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## **New Post-Primary Arrangements A Statement by Angela Smith, MP Minister for Education**



*Education will make our children's future  
Our children will make Northern Ireland's future*

December 2005

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## **New Post-Primary Arrangements – A Statement by Angela Smith, MP, Minister for Education**

We live in a fast changing global market. Our young people need the right knowledge and skills for Northern Ireland to be competitive and to prosper. Our education system cannot stand still. It needs to change to ensure that our young people are properly equipped for life and work. The post-primary reforms will deliver an education system fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Last month, I announced major changes to the way in which the education system is administered. This will improve its efficiency and effectiveness and provide better value for money. But our key focus must be on the pupils. The education system must give all our young people equal opportunity to fulfil their potential no matter where they live, the school they attend or their social background. It must offer choice and be flexible to meet individual pupils' needs and also changing economic and social conditions.

The reforms to post-primary education will build on our current strengths:

- Well qualified and dedicated teachers and non-teaching staff;
- Enthusiastic young people eager to learn; and
- Parents who care deeply about the quality of their children's education.

The reforms **will not**:

- abandon what is good about the present arrangements;
- abolish grammar schools; or
- impose all-ability comprehensive schools.

For all pupils the reforms **will**:

- provide greater choice;
- raise standards;
- provide flexible pathways to meet individual needs; and
- develop closer working relationships among schools and with the Further Education sector.

## What will the reforms do?

The Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has worked closely with teachers over the last 5 years to develop a new curriculum for all pupils. It will be introduced gradually from September 2006, and will be completed by 2010.

Teachers will have greater freedom to tailor their teaching to what individual pupils need. From age 14, there will be an emphasis on skills, Learning for Life and Work and on employability.

All pupils from age 14 will be guaranteed access to a much wider range of general and applied (i.e. academic and vocational) courses. Schools will work with each other, with Further Education colleges and with approved training organisations to make these courses available. Pupils and their parents will decide how many courses and which courses to follow. Schools will work together for the benefit of all pupils instead of being in competition.

We will make sure pupils have excellent facilities in modern well-equipped buildings. We are rebuilding and improving many of our schools, and computers are already transforming how pupils learn. We will also be looking at removing or replacing schools that have become too small because of falling pupil numbers.

The Review of Post-Primary Education began in 1998. Following wide debate, Government announced in 2004 that academic selection will end. The last 11+ Transfer Tests will be held in 2008. Future transfer arrangements will be based on parents' choice. To help them, parents will have information about their child's progress in a Pupil Profile, advice from the primary school and access to advice from post-primary schools. Using all of this information, parents will decide which type of school will best meet their child's needs.

Work on all these reforms is underway and details are provided below. Together they will provide a better system of education for all pupils with:

- a focus on the needs of individual pupils;
- greater choice of general and applied courses for pupils from age 14; and
- greater flexibility to change direction, if necessary.

When the new post-primary arrangements are implemented, young people leaving school will be well prepared for life and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, whether they move on to further or higher education or into employment and training.

## What changes will take place over the next 5-10 years?

### New Curriculum

- Getting it right from the start is vital. There will be a new Foundation Stage (age 4 and 5) to ease the change from pre-school to primary school. Formal learning will be introduced gradually, and at a pace that matches pupils' level of development. This approach is in line with the priority being given to reducing underachievement and improving the life-chances of pupils as part of the Children and Young People's Fund proposed in the draft budget.
- The compulsory elements of the new curriculum will be much slimmer, but will still cover all of the key learning areas, and will include citizenship and physical activity. Employers tell us that many pupils leaving school lack skills in areas such as literacy, numeracy, ICT and an ability to solve problems and work in teams. The changes to the curriculum generally, and in particular at Key Stage 4 (age 14-16), will help to address these skills shortages and increase the employability of the new generation coming through schools.
- We are giving schools time to introduce the revised curriculum. Only the basic curriculum structure will be in place from September 2006. The new requirements about what must be taught and the assessment arrangements will be phased in from 2007 until 2010. Guidance will be available to schools towards the end of the current school year to give them at least a full year to prepare. More details on the new curriculum are available on CCEA's website [www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk)

### Decisions at age 14

- Up to age 14, all pupils will have studied a broad and general curriculum. Age 14 will be a key decision point for pupils, when they will begin two-year examination courses. Pupils will choose from a range of courses to meet

their future career plans and interests. The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning are working together to ensure that pupils will be supported with high quality careers advice and guidance within the school, and with independent advice and guidance from the Careers Service.

- Pupils should be able to see the range of different routes leading to different careers. People are familiar with the 'A' level route to higher education, but we need to show young people other routes, for example through modern apprenticeships or foundation degrees. Some examples of different routes are included at the end of the statement.

