belief when making employment decisions. Research from Ulster University has found that only 2 per cent of teachers in Catholic primary schools are from Protestant backgrounds, while 7 per cent of teachers in primary schools with mainly Protestant pupils are from Catholic backgrounds. Similar patterns exist at the secondary level.³⁰² The general view among witnesses was that movement between roles and sectors is becoming easier.³⁰³

140. The Department and the Education Authority piloted an Investing in the Teaching Workforce scheme in 2017–18. The scheme enables teachers over the age of 55 to take early retirement, with the aim of creating vacancies that can be filled by new graduates and so renewing the teaching workforce. 29 teachers left the profession through the scheme in 2017–18, followed by 133 more in 2018–19 following the extension of the scheme.³⁰⁴

Teachers' pay and industrial action

141. The pay scale for teachers in Northern Ireland is different to other parts of the UK. For example, the starting salary for a classroom teacher is £22,243 in Northern Ireland compared to £23,720 in England and Wales.³⁰⁵ Gerry Murphy of the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) and Secretary of the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC), which negotiates on behalf of several trade unions, told us that a new teacher in Northern Ireland was paid 6 per cent less than their counterparts in England or Wales, 23 per cent less than in Scotland and 47 per cent less than in the Republic of Ireland.³⁰⁶ Similar discrepancies between Northern Ireland and other parts of the British Isles exist across the pay scale and across roles.³⁰⁷

142. Teachers' pay scales in Northern Ireland have been unchanged since 2016. Teachers continue to receive incremental increases based on length of service, as schools are required to do, but we were told that the value of each pay step had not risen in line with the cost of living.³⁰⁸ Meanwhile, teachers' pay scales in England and Wales were uprated in 2017 and 2018. However, teachers' unions told us that pay was a concern even before the collapse of the Assembly: Gerry Murphy said that "public sector pay policy ... has remained static since 2012."³⁰⁹ The NASUWT estimates that, after adjusting for inflation, teachers' pay has fallen by 20 per cent since 2010.³¹⁰ School support staff are paid on a separate UK-wide scale, and unions accepted a new pay offer in January 2018 covering pay increases between 2018 and 2020.³¹¹

302 Ulster University, [Employment Mobility of Teachers and the FETO Exception](#), April 2019

303 [Q249](#)

304 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 34 ; [Letter from the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education to the Chair](#), 29 April 2019

305 NASUWT, [Teachers' Pay Scales \(Northern Ireland\)](#), July 2017; NASUWT, [Teachers' Pay Scales \(England and Wales\)](#), September 2018; NASUWT, [Teachers and Leadership Salary Scales 2017/18 \(Scotland\)](#), February 2018

306 [Q208](#)

307 NASUWT, [Teachers' Pay Scales \(Northern Ireland\)](#), July 2017; NASUWT, [Teachers' Pay Scales \(England and Wales\)](#), September 2018; NASUWT, [Teachers and Leadership Salary Scales 2017/18 \(Scotland\)](#), February 2018; INTO, [Pay Scales \(Republic of Ireland\)](#), 1 October 2018

308 [Q98](#)

309 [Q208](#)

310 NASUWT([EDU0043](#))

311 NIPSA, [New NJC Pay Scales 2018](#), 25 May 2018

143. We heard that pay constraints were contributing to low morale among teachers, and participants at our engagement event told us they felt the profession has been devalued.³¹² The NASUWT said there was a risk that more teaching graduates from Northern Ireland would pursue their careers in Great Britain, and said it was increasingly receiving inquiries from members seeking jobs in the Republic of Ireland. NASUWT representative Justin McCamphill warned that “we will have a recruitment crisis a lot sooner than you might think.”³¹³ We also heard some evidence that pressure on staffing budgets was affecting employers’ behaviour. At our engagement event we heard that schools were increasingly relying on cheaper Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) because experienced staff were more expensive to employ.³¹⁴

144. Northern Ireland’s teaching unions and employing authorities have recently been engaged in negotiations over pay and conditions. In November 2017 the NITC called for a 5 per cent pay rise.³¹⁵ However, Gerry Murphy explained that trade unions and the employing authorities had “effectively been in dispute in one form or another since 2010–11,” over issues including assessments and budget reductions as well as pay. Mr Murphy told us that a formal talks process between unions and the employing authorities had begun in February 2017.³¹⁶ In June 2019 it was reported that unions and employing authorities had reached an agreement in principle to end industrial action. Details of the agreed package have not yet been confirmed. Trade union members have not yet formally accepted or rejected the offer.³¹⁷

