

Schools for the Future:

Funding, Strategy, Sharing

December 2006

Report of the
**Independent Strategic
Review of Education**

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Chairman's Foreword

1. The education of children and young people is one of the most important aspects of any society, especially a society such as Northern Ireland, which is experiencing rapid social, economic, and political change. Not surprisingly, therefore, in the past few years schools and schooling here have received a great deal of attention and been the subject of several reviews and reports that have dealt, among other things, with the selective system of secondary education, post-primary arrangements (including the curriculum entitlement), pre-school education, and special educational needs and inclusion.
2. In March of this year, the Government announced the present review and asked it to examine education funding, and the strategic planning and organisation of the schools' estate, taking particular account of curriculum changes and demographic trends. One of the Review's first tasks was to issue a consultation paper. It then invited written submissions from a wide range of education stakeholders, and subsequently held meetings with most of the respondents. These submissions and meetings, and the constructive dialogue that emerged from them, were most valuable in helping the Review to consider the major issues facing it and to decide on its conclusions and recommendations. I am most grateful to all those who responded.
3. Although this Review was independent of government, it needed to rely upon the Department of Education to supply information on a wide range of issues, particularly statistical data on the funding, planning, and organisation of the schools' estate. I am indebted to all those officials who interrupted their normal work to help, and to those in the Department's Desk-Top Publishing Unit who produced the report with great speed and accuracy. With one exception, they are too numerous to mention individually here – the exception being Paul Price, who skilfully co-ordinated the compilation and description of most of the statistical data that underpin the analysis contained in this Report.
4. I am particularly grateful to the other members of the Review Team. Michael O'Neill and Vivian Thomas, who acted as consultants to the Review, provided useful insights and observations based on their Scottish and Welsh experience. The general rule that the Secretary to a Review of this kind is at least

as important as the Chairman is well illustrated by Matthew Murray. The knowledge he acquired during a distinguished career as a school teacher and an inspector was invaluable to the Review, as were his organisational skills and his ability to draft quickly and elegantly.

5. At the beginning of the Review's work, I thought it would be mainly concerned with the issue of "surplus places" and the economic case – cost-effective provision that gives good value for money – for rationalising the schools' estate. As the work advanced, the economic case for rationalisation remained important, but two other arguments for rationalisation became even more important: first, the educational case – access for pupils to the full range of the curriculum, to high quality teaching, and to modern facilities – and second, the social case – societal well-being by promoting a culture of tolerance, mutual understanding, and inter-relationship through significant, purposeful and regular engagement and interaction in learning.
6. In short, the argument for rationalising the schools' estate is not primarily about saving money – the savings, in any case, being difficult to quantify and, whatever their amount, being required for reinvestment in Northern Ireland's schools – but about giving the children of Northern Ireland an excellent education that will benefit both them and the society in which they live. That is what the Review's sixty-one recommendations are intended to achieve, and I commend them strongly to the Government and to the citizens of Northern Ireland.



Professor Sir George Bain

Executive Summary

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. The Review was announced in March 2006 with the following terms of reference: "To examine funding of the education system, in particular the strategic planning and organisation of the schools' estate, taking account of the curriculum changes, including the wider provision for 14-19 year olds, and also demographic trends." The full terms of reference are grouped under three headings: Financial Issues, Strategic Planning of the Schools' Estate, and Integrating Education and Improving Collaboration.
2. Through written submissions and a series of meetings we have consulted with a wide range of educational interests. This vital part of our approach proved to be extremely valuable in developing our understanding of substantive issues and appreciation of different perspectives. The Department of Education (DE) provided the Review with information, analyses and perspectives on a wide range of matters in relation both to funding education and to the planning and organisation of the schools' estate. The Review acknowledges the positive and constructive engagement with all those who contributed to its work.

CHAPTER 2: STRATEGIC CONTEXT

3. The Review has undertaken its work concurrently with the planning of major reforms in education in Northern Ireland and in the knowledge of other drivers for change. From the perspective of the Review, these key reforms and drivers are demographic change, education policy, *A Shared Future*, the Northern Ireland Schools Modernisation Programme, and the Review of Public Administration.
4. The downward trend in the pupil population, the effects of which are already clear, is expected to continue well into the future. Strategic planning needs to address the issue of over-provision and the much lower demand for school places.
5. There are significant policy developments underway in relation to post-primary arrangements, in particular the Curriculum Entitlement Framework for 14-19 year-olds, Extended Schools, Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, and policy responsibility for early years' functions.

6. The Government's policy and strategy framework for good relations in Northern Ireland, presented in *A Shared Future* (March 2005) calls, in particular, for promoting sharing in all levels of education and encouraging integrated education in its widest sense, and the First Triennial Action Plan for implementing *A Shared Future* sets out specific commitments for DE in relation to the planning and organisation of the schools' estate.
7. Some £3 billion is to be invested over a period of ten years to achieve a "fit for purpose schools' estate, efficiently delivered and managed". The objective of the estate planning process is to provide a sufficiency of school places through the appropriate mix of schools of the right size in the right locations.
8. In formulating its recommendations and in considering their implementation, the Review has taken account of the proposed functions of the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA), particularly its role in the strategic planning of the schools' estate, and the future role of DE focused on developing policy and strategy, monitoring standards, allocating resources, and maintaining accountability.

