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Specialist Schools Application Guidance

STAGE 2 FULL APPLICATION PROCESS

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Submitting an application

NB: Only schools who have been invited by the Department of Education following Stage 1 of the pilot process are eligible to apply at Stage 2.

Copies of the booklet "Specialist Schools Concept in the Northern Ireland Context" are available from the Policy Unit at the address below, or can be downloaded from the Department's website at <http://www.deni.gov.uk/pprbl/index.htm>

THE CLOSING DATE FOR THE PILOT SPECIALIST SCHOOL
STAGE 2 APPLICATION WILL BE:

NOON ON FRIDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2006

Applications should be forwarded to:-

Specialist Schools Pilot
Policy Unit
Room 404e
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Bangor BT19 7PR

The application form is available on the DE website at:
www.deni.gov.uk/pprbl/index.htm If you have any special requirements around the guidance or application form (e.g. large print, Braille), please contact: Policy Unit on 028 9127 9887.

Decisions on applications will be announced in March 2006.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Please organise your application in two parts:

- 1) Completed application form;
- 2) All sponsorship letters. 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. 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.

Please submit one printed copy of the application form and the supporting information requested and one electronic version of your application form. Electronic forms should be emailed to <mailto:lorraine.finlay@deni.gov.uk>

If you do not have access to email, please enclose a copy of your application on disk with the printed copy. Electronic copies of supporting information are not needed. 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.

Who should be involved in planning an application?

PLEASE NOTE THAT, DURING THE APPLICATION PROCESS, THE DEPARTMENT MAY SEEK COMMENT FROM SCHOOL MANAGING AUTHORITIES OR REPRESENTATIVE BODIES ON ANY APPLICATION.

Education and Library Board and/or CCMS

Your application for specialist status should fit in with other strategies/partnerships relating to the ELB/CCMS' planned provision for your local area and this will be assessed in the case your school makes.

NICIE, GBA, CnaG

Depending on your school type and that of the schools which you will link to under the Community Plan, you should consult any or all of the above organisations. Your Specialist application should, where possible, clearly increase the coherence of provision in your school's local area.

Local schools

Schools are strongly advised to use and develop their links to other local schools as part of the application process.

Others

You will also want to consider the learning and skills needs of your local community. For example, schools may wish to discuss with their local schools, FE College and training organisations links between their specialism and local post-16 provision.

It is important that schools should also keep parents and pupils informed throughout the application process.

Sources of support

The Regional Training Unit

Schools seeking support in completing this application may contact RTU at:

John Reid
Regional Training Unit
Blacks Road,
Belfast
BT10 0NB

Statutory and admissions implications

NB: Designation as a specialist school is not a statutory process and **does not result in any change in a school's admissions criteria.**

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS COMPLETING THE APPLICATION FORM

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
A: Relative focus on sections of the application form	6
B: General Case	6
C: School Plan	7
C.1 School plan audit	7
C.2 School plan objectives and targets	8
Implementation of the school plan	10
C.3 Outline of use of annual grant for 1st year	10
D: Community Plan	11
Partnerships	11
Key principles for the community plan	12
D.1 Community Plan Audit	13
D.2 Community Plan objectives and targets	13
Additional guidance re Community Plan	14
Implementation of the Community Plan	15
D.3 Outline of use of grant for 1st year	15
E: Monitoring and Evaluation of School and Community Plan ..	16
F: Funding	16
Capital Funding	16
The project outline	17
Recurrent Funding	17
G: Sponsorship	17
Eligibility	18
Supporting evidence	20
Receipt of sponsorship: verification process	20
Annex: Summary of attainment targets required in schools	23

A. Relative focus on sections of the application form

In drawing up their application, schools are expected to focus on the School and Community Plans in a ratio of approximately 70:30. The school plan must set out convincing approaches to raising standards in the specialist subjects **and** using them to drive whole school improvement.

B. General case

You should explain:

- ◆ how the chosen specialism will be used to raise attainment and what you aim to achieve in four years' time, if your school is designated;
- ◆ how you will promote your school's distinctive ethos and identity to widen pupil and parental choice; and
- ◆ how you will use the specialism to develop links with other schools, FE colleges and the wider community (including business and industry) to share effective practice through collaboration and to make best use of the existing resources in the local area.