145. During the current dispute, several unions have taken industrial action short of strike, for example by refusing to take part in school inspections by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).³¹⁸ The ETI reports that only 39 per cent of schools fully co-operated with inspectors in the last two years, and that this was preventing improvements being made in schools.³¹⁹ The former Chief Executive of the EA, Gavin Boyd, has said that industrial action is “seriously affecting the education of children and young people.”³²⁰

146. Both the EA and DE said they hoped to resolve the dispute as soon as possible.³²¹ Both agreed that any resolution would need to include a pay increase for teachers.³²² The Permanent Secretary said this would be accompanied by a “workload element” relating to changes to administration and inspection requirements. However, he said that any pay rise of above 1 per cent would need to be funded through changes to teachers’ terms and conditions, as the Public Sector Pay Policy for Northern Ireland required any pay increases of more than 1 per cent to be funded by efficiency savings.³²³ DE told us that any pay award would have to be backdated to cover 2017–18 and 2018–19; however, they explained that this money had been accrued so that it could be paid when a future settlement is agreed.³²⁴

312 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#))

313 [Q210](#)

314 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#))

315 BBC News, [Teaching unions push for pay rise](#), 30 November 2017

316 [Q208](#)

317 BBC News, [NI teachers pay dispute: ‘Agreement reached’ to end industrial action](#), 13 June 2019

318 BBC News, [INTO teachers begin industrial action over pay dispute](#), 6 January 2017

319 BBC News, [Fewer schools ‘fully co-operating’ with inspections](#), 28 November 2018

320 BBC News, [Education official says industrial action harms education](#), 15 May 2017

321 [Qq29–30](#); [Q349](#)

322 [Qq29–30](#); [Q349](#)

323 [Q349](#)

324 [Q368](#)

147. Although we heard broad support for a pay increase, school leaders told us that in practice it would be very difficult for schools to afford the costs associated with a new pay award. As many schools noted, staffing costs are by far the largest component of school's spending, and commonly make up more than 90 per cent of a school's costs.³²⁵ In addition, we heard that schools were already facing pressure on their staffing budgets due to recent statutory changes to employers' pension contributions and National Insurance Contributions.³²⁶ The CSSC estimated that every 1 per cent increase in pay would cost £10 million.³²⁷

148. Most witnesses agreed that schools would not be able to meet the cost of pay increases from their existing budgets, and that a new pay award would substantially increase schools' deficits.³²⁸ One principal admitted that if previous pay awards had been granted, "School budgets would be blitzed. There wouldn't be a school to attend in Northern Ireland."³²⁹ Several witnesses therefore argued that a teachers' pay increase should be centrally funded.³³⁰ Koulla Yiasouma said:

Whether that is from the Department of Education or whether that is from the budget set here in Westminster, teachers should absolutely get their pay rise. Schools cannot afford to do that within their existing budget. That increase has to come centrally.³³¹

149. The Permanent Secretary said he could not confirm how a pay agreement would be funded until details had been finalised. He reiterated that increases above 1 per cent would need to be paid for through efficiency savings, and said the Department had proposals for how this could be achieved.³³² He also said that DE had made bids during the in-year monitoring round and the budget process for funding to cover an anticipated pay settlement. As negotiations were ongoing at the time, he could not disclose any figures publicly.³³³

150. Teachers in Northern Ireland have continued to deliver an excellent education for their pupils in increasingly challenging circumstances. However, they have seen their wages stagnate at the same time as their counterparts elsewhere in the UK are receiving increases, and wages in the sector are considerably lower than those in the Republic of Ireland. This is deeply unfair to Northern Ireland's teachers, and must be corrected. One obstacle remains the lack of an Executive, which would need to sign off a new pay deal. Another concern is that schools' budgets are under immense pressure, and it is unlikely that most would be able to afford the cost of a pay rise. *The Secretary of State should issue guidance that if a final settlement is agreed to resolve the present industrial action, and there is no Executive in place to approve it, the Permanent*