CHAPTER 3: NORTHERN IRELAND EDUCATION SYSTEM

9. DE is responsible for the central administration of education and related services in Northern Ireland, with the exception of the Further and Higher Education sectors, which are the responsibility of the Department for Employment and Learning. DE's main areas of responsibility are pre-school, primary, post-primary, and special education; the youth service; the promotion of community relations within and between schools; and teacher education.
10. Inspection and monitoring of all education and training establishments is the direct responsibility of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). In keeping with key government principles for inspection, ETI provides an independent professional assessment of the effectiveness of existing or proposed policy.
11. Responsibility for the delivery of day-to-day education services within the policy, strategy and procedures set by DE currently lies with: the five Education and Library Boards, including the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; the Youth Council for Northern

Ireland; other grant-aided bodies, including the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta; and schools.

12. The system of schools in Northern Ireland comprises five main sectors: Controlled Schools – including Controlled Integrated Schools – Catholic Maintained Schools, Voluntary Grammar Schools, Grant-maintained Integrated Schools, and Irish-medium Schools.
13. The diversity of school type, the selective system of education, the existence of single sex schools, and the substantially rural nature of Northern Ireland largely explain both the relatively large number of schools that exist and the sizeable proportion of small schools. Although the range of provision is explained, and indeed justified, by the principle of parental choice, the inefficiencies manifest in the system need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

CHAPTER 4: QUALITY IN EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

14. To examine funding and to consider planning of the schools' estate without reference to their ultimate function would, in our opinion, be futile. We considered it essential, therefore, to devote a special chapter to quality in education, the importance of good schools, and the priority of school improvement.
15. Submissions to the Review, together with material from other sources, reflect a large measure of agreement on such fundamental matters as purpose, aims, principles and values in education, central to which is the paramount importance of the pupil as learner and as a unique human being living in a community with others.
16. Consultation endorsed two broad aims for education focused on: quality of individual opportunities and experiences in terms of curriculum, learning and teaching, standards in relation to attainment, personal growth and social development; and social, community and economic well-being.
17. Consultation articulated views that education should be in the service of both the individual and society, should be concerned with all aspects of the human person, and contribute to personal fulfilment, civic well-being and economic prosperity. Within a framework of shared core values and principles, we acknowledge

perspectives that make for distinctiveness in the educational experience provided by schools, manifest in their ethos, but with scope for each school to develop and maintain its own particular character.

18. The relationship between school and community was a recurring theme in the responses to the Review. Good schools both benefit from, and contribute to, social cohesion through their relationship with healthy communities, which in turn play a major role in educating young people and make a real contribution to education and to social stability.
19. We found a high level of support for the determinants of quality and standards in schools set out in the consultation paper. As well as reflecting the key indicators on standards, pedagogy, curriculum, pastoral care, and effective partnerships, a good school or learning organisation also ensures that the resources and facilities it provides, and its structures and management arrangements, are suited to the age, maturity and range of learning styles of its learners.

CHAPTER 5: DETERMINING THE EDUCATION BUDGET

20. The Northern Ireland education budget (£1838m in 2006/07) is determined within the context of the overall level of resource allocated to Northern Ireland by the United Kingdom government during biennial national Spending Reviews. Changes to the overall level of funding are determined using the Barnett Formula. Under this formula, Northern Ireland receives its population-based proportion of changes according to planned spending on comparable United Kingdom government services in England, England and Wales, or Great Britain. Although changes under this formula are calculated by reference to specific services, changes to the Northern Ireland departmental budgets for these services, including that of education, are determined by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (the Executive under devolution) in the context of the Government's priorities for Northern Ireland. In 2006/07 the education budget (i.e. for the areas of education for which the Department of Education is responsible) represents just over a fifth of the overall level of resource allocated to Northern Ireland. Almost all of it is spent on schools and over half of it is spent by schools.
21. It is difficult to establish to what extent the Northern Ireland education budget, so determined, represents a "fair share". The countries of the United Kingdom collect and publish data on education expenditure in ways that reflect the

manifold differences across the four administrations and that resist straightforward comparison. What can be said is that Northern Ireland's budget for current expenditure in education has grown in recent years (27.2 per cent between 2001/02 and 2005/06). On the face of it, this relative increase appears less than that experienced in England (41.2 per cent over the same period), but Northern Ireland's pupil numbers have dropped by a greater margin during these years (3.8 per cent compared to 1.8 per cent in England). To the extent that pupil-level investment comparisons can be relied upon, these suggest that, in 2004/05, Northern Ireland spent slightly more per post-primary pupil than Wales, but considerably less per primary pupil. In terms of capital investment, Northern Ireland's planned capital investment in schools of £207m for 2006/07 is part of a pattern of rising investment in recent years, and is planned to continue in 2007/08 when investment in schools will increase to £406.9m.

