

**DE 2008/04a**

**Specialist Schools: Cohort 3**

**YEAR 3 SPECIALIST SCHOOLS APPLICATION**  
**GUIDANCE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**A number of changes have been made to the application process for the third year of the pilot and schools should familiarise themselves with this revised document before beginning their application.**

**Schools wishing to complete an application should contact the Department of Education at the address below. A copy of the application form will be forwarded to you by e-mail.**

**Specialist Schools Pilot  
14-19 Team  
Department of Education  
Rathgael House  
Bangor  
BT19 7PR**

**Email: [14-19team@deni.gov.uk](mailto:14-19team@deni.gov.uk)**

**Copies of this guidance are available from the DE website.**

**If you have any particular requirements (such as different formats) around the guidance or application form please contact the 14-19 Team at the address above, or tel: 91279850**

**THE CLOSING DATE FOR RECEIPT OF SPECIALIST SCHOOLS  
APPLICATIONS IS:**

**NOON ON FRIDAY 2 MAY 2008**

## **PART 1: The Specialist Schools Concept**

### **Policy Context**

In the third year of the specialist schools programme, the Department of Education (DE) is keen to emphasise the programme's place within the broader framework of the School Improvement and Raising Standards agenda (particularly regarding 14-19 provision) and its place in the changing educational landscape that children will have access to over the coming years. The specialist programme has never been a stand alone programme and, in the coming years, its role as a key connector in linking the ongoing education reforms is set to increase.

### **The 14-19 Context**

DE and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) are currently working to bring forward a co-ordinated 14-19 programme across the schools and the further education and training sectors to ensure complementarity of provision and coherent pathways for young people, with their choice informed by good quality careers education, information, advice and guidance. The aim is that our young people can, regardless of the path they choose, fulfil their potential and are equipped with the knowledge and skills to take their place in an increasingly global workforce.

### **The Entitlement Framework**

The Entitlement Framework (EF) is a major focus of DE's development of 14-19 policy. The EF will guarantee all post-primary pupils aged 14 and above greater choice and flexibility by providing them with access to a wide range of learning opportunities suited to their needs, aptitudes and interests, irrespective of where they live or the school they attend

The current target date for the full implementation of the EF is September 2013. From that date, schools will be required to provide pupils with access to a minimum number of courses at Key Stage 4 (KS4) (current target is 24) and a minimum number of courses at post-16 (current target is 27). In both cases at least one-third of the courses must be general (academic) and at least one-third applied (vocational/professional/technical). The remaining one-third of courses is at the discretion of each school; this flexibility provides schools with an opportunity to develop a distinctive curricular offer.

For most schools, some form of collaboration with other schools, colleges of further education, and training organisations, will be necessary to enable their pupils to have access to the full number of courses specified under the EF.

### **Learning Communities**

Schools across the North are already working with other schools and with colleges of further education in the development of Learning Communities to plan and co-ordinate collaborative provision (particularly for 14-19 pupils) in a coherent way. The development of these Learning Communities will complement the wider development of area-based planning within education. It is within this context and structure that DE wishes to see the specialist schools programme develop, linking the ongoing reforms and supporting and extending local collaboration.

### **STEM**

It is widely recognised that for the economy of the North to grow and compete in an increasingly global market that we will need to enhance the uptake of STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in schools. In the Programme for Government promotion of STEM related activities is a very high priority. To take this agenda forward DE, working with DETI, have identified resources within the Innovation Fund to support the STEM agenda through the Specialist Schools programme.

DE recognises the potential that specialist schools could have in the promotion of STEM subjects and wishes to encourage this in two ways:

1. Applications are particularly welcomed from schools under the STEM specialisms, i.e.:

- SCIENCE
- TECHNOLOGY
- MATHEMATICS AND COMPUTING
- MATHEMATICS

While the Department hopes to designate a number of STEM specialists, it should be noted that, as with all other specialisms, decisions will be made based on the quality of the application.

2. Following the announcement of the third cohort of specialist schools, all STEM specialist schools, including those in cohort one and two, will be invited to submit a bid for a capital project designed to increase the uptake of STEM subjects, bring together STEM specialist schools to act collegially to improve practice, raise standards and enhance the facilities available for STEM teaching in their areas. Details of this application process will be announced after Easter 2008.

### **Specialist Schools**

DE hopes to designate between 10 and 15 new specialist schools, effective from September 2008. **However, as with previous years, schools should note that final decisions on designation will be taken on an individual basis, based on the quality of the applications received, and that only schools demonstrating the capacity to take the programme forward will be designated.**

Schools should consider seeking specialist designation where they have a particular curricular strength in one of the listed specialist areas and they are actively seeking to raise standards in the specialism through further developing that strength not only within the school but also in post primary

schools within the Learning Community and in their partner primary schools. It is essential, therefore, that schools ensure that their specialist plans are entirely complementary with the plans and strategies for the development of their respective Learning Communities.

The core objectives of the Specialist School concept in Northern Ireland remain essentially unchanged for the third year of the pilot programme.

- To provide opportunities for pupils to benefit from wider learning experiences and to ensure maximum impact of the available expertise and resources, by promoting co-operation and collaboration among schools and between schools and other providers of education and training for 14-19 year-olds;
- To provide parents with greater choice among a range of schools, which have differing areas of focus;
- To raise standards and realise performance improvement for all young people; and
- To develop links between schools, their local communities and the economy to ensure that all young people are given a strong foundation for lifelong learning and work.

