



Department of
Education

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**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION EQUALITY
IMPACT ASSESSMENT:**

**‘EVERY SCHOOL A GOOD SCHOOL’: A
POLICY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT’**

September 2008

SEEKING YOUR VIEWS

The Department has decided to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment on its draft consultation document, 'Every School a Good School: A Policy for School Improvement.' You are invited to give your views on this draft assessment. The purpose of the consultation is to obtain:

- consultees' views on this draft assessment of the equality impacts of the policy; and
- any further information which could be useful in assessing those equality impacts.

When considering your response, the following questions may offer a useful guideline:

- Do you have any views on any of the aspects of equality covered in this draft assessment?
- Are there any other issues that have not been addressed? If so, what are these?
- Do you have any views on how the delivery of the Policy for School Improvement should be taken forward to effectively address inequalities and differentials?
- Are there any measures that should be implemented to mitigate against an adverse impact on people in the Section 75 equality groups?

We would welcome any additional information and comments that you feel would help inform our equality considerations of the draft Policy for School Improvement.

We would like to receive your comments by **31 October 2008**. We would encourage you to send your comments to:

SchoolImprovementConsultation@deni.gov.uk.

You can contact us by writing to us at the address below or by

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This document is also available on the following Internet site:

www.deni.gov.uk

Should you require this document in an alternative format please contact the above address.

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EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON PROPOSALS FOR A REVISED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT POLICY

Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 requires the Department of Education, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- people with different religious beliefs;
- people from different racial groups;
- people of different ages;
- people with different marital status;
- people with different sexual orientations;
- men and women generally;
- people with or without a disability;
- people with or without dependants; and
- people with different political opinions.

In addition, but without prejudice to duty above, the Department should also have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between people with different religious beliefs, different political opinions or from different racial groups.

This legislation requires public authorities to conduct an equality impact assessment where a proposed policy is likely to have a significant impact on equality of opportunity. In response to this, the Department of Education (DE) has decided that its draft consultation document, 'Every School a Good School: A Policy for School Improvement' requires an equality impact assessment.

This document is therefore the prepared Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for 'Every School a Good School: A Policy for School Improvement'.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE REVISED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT POLICY

Equality, the raising standards and the provision of high quality education are core elements of the overall strategy of the Department of Education. They command a very high priority because they are in the very best interests of every pupil attending a grant-aided school here and because, through a consistent and transparent approach to school improvement, we can make sure that no child gets left behind, and that every young person, regardless of social background, race or gender, has equal opportunity to succeed. As part of its contribution to the improvement agenda, DE has reviewed its current policy on School Improvement, in collaboration with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

The 2006 Westminster Public Accounts Committee report into literacy and numeracy and subsequent NIAO report highlighted real concerns about the achievement levels of schools in the north of Ireland and made clear the urgent need for a new approach that will raise standards, especially in disadvantaged areas, in a way that recognises good practice and tackles poor performance. It is now time to consider and review overall school improvement policy and the roles and accountabilities of all involved in the school improvement process.

The NIAO and PAC reports and further research highlighted the following features of the current system:

- over 20 per cent of children leave primary school without having achieved the appropriate level of performance in literacy and numeracy and almost 50 per cent leave post-primary school without a GCSE A*-C in English and Mathematics;
- the failings of the Department in respect of strategic leadership and target-setting;
- the under-achievement of boys;

- the significant differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic children in socio-economically deprived areas in achievement of GCSE English and Mathematics (and with their peers in Glasgow);
- the extent of the gap between the best and poorest performing schools; and
- the importance of raising standards of leadership in schools, the dissemination of best practice, the effective use of data for schools and teacher planning, the value of benchmarking performance and the involvement of parents.

The review has concentrated on the:

- a) Legislative requirements for the effective delivery of school improvement policy in terms of future roles, responsibilities and accountabilities and the content of future policy

The proposed school improvement policy sets out the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities as detailed below. These have already been through a consultation process via the RPA Stakeholders Group and comments received from this group have been considered during the policy development process. It is intended that these roles, responsibilities and accountabilities will be clearly set out in the new Education Order due to come into effect on 1 April 2009. They therefore include a specific focus on the respective responsibilities of:

- the school, which has the primary responsibility for ensuring that its ethos, its leadership, its organisation, its expectations, its pastoral care, its teaching and its curricular provision motivate the pupils and provide them with the opportunities to succeed
- ESA will be responsible for monitoring the performance of individual schools and for providing support, and where necessary challenge, to raise standards. The Authority will be accountable to the Department of Education for the effectiveness of the outworkings of these responsibilities. (ELBs and CCMS will to fulfil this role until ESA is established)

- The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) is responsible for promoting improvement through the inspection programme and through reporting the outcomes of schools' inspection to the Department, the principal and teachers, the Board of Governors, the ESA, the parents and others who need to know
 - The Department will determine the nature of the school improvement policy within the context of its overall education strategy, monitor and report on the performance of the overall school system, and hold the Chief Executive of the Education and Skills Authority accountable for the performance of the Authority in relation to school improvement.
- b) Make-up of current delivery programmes, particularly the SSP and Group 1 elements of the School Improvement Programme. (A review of the existing literacy and numeracy strategy is under separate review.)