CHAPTER 6: ALLOCATING THE EDUCATION BUDGET

22. In 2006/07, £207m is planned for expenditure on the buildings in the schools' estate and £1595m is being spent on the day-to-day costs involved in the delivery of provision. Under the Local Management of Schools Scheme, two-thirds of this money is delegated to schools to spend according to their own assessment of priorities. The mechanism through which schools receive their level of delegation, the Common Funding Formula, seeks to be responsive to the large array of factors that create any school's particular resource needs: the number and age of their pupils, the needs of their pupils, and the costs of their staff and buildings, for example.
23. The Common Funding Formula was only recently introduced, in April 2005, and there is potential to improve the way in which it distributes resources to schools. Smaller schools, despite features of the formula designed to cater for their needs, seem to have particular pressures, chief of which is that the funding of staff costs from the delegated budget can account for most of a small school's delegation and leave little scope for significant management decisions. One possible solution to this is for schools to collaborate, to share and gain access to each other's resources – key themes for this Review. A funding mechanism based largely on enrolment, however, encourages schools to maximise their pupil numbers and, hence, will not necessarily facilitate partnership and collaboration.

24. The principles behind the Local Management of Schools Scheme and the Common Funding Formula – devolution to the front line, the centrality of the pupil, and equity of distribution – are sound and, in the face of the particular characteristics of the Northern Ireland school system (e.g. small schools, over-provision) should not be weakened but developed further. In the interests of devolved decision making, the level of delegation within schools' budgets should maximise their ability to determine and manage their own priorities. Northern Ireland's level of delegation within individual schools' budgets, currently roughly 69 per cent, is lower than that in England, where it typically exceeds 80 per cent. This suggests that there is scope to increase the Northern Ireland level of delegation. Increasing it requires that schools' staff costs continue to be part of delegated budgets, but it also gives them greater ability to manage this dominant pressure. Similarly, funding should continue to follow pupils but, in their interest, the Common Funding Formula should be complemented by incentives that encourage schools to work together to improve the range of educational experiences they can offer their children. In the interests of equity, there is a need to review at regular intervals the formula's methods of calculation to ensure that they continue to distribute available resources fairly and accurately across all schools. Equity also requires a review of the funding for fee-charging preparatory departments in grammar schools, admission to which is determined by parents' ability to pay.

CHAPTER 7: EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

25. Northern Ireland's schools perform well in educating its young people and preparing them for adult life and the world of work. At most stages of their education the attainment levels of pupils in Northern Ireland compare favourably with those in the other countries of the United Kingdom. But there is evidence that the resources of the education system are not being used as effectively as they might be. There are opportunities for improvement, and the incidence of low attainment and the legacy of underachievement within Northern Ireland's overall performance levels require that these opportunities are taken.
26. Our analysis shows that, because of falling pupil numbers and Northern Ireland's many school sectors, there are too many schools in Northern Ireland. As a result, there are too many schools with small pupil numbers, some to the extent that they are, or soon will be, unsustainable. Related to this, as a further indication of a schools' estate that is not fit for purpose, is the large number of empty places

(53,000 in 2005/06, 15 per cent of total capacity) in a school system designed to cater for a much larger number of pupils than are provided by current enrolment levels.

27. A clear policy on school sustainability needs to be developed. School sustainability means a number of things but its governing principle should be educational sustainability. Children need schools that have the ability to provide them with a high quality educational experience. There is a point, and it can vary across schools and locations, when the enrolment of a school and its budget (determined largely by the number of pupils) limits its ability to provide a broad and balanced curriculum (particularly in anticipation of the new Entitlement Framework). Minimum school sizes are, therefore, central to school sustainability and the recommendations of this Review include minimum enrolment thresholds for primary and post-primary schools. Schools with enrolments below the relevant thresholds should be reviewed and schools that are found to be not educationally sustainable should close, regardless of their economic position or the non-educational services they provide. The Review adopts a similar approach to sixth-form enrolments.
28. The schools' estate needs to consist of fewer and larger schools, all of them educationally sustainable and all of them maximising the potential of their resources. As a baseline of effectiveness, therefore, and in conjunction with enrolment thresholds, the level of surplus capacity distributed across the schools' estate should not when aggregated exceed 10 per cent so as to cater for a degree of uncertainty in planning and to accommodate choice. The thresholds proposed are minima, not optima, and they must be complemented, across the system, by an effort to harness the potential of resources collectively with the aim of improving the quality and breadth of provision through collaboration between schools and between them and colleges of further education.