The experience of the pilot programme to date has demonstrated that it is primarily the process of self-evaluation and application of aspects of an existing curricular strength, as a whole-school development process, that leads to the benefits of specialism. Successful specialist schools identify and build on their particular curricular strengths and, by sharing good practice, secure whole-school development, foster strong collaborative links with partner schools and contribute to the development of good school leadership in their area. Requiring schools to take forward a community dimension with other schools, other providers of 14-19 education and training, businesses and the wider community – also helps them move from an environment characterised by competition towards one of co-operation and collaboration.

## **Who can apply for Specialist status?**

All schools, currently with pupils in each year group in Key Stages 3 and 4, are invited to apply for inclusion in the Specialist Schools programme **except** those schools:

- currently in the School Support Programme; or
- already designated specialist schools.

## **Special Schools**

The Department has been working with a number of Special Schools who have previously expressed an interest in Specialist status. If you are a Special school and you wish to know more about this work, or would be interested in possible specialist designation in future cohorts please contact the 14-19 Team at the address on page 4.

## **Schools can apply for Specialist status in the following:**

- **Arts (performing, visual or media, drama)**
- **Art and Design**
- **Business and Enterprise**
- **Health and Social Care**
- **Humanities**
- **Language**
- **Leisure and Tourism**
- **Music**
- **Sport**
- **STEM:** Science  
Mathematics  
Technology  
Mathematics and Computing

## **The Application Process**

**The application process is a demanding one. Schools are advised that only those applications which meet the required standard will be successful and an application should not be attempted unless there is a high level of commitment to the concept, throughout your school (including your Board of Governors), your partner schools, and the wider community.**

Primarily, applicant schools will be expected to demonstrate that they have stable (but high) or rising standards of attainment within the Specialist area.

Applications must include:

- A four-year School Plan
- A four-year Community Plan that involves developing partnerships with at least 5 partner schools.
- Evidence of at least £25,000 of unconditional private sector sponsorship. (or evidence of how a school has sought this sponsorship).
- A bid for a one-off recurrent Support Grant of up to £75,000 and an outline of how this would be used

Schools should note that further documentary evidence should be available to support all aspects of the application, such as records of discussions with schools and other 14-19 providers within their Learning Community. **THIS EVIDENCE SHOULD NOT BE SENT AS PART OF THE APPLICATION.**

### **Changes to the programme**

To ensure continuity, the application process remains essentially the same as in previous years, but with a small number of modifications:

- All specialisms must comprise a minimum of two (and up to a maximum of three) contributory subjects.

- The Learning for Life and Work targets have been removed; schools, however, should ensure that this and other elements of the implementation of the revised curriculum remain an integral part of their specialist plans.
- Targets in the subjects contributing to the specialism are no longer required at Key Stage 3 (KS3), though DE will expect applications to show clearly, in both the School Plan Audit and the implementation strategies for the KS4 targets, how the school's KS3 provision supports the contributory subjects of the planned specialism.
- The Year One Support Grant is now wholly recurrent, with a value of up to £75,000.

### **Evaluation of the Pilot**

It will take some years to assess the full impact of the specialist schools programme. In the short to medium term, the findings of surveys undertaken to gauge the reactions and responses of pupils, teachers, parents, governors, employers and community representatives, together with work of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), will inform the future roll-out of the programme. Moreover, given the key role that school self-evaluation has to play in whole-school improvement, schools' own evaluations of their work as a specialist school, quality assured by ETI, will form a strong element to the evaluation of a school's successful participation in the initiative and demonstration of improvement. All schools in the pilot will be required to participate in the evaluation procedures and processes.

### **Who should be involved in planning an application?**

In addition to your **Senior Management Team** and the **specialist departments**, successful applications for specialist school designation will involve input from **teachers in other departments across the school**. You should also discuss your application at an early stage with your **Board of Governors**. It is equally important that you consult **parents and pupils** during the application process and that they are kept informed throughout.

Importantly, **there will be procedures regarding expenditure that are particular to your school sector and these should be clearly followed in drawing up your plans.** Details of the relevant bodies which should be consulted for schools in each sector are detailed in Section F of this guidance (“Funding”).

Schools are required to use and develop their existing links with other local schools as part of the application process, particularly when identifying **partner schools**. The importance of the **Learning Community** context of the specialist schools programme has been emphasised on page 6 and applicant schools should note that at least two of the applicant school’s post-primary partners should be members of the same Learning Community. The extent to which the plans outlined in the application fit with the developing collaboration in the local area will be a key factor in the assessment of the application.

You will also have to consider the learning and skills needs of your **wider local community** –for example, local businesses/employers, youth groups and other community groups. In doing so, schools will wish to discuss links between their specialism and the capacity of other local providers of 14-19 education and training including their local post primary schools, college of further education and training organisations.

