COUNTRY POLICY REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The information in this document was current in March 2022.

Further information about the Country Policy Review and Analysis (CPRA) activities is available on the CPRA web area.

With a view to greater accessibility, this report is available in accessible electronic format on the Agency's website: www.european-agency.org

Section 1: Country priorities for education

The text below presents the main country priorities in the field of education, with special attention to the development of inclusive education.

Country priorities
Programme for Government The long-term, strategic priorities for Northern Ireland (NI) are set out through an Executive endorsed Programme for Government (PfG). The PfG is intended to be based on a shared and strategic vision for the future which aims to improve well-being for all. Between 25 January and 22 March 2021, the Executive held a public consultation on its Programme for Government draft Outcomes Framework. The draft Framework contains nine strategic Outcomes which, taken together, will set a clear direction of travel for the NI Executive and provide a vision for the future of all citizens. The draft Framework included an outcome of 'our children and young people have the best start in life'. It states that: > This Outcome is about ensuring all our children and young people grow up in a society which provides the support they need to achieve their potential. We want to ensure all our children and young people have access to the high quality education they all deserve and are equipped with the skills to help them make the best life choices. We also recognise the importance of ensuring our children and young people have good health, quality physical environments with space to play, opportunities for cultural and artistic expression and to make a positive contribution to society, and protection from violence and harm. The key priority areas are: Access to Education; Capability and Resilience; Care; Early Years; Skills and Attainment. Responses from the consultation are now being considered. **The Children and Young People's Strategy** The NI Executive approved the Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 on 10 December 2020. On behalf of the Executive, the Department of Education has led responsibility for liaising with departments as they work towards implementing the new strategy. The new Strategy's Aim is 'To work together to improve the well-being of all children and young people in Northern Ireland – delivering positive long lasting outcomes'. **Department of Education Business Plan** The Department of Education (DE) Business Plan 2021/22 states the Department's vision: 'A system that is recognised internationally for the quality of its teaching and learning, for the achievements of its young people and for a holistic approach to education' (p. 10).

Country priorities

The business plan reflects the key priorities and objectives for the Department of Education under the following eight strategic priorities:

1. Make learning accessible to all: We give all children and young people access to pre-school, school and youth education provision

2. Improve the quality of learning for our children & young people: We ensure that education provision is of a high quality and supports learning and progression

3. Look after our children & young people: We support and promote positive physical and emotional health and wellbeing and support high-quality affordable childcare

4. Support those who need more help with learning: Working with health & education partners, we deliver high quality services for children & young people, including those with Special Educational Needs

5. Improve the learning environment: We promote equality of opportunity, respect for others, good relations and inclusivity and we provide modern, sustainable educational settings which are fit-for-purpose and facilitate shared learning

6. Tackle Disadvantage and Underachievement: We improve developmental and learning outcomes for all children & young people, with a particular focus on those who are underachieving, at risk of underachieving, or disadvantaged

7. Support and develop our education workforce: We develop and deploy teachers, other education professionals and support staff effectively, promoting high standards and leadership and improving health & wellbeing.

8. Effectively manage, review and transform our education system: We deliver corporate governance and finance responsibilities while seeking to improve efficiency, increase sustainability and introduce new ways of learning (pp. 10–11).

New Decade, New Approach

The New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) document, agreed by political parties in January 2020, was described as a deal that would 'transform public services' and 'tackle immediate challenges in key areas such as growing the economy, health, education and housing'.

Country priorities

The document included a number of commitments/priorities relating to education:

- The Executive will urgently resolve the current **teachers' industrial dispute**. It will also address resourcing pressures in schools, ensuring that every school has a **sustainable core budget** to deliver quality **education**.

- The Executive will **establish an external, independent review of education provision**, with a focus on securing greater efficiency in delivery costs, raising standards, access to the curriculum for all pupils, and the prospects of moving towards a single education system.

- To help build a shared and integrated society, the Executive will **support educating children and young people of different backgrounds together** in the classroom.

- The Executive will establish an expert group to examine and propose an action plan to **address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background,** including the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys.

- The Executive will **deliver a new special educational needs framework** to support young people with special needs to achieve their full potential (p. 7).

- In support of both economic and educational objectives, the Executive will **develop an enhanced approach to careers advice, curriculum, training and apprenticeships** to enhance employability and support economic growth. […]

- The Executive will **publish a Childcare Strategy** and identify resources to deliver extended, affordable and high quality provision of **early education** and care initiatives for families with children aged 3-4 (p. 9).

A Fair Start

In line with the NDNA commitment described above, the DE Minister appointed an Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement in July 2020. As set out in NDNA and the subsequent Terms of Reference, the panel was independent. It was tasked with bringing forward recommendations and a costed Action plan.

The Expert Panel submitted A Fair Start – Final Report and Action Plan to the Minister in May 2021. It was endorsed by the Executive on 27 May 2021 and published on 1 June 2021.

Country priorities

The report contains 47 actions spanning a number of departments, including Education, Health, the Executive Office, Department for the Economy and numerous 'arm's-length bodies' involving collaboration across the public sector and beyond.

The report identified eight priority areas:

1. Redirecting the focus to Early Years

2. Championing Emotional Health and Wellbeing

3. Ensuring the relevance and appropriateness of Curriculum and Assessment

4. Promoting a whole community approach to education

5. Maximising boys' potential

6. Driving forward Teachers' Professional Learning (TPL)

7. Supporting the professional learning and wellbeing of school leadership

8. Ensuring Interdepartmental collaboration and delivery (p. iii).

Independent Review of Education

Again, in line with NDNA commitments, an independent Review of Education commenced in October 2021. Appendix 2 of NDNA states that:

> The education system has a diversity of school types, each with its own distinctive ethos and values. However it is not sustainable. The parties acknowledge the progress made in developing new models of sharing, cooperation and integration. There is a desire to build on this as a basis for delivering long term improvements in the quality, equity and sustainability of the system. The parties agree that the Executive will commission and oversee an independent fundamental review with a focus on quality and sustainability. The educational experience and outcomes for children and young people are the most important factors (NDNA, p. 43).

The NI Executive agreed the terms of reference for the Review in December 2020. They provide scope for a fundamental review of the design and delivery of education.

The Review is expected to cover three core strands:

1. Education journey and outcomes
2. Support for settings and schools, funding and governance
3. System level design, delivery and administration.

Country priorities

The Review Panel will also be expected to set out a vision for what a high quality, innovative and inclusive education system looks like in Northern Ireland in the 21st century and how relevant partners might work together to realise that vision – making Northern Ireland a truly excellent system internationally. This vision should not be constrained by the existing education structure.

The Review Panel will deliver an interim report by October 2022 and a final report by April 2023.

The DE held public consultations on the new draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Regulations and draft SEN Code of Practice from 30 September 2020 to 2 March 2021. The Department presented the findings of the consultations to the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Committee on 23 June 2021. Consultation Summary Reports were published on the Department's website on the same day (Consultation Summary Reports: SEN Code of Practice; Draft SEN Regulations).

Changes to both the draft SEN Regulations and associated Code of Practice are currently being considered as a result of the feedback. The Department hopes to commence the legislative journey for the new Regulations in 2022, subject to Ministerial approval. The new Regulations and Code of Practice will then be phased in during 2022.

The DE and the Department for the Economy are working together on a project to develop a more strategic and joined-up approach to education and training provision for 14–19-year-olds. The project has examined how high-quality careers education and guidance is provided to ensure learners are aware of their options and the available pathways into higher education, further education, training and employment.

Independent Review of SEN service provision and processes

The Public Accounts Committee Report on Impact Review of Special Educational Needs (2021) Recommendation 2 states that there should be an independent, external review of the SEN service provision and processes. According to the Report, the review should include:

- an evaluation of all types of SEN support provided by developing benchmarks and collating data to demonstrate the progress made by children;

- an assessment of the impact of classroom assistance on children's outcomes, for both primary and post-primary school pupils, to determine when it is the best form of support;

- obtaining an understanding as to why there is a higher proportion of children with SEN and specifically children with a statement of SEN in Northern Ireland compared to England;

- benchmarking SEN services with other jurisdictions to learn from their experiences;

Country priorities
• consideration of the funding of SEN services including the delegation of budgets; and • assessing the impact of the new Framework coming from the revised Regulations and Code of Practice (p. 8). The appointment of an external consultant to carry out this review went out to tender on 25 November 2021. Once commenced, the review is expected to take six months to complete.

Section 2: Analysis grid

Measure 1: To improve inclusive education and to ensure that good quality education is accessible for all

Agency recommendation	Findings
1.1 There is a clearly stated policy for the promotion of quality in inclusive education. *(Policy aims to widen access to education and to promote full participation and opportunities for all learners vulnerable to exclusion to realise their potential. Policy outlines how education policy-makers need to take responsibility for all learners.)*	1.1.1 The Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO) strengthened the rights of learners with SEN to be educated in mainstream schools, where their parents want this and the interests of other learners can be protected. SENDO also introduced disability discrimination provisions that apply to schools and the Education Authority (European Agency, Country information for UK (Northern Ireland) – Legislation and policy). The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 was parent order of SENDO. 1.1.2 The objective is to improve the quality of education offered to pupils of all ages and backgrounds (Sustainable Schools Policy, 2009, p. 6). 1.1.3 We want to make sure that schools can maintain their quality and improve even further. We see this happening through promoting the importance of high standards across the school system; supporting schools and their leaders and teachers effectively in their pursuit of excellence; and helping to address better the various barriers to learning faced by children (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 1). The expectation of, and support for, schools and teachers in addressing these additional needs will be set out in other policy documents but is an integral part of the overall school improvement agenda (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 2). Indicators of effective performance include: • A clear commitment exists to promoting equality of opportunity, high quality learning, a concern for individual pupils and a respect for diversity.

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• Effective interventions and support are in place to meet the additional education and other needs of pupils and to help them overcome barriers to learning (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 14). 1.1.4 The SEN Framework is set in the context of a well-developed inclusive educational policy environment aimed at providing: 'a system that is recognised internationally for the quality of its teaching and learning, for the achievements of its young people and for a holistic approach to education' (Draft SEN Code of Practice, Section 1, p. 4) Department of Education vision, corporate goals and strategic objectives: a) improving the well-being of children and young people; b) raising standards for all; c) closing the performance gap, increasing access and equality; d) developing the education workforce; e) improving the learning environment; and f) delivering high quality education services (Draft SEN Code of Practice, Section 1, p. 4; Extant Code of Practice, p. 2, para 1.6). Fundamental principles of the Code include: • Inclusion – the needs of most pupils with SEN and/or a disability will be met in mainstream schools, without the need for a statutory assessment or a Statement. Children with SEN, including those with Statements, should, wherever appropriate, and taking into account the wishes of parents or the child over compulsory school age, have a right to be educated alongside their peers in mainstream schools. 1.1.5 We want our education system to be child-centred, inclusive and child-friendly (Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, p. 51).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	The Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 sets out eight outcomes for children and young people, including that they live in a society:
	• which respects their rights (p. 83);
	• in which equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted (p. 89).
	1.1.6 The Policy for sustainable schools vision is to ensure that every learner achieves his or her full potential at each stage of development.
	In advancing towards this vision the education sector will want to:
	• ensure that the excellent quality of education available to some young people is made available to all;
	• improve outcomes for all but, in particular, to provide additional support to those who require it, including those children with Special Educational Needs, to realise their full potential;
	• encourage schools to co-operate in sharing best practice to support children with Special Educational Needs and those with other barriers to learning (p. 4).
	Our aim is to support effective and meaningful collaboration across the education system and enable children and young people to build their understanding of what they have in common as well as what defines them as being different. This should equip them to explore issues around diversity and how people of differing political, religious, ethnic and cultural traditions can live together in mutual respect and with a common understanding of our interdependence as equal members of society (Policy for sustainable schools, p. 11).
	1.1.7 Equality and inclusion are one of the cornerstones of an education system which enables every learner to fulfil his or her potential (Community Relations Equality and Diversity, p. 4).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	1.1.8 Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education sets out a vision for self-improving Shared Education communities delivering educational benefits to learners, encouraging the efficient and effective use of resources, and promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion (p. ii). Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 place a statutory obligation on public authorities carrying out their various functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity: • between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; • between men and women generally; • between persons with a disability and persons without; and • between persons with dependants and persons without (Sharing Works, p. 7). DE encourages active participation of pupils with Special Educational Needs to engage in shared learning activities with their peers. Special Schools will be encouraged to partner with other schools for Shared Education (Sharing Works, Key Action 11, p. 20). 1.1.9 Integrated education brings children and staff from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other faiths, or none, together in one school. Integrated Schools ensure that children from diverse backgrounds are educated together. There are at present 65 grant-aided integrated schools in Northern Ireland, made up of 38 grant-maintained integrated schools and 27 controlled integrated schools (Department of Education – Integrated schools).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	1.1.10 One of the strategic aims of youth work is to continue to improve the non-formal learning environment by creating inclusive, participative settings in which the voice and influence of young people are championed, supported and evident in the design, delivery and evaluation of programmes (Priorities for Youth, p. 12).
1.2 Legislation and policy are consistent with the principles of the UNCRC and the UNCRPD. *(Legislation and policy upholds the right of all learners to full participation in school with their own local peer group.)*	1.2.1 Part 3 of The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (NI) Order 2005 details disability discrimination in education, accessibility plans for schools, enforcement via SEN and Disability Tribunal for NI. 1.2.2 In the development of the SEN Code of Practice, consideration has been given to United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (Draft SEN Code of Practice, Section 1, p. 5). Article 5A of 1996 order (as amended) includes the right of a child to give views and have them considered (Extant Code of Practice, p. 3, para 1.7). 1.2.3 Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) enshrines the right of all children and young people to say what they think should happen and to have their opinions taken into account when adults are making decisions that affect them (Pupil Participation Circular 2014/4, 2 June 2014, p. 1). 1.2.4 The Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 sits within the context of the United Nations international human rights conventions including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the rights of children and young people with disabilities which are encompassed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government; the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015; and the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (p. 9).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	The UNCRC says that all children and young people should be treated equally without discrimination, irrespective of their ethnicity, gender, language, religion, political opinion, family background, abilities or other status (Article 2). By challenging discrimination and promoting equality, particularly for the most vulnerable in society including disadvantaged, marginalised and minority ethnic groups, we will ensure we celebrate the diverse experience, skills and talents of all our children (Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, p. 89).