The proposed policy is based on the premise that every school is capable of improvement through self-evaluation by way of effective use of data and it aims to move away from a “reward for failure” to a “reward for success” system.

This is not new to schools as they already self-evaluate by using a range of existing mechanisms, including school development planning and target setting, Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD), school development days, data, ETI guidance on self-evaluation, and the Education and Library Boards. However, inspection reports indicate that not enough use is made of data. To ensure educational accountability, the document sets out for consultation some suggested quality indicators for use by all involved in the school improvement process. These indicators will be used to provide an informed picture of a school's performance. In addition to these quality indicators, a range of contextual information will also be used.

The proposed policy also recognises that effective school improvement depends on a number of issues such as school leadership at all levels;

effective governance; support and challenge arrangements; self-evaluation and inspection; continuous professional development; Initial Teacher Education (ITE); and parental and community confidence and support.

1. DEFINING THE AIMS OF THE POLICY

- 1.1 The aim of this draft policy is to ensure that all schools in the north of Ireland achieve good standards and that all pupils, irrespective of geographical location or social background, are given the opportunity to achieve their full potential, and to develop the skills, knowledge and self confidence to make a positive contribution to society and the economy.

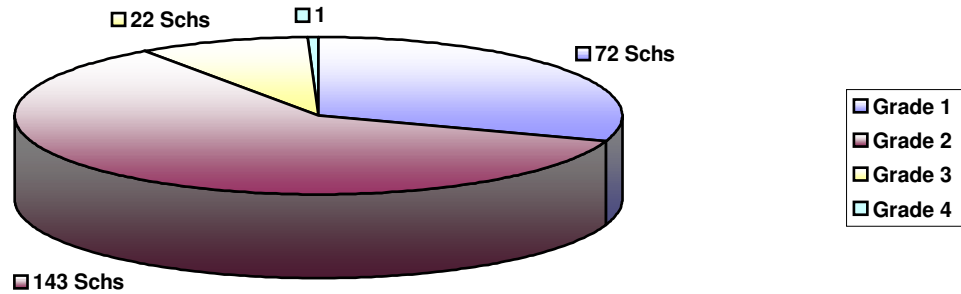
2. CONSIDERATION OF AVAILABLE DATA AND RESEARCH

- 2.1 While a range of qualitative data is collected by the Department annually and was considered in the policy development process, consultation sessions and the research commissioned by the Department also provided a wide range of views and qualitative data for consideration.

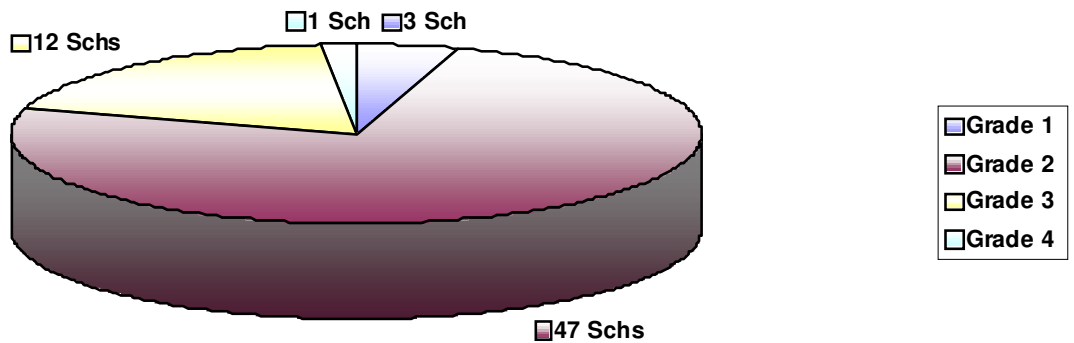
Quantitative Data

- 2.2 A detailed analysis of current performance, including the School Improvement Programme indicates that progress has been made over the past 8 years. The number of schools where fewer than 40% of pupils obtain 5+ GCSEs A*-C (or equivalent) has been reduced significantly and the number of schools where fewer than 20% of pupils achieve this level has reduced by half.
- 2.3 However, the data reveals a gap in performance between the top performing schools and those that perform less well and this gap is present in both the selective and non-selective post-primary schools and in the primary phase. This view is reinforced by inspection evidence which reveals that as many as 12% of schools inspected have significant weaknesses or weaknesses which outweigh their strengths.

**Inspection Grades for 238 Primary Schools inspected
2003/04-2005/06**



**Inspection Grades for 63 Post-primary Schools inspected
2003/04-2005/06**



2.4 During 2002-04 the Inspectorate carried out 134 inspections in the primary sector, including 129 focussed inspections that centred on the quality and effectiveness of English or mathematics, information communication technology (ICT) and pastoral care and child protection. In almost all the inspections the overall quality of the school was

satisfactory or better. Some areas highlighted for improvement in the primary sector included: -

- Monitoring and evaluation;
- Provision for special education;
- Use of assessment information to track children's progress;
- Supporting the needs of individual children; and
- Insufficient integration of ICT into the wider curriculum.