Six new employer-led **Workforce Development Forums** (WDF) have been established since 2007, in each of the new further education college areas, to identify local skills training needs and to articulate a strategic response to those needs. Applicant schools are strongly advised to make contact with the

relevant WDF, where possible, to discuss the school's links with business and the community and how their specialist application will fit into plans being developed for their area. Contact details are as follows:

### **Group Secretaries**

Denise Mayo [Denise.Mayo@ballymena.gov.uk](mailto:Denise.Mayo@ballymena.gov.uk) ----- Northern Group  
Alice Adams [Alice.Adams@edifhe.ac.uk](mailto:Alice.Adams@edifhe.ac.uk) ----- South Eastern Group  
Paul White [pwhite@belfastinstitute.ac.uk](mailto:pwhite@belfastinstitute.ac.uk) ----- Belfast Metropolitan Group  
Tony McConville [mconvillet@nkifhe.ac.uk](mailto:mconvillet@nkifhe.ac.uk) ----- Southern Group  
Victor Refausse [victor.refausse@omagh.ac.uk](mailto:victor.refausse@omagh.ac.uk) ----- South Western Group  
Vinny McGroary [vinng.mcgroary@nw.fas.ie](mailto:vinng.mcgroary@nw.fas.ie) ----- North West Group

### **Statutory and admissions implications**

**DESIGNATION AS A SPECIALIST SCHOOL IS NOT A STATUTORY PROCESS AND DOES NOT RESULT IN ANY CHANGE IN A SCHOOL'S ADMISSIONS CRITERIA.**

## **Sources of support in drawing up your application:**

### **The Regional Training Unit**

The Regional Training Unit (RTU) will be your principal source of support in completing your application. Feedback from schools taking part in the first two years of the pilot highlighted the value of this support and **the Department strongly recommends that your school makes use of this resource.** Schools considering submitting an application should also note that the RTU has developed a “state of readiness” tool which schools in previous years indicated was helpful in assessing their preparedness for the application process and in identifying areas requiring development. There is also a series of Frequently asked Questions relating to the application process hosted on the DE website and accessible through the RTU website.

### **e2s Development Officers**

The e2s Development officers in the Education and Library Boards, CCMS, NICIE and CnaG are currently working to help schools develop collaborative arrangements and increase pupil access in preparation for the introduction of the Entitlement Framework. Contact details for these officers are attached at Annex A. **The relevant Development officer(s) should be contacted during the application process, particularly when looking at how your specialist application will fit into the collaborative arrangements in your area, and specifically the development of your local Learning Community, as this will be a key factor in how your application is assessed.**

**On receipt of your request for an application form, the Department will pass your contact details to the RTU and the relevant e2s Development Officer. The extent and nature of the support to be provided will then be discussed and agreed.**

## How Your Application Will Be Assessed

**As in previous years, an independent panel will consider all of the specialist applications and will advise the Department as to which applications meet the criteria for specialist designation as detailed in this guidance.**

The School Plan and the Community Plan sections of your application will carry **equal** weight, for assessment purposes.

The **School Plan** must set out convincing approaches to raising standards in the specialist subjects and using these approaches to drive whole school improvement.

The **Community Plan** must demonstrate how you will use your specialism for the benefit of your partner schools and the local community and must be complementary to the existing plans for your Learning Community's development.

### **SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS WILL BE REQUIRED TO DEMONSTRATE THE FOLLOWING:**

#### **1. School Plan:**

- A comprehensive and rigorous audit of the school's current position in the subjects contributing to the specialism which identifies strengths and areas for improvement and/or development;
- That the chosen specialism is an area of curricular strength (both within the school and against relevant benchmarks);
- The identification of objectives and challenging but SMART<sup>1</sup> targets for improvement to address issues arising from the audit, and specifically

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<sup>1</sup> **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound**

in respect of attainment, provision / uptake and enrichment in the specialist subjects;

- Convincing plans setting out the actions to be taken to achieve the targets set in the specialist subjects, with particular emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning;
- Objectives, targets and implementation plans which show how the school will use the specialism, and the teaching and learning in the specialism, to help raise standards of learning and attainment across the school curriculum, including, and specifically, in English and mathematics;

## **2. Community Plan:**

- That, in relation to the proposed specialism, the school has audited the current position with all of the proposed community partners and, through consultation, has agreed how its specialism is to be integrated into a collaborative local strategy to meet learners' needs by widening access, building capacity and improve standards of learning and attainment;
- Specific priorities, SMART targets and plans showing how the school will use the specialism over the period of the designation to develop significant and sustainable working partnerships with other schools and the further education and/or training sectors for the mutual benefit of learners and the partner organisations;
- Specific priorities, SMART targets and plans showing how the school will use the specialism over the period of the designation to help support and extend the work of business organisations and/or other community groups for the benefit of individuals in these partner organisations; and

### **3. Monitoring and Evaluation:**

- That the school's procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of the school and community elements are thorough, inclusive of all the participants, and reflect specifically the plans outlined in the application.

**Schools that are unsuccessful in this application round will be offered feedback on their applications.**

## **PART 2:GUIDANCE ON COMPLETION OF THE APPLICATION FORM**

**NB: THE APPLICATION FORM SHOULD BE COMPLETED USING ARIAL FONT SIZE 10**

**Section A. School Information: Guidance on the completion of the statistical information will be forwarded by the Department following your request for an application form.**

### **Section B. General Case:**

You should use this section of the application to explain:

- how the chosen specialism will be used to raise standards of learning and attainment and what you aim to achieve in four years' time, should your school be designated;
- how specialist status will fit in to your plans to offer access to the full Entitlement Framework in due course, including the one third of applied courses<sup>2</sup>.
- how specialist designation will fit in with your school's ongoing collaboration with other providers, particularly in the development of your school's Learning Community and in plans to share effective practice and make best use of the existing resources in the local area; and
- how you will promote your school's distinctive ethos and identity to widen pupil and parental choice

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<sup>2</sup> For further guidance, see DE Circular 2005/18 "Entitlement Framework – Initial Guidance" and "Entitlement Framework-Further Guidance"

You should use the General Case section to outline how your specialist status will link with your work on other relevant Government policies and initiatives such as *A Shared Future* and/or *Extended Schools*.