325 [Q11](#)

326 Governing Bodies Association ([EDU0045](#)) p 6

327 Controlled Schools Support Council ([EDU0061](#)), p 7

328 Association of School and College Leaders ([EDU0009](#)); Controlled Schools Support Council ([EDU0037](#)), p 9; Governing Bodies Association ([EDU0045](#)) p 8

329 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#))

330 Association of School and College Leaders ([EDU0009](#)); Controlled Schools Support Council ([EDU0037](#)),

331 [Q286](#)

332 [Q366](#)

333 [Q368](#)

Secretary may authorise it. We recommend that the agreed pay settlement for teachers is funded centrally, with adjustments being made to the Department of Education's budget where needed.

Skills and Continuing Professional Development

151. We heard that, as staffing capacity has become stretched and pressure on teachers' workloads has increased, it had become more difficult for teachers to access training. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools told us:

The primary focus of the support agencies being on schools in 'special measures' means that staff development opportunities are minimal. Internal and external support opportunities cannot be bought-in to create staff development opportunities and so share good practice to develop high quality teaching and learning. The ability of schools to develop capacity and capability of staff, and so for them to adapt innovative practice and increase outcomes in the face of such resource shortfalls, is unsustainable.³³⁴

One obstacle to staff accessing training is that schools have to meet the cost of a supply teacher to cover a teacher's classes. As the CSSC noted, many schools cannot afford to meet this cost and so training opportunities are missed.³³⁵

152. There was clear demand for additional training opportunities in some areas: particularly in supporting children's mental wellbeing and supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEN or SEND). Witnesses told us that the number of children displaying SEND was increasing, and a survey carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate found that teachers were increasingly supporting children with issues of emotional health and wellbeing and that those issues were becoming more complex.³³⁶ In its report on SEND the Northern Ireland Audit Office wrote that "there remains a desire for further comprehensive training for all school staff, including an enhanced focus on SEN as part of initial teacher education."³³⁷ The British Psychological Society also called for training in psychological well-being and mental health to be introduced across the education sector "as part of a general strategy to create a psychologically informed workforce" that could deliver appropriate support to children and young people.³³⁸

153. Some contributors to the inquiry highlighted other areas that they thought should be the focus of additional training. The NAHT emphasised the need for a strategy to develop school leadership skills, to increase the cohort of staff able to carry out management functions and to develop the next generation of school leaders.³³⁹ The Northern Ireland Audit Office's *Financial Sustainability of Schools* report found that some schools did not feel they had the financial skills necessary for day-to-day budget management.³⁴⁰

334 Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (EDU0056), p 7

335 Controlled Schools Support Council (EDU0037), p 7

336 Education and Training Inspectorate, [An evaluation of the effectiveness of Emotional Health and Well-Being support for pupils in schools and EOTAS centres](#), November 2018, p 3

337 Education Authority (EDU0044), p 10 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (EDU0057), p 7; Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Special Educational Needs](#), 27 June 2017, p 2

338 British Psychological Society (EDU0005), p 4

339 National Association of Head Teachers NI (EDU0038), p 14

340 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [The Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 38

154. The Department told us that, in anticipation of new regulations under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, they had set aside money to cover the cost of supply teachers so that teachers could take time out of school to train in preparation for the new arrangements.³⁴¹

155. The Department of Education told us that it had committed to covering the cost of staff cover so that school staff could attend training courses relating to Special Educational Needs. This is a welcome step, and we recommend that the Department continue and extend this approach. *The Department should cover the cost of supply cover when school staff attend training courses in areas for which there is a clear need, including, but not limited to, financial management and school leadership skills.*

Staff workloads and wellbeing

156. Principals and teachers told us that their workloads had increased in recent years. The NAHT said that teachers were “working longer hours than ever,” and classroom assistants were working beyond their contracted hours.³⁴² According to the NASUWT a number of factors had contributed to increasing workloads, including larger class sizes, reductions in support staff and changes to the curriculum and assessment process.³⁴³ Participants in our engagement event told us that teachers’ responsibilities for supporting children with Special Educational Needs were growing, and they were also having to cope with new challenges such as pupils’ use of social media.³⁴⁴