CHAPTER 8: CURRENT APPROACH TO PLANNING

29. The main concerns about the current planning process are lack of integration, co-ordination and consistency between the planning activities of the education authorities. There is a lack of strategic planning in the Integrated and Irish-medium sectors, where planning is essentially in response to actual, rather than predicted, demand.

30. The existing planning arrangements, generally focused on individual schools, rather than taking a broader view, tend to over-estimate demand, and they are not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that investment is directed at those schools with the greatest need. There is a lack of robust and consistent information on the condition and suitability of the schools' estate.

CHAPTER 9: PLANNING: A STRATEGIC APPROACH

31. We specify guiding principles, overwhelmingly endorsed in consultation, underpinning the planning of the schools' estate. Communities need schools that provide high quality educational experiences and outcomes for all pupils; reflect the pluralist nature of Northern Ireland; ensure equality, accessibility, diversity and parental choice; are educationally and financially viable and operate cost-effectively, maximising expenditure on the pupils' education; share and collaborate to optimise the use of their facilities for the benefit of all; are affordable and sustainable in the long-term; and represent good value for money in relation to capital and recurrent expenditure.
32. Area-based planning, within a strategic framework of vision, policy, principles and guidelines provided by DE, is the central feature of the new and strategic approach to planning the schools' estate recommended by the Review. ESA should have overall operational responsibility for the strategic planning of the schools' estate, within the framework established by DE. In recognition of the urgency with which the new approach should be implemented, we are recommending that DE should proceed with area-based planning from early in the year 2007 until ESA is established, and that it should draw up a timetable for the key actions and outcomes in establishing and implementing the new strategic approach. In view of the new approach to planning, future school building projects should be approved only after area-based planning is established, and previously announced capital projects that are currently underway should be reviewed for their consistency with the area-based approach according to their stage of development.
33. Local areas should comprise coherent sets of nursery, primary and post-primary schools, and, as appropriate, special schools, as well as accessible further education provision, and as far as possible should lie within a single local council's boundaries. Areas based on these features should facilitate planning of curricular

provision at local level, and also allow for co-ordination of educational planning with provision of other services, including local government services. Extending school provision into new areas of service has major implications for the types of buildings, for the range of accommodation needed, and for funding.

34. To establish a baseline for planning, and to monitor future provision, DE and ESA should establish quality indicators and other criteria and use them consistently, in conjunction with a sustainable schools policy, to assess the appropriateness, quality and effectiveness of the educational provision in an area; the sufficiency, suitability and condition of the schools' accommodation and facilities; the nature and quality of the connection between the schools and the community; and the extent to which the provision reflects value for money. ESA and DE should establish and maintain, as a service to all the education partners, a comprehensive data collection and analysis capability, availing of modern data-gathering technology.
35. To ensure effective, efficient and participative procedures for area-based planning, ESA should establish, lead and co-ordinate planning groups that are representative of all the educational interests and that can bring informed knowledge of local communities and circumstances to the planning process. The process should aim to achieve maximum agreement at local level on the proposals that are submitted for consideration centrally. ESA should have responsibility for finalising proposals, but it will be essential to ensure fairness, consistency and accountability.
36. It is appreciated that rationalisation of provision can be a highly emotive community issue, accompanied by a sense of loss. Nonetheless, it is essential that there should be early intervention and investigation when there are signs that a school's enrolment is falling and there is a budgetary difficulty, and a long-term appropriate strategy should be put in place. The focus should be on the real benefits that alternative and better provision can bring for the children, and indeed for the community. In the light of submissions to the Review, DE should review existing procedures, with the aim of accelerating the rationalisation and procurement process.

CHAPTER 10: COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND FURTHER EDUCATION

37. Current curricular provision in most post-primary schools in Northern Ireland falls well short of the requirements of the Entitlement Framework, established in response to the wide variation in schools' provision at Key Stage 4 and at post-16. Although the shortfall is most evident in smaller schools, and at post-16 in schools with small sixth forms, there is a surprising variation in the provision of schools of comparable enrolments.
38. Given this picture of provision, the implementation of the Entitlement Framework will require co-operation and collaboration between schools, and between schools, colleges of further education and approved training organisations. Collaborative arrangements, however, cannot be regarded as an alternative to re-organising Northern Ireland's post-primary schools into a system of sustainable schools, and the benefits of collaboration must be weighed against the costs and the manageability of the arrangements.
39. The development of local collaborative arrangements should be within a framework of operational and strategic planning and development, to ensure consistency and coherence in provision and equality of opportunity across the education system. To ensure that all learners have access to an appropriate curriculum and that organisations optimise the use of their resources, there should also be a strategic dimension to planning at local level, in respect of both curriculum provision and institutional roles. The planning of provision should ensure the optimal use of the expertise, experience and facilities available in schools and in colleges of further education, and ensure that there is no wasteful duplication in schools of professional, technical and vocational facilities.
40. Although progress is being made in developing collaboration between schools and colleges of further education through developing, evaluating and improving the Vocational Enhancement Programme, in the view of the ETI collaboration is at an early stage of development, with most of the existing partnerships considered to be characterised by forms of co-operation in a competitive environment, rather than demonstrating key features of co-ordination and collaboration. The absence of a common, cohesive and comprehensive 14-19 education and training policy and strategy – incorporating curriculum, funding, facilities and teacher education

– militates against collaboration and the most effective use of the schools' and further education estates.