## **Section C The School Plan**

### **C.1 School plan audit**

Your school plan will be based on a crucial first stage: a comprehensive and rigorous audit of the school's current position in the subjects contributing to the specialism, identifying strengths and any areas for improvement and/or development. Your current School Development Plan<sup>3</sup>, together with any supporting documentation will be particularly relevant. This audit will entail analysing data and reviewing existing strengths and areas for development in each subject relating to your proposed specialism in each of the areas below.

**Section C.1.a** of the application should include:

- Current **attainment** in KS4, and where appropriate, post-16 in the specialist subjects (this should take account of the statistical information already provided in Section A).
- The quality of **teaching and learning** in specialist subject(s).
- The quality of **curriculum provision** in Key Stages 3 and 4 and, where appropriate, post-16: the range of relevant courses (please list all pre- and post-16 exams/other awards), curriculum enrichment, time given to the subjects and out-of-hours learning.
- Current **uptake** in specialist subject(s) in Key Stage 4 and post-16, including outside lesson time where appropriate.
- **Resources** for the specialist subject(s) including accommodation.
- The role of **ICT** in supporting teaching and learning in the subject(s) covered by your proposed specialism and in supporting any other relevant areas for development.

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<sup>3</sup> For further guidance, see "School Development Planning", DE, June 2005. Schools will also find the ETI's "Together Towards Improvement" and the "Evaluating Schools" and "Improving ..." series helpful.

- **Quality of management**, including SMART target setting; monitoring and evaluation; management of resources; and success of staff development policy/practice.

**Section C.1.b** of the application form should be used to indicate how your schools currently shares effective teaching and learning between subject areas (specialist and non-specialist).

**Section C.1.c** allows your school to outline existing links with post-primary partners and any plans for extending these. These may include links in subjects other than those associated with the specialism.

### **C.2 School plan objectives and SMART targets<sup>4</sup>**

Based on the school-plan audit, the main part of the school plan will set out your objectives, SMART targets and implementation strategies, which are intended both to raise standards in the subjects contributing to the specialism and to promote whole school improvement. All objectives and their associated targets should address an issue identified in the audit and reflect the Specialist Schools pilot's aims and principles. If the audit has raised a significant number of issues, you should look to prioritise these (explaining the rationale for which issues are to be addressed) so as to set a realistic scope for the use of the specialist funding. You should also include any issues concerning underachievement and address issues of inclusion.

You will be expected to set a number of broad objectives in the school plan: one for each subject within your specialist area; one for whole school improvement.

You may wish to use an optional objective that can be used flexibly to cover other issues from the school plan audit. Each objective needs to briefly and

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<sup>4</sup> Further guidance on target setting can be found in DE Circular 2006/16 "Target-Setting and Benchmarking" issued in June 2006. Does This need updated?

broadly cover the issues that the associated targets will pick up on e.g. attainment, provision/uptake, enrichment and (where appropriate) post-16 provision.

Using the grids in the application form, you will need to set a range of outcome targets against which to measure progress in each objective. These should take account of your current School Development Plan and, where appropriate, demonstrate the additional improvement and progress that the specialist resources would deliver.

**The assessment of your application will look closely at whether the targets state a clear base-line/starting point and are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART)– to ensure that progress against targets/objectives can be measured.**

For the **specialist subject objectives**, the SMART targets will reflect how (and how far) you are planning to raise attainment, increase provision/uptake and expand enrichment opportunities.

- i) Attainment should be the key driver of the whole plan – which is why targets are required here for each specialist subject in each of the four years of the designation phase. You should cover, as part of overall attainment targets, any areas/groups of pupils for particular attention e.g. *'To raise A\*-Cs from a% to b%, in particular by raising under-achieving boys' attainment from x% to y%'*.
- ii) Targets on provision/uptake and enrichment are required for Years 1 and 2 of designation.
- iii) Where appropriate, you should also set post-16 targets for attainment and provision/uptake in the first two years of designation.

A range of targets is also required for the **whole school improvement objective**, reflecting various key elements:

- i) You should set detailed **whole school attainment** targets for each year of the phase and explain how you will use your specialism to drive up attainment across the school. In particular, targets focusing on raising attainment in English and Maths should be a priority.
- ii) Qualitative targets are required in terms of how **teaching and learning** in the subjects relating to your proposed specialism will both draw on and help improve standards in other departments.
- iii) You will also need to set SMART targets for the **involvement of businesses/employers** – which should go beyond contributions to initial sponsorship, towards e.g. innovative curriculum delivery, vocational experiences, management involvement, work-shadowing and mentoring.

For all the areas above, (apart from **attainment** in the specialist and whole school targets), explicit targets are only required for Years 1 and 2 of designation, where your planning will be most advanced and detailed, but will need to be complemented by outline plans for the second half of the phase. You will need to update and record new targets for Years 3 and 4 of designation as part of your own monitoring and review processes.

An **optional objective** can be used to cover other issues arising from the school plan audit, such as issues that cut across all the specialist subjects, and must be accompanied by appropriate, outcome-based targets.

## **Implementation of the School Plan**

In the final column of the grid, you will need to briefly set out an overview of the actions to be taken to deliver your targets – **taking care to pick up on the issues identified in the School-Plan audit**. Your proposed actions will be expected to reflect some key principles for personalised and effective teaching and learning:

- setting high expectations for all;
- ensuring every pupil is working to explicit targets in each subject;
- making learning relevant, stimulating and challenging;
- matching teaching techniques to a range of learning styles; and
- using assessment, diagnosis and data to maximise progress.
- how strategies and provision at KS3 support the delivery of the targets identified at KS4 and post-16 where appropriate.