157. Some witnesses expressed concern about the effect of increasing work pressure on staff’s health and wellbeing. Dr Graham Gault told us that he had “very serious concerns” about the mental health of staff, and that the stress he experienced in managing his school was “like nothing I have experienced before in my life.”³⁴⁵ Trade unions said the physical safety of staff was another concern. Justin McCamphill explained that it was becoming more difficult to obtain support for teaching behaviourally challenging pupils, and that this made incidents of assault or harassment more likely.³⁴⁶ Due to a combination of these factors, principals and teachers at our engagement event reported rising levels of staff absence.³⁴⁷ The Northern Ireland Audit Office noted that in 2016–17 an average of 9.5 days were lost per teacher due to sickness, and that the costs of substitution cover alone totalled £73.6 million, with much of this cost being borne by schools themselves.³⁴⁸ Some principals, particularly in smaller schools, told us that they were increasingly having to cover classroom teaching duties, leaving them with less time to carry out management functions.³⁴⁹

158. Witnesses from teaching unions made the case for the sector to agree a teacher health and wellbeing strategy to respond to these issues. The EA and the CCMS employ welfare

341 [Q352](#)

342 National Association of Head Teachers Northern Ireland ([EDU0059](#))

343 NASUWT ([EDU0043](#)), p 2

344 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 6; APTIS: The Association of Principals in Integrated Schools ([EDU0032](#)), p 2

345 [Q108](#)

346 [Q226](#)

347 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 6

348 Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Financial Health of Schools](#), 16 October 2018, p 34

349 Education Funding in Northern Ireland Engagement Event, 28 January 2019, Holy Cross College, Strabane ([EDU0064](#)), p 6

officers, and we also heard that third party helplines such as Carecall are available for staff in all sectors.³⁵⁰ However, we heard that there was an urgent need to develop “a proper occupational health service sitting within a broader health and wellbeing strategy for the profession.”³⁵¹ We also heard a perception that current occupational health services were “more about pushing people back into work as quickly as they can, as opposed to ensuring that they are fully recovered and ready to return to work.”³⁵² The EA’s Annual Report stated that a new occupational health provider had been appointed for 2018–19 with a view to providing managers with better occupational health advice and improving the referral progress. However, we did not hear whether there were plans to establish a wider health and wellbeing strategy.³⁵³

159. We heard that teachers and school leaders are working harder than ever under extraordinary pressure, at a cost to their wellbeing. We welcome the Education Authority’s work on staff health and wellbeing. However, we also heard the need for a more strategic approach. *The Department and the EA should commit to establishing a health and wellbeing strategy for teachers, school staff and school leaders. The Department should publish a draft strategy for consultation before the end of year.*

350 Department of Education, [Staff Welfare](#), Accessed 13 May 2019 ; [Qq165–166](#)

351 [Qq228–233](#)

352 [Q233](#)

353 Education Authority, [Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2018](#), 8 April 2019, p 13

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction and political context

1. As long as the Assembly remains absent, the normal routes through which elected representatives would usually scrutinise education in Northern Ireland are unavailable. As a result, it has not been possible to scrutinise properly the delivery of this vital public service, or to hold decision-makers to account. This is an unacceptable state of affairs. We recommend that, as long as the Assembly remains absent, the Department of Education and the Education Authority commit to appearing at our Committee at least annually to provide an update on the state of education funding. *We recommend that, as long as the Assembly remains absent, the Department of Education and the Education Authority commit to appearing at our Committee at least annually to provide an update on the state of education funding.* (Paragraph 8)

2. The political deadlock at Stormont has meant that the education system has been unable to respond to the urgent challenges facing schools. Educators told us that with no political solution in sight, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should be prepared to take decisions so that the school system can make progress on existing policy priorities. We recommend that, if the Executive is not reformed by October, the Secretary of State should lay before Parliament those education regulations required by Acts already agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and on which the Department of Education has consulted. The Secretary of State should also be prepared to take further steps, in consultation with the Department of Education and relevant stakeholders in Northern Ireland, when these are necessary to meet key education objectives. *We recommend that, if the Executive is not reformed by October, the Secretary of State should lay before Parliament those education regulations required by Acts already agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and on which the Department of Education has consulted. The Secretary of State should also be prepared to take further steps, in consultation with the Department of Education and relevant stakeholders in Northern Ireland, when these are necessary to meet key education objectives.* (Paragraph 12)

