



**RESULTS OF EQUALITY IMPACT
ASSESSMENT:**

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

April 2009

CONTENTS

	Page
Executive Summary	3
1. Introduction	5
2. Background to Every School A Good School: a policy for school improvement	6
3. Data Collection and Consultation on EQIA	7
4. Key Findings	9
5. Conclusion and Decision by Department of Education	10
6. Next Steps and Monitoring arrangements	11
Annex A: Summary of comments made in response to the consultation	12
Annex B: Actions recommended by respondents and DE response	14

RESULTS OF EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT: 'EVERY SCHOOL A GOOD SCHOOL': A POLICY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT'

Executive Summary

1. The Department of Education has developed a revised school improvement policy, 'Every School a Good School: a policy for school improvement', which aims to ensure that every school is a good school and puts meeting the needs and aspirations of individual pupils first.
2. The Department consulted on the draft revised school improvement policy from 21 January to 31 March 2008. Responses were, in general, supportive of the policy but were also clear that it could benefit from being clearer in some areas. The Department carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the draft policy. This included a period of formal consultation from 5 September to 31 October and 3 responses were received.
3. The respondents all generally agreed that the policy would have a positive effect. The main issue arising is the need to take account of the differing needs of pupils and on that basis, target resources and tailor the support to be provided to address underachievement, including underachievement among particular groups. The particular groups identified were Protestant working class boys, Traveller children, disabled children and young people of different sexual orientations.
4. *Every School A Good School: A policy for school improvement* is a child-centred policy aimed at ensuring every child, irrespective of their background, race, gender or religion, is enabled to fulfil his or her potential at every stage of their development. To this end, a key policy priority is maintaining a particular focus on tackling the barriers to learning that many young people face and supporting an ethos of aspiration and high achievement for all pupils. The Department's assessment therefore, is that the policy will have a positive impact for each of the Section 75 groups.

5. The Department is working with the education support bodies and schools to implement Every School a Good School from September 2009. The revised policy sets out clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for the policy and the monitoring arrangements that are being put in place. An Implementation Plan, setting out key actions, targets and timescales, has been published alongside the revised policy and is available on the Department's website.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Department of Education, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:
- people of different religious beliefs; racial groups; ages; marital status; sexual orientation; or political opinions;
 - men and women generally;
 - people with or without a disability; and
 - people with or without dependants.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 This legislation requires public authorities to conduct an equality impact assessment (EQIA) where a proposed policy is likely to have a significant impact on equality of opportunity. Following feedback from stakeholders during the initial policy consultation on *Every School a Good School*, the Department's revised school improvement policy, the Department of Education (DE) decided to carry out an EQIA on the policy. In doing so, the Department considered that there should be no adverse impact on any of the Section 75 equality groups as a result of the proposed policy. In fact, the Department judged that the policy should have positive impacts as it aimed to improve standards for all pupils and was focussed on supporting those with greatest need to achieve their full potential. The Department carried out a public consultation on its EQIA from 5 September to 31 October 2008 and is publishing the results in this document.

2. Background to 'Every School a Good School: a policy for school improvement'

- 2.1 The Department of Education has developed a revised school improvement policy, 'Every School a Good School: a policy for school improvement'. A draft of the policy issued for consultation on 21 January until 31 March 2008 and was revised in light of responses to the consultation and engagement with stakeholders.
- 2.2 The revised school improvement policy aims to ensure that every school is a good school. It puts meeting the needs and aspirations of individual pupils first to give every child, irrespective of their social background or where they live, the opportunity to fulfil their potential at each stage of their development. The policy sets out how this will be brought about by promoting high standards across the school system, supporting school and teachers effectively in their pursuit of excellence and helping to address better the various barriers to learning faced by children.
- 2.3 The roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of all parties involved in delivering the policy are set out in legislation currently before the Assembly, which, if approved, would take effect from 1 January 2010. The revised policy will be implemented during the 2009-10 year and an implementation plan has been published on the DE website. Interim arrangements will apply until the establishment of the new Education and Skills Authority in January 2010.
- 2.4 Further information on the background to the policy and the new policy approach is set out in the policy document 'Every School a Good School: a policy for school improvement' published in April 2009.

