

Entitled to Succeed

The Specialist Schools Concept: Year 2



Department of
Education

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

e2s
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INTRODUCTION

1. The “Entitled to Succeed” (e2s) Programme, aims to raise standards for all pupils in Northern Ireland, by providing high quality education in a flexible way to meet the educational needs of all young people. This education will be delivered in modern accommodation and supported by the most effective use of ICT. The e2s programme aims to provide parents with a wider range of schools from which to choose a school best suited to their child’s educational needs.
2. The introduction of the revised curriculum and the new post-primary arrangements provides increased flexibility and greater scope for schools to determine their own distinctive approach to the curriculum, taking account of the Entitlement Framework. It also provides an opportunity to explore the Specialist Schools concept, tailored for the particular needs of the Northern Ireland Education system. There is clear evidence of rising standards of attainment within Specialist Schools in England and the greater flexibility offered by the revised curriculum provides an opportunity to consider whether a Northern Ireland specialist schools model would contribute to raising standards as well as providing greater choice for parents and pupils.
3. The experience so far of last year’s pilot, and the evidence from the DfES model, demonstrates 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, rather than simply designation as specialist. The excellent standard set by last year’s applications clearly showed how **specialist schools identify and build on their particular curricular strengths and, by sharing good practice, secure whole school development and contribute to the development of good leadership in schools.** Requiring schools to take forward a community dimension, ie with other schools, FE Colleges, businesses and the wider community, also helps them move from the current environment characterised by competition to one of co-operation and collaboration.

4. The core objectives of the Specialist School concept in Northern Ireland are:
 - 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 FE Colleges.
 - 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.
 - 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.

5. The specialist school objectives are closely linked to the key aims of the e2s Programme and will contribute significantly to improving choice for pupils and parents and raising standards for all young people. Specialist schools are, by definition, outward looking and collaborative in their focus, and they will be at the cutting edge of the development of education in the coming years.

Application Process

6. Following a review of experiences to date of Year 1 of the pilot, the Department has announced the timetable and application arrangements for the next phase of specialist designations (see Annex A for the outline timetable). Schools in the first year of the pilot set a very high standard and the Department wishes to see this level maintained in future years.

7. It is important to recognise that the specialist initiative is a developing and evolving one and a number of significant changes have been made to the application process which schools underwent last year. The Department is

working with the ETI to assess and monitor our existing specialist schools and this information will continue to inform decisions about the future shape of the programme. This document outlines how the application process has changed in comparison to last year to ensure that e2s objectives continue to be met.

8. For the first year of the pilot, the Department used an initial sift to identify 12 schools to go through to the full application stage. For the second year of the pilot, where we hope to announce the designation of around 15 new specialist schools, **it has been decided to allow all qualifying schools to submit a full application.** 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 pilot **except** those schools:
 - currently in the School Support Programme; or
 - already designated specialist schools.

The Specialist Application Process

9. **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, both throughout your school (including your Board of Governors) and from your partners.**
10. Primarily, applicant schools will be expected to demonstrate that they have stable (but high) or rising standards of attainment within the Specialist area.
11. Applications must include:
 - A four-year School Development Plan (SDP).
 - A four-year Community Development Plan (CDP) 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 support grant of up to £100,000 and an outline of how this would be used.
12. The recurrent funding available to successful schools will be calculated on the basis of £100 per pupil for each of the years of designation. More details of how schools should complete an application can be found in the “Specialist Schools Application Guidance: Year 2” Document.
13. This is essentially the same process as schools underwent at Stage 2 last year. The major changes that have been made for this year’s process are outlined below:

Changes to the “General Case”

14. Last year’s schools were required to complete a general case section of their applications and were asked to explain the schools’ plans to link their specialism to a number of areas, including how designation would fit their plans to offer the Entitlement Framework. For the second year of the pilot, the general case section of the applications has been expanded and schools are explicitly required to demonstrate how specialist status would be used:
- to raise attainment, both in the specialist area and whole school improvement and what will be achieved over the 4 years of designation;
 - to assist the school’s implementation of the revised Curriculum, particularly in relation to Learning for Life and Work;

- to take forward the school's plans to offer access to the Entitlement Framework, *including the one third of applied/vocational courses*;
- to enhance career education, information, advice and guidance and progression;
- to develop ICT as a teaching and learning tool; and
- to develop links with other schools/FE/the wider community.

Changes to the School and Community Development Plans

15. Due to the limited time available to schools for the completion of their full applications in the first year of the pilot, emphasis in the guidance was placed on the School Development Plan (SDP), ie those parts of the application which focussed on setting targets for using the specialism to generate improvements within the applicant school. The guidance stated that schools should focus 70:30 in favour of the SDP. The second year of the pilot increases the emphasis placed on the Community Development Plan (CDP), the section of the application which sets objectives and targets for the school's work with other schools, FE and the local community. Schools are required to demonstrate in detail the depth of their existing and planned collaborative links, particularly with other post-primary schools, and how they are using these links to widen choice and open up pupils' options in preparation for delivery of the Entitlement Framework, in particular the applied/vocational element.
16. The first tranche of applicant schools were required to set objectives and targets with 5 other schools of which at least one must be post-primary. In order to further reinforce the specialist programme's place within the wider e2s context, this year at least 2 partner schools must be post-primary.