Education in Northern Ireland

3. We heard concerns about the support provided to schools by the Education Authority following the amalgamation of the Education and Library Boards. Issues raised included a lack of staffing capacity and expertise, a lack of clarity around responsibilities within the organisation, and the EA's limited oversight of schools' financial management. The upcoming review of the Education Authority is timely, and will provide an opportunity to evaluate its work. Given the EA's importance within the sector we expect the Department and the EA to take a proactive approach to addressing the concerns raised in this report. *As part of its five year review of the Education Authority, the Department of Education should specifically examine: whether: the EA has sufficient resource and capacity to perform its functions; the EA's services are delivering value for money when compared to the previous regional model; decision-making within the organisation is sufficiently transparent; the EA has*

sufficient powers to hold schools accountable for the way they manage their finances; the EA is making sufficient use of those powers. In responding to this report, the Department should set out the terms of reference for the review. (Paragraph 31)

4. We welcome the ongoing review into procurement, which was a priority concern for many of the Controlled and Maintained schools we spoke to. We believe there is scope for substantial savings in this area and expect that this review will allow these to be promptly realised. *Once the review of procurement is complete, the Department should update this Committee (or the relevant Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly if it is constituted) with its findings and its plan for implementation.* (Paragraph 39)

The education budget and school funding

5. We heard a consistent message that the education budget is not sufficient to meet rising pressures on schools while the system remains in its current form. Independent of this issue, however, there is a clear need to properly fund the existing education system to meet rising demand so that the current generation of children receive the excellent education they deserve. *We recommend that future budget allocations to the Department of Education rise not only in line with inflation, but in proportion to the number of pupils in the school system in order to reflect increasing pupil numbers and the associated demand for additional staff.* We examine the organisation of the school estate and make further recommendations in Chapter 4. (Paragraph 51)
6. We welcome the announcement in the 2018 Budget Statement that Northern Ireland will receive additional funding in 2020–21 and in the upcoming Spending Review. However, in the absence of functioning devolved institutions it is not clear how Northern Ireland can exercise its usual discretion in the way this money will be spent. *The Northern Ireland Office should, in responding to this report, explain how decisions will be taken on how the Barnett consequentials arising from the 2018 UK Budget will be spent. The Secretary of State should be prepared to authorise the allocation of funds to areas of acute public service need, consulting with the Department of Finance and the major political parties in Northern Ireland to ensure there is consensus for such an approach.* (Paragraph 52)
7. In the absence of an Assembly the education budget has been set on a rolling annual basis, with the consequence that schools and sectoral bodies have not been able to plan for the future of education. This has been an obstacle to investment and improvement in children's education. We recognise the UK Government's reservations about setting long-term budgets while there is the prospect of the Assembly being restored. However, we believe that it is not in the long term interests of education for the current uncertainty to continue. (Paragraph 60)
8. The UK Government should work with the Department of Education and Department of Finance as part of the upcoming Spending Review to produce provisional three-year budget allocations for the Department of Education. (Paragraph 60)
9. Many of the teachers and principals we spoke to did not know how the Department of Education had spent the money obtained through the Confidence and Supply Agreement, and some believed they had not benefitted from this funding at all. *The*

Department should proactively contact schools to set out how the 2019–20 allocation of Confidence and Supply funding is spent and make this information clearly available to the general public so that decisions on this spending can be properly scrutinised. (Paragraph 73)