3. Data Collection and Consultation

Consideration of Data and Research

- 3.1 The Department considered a wide range in developing the revised policy and carrying out the EQIA. This included:
- Detailed statistical data on the performance of schools, including data on achievement at the end of each key stage and data revealing differentials in achievement by gender, by ethnic origin, social background and the management type of schools (catholic or other managed);
 - Inspection findings;
 - The NI Audit Office and Westminster Public Accounts Committee reports on literacy and numeracy and subsequent research into literacy and numeracy outcomes among pupils in the north of Ireland, which examined boys' underachievement and the differences between high and low performing schools, and research comparing good practice in literacy and numeracy in socially deprived areas;
 - Research on what makes a good school and on raising achievement in literacy and numeracy; and
 - Pre-consultation discussions with the Review of Public Administration Stakeholders Group, Senior and Assistant Senior Education Officers from the Education and Library Boards, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and the NI Council for Integrated Education.
 - Informal consultation sessions with principals and pupils across the north and these sessions were also attended by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the Governing Bodies Association (GBA).

Consultation on draft revised school improvement policy

- 3.2 The Department consulted on the draft revised school improvement policy from 21 January to 31 March 2008. The formal consultation exercise sought to engage with as wide a range of interested parties as possible, including teachers, governors, parents, young people and those in the business community. In particular the Department sought to encourage principals of

post-primary schools to obtain the views of their pupils on the policy proposals. Responses received from 203 organisations and individuals and were, in general, supportive of the policy. Respondents were also clear that the draft policy could benefit from being clearer in some areas, including in relation to the role of governors, leadership, effective use of data and the involvement of parents and the community.

- 3.3 Further information on the responses to the consultation and how the Department is addressing the issues raised is set out in the revised policy document, available on the Department's website.

Consultation on the EQIA

- 3.4 The Department consulted on the EQIA from 5 September to 31 October 2008 to get the public's views on the Department's assessment of the equality impacts of the policy and any further information which could be useful in assessing equality impacts.

- 3.5 During the consultation period the Department:

- issued a consultation document along with a consultation response form to all schools, educational organisations, Section 75 groups and to all others who had responded to the consultation on the policy proposals;
- put a copy of the consultation documents on the Department of Education's website;
- was prepared to make the consultation documentation available in alternative formats for those who required it;
- was prepared to arrange consultation meetings on request with individuals or representatives of particular interest groups, taking account of any special requirements they may have; and
- responded to queries in a prompt manner.

- 3.6 Three responses to the consultation were received.

4. Key Findings

Responses to the consultation on the EQIA

- 4.1 The respondents all generally agreed that the policy would have a positive effect, with one respondent commenting that:

‘We envisage that implementation of the policy, Every School a Good School, may address some of the persistent inequalities that continue to exist in our society. Indeed, we agree that improving educational attainment can make a significant contribution to the promotion of equality of opportunity and improved social inclusion.’

- 4.2 The main issue arising from the consultation is the need to take into account the differing needs of pupils and on that basis, target resources and tailor the support to be provided to address underachievement, including underachievement among particular groups. The particular groups identified by respondents were Protestant working class boys; Traveller children; children with disabilities; and young people of different sexual orientations.
- 4.3 A summary of comments on the equality implications of the policy is provided at Annex A.
- 4.4 Respondents also recommended some actions that the Department should take and these are set out alongside the Department’s response at Annex B.

Additional Contextual Information

- 4.5 In addition to the needs of Protestant working class boys, the Department recognises that underachievement exists among Catholic boys. In 2006/07 there was a higher proportion of Protestant male school leavers entitled to Free School Meals not achieving 5 or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C (79.2% of Protestant compared to 63.6% of Catholic male school leavers entitled to Free School Meals). However, this represents a larger number of

Catholic male school leavers entitled to Free School Meals (895 of the 1,408 male Catholic leavers entitled to Free School Meals not achieving 5 or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C, compared to 519 of the 655 male Protestant leavers entitled to Free School Meals).

- 4.6 Underachievement can also represent a particular challenge for girls, many of whom face additional barriers in their lives, such as teenage pregnancy, sexism, domestic violence (which will also affect boys in the home), and sexual violence (particularly against teenage girls).

5. Conclusion and Decision by Department of Education

- 5.1 *Every School A Good School: A strategy for school improvement* is a child-centred policy aimed at ensuring every child, irrespective of their background, race, gender or religion, is enabled to fulfil his or her potential at every stage of their development. To this end, a key policy priority introduced in the final policy document is maintaining a particular focus on tackling the barriers to learning that many young people face and supporting an ethos of aspiration and high achievement for all pupils. The emphasis is on providing high quality teaching, focused on the needs of each pupils, and support to help young people overcome any barriers to learning they may face.
- 5.2 In this respect, *Every School a Good School* is complemented by other key DE policies, including:
- The draft revised literacy and numeracy strategy, which sets out a 3 Wave approach combining quality teaching and the provision of additional individualised support;
 - The development of an Early Years Strategy;
 - The Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Review;
 - *Every School a Good School – Supporting Newcomer Pupils* policy;
 - The Pupil Health and Well-Being Programme;
 - The Extended Schools Programme; and
 - The Taskforce on Travellers' Education.
- 5.3 The Department's assessment is that the policy will have a positive impact for each of the Section 75 groups.