2.5 In the post-primary sector the Inspectorate paid particular attention to the extent to which the school engaged in self-evaluation leading to self-improvement. The process of self-evaluation was supported within schools by ETI's publication of Together Towards Improvement that promotes the self-evaluation process and provides guidance for principals to develop this process in a more systematic way. Some areas highlighted for improvement included: -

- The performance of low and under attaining pupils at GCSE and the need to continue to reduce the proportion of boys who leave school with no qualifications;
- Further embedding of ICT across the curriculum;
- Leadership in a minority of schools;
- Monitoring and evaluation in a minority of schools; and
- The need to make more effective use of data analysis and benchmarking to influence classroom practice and improve standards.

2.6 In terms of performance at Key Stage 2, analysis of the numbers of schools where performance has been below 50%, shows that, following the launch of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in 1998, there was a sharp decline in the number of schools with lower levels of performance but there has been little progress in the latter years of the survey period. In considering this evidence it is worth noting that in some instances a school may have had a small cohort of pupils undergoing assessment and the picture may therefore be distorted,

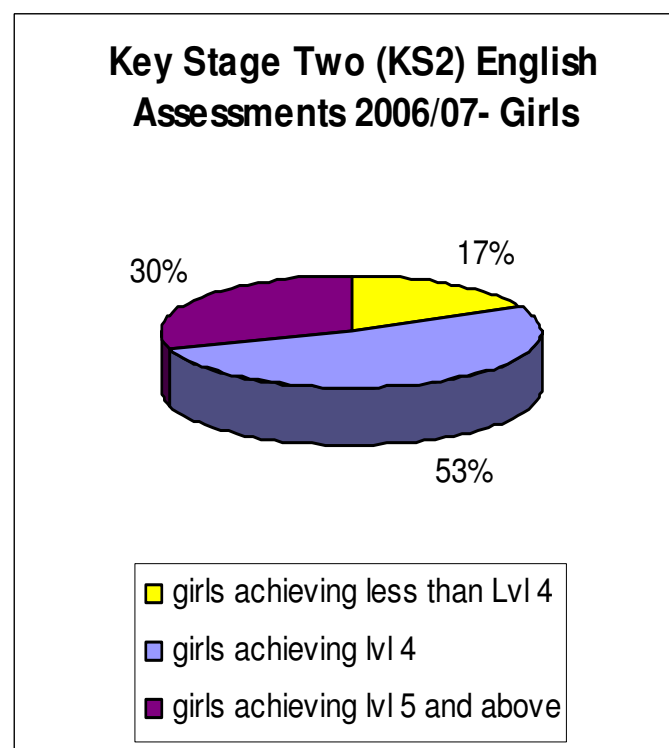
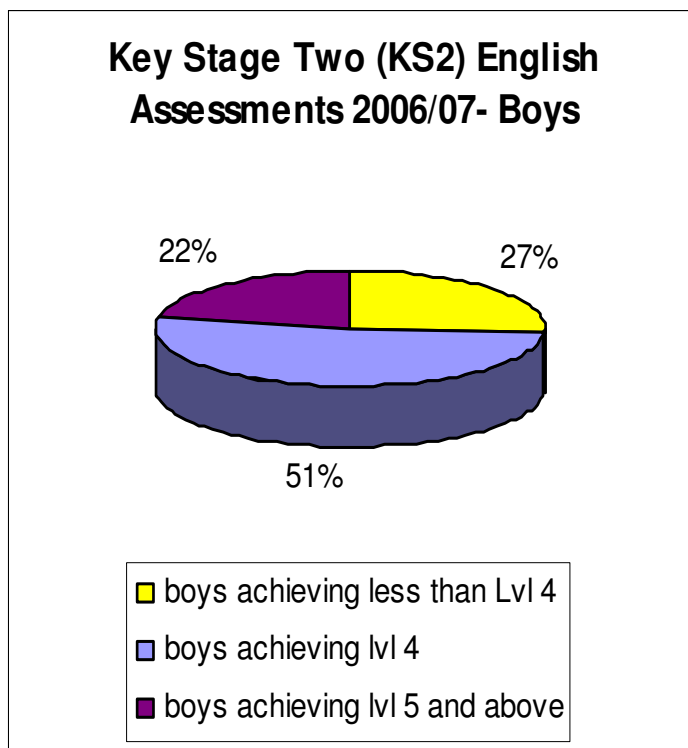
especially if the year group included a significant number of low ability pupils. It is also worth noting that the individual schools with performance below 50% will vary from year to year.

- 2.7 However the general point remains, that although there have been improvements in terms of the percentage of pupils performing at the expected level, (67.0% achieving Key Stage 2 Level 4 or above in English in 1998 to 78.0% achieving this standard in 2007 and 72.2% achieving Key Stage 2 Level 4 or above in Maths in 1998 to 79.5% achieving this standard in 2007), there are many schools where performance is well below average and at any time the number of schools with less than 50% of pupils performing below the expected level could be as high as 100.
- 2.8 The percentage of pupils with 5+ GCSEs Grades A*-C (or equivalent) has increased from 55% in 1998 to 64% in 2007. However, an analysis of GCSE performance also reveals that although 64% of pupils are achieving 5 GCSEs Grades A*-C (or equiv) only 52% of pupils are achieving 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C which include English and Maths – a gap of 12 percentage points. In 1997/98 this gap was 8 percentage points.
- 2.9 At an individual subject level, grades A*-C in English have increased by 3.6 percentage points from 59.8% in 1999 to 63.4% in 2007. While in mathematics performance has improved by 3.5 percentage points from 55.3% in 1999 to 58.8% in 2007.