### Entitlement Framework

- The Entitlement Framework is a guarantee for all pupils of a minimum number and range of course choices (eventually 24 courses at Key Stage 4 and 27 courses at post-16). Pupils will choose which courses they wish to follow and how many. Most of the courses will be available in their own school and some pupils will also access courses in neighbouring schools, Further Education colleges or approved training organisations. Pupils will be able to study courses appropriate to their needs and in line with their career plans and interests. The Entitlement Framework will ensure that these opportunities exist for all pupils, not just for the few.
- The Entitlement Framework will **not** require:
  - schools to offer a set list of courses;
  - pupils to follow 24 or 27 courses;
  - pupils to follow academic courses, unless it suits their needs;
  - pupils to follow vocational courses, unless it suits their needs; or
  - all pupils to travel to access courses, or any pupils to travel for significant periods of the school day.
- Schools can choose the 24 and 27 courses which they feel are most suitable for their pupils from the extensive range of accredited courses available.

- Pupils will choose the courses best suited to their needs, interests and career plans, including the number and type of courses.
- Schools working together, with Further Education colleges and with approved training organisations is not new, nor is it unique to Northern Ireland. Other regions are already doing this and their young people are reaping the benefits of greater choice and flexibility. This is not about diluting the ethos of individual schools but broadening the opportunities for all pupils.
- It will take time for schools to develop plans for working with others to put the Entitlement Framework in place. There will be particular challenges for smaller schools or those in rural areas, but we are confident that schools and School Managing Authorities working together will be able to ensure that all pupils have access to the Entitlement Framework. However, we will monitor closely the progress of schools towards delivering the full range of courses over time to ensure that pupils get the wider choices and that this is a manageable process for schools.
- New vocational qualifications are being developed. We will work with employers, colleges and universities to ensure that vocational qualifications are seen as counting equally alongside GCSEs and 'A' levels.
- Widening the range of courses will provide young people with different learning environments and teaching styles in the Further Education sector. There has been massive investment in the facilities and equipment available in Further Education colleges and all young people should have the opportunity to make use of this, if they so wish. Pilot projects have already started to develop relationships between schools and Further Education colleges to the benefit of pupils.

### New Admissions Arrangements

- Pupils will continue to transfer to post-primary schools at age 11. Under the new arrangements, academic selection will end, with the last Transfer Tests to be held in Autumn 2008. Thereafter, parents will decide which school best meets their child's educational needs.

- A range of views were expressed in the consultation on the new admissions arrangements for post-primary schools. Government has carefully considered these views and has decided on the shape of the new arrangements.
- Arrangements will be parent-friendly and supportive. There are two main ways in which we will do this.
  - The **first** is the Pupil Profile, which we will be introducing for all pupils over the next 5 years. It will provide a range of information about a pupil's progress and capabilities throughout their education. It will help pupils and parents make choices and it will help teachers to plan their teaching for individual pupils.
  - CCEA has been developing, testing and refining the Pupil Profile over the last two years. The pilot work has, so far, received a positive reaction from parents.
  - Further testing and development will continue this year and we will involve more parents and schools in this process. Our key aim is to ensure that pupils, parents and teachers have confidence in the Pupil Profile.
  - Each year, teachers will complete a Pupil Profile for each of their pupils, based on pupils' work over the year – in a similar way as they do now with pupils' annual reports. During the year, teachers will be able to use different assessment methods, including some computer-based tasks, to inform and support their professional judgement. These will include the key areas of literacy and numeracy. These assessment tasks can also help teachers to identify high and low levels of performance and to tailor their teaching to individual pupils' needs.
  - The Pupil Profile will not be used to select pupils for post-primary schools. The draft Education Order we are publishing today will prevent academic selection – in any form – after the 2008 Transfer Tests (the main elements of the draft Order are outlined below).
  - The **second** is building a strong and trusting relationship between parents and their child's school. From Primary 1 onwards, parents will

discuss the Pupil Profile with their child's teacher– it will not just be 'sent home' to parents, other than in very exceptional circumstances. Schools will be encouraged to give extra help to any parents who may feel uncomfortable with this approach at first.

- These regular contacts with the school have been shown to work well elsewhere. They also help to develop community involvement with the school generally, and help teachers and parents to deal more easily with other issues that arise, such as discipline or special educational needs.
  
- We recommend parents to have discussions with post-primary schools before making up their minds about which schools to list in the Transfer Form. The steps we are taking should help parents feel more confident about approaching the schools they are considering. But we cannot and will not force them to have such discussions. The annual timetable for the admissions process will include enough time to enable these discussions to take place, should parents wish to take the opportunity. A brief outline of the annual transfer process for parents under the new arrangements is included at the end of this statement.
  