**Your proposed actions must also demonstrate how Information and Communication Technology will be used to provide opportunities for pupils and promote quality teaching and learning both in the specialism and across the school as a whole.**

## **C.3 Outline of use of annual grant for 1<sup>st</sup> year on School Plan**

In this section, you should give a breakdown under the indicated headings of how you intend to spend the specialist grant to meet targets for Year 1 of the plan. The school plan should involve around 50% of the overall specialist recurrent funds. Although similar breakdowns are not required for Years 2 to 4 of the plan, the Department will examine how the money has been spent during the ongoing evaluation of the pilot. Your own monitoring and evaluation plans will also focus on the detail of your financial plans as they develop.

## **Section D The Community Plan**

Your Community Plan will involve partnerships with:

- at least **five** other schools, at least **three** of which must be post-primary and at least **two** of which must be members of your Area Learning Community. Partnerships with special schools are welcomed and, where they have post-primary age pupils, they can 'count' as post-primary partners; and
- wider community groups such as local businesses/employers, youth groups and other community organisations.

The experience from previous years of the programme demonstrates that key factors in successful partnerships with other schools are likely to be:

- a sense of shared ownership;
- trusting relationships based on challenge and support;
- creating a climate of continuous evaluation; and
- a rigorous analysis of development needs, aligned to effective use of resource.

**Partnerships are also more likely to be successful if they focus on one or two specific projects with each partner school.**

Your plan will be about building excellence and expertise in your specialist subjects across and for your local area. **In doing so, you must respond to needs not currently met by your school or others. Applications which clearly duplicate existing provision will not be successful.** You should demonstrate that you are planning to develop co-operation with local schools and with other providers of 14-19 education and training, making best use of the existing resources available in the local area. This will involve close consultation with all your intended partners from within the Learning Community and more widely. You should take account of any specialist provision available at the local college of further and higher education, adult/community learning centres etc, in order to avoid duplication. You must

also consult with relevant local community organisations for their perspective on outstanding needs. The degree to which you have consulted in drawing up your Community Plan will be assessed as part of your application. Your school's engagement with employers/businesses should also be clearly seen within the context of ongoing initiatives in this area, principally the *NI Skills Strategy*. Schools should also make contact with the relevant Workforce Development Forums (WDF). See the earlier section; "Who should be involved in planning an application?"

### **Key principles for the Community Plan:**

- objectives and targets should involve **up to two** of the subjects covered by your specialism in any one year. Proposals that relate to other parts of the curriculum will **not** 'count' in your specialist plans – though you may separately decide to develop such wider community services and facilities along 'extended school' lines;
- you will need to demonstrate that work with, for example, local theatre groups (as part of an arts specialist plan), is clearly additional to their existing activities – similarly, proposed work with partner schools must complement and go beyond existing partnership arrangements and/or funded collaborative programmes;
- your school/wider community partners need to understand the aims of the programme, and that your school cannot meet all their needs. The community plan audit may identify many issues amongst which you might need to prioritise – the quality/impact of activities are more important than the quantity and the assessment of your application will consider how realistic your plans are;
- you can be flexible, focusing either on different subjects within your specialism, or on different partner schools/wider community groups, over the four year phase; and

- your choice of partners and your objectives/targets should demonstrate a commitment to social inclusion, equal opportunities and cultural diversity. This might involve helping partner schools to address under-performance of particular groups of pupils (by gender, socio-economic background, pupils with SEN or English as an additional language, gifted and talented pupils etc).

In terms of activities for work with partner schools, **applicant schools will be expected to focus on:**

- a. **Post-Primary Partners:** Expanding access to applied/vocational provision in the local area without duplicating what already exists, linking the Learning Community Plan to the school's and partner's plans to offer the full Entitlement Framework.
- b. Tackling underperformance – helping local schools that are struggling in in subjects contributing to your specialism;
- c. **Primary Partners:** Key Stage 2-3 transfer and transition, focusing particularly on ensuring robust curriculum continuity and progression in learning.
- d. Inclusion and children's issues – helping partner schools to ensure inclusion issues are managed effectively in a context where every child is achieving, healthy and safe.

In drawing up your Community Plan, your school should also ensure that regard is paid to the aims and objectives of “A Shared Future - Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, March 2005

### **D.1. Community Plan Audit**

Like the School Plan, the Community Plan should be based on a comprehensive and rigorous audit of the current position – in this case, of the school's existing partnerships with the selected partner schools and wider community groups. You should:

- a. identify your intended partner schools and highlight current activities and areas for development/priority needs in your existing work with them – focusing on teaching and learning in, and resources for, the specialist subjects. You will need to consider and record your existing involvement in school-to-school collaborative arrangements and in particular your school's ongoing work in developing your Learning Community. An assessment should also be made of how links to partner schools are supported by ICT;
- b. research and identify wider community groups and specify areas for development in relation to existing learning provision (by your school or other providers) in the specialist subjects. You do not need to review every community link you have but you should clearly identify what support you provide/facilitate and what established links with other providers you could use to extend specialist provision further for these groups.

### **D2. Community Plan objectives and targets**

Based on the audit, the main part of your specialist Community Plan will set out your objectives, targets and implementation strategies for partnership working between your school and your partner schools/wider community partners. All objectives and their associated targets should address an issue identified in the audit and reflect the Specialist Schools pilot's community aims and principles.