41. Learners need well-informed curricular guidance, good tutorial support, and also impartial careers education, advice, information and guidance to help ensure that their learning is coherently anchored into a learning pathway and provides progression. Each learner should have a host learning organisation that takes responsibility for overseeing the coherence of the individual's learning programme, and his or her progression within it.
42. The provision in schools, colleges of further education and work-based learning should be more complementary and better co-ordinated, with provision by each type of organisation capitalising on its distinctive strengths and capabilities, in terms of its teaching expertise and facilities. Progression routes within each type of provision should be made accessible and clear to their respective users.

CHAPTER 11: PERSPECTIVES ON INTEGRATION AND COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

Integrated Education

43. The aims and spirit of *A Shared Future* are unmistakable features of the backcloth to this Review. We acknowledge that integrated schools make a highly significant and distinctive approach to educating children and young people together. We believe, nonetheless, that all schools, and all the educational interests, need to, and wish to, play their part in the journey towards the goal of *A Shared Future* – “a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society firmly founded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust”. We advocate, therefore, not a single approach to integration, but a more pervasive and inclusive strategy, focused on the dynamic process of integrating education across the school system.
44. We believe that integration starts with individual schools educating their pupils to be enlightened, critical thinkers and well-balanced individuals, prepared for the responsibilities and obligations of life in a civilised and democratic society. The good school, as an inclusive, civilised and tolerant learning community, gives

witness to, and promotes, those values, attitudes, understandings and behaviours fundamental to the development of a healthy society.

45. Schools committed to integration reach out to other schools, build mutually beneficial relationships and develop understanding, respect, trust and tolerance through significant, purposeful and regular engagement and interaction in learning, both by pupils and teachers, supported by governors and parents. Such schools put learners' interests first, value and respect distinctiveness and diversity, and are convinced that productive links with other learners and other providers are desirable, indeed natural.
46. Our argument for this more inclusive and pervasive approach is three-fold: first, the educational case – access for pupils to the full range of the curriculum, to high quality teaching, and to modern facilities; second, the social case – societal well-being by promoting a culture of tolerance, mutual understanding and inter-relationship through significant, purposeful and regular engagement and interaction in learning; the economic case – through cost-effective provision that gives good value for money.
47. In light of our thinking on integrating education and improving collaboration, we believe the time is right for DE to make clear that, in discharging its duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education, it is committed to facilitating and encouraging an inclusive strategy with a variety of meaningful approaches. We also advocate that in undertaking its functions in relation to the planning of the schools' estate, there should be a duty on ESA to maximise opportunities for integrating education within a system of sustainable schools.

Irish-medium Education

48. The accommodation needs of the Irish-medium sector should be met within the area-based approach to planning advocated by the Review. Since Irish-medium schools are educational institutions, the nature and structuring of the accommodation and facilities for Irish-medium education must, first and foremost, support high quality teaching and learning.
49. Options for accommodating the development of Irish-medium education include: new builds; reassigning and modernising accommodation that is surplus to requirements; transformation of school status; and Irish-medium units in

English-medium schools. Multi-campus or shared-campus models seem to be potentially practicable at the primary school stage, but the untested satellite system appears to pose substantial difficulties and uncertainties in relation to curriculum, quality of learning, management and organisation. Post-primary Irish-medium education faces intrinsic difficulties, not just in terms of enrolments, but also in relation to the recruitment and deployment of specialist teachers and in meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework.

50. The Review has identified a number of important factors that warrant DE to review the current position and to develop a comprehensive and coherent policy for Irish-medium education. These factors are the pattern of growth in the sector, a lack of consensus on aspects of the educational process and on the suitability of the environment for education through Irish, and a radically changing planning context for education.

CHAPTER 12: MODELS OF COLLABORATION AND SHARING

51. Northern Ireland's educational structure – based almost entirely on institutional independence, and its preservation, within a competitive system – is also, to a greater or lesser extent, at a cost to learners' experiences and opportunities, to teachers and principals, to the efficient use of the schools' estate, and to economic well-being, and the integration and health of our society more generally.
52. The Review acknowledges the success of arrangements for joint work where sensitive, high level leadership has encouraged local initiatives in collaboration and has struck the right balance between realism and boldness. There are clear educational, community and financial benefits in self-reliant, and self-generated, arrangements, particularly when parents have been kept informed and made to feel involved. The Review would wish those initiatives to continue and believes that ESA should have a role to play, not only in supporting, but also in proactively developing and extending sharing and collaboration at local level.
53. A variety of incentives should be available to encourage and support sharing and collaboration, recognising and building on local "success stories" that demonstrate the common benefits. Such incentives might include building a new high specification common facility, for instance, in technology; financial support to promote sharing of staff and facilities between schools; and making it

attractive for two or more neighbouring schools to gain additional or better facilities than would normally be available.