Differing Attainment Levels between Girls and Boys

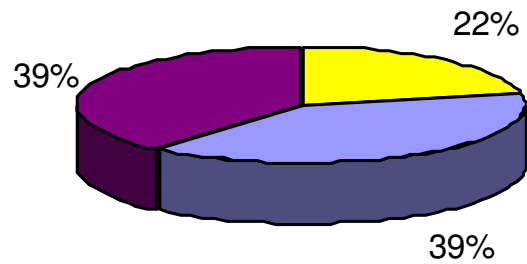
The pie charts below clearly identify the attainment gap at Key Stage 2; Key Stage 3 and GCSE achievement between boys and girls:

Key Stage Two



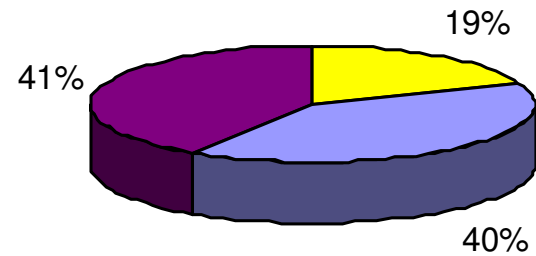
Source: DE

Key Stage Two (KS2) Maths Assessments 2006/07- Boys



- boys achieving less than Lvl 4
- boys achieving lvl 4
- boys achieving lvl 5 and above

Key Stage Two (KS2) Maths Assessments 2006/07- Girls

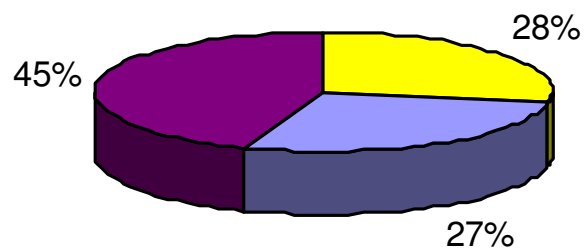


- girls achieving less than Lvl 4
- girls achieving lvl 4
- girls achieving lvl 5 and above

Source: DE

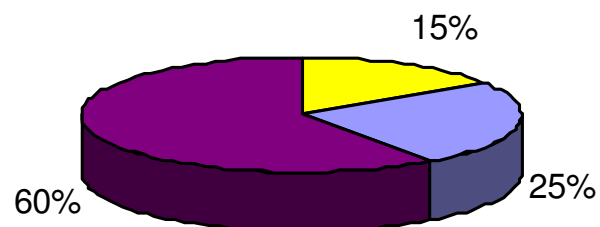
Key Stage Three:

Key Stage Three (KS3) English Assessments 2006/07- Boys



- boys achieving less than Lvl 5
- boys achieving Lvl 5
- boys achieving Lvl 6 and above

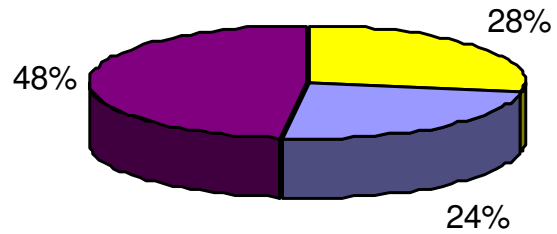
Key Stage Three (KS3) English Assessments 2006/07- Girls



- girls achieving less than Lvl 5
- girls achieving Lvl 5
- girls achieving Lvl 6 and above

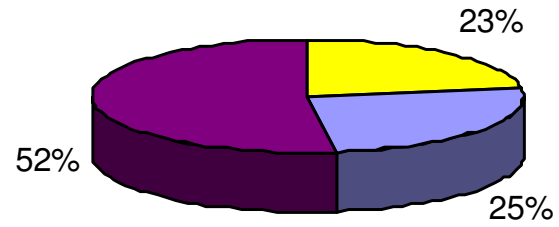
Source: DE

Key Stage Three (KS3) Maths Assessments 2006/07- Boys



- boys achieving less than Lvl 5
- boys achieving Lvl 5
- boys achieving Lvl 6 and above

Key Stage Three (KS3) Maths Assessments 2006/07- Girls

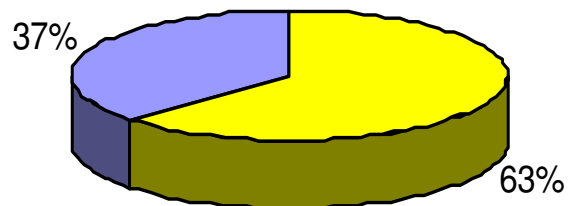


- girls achieving less than Lvl 5
- girls achieving Lvl 5
- girls achieving Lvl 6 and above