You should also demonstrate how specialist status will fit in to your plans to offer access to the full Entitlement Framework in due course¹. Where appropriate, you should also demonstrate how specialist designation will fit in with your school's role in other collaborative initiatives (the Vocational Enhancement Programme for example), as well as other Government policies and initiatives such as A Shared Future, Neighbourhood Renewal, Health Action Zones etc.

¹ For further guidance, see DE Circular 2005/18 "Entitlement Framework – Initial Guidance"

C. School Plan

C.1 School plan audit

Your school plan will be based on a crucial first stage: a comprehensive audit of the school's current position in the specialist subject(s) and any areas for development. Your current School Development Plan², together with any supporting documentation will be very 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.

- a. Current attainment in Key Stages 3³ and 4 and, where appropriate, post-16 in the specialist subject(s); and how this contributes to the proportion of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C GCSE grades or equivalent.
- b. The quality of teaching and learning in specialist subject(s) and how that currently contributes to effective teaching and learning strategies in other parts of the curriculum.
- c. 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.
- d. Current uptake in specialist subject(s) in Key Stage 4 and post-16, including outside lesson time where appropriate.
- e. Resources for the specialist subject(s) including accommodation.
- f. The role of ICT in supporting teaching and learning in the subject(s) covered by your proposed specialism.
- g. Quality of management, including target setting; monitoring and evaluation; management of resources and; success of staff development policy/practice.

² 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.

³ Please contact the Policy Unit if you are unsure whether directly relevant KS3 targets can be set for the subjects covered by your specialism.

C.2 School plan objectives and targets⁴

Based on the audit, the main part of the school plan will set out your objectives, targets and implementation strategies, which, together with the capital project, are intended to both raise standards in the specialist subject(s) and deliver 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 grant. You should take care to pick up on any issues of underachievement and to 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; and an optional objective that can be used flexibly to cover other issues from the audit. Each objective needs briefly and broadly to cover the issues that the associated targets will pick up on e.g. attainment, provision/uptake, enrichment and (where appropriate) post-16.

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 your existing statutory targets 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 – to ensure that progress against targets/objectives can be measured.

- a. For the specialist subject objectives, the targets will reflect how (and how far) you are planning to raise attainment, increase provision/uptake and expand enrichment opportunities. Vocational/applied⁵ and work-related learning should be included in this.

⁴ Further guidance on target setting can be found in DE Circular 2005/15 "Target-Setting and Benchmarking" issued in June 2005.

⁵ For further information on applied/vocational courses, see the DE Circular 2005/18 "Entitlement Framework - Initial Guidance" issued in June 2005. For a full list of Approved Qualifications, see DE Circular 2005/05.

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- 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.
- b. 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.
 - ii) Qualitative targets are required in terms of how teaching and learning in the subject(s) relating to your proposed specialism will both draw on and help improve standards in other departments.
 - iii) You will also need to set 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.
- c. For all the above areas apart from attainment, 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
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and record new targets for Years 3 and 4 of designation as part of your own monitoring and review processes.

- d. The optional objective can be used to cover other issues arising from the audit, such as issues that cut across all the specialist subjects (building the capacity of staff to embed ICT, for instance), and must be accompanied by appropriate, outcome-based targets.

See Annex: Summary of attainment targets required in schools

We expect attainment targets in the specialist subjects to focus on GCSEs, including the new GCSEs in vocational/applied subjects.⁶

Implementation of the school plan

In the final column of the grid, you will need briefly to 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 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.

C.3 Outline of use of annual grant for 1st year

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 school plan should involve around 70% 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 4th year of the designation.

⁶ For further information on applied/vocational courses, see the DE Circular 2005/18 "Entitlement Framework - Initial Guidance" issued in June 2005. For a full list of Approved Qualifications, see DE Circular 2005/05.

D. Community Plan

In addition to proposals for a specialist centre of excellence within your school, you will need to develop a community dimension to your specialist plan – involving partnerships with:

- a. at least five other schools, at least one of which must be post-primary. Partnerships with special schools are welcomed and, where they have post-primary age pupils, they can ‘count’ as post-primary partners. High performing schools are encouraged to partner lower attaining schools; and
- b. wider community groups including local businesses/employers and the public sector.

Your plan will be about building excellence and expertise in your specialist subjects across and for your locality/region. **In doing so, you must respond to needs not currently met by you or others.** You should demonstrate that you are planning to develop co-operation with local schools and with local FE colleges, making best use of the existing resources available in the local area. This will involve close consultation with all your intended partners and more widely. You should take account of any specialist provision by local FE and HE institutions, adult/community learning centres etc, in order to avoid duplication. You should 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.