54. Various forms of association, from voluntary coalitions and partnerships to a relationship involving formal management and governance structure, can provide the opportunity for schools to share and collaborate on a range of curricular and other issues, to procure efficiencies, and to secure improvements in the quality of education provided. These arrangements can accommodate the need, and the desire, to preserve and maintain the ethos of individual schools, while making more efficient use of resources. The options include confederation, federation, co-location, and a shared campus model. The degree to which a particular form of sharing promotes integration will depend on the extent to which pupils of the schools involved experience significant, purposeful and regular engagement and interaction in learning. Arrangements for sharing and collaboration should be evaluated and reported, through both self-evaluation and inspection, in order to acknowledge success and to promote improvement.

CHAPTER 13: THE WAY FORWARD

55. We have consulted widely and listened carefully and critically, but with an open mind. This engagement with the many educational interests was most valuable in helping the Review to consider the major issues facing it and to decide on its conclusions and recommendations.
56. The process of moving from the current configuration of the schools' estate to a more effective, efficient and better integrated system of schools, more assured of their future, will take time and careful, imaginative, sensitive planning. The change cannot, and should not, be achieved hastily. But it is an inescapable direction of travel, a journey that must be undertaken, and must begin without delay.
57. We believe that our recommendations taken together provide a realistic, achievable, yet challenging way forward to bring about the radical and long-term changes that are necessary if the children and young people of Northern Ireland are to be provided with an excellent education, in the broadest sense, in good schools with a secure future.

58. These new directions will require visionary, clear yet sensitive skill and leadership in managing change. They will require public support and ownership if they are to bring success and, therefore, high quality communication regarding the Review's recommendations will be essential for all those, not least children and young people, and the professionals themselves, whose stake in the outworking of any decisions is indeed great.

List of Recommendations

Allocating the Education Budget

1. The degree to which schools have control of their own budgets should be maximised, with appropriate arrangements for accountability put in place.
2. In addition to a delegated budget, schools should receive financial and other incentives to share resources and deliver improved provision in collaboration with other schools.
3. The budgets delegated to schools should continue to include resources for teachers' salaries and other staff costs.
4. The methodology used to distribute resources to schools through the Common Funding Formula should be reviewed to ensure that delegations under the formula reflect the costs of the main needs of schools.
5. The rationale for funding Preparatory Departments in grammar schools should be reviewed.

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Effectiveness and Efficiency

6. The policy for sustainable schools in Northern Ireland should ensure that all schools are sustainable in terms of the quality of the educational experience of children, enrolment trends, financial position, school leadership and management, accessibility, and the strength of their links to the community.
7. The sustainable schools policy should ensure that regardless of the financial position of a school or the other services it provides, it is not considered viable if the quality and breadth of the education it provides is less than "satisfactory".
8. (a) The minimum (not optimal) enrolments for new primary schools, and for Years 8–12 in new post-primary schools should be (i) Primary: 140 pupils in urban areas, and 105 pupils in rural areas, and (ii) Post-primary: 500 pupils. When the enrolment in an existing school falls below the relevant level, the future of the school should be reviewed.

- (b) The minimum (not optimal) enrolment for a new sixth form in an 11–18 school should be 100 pupils. When the enrolment falls below this level in an existing sixth form, the future of the sixth-form provision should be reviewed.
- 9. Surplus capacity in the schools' estate should be no more than 10 per cent of the estate's total capacity, distributed across the system.
- 10. Schools involved in rationalisation or closure should be given adequate funding to ensure that a satisfactory education can be provided for the remaining pupils during the period leading up to the rationalisation.

Planning: A Strategic Approach

- 11. The Education and Skills Authority should plan the schools' estate on a local area basis, within a strategic framework of vision, policy, principles, and guidelines provided by the Department of Education.
- 12. Within the strategic framework established by the Department of Education, the Education and Skills Authority should have overall operational responsibility for the strategic planning of the schools' estate.
- 13. Until the Education and Skills Authority has acquired the capacity to exercise its estate planning function, the Department of Education should act quickly and decisively to take forward area-based planning as soon as possible in the year 2007, with the full support of the relevant education authorities.
- 14. The Department of Education should establish a provisional timetable, to be refined and taken forward by the Education and Skills Authority, specifying target dates for the following key steps in setting up and implementing the area-based planning strategy: (a) the Department of Education's strategic framework of vision, policy, principles, and guidelines; (b) the specification of local areas; (c) the review of local provision; (d) the initiation and conclusion of local planning; (e) the submission of area proposals to the Education and Skills Authority; (f) the finalised and approved area plans; and (g) the implementation of individual plans for the estate as a whole.