1.2.5 The Department sets out its aim to encourage all schools to set up councils or other forums to ensure that pupils have a voice in decisions regarding the running of the school. The involvement of young people is now identified as an indicator of effective performance, and it is also a specific goal in promoting engagement among schools, staff, pupils, parents, families and communities (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 7).

1.2.6 This Framework is being brought forward in the broad context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) then more locally the Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 (Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework, p. 6).

1.2.7 The principles of the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have been taken into consideration when developing the framework. This framework should promote children's rights and reflects the main guiding principles of the UNCRC and UNCRPD (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 19).

1.2.8 Strengthening participation in the youth service at local, sub-regional and regional level. Engaging with children and young people, supporting the youth voice and co-design of programmes is embedded within Youth Service delivery (Priorities for Youth, paras 1.7–1.8, 2.23; p. 24, action 4.20, para 3). |

Agency recommendation	Findings
1.3 The concept of inclusion is clarified in education policy as an agenda that increases quality and equity for all learners. *(Policy aims to address underachievement of all vulnerable groups including children with disabilities.)*	1.3.1 Inclusive education is not a marginal issue but is central to the achievement of high quality education for all learners and the development of inclusive societies. Inclusive education is essential to achieve social equality and is a constituent element of lifelong learning. Inclusion is an ongoing process by which schools, the EA and others develop their cultures, policies and practices to include all children in the life of the school. Through effective inclusion, all children in the school access common opportunities in ways relevant to their needs, this will help to ensure they feel they fully belong to the school community. Inclusion requires the active involvement of all concerned. It places an onus on schools to adapt their organisation and make reasonable adjustments to meet the diverse needs of all children and value the development of all children in all areas of school life. Inclusion is about delivering a curriculum which caters for the different aptitudes and abilities of all children. It puts in place measures to improve awareness of teaching staff (including the Learning Support Co-ordinator (LSC)) and other school staff of inclusive learning and equality issues. (Draft SEN Code of Practice, Section 14, pp. 3–4) 1.3.2 Equality legislation underpins the duty of statutory authorities and employers to work towards the inclusion of the diverse range of people within our society and towards equality of access and provision. This includes the need to promote equality of opportunity: • between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; • between men and women generally; • between persons with a disability and persons without;

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• between persons with dependants and persons without ([Community Relations Equality and Diversity](#), p. 3).

Equality and inclusion are one of the cornerstones of an education system which enables every learner to fulfil his or her potential. ([Community Relations Equality and Diversity](#), p. 4)

1.3.3 The Programme for Government of the Northern Ireland Executive reflects a long-term commitment to tackle social disadvantage and underachievement at school; to ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity to reach their full potential; and to improve educational outcomes across Northern Ireland.

The [Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021](#) includes a number of priorities relating to educational support and guidance, including Indicator 12: Reduce educational inequality. The outcomes for Indicator 12 will be measured by the percentage reduction in the attainment gap between school leavers on free school meals (a measure of disadvantage) and their peers (pp. 65–66).

1.3.4 The [Department of Education Business Plan 2021/22](#) includes strategic priorities relating to increasing access and equality:

• Make learning accessible to all: We give all children and young people access to pre-school, school and youth education provision

• Support those who need more help with learning: Working with health & education partners, we deliver high quality services for children & young people, including those with Special Educational Needs

• Improve the learning environment: We promote equality of opportunity, respect for others, good relations and inclusivity and we provide modern, sustainable educational settings which are fit-for-purpose and facilitate shared learning |

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• Tackle Disadvantage and Underachievement: We improve developmental and learning outcomes for all children & young people, with a particular focus on those who are underachieving, at risk of underachieving, or disadvantaged (pp. 10–11). 1.3.5 Equality and inclusion is fundamental to planning and implementation and the values of equality, diversity and interdependence is recognised as being at the heart of youth work (Priorities for Youth, paras 3.3–3.4). The Priorities for Youth policy commits to provision of both generic and targeted delivery, the latter supporting the needs of specific groups of young people to ensure equality of opportunity and inclusive programmes (p. 19, action 4.8).
1.4 Legislation and policy for inclusive education is cross-sectoral. *(Policy outlines procedures to ensure the efficient co-ordination of services, as well as clearly defining roles and responsibilities.)*	1.4.1 SEN and Disability Act (NI) 2016, Section 4, Co-operation between the Authority and health and social services authorities: 12A (1) In the exercise of their respective functions in accordance with the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 ('the 2015 Act'), the Authority and a health and social services authority ('the relevant bodies') must in particular co-operate – a) in the identification and assessment of children who have, or may have, special educational needs; b) in providing to children with special educational needs the services which those special educational needs call for; and c) in the preparation of a transition plan as defined by regulation 2 of the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. (2) In particular, the relevant bodies must in so exercising those functions – a) share on request information about a child who has, or may have, special educational needs (but only with the permission of the child, if the child is over compulsory school age, or the parent of the child in any other case); and

Agency recommendation	Findings
	b) prepare a joint plan for the exercise of those functions.

Section 5, Duty of Authority to request help from health and social care bodies

5 (1) Article 14 of the 1996 Order (duties of health and social care bodies) is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph (3) for 'may request' substitute 'shall request'.

1.4.2 The Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 is the overarching Strategy from which will flow a variety of cross-departmental, multi-agency plans and more detailed topic-specific strategies and programmes (p. 9).

1.4.3 The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 places a number of duties on the Executive and other bodies delivering services for children and young people – these other bodies are referred to as 'Children's Authorities'. The Act requires the Executive to promote co-operation across relevant bodies and to adopt a Strategy to improve the well-being of children and young people (Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, p. 11).

This Strategy will be delivered by all nine government Departments. Children's lives cannot be compartmentalised and policy responsibility for children and young people therefore cannot be placed on a single Department (Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, p. 12).

1.4.4 Partnership – Safeguarding is a shared responsibility and the most effective way of ensuring that a child's needs are met is through working in partnership. Sound decision-making depends on the fullest possible understanding of the child or young person's circumstances and their needs. This involves effective information sharing, strong organisational governance and leadership, collaboration and understanding between families, agencies, individuals and professionals (Co-operating to safeguard children and young people in Northern Ireland, p. 10). |

Agency recommendation	Findings
	Shared Education (NI) Act 2016: The Act places a duty on both the DE and the EA to 'encourage, facilitate and promote shared education' and to consider Shared Education in both policy and operational work. The Act states that the purpose of Shared Education is: a) to deliver educational benefits to children and young persons; b) to promote the efficient and effective use of resources; c) to promote equality of opportunity; d) to promote good relations; and e) to promote respect for identity, diversity and community cohesion.
1.5 There is a long-term multi-level policy framework for implementing quality inclusive education at national, regional and / or organisational levels.	1.5.1 The Priorities for Youth policy commits to the planning, funding and delivery of youth work based on a composite regional and local assessment of needs, supported by regional and local youth development plans (paras 1.8, 2.11, 2.23, 4.2; p. 17, action 4.6; p. 24, action 4.20(3)).
1.6 Policy outlines how education policy-makers need to take responsibility for all learners.	1.6.1 Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 sets out a focus on the following groups: • Children and young people from families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage • Children and young people with SEN • Children with social, emotional, behavioural difficulties • Care experienced children and young people • Newcomers, Travellers, Roma children and young people • Children and young people in custody (pp. 55–59).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	1.6.2 Action on tackling barriers to learning: Bring forward revised policies on special educational needs and inclusion, newcomer children, Traveller and Roma children and alternative education provision that are based on a whole school recognition of the diversity of pupils within their population with schools accepting responsibility for educational outcomes for all their pupils (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 45). 1.6.3 The Department of Education provided updated guidance for schools seeking to transform to integrated status in December 2017 – Integration Works: Transforming Your School. This states that: Integrated schools aim to provide an environment where pupils from different community backgrounds can interact, formally and informally, on a daily basis. A large body of research data suggests that extended contact between children and young people from different community backgrounds, such as that provided in integrated schools, creates the conditions for generating mutual respect and understanding (p. 5). 1.6.4 The Department of Education has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education: 'It shall be the duty of the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education, that is to say the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils' (Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, Article 64). 1.6.5 The Priorities for Youth policy demonstrates a policy commitment to all learners (p. 19, action 4.8).

Agency recommendation	Findings
1.7 Policy has the goal of supporting all teachers to have positive attitudes towards all learners.	1.7.1 The Northern Ireland Curriculum statement on inclusion requires teachers to plan their teaching so that it pays particular attention to and responds to the achievement of different groups of pupils. It explains that inclusive practice should involve differentiation strategies, co-operative learning strategies, the use of new technology, and classroom management strategies. It also states that teachers and schools may seek support from external agencies to promote inclusion in their classrooms, including with respect to the education of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities (Eurydice: Separate Special Education Needs Provision in Early Childhood and School Education). 1.7.2 Priorities for Youth recognises the positive contribution which youth workers make to the lives of young people (paras 1.5, 1.12, 4.12; p. 21, action 4.13). Current youth work delivery is based on the Circle of Courage model and Trauma Informed Practice.
1.8 Policy requires learning material to be accessible.	–
1.9 Policy describes an effective framework of support for schools to implement inclusive education. *(Support structures focus on different forms of educational resource centres that are locally organised to offer support to individual or clusters of schools.)*	1.9.1 The Department has funded the setting up of a regional support service across the ELBs [now EA] called the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS), to strengthen and improve support to newcomer pupils, by ensuring a consistent level of support and specialist advice is provided to all grant-aided and special schools. The key services of the IDS that are currently available are: diversity coordinators; interpreting and translating services; multi-lingual website; toolkit for diversity in the primary school; and continuous professional development (Every School a Good School – Supporting newcomer pupils, p. 2). 1.9.2 Objectives of the Traveller Education Support Service: • To improve the quality of educational support provided to the Traveller community; • To provide a consistent service to schools and families in need of support across Northern Ireland;

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• To facilitate equality of access from pre-school to post-primary education;
	• To build the capacity of schools to meet the educational needs of Traveller children and young people;
	• To promote whole school approaches to service development;
	• To promote full inclusion and integration across all areas of youth education;
	• To support and encourage family learning, out of school hours learning and life-long learning.
	1.9.3 Commitment to:
	• Provide tailored support to looked after children in education to ensure they have a positive and engaging learning experience
	• Identify the primary causes of the educational attainment gap and measures to address it (A Life Deserved – 'Caring' for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, p. 42).
	1.9.4 In addition to schools, the Priorities for Youth policy commits to providing support for youth work settings to provide inclusive non-formal education (pp. 21–24, priorities 3 and 4).
1.10 Policies outline a continuum of support for children and young people in schools, to meet the full diversity of learners' needs.	1.10.1 Based on the continuum of special educational needs and of special educational provision, in addition to mainstream classes, the EA may identify the need for different learning environments with enhanced adult pupil ratios, e.g. EOTAS. In keeping with the requirement that special education provision is '… additional to or otherwise different from the educational provision made generally for children', this will normally include:
	• resourced provision attached to a primary or post-primary school, that is, a Learning Support Centre (LS Centre), to provide, in a small group setting, individual programmes of teaching and learning tailored to the individual child's needs; and

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• Special Schools to provide individualised special educational provision to address specific needs for those children who cannot access the curriculum in a mainstream setting (Draft SEN Code of Practice, Section 2, p. 10; Extant Code of Practice, p. 2, para 1.6).
	1.10.2 The draft SEN Code of Practice outlines strategies to support specific children, including behaviour support plans, Educational Guidance Centres, Behaviour Support Units, special schools, Learning Support Centres, education other than at school (Draft SEN Code of Practice, Section 14, p. 21).
	1.10.3 Evidence clearly demonstrates that providing help and support at an early stage, and intervening early and focusing on preventative actions, can improve outcomes for children and young people and result in reduced public expenditure (Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030, p. 22).
	1.10.4 Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework sets out a three-tier model of support: well-being for all, early support, enhanced support (promoting prevention/early intervention) (p. 10).
	1.10.5 Since 2007, the Department of Education has funded an independent counselling service for post-primary pupils in grant-aided schools. The Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICCS) works as an integral part of a school's pastoral care system to help provide this support to pupils.
	Educational psychologists employed by the Education Authority (EA) have a central role in the statutory assessment process for children who may need a statement of special educational needs (SEN).
	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are specialist mental health services for children and young people provided by the Health and Social Care (HSC) service. They aim to promote emotional well-being and deliver care, treatment and preventative mental health services to children and young people aged 0–18/19 who experience significant mental health difficulties (Eurydice: Guidance and Counselling in Early Childhood and School Education).
	1.10.6 In addition to schools, the Priorities for Youth policy recognises youth work as an important aspect of learning, on the continuum of educational provision (paras 2.5 and 2.11).