Education for Employability as an Integral Element of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) Provision

17. The first pilot schools were asked to complete a number of objectives and targets in both their School Development and Community Plans. In order to reflect a stronger emphasis in the second year on the wider context of the programme, applicant schools must provide an additional set of objectives and targets in both the School and Community Plans. These objectives should focus on how your school plans to connect the specialism to each of the strands of “Learning for Life and Work”, with particular emphasis on “Education for Employability” as part of the school’s provision for CEIAG.
18. Effective preparation for the world of work is an essential part of education and it is vital that the specialist school programme reflects this. The Department sees specialist schools, particularly with their strong links to other providers, businesses and community groups, as important drivers in helping young people realise their potential and, ultimately, creating a workforce capable of competing on a global level.
19. Following the introduction of the revised curriculum, Education for Employability as part of the school CEIAG provision will be an entitlement for all pupils. It requires a coherent and progressive approach across all year groups and requires the involvement of all staff, each of whom will have a contribution to make to this area of the curriculum. In the second year of the pilot, the Department expects applicant specialist schools to demonstrate how they intend to use their strengths in their specialist area of the curriculum to assist in the development of this area, both across the applicant school and with partner schools (including primary partners). The links to the local community and businesses and sponsors established through the schools’ specialist plans may also have great potential in this area.

Changes to the Specialisms

20. The development of ICT as a teaching tool remains one of the key strands of the e2s Programme. For Year 2, the development of ICT in all of the

specialisms, both within the schools and in terms of facilitating inter-school and community collaboration has become a more explicit requirement, with appropriate targets included within the schools' applications. With the role of ICT increasing across all specialisms, **the Department has removed this area as a stand-alone specialism** for the second year of the pilot, though Mathematics and Computing remains for those schools with curricular strengths in these areas. This decision in no way affects the status of the existing ICT specialist schools, who continue to operate within the parameters of the first year of the pilot and within the specialist programme as a whole.

21. In order to avoid any potentially expensive duplication of provision with the FE sector, Engineering has been removed as a specialism from the second year of the pilot.
22. The list of specialisms which was offered to schools in the first year of the pilot is a broad one, with as little prescription as possible, in order to allow schools maximum flexibility. For the second year of the pilot, the Department has again not specified the subjects that relate to each specialism and schools have the opportunity to demonstrate their strength in the subjects that they see contributing to the specialism. A full list of the available specialisms can be found at Annex B.

Other changes

23. The second year of the pilot differs from the first in a number of other important areas, summarised below:
 - The Department is considering permitting Special schools to submit applications. Interested schools should contact the 14-19 Team¹ to discuss this in more detail; and

¹ See "Specialist Schools Application Guidance: Year 2" for contact details.

- Dickson Plan Schools are permitted to apply via a joint application (ie 11-14 schools apply with 14+ schools). Please see Annex A of the Guidance document for further information.

Sponsorship

24. All of the 12 applicant schools last year were able to access the required £25K unconditional sponsorship, in some cases considerably more. For year two of the pilot, schools will again be required to obtain sponsor commitment to at least £25K (or, if they are unable to obtain the full amount, they must clearly demonstrate their efforts to do so). Nonetheless, the Department is aware of the particular difficulties that schools in Northern Ireland might have in raising this amount and schools' experiences will be closely monitored.
25. The Department would particularly welcome applications demonstrating imaginative plans for active sponsor involvement in drawing up and implementing schools' specialist plans. Sponsors might help draw up targets for work with other schools or community groups for instance and/or become involved in the monitoring and evaluation of the schools progress (sponsor representatives could be given a place on the school's Board of Governors for example). The increased focus of the pilot on Employability is another area where sponsor involvement might be potentially valuable.

Support for Schools

26. As in the first year of the pilot, support from the **Regional Training Unit (RTU)** will be available to schools throughout the process. On receipt of a school's request for an application form, the Department will forward the school's contact details to the RTU, who will be in contact to discuss the extent and nature of future support. The experience of the first year of the

pilot demonstrated the significant value that RTU support and guidance added to the process and to the efforts of the applicant schools. **The Department strongly recommends that applicant schools make maximum use of the support provided by RTU.**

28. How your specialist application fit into the developing collaborative arrangements in your area will be a key factor in how your application is assessed. 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 and the relevant Development officer(s) should be contacted during the application process.

Timetable for Year 2 of the Pilot

29. The application time scale is outlined in Annex A. Schools must be completely satisfied that they have the capacity to meet these timescales, as the Department will not grant a time extension to any school for completion of the application forms.

Evaluation of the Pilot

30. It will take some years to assess the full impact of a specialist approach on raising standards but, in the short to medium term, surveys of schools to gauge pupil, teacher and parent reaction together with ETI evidence will inform the roll-out of the programme. Given the key role that a school's own evaluation has to play in the whole school improvement process, this should also contribute to the evaluation of the pilot and, as with other self-evaluation processes, it will be quality assured by ETI. All schools in the pilot will be required to participate in the evaluation process.

PROPOSED TIMETABLE FOR 2ND ROUND OF SPECIALIST SCHOOLS APPLICATIONS*


DATE	ACTION
November 2006	Launch of 2nd year of pilot and invitation to schools to submit applications
30 March 2007	Closing date for receipt of applications
April 2007	Panel assessment arrangements in operation. Panel produces list of schools suitable for designation.
May 2007	Outcome of the application process and successful schools announced
September 2007	2nd tranche of schools open as specialists

** The timetable for assessing applications will be dependant on the number received, and may need to be reviewed.*

ANNEX B

SPECIALISMS UNDER THE E2S MODEL

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



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