You will be expected to set **5 objectives** – at least one on your work with

primary partner (or other) schools, at least two with your post-primary partners and at least one with wider community groups. Please note that you may also wish to set an **optional objective** that you can use to cover/focus on other issues identified in the audit and not addressed in the objectives detailed above.

Using the grids in the application form, you will need to set a range of outcome targets against which to measure progress in achievement of each objective. The assessment will look closely at whether the targets state a clear base-line/starting point and are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound – to ensure that progress against targets/objectives can be identified. Targets are required for Years 1 and 2 of the phase only, where your planning will be most advanced and detailed, but will need to be complemented by outline plans for the second half of the phase. You will need to update and record new targets for Years 3 and 4 as part of your own monitoring and review processes.

Targets for your work with partner schools should describe specific learning outcomes and fit with the schools' own development priorities. Targets do not have to be expressed in terms of directly raising attainment in partner schools. They should, however, clearly specify learning standards to be delivered by providing supporting or facilitating well-defined activities in the specialist subjects to address the learning needs of defined groups of pupils/teachers (e.g. Year 6 pupils, gifted and talented pupils, under-achieving boys).

Targets for your work with wider community groups must set out the intended learning outcomes of specialist subject-related activities that your school will provide or facilitate for defined groups.

You may wish to demonstrate how the use of ICT will add value to relevant objectives in your Community Plan.

**The assessment of your application will look closely at whether the targets state a clear base-line/starting point and are specific,**

**measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART) – to ensure that progress against targets/objectives can be measured.**

### **Implementation of the Community Plan**

In the final column of the grid, you should briefly set out the actions you will take to deliver each target. An effective way to manage and monitor the plan may be to identify link staff with specific responsibility for co-ordinating activities and sharing good practice. Implementation plans should help ensure that activities, especially with/in partner schools, are sustainable and could be continued independently in due course.

### **D3 Outline of use of grant for 1<sup>st</sup> year on Community Plan**

In this section, you will give a breakdown under the indicated headings of how you intend to spend the specialist grant to meet targets for Year 1 of the plan. The Community Plan should involve around 50% of the overall specialist recurrent funds. Although similar breakdowns are not required for Years 2 to 4 of the plan, the Department will examine how the money has been spent during the ongoing evaluation of the pilot. Your own monitoring and evaluation plans will also focus on the detail of your financial plans as they develop.

## **Section E Monitoring and Evaluation of School Plan and Community Plan<sup>6</sup>:**

Monitoring and evaluation should address the following:

- a.** How will you monitor progress against targets at subject and individual levels and evaluate the quality and impact of teaching and learning? How will you evaluate the impact of the specialist subjects in raising standards of attainment across the school? What tools will you use to track individual performance e.g. pupil data? If targets are not being met, what remedial action will be taken?
- b.** How are governors and sponsors involved in monitoring and evaluation? Are there plans to involve external agencies? What are the accountability structures? What representation from outside the school will there be on monitoring and evaluation groups?
- c.** How will key stakeholders from partner schools and the wider community contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the community plan? How will account be taken of their views? If targets are not being met, what remedial action will be taken?
- d.** What data and other evidence do you need to collect to be able to tell how well targets are being met?
- e.** How will you approach reviewing and developing targets and implementation plans for the second half of the phase?

In summary, the procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of the school and community plans should be thorough, inclusive of all the participants, and reflect specifically the plans outlined in the application.

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<sup>6</sup> For guidance on monitoring and evaluation, see “School Development Planning”, DE, June 2005. Schools will also find the ETI’s “Together Towards Improvement” and the “Evaluating Schools” and “Improving Schools” series helpful.

## **Section F: Funding**

Spending of funds associated with Specialist School's designation should be separate and distinct from those of other DE funded initiatives, such as Extended Schools and other initiatives funded by non-Departmental bodies. Where a proposed activity is also covered in your school's Extended Schools action plan your action plan should indicate that this activity is being funded through the Specialist Schools programme.

All the funding must be spent on the implementation of the School and Community Plans and must be additional to funding that would normally be available. This funding cannot be used to cover school budget shortfalls. In addition, schools should not use their specialist funding to duplicate facilities already available in the local area.

### **Recurrent Funding**

Specialist schools receive extra annual grant to support the on-going implementation of the specialist school and community plans.

The amount of grant is based on pupil numbers taken from the annual school Census figure for the September preceding the school year for which payment is being made. The flat rate of grant for schools is calculated at a rate of £100 per pupil. Grant is paid on a school-year basis (funding for the first year of the pilot will begin in September 2008).

### **Specialist Schools Year One Support Grant**

In addition to your annual recurrent funding, a specialist recurrent grant of **up to** £75,000 can be used, together with the sponsorship raised, to enhance the school's non teaching resources for the teaching of your specialist subjects in the first year of designation.

An outline of the use of the support grant should be included in your application and this should reflect the needs identified in the audit. Should there be any additional costs associated with the Project, the school must identify these and indicate how they are to be met.

**It is extremely important that your proposed use of the Specialist Support Grant is discussed as part of the application process with;**

- i) Your Education and Library Board in the case of controlled schools;**
- ii) The Department of Education for Maintained, Grant-Maintained Integrated and Voluntary Grammar schools.**

**These discussions should include the relevant accounting policies which determine capital/recurrent categorisation. Failure to do so could lead to delays in funding becoming available or your application may be deemed ineligible. *Please ensure that all support grant costs outlined in your application are inclusive of VAT.***

This is particularly important in respect of schools operating (or planning to do so) under a PPP procurement as it will be essential to understand the implications under the contract, the change order process and ramifications for the school's LMS budget.

