



**EUROPEAN AGENCY**  
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education



**RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT**  
OF ALL LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

# **RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ALL LEARNERS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

## **Country Report: United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)**



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# UNITED KINGDOM (NORTHERN IRELAND) COUNTRY REPORT

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Report completed by: Carol McCann, Principal

## 1. What reference is made to raising achievement in national policies? How is raising achievement defined?

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Raising Achievement for all learners is central to all policies. The Programme for Government sets goals for raising the achievement of learners.

The Department of Education's (DE) wider vision for learners, as set out in one of its core policies 'Every School a Good School' (ESaGs), states its aim as 'To ensure that every learner fulfils his or her full potential at each stage of her or his development'. The policy recognises the centrality of effective leadership and high quality learning and teaching in raising the achievement of all learners. It describes the characteristics of a successful school as having:

- Child-centred provision
- High quality learning and teaching
- Effective leadership
- A school connected to its local community.

## 2. What national policies specifically target raising achievement?

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The key policy documents which highlight areas for improvement and focus on key processes which lead to improvement are Every School a Good School (ESaGs) (2009) and Count, Read, Succeed (2011). Additionally, the policy on the Entitlement Framework is aimed at raising the achievement of all learners. DE states in its guidance about the Entitlement Framework:

*We will best meet needs of young people and the economy by offering them, wherever they go to school, a wide and better balanced range of courses that are relevant to their needs, aptitudes, interests and their future job prospects.*

ESaGS, which is the key policy for school improvement, recognises:

- the importance of effective leadership, ethos of aspiration;
- high quality, child-centred learning and teaching;
- embedding a culture of self-evaluation/self-assessment and of using performance and other information to effect improvement;
- tackling the barriers to learners, especially those disadvantaged economically and socially, as well as through disability;



- supporting and enabling schools to improve, including via formal intervention processes;
- increasing the engagement