6. Next Steps and Monitoring Arrangements

Next Steps – Policy Implementation

6.1 The Department is working with the education support bodies and schools to implement the strategy from September 2009. An Implementation Plan, setting out key actions, targets and timescales, has been published as part of [the](#) revised policy and is available on the Department's website.

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Monitoring Arrangements

6.2 The revised strategy sets out clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities. The monitoring arrangements include:

- The development of a range of quantitative and qualitative quality indicators for educational accountability;
- The development of an agreed set of value-added and contextual value-added measures to allow for meaningful comparison between schools, and the provision of a programme of support for schools in the effective use of data;
- Self-evaluation by schools;
- Support for schools from ESA (and challenge where necessary) in driving school improvement and improving outcomes for pupils;
- The continuation of a programme of school inspections carried out by the Education & Training Inspectorate.

Summary of Key Comments in EQIA Consultation Responses

Policy Aims

Concur with the policy aim, the Department's commitment to *Every School A Good School* and welcome recommendations on improving standards.

Equality Issues Relating to Specific Groups

A policy which aims to raise standards in schools generally does not necessarily promote equality of opportunity for all pupils – need to consider differing needs of pupils.

EQIA would have benefited from further consideration of equality issues pertaining to children and young people with disabilities, those of different sexual orientations, Traveller children and Protestant working class boys.

Policy Delivery

'One size does not fit all' – need to take cognisance of differences in educational attainment and opportunities available to individual pupils. People have different learning styles and therefore it is critical that schools are given the scope and finances to source different learning methods to ensure focus is on the individual and their learning needs and challenges.

The Department may wish to elaborate further on how the policy will 'target specifically at those with greatest need' at para 4.1. Ways of delivering policy aims which better promote equality of opportunity for each category must be considered, e.g. specific actions for disadvantaged groups.

Resource Issues

Adequate resources must be provided to enable schools to meet needs of individual pupils.

Suggested Actions to be taken by the Department

The current gap between highest and lowest performing schools is alarming. There is a need to review inspection and evaluation systems to ascertain scope for improving education.

DE should review the need for greater advisory and support services for schools.

The Department may wish to give further consideration to collecting information on other equality categories.

The Department should establish a system to monitor impact of the policy in order to determine effect on relevant groups. Results should be reviewed and published annually.

Actions recommended by respondents and DE response

Recommended Action for DE	DE Response
Provide adequate resources to enable schools to meet needs of individual pupils.	An additional £20m is being directly provided to schools over the 2008/09 to 2010/11 budget period. Additional funding is also being provided over that period in support of Literacy & Numeracy (£12m), the Foundation Stage (£32m) and revised curriculum (£22m), SEN & Inclusion (£25m) and pupil health and well-being (£2.5m). These amounts come on top of the very sizeable budgets delegated directly to schools under the Local Management of Schools arrangements.
Need to review inspection and evaluation systems to ascertain scope for improving education (in light of alarming gap between highest and lowest performing schools).	The strategy's aim is that every school is a good school and the emphasis is on self-evaluation by schools to identify and address areas for improvement and the support they need to bring this about. Monitoring arrangements, roles and responsibilities are set out in the strategy document. ESA will provide support to schools and monitor performance to hold schools to account for the outcomes achieved. The ETI will continue to carry out inspections and will also identify best practice to be disseminated among other schools. Formal intervention arrangements are also being put in place to protect the interests of children where inspection findings show a school to have unsatisfactory performance.
Review and address need for greater advisory and support services for schools.	The Education & Skills Authority (ESA) is being established from January 2010 and will be responsible for provided support to schools. Work is well underway to establish ESA and this includes work on arrangements for the support services it will provide to schools.
Collect information on equality categories other than gender, age, religion and minority ethnic status (e.g. sexual orientation).	DE met with the Equality Commission in September 2008 and further discussions will take place to consider further ways of collecting additional statistical information.
Establish a system to monitor impact of the policy in order to determine effect on Section 75 groups.	The revised strategy includes educational quality indicators that will be used to assess its effectiveness, including in relation to relevant groups. DE is considering recommendations on the effective use of data, including development of value-added

	and contextual value-added measures and the arrangements for supporting schools. The revised strategy sets out clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities and an annual report will be published to provide details on progress made.
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