

CHAPTER 9: IMPLEMENTATION

Context

- 9.1 The implementation of new post-primary arrangements will be challenging for every post-primary school and will require careful planning and a high level of commitment. While it will be for each school, in conjunction with other schools in the locality, to determine the pace at which they start to implement the necessary changes to deliver the Entitlement Framework, it will be important for schools to begin the process as soon as possible. The Department of Education should take steps to encourage and facilitate the changes with the view to creating the circumstances in which all aspects of the new arrangements are in place at the earliest possible date.

Schools Estate

- 9.2 The Entitlement Framework envisages a substantial expansion of the range and variety of educational choice available in our schools. This increased range will be provided primarily through partnership working between schools and with the FE sector and other providers. It will not therefore give rise directly to significant demand for additional buildings and equipment. However, the physical environment in which teaching and learning currently takes place in many of our post-primary schools is far from ideal and well below the standards required in the 21st Century. Creating a modern and attractive environment for learning is an integral part of the measures needed to ensure that schools are equally valued by the communities they serve and are seen to be providing a high quality educational experience for all pupils.
- 9.3 The Department should provide the strategic leadership in taking forward the planning and implementation of new arrangements. The relevant managing authorities should look fundamentally and critically at the physical facilities available to ensure that they are fit for purpose, of sufficient standard and that they are being used effectively. This review must be forward looking and take account of projected enrolment trends to ensure that facilities are not only adequate but are appropriately located. In addition, consideration should be given to reviewing the School Building Handbook to reflect the implementation of the new curriculum and the Entitlement Framework.

- 9.4 There is already a significant problem of surplus capacity in the schools estate, which is being exacerbated by the continuing demographic decline. Our proposals do not rely on a specified minimum school size. However, the diseconomies of scale experienced by small schools mean that many already have a more limited range of teaching expertise available and offer a more limited curriculum and range of enrichment opportunities, including clubs, societies and sports provision, than larger schools. It will be much more difficult for some small schools to achieve the range and variety of learning experiences and enrichment opportunities we envisage, even with partnership working. The need for rationalisation is therefore clear and urgent, for both demographic and educational reasons. We do not believe this should be regarded as a threat: it presents a real opportunity to effect much needed change and in so doing to free up resources – including teaching resources – that would contribute directly to the delivery of the greatly enhanced range of educational opportunities which we envisage. The Group recognises that, given the largely rural nature of Northern Ireland, the retention of a number of smaller schools is likely to continue to be a feature of our provision, albeit on a reduced scale and as part of an inter-related structure.
- 9.5 The Group is aware that the Strategic Investment Programme currently provides opportunities for substantial investment in the renewal of the schools estate. This has major potential for achieving the required realignment of provision within a shorter timescale than would otherwise be possible. However, it will be vital to ensure that the investment contributes to the achievement of the Entitlement Framework rather than merely consolidating existing models of provision. The availability of these resources adds to the urgency in taking our proposals forward: failure to do so in a timely manner could result in valuable resources being diverted to needs in other parts of the public sector. The needs of each locality should therefore be reviewed urgently and early decisions taken about the range of provision required and how best it should be structured, whether drawing from the examples of possible structures outlined earlier or other arrangements agreed at local level.
- 9.6 At a practical level, experience has shown that where rationalisation or amalgamations are proposed, it is essential to have an interim Board of Governors to take forward planning and recruitment etc, but at present there is no such provision in law. The Group recommends that the Department should seek such provision at the earliest opportunity.

Policy Areas

- 9.7 We discuss below several key policy areas that will impact on the new arrangements and we recommend that the Department review these policies to facilitate the delivery of the Entitlement Framework.