Agency recommendation	Findings
1.11 Policy outlines strategies for awareness-raising with all stakeholders in inclusive education.	–
1.12 Policy outlines the development of the role of special schools as a resource to increase the capability of mainstream schools and improve support for all learners. *(The specialist knowledge and skills of special school / resource centre are maintained and further developed so as to enhance support for learners, such as those with low-incidence disabilities.)*	1.12.1 Special schools are active members of Area Learning Communities. These communities, established by the Department of Education, enable clusters of schools within a certain geographical area to determine their priorities regarding the delivery of the Entitlement Framework. This framework guarantees all learners access to a minimum number of courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16 to enable them to reach their full potential no matter what school they attend. In most of these communities, there is a sub-group for SEN chaired by the principals of the participating special schools. This sub-group helps to drive the inclusion agenda and widen the range of learning pathways and accreditation courses for all learners. In addition, this work is underpinned by the Department of Education's policy on shared education and reconciliation. (European Agency, Country information for UK (Northern Ireland) – Systems of support and specialist provision)

Measure 1 evaluative comments

See also UNCRPD Concluding observations on the initial report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2017), Article 24: Education (p. 10).

Measure 2: To support improved co-operation, including greater involvement of parents and local community

Agency recommendation	Findings
2.1 The full involvement of families in all educational processes is outlined in legislation and policy.	2.1.1 The Education (Pupil Reporting) Regulations (2009) set out the information needed in annual school reports to parents. The Education (NI) Order 1996 Order and extant Code detail parental involvement during inter alia agreement and finalising of statement, annual review process and development of transition plans.
	2.1.2 Give your child a helping hand (2018) aims to encourage parents and carers to support their children's education by giving them 'a helping hand' – read and count with them from an early age; show an interest in their day at school; talk to them about their homework; and help them make the decisions now that will help shape them into the adults they will become.
	Note that this campaign was paused due to COVID-19. Lockdown meant that the vast majority of pupils were required to learn from home, supported by their parents, family or carers. A new 'Try and Stop Me' campaign was launched with effect from 20 September 2021 and is about instilling hope and aspiration in children and young people.
	2.1.3 Count, Read: Succeed aims to link with parents, families and communities to help them support their children, particularly in literacy and numeracy, for example through the Extended Schools programme, and within DE, through the creation of a directorate with a specific focus on parents, families and communities (p. 8).
	The co-operation between schools, parents and pupils can include:
	a. parents and communities engaging with, and supporting, the school;
	b. maximising pupils' enjoyment of school;
	c. proactively and diligently encouraging pupils' attendance at school;
	d. pupils being encouraged and facilitated by their parents to study to the best of their ability;

Agency recommendation	Findings
	e. pupils participating fully and positively with their teachers and other staff; f. ensuring homework is completed diligently; g. preparing properly for school-based and external examinations; h. schools that are welcoming to parents; i. the provision of regular feedback from schools to parents on their children's progress; j. schools keeping parents informed about how they can help to support their children's learning; and k. parents being encouraged to consider volunteering, in particular to support the development of literacy and numeracy (p. 31). In opening up to parents and the community, schools should make particular efforts to engage those parents that are considered 'hard-to-reach'. In some cases, this will require overcoming parents own negative experiences of, and resulting attitudes to, education (p. 32).
2.2 Policy for inclusive education places learners and their families at the centre of all actions.	2.2.1 Adopt an approach in which the needs of all children and young people are paramount (Community Relations, Equality and Diversity, p. 21) 2.2.2 Key Principles include: the interests of pupils rather than institutions must be at the centre of efforts to improve educational achievement and tackle underachievement (Every School a Good School, p. 5). The policy will be focused on the needs of the learner, and will apply to children and young people in statutory early years, primary, post-primary, special schools and youth settings. While the requirement is to address all section 75 groups this should be implemented in a way which is age appropriate and flexible enough to focus on particular issues relevant to the needs of the learners and the communities within which the policy is delivered (Community Relations, Equality and Diversity, p. 22). 2.2.3 The Priorities for Youth policy recognises and supports the need for young people, their families and the wider community to be involved in youth work in a meaningful way (para 3.3).

Agency recommendation	Findings
2.3 Sharing information among professionals and families is a policy priority.	2.3.1 Co-operation to improve well-being. 2 (1) Every children's authority must, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of its children functions, co-operate with other children's authorities and with other children's service providers in the exercise of those functions (Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland), 2015). 2.3.2 The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has published a statutory Data Sharing Code of Practice to assist organisations to comply with the DPA (Co-operating to safeguard children and young people in NI, p. 73). 2.3.3 The Priorities for Youth policy recognises and encourages the sharing of good practice (paras 2.12 and 4.11).
2.4 Policy has the goal of supporting parental interaction and communication with professionals.	2.4.1 Extant Code of Practice. The Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland (UNOCINI) framework is used to assess the child's needs and the most appropriate forms of intervention to meet identified needs of the child or young person. The framework recognises that services may be required from a range of professions, disciplines and organisations and services should be co-ordinated on a multi-disciplinary and inter-agency basis. Services should be planned and provided, in consultation with families, by professional staff and voluntary organisations with the appropriate skills and resources to meet those needs (Co-operating to safeguard children and young people in NI, p. 32). 2.4.2 The Priorities for Youth policy recognises and supports the need for young people, their families and the wider community to be involved in youth work in a meaningful way (para 3.3).

Agency recommendation	Findings
2.5 Schools are expected and supported to involve a wider range of partners and foster formal and informal networks that support their practice.	2.5.1 The school may decide to seek external support for the teacher from a number of sources. This could include, for example, other schools, the Education Authority (EA), or health professionals. The additional support will focus on helping the teacher meet the needs of the pupil (Count, Read: Succeed, pp. 38–39). 2.5.2 Indicators of effective performance include: • Good relationships that facilitate engagement and communication between the school and its parents and the wider community that it serves. • The school and its teachers are held in respect by parents and the local community who in turn actively support the work of the school. • The school uses its involvement in particular programmes (for example Extended Schools or Specialist Schools) effectively in meeting the needs of the community and nearby schools (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 16). 2.5.3 The Department of Education's Extended Schools Programme aims to improve levels of educational achievement for disadvantaged children and young people by providing the additional support that they might need to help them reach their full potential. The Extended Schools: Schools, families, communities – working together policy document states that: An Extended School provides a range of services and activities, sometimes during or beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of children, their families and the wider community. In doing so, Extended Schools will engage in collaboration and partnership with neighbouring schools and statutory and voluntary and community sector organisations operating in the community (p. 2).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	2.5.4 The Entitlement Framework sets out the minimum number and range of courses a school should offer at Key Stage 4 and Post-16.

Every post-primary school in Northern Ireland is a member of an Area Learning Community (ALC). ALCs provide a mechanism within which schools come together to plan the curriculum they offer on an area basis.

Schools work together in collaboration with other schools, further education colleges and other training providers to deliver access to the Entitlement Framework, thus enabling them to offer a broad and balanced, economically-relevant curriculum to meet the needs and aspirations of all pupils.

There are currently 27 ALCs, which are commonly made up of between six and ten schools. The Chair of each ALC, which can change annually, is one of the principals from a participating member school. |

Measure 2 evaluative comments

The Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy recognises:

> This policy will need to address the limited connections between the current CR policy and other education and government policies, which results in the perception of CR as an 'add on' to, rather than an integral part of, education. It will also need to broaden the scope of the work to include wider issues of diversity (including respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to all Section 75 groups and linguistic diversity) without losing the focus on the continuing need for specific work with children and young people to address equality, discrimination, sectarian attitudes and behaviour. This policy will take account of other existing and developing policies which contribute to the wider aspect of diversity (such as Every School as Good School; Supporting Newcomer Pupils, English as an Additional Language, Travellers, Way forward for Special Educational Needs, etc) (p. 17).

Measure 3: To develop monitoring strategies, establishing a comprehensive accountability and evaluation framework for inclusive education

Agency recommendation	Findings
3.1 Policy describes clear mechanisms to evaluate effectiveness and quality in inclusive education.	3.1.1 The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) is effective from January 2017 and is common to all phases inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Each phase is supported by characteristics of effective practice and self-evaluation questions that are phase specific.
	[…] The ETI has developed the ISEF to provide a more holistic overview of the key aspects of education and training at all stages from early years through to further education and work-based learning (p. 1).
	3.1.2 Performance as measured by educational attainment is only one indicator of success. It is important to look at other indicators, particularly the findings from inspection, as it focuses much more widely on aspects such as the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom; the effectiveness of leadership and governance; the school's ethos and environment; the treatment of pupils with special needs; any indicators determined by the school through its self-evaluative work; and the quality of pastoral care arrangements. This policy recognises, therefore, the urgency of agreeing more meaningful value-added measures that will assist schools in benchmarking their performance against others with similar characteristics to ensure that parents and others receive more useful information about the true contribution of individual schools in helping young people to reach their full potential (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 9).
	Indicators of effective performance include:
	• A clear commitment exists to promoting equality of opportunity, high quality learning, a concern for individual pupils and a respect for diversity.
	• A school culture of achievement, improvement and ambition exists – with clear expectations that all pupils can and will achieve to the very best of their ability.
	• Effective interventions and support are in place to meet the additional education and other needs of pupils and to help them overcome barriers to learning (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 14).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	The Education Authority is responsible for monitoring the performance of individual schools, particularly the standards of attainment; for challenging schools about their performance where it is clearly declining or where the ETI identifies weaknesses; for providing the necessary support to schools seeking to improve; and for taking the actions required to deliver and sustain improved performance in those schools where provision and progress is deemed unsatisfactory. EA will be accountable to the Department of Education for the effectiveness of the discharge of these responsibilities. It will prepare and publish an overarching School Improvement Plan and submit this to the Department for approval at the start of each financial year (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 36).
	The Education Authority is also required to publish an Annual Report commenting on progress against its Plan and analysing aspects of performance from which lessons can be learned. This report, taken alongside other evidence such as the Chief Inspector's Report, research outcomes and performance statistics, will be the basis of the regular and ongoing review of the Department's school improvement policy. It will also inform school support and all aspects of teacher education (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 36).
	3.1.3 A key feature of using the framework is that each partnership identifies the progress made in demonstrating measurable educational outcomes and delivering social change by achieving conditions whereby young people demonstrate positive attitudes, dispositions, behaviours, understanding of reconciliation and respect for others (Developing Shared Education, p. 3).
3.2 Monitoring procedures ensure that inequalities in access to educational resources at regional or organisational levels are addressed.	3.2.1 The commitments made to promoting reconciliation and mutual trust in The Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, including Section 75 and Schedule 9 to the NI Act 1998, place a statutory obligation on public authorities in carrying out their various functions relating to the north of Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity: • between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; • between men and women generally;

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• between persons with a disability and persons without;
	• and between persons with dependants and persons without (Community Relations, Equality and Diversity, p. 3).
	3.2.2 The implementation of a Northern Ireland System Evaluation Framework (appropriately funded to ensure implementation as soon as possible), will help to overcome previous concerns regarding how data is used by separating data used by schools from data used on a sample basis for system measurement purposes. This System Evaluation Framework will illustrate at system (Northern Ireland) level the range of ways in which schools support learners as they progress through their education, providing additional information such as the context of the school, the challenges which learners face and the value-added which has been provided. (A Fair Start, p. 22)
3.3 Accountability measures that impact upon educational professionals' work reflect the importance of wider learner achievements.	3.3.1 Introduce a contextual value-added measure to be used alongside other performance data in assessing the performance of schools. (Action plan on tacking barriers to learning, Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 46).
3.4 Policy outlines common standards for service and provision evaluation for use across health, education and social services.	–
3.5 Policy outlines how to involve families in the process of evaluating quality of services.	–

Agency recommendation	Findings
3.6 Policy describes mechanisms to evaluate demand for services.	–
3.7 Policy supports opportunities for school teams to evaluate their practice through involvement in research and development activities.	3.7.1 Whole school development and improvement planning can be based around the competences as outlined in the GTCNI publication 'Teaching: the Reflective Profession' (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 35). The Implementation Plan includes: Extend, for at least the next five years, the provision that has allowed schools to take up to 5 school development days to be used for self-evaluation and continuing professional development in the pursuit of improvement and raising standards (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 22). Introduce the e-schools system which will allow schools to make better use of information, particularly that which benchmarks aspects of performance and context against schools of a similar type (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 27). Review the current requirements for School Development Planning and produce revised guidance material on self-evaluation and school development planning (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 28).