- Some popular schools will continue to have more applications than places are available. As now, schools will use admissions criteria to determine who will be admitted. There will be a menu of criteria for schools to choose from. The menu will provide schools with some flexibility to take account of different circumstances, for example, schools and pupils in towns and cities, and schools and pupils in rural areas.
  
- The main elements of the menu will be:
  - *Siblings currently at the school and eldest child;*
  - *a range of community/geographical criteria* - feeder primary schools, parish, child-centred catchment and school-centred catchment; and
  - *tie-breakers* - to be used only where other criteria are not capable of allocating places to remaining applicants. Random selection or measured distance from the school will both be included in the menu.

- The use of community/geographical criteria are likely to impact on the pattern of admissions. The details of these – and the other criteria – will be set out in regulations and we will be consulting on this in detail at a later stage. In preparing the regulations in relation to the community/geographical criteria, the guiding principles will be:
  - to retain as much flexibility as possible, so that schools can reflect their local circumstances; and
  - to ensure that the combined effect of the criteria does not result in postcode selection or social exclusion, and that it does not disadvantage pupils living in particular areas e.g. rural areas or pupils attending feeder primary schools that are not given an appropriate degree of priority for admission.
  
- It is intended that draft Regulations will be published in 2007 to allow for detailed discussion and consultation well in advance of the Regulations coming into effect to apply to admissions in the 2010/11 school year and future years.
  
- There will also be an important role for the new Education Authority to ensure that schools comply with the new admissions arrangements and apply their admissions criteria in an open and fair way.

### Better Buildings and Facilities for Schools and Colleges

- Pupil numbers are falling and this presents a challenge. Surplus capacity is a drain on resources. It is also unsatisfactory for pupils if they are in schools that can no longer provide a proper range of education because they are too small. We now have a major opportunity to ensure that we have buildings and facilities that are suitable for delivering education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Investing in schools and colleges is investing in our children's future. We will provide the buildings and facilities for learning, to ensure that every child is able to take the maximum benefit from their education.
  
- All school types will continue to exist under the new post-primary arrangements, including grammar schools. Schools will range from those with an academic emphasis, to those with a vocational emphasis, to those with a mix of vocational and academic provision, and specialist schools.

Specialist schools will broaden the choices available for parents and pupils and help to share expertise and good practice among schools to raise standards for all pupils. A pilot project has already started to test a Specialist Schools model in the Northern Ireland context.

### Suspensions and Expulsions

- Education that meets individual pupils' needs will better motivate them and help to reduce problems of indiscipline, which occur among a minority of pupils. There will nevertheless be occasions when it may be necessary to suspend or, more rarely, expel a pupil for persistent or serious misbehaviour. Last year the Department sought views on what changes should be made to the arrangements to ensure greater consistency and equity of treatment for all pupils. Following careful consideration of the comments, we have decided to introduce new arrangements.
- From 2007, all grant-aided schools will be required to follow the same suspension and expulsion arrangements. Education and Library Boards will decide if a pupil should be expelled. Parents and pupils will be able to appeal against this decision. As soon as practicable, the Department also intends to introduce a system of appeals against decisions to suspend pupils.

### Partnership

- This statement sets out the vision for the future arrangements for post-primary education, building on the strengths of our current education system. We have a unique opportunity to reshape post-primary education for the benefit of all pupils. The curriculum and post-primary reviews have been ongoing for several years. Now it is time for action, so that we put in place as soon as possible the arrangements to enable each and every one to achieve their fullest potential.
- Government cannot do this alone. We need a partnership involving pupils, parents, teachers, Principals, Boards of Governors and School Managing Authorities. I am fully committed to providing the clear leadership from Government.

- We must all work together and give our total commitment to providing the best possible education for all children, regardless of their background or circumstances.

### Draft Education Order

- New legislation will provide a key foundation for the reforms. A Proposal for a draft Education Order is being published today for consultation. It provides for:
  - the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum and its associated assessment arrangements;
  - the introduction of the Entitlement Framework;
  - the ending of academic selection, and powers to enable the Department of Education to make regulations about the admissions criteria for post-primary schools; and
  - new arrangements for the suspension and expulsion of pupils.
  - The Order also contains a number of other minor and consequential amendments to current education law.
- This is important legislation and I want educational interests, parents and the public to let the Department of Education have their views. Copies of the draft Education Order and explanatory document are being issued to all schools and key educational interests. Copies will be available on request from the Department and they are also available on the Department's website. Schools will receive copies of this document and a leaflet for parents to tell them how they can make their views known.
- The consultation period will end on 7 March 2006. I will consider the comments sent in and decide if any changes should be made to the Order before it is laid before Parliament for approval.