15. Future school building projects should be approved only after area-based planning is established, and previously announced capital projects that are currently underway should be reviewed, according to their stage of development, for their consistency with the area-based approach.
16. Local areas should comprise coherent sets of nursery, primary and post-primary schools, and, as appropriate, special schools, as well as accessible further education provision, and as far as possible lie within a single local council's boundaries.
17. Planning should ensure that proposals for contiguous local areas are considered together, and that their interrelationships are identified and taken into account, before investment decisions are made.
18. Area-based plans should ensure that each area is served by sustainable schools that provide high quality education for all pupils and that, taken together, balance the expressed wishes of parents and the projected requirements of each school sector, with the cost-effective use of capital and recurrent funding.
19. To ensure effective, efficient and participative procedures for area-based planning, the Education and Skills Authority should establish, lead and co-ordinate planning groups that are representative of all the educational interests and that bring informed knowledge of local communities and circumstances to the planning process.
20. The process of area planning should incorporate intra-sectoral, cross-sectoral and cross-community considerations, and aim to achieve maximum agreement at local level on the proposals that are to be submitted to the Education and Skills Authority.
21. Planning should be open to the possibility of establishing schools of new management types as a result of cross-sector or cross-community agreement to maintain local educational provision.
22. In accordance with *A Shared Future*, proposals for new schools, or re-organisation, or rationalisation of schools should demonstrate that options for collaboration and sharing on a cross-community basis have been considered and fully explored.

23. In area-based planning, the Education and Skills Authority should have the option of consulting directly with communities to ascertain views on options for educational provision, with the information obtained being considered alongside the assessments of need made by the various school sectors.
24. With the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, the Department of Education should provide appropriate resources for each sector to ensure that they have the capacity to support the planning of the schools' estate.
25. The Department of Education and the Education and Skills Authority should establish quality indicators and other criteria and use these consistently, in conjunction with a sustainable schools policy, to assess the appropriateness, quality and effectiveness of the educational provision in an area; the sufficiency, suitability and condition of the schools' accommodation and facilities; the nature and quality of the connection between the schools and the community; arrangements for sharing and collaboration; and the extent to which the provision reflects value for money.
26. Using the specified quality indicators and other criteria, the Education and Skills Authority should undertake a detailed area-based audit of provision (including that in Further Education), and, having done so, it should maintain and regularly up-date the resulting data.
27. The Education and Skills Authority should regularly monitor area-based provision against the quality indicators and other criteria, identify factors that suggest a review of provision is required, promote innovative ideas for consideration, prompt and encourage linkages, initiate discussion with the sectors and community interests, and work with others to remove hindrances to desirable developments.
28. To ensure coherence and consistency in education policy, the planning of the schools' estate should harmonise with policy on the curriculum, and with policy in such areas as Extended Schools, special needs provision, youth provision, admissions procedures and criteria, and transport.
29. The planning of the schools' estate should, as far as possible, be co-ordinated with planning in such fields as health; social services; adult education; youth provision; sports, arts and recreation; and community regeneration and development.

30. The planning of the schools' estate and of the Further Education estate should be co-ordinated in order to optimise the use of accommodation and resources across the education system.
31. School accommodation that becomes available through rationalisation and re-organisation should be appraised for its potential as an alternative to new builds to meet identified sector or community requirements for additional provision.
32. The forecasting of enrolments should consider all the relevant determinants of demand to the greatest practicable extent, including demographics, pupil movements, population shifts, economic development, parental choice, and changes in school performance and sustainability.
33. To inform the siting of new schools, maximum travel distances and maximum travel times for all pupils should be established.
34. A data collection and analysis capability, availing of modern data gathering technology, should be established and maintained by the Department of Education and the Education and Skills Authority, as a service to all the education partners, to enable them to access and use up-to-date and relevant data, and to take full account of the determinants of demand and the interactions between geographic areas and sectors.
35. As soon as there are signs that a school's enrolment is falling and there is a budgetary difficulty, the Education and Skills Authority should identify and address the causes and, if these can not be addressed, consider the options for future provision and implement that which is effective and efficient in the interests of learners.
36. When considering the long-term future of a school, the Education and Skills Authority and the appropriate sector should not take account of short-term funding arrangements (such as those contingent on certain initiatives) that can distort or mask the financial viability of a school.
37. The Department of Education should review the existing procedures with the aim of accelerating the rationalisation and procurement processes.

38. The approach to re-organisation should not focus on the deficits in the current position, but rather concentrate on demonstrating the gains and benefits that alternative and better provision can bring to learners and, indeed, to the entire community.
39. School design and schedules of accommodation should be amended to take account of such factors as: the changing nature of schools and their functions in local communities; the potential for using new technologies for teaching and learning; the requirement to ensure that the schools' estate is environmentally sustainable; and the provision of areas within the school that are conducive to social interaction and individual study.
40. The planning, to quality standards, and the use of sports facilities in schools should be set within a co-ordinated strategic approach, involving bodies concerned with sports facility provision at central and local level.
41. School sports facilities should be made available to outside groups at reasonable cost, with schools and other providers working together to share the provision and maintenance of these facilities.
42. The planning of the schools' estate should take account of policy on Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, including such aspects as accommodation, school based support, and collaboration between all schools, specialist services, and multi disciplinary teams.