Measure 3 evaluative comments

The lower attainment of students with SEN or a disability is a persistent inequality. For each category of attainment and across each SEN group, females outperformed their male counterparts (Report on Key Inequalities in Education, p. 10). (No data on pupils in special schools).

School leavers with no SEN or disability were much more likely than those with any SEN or disability to enter higher education. This is a persistent inequality (Report on Key Inequalities in Education, p. 11).

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered for the equality ground of disability and SEN reinforced how important it is for these two categories to be considered separately in addressing the educational needs of both. Not all disabled young people have a statement of special educational needs; but it appears that at times the educational needs of some disabled young people can be overlooked if they do not have a statement that outlines for schools how exactly their needs should be met. Furthermore, it appears that disability is often underreported by schools, parents and perhaps in further and higher education – this makes understanding the needs and outcomes of people with disabilities in regard to education difficult to fully realise (Report on Key Inequalities in Education, p. 12).

See also UNCRPD Concluding observations on the initial report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2017), Article 24: Education (p. 10).

Measure 4: To improve the cost-effectiveness of the education system, combining efficiency, effectiveness, equity and inclusion

Agency recommendation	Findings
4.1 National level inclusive education strategies are linked to long-term financial support.	4.1.1 Common Funding Scheme: Funding includes a social need element (TSN) (p. 12) and an additional social deprivation factor in 2020/21 (p. 15). Other elements (primary) include: small schools (p. 17), and support for children from the traveller community, for looked after children, newcomer pupils, children of service personnel, Irish medium schools and special units (pp. 21–24). Post-primary also includes an educational attainment factor for learners performing below expected level for age and needing extra support (pp. 31–32). 4.1.2 The Education Authority determines the level of funding for special education as part of its annual decision about the allocation of its block grant. Special schools have partially delegated budgets, with all pupil-related costs being retained centrally by the Education Authority (European Agency, Country information for UK (Northern Ireland) – Financing of inclusive education systems). A large number of projects and initiatives which offer additional funding to support aspects of inclusive education exist across government departments and other sectors, such as charitable organisations (European Agency, IECE Country Questionnaire – UK (Northern Ireland), p. 17).

Agency recommendation	Findings
4.2 Funding policies and structures provide flexible resourcing systems that promote inclusion.	4.2.1 The Common Funding Scheme has been developed in accordance with the following key principles: • Sustainable schools should be funded according to the relative need of their pupils, and in a way that enables the effects of social disadvantage to be substantially reduced. [Note: the term 'sustainable' refers to the DE Policy on sustainable schools]; • Sustainable schools should be funded on a consistent and fair basis, taking full account of the needs of pupils; • The formula should support schools in delivering the curriculum; • The formula should underpin and reinforce wider education policy and objectives; • The formula should be as transparent and comprehensible as possible and predictable in its outcome (pp. 3–4). 4.2.2 Resources held at centre. The additional costs associated with meeting the 'statemented' needs of an individual child will be in addition to a school's formula allocation. It will include additional staffing support, such as support from a classroom assistant, and additional items of equipment (Common Funding Scheme, p. 44). In some cases, a pupil will have a short term special need, arising for example from an accident and which, were the need to be permanent, would require a Statement of Special Educational Need to be prepared. Where the Funding Authority certifies that additional staffing support and/or items of equipment are necessary, the cost of these will be met from centre funds for a period not exceeding 6 months following which the requirement should be reviewed (Common Funding Scheme, p. 44).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	4.2.3 The Pathway Fund provides additional targeted support to children to age four in disadvantaged areas, who are at risk of not reaching their full potential within the school system. The Department also makes Extended Services funding available to non-statutory pre-school education settings with a high proportion of children from disadvantaged areas or with a Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) to help address barriers to learning. (A Fair Start, p. 9) 4.2.4 Sharing of resources and pooling of funds: 1) This section applies to a children's authority for the purposes of exercising any functions in accordance with arrangements under section 2. 2) For those purposes, a children's authority may: a) provide staff, goods, services, accommodation or other resources to another children's authority (Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland), 2015, Section 4). 4.2.5 The policy commitment to implement a new funding mechanism (actioned April 2021) has the aim of providing greater consistency, coherence and cost effectiveness to addressing the assessed needs of children and young people in a transparent way (Priorities for Youth, p. 25, priority 5). This also provides a flexible approach to meet the needs of children and young people in line with the inclusive nature of the youth work policy.
4.3 There are long-term funding commitments to support collaborative initiatives between various school-based, resource centre and research teams.	4.3.1 Additional Entitlement funding is provided as a contribution towards meeting costs associated with the collaborative delivery of Key Stage 4 and post-16 courses (Delivering the Entitlement Framework: Guidance to schools 2019/2020, p. 2). 4.3.2 Launched in May 2006, over GBP 150 million of funding has been provided through the Extended Schools Programme over the last 15 years. The funding allows those schools serving the most disadvantaged areas to offer a wide range of services or activities outside of the normal school day to help meet the learning and development needs of pupils, their families and local communities.

Agency recommendation	Findings
	Extended schools activities are designed to support learning, raise school standards and promote healthy lifestyles, enabling schools to work closely with members of the wider community and connect local people with local services (Extended Schools Programme).
4.4 Policy outlines mechanisms for systematic data collection on expenditure and implementation that informs cost-effectiveness issues.	4.4.1 Both the Department and the Education Authority are addressing this issue on foot of the recommendations in the 2017 and 2020 NI Audit Office SEN reports and the 2021 Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Report on Impact Review of SEN.

Measure 4 evaluative comments

The establishment and delivery of an Independent Review of Education is a key commitment in the New Decade New Approach (NDNA) document, agreed by the main political parties in Northern Ireland in January 2020. The Independent Review of Education commenced on 4 October 2021. The Review is expected to identify barriers within the education system which inhibit positive outcomes for children and young people, as well as explaining structural issues which led to inefficiencies or ineffectiveness. The Review will provide a set of focused and strategic recommendations on how the Department and the Executive might improve outcomes for pupils, support to schools and the effectiveness of education administration. The Review's Terms of Reference include:

- The distribution of funding to education settings and quantification of any potential funding gap

- The resourcing requirements of education settings, with modelling and quantum of funding of individual schools and settings (including further and higher education) (p. 10).

- The better alignment of education provision and funding, at all levels, with NI Executive priorities (p. 11).

- An assessment of resource intensive services within education delivery and identification of priority areas for further investment (p. 12).

The Department has also accepted all of the recommendations in the 2021 PAC Report on Impact Review of SEN and, in particular, is in the process of commissioning an independent, external review of SEN service provision and processes under recommendation 2 of the report.

Measure 5: To increase participation in good quality inclusive early childhood education and care and enrolment rates in pre-school education

Agency recommendation	Findings
5.1 Policy clearly respects the rights and the needs of children and their families.	5.1.1 The rights of children and their families are respected – early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life and as such it should be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right and for the significant foundation it provides for future and lifelong learning (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 19).
5.2 Support is available for families to recognise and understand the needs of their child. *(Support focuses upon and what is in the child's best interests.)*	5.2.1 The Department's 'Education Works' campaign aimed to get more parents involved in their child's education, and provides practical examples to help parents read, count, play and talk to their children. (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 8). It has since been superseded by three campaigns: • Give your child a helping hand • Miss School. Miss Out • Try and Stop Me. 5.2.2 Parents and families will also be supported in understanding the development stages of their child, especially in relation to the early language and motor skills required to give every child greater equality of opportunity and in so doing, facilitating their ability to start school better prepared to learn (A Fair Start, p. 1). 5.2.3 Redirecting the Focus to Early Years: EA should expand and enhance their Early Years SEN Inclusion Service to ensure that pre-school settings have access to expertise to enable them to support children with additional needs / SEN in their pre-school education (A Fair Start, p. 4, action xii).

Agency recommendation	Findings
5.3 Policy outlines how ECI services should be provided for children and families as early as possible and as quickly as possible, following identification of need.	5.3.1 The need to identify and address potential barriers to a child's development as early as possible, lay important foundations for lifelong learning and provide additional support to families, children and communities is acknowledged by the Executive in the priorities and objectives in the Programme for Government (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 1). 5.3.2 Sure Start is a programme targeted at parents and children under the age of four living in the most disadvantaged areas. Sure Start projects deliver a wide variety of services which are designed to support children's learning skills, health and well-being, and social and emotional development. To help children get ready for pre-school, Sure Start projects run a programme for two- to three-year-olds. 5.3.3 Free, part-time pre-school places are available for children in the year immediately before they start compulsory education (aged 3-4). This provision is usually available for 2.5 hours per day, five days a week, for 38 weeks of the year, and the funded places are offered in grant-aided nursery schools and nursery classes / units in primary schools, and in voluntary and private settings. Parents may pay for additional provision if they wish. Funding is provided through the Department of Education (DE) budget and is transferred to early years education providers and grant-aided schools via the Education Authority (EA) or directly from the DE. This depends on the type of funding (revenue or capital funding) and the legal category of school (see the article on 'Administration and Governance at Local and/or Institutional Level') (Eurydice: Funding in Education).
5.4 Policy states that in risk situations, the child's rights should come first.	5.4.1 The Department will work with DHSSPS [now DoH] to develop protocols for delivery bodies to enhance information sharing, early identification and intervention services for children and families at risk, and review joint training requirements across disciplines as well as improving inter-professional communication (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 28).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	5.4.2 The child or young person's welfare is paramount. The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration for the courts and in childcare practice. An appropriate balance should be struck between the child's rights and parent's rights. All efforts should be made to work co-operatively with parents, unless doing so is inconsistent with ensuring the child's safety (Co-operating to safeguard children and young people in Northern Ireland, p. 10).
5.5 Policy measures and guidelines clearly define quality standards for early childhood services and provision.	5.5.1 Children and their families are entitled to high quality, age appropriate early years education and learning services and opportunities – delivered in safe and inclusive environments, led by a skilled workforce, and evaluated against quality standards where the importance of play in its own right, and as a pedagogical tool is recognised (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 18).
	5.5.2 Equality of opportunity and inclusion are essential characteristics of quality early years education and learning – all children, regardless of their special educational needs, disabilities, gender, cultural, religious, socio-economic, or linguistic backgrounds are provided with practical, challenging activities in a stimulating environment which help them achieve their potential (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 19).
	5.5.3 The Refreshed Curricular Guidance for Pre-school Education was published in 2018 and aligns with Foundation Stage. It 'outlines the range of learning opportunities which children of this age and stage of development should have through play and other relevant experiences'.
	5.5.4 All DE-funded pre-school settings are inspected to the same standard by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). The curricular guidance is used by ETI when evaluating the quality of provision and the outcomes for learners in all pre-school settings.

In addition, the ETI Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) for pre-schools provides effective practice and self-evaluation questions for pre-schools. It is used by pre-school settings as a tool to guide their self-evaluation and is used by the ETI when inspecting pre-school settings. |

Agency recommendation	Findings
	The Sure Start programme is also inspected by the ETI, which has evaluated Sure Start four times and produced a set of quality indicators to use for this purpose. An [example of a Sure Start Evaluation](#) is available on the ETI website.
	5.5.5 The [Early Years Registration and Inspection teams](#) based in the Health and Social Care Trusts also inspect the quality of care in playgroups and other non-statutory settings. They are 'specialist teams of social workers … responsible for the registration, inspection, monitoring and support of childminders and day care providers'.
	5.5.6 The [Priorities for Youth](#) policy recognises the importance of having quality standards for youth work delivery (paras 1.6, 2.9, 2.17, 3.2, 3.3, 4.6(3), 4.6(8), 4.11, 4.20(4)). As well as operational responses to deliver this commitment, the ETI Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF) for youth work provides effective practice and self-evaluation questions for youth work settings.
	5.5.7 A Proposed Framework of Future Provision for Children in Early Years with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is currently under development. It needs to be updated to reflect the consultation findings and the strategic direction that has emerged since this work commenced in 2016. The Education Authority (EA) has already commenced a significant programme of improvement and review across all SEN services under its SEN and Disability Strategic Development Programme. The business case for this is currently under consideration by the Department, and Early Years is an integral part of it.
5.6 Early childhood guidance is developed jointly by departments of health, education and social services.	5.6.1 Whilst there is no single government department with overall responsibility for every early years service that children and their families need, the Delivering Social Change (DSC) framework seeks to co-ordinate key actions across Executive Departments to take forward work on priority social policy areas. The DSC framework aims to deliver a range of measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion and has identified early intervention as a priority theme ([Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning](#), p. 13).