### **ICT Equipment**

Before submitting a proposal which includes the purchase of ICT equipment, schools should ensure that C2K and/or the ELB ICT advisers are consulted to ensure that any equipment purchased is fit for purpose, value for money, and that there are no insurmountable capacity or support issues.

Where schools are seeking to fund projects to extend the curricular offer using ICT, particularly those which involve the purchase of ICT equipment, the participant schools will be expected to demonstrate that the formulation of this aspect of the application has been informed by the participation of key staff

members in appropriate training, such as the Online Learning and Teaching for Educators (OLTE) training provided by the Regional Training Unit (RTU).

## **Section G: Sponsorship**

This section gives a brief overview of the rules governing sponsorship. Specialist schools are required to raise a minimum of £25,000 in unconditional sponsorship.

### **Eligibility**

The four guiding principles on the eligibility of this sponsorship are that:

- a. it must be raised for the purpose of the application;
- b. it must be unconditional;
- c. it must be from the private sector; and
- d. it must be relevant to the School and Community plan and also support the use of the Year One support grant.

Details of eligible and ineligible sponsorship are shown below;

<b>ELIGIBLE SPONSORSHIP</b>	<b>CRITERIA</b>
Cash donations	The preferred form of sponsorship - must reflect the four guiding principles.
Goods/equipment	Must be relevant to the School Plan and contribute to the capital project and ICT resources should be compatible with/extend the C2k managed service.
Free overseas travel	£5,000 maximum.
School monies (fund raising; School Foundations; PTA funds; donations from parents, past pupils diocese etc)	Such monies can account for up to £10,000. PTA and Foundation monies must have been raised before applying for specialist status.

Gift Aid on sponsorship pledges	
Private Finance Initiative providers/Public Partnerships	Private

<b>INELIGIBLE SPONSORSHIP</b>	<b>EXCEPTIONS (if any)</b>
Supplier sponsors, i.e. companies who have or may have a commercial interest in the school. This includes discounts on purchases. <i>If unsure what "supplier" means, contact the RTU.</i>	Companies who are part of ELB wide contracts or who sign a non-supplier declaration Donations may also be made via approved stakeholders.
Funding from local authorities/public sector bodies	Organisations with private sector funds who confirm sponsorship is from such streams
Donations from school staff, their partners or spouses and those in partner schools	
Services	Architectural/professional services in connection with capital bid. The whole fee must be donated
Other school monies - profits from vending machines, tuck shops, school photo/uniform sales, trading activities, room lettings etc	

Unconditional pledges (not payment) of sponsorship are required at the point

of application. Where this is not possible, schools will be required to produce evidence of the steps that they have taken to access private sponsorship to date, along with how the school intends to secure this before designation as a Specialist School. It is acceptable for sponsors to make the actual donation at this stage if the money is separately identifiable and held until needed for the support grant project.

If your school already has links with companies or other organisations which provide sponsorship on an on-going basis, it may be possible to count one year's worth of this towards the sponsorship requirement.

Sponsorship must have been received by the end of the first year of designation, with the exception of PTA/fundraising monies which must have been received at the point of application.

### **Supporting evidence**

The following supporting evidence is required -:

- a. statements by the Principal and the Chair of the Board of Governors, on school headed paper, to the effect that all sponsorship is unconditional;
- b. original letters for all amounts of sponsorship pledged;

On the application form please list all sponsors separately, except where the sponsorship is from fund-raising activities or parental donations/covenanting schemes which can be included as one line. Original letters from all sponsors are required, except in the case of individual parental donations and/or covenanting schemes where a list of all parents and the amounts donated should be attached.

### **Receipt of sponsorship: verification process**

Some or all of the designated schools may be required to provide copies of bank statements or other finance related documentation, providing evidence of receipt of all funding by the end of the first year of operation. Acceptance of such checks is one of the conditions of funding prior to the announcement of designation.

## **APPLICATION CHECKLIST**

Please organise your application in two parts:

Part I) Completed **application form**;

Part II) Schools are required to submit the following **supporting information** with their application:

- Sponsorship declaration letter signed by the Principal and Chair of the Board of Governors;
- Signed pledge letters from all sponsors. Applications must be supported at the time of application with evidence of at least £25,000 of unconditional private sector sponsorship. Where this is not possible, schools will be required to produce evidence of the steps that have been taken to access private sponsorship, along with how the school intends to secure this before designation as a Specialist School;
- Consent forms by all partnership schools to be signed by the respective principals.

Please submit **one printed copy of the application form and the supporting information** requested and **one electronic version of your application form to the Department by NOON 2 MAY 2008**. Printed copies should be sent to the 14-19 Team address on page 4. Electronic forms should be emailed to: [14-19team@deni.gov.uk](mailto:14-19team@deni.gov.uk)

Electronic copies of supporting information are not required. All supporting material must be with the Department by the specified deadline.

Please note: individual applications or parts of applications, including details of sponsors, could be made public at any time in response to requests under Freedom of Information legislation.