10. We heard that Confidence and Supply money was largely used to maintain existing provision, and that without it further cuts would have been necessary. This raises the alarming prospect that once the deal expires there will be a substantial funding gap that threatens the continuation of vital programmes. *We recommend that, in anticipation of the end of the current Confidence and Supply Agreement funding period, Ministers say how they will respond to the exhaustion of the additional funding for the programmes supported by the Agreement in 2017–18 and 2018–19.*
11. We welcome the Government’s decision to allow unspent money from the first two years of the Fresh Start Agreement to be carried over into future years. The long-term nature of capital projects means it may be necessary to allow further money to be carried over to avoid it being lost. *The Government should continue to allow underspends in Fresh Start funding to be carried over into future years, as it did in 2016–17 and 2017–18. (Paragraph 75)*
12. We heard a number of concerns about the way school budgets are allocated through the Common Funding Formula. In current circumstances it is more important than ever to ensure that funding is being directed where it can do the most good. *The Department of Education should carry out a review of the Common Funding Formula to identify whether a fairer and more efficient balance of funding can be achieved. The review should examine the balance of funding across key stages, funding that targets social deprivation and funding for smaller schools, and whether the current balance between money held centrally and money delegated directly to schools achieves the best possible value for money. The Department should complete this review by the end of the financial year. (Paragraph 90)*
13. Many schools told us that too great a proportion of funding was held centrally, and they wanted to see an increase in their delegated budgets. Not all schools shared this view however, and it was acknowledged that any delegation of functions would bring additional responsibilities that some schools would neither want nor have capacity to manage. Nevertheless, we heard that the proportion of the budget held centrally could be reduced by around 5 per cent. *We recommend that there is merit in revisiting proposals to give Controlled and Maintained schools greater financial flexibility where they desire to do so. We recommend that, starting with the next annual budget cycle, the Department pilot arrangements through which Controlled and Maintained schools can gain greater financial freedoms in the same vein as Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated schools. (Paragraph 91)*

Area Planning and the school estate

14. There is widespread agreement that the way education in Northern Ireland is organised does not make the best use of resources. We heard that better allocation of resources could improve the quality of education for all children, and there remains scope for change while continuing to meet the demand for different models of education that exists in the province. *Based on the evidence we received, we believe*

that a broad ambition for the education sector should be to consolidate the school estate so that resources can be concentrated in fewer schools, giving greater scope for an enriched, broadened school experience. The Department and the Education Authority should use this as its guiding principle when taking decisions about school provision. (Paragraph 103)

15. Ultimately these decisions are for the people of Northern Ireland to take, and no single approach will be right for every community. Consultation is therefore an essential part of this process, so that parents and communities are truly included in these decisions and their concerns respected. *The Department of Education should use part of the public sector transformation fund allocated in the 2019–20 draft budget to run community consultations on school provision, so that communities have a real stake in decision-making rooted in their desired outcomes. (Paragraph 104)*
16. Departments in Northern Ireland have been without ministerial direction for more than two and a half years. The Department of Education has judged—in our view correctly—that it should still take decisions on school Development Proposals. Throughout our inquiry we heard consistent evidence on the urgent need for improvements to Northern Ireland’s school estate. This is clearly an immediate strategic priority for the sector. We recommend that, if no Executive is formed by October, the Department of Education should issue a call for new capital projects, consulting with key stakeholders and the political parties to ensure widespread confidence in its approach. *We recommend that, if no Executive is formed by October, the Department of Education should issue a call for new capital projects, consulting with key stakeholders and the political parties to ensure widespread confidence in its approach. (Paragraph 114)*

Special Educational Needs and Disability

17. Witnesses told us that the number of children requiring support with Special Educational Needs and Disability was increasing rapidly, and that this was one of the most significant pressures on the Education Authority’s budget and on individual schools. It is clear that the system does not currently have the resources it needs to meet demand for SEND support. *We recommend that future budget allocations to the Department of Education reflect the increasing number of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability in the Northern Ireland school system, so that these children can be identified and assessed at the earliest age possible and appropriate support can be put in place. (Paragraph 127)*
18. Witnesses identified shortcomings in the way children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are supported. Action was being taken to remedy this before the collapse of the Stormont institutions, and the Assembly passed legislation establishing a clear agenda for change. The Department has progressed this work as far as it can, but in the absence of an Assembly work has stalled. *The Secretary of State should lay before Parliament consequential regulations and documents arising from the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and the Children’s and Young People’s Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 in order to give full effect to those Acts and so improve the support offered to children with SEND. (Paragraph 131)*

19. The funding arrangements for special schools are not transparent, and it is not possible to tell whether this money is being well spent. While we accept that these schools cannot be funded according to a simple formula, the more transparency the Department is able to provide the better. *In responding to this report, the Department should set out which key factors it considers when determining special school budgets.* (Paragraph 135)