Agency recommendation	Findings
5.7 Policy for early childhood services supports cross sectoral, multi-disciplinary working at regional and local levels.	5.7.1 Collaborative working among the statutory, voluntary, and other relevant sectors and professional bodies will play an important part in securing improved outcomes for young children in their early years (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 19). The importance of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working, together with good communication and information sharing are essential to the common goal of improving outcomes for all children and their families (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 26).

5.8 Policy ensures there are pre-school places offered to children coming from ECI services/provision.	5.8.1 Education (NI) Order 1998, Part V: Pre-School Education states:
	
	… each board [now EA] shall prepare and submit to the Department a plan for the provision (whether by the board or by other persons) of pre-school education for children resident in the area of the board …
	
	In this Part 'pre-school education' means education provided for a child (whether at a school or any other premises) at any time—
	
	    a) after he has attained the age of 2 years; and
	
	    b) before he has attained compulsory school age, otherwise than in a reception class.

5.9 Policy outlines how cost-free services/provision are made available for families.	5.9.1 The Pathway Fund 2021–2023 aims for: improved development of children who are at risk of not reaching their full educational potential; and an enhanced, more sustainable Early Years sector. The Pathway Fund is a diverse and flexible fund which supports registered providers or facilitators of early years (0–4) education and learning provision to improve the development of children identified as most at risk of not reaching their full potential within the school system.

Agency recommendation	Findings
	5.9.2 The Pre-School Education Programme is funded to provide one year of non-compulsory pre-school education, delivered in line with a curriculum, which builds upon the learning that children experience at home. It is not provided to meet the day care needs of parents (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 15).
5.10 Policy ensures the same quality of service irrespective of differences in geographical location. *(Such as isolated or rural areas).*	5.10.1 In support of the DE vision 'every young person achieving to his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development' the framework reflects the two overarching goals for education: • Raising standards for all; • Closing the performance gap, increasing access and equality (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, pp. 16–17). Assessing the potential implications of and options for standardised patterns of attendance as part of wider considerations of area based planning for pre-school provision (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 32). 5.10.2 Pursuant to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland 2016), the Department must have due regard to rural needs when: a) developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and b) designing and delivering public services.

Measure 5 evaluative comments

The Terms of Reference of the Independent Review of Education include 'The preparation of children for schooling in the early years, including childcare, pre-school and transition into primary school (including flexibility of school starting age)' (p. 8).

Measure 6: To improve student-focused measures such as mentoring, personalised learning approaches and improved guidance

Agency recommendation	Findings
6.1 High expectations for all learners' achievements underpin policy for inclusive education.	6.1.1 Equality of opportunity and inclusion are essential characteristics of quality early years education and learning – all children, regardless of their special educational needs, disabilities, gender, cultural, religious, socio economic, or linguistic backgrounds are provided with practical, challenging activities in a stimulating environment which help them achieve their potential (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 19). 6.1.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of the draft strategy concluded that the revised literacy and numeracy strategy will help ensure every child, irrespective of their background, race, gender or religion, leaves school with the skills they need in literacy and numeracy. It aims to raise the levels of attainment for all young people and to close the gap between the highest and lowest achieving pupils. This will be achieved through high-quality teaching for every child, along with early intervention and additional support for those children who are struggling with literacy and/or numeracy (Count, Read: Succeed, p. 7). 6.1.3 The Department of Education's vision is: 'A system that is recognised internationally for the quality of its teaching and learning, for the achievements of its young people and for a holistic approach to education' (Department of Education Business Plan 2021/22, p. 10). The Department has identified the following eight strategic priorities to achieve this vision: 1. Make learning accessible to all 2. Improve the quality of learning for our children & young people 3. Look after our children & young people 4. Support those who need more help with learning

Agency recommendation	Findings
	5. Improve the learning environment
	6. Tackle Disadvantage and Underachievement
	7. Support and develop our education workforce
	8. Effectively manage, review and transform our education system ([Department of Education Business Plan 2021/22](#), pp. 10–11).
	6.1.4 *Graduating to Success* is supported by *Access to Success*, DEL's regional strategy for widening participation in higher education by students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The vision is that any qualified individual should be able to gain access to higher education, irrespective of their personal or social background ([Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance](#), p. 23).
	6.1.5 A school culture of achievement, improvement and ambition exists – with clear expectations that all pupils can and will achieve to the very best of their ability ([Every School a Good School](#), 2009, p. 14).
	6.1.6 Every child is an equal child. The expectations for Traveller children should be the same as for all others, including access to the full range of educational experiences free from racial discrimination and prejudice. Outcomes for Traveller children should parallel the range of outcomes for all children ([Taskforce on Traveller Education](#), p. 42; [Recommendations from the Taskforce on Traveller Education's report to the Department of Education](#), p. 1).
6.2 Policy outlines that learners' voices should be listened to in decision-making that affects them.	6.2.1 Access to good careers guidance throughout adult life enables individuals to clarify their aspirations for work, to understand the options open to them and to take control of and make informed decisions in terms of job and career change, training, promotion, flexible working and retirement ([Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance](#), p. 4).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	6.2.2 There is a commitment to involve young people in discussions and decisions on school life that directly affect them and to listen to their views (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 14).

6.2.3 The voice of the child is given high importance in terms of planning to meet needs, including establishing and reviewing Education Plans (A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs, Part 1, p. 6).

6.2.4 The Priorities for Youth policy recognises the importance of youth voice in relation to planning, funding and delivery of youth services. Strengthening participation in the youth service at local, sub-regional and regional levels, engaging with children and young people, supporting the youth voice and co-design of programmes is embedded within Youth Service delivery (paras 1.6–1.8 and 2.23; p. 24, action 4.20(3)). In particular the commitment to establish a 'Network of Networks' model to strengthen youth voice/participation is a key driver. Practice is embedded within the youth service in relation to regularly engaging with children and young people across the youth service, listening and responding to young people's views and ensuring young people have the support and opportunity to voice their views.

6.2.5 Extant Code of Practice, p. 67, paras 6.49 and 6.50. |
| 6.3 Teaching, support and guidance has the goal of empowering all learners. | 6.3.1 Completing education: Current legislation governing compulsory education is based on the premise that all children and young people in Northern Ireland should have at least 12 years of education i.e. seven years of primary education and five years of post-primary education and the opportunity to obtain school leaving qualifications (Statutory Curriculum). |

Agency recommendation	Findings
	6.3.2 The Entitlement Framework in special schools and learning support centres:

The Department commissioned the regulatory side of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to conduct a two-year development project with schools and learning support centres (LSCs) in the special educational needs sector. The directions specifying minimum course numbers do not apply to special schools or LSCs. The purpose of this work was therefore to inform how the entitlement framework should apply in practice to this sector.

The focus is on schools providing relevant and achievable courses (or units) that offer recognisable and transferable progression for each individual learner. The project concluded that all special schools and LSCs should aim to identify learning programmes for their learners covering the three curriculum areas of literacy/numeracy, Learning for Life and Work and a vocationally related element. A short guidance document and associated case studies have been issued to all post-primary special schools and LSCs.

In addition a qualifications guide has been launched which provides an overview of those regulated qualifications at entry level and level 1 which recognise and reward the achievement of pupils within special schools and LSCs.

6.3.3 One of the objectives of the Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education (CRED) policy is to 'Ensure that learners, at each stage of their development, have an understanding of and respect for the rights, equality and diversity of all without discrimination' (p. 20). |

Agency recommendation	Findings
6.4 Appropriate educational support is available as necessary and is fit for purpose in meeting personal learning needs.	6.4.1 Each teacher will set high expectations for all pupils to fulfil her or his individual potential, from the highest achieving to the lowest. Pupils who have already been identified as having a special educational need should have their individual requirements accommodated through appropriate differentiation, drawing on any support already in place. This personalised approach to learning should enable all pupils to experience and build on success as they develop their literacy and numeracy skills to the best of their ability (Count, Read: Succeed, p 34).

6.4.2 Extant Code of Practice. New draft SEN Code of Practice: The new Code of Practice translates the new draft SEN law into clear and practical guidance for those involved in identifying and assessing children who have, or may have, SEN and for those who provide special educational provision for children with SEN. It will support them in ensuring the right SEN provision is given to help each child fulfil their potential (New SEN Framework).

6.4.3 Non-formal education in the form of youth work is an important part of education as it encourages children and young people's participation to develop their personal and social skills encouraging them to engage or re-engage in positive learning within a non-formal setting (Priorities for Youth, para 1.3).

Strengthening participation in the youth service at local, sub-regional and regional levels, engaging with children and young people, supporting the youth voice and co-design of programmes is embedded within Youth Service delivery (Priorities for Youth, paras 1.7–1.8 and 2.23; p. 24, action 4.20(3)). |
| 6.5 The learning process is based on flexible curricula based on learner centred approaches and the development and implementation of individual learning plans as necessary. | 6.5.1 The curriculum applies to all 12 years of compulsory education. The current curriculum includes a Foundation Stage which covers P1 and P2. Key Stage 1 covers P3 and P4 and Key Stage 2 covers P5, P6 and P7. At post-primary level, Key Stage 3 covers Years 8, 9 and 10 and Key Stage 4 covers Years 11 and 12 (Statutory Curriculum). |

Agency recommendation	Findings
	6.5.2 The Entitlement Framework (EF) is the Post-14 curriculum which puts the needs of pupils first. It aims to provide access for pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum to enable them to reach their full potential no matter which school they attend or where they live.
	It will guarantee that all pupils have access to a minimum number of courses at Key Stage 4 and Post-16, of which at least one third must be general and one third applied. The Department will specify the number of courses and is responsible for designating courses as general or applied, based on its published definitions contained in general and applied courses circular.
	6.5.3 The Education (NI) Order 2006 (articles 18–22) gives Statutory effect to the EF and requires schools to offer access to at least the specified number of courses at KS4 and Post-16; of which at least one third must be general and one third applied. In order to meet the statutory requirements, from September 2017 the EF requires all post-primary schools to provide pupils with access to a minimum of 21 courses at both phases.
	The minimum number of qualifying courses post-primary schools must provide access to for pupils in Key Stage 4 and for pupils over compulsory school age are set out through written directions (Entitlement Framework).
	6.5.4 It must be a central purpose of our schools, supported by parents, to ensure that pupils develop the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to succeed at school and later on, in life and at work. In developing literacy and numeracy it is essential that, after 7 years of primary education, children have developed a firm foundation in these skills and that, after 12 years of compulsory education, all young people leave school competent in reading, writing, talking and listening and in using mathematics (Count, Read: Succeed, p. 2).
	6.5.5 Once a pupil has been identified as making insufficient progress despite receiving additional in-class support, the teacher should:
	a. seek help in the intervention process from within the school; and

Agency recommendation	Findings
	b. review, together with their colleague(s) within the school providing the additional assistance, the actions that will be taken to support the pupil and the associated targets (Count, Read: Succeed, p. 37). 6.5.6 The IEP within the described framework is a planning, teaching, reviewing tool, which includes two parts; - Part 1 – a learning profile of the pupil detailing generic learning strategies to underpin planning for all lessons and indicators to ensure the pupil's effective inclusion in the learning environment: a generic and personalized learning planner; - Part 2 – a document with literacy and numeracy specific targets linked to the overall skills needed to enable the pupil to access the wider curriculum; - a working document for teaching staff; - a document guided/underpinned by an overarching long term aim, with specified levels of attainment and at post primary level accreditation; - a document guided by pupil profiles/records/baseline entry level assessment/a pupil's particular needs and strengths/a statement of SEN if applicable; - a jargon free document which may be key stage and age consistent; - a document a pupil can use to monitor his/her progress. (A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs, Part 2, p. 336) 6.5.7 The resources file was produced by working parties of principals, teachers, lecturers and other educationalists who shared their considerable skills and experience and identified useful and effective strategies, shaping these into a common framework for use by all teachers and support staff. It is hoped that the resources and skill set to which these resources contribute can be deployed

Agency recommendation	Findings
	to support children not only with SEN but with a range of barriers to learning. (A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs, Part 1, p. 2) (currently being updated). • The support staff is seen as an important part of the inclusion team and are included in the planning process, monitoring and evaluation; • Pupil needs are supported on the basis of individualised planning, and support offered accordingly; • A balance is maintained between supporting pupils through withdrawal and in-class support; • Time is taken for consultation with support services to ensure a unified approach is in place to meet individual pupil needs. (A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs, Part 1, p. 8). 6.5.8 Our goal in relation to tackling barriers to learning: To make sure that our strategies, policies and programmes to support children and young people who have special needs or who face particular barriers to learning are developed in a way that maintains a clear focus on raising standards and on allowing every young person to reach his or her full potential (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 24). 6.5.9 Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice is a voluntary curriculum developed in collaboration with the youth sector and other stakeholders to provide a flexible approach to meet the needs of learners. The youth curriculum is due to be reviewed.