**PLEASE DO NOT SEND ANY OTHER ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.**

**For further information on any of the contents of this Guidance, or other aspects of the specialist schools application process, please contact;**

John Reid

Regional Training Unit

Blacks Road,

Belfast

BT10 0NB

## ANNEX A

### FUNDED E2S DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS

BELB 40 Academy Street BELFAST BT1 2NQ	Margaret Watson Tel: 9056 4049 MargaretW@belb.co.uk
WELB Omagh Teachers' Centre 1 Spillars Place OMAGH BT78 1HL	Alison Smyth Tel: 8225 3666 alison_smyth@welbni.org
NEELB Antrim Board Centre 17 Lough Road ANTRIM BT41 4DH	Verona Hassan Tel: 9448 2298 verona.hassan@neelb.org.uk  Heather Thompson Tel: 9448 2298 heather.thompson@neelb.org.uk
SEELB Grahamsbridge Road DUNDONALD BT16 0HS	Bill Swann Tel: 9056 6598 bill.swann@seelb.org.uk  Uel Dougherty Tel: 9056 6593 uel.dougherty@seelb.org.uk
SELB Silver wood Centre Lough Road LURGAN BT66 6LX	Aidan McCormick Tel: 3831 0939 aidan.mccormick@selb.org
CCMS 160 High Street HOLYWOOD BT18 9HT	Sean Rafferty :Clogher and Derry Diocese (WELB Area): Tel: 8775 1500 seanrafferty@pprce.org  Nuala O'Donnell: Armagh and Dromore Diocese (SELB Area): Tel: 8775 1500 nualaodonnell@pprce.org  Herbie Artt: Down and Conor Diocese (BELB/SEELB/NEELB Areas): Tel: 9032 7875 <a href="mailto:herbieartt@ccmsschools.com">herbieartt@ccmsschools.com</a>
NICIE Aldersgate House 3-19 University Road BELFAST BT7 1NA	Ivan Arbuthnot Tel: 9023 6200 iarbuthnot@nicie.org.uk
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta Teach an Gheata Thiar 4 Sráid na Banríona Béal Feirste BT1 6ED	Liam Mac Giolla Mheana Tel: 9032 1475 limgmheana@comhairle.org

## ANNEX B

### **Guidance for schools wishing to submit a joint application**

1. In certain circumstances joint applications from two schools are welcome, for example, from an 11 to 14 and 14 to 18 school. Applications would need to be supported by sponsorship of £25,000 for the joint application, and will receive a single package of support from the Department.
2. Such applications are required to relate to one specialist area, and **both** applicant schools will be expected to clearly demonstrate existing curricular strength in the chosen specialism.
3. Schools should consider very carefully whether they wish to submit a joint application, particularly where two schools do not have a previous history of working together. Where this is the case schools are discouraged from making joint applications unless their application is clearly part of a wider and coherent strategy to bring about overall improvement in standards of achievement at both schools.
4. There will be a funding differential compared with two solo applications (because the financial support package is shared), and this may affect progress towards targets. In effect the resources available for a joint designation are the same as those for a solo application. It follows that joint applicants will not be able to be as ambitious as two schools making solo applications and schools should take this into account.
5. **An application consisting of a self-contained development plan from each school, with little evidence of joint planning, will not be successful.**

### **Partnership**

6. Successful joint applications will be based on genuine partnership between both schools. It must be evident from the application why both partners consider it beneficial to be applying jointly. The case for a joint application should give details of any history of collaboration between the schools.

7. A joint application must be more than just two school development plans put together and called a joint application. The specialist school plan of both partners should be one integrated plan. Some objectives and targets will obviously relate only to one of the partners but in other instances both schools should share objectives and targets.
8. For the purpose of the community development plan, joint specialist schools must still work with at least **five** other schools, at least **three** of which must be post-primary and at least **two** of which must be members of your Area Learning Community.

### **Issues for consideration when formulating the development plan of a joint application**

9. Joint applicants are therefore unlikely to be successful **unless they provide evidence** of the following:
  - a. existing collaboration which is purposeful and can demonstrate that **a genuine partnership already exists**;
  - b. joint agreement at governing body and school management levels about **how their new status will be communicated** to the wider community and local schools;
  - c. joint planning at senior and middle management levels which results in a **cohesive and well co-ordinated approach** to implementing the various components of the development plan;
  - d. the development of **significant strengths and improvements at both schools in the specialist subjects**;
  - e. a development plan which capitalises on the complementary strengths of both schools and ensures that **each will benefit from the other in terms of plans for joint working**;
  - f. a joint management structure and system for the implementation of the community programme.

## **Funding**

Schools in a joint application will receive a single funding package calculated at £100 per pupil for the total number of pupils in both schools. **How these funds are spent should relate to clearly defined needs and priorities as identified in the School and Community Plans. They should not be simply an equal division between the schools.** Schools in a joint designation will receive an annual additional payment of £10,000 (again for division between the schools according to need) in recognition of the particular circumstances inherent in a joint designation.

A one-of Specialist Support Grant will be available in the first year of designation to joint applicant schools. This will total up to £75K maximum to be spent between the schools in the first financial year of designation. See Section F for further details.

## **ANNEX C**

**Name of School Applying for Specialist Designation:**

### **STATEMENT BY PARTNER SCHOOLS**

**This statement of consent letter must be understood and signed by all partner schools included in the Community Plan and submitted with the specialist school application.**

**Name of Partner School:**

Members of the senior management team and other relevant staff of this school have taken part in discussions with key staff in the school applying for specialist designation.

We have been fully consulted throughout the process of development of the four-year Community Plan, as outlined in the specialist school's application.

We are fully committed to partnership working to undertake the implementation strategies and to achieve the targets for this school that are outlined in the Community Plan.

The school applying for specialist designation is / is not ( delete, as appropriate ) a member of our local Area Learning Community.

Signed:

Principal of Partner School:

SCHOOL

Date:

STAMP