Source: DE

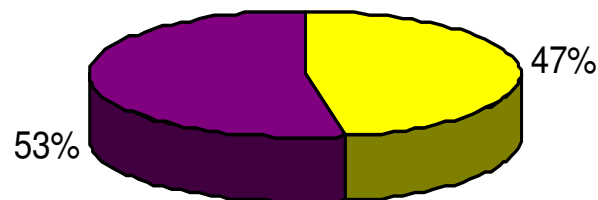
GCSE

**Percentage of Year 12 Boys
achieving 5+ GCSEs
Grades A*-C (or equivalent)
2006/07 - Non-selective**



- boys not achieving 5+ GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C
- boys achieving 5+GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C

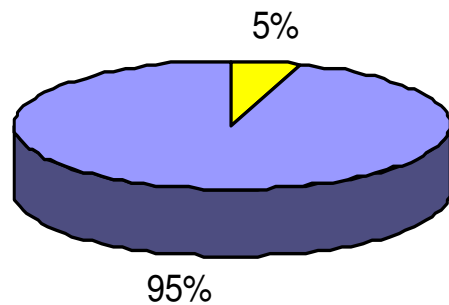
**Percentage of Year 12 Girls
achieving 5+ GCSEs
Grades A*-C (or equivalent)
2006/07 - Non-selective**



- girls not achieving 5+ GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C
- girls achieving 5+GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C

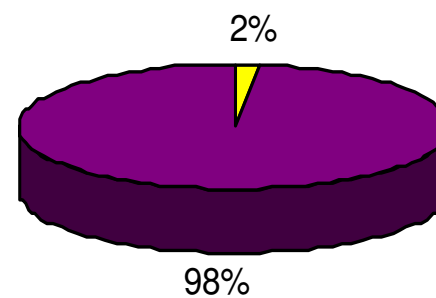
Source: SAER

**Percentage of Year 12 Boys
achieving 5+ GCSEs
Grades A*-C (or equivalent)
2006/07 - Grammar**



- boys not achieving 5+ GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C
- boys achieving 5+GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C

**Percentage of Year 12 Girls
achieving 5+ GCSEs
Grades A*-C (or equivalent)
2006/07 - Grammar**



- girls not achieving 5+ GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C
- girls achieving 5+GCSEs (or equivalent) Grades A*-C

Source: SAER

Differing attainment levels between pupils from different school managements

KS2 Assessments - English & Maths by Management Type - Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 and above

KS2 - Percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 and above			
	Key Stage 2 Assessments	2005/06	2006/07
RC Managed	English	77.6	77.2
	Maths	79.5	78.7
Other Managed	English	78.2	78.7
	Maths	80.3	80.2

Source: DE

KS3 Assessments - English & Maths by Management Type - Percentage of pupils achieving level 5 and above

KS3 - Percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 and above			
	Key Stage 3 Assessments	2005/06	2006/07
RC Managed	English	77.7	79.3
	Maths	73.6	74.6
Other Managed	English	75.5	77.4
	Maths	72.2	74.3

Source: DE

Percentage of Year 12 Pupils in All Post-Primary Schools GCSEs by Management Type

Management	Achievement	2005/06	2006/07
RC Managed	5+ GCSEs Grades A*-C (or equivalent)	63.6	66.5
	5+ GCSEs Grades A*-G (or equivalent)	88.7	91.8
	No GCSEs	3.7	2.0
Other Managed	5+ GCSEs Grades A*-C (or equivalent)	62.5	62.8
	5+ GCSEs Grades A*-G (or equivalent)	90.7	91.2
	No GCSEs	2.6	2.2

Source: Summary of Annual Examination Results

GCSE English and Maths results for NI school leavers by Ethnic Origin¹ 2006/07

	White ²		Other ²	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
GCSE English A*-C	15894	64.9	158	52.1
GCSE Maths A*- C	14680	59.5	153	50.5
GCSE English and Maths A*-C	13609	55.5	137	45.2
GCSE English A*-G	21972	89.7	225	74.3
GCSE Maths A*-G	21841	89.1	224	73.9
GCSE English and Maths A*-G	21235	86.7	212	70.0
Total Leavers	24500	100.0	303	100.0

Source: School Leavers Survey 2006-07

¹ Excludes special and independent schools

² 'Minority Ethnic Groups' includes Irish Travellers. The 'White' figures do not include Irish Travellers

HIGHEST QUALIFICATION OF SCHOOL LEAVERS BY ETHNIC ORIGIN⁽¹⁾

	2006/2007	
	TOTAL	
	Numbers	%
WHITE⁽²⁾		
A levels		
3 or more (or equivalent) ⁽³⁾	9555	39.0
2 (or equivalent) ⁽³⁾	1360	5.6
1 ⁽³⁾	633	2.6
GCSEs		
5+ A*-C (or equivalent) ⁽⁴⁾	4353	17.8
1-4 A*-C (or equivalent) ⁽⁴⁾	4885	19.9
Other grades (1+ D-G) ⁽⁵⁾	2791	11.4
5+ A*-G (or equivalent) ⁽⁶⁾	10237	41.8
1-4 A*-G (or equivalent) ⁽⁶⁾	1792	7.3
No GCSEs ⁽⁷⁾	923	3.8
No Formal Qualifications ⁽⁸⁾	717	2.9
TOTAL WHITE	24500	100.0
MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS⁽²⁾		
A levels		
3 or more (or equivalent) ⁽³⁾	125	42.6
2 (or equivalent) ⁽³⁾	16	6.4
1 ⁽³⁾	9	2.8
GCSEs		
5+ A*-C (or equivalent) ⁽⁴⁾	44	15.2
1-4 A*-C (or equivalent) ⁽⁴⁾	50	15.6
Other grades (1+ D-G) ⁽⁵⁾	33	9.2
5+ A*-G (or equivalent) ⁽⁶⁾	102	31.2
1-4 A*-G (or equivalent) ⁽⁶⁾	25	8.9
No GCSEs ⁽⁷⁾	26	8.2
No Formal Qualifications ⁽⁸⁾	24	7.8
TOTAL MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS	303	100.0

The numbers of pupils in individual ethnic groups are not sufficient to support any meaningful statistical analysis.