School funding

- 9.8 Delivering the proposed Entitlement Framework will require schools to make available additional provision, in cooperation and collaboration with other schools, FE institutions and other providers. In Appendix 8 we have identified where additional funding will be required to ensure delivery of the Entitlement Framework.
- 9.9 As well as providing additional funding, it will be important to ensure that the allocation of resources to schools is based on schools' needs under the proposed new arrangements. The current LMS arrangements are largely pupil based and provide additional resources to reflect the specific needs of schools - for example, where the school is located in two sites, or to help small schools to deliver the curriculum. However, neither the current formulae nor the proposed common formula would fully meet the needs of schools under the proposed new arrangements for post-primary education.
- 9.10 We believe that the LMS arrangements should continue to have a pupil focused element but should include enhanced elements to reflect the cost of providing the greater curriculum breadth, including partnership arrangements, specialisms, flexibility on enrolment numbers etc. It is outside the remit of the Group to determine what changes should be made to the LMS arrangements. However, we consider that the Department of Education should review the arrangements to consider how the LMS common formula should be amended to ensure that all schools are able to provide all pupils with full access to the proposed Pupil Entitlement, and to encourage collaboration between schools.

Open Enrolment

- 9.11 The current system of open enrolment enables parents to express, in order, their school preferences and schools are required to admit pupils up to their enrolment and admissions numbers. This creates competition amongst schools to keep up their pupil numbers; and competition amongst pupils for places in what are perceived to be 'good' schools. In the context

of a demographic downturn, the net effect is a diverse pattern of oversubscription and surplus places in schools. The competition for pupils between schools, which is also linked to the current funding arrangements, has the effect of hindering cooperation between them.

- 9.12 The Group has agreed that future post-primary arrangements must be pupil centred and that informed choice by parents and pupils will be fundamental to the new arrangements for admitting pupils to schools.
- 9.13 Under the Entitlement Framework, schools will be working in partnership to provide access to a wider range of educational opportunities for all pupils, irrespective of the school they attend. Schools will become more equally valued and parents will have a wider range of acceptable schools. This will reduce the potential for oversubscription and we believe that the policy of open enrolment will function more effectively under the proposed post-primary arrangements once the Entitlement Framework and the wider range of choices are available to pupils.
- 9.14 Currently enrolment and admission numbers, based on the physical capacity of schools, are determined by the Department of Education and can be varied by the Department in response to temporary pressures. Proposals for new post-primary arrangements will be determined locally, for approval by the Department, and we believe that there should also be greater flexibility at local level in relation to enrolment and admissions numbers. If a school agrees not to fill to capacity in support of local arrangements, they should not be penalised financially and the LMS funding arrangements should be amended accordingly. The aim is to secure provision which is in the best interests of all the pupils in the locality.
- 9.15 It will require careful management in order to establish successful new arrangements in each area. The Group believes that this could be achieved through a more flexible open enrolment policy involving the schools (through the LPDP) and the APDP. It will be important to keep the arrangements in each locality under review.

Transport

- 9.16 The current Home to School Transport policy is based on the principle of “nearest suitable school” as determined by the outcome of the Transfer Test and the preference expressed by parents when choosing a

post-primary school for their child from the established educational categories of controlled, maintained, integrated and Irish-medium, and in the grammar sector, denominational and non-denominational schools. Ending the Transfer Tests and changing to a system of post-primary school admissions based on informed parental choice means that the present definition of “nearest suitable school” will no longer be appropriate and should be reviewed.

- 9.17 The Entitlement Framework will provide a greater range of suitable schools within localities. This may have the dual impact of some pupils travelling shorter distances whereas others may decide to travel further. Age 14 is the point at which major decisions are made about learning pathways and it will be important that Home to School Transport policy is designed in a way that supports, rather than inhibits, those decisions. The Home to School Transport policy should therefore be reviewed to ensure that it supports and facilitates the implementation of the Entitlement Framework. Other transport resource implications linked to cooperation and collaboration are identified in Appendix 8.

Expulsion/Powers to Direct

- 9.18 The implementation of the Entitlement Framework, combined with the revised curriculum, will provide all pupils with education which they will see as more relevant to them. As a result, we believe pupils will be better motivated and engaged. We expect that this will lead to a decline in the incidence of behaviour which currently may result in expulsion.
- 9.19 We believe that schools should retain responsibility for the educational needs of all their pupils. Where a pupil is losing motivation or displays signs of disengagement, the school, with appropriate support as necessary, should review the provision made for the pupil in consultation with the pupil and parents. Schools should make available more suitable provision to meet the pupil’s needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations, in partnership with other schools, FE institutions and other providers. This could include a temporary placement, for example, to address specific behavioural problems but the aim should be to re-integrate a pupil into his or her school as soon as possible.
- 9.20 Expulsion should become a very exceptional occurrence and resorted to only where all other approaches have failed or in the most extreme circumstances. The Department of Education should review policy and

practice in relation to the arrangements for the placement of pupils who have been expelled.