Measure 6 evaluative comments

All NI delivered ITE courses were reviewed and reaccredited for a further four-year period in 2019 (one-year postgraduate courses) or 2020 (four-year degree courses).

Measure 7: To improve the school ethos (such as the creation of supportive learning environments, adapting learning environments to specific learning needs)

Agency recommendation	Findings
7.1 Policy supports school leaders to value diversity among staff as well as learners, encourage collegiality and support innovation.	7.1.1 Leadership and management: Effective practice is demonstrated when: there is a shared strategic and vision which is based on the school's values and aims and is learner-centred (Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF), p. 10).
7.2 Policy outlines the responsibility of school leaders to effectively communicate their vision for inclusive education to the school teaching team and wider school community.	–
7.3 Policy aims to ensure the recruitment of teaching staff from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities.	–

Agency recommendation	Findings

7.4 Policy supports schools to ensure teaching staff are able to meet diverse learning needs.
 	
(Teaching staff have competence and expertise to develop individual plans, implement learner-centred approaches and support learners in personalised learning.)
	7.4.1 The aims of this strategy are to:
	
	  a. support teachers and school leaders in their work to raise overall levels of attainment in literacy and numeracy among young people; and
	
	  b. narrow the current gaps in educational outcomes (Count, Read: Succeed, p. 2).
	
	7.4.2 Leadership:
	
	• The most effective leaders are proactive in accessing continuing professional development and training for staff through a range of methods, including collaborating with other practitioners and professionals;
	
	• The majority of leaders need to increase the opportunities for ongoing professional development for all staff (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 44).
	
	7.4.3 The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) facilitates Teacher Professional Learning in integrated schools in Anti-Bias Approaches to Education.

7.5 The school ethos and culture is guided by school strategic plans that have high expectations for the academic and social achievements of all learners.	7.5.1 Culture and Ethos: • The school is committed to a school improvement agenda; • The school is child centred in terms of ethos and culture; • Social deprivation or other barriers to learning are not seen as an excuse for further educational failure; High expectations are maintained for all children; • The voice of the child is given high importance in terms of planning to meet needs, including establishing and reviewing Education Plans;

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• The school is actively engaged in community development and supporting community learning needs;
	• Parents are welcomed as partners in the planning and delivery of learning;
	• The needs of the whole child are addressed rather than focusing only on measurable outcomes;
	• Meaningful links are maintained with the local special school; this may include sharing of staff expertise and opportunities taken for joint training (A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs, Part 1, p. 6).
	7.5.2 Planning:
	• The school development plan consistently identifies areas for improvement in special educational needs (SEN) and inclusion;
	• School resources, including budget, are regularly targeted at special educational needs and inclusion;
	Good practice in SEN and inclusion is identified and disseminated in school and between schools (A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs, Part 1, p. 7).
7.6 School strategic plans describe how universal design for learning approaches are used to provide individualised learning tools and opportunities.	–

Agency recommendation	Findings
7.7 School strategic plans stipulate that all learners are entitled to be active participants in the life of the school and community.	7.7.1 School councils: DE encourages those schools wishing to establish a school council to adopt the 'Democra-School' programme developed by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY). The programme is designed to support and encourage the development of meaningful school councils and the practice of democracy in the school environment… The Democra-School guidance pack […] gives detailed practical advice on how to set up a school council and steps that can be taken to involve pupils in school councils (School councils and pupil participation).

7.7.2 Pupil participation: In line with the UNCRC, the Executive, all government departments and public bodies have a duty to ensure that the views of children and young people are sought in matters which impact on their lives.

As outlined in the policy for school improvement, 'Every School a Good School', DE wishes to see a greater focus on engagement within schools, particularly with pupils.

As part of his statement on advancing shared education, delivered to the Assembly on 22 October 2013, the Minister for Education also made clear his aim 'that every school will have an effective method of encouraging young people's participation in the life of the school' (School councils and pupil participation).

7.7.3 Guidance: DE has developed a school circular which provides guidance on how to encourage pupil participation in decision-making in schools.

The circular:

- outlines the range of benefits that pupil participation can bring not only for pupils, but for schools and the wider community;
- explains how successful participation can be achieved;
- highlights a number of key issues which schools need to consider to ensure that pupil engagement is meaningful and effective; |

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• signposts schools to other sources of help and support.
	School councils are one way in which schools can try to encourage the involvement of pupils, but there are many others. The circular seeks to assist schools in identifying and establishing the most effective method/s of participation which best suits the needs of their pupils and which allow children and young people to have a real say in issues which impact on them and the wider school community (School councils and pupil participation; Pupil Participation Circular 2014/4).
	7.7.4 Good practice case studies: Many schools already have in place forms of pupil participation. A selection of those schools demonstrating good practice in this regard have been identified by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Schools are encouraged to refer to the examples [in the Pupil participation – Case Studies publication] (School councils and pupil participation).
7.8 School strategic plans have clear statements on the value of diversity.	7.8.1 All schools should be open to and welcoming of Traveller children (Taskforce on Traveller Education, p. 42; Recommendations from the Taskforce on Traveller Education's report to the Department of Education, p. 1)
	7.8.2 Strategic planning and connections across formal and non-formal education settings. The CRED policy should broaden the scope of community relations work without losing the focus on promoting equality and building relationships between the two main traditions. It will address the need for improved strategic planning and connections for CRED work across formal and non-formal education settings, and should set out clearly the Department's expectations about the quality expected of CR, equality and diversity work, including how this will be monitored and evaluated. Funding schemes should be focused on supporting formal and non-formal education settings to address the needs of the young people within communities. (Community Relations Equality and Diversity, p. 25)

Agency recommendation	Findings
7.9 School strategic plans describe mechanisms for shared leadership, teamwork and collaborative problem solving.	7.9.1 Senior Leadership: • The principal is passionate about ensuring all children and young people have their needs identified and met; • The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) may be a member of the school's Senior Management Team / Senior Leadership Team and make regular contributions on the special educational needs and inclusion agenda; • The whole staff takes responsibility for meeting the needs of all pupils in the school, regardless of the child's ability, SEN, disability, social background or home language; Continuing Professional Development is given a high priority for all staff in the school (A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs, Part 1, p. 7).

Measure 7 evaluative comments

The Department of Education conducted a consultation on Supporting Newcomer Pupils. Work has commenced on developing a new policy and is due for completion in March 2022.

Measure 8: To reduce the negative effects of early tracking (the early streaming of pupils by ability into different types of provision or schools) and to reduce the extensive use of grade retention[1]

Agency recommendation	Findings
8.1 Legislation across relevant public sectors has the goal of ensuring educational services enhance developments and processes working towards equity in inclusive education.	–
8.2 Policy outlines how support structures that impact upon inclusive education are diverse and easily available. *(Support structures prevent early tracking and streaming of pupils at an early age).*	–
8.3 Assessment mechanisms are in place to identify the support needs of learners at an early stage.	8.3.1 One of the goals of the *Numeracy and Literacy Strategy*: ensuring early intervention to address actual or potential underachievement, i.e. as soon as it begins to appear, and to support pupils with special or additional educational needs, including those who do not have the language skills to access the curriculum, and to promote inclusion for pupils of all ages (Count, Read: Succeed, p. 8). The arrangements for assessing pupil progress must also be capable of instilling confidence in teachers, parents, pupils and schools. The new assessment arrangements have been designed to:

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[1] Early tracking means the early streaming of pupils by abilities into different types of provision or school; this includes placing children into separate schools.

The extensive use of grade retention means holding students back to repeat school years, instead of providing flexible individual support.

Agency recommendation	Findings
	a. reflect and support the central role of teachers in classrooms, helping pupils to fulfil their potential;
	b. complement and support the key aims of the revised curriculum;
	c. embrace the assessment of skills, knowledge and understanding;
	d. have a clear and unambiguous focus on literacy and numeracy (and increasingly also on ICT);
	e. be straightforward and fit for purpose in a way that does not divert professional time and resources away from the core business of teaching and learning and avoid creating perverse incentives; and
	f. ensure there is appropriate accountability at all levels for the performance of our school system, particularly in relation to outcomes in literacy and numeracy (Count, Read: Succeed, pp. 11–12).
	8.3.2 The role of assessment:
	Such improvements can be achieved when assessment (formative or diagnostic) is used by teachers to plan how best to meet each pupil's needs. In support of improving literacy and numeracy, the Department put in place the Interactive Computerised Assessment System (InCAS) diagnostic assessment tool, which focuses on reading and mathematics. InCAS is statutory from Years 4 to 7 and during the autumn term it provides data for teachers on the performance of pupils to help inform planning and teaching to meet pupils' needs. Teachers report the results in reading and mathematics to pupils' parents, also in the autumn term, promoting engagement between parents and schools.
	The Department has also provided schools with access to the Adaptive Learning Teaching and Assessment (Alta) formative assessment tool for mathematics. It is a fully adaptive online e-assessment system, designed to raise standards in mathematics, that can be used by students aged 5 to 14, i.e. across Key Stages 1–3. Teachers can use Alta to help keep them informed about the

Agency recommendation	Findings
	development of individual pupils' numeracy. Schools and teachers can use Alta alongside InCAS as part of their strategy for raising standards in literacy and numeracy (Count, Read: Succeed, p. 10).

8.3.3 The Department of Education has developed new guidance to assist schools with the recording of children with special education needs (SEN) and medical diagnoses.

A full review of SEN categories was undertaken in 2017/18 and consequently a new list of SEN categories and associated descriptions has been created. The purpose of the guidance is to highlight the changes which were to be implemented from January 2019. This guidance should be used to help schools determine the most appropriate SEN category or categories which can be recorded for pupils with SEN – this will allow the creation of the schools SEN Register.

Pupils with a medical diagnosis/es who do not have an associated special educational need should be recorded on a school's Medical Register only. Any pupil with a medical diagnosis who requires special educational provision or has been assessed in other SEN categories should be recorded on the school's Medical Register and also on the SEN Register (Recording children with special educational needs; SEN and Medical Categories Guidance Circular 2019/03, 17 January 2019).

8.3.4 The proposals for the Review of SEN and Inclusion focus on early identification, assessment and intervention. All funded pre-school settings will be expected to meet, within the setting, the needs of children with SEN and or disability at Level 1 of the new SEN framework, and by the setting with support or guidance from the EA at Level 2. A statement in the form of a co-ordinated support plan will be put in place for those children who need it at Level 3. The early years settings pilot, initiated by the review, aims to improve the capacity of the early years settings to be able to identify, assess and meet the needs of children with SEN and, where the needs are not able to be met by the setting alone to request EA support. The evaluation of the pilot will be used to inform a future model of SEN best practice for early identification, assessment and provision across early years settings (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 23). |

Agency recommendation	Findings
8.4 Data is available relating to learners' rights to age appropriate education.	8.4.1 Data is used effectively to identify pupils in need of support and monitor their progress during intervention (A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs, Part 1, p. 8). 8.4.2 Assessment and other data is used to effectively inform teaching and learning across the school and in the classroom and to promote improvement (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 15). 8.4.3 The annual school census, carried out by the Department of Education's Analytical Services Unit (ASU), collects data on: • the number of children looked after per school management type; • the number of children entitled to free school meals per school management type; • the number of children in mainstream schools / special schools / EOTAS centres; • the number of newcomer pupils per school management type; • pupil religion by school management type; • the number of children in Irish medium education; • the number of children with a statement of Special Educational Needs per school management type; • the number of children at stages 1–4 of the SEN Code of Practice per school management type.

Measure 8 evaluative comments

> The [Terms of Reference](#) of the Independent Review of Education, which commenced on 4 October 2021, include:
>
> - The transition and transfer of children from primary to post-primary (p. 8)
>
> - Defining what a 'single education system' means and would entail in practical terms, assessing the costs / benefits of such an approach (p. 12).

Measure 9: To support improvement in schools with lower educational outcomes

Agency recommendation	Findings
9.1 Clear mechanisms exist to identify schools with lower educational outcomes.[2]	9.1.1 Education outcomes reflect positively on the school and compare well, when benchmarked measurement is undertaken, against the performance of similar schools ([Every School a Good School](#), 2009, p. 15).
9.2 Policy outlines how methods of assessment, inspections and other accountability measures contribute to school improvement processes. *(Accountability measures support inclusive practice and inform further improvement of provision for all learners.)*	9.2.1 Emphasis has been given over recent years to the school development planning process and for the need for schools to be self-evaluative, as evidenced through the introduction of the School Development Planning Regulations (2005) and School Development Planning Regulations (2010) along with specific guidance from the Department of Education (DE) in 2011. The starting point for schools developing their provision for children with a SEN and inclusion is to conduct an audit of the strengths and areas for development. A wide range of audit tools are available. The Quality Indicators for the Work of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators have been developed by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) as an audit tool as part of Together Towards Improvement (TTI) (ETI, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d). The areas for improvement should be

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[2] This recommendation does not directly come from the Agency work covered in the CPRA activities. A number of project recommendations have implicitly, but not explicitly referred to this issue. However, the piloting work and detailed discussions with PG countries showed it is necessary to have this explicit recommendation linked to this measure.