NOTES

- 1 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 2 'Minority Ethnic Groups' includes Irish Travellers. The 'White' figures do not include Irish Travellers.
- 3 Includes AVCE qualifications.
- 4 Includes Grades A*-C only and GNVQ Intermediate qualifications.
- 5 Includes Grades D - G only and GNVQ Foundation qualifications.
- 6 Includes GNVQ Intermediate and GNVQ Foundation qualifications.
Includes those who undertook no GCSE examinations or obtained no graded results but who obtained other qualifications such as RSA,
- 7 Pitman, City and Guilds etc.
- 8 Includes only those with no qualifications of any kind.

NB The non-shaded rows sum to the total. Figures in the shaded rows overlap with other rows. In addition, there are 24 pupils for whom an Ethnic group was not given.

Results achieved by the Travelling Community

2.10 From a total of 78 school leavers from the Travelling community during the period 2003/04 to 2006/07, 9 pupils achieved at least 5+ GCSE Grades A*-C (or equivalent), the accepted standard for entry into further education or onto the employment ladder and 18 pupils achieved at least 5+ GCSEs Grades A*-G (or equivalent)

Qualitative Data - Research

2.11 The research, undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) covered: -

- 'Literacy and numeracy of pupils in the north of Ireland', which considered the outcomes in literacy and numeracy at school-level, explore the international literature on boys' underachievement and examine the differences between high and low performing schools; and
- 'Good practice in literacy and numeracy in British and Irish cities where the level of social deprivation is comparable to, or worse than, Belfast' which sought to identify the measures which are working successfully in delivering better literacy and numeracy outcomes in comparator cities elsewhere in Great Britain and Ireland.

Main Findings

2.12 In an analysis of school performance in English and maths by location and sector, there was evidence that there are some clusters of underperformance in schools in Belfast and in the controlled sector. However, while the analysis identified specific issues in regard to some schools in the controlled sector, it should be remembered that the factors impacting on attainment are complex and interactive (including socio-economic context and gender) and that generalisation is therefore difficult.

2.13 In discussion with school principals, it was suggested that reasons for the 'long tail' of underachievement included:

- A lack of parental involvement in their children's education;

- A perceived lack of value placed on education in certain areas, particularly deprived Protestant areas;
- A shortage of positive role models;
- The impact of 'the conflict';
- A decline in the readiness for schooling of pupils entering primary school in recent years (e.g. in terms of behaviour, linguistic development etc);
- A lack of baseline data on young children, hindering early intervention in schools;
- The transition between pre-school and primary and between primary and post-primary schools; and
- A lack of strategic direction and consistency of approach at the system level.

2.14 In the local authorities and cities identified as having similar levels of Free School Meals (FSM) entitlement as Belfast, social deprivation and a lack of parental involvement in their children's education were thought to be the main factors impacting upon attainment. Gender was also an issue, with many respondents identifying the performance of (some) boys as an area of concern.

Boys' Performance

2.15 In 2006, the NI Audit Office and House of Commons Public Accounts Committee identified boys' performance as a key issue in the North of Ireland. The gender gap in educational attainment to the benefit of girls is a feature of many developed countries. PwC's review of the current national and international literature demonstrates that there is no single explanation for the attainment gap between boys and girls. Furthermore, while not all boys underperform, those from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds are more at risk. The most commonly cited factors include:

- Perceptions of literacy activities as 'female';
- Gender stereotyping on the part of teachers;
- The greater vulnerability of boys to poor teaching;
- The greater likelihood that boys are less ready to commence formal schooling;

- A greater proportion of learning activities which require a prolonged attention span;
- Changing patterns of employment and higher expectations of girls;
- Peer group cultures;
- A greater incidence of behavioural problems such as ADD/ADHD amongst boys; and
- A lack of male role models including fathers and male teachers.

2.16 Measures to improve boys' performance, based on good practice from international literature were identified as follows:

Individual approaches:

- Individual target-setting; and
- Mentoring (older boys, adults in school or wider community).

Pedagogical approaches:

- Flexing style to meet needs of individual;
- Setting aims, objectives and targets, building on previous learning;
- Using a variety of activities, including practical work, use of ICT (including interactive whiteboards) and 'real situations';
- Use of texts (fiction and non-fiction) that appeal to boys; and
- Positive and forward-looking feedback.

Whole-School approaches:

- All teachers acting as literacy teachers;
- Roles and responsibilities of school leadership;
- Ethos of high expectations;
- The effective use of data;
- Single-sex groupings for some subjects; and
- Strategies for parental involvement.