Partnerships

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 very specific projects with each partner school.

Key principles for the Community Plan and how it will be assessed:

- a. 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;
- b. 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;
- c. your school/wider community partners need to understand the aims of the programme, and that your school cannot meet all their needs. The 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 will consider how realistic your plans are;
- d. you can be flexible, focusing on different subjects within your specialism, or different partner schools/wider community groups, over the four year phase; and
- e. 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) or of weak departments in under-performing schools.

D.1. Community Plan audit

Like the school plan, the community plan is based on a comprehensive 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. 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 others) 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.

D.2. 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 up to 4 objectives – on your work with primary (or other) schools, with your post primary partner and with wider community

groups, plus a further, optional objective that you can use to cover/focus on other issues identified in the audit.

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.

- a. 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 but should 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); and
- b. 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.

Additional guidance re Community Plan

In terms of activities recommended for work with partner schools, priority options include the following:

- a. Linking the Community Plan to the school's and partner's plans to offer the full Entitlement Framework making best use of the existing resources available in the local area.

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- b. Expanding access to applied/vocational provision in the local area without duplicating what already exists.
 - c. Tackling underperformance – helping local schools that are struggling in a particular curriculum area.
 - d. Key Stage 2-3 transfer and transition, focusing particularly on ensuring robust curriculum continuity and learning progression.
 - e. 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”⁷.

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.

D.3 Outline of use of grant for 1st year

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 30% of the overall specialist recurrent funds. Although similar breakdowns are not required for Years 2 to 4, we shall look at how the money has been spent during the 4th year of the designation.

E. Monitoring and Evaluation of School and Community Plan⁸

Outline monitoring and evaluation strategies should answer 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? 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 are beneficiaries of the community plan involved in monitoring and evaluation? How will account be taken of their views?
- d. What data and other evidence do you need to collect to be able to tell how well targets are being met?

You will also need to indicate how you will approach refining and updating, where appropriate, targets for the second half of the phase.

F. Funding

Capital Funding

The capital grant of £100,000 must be used, together with the sponsorship raised, to enhance the school's facilities for the teaching of your specialist subjects.

⁸ 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" series helpful.

The Project Outline

An outline of the proposed capital project should be included in your application. This should reflect the needs identified in the audit by addressing any accommodation issues in the specialist subject areas to the extent allowed by the available capital sum. Should there be any additional costs associated with the Capital Project, the school must identify these and indicate how they are to be met.

Recurrent Funding

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

The amount of grant is based on pupil numbers taken from the September Pupil Count 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 financial-year basis (funding for the first year of the pilot will begin in April 2006, though official designation as a Specialist School will not begin until September 2006. The funding from April to September is intended to facilitate further detailed planning for the implementation of the School and Community Plans).

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 plan and also support the capital project.

Details of eligible and ineligible sponsorship are shown opposite;

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

INELIGIBLE	EXCEPTIONS (if any)
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 Policy Unit</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 capital 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 will 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.

For further information on any of the contents of this Guidance, or other aspects of the specialist schools concept here, please contact;

**Lorraine Finlay
Policy Unit
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Bangor
BT19 7PR**

Tel: 028 9127 9573

Summary of attainment targets required in the school plan – by Key Stage and specialism

Targets	Key Stage 3		Key Stage 4		Post-16	Whole school improvement		
	% of pupils in cohort attaining level 5+ (statutory tests) in...	% of pupils in cohort attaining level 5+ (teacher assessment) in...	% of pupils of entry attaining A*-C at GCSE or equivalent in...	Increasing % of pupils gaining a qualification in...	% of pupils gaining A-E at AS/A Levels in subjects relevant to specialism	average point score at KS3: English, maths, science (combined)	% of cohort attaining 5+ GCSEs or equivalent at A*-C	GCSE average point score – capped at 8 best
Specialism	the chosen specialist subjects ⁹	the chosen specialist subjects ⁹	the chosen specialist subjects	one or more of the chosen specialist subjects	∅	∅	∅	∅

⁹ Please contact the Policy Unit if you are unsure whether directly relevant KS3 targets can be set for the subjects covered by your specialism

Specialist Schools Application Guidance

STAGE 2
FULL APPLICATION PROCESS