Teachers and pay

20. Teachers in Northern Ireland have continued to deliver an excellent education for their pupils in increasingly challenging circumstances. However, they have seen their wages stagnate at the same time as their counterparts elsewhere in the UK are receiving increases, and wages in the sector are considerably lower than those in the Republic of Ireland. This is deeply unfair to Northern Ireland's teachers, and must be corrected. One obstacle remains the lack of an Executive, which would need to sign off a new pay deal. Another concern is that schools' budgets are under immense pressure, and it is unlikely that most would be able to afford the cost of a pay rise. *The Secretary of State should issue guidance that if a final settlement is agreed to resolve the present industrial action, and there is no Executive in place to approve it, the Permanent Secretary may authorise it. We recommend that the agreed pay settlement for teachers is funded centrally, with adjustments being made to the Department of Education's budget where needed.* (Paragraph 150)
21. The Department of Education told us that it had committed to covering the cost of staff cover so that school staff could attend training courses relating to Special Educational Needs. This is a welcome step, and we recommend that the Department continue and extend this approach. *The Department should cover the cost of supply cover when school staff attend training courses in areas for which there is a clear need, including, but not limited to, financial management and school leadership skills.* (Paragraph 155)
22. We heard that teachers and school leaders are working harder than ever under extraordinary pressure, at a cost to their wellbeing. We welcome the Education Authority's work on staff health and wellbeing. However, we also heard the need for a more strategic approach. *The Department and the EA should commit to establishing a health and wellbeing strategy for teachers, school staff and school leaders. The Department should publish a draft strategy for consultation before the end of year.* (Paragraph 159)

Formal minutes

Wednesday 17 July 2019

Members present:

Simon Hoare, in the Chair

Gregory Campbell Ian Paisley

Maria Caulfield Jim Shannon

Lady Hermon Sir Desmond Swayne

Draft Report (*Education funding in Northern Ireland*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph. Paragraphs 1 to 159 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Ninth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 4 September at 9.15am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 10 October 2018

Sharon O'Connor, Chairperson, Education Authority, **John Collings**, Director of Education, Education Authority, **Joyce Bill**, Director of Finance & ICT, Education Authority

[Q1–90](#)

Wednesday 31 October 2018

Deirdre Gillespie, Principal, St Mary's Grammar School and President, Association of School and College Leaders NI, **Dr Graham Gault**, Principal, Maghaberry Primary School and Secretary, Strategic Primary Principals Forum, **Jo McColgan**, Principal, Ashfield Boys' High School, **Nigel Frith**, Principal, Drumragh Integrated College

[Q91–125](#)

Wednesday 5 December 2018

Gerry Campbell, Chief Executive, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, **Tony McCusker**, Chair, Finance and Personnel Committee, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, **Barry Mulholland**, Chief Executive, Controlled Schools Support Council, **Heather Murray**, Board Member, Controlled Schools Support Council and Principal, Millington Primary School

[Q126–157](#)

Nuala O'Neill, Chief Executive, Governing Bodies Association, **Sir Gerry Loughran**, Vice Chairman, Governing Bodies Association, **Roisin Marshall**, Chief Executive Officer, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, **Diane McDowell**, NICIE Representative, Department for Education Local Management of Schools Funding Committee and Bursar, Hazelwood Integrated Primary School

[Q158–206](#)

Wednesday 9 January 2019

Geri Cameron, President, National Association of Head Teachers, NI, **Justin McCamphill**, Senior Northern Ireland Official, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, **Gerry Murphy**, Northern Secretary, Irish National Teachers Organisation

[Q207–249](#)

Wednesday 27 February 2019

Sir Robert Salisbury, Chair of the 2013 Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme, **Koulla Yiasouma**, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

[Q250–334](#)

Wednesday 13 March 2019

Derek Baker, Permanent Secretary, Department of Education (NI), **Fiona Hepper**, Deputy Secretary for Education Policy and Children's Services, Department of Education (NI), **Gary Fair**, Director of Finance, Department of Education (NI)