System-Wide approaches:

- Early intervention;

- Professional development;
- The role of the inspectorate in disseminating best practice; and
- The dissemination of best practice.

What are the lessons from the comparator cities?

- 2.17 Throughout this research, respondents stressed that ‘one size did not fit all’ and that the more successful local authorities and schools cherry picked those aspects of national strategies which best suited their circumstances. There is some evidence from the literature however that a more faithful adherence to the implementation of improvement initiatives is linked to better outcomes.
- 2.18 Findings suggest that while there is a broad range of literacy and numeracy initiatives and strategies that were reported to support improvement, there are a number of common characteristics to these approaches, including: -
- Raising self-esteem and expectations through, for example, having high expectations of all learners and demonstrating the value of learning to children at an early age;
 - Using data effectively to track and monitor pupils’ progress and to set challenging targets for all pupils including those with SEN, EAL, looked after children, minority ethnic groups and those who are socially or economically disadvantaged;
 - Linking self-evaluation and school development planning to pupil achievement data;
 - Focusing on high quality teaching and learning. Effective and improving schools have a clear work scrutiny system for regularly reviewing the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders in these schools regularly observe lessons, give feedback to staff on the quality of teaching and learning and provide support to teachers who may be experiencing difficulties;
 - Personalising learning, through focusing on the pastoral needs of pupils and by tailoring teaching to individual learning needs (as informed by effective data analysis), styles and preferences;

- Focusing on family learning and engaging parents as partners to encourage parental involvement in their children's schooling and by stimulating their interest in their own learning;
- Making learning fun by using games, competitions, events, visits and play as a basis for learning in literacy and numeracy;
- Exploiting the potential of ICT through whiteboards and computer games and other resources; and
- Taking a whole-school approach, emphasising the importance of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum and consistency in teaching methodologies both within and between phases. In Ireland, for example, there is a drive to ensure that every primary and post-primary teacher has a SEN role.

2.19 These research reports are available for download from the Department of Education website (http://www.deni.gov.uk/no_49-2.pdf http://www.deni.gov.uk/no_50-3.pdf). The findings and the data which supports them have been fed into not only this EQIA but also the revised Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

Pre Consultation Discussions

2.20 Qualitative data was also gathered by submitting, at an early stage of development, outline proposals for this policy to the Review of Public Administration Stakeholders Group. The views received from this group were considered as the policy developed. The Department also consulted with the Senior and Assistant Senior Education Officers from the Education and Library Boards and met with Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and the NI Council for Integrated Education. Informal consultation with principals and pupils was also held across the region. These sessions were also attended by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the Governing Bodies Association (GBA). Some of the views received from principals on the proposed changes to the school improvement policy included:

Teacher Quality

- Importance of creating excellence and furthering staff development

- Crucial need for a revised Regional Training Unit role
- Inspection needs to change – the school itself should look at quality of teaching and ETI should take a quality assurance role

Leadership

- Need a method of maintaining upper levels of management

Data

- Identification of a baseline is critically important so that like is compared with like
- Too much focus on attainment levels/results – loses focus on pupils
- Timing of availability of results to inform School Development Plans
- Support for emphasis on School Development Planning and self-evaluation
- Need standardisation for pupils on entry to school to determine value-added. It was recognised that measurement at a primary level required more consideration
- The quality of current data and the lack of baselines was a major concern
- Welcomed benchmarking – use to see how other schools in a similar situation are doing
- It was accepted that the quality indicators would not be perfect so how could they be incontestable
- It was agreed that knowing how to use the data was the most important issue. Data cannot provide answer, only raise questions. This would be a major change for teachers in terms of teaching and learning and general improvement. It would also help BoGs to see and chart a school's progress
- Reference to ETI's self-evaluation tool, Together Towards Improvement (TTI) – where these not already the quality indicators to be used in self-evaluation? It was felt that these were too extensive
- Need for sensitivity in use of language on school performance

Parent/Community Links

- Need to challenge own and parents' perceptions
- Glad that support of pupils, parents and community included in policy

Other

- Current system meets needs of the class not the individual – need to focus on child
- Like idea of celebrating success
- Concern about appropriate specific support
- Acknowledgement of success should be introduced
- Consideration needs to be given to the function of the Board of Governors
- Need compatibility with criteria for sustainable schools
- Support that additional resources is not the answer
- Need for strategic planning
- Needs to be better dissemination of information about what is going on in the field of education
- While revised curriculum will help to raise standards, the relationship between teacher and pupil will have a greater impact
- Need better links between education and the economy
- Need to review language of inspection e.g. visiting teams, areas for improvement and not weaknesses
- Look at fixed timescale of inspections
- Good that all schools will be included in the policy – more open and fair
- Culture of school is fundamental – this needs to be measured
- Weary that the issue of an exit strategy is linked to sustainable schools policy and the Bain Report
- The number of new nationals in the North of Ireland was raised as an issue of concern
- A lack of success may not be school-based i.e. problems at home – whole extended school agenda needed to be considered in line with any SI policy

2.21 Pupils were asked for their views on what makes a good school. Some of the views received were as follows: -

Teacher Quality

- Enthusiastic teachers with good knowledge of their subjects providing a relaxed atmosphere
- Variation in teaching methods