Agency recommendation	Findings
	identified through an audit process and action plans established as part of the school development plan (A Resource File for schools to support children with Special Educational Needs, Part 1, p. 10).
	9.2.2 Our goal in relation to self-evaluation and the use of performance and other information: To provide the support systems needed to help all schools to engage positively in robust self-evaluation and to use the findings from self-assessment and performance and other data to determine priorities and to plan for continuing improvement.
	In pursuit of this goal we will:
	• update and re-issue guidance to schools on self-evaluation and self-assessment;
	• clarify the expectation of outcomes in literacy and numeracy at each Key Stage in the context of the revised curriculum and the assessment arrangements to support these, to enable schools to plan and track progress better;
	• introduce a contextual value-added measure to be used alongside other performance data in assessing the performance of schools;
	• introduce the e-schools system which will allow schools to make better use of information, particularly that which benchmarks aspects of performance and context against schools of a similar type;
	• require the Education and Skills Authority [now Education Authority] to develop and deliver a training programme for governors, principals and teachers in the effective use of data, including benchmarking and the new value-added measure; and
	• review the current requirements for School Development Planning and produce revised guidance material on self-evaluation and school development planning (Every School a Good School, 2009, pp. 27–28).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	9.2.3 The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has developed the ISEF to provide a more holistic overview of the key aspects of education and training at all stages from early years through to further education and work-based learning. In creating a common framework for inspection and self-evaluation the ETI is extending the principle of openness and transparency so that all stakeholders are working together to promote improvement for all learners. The key areas that influence most the quality of education provided to learners are the quality of leadership and management at all levels and the provision for learning and teaching which in turn impact on the outcomes for learners. The framework is designed to provide a balance of inspection and reflection on academic achievement but also the wider skills and dispositions that learners require to live and work in the world today. It is also designed to promote an inclusive learning environment where all learners have access to high quality provision. The safety of children and young people is paramount, therefore safeguarding/child protection is a core element of the framework as is the care and welfare of learners; these are intrinsic to the holistic view of learning and should be visible in every aspect of the work of an education or training organisation (Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework (ISEF), p. 1).
9.3 Policy aims to increase the capacity of all schools to meet a greater diversity of needs and support learners within their local communities. *(Schools are supported to use innovative teaching methods, practical learning approaches and individual plans, focusing on learners' capabilities.)*	–

Agency recommendation	Findings
9.4 Policy outlines clear incentives for schools to take all learners from their local community.	–
9.5 Policy requires school strategic plans to outline preventive educational action against dropouts. *(Including necessary measures so that learners who become disengaged find new educational alternatives.)*	9.5.1 The role of assessment: […] Knowing how pupils are performing allows the school to undertake informed self-evaluation and set meaningful and challenging targets in its School Development Plan. Pupil level information also allows schools to plan for improvements in individual classes, year groups, and then at school level (Count, Read: Succeed, p. 10).

Measure 9 evaluative comments

The Terms of Reference of the Independent Review of Education, which commenced on 4 October 2021, include 'The role of education inspection and school improvement services' (p. 10).

Measure 10: To improve the quality of school staff, focusing on the quality of teachers, quality in continuing professional development, developing teacher competences and reinforcing school leadership

Agency recommendation	Findings
10.1 Policy outlines how all school staff develops the skills to meet the diverse needs of all learners. *(Appropriate training and professional development is provided to all school staff including teachers, support and administrative staff, counsellors, etc.).*	10.1.1 Our strategic vision for teacher professional learning is: Every teacher is a learning leader, accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, p. 10). 10.1.2 Initial Teacher Education: Approval of programmes is made by the Department of Education (DE) and is dependent upon evidence of need, accreditation by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) and evidence from inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Approval permits ITE providers to offer programmes, the successful completion of which entitle individuals to seek registration with the GTCNI and thus be able to teach in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland (Initial Teacher Education: Approval of Programmes, p. 1). All NI delivered ITE courses were reviewed and reaccredited for a further four-year period in 2019 (one-year postgraduate courses) or 2020 (four-year degree courses). 10.1.3 Requirements underpin the approval, accreditation and inspection of ITE programmes. These include entry requirements, degree requirements, interviews and suitability criteria: In assessing suitability, and in compliance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all ITE providers shall have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity: • between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; • between men and women generally;

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• between persons with disability and persons without;
	• and between persons with dependants and persons without (Initial Teacher Education: Approval of Programmes, pp. 3–4).
	10.1.4 Continuous Professional Development (CPD) All careers practitioners throughout the system will be professionally qualified and obliged to maintain their professional competence through continuing professional development and adherence to professional standards.
	All careers teachers hold a professional teaching qualification. In addition, DE has commissioned the development of a bespoke CPD programme for all careers teachers which is being rolled out to all post-primary schools. Teachers need to spend time with employers to better understand their needs, which in turn will inform the design and delivery of the careers education programmes in schools. The Departments will explore with schools and employers how this can be encouraged and supported.
	The Careers Service will continue to ensure that all advisers are professionally qualified to postgraduate level or equivalent and are members of the Careers Development Institute, the main UK-wide professional body for careers practitioners. A requirement of this membership is adherence to the Institute's code of ethics which includes a commitment to continuous professional development and accountability for their actions and advice to the public.
	Further to their professional qualification, each careers adviser is also required to undertake CPD to ensure that his or her knowledge and skills are fully up-to-date. CPD requirements are reviewed on an annual basis and tailored to meet the needs of the adviser and Careers Service. Careers advisers will continue to update their knowledge on employer needs through employer placements and visits (Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance, pp. 38–39).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	10.1.5 Consistent regional anti-racism training and high quality learning materials which reflect Traveller culture and heritage should be available to school Governors and school leaders and as part of Initial Teacher Education and the Continuing Professional Development of teaching and non-teaching staff (Recommendations from the Taskforce on Traveller Education's report to the Department of Education, p. 3). 10.1.6 In addition to schools, non-formal education in the form of youth work develops the skills to meet diverse assessed needs of all learners (Priorities for Youth, para 4.6(1)).
10.2 Policy supports the development of high quality and appropriately trained teacher educators. *(With improvements in recruitment, induction and continuing professional development.)*	10.2.1 Initial Teacher Education: • Programme Design: The content, structure, methodology, assessment and the range of suitable resources are designed to enable students to develop the teacher competences appropriate to the ITE phase as set out in the GTCNI publication, Teaching: the Reflective Profession • Strategic Education Priorities: The programmes prepare students to address the strategic priorities for education and key education strategies, as defined and communicated by DE, and, in particular, those relating to literacy, numeracy and special educational needs and inclusion • Recent and Relevant Experience: Teacher Educators in the ITE providers have experience of teaching in schools relevant to their particular phase, subject or other specialisms, and that they maintain and develop that experience. • Teacher Education Quality: Provision is of a quality which is judged by the ETI to be at least satisfactory. • Individual Needs: The provision and the teaching ensure equality of access and enable the individual needs of the students to be met.

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• Preparation for Continuing Professional Learning: All students are adequately prepared for their transition into continuing professional learning, underpinned by a commitment to a process of continuing improvement and development from the initial phase, through the induction to early and continuing professional development phases of professional formation. • Age Range: All students are prepared to teach across at least two consecutive Key Stages which, for the purpose of this requirement, includes the foundation stage as part of KS1, and the 16-19 age range (Initial Teacher Education: Approval of Programmes, p. 5). 10.2.2 The aspiration articulated by the stakeholder development group in agreeing on an overarching [Teacher Professional Learning] Framework is to provide: • teachers with support in the early part of their careers to develop their expertise; • teachers with access to ongoing professional learning opportunities and pathways that inspire, motivate and recognise commitment to developing professional proficiency; • teachers, as leaders of learning, with opportunities to develop specialist knowledge and skills in specific areas together with coaching and mentoring skills to enable them to share outstanding practice with others; • school leaders with ongoing access to a mix of experiential, vocational and academic professional learning to enable them to lead and inspire their teachers, pupils and parents; • professional learning communities within and across schools with access to a range of guidance and quality-assured support to enable them to drive continuing professional learning; and • teachers with a tool to guide, motivate, recognise and share outstanding practice (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, pp. 16–17).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	10.2.3 Our goal in relation to quality teaching: To work with teachers, those who support teachers and those who represent their interests to ensure that our teaching profession is equipped and empowered to deliver the highest quality teaching that helps every young person to reach her or his full potential (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 22).
	10.2.4 Enabling Goal: Developing the Education Workforce [early years]: The workforce is appropriately skilled, competent and supported to deliver effective early years education and learning services to all children, their parents and families (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 26).
	10.2.5 As well as teachers, commitments are in place to develop the non-formal education workforce (Priorities for Youth, p. 21, priority 3).
10.3 Policy supports flexible training opportunities in initial and continuing professional development, for all teachers. *(Schools and teacher education institutions will work together to ensure good models in practice schools and appropriate placements for teaching practice.)*	10.3.1 Key Area: 'Building professional learning communities', policy commitment 7: Support will be provided for the ongoing development and sustainability of professional learning communities and/or self-directed learning networks where schools or groups of teachers can demonstrate the capacity to deliver clear educational benefits (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, p. 14).
	10.3.2 The Department will establish a small expert group of educators from other jurisdictions to provide a robust and cost effective quality assurance and challenge function at key stages in the development and implementation of actions arising from the Strategy (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, p. 20).
	10.3.3 As part of its continuing commitment to engagement, the Department will seek input from teachers and wider stakeholders in reviewing this Strategy. Feedback will be used to modify and, where appropriate, adapt key actions on an ongoing basis (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, p. 20).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	10.3.4 Teacher tutors, teacher educators and support services to schools can all have a significant role with student and beginning teacher, for example: schools can assist HEIs to provide more customised support for student and beginning teachers (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, p. 27). 10.3.5 In pursuit of this goal [quality teaching] we will: • extend, for at least the next five years, the provision that has allowed schools to take up to 5 school development days to be used for self-evaluation and continuing professional development in the pursuit of improvement and raising standards; • bring forward proposals for teacher education in a consultation document produced jointly with the Department for Employment and Learning; • work with the General Teaching Council, Teacher Representatives and the Education and Skills Authority [now Education Authority] to develop effective arrangements which ensure that the teaching workforce continues to be of the highest quality; • issue guidance to school leaders on the importance of ensuring that every teacher has agreed a plan to facilitate her or his professional development; that the plan is implemented; and that professional development needs are reviewed on at least an annual basis; and • ensure that the professional development model of EA is based on improvement, raising standards, disseminating good practice and effectively building expertise (Every School a Good School, 2009, pp. 22–23).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	10.3.6 Key actions [early years]:
	• Developing a programme of continuous professional development for principals, teachers and staff in Foundation Stage and funded pre-school settings with a focus on the pedagogy of play and leadership and management. Training for Management Committees will also be developed for funded pre-school settings.
	• Revising the number of development days available for non-statutory settings in the Pre-School Education Programme for staff training and development (Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning, p. 27).
10.4 All teaching staff are supported and develop a clear understanding of effective learning strategies. *(Such as learning to learn and active learning approaches.)*	10.4.1 All teacher professional learning programmes should: […] build on and develop the skills articulated in our curriculum in an explicit way; model effective practice in individualised learning so that teachers can do the same; […] develop partnership approaches to course design and delivery; be based on appropriate classroom and other research and have reflective practice at their core; be practice-led but with appropriate support (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, p. 11).
	10.4.2 The Department will commission the development of a virtual Centre of Excellence. This will give teachers and school leaders advice, resources and professional learning opportunities that ensure a new approach to delivering a modern, skills-focused, 21st century curriculum. It will build on existing work to provide a single portal to give teachers access to research, guidance and support materials, examples of different methodologies and best practice case studies with links to resources in other countries (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, p. 20).
	10.4.3 Implementation phases of the Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning:
	1. Defining and Developing: Building capacity through collaborative practice
	2. Expanding: Creating coherence

Agency recommendation	Findings
	3. Embedding: Supporting a self-sustaining system of professional learning (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, p. 27). 10.4.5 Teachers must therefore be properly supported in their work. Accordingly, this strategy sets out a more structured approach to supporting teachers as they work to meet the needs of every pupil (Count, Read: Succeed, p. 12).
10.5 Policy supports schools to develop strategic plans of staff training in inclusive education.	10.5.1 Key Area: 'Engagement', policy commitment 13: Teachers and school leaders will have the opportunity to contribute to designing, developing and evaluating all funded programmes related to the Strategy. Providers of professional learning programmes will establish focus and/or advisory groups to demonstrate how programmes can improve standards (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, p. 15). 10.5.2 School leaders demonstrate a commitment to providing professional development opportunities for staff, particularly teachers, and promote a readiness to share and learn from best practice (Every School a Good School, 2009, p. 16).
10.6 Policy outlines the specialised training pathways for specialists who support school communities to implement inclusive education.	–

Agency recommendation	Findings
10.7 Policy supports research into the effectiveness of different routes into teaching. *(Including course organisation, content and pedagogy to best develop the competence of teachers to meet the diverse needs of all learners.)*	10.7.1 HEIs can assist schools in developing the action research skills of their teachers in helping them become reflective practitioners (Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning, p. 27).