## Examples of how the new arrangements will benefit pupils with different career paths

**Patrick is 14:** Patrick's school offers a mainly academic curriculum. Patrick wants to pursue a career in law. He can continue his studies at his school, focusing on courses that will lead to 'A' levels, a GCSE in law and eventually a university place. The school will also be able to secure for Patrick some work experience in a local solicitor's office. Patrick is also able to take a short course in Employment Law through his local Further Education college to enhance his A Level studies.

**Sarah is 14:** Sarah's school offers a balanced mix of academic and vocational courses. Sarah wishes to pursue a career in physiotherapy and one day a week during Key Stage 4, she attends a local school offering a wider range of science courses to extend her range in that area. At age 16, Sarah transfers to a school with a larger 6th form to study 'A' levels for entry into a physiotherapy course at university. Sarah can also attend her local FE college in the evenings to take a sports injuries course that provides her with some background knowledge and skills prior to undertaking physiotherapy at university.

**Matthew is 14:** Matthew's school offers mainly vocational courses. During Key Stage 4, Matthew samples a range of vocational courses at his local FE college, where he develops an interest in Web design. At age 16, Matthew decides to leave school and take up a full time National Diploma course in e-Media at his FE college. On completion of this course he can choose whether to undertake further study for the Foundation Degree in Interactive Multimedia, or leave with a qualification and enter employment in the multimedia sector.

**Helen is 14:** Helen's school offers a mix of academic and vocational courses and she wishes to pursue a career in the care sector. Helen continues to attend her school to take GCSEs and also attends her local FE college one day a week to follow a National Certificate in Health & Social Care. This will enable Helen to either enter employment as a health worker, or progress to other vocational qualifications such as BTEC National Diploma in Health Studies, Care or Early Years, or the GCE in Health and Social Care.

**Jennifer is 16:** Jennifer's school offers a mainly academic curriculum and she wishes to pursue a career in engineering. Jennifer continues to attend her school to study two 'A' levels and also attends her local FE college one day a week to follow a National Award in Engineering, which is a vocational qualification designed to meet the work-related and progression needs of learners in engineering disciplines. She intends to seek a place at university.

**Michael is 16:** Michael's school offers a mainly academic curriculum. After sampling some vocational courses at the local FE college during Key Stage 4, Michael decides that he would like to eventually run his own plumbing business. Michael continues at his school, following a business management course with a focus on ICT and also attends his local FE college to follow a technical certificate course in plumbing that involves an element of work placement with a local plumbing company. Michael intends to leave school at 18 to take up employment with a plumbing firm and continue to study with his FE college on a part time basis to obtain an NVQ in Plumbing before setting up his own business.

**Paul is 14:** Paul attends a school that offers a broad mix of vocational and academic courses. At the beginning of Key Stage 4, following some independent careers advice, Paul expresses an interest in a career in medicine. Paul is able to take his GCSEs and A levels in his own school, to provide him with the necessary qualifications to obtain a place at university studying medicine, including a vocational GCSE in Health and Social Care.

## **NEW ADMISSIONS ARRANGEMENTS – STEP BY STEP PROCESS FOR PARENTS**

Many of these steps will be familiar to any parent whose child has gone through the transfer process recently.

### **P6 meeting with primary school – May/June of P6 year**

- Parents attend one to one annual parent-teacher meeting with P6 teacher to discuss their child's progress, including their P6 Pupil Profile.

*Primary school teacher/Principal will provide general information and advice, but will not recommend a specific school.*

### **Parents gather/receive information on a range of schools – from September of P7 year**

- Parents receive an information pack from their local Education and Library Board including the Transfer Booklet and a guidance leaflet explaining the transfer process.
- Parents and P7 pupils can attend Open Days/Evenings arranged by post-primary schools and obtain copies of school prospectuses. Schools will also have details on their websites which parents and pupils can access.
- Parents can arrange and attend informal discussions with prospective post-primary schools, if desired. Parents may take their child's P6 Pupil Profile to the meeting to inform discussions.

*These meetings are not compulsory and parents can decide whether or not to show the Pupil Profile to the post-primary school at or before the meeting.*

### **Parents complete Transfer Form – late November/early December**

- Parents meet with the primary school Principal to complete the Transfer Form, taking account of the information in the Pupil Profile and what they have found out about prospective post-primary schools.

### **Applications are processed – January-March**

- Post-primary schools receive Transfer Forms from their local Education and Library Board and begin processing applications. Where a school has more applications than places available, the school will apply its admissions criteria to decide which pupils to admit.

*Schools will draw from a menu of admissions criteria, but will not be allowed to use any form of academic selection as part of their criteria.*

### **Parents receive a letter confirming a school place – March**

- Parents receive a letter from their local Education and Library Board advising of the post-primary school into which their child has been accepted.

### **Appeals Process – April**

- Any parent who wishes to appeal the decision made must give notice of intention to appeal.