[Q335-388](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

EDU numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Abbey Grammar School Newry ([EDU0040](#))
- 2 Alliance Party of Northern Ireland ([EDU0035](#))
- 3 APTIS: the Association of Principals in Integrated Schools ([EDU0032](#))
- 4 Association of School and college Leaders ([EDU0009](#))
- 5 Barnardo's Northern Ireland ([EDU0013](#))
- 6 Belfast Global Shapers ([EDU0046](#))
- 7 Brackenagh West Primary School ([EDU0016](#))
- 8 British Psychological Society ([EDU0005](#))
- 9 Children in Northern Ireland ([EDU0025](#))
- 10 Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta ([EDU0028](#))
- 11 Controlled Schools' Support Council ([EDU0037](#))
- 12 Controlled Schools' Support Council ([EDU0061](#))
- 13 Council for Catholic Maintained Schools ([EDU0056](#))
- 14 Cromie, Mr Ray ([EDU0006](#))
- 15 Currie, Mr Christopher ([EDU0001](#))
- 16 Democratic Unionist Party ([EDU0010](#))
- 17 Department of Education ([EDU0058](#))
- 18 Department of Education ([EDU0065](#))
- 19 Division of Educational & Child Psychology NI branch ([EDU0063](#))
- 20 Dromintee PS ([EDU0004](#))
- 21 Early Years - the organisation for young children ([EDU0041](#))
- 22 Education Authority ([EDU0044](#))
- 23 Employers For Childcare ([EDU0014](#))
- 24 Equality Commission for Northern Ireland ([EDU0036](#))
- 25 Friends' School Lisburn ([EDU0047](#))
- 26 Frith, Nigel ([EDU0060](#))
- 27 Governing Bodies Association (GBA) ([EDU0045](#))
- 28 Governing Bodies Association NI ([EDU0066](#))
- 29 Grosvenor Grammar School ([EDU0030](#))
- 30 Haire, Mr David ([EDU0054](#))
- 31 Holy Family Primary and Nursery School Derry ([EDU0018](#))
- 32 Integrated AlumNI ([EDU0017](#))
- 33 Integrated Education Fund ([EDU0021](#))

- 34 Irish National Teachers Organisation, National Education Union and Ulster Teachers Union ([EDU0053](#))
- 35 Killinchy Primary School ([EDU0007](#))
- 36 Killowen Primary School ([EDU0020](#))
- 37 Lindsay, Principal Marie ([EDU0048](#))
- 38 Macdonald, Dr Maeve ([EDU0062](#))
- 39 NASUWT ([EDU0043](#))
- 40 National Association of Head Teachers ([EDU0038](#))
- 41 National Association of Head Teachers Northern Ireland ([EDU0059](#))
- 42 The National Deaf Children's Society ([EDU0012](#))
- 43 Northern Ireland Affairs Committee ([EDU0064](#))
- 44 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ([EDU0057](#))
- 45 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People ([EDU0067](#))
- 46 Northern Ireland Community Relations Council ([EDU0051](#))
- 47 Northern Ireland Council For Integrated Education ([EDU0042](#))
- 48 Queen's University Belfast ([EDU0033](#))
- 49 The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists ([EDU0024](#))
- 50 School Principal's Forum ([EDU0011](#))
- 51 South Belfast Sure Start ([EDU0029](#))
- 52 St Columbanus' College ([EDU0015](#))
- 53 St Kieran's P.S. ([EDU0002](#))
- 54 St Killian's College ([EDU0027](#))
- 55 St Patrick's Primary School ([EDU0019](#))
- 56 St Patricks's College ([EDU0049](#))
- 57 St. Anne's Primary School ([EDU0008](#))
- 58 The Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South ([EDU0055](#))
- 59 Start360 ([EDU0034](#))
- 60 Strandtown Primary School ([EDU0022](#))
- 61 Strategic Primary Principals Forum ([EDU0026](#))
- 62 Sólás (Special Needs) Charity ([EDU0031](#))
- 63 Transferors Representatives' Council ([EDU0039](#))
- 64 YouthAction Northern Ireland ([EDU0003](#))

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

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Second Report	The land border between Northern Ireland and Ireland	HC 329 (HC 1198)
Third Report	Devolution and democracy in Northern Ireland – dealing with the deficit	HC 613 (HC 1589)
Fourth Report	Brexit and Northern Ireland: fisheries	HC 878 (HC 1812)
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Seventh Special Report	Brexit and Agriculture in Northern Ireland: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1847

Eighth Special Report	HM Government support for UK victims of IRA attacks that used Gaddafi-supplied Semtex and weapons: follow-up: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report	HC 2352
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