- Good teachers who are well qualified and who do things outside of standard school hours
- Variations in types of learning

Leadership

- Good pupil/teacher relationships (ethos and atmosphere of school)
- A more consultative approach (more of a wider system approach)

Data

- Focus on educational standards and not things like school uniform, sports etc

Parent/Community Links

- More links with the community

Other

- Provision of a good balance of activities including extra curricular
- Student council so that pupils' views are expressed
- Friendly environment where everyone knows your name
- Educational Maintenance Allowance properly used and available to everyone
- Smaller classes
- Name of school not indicative of type of school
- ICT introduced early in school
- Warm-up session with teachers to take place before the start of each school year
- Good facilities/accommodation and learning resources
- Good subject choices (broad and balanced curriculum)
- More after school facilities (extended schools)
- More specialism in subjects
- Good pastoral care
- Good, tailored resources
- Choice of vocational qualifications (new curriculum)
- Non academic 6th form year
- Good IT facilities
- An opportunity to take an active role i.e. student councils, mentoring etc.

- Atmosphere of good behaviour and respect

2.22 Further data, both quantitative and qualitative was collated through research commissioned by the Department into literacy and numeracy in our schools.

3. CONSIDERATION OF IMPACT

3.1 In accordance with the guidelines, the Department is required to assess whether there is a differential or adverse impact on the Section 75 groups. In making this assessment the Department is aware that the duty goes beyond the necessity not to discriminate (either directly or indirectly) in respect of the groups.

3.2 An assessment of the possible impacts of the Department's revised School Improvement Policy is set out below:

(i) Religion

As noted above, in the research undertaken by PwC, there was evidence that there are some clusters of underperformance in schools in the controlled sector. However, while the analysis identified specific issues in regard to some schools in the controlled sector, it should be remembered that the factors impacting on attainment are complex and interactive (including socio-economic context and gender) and that generalisation is therefore difficult.

The draft School Improvement Policy seeks to raise attainment across all schools. The Department does not believe that the policy will adversely affect pupils of different religious beliefs.

(ii) Political opinion

The Department does not believe that the policy will affect young people adversely as a result of their political opinion.

(iii) Racial groups

The Department does not believe that the policy would have an adverse impact on pupils of different racial group. We believe that the policy will promote equality of opportunity for young people from different racial groups, particularly Travellers and those whose first language is not English.

Age

The Department accepts the importance of early identification of any problems being encountered by individual pupils and having appropriate interventions put in place before any problems become intractable. The policy is applicable to all young people between the ages of 4 and 19 and the Department does not believe that it will have any adverse impact on any group within these age ranges.

(iv) Marital status

The Department does not believe that the policy would have any adverse impact on pupils regardless of their marital status as it is focused on pupils during their compulsory schooling which ends at 16.

(v) Sexual orientation

The Department does not believe that the strategy would have any adverse impact on pupils of differing sexual orientation.

(vi) Gender

As noted above the PAC report highlighted the underperformance of (some) boys as an issue to be addressed. The school improvement policy is applicable to all pupils and to all grant-aided schools and as such the Department does not believe that the policy would have an adverse affect on pupils because of their gender. The intention is to narrow the gender gap and raise overall performance.

(vii) Disability

The policy applies to all pupils and to all grant-aided schools. Provision is made within the education system for pupils with special educational needs and this, together with the actions arising from the policy will help ensure that pupils with a disability are helped and supported to achieve their full potential. A SEN review is nearing completion and will be the subject of a separate consultation.

(viii) Persons with dependants

The Department does not believe that the content of this policy will have a different or adverse affect on persons with dependents.

3.3 The issue, of course, is that there is a need for the policy to have a beneficial impact non those who are leaving school with poor qualifications, some of whom will be in Section 75 groupings. Improvements in data availability and usage as outlined in the policy document coupled with revised and new policies under development in literacy and numeracy, Special Education Need and Alternative Education Provision will be key to narrowing differentials

4. CONSIDERATION OF MITIGATION AND ALTERNATIVES

Introduction

4.1 The Department's assessment is that the strategy will have positive impacts because it includes provisions to:

- raise overall standards;
- narrow the gap between those schools and pupils achieving high outcomes and those which do not; and
- target specifically at those with greatest need – the socially deprived and those who are struggling below expected levels.

4.2 The Department does not consider that the policy will have any adverse impacts. However, should consultees think that the policy would be likely to have any adverse impacts, the Department would welcome suggestions on mitigations and alternatives that might better promote equality of opportunity.

5. FORMAL CONSULTATION

5.1 The Department wishes to consult as widely as possible on the potential equality impacts of the 'Policy for School Improvement'. Officials have already held preliminary meetings, and during the consultation period the Department:

- issued a consultation along with a consultation response form to schools, schools, educational interest groups, religious groups, Section 75 groups and to any members of the public on request;
- put a copy of the consultation documents on the Department of Education's website and the Consultation NI website, together with an on-line consultation response form;
- made the consultation documentation available in alternative formats for those who require it;
- arranged consultation meetings on request with individuals or representatives of particular interest groups, taking account of any special requirements they may have; and
- dealt with any queries in a prompt manner.

5.2 The consultation was co-ordinated by School Improvement Branch and closed on 31 March 2008.