Collaboration Between Schools and Further Education

43. To ensure that provision is consistent and coherent, and that all young people have access to the same range and high quality of education, the delivery of the 14-19 curriculum should take full account of the defined local areas and involve the collaboration of schools, colleges of further education, and training providers.
44. The full potential of collaboration – through the innovative use of information technology and movement of staff – should be explored, particularly where it can contribute positively to the quality and range of provision available (e.g. in sparsely populated, rural areas where there are poor public transport facilities, or in areas involving the crossing of sectarian interfaces).

45. The Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning should progress urgently their current review of 14–19 provision, with particular reference to curriculum, funding, and planning of provision, and taking account of local and regional requirements, establish a common and coherent 14–19 education and training policy and strategy.
46. The provision in schools, colleges of further education, and work-based learning should be more complementary and better co-ordinated, with each type of organisation capitalising on its distinctive strengths and capabilities in terms of its provision, teaching expertise, and facilities. Progression routes within each type should be made accessible and clear to their respective users.
47. Learners should have access to high quality and impartial services to help them make informed choices based on sound careers education, information, advice and guidance.
48. In order to take account of developments in provision for 14–19 year olds, current teacher education arrangements (and related in-service training), including an examination of the desirability of a common set of standards for qualified teacher status across 14–19 provision, should be reviewed.
49. Staff development should be provided across the schools' and Further Education sectors to ensure high levels of understanding about each other's provision and culture, and to help those involved to value difference and diversity without the pressure of organisational self-preservation.
50. Each learner should have a "host" learning organisation that takes responsibility for overseeing the coherence, suitability, and development of his or her learning programme.
51. An urgent examination should be undertaken of the factors that contribute to a competitive rather than a co-operative environment, such as the open enrolment policy and differentials in funding mechanisms, with a view to removing or at least reducing impediments to collaborative work.

Perspectives on Integration and Collaboration

52. In undertaking its functions in relation to the planning of the schools' estate, the Education and Skills Authority should be required to maximise opportunities for integrating education within a system of sustainable schools.
53. To encourage and support a more inclusive approach to integrating education, additional funding – in the form of (a) an enhanced unit of resource, and (b) special funding for particular areas of work such as staff development – should be provided to schools that are actively engaged in sharing with other schools, or a school that is developing an inclusive environment in recognition of the diversity of its pupils' religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
54. Either through new arrangements under the Review of Public Administration, or through a dedicated strategic forum, the Department of Education should help education stakeholders to discuss issues pertinent to integrating education and improving collaboration, promoting trust and mutual understanding, and working to develop collaboration and sharing.
55. The Department of Education should make clear that, in discharging its legislative duty in respect of integrated education, it is committed to facilitating and encouraging a variety of approaches to integrating education within a framework of sustainable schools.
56. The Department of Education should develop a comprehensive and coherent policy for Irish-medium education.
57. The planning for Irish-medium education should make use of a variety of feasible options capable of providing the accommodation and facilities that support a high quality of education through the medium of Irish, including:
 - creating new sustainable Irish-medium schools through new builds, adapting existing surplus capacity in the schools' estate, and transformation; and
 - collaborating and sharing within the Irish-medium sector, and with English-medium schools, including the provision of Irish-medium units or streams in English-medium schools.

Models of Collaboration and Sharing

58. Local "success stories" of collaboration and sharing should be encouraged, identified, and used to disseminate good practice.
59. The Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Education and Skills Authority should develop a range of incentives to encourage and support local schools to build on existing levels of shared facilities and staff and to develop their partnership further. Examples of incentives that should be considered include:
 - providing a new high specification common facility, for example, in technology;
 - funding for an additional teacher to facilitate link arrangements and work across schools or between schools and Further Education;
 - modifying the accommodation norms and standards to make it attractive for two or more geographically close schools to gain facilities which, if they continued to operate separately, would be inappropriate (due to school enrolment) or less practicable; and
 - prioritising proposals for school improvements that incorporate sharing and collaboration.
60. Sharing and collaboration between schools should be evaluated, through both self-evaluation and inspection, in order to acknowledge success and to promote improvement.
61. The manifestations and outcomes of the distinctive character of schools, and the contribution of schools to the spirit of *A Shared Future*, should be included in schools' annual reports and in inspection reports, taking account of the community environment of the school.

Review Team

Professor George Bain,
Chairman

Matthew Murray,
Secretary

Michael O'Neill,
Consultant to the Review, and Director of Education,
North Lanarkshire Council

Vivian Thomas,
Consultant to the Review,
and formerly Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning,
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