Measure 10 evaluative comments

The Terms of Reference of the Independent Review of Education, which commenced on 4 October 2021, include:

> The delivery of initial teacher education (ITE) and In Service Tutor Education in the School and Further Education sectors respectively and consideration of how education leaders and practitioners are empowered to fulfil their potential and share excellent practice (p. 9).

Measure 11: To improve transition from education to work by increasing the coherence between employment incentives, education and VET; improving the quality and accessibility of apprenticeships; promoting cross-sector co-operation; simplifying the systems of qualifications

Agency recommendation	Findings
11.1 Policy ensures that VET programmes should address labour market skill requirements.	11.1.1 The overall aim of the strategy is to support individuals to make appropriate decisions, through developing them as effective careers decision-makers, leading to increased and appropriate participation in education, training and employment, and thereby contributing both to the fulfilment of the individual's potential and to a rebalancing of labour market supply and demand (Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance, p. 7).

Agency recommendation	Findings
11.2 Policy aims at matching labour market skill requirements and learners' skills, wishes and expectations.	11.2.1 In aligning with the key strategies mentioned above and situating itself within the prevailing economic context, the *Preparing for Success* Careers Strategy 2015-2020 will aim to ensure young people and adults are able to develop the skills and confidence to realise their potential, and follow the career path which suits them best, enabling them to contribute to their community and to support social and economic prosperity ([Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance](), p. 25).
	11.2.2 All young people and adults will:
	• have access to good quality careers education provision, up-to-date LMI, and impartial careers information, advice and guidance, to assist them to make well-informed career choices, to achieve their potential and prosper in employment;
	• be lifelong learners and be motivated to pursue continuous professional development to achieve their own potential, to become effective employees and to make a valuable contribution to the local economy;
	• develop the skills to plan their career, and manage planned and unplanned career change; and
	• have a clear understanding of the impact of their education, training and employment choices and make career choices which are informed and well thought through and based on self awareness; understand the relevance of their education, skills and experience; and be aware of the opportunities and pathways available ([Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance](), pp. 31–32).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	11.2.3 Careers Advisers, working in conjunction alongside teachers in schools, will support young people and adults to determine the occupations that best suit their personal aptitudes, interests and skills; help them access and analyse relevant LMI about current and future employment opportunities; ensure they have a clear understanding of the impact of their education, training and employment choices; make career choices which are informed and well thought through based on self awareness; understand the relevance of their education, skills and experience and understand the various routes to the world of work and opportunities and pathways available (Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance, p. 42).
11.3 Policy outlines the development of partnerships and networking structures. *(Partnerships with a pool of local employers to ensure close co-operation with regard to learners' supervised practical training and finding employment after graduation.)*	11.3.1 We will: […] work closely with employers to develop a work experience system that is based on a partnership approach and agreed principles, standards and quality measures (Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance, p. 33). 11.3.2 We will: • ensure that all career advisers continue to have a number of placements with employers in growth sectors each year. • Through the Careers Advisory Forum (CAF), develop strategic and local partnerships to better understand the employability skills, qualifications and attributes needed by employers to grow their business. • With the support of the CAF, facilitate better links between schools, colleges, local businesses, local councils and enterprise agencies. • Engage employers' support in attracting more people, and in particular young people, to consider careers in priority, growth and emerging sectors.

Agency recommendation	Findings
	• Encourage and increase employer participation, providing support and guidance to employers in the delivery of work experiences; and explore how teachers can access relevant work placements to help them better understand current and future local labour market opportunities (Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance, p. 34). 11.3.3 Every post-primary school in Northern Ireland is a member of an Area Learning Community (ALC). ALCs provide a mechanism within which schools come together to plan the curriculum they offer on an area basis. Schools work together in collaboration with other schools, further education colleges and other training providers to deliver access to the Entitlement Framework, thus enabling them to offer a broad and balanced, economically-relevant curriculum to meet the needs and aspirations of all pupils. There are currently 27 ALCs, which are commonly made up of between six and ten schools. The Chair of each ALC, which can change annually, is one of the principals from a participating member school (Entitlement Framework). 11.3.4 The Priorities for Youth policy recognises and encourages collaborative approach and networking which is actioned through the new funding mechanism (pp. 25–26, priority 5, particularly paras 4.24(3) and (4)).
11.4 Policy outlines how transition from education to employment is supported by adequate provision.	11.4.1 Education Maintenance Allowance: If you decide to stay on at school or go to a further education college in Northern Ireland, you may be able to get the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). It is available for both academic and vocational courses. EMA is a weekly award of GBP 30 which is paid fortnightly to students [aged 16, 17, 18, 19] who meet the eligibility criteria.

Agency recommendation	Findings
	It is intended to help cover the day-to-day costs that you have to meet when you stay on at school or college like travel costs, books and equipment for your course. […]

You have to be enrolled on courses of further education up to and including Level 3, but not including higher education. The main types are: GCSEs; A levels; NVQ/SVQ level 1, 2 or 3; Pre U; BTEC National Diploma, National Certificate and First Diploma; Baccalaureate; SCE higher grade or similar.

Any course that attracts a training allowance will not be covered by the Money to Learn EMA.

11.4.2 The Priorities for Youth policy seeks to provide opportunity to support the transition from education to employment (paras 4.7 and 4.8(4)). |
| 11.5 Policy supports the availability of meaningful VET options for learners to choose from. | 11.5.1 We will best meet the needs of young people and the economy by offering them access to a broad and balanced range of courses that are relevant to their needs, aptitudes, interests and their future career aspirations, regardless of where they live or which school they attend.

Schools are encouraged to make use of up-to-date labour market information and take note of DfE's priority skills areas in offering access to a coherent and economically relevant choice of courses for pupils. This means that all pupils will have access to at least the number of courses set out above. Pupils can then choose the courses which provide the best progression for them.

Progression can be to continue in education, including further and higher education, or to move into training or employment. Every pupil is different and choices should reflect each young person's interests and aspirations. There may be occasions where a school's timetabling makes it difficult to facilitate course choices, but parents and pupils should discuss this with the school (Entitlement Framework). |

Agency recommendation	Findings
11.6 Policy supports the availability of supervised practical training.	11.6.1 Policy commitment 3 – Work experience for young people, schools and employers will be improved to ensure equality of opportunity and improve the administrative process of organising work experience opportunities (Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance, p. 8). 11.6.2 It is essential that young people have the opportunities in post-primary school to experience a number of planned and appropriate learning experiences of the world of work including work placements. Working with the Careers Advisory Forum Departments will consider how work-related learning opportunities and young people's experiences of work can be enhanced to ensure that by the age of 16 all pupils have had good-quality work-related learning experiences including work placements for a range of occupations, including in sectors that are predicted to grow. In light of progress, the Departments will consider setting a minimum number of days' experience for each child to have received before leaving school and consult on these proposals (Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance, pp. 40–41).
11.7 Policy outlines how sustainable employment opportunities are supported through the availability of appropriate, on-going support.	–
11.8 Policy outlines how VET programmes are reviewed periodically. *(Both internally and/or externally in order to adapt to current and future skill needs.)*	–

Measure 11 evaluative comments

The Department for the Economy's (DfE) draft [Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Skills for a 10X Economy](#) sets out proposals for the strategic direction for the development of a flexible skills system for the next decade, in line with the department's economic vision. It outlines key themes and proposed commitments, with an overarching focus on creating a skills framework which can drive economic prosperity and tackle social inequality. Proposed commitment 13 Creating a culture of lifelong learning notes that work is 'well advanced in considering how we can better support young people to transition from compulsory education to further education and work. The enhancement of non-academic pathways towards vocational qualifications, such as higher level apprenticeships, is a key aspect' (p. 58).

The Department of Education and the Department for the Economy are working jointly on a project to develop a more strategic and joined up approach to education and training provision for 14–19-year-olds. The Project has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders to gain support, identifying key challenges and building an evidence base which will support the development of an enhanced approach to education and training for 14–19-year-olds. The Project has identified a number of work streams which include careers, progression and pathways, post-16 provision and curriculum delivery. The Project has examined ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our education and training system, particularly for young people in the 14–19 age group where schools, Further Education Colleges and other training providers compete for full-time enrolments to support their financial position. The Project has scrutinised how this has impacted on the viability of some provision, the duplication of provision, the best use of resources and whether young people are being given the right support to meet their needs to transition from education and training into employment [no source available].

Measure 12: To improve educational and career guidance across all phases of inclusive education

Agency recommendation	Findings
12.1 Policy outlines the mechanisms for ensuring effective transition across educational sectors and phases. *(There are well-organised transition processes among services to ensure continuity in the support required when learners move from one form of provision to another.)*	12.1.1 Extant Code of Practice (pp. 63–67, paras 6.33–6.50). Education other than at school (EOTAS): EOTAS makes educational provision for children with social, emotional, behavioural, medical or other issues who, without its provision, cannot sustain access to suitable education. It allows children who have been expelled from, suspended from, or have otherwise disengaged from, their registered school to participate in education until they achieve a new school place, are prepared for re-entry to an existing school place or to maintain their education until compulsory school leaving age (Education Other Than at School, pp. 3–4). 12.1.2 EOTAS must provide a continuum of provision to address the diversity of needs presented by these young people, particularly those with SEBD. The three main types of EOTAS provision are: • Short term placements with continued school attendance where EOTAS focuses completely on addressing social and emotional behaviour difficulties (SEBD); • Longer term placements retaining links with school but with the EOTAS setting taking responsibility for delivering curriculum as well as addressing SEBD; and • Exceptional arrangements for young people whose difficulties are so severe that attendance at group provision is temporarily unsustainable. Young people in this category will be under continuous multi-disciplinary review with the goal of re-establishing links to school and group EOTAS provision at the earliest opportunity (Education Other Than at School, p. 4). 12.1 3 The Department of Education's Guidance on induction and transition in Pre-School Education and Year One provides guidance for teachers, non-teaching staff and parents to assist children to settle into pre-school or primary school.

Agency recommendation	Findings
	The Education Authority will discuss with the parent a suitable post-primary school placement for their child as part of the review of the child's statement (Circular 2016/15 The Procedure for transfer from Primary to Post-Primary Education, p. 5).
	The [Education] Authority and a health and social services authority must in particular co-operate […] in the preparation of a transition plan as defined by regulation 2 of the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act [Northern Ireland] 2016, Section 4).
	Transition from primary to post-primary school can be a difficult time for many Traveller children given the strong pressure that many face to leave school at this time. This is in addition to the widely recognised drop out of Traveller children from school during the early years of post-primary education. A joined up approach should be taken to developing regional transition programmes to support Traveller children moving from primary to post-primary school involving Education Welfare Service, schools, Traveller support groups, Traveller parents and the children themselves (DE Circular 2010/15 The Education of Children and Young People from the Traveller Community, p. 4).
12.2 Policy outlines how career counsellors/officers support learners and employers regarding employment possibilities. *(Support is provided with job applications, inform and support employers and facilitate contact between both parties.)*	12.2.1 Policy commitment 2 – Access to careers services will be improved through the use of new and innovative delivery channels, including online web chat and social media to allow clients to access services at a time and place that meets their needs, improving customer satisfaction and cost efficiency. This will include on line robust user friendly and up to date labour market information (Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance, p. 8). 12.2.2 Policy commitment 4 – Access to impartial advice will be maintained and improved, including offering face to face impartial advice to young people at key transition stages, providing additional support to those at risk of becoming disengaged and those with barriers; and providing more advice to parents (Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance, p. 8).

Agency recommendation	Findings
	12.2.3 Policy commitment 5 – Young people should have access to an e-portfolio to record activities undertaken to improve their employability including work experience, voluntary and part-time work, careers learning, sporting achievements, and other relevant extra-curricular activities alongside educational qualifications ([Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance](#), p. 8). 12.2.4 DEL in association with Ulster University (UU) has developed a Skills Barometer which provides a clear indication of where the skills gaps/shortages are currently (by occupation/sector/ business size/skills level), where they are emerging, and where they are likely to emerge over the longer term. Ultimately, the Barometer will provide the local economy with a detailed picture of current skills demand by sector and occupation. It will also identify the skills areas where interventions require further targeting, or more flexible responses are required, in order to aid government, and indeed other key stakeholders, in meeting the skill needs of the NI economy ([Preparing for success 2015-2020: A Strategy for Careers Education and Guidance](#), p. 24).

Measure 12 evaluative comments

'Based on the evidence gathered to underpin the draft Skills Strategy, it is recommended that we reform careers education by introducing new measures of careers guidance outcomes and developing clear, common, transparent and accountable standards' ([Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Skills for a 10X Economy](#), p. 8).