Encouraging the Development of the New Arrangements

- 9.21 The success of the proposed arrangements will be heavily dependent on the availability of additional resources to enable the changes to take place. School managing authorities must have confidence that these resources will be made available to support the development and implementation of their proposals without impacting on the resources currently available for the classroom and that those children already in the system will continue to receive a high quality education while the changes are being introduced.
- 9.22 The Department of Education should seek additional resources for the development and implementation of the new arrangements. These should be focused on those schools which can clearly demonstrate that they can deliver the Entitlement Framework and meet the criteria. We recognise that this will be a developmental process for schools and the allocation of resources should take this into account. It is not possible at this stage to provide an overall estimate of cost because, by definition, this will emerge only after decisions are taken at local level on the form of provision to be adopted.
- 9.23 The need for additional resources falls into the following categories:
- developing new proposals;
 - delivering the Entitlement Framework;
 - implementing new arrangements;
 - capital investment; and
 - raising local awareness of new arrangements.

Details of areas which may be covered under each of these headings are contained in Appendix 8. We wish to emphasise that the list is not exhaustive but reflects the main resource issues identified during our discussions.

Information and Public Awareness

- 9.24 The proposals contained in this advice are wide-ranging and will impact on provision both at local level and more generally. Pupils, parents and teachers have a legitimate interest in any educational developments and will wish to understand what is happening, when and why. Parents should be aware of what the new arrangements could provide for their children. It is important therefore that the reasons for change and the benefits that will accrue should be fully explained to everyone. Providing information at local level will facilitate the engagement of the community in developing local arrangements so that the resultant provision can reflect local wishes, needs and circumstances.
- 9.25 The Group considers that a coherent and multi-stranded information and communication plan to provide information to teachers, parents, pupils and the wider public should be developed and implemented. This should identify the key issues requiring explanation and the various interest groups to be addressed.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- 9.26 Our proposals will involve significant changes to our system of post-primary education and it will be important that the implementation process is monitored to ensure that momentum is maintained and also to resolve any emerging difficulties. We propose that the Department of Education, advised by the Strategic Planning and Implementation Group, should have this function on an ongoing basis.
- 9.27 We have every confidence that our proposals represent the best way forward in the interests of all pupils. Nevertheless, given the complexity of the issues and their importance to our young people and the future of our society and economy, we believe that the proposed changes should be the subject of a full evaluation after they have been implemented. This will identify any issues emerging from the implementation of the new curriculum and the Entitlement Framework, including arrangements for cooperation and collaboration, the system of informed parental and pupil choice, and the outcomes from the new arrangements and make recommendations for any amendments to improve their operation.
- 9.28 We propose that an evaluation should not take place until the arrangements have become fully embedded, and parents and teachers

have become familiar with them and their operation. This process should include self-evaluation by LPDPs which should be quality assured by the Department of Education. We propose that the evaluation should take place 5 years after the date of the final Transfer Tests i.e. in 2014.

Key Recommendations

- The Department of Education should provide a cohesive and strategic approach to the planning and development of the schools estate.
- Schools and managing authorities should take a fundamental and critical look at the physical facilities available to ensure they are fit for purpose, of sufficient standard and used effectively.
- The Department of Education should review policies on school funding, open enrolment, school transport and expulsions/powers to direct and make the necessary policy changes to facilitate the development of new arrangements.
- The Department of Education should seek the necessary additional recurrent and capital resources to implement these proposals.
- A coherent and multi-stranded information and communication strategy should be put in place to provide information to teachers, parents, pupils and the wider public.
- The Department of Education should monitor the implementation of new arrangements on a continual basis and an evaluation of the new arrangements should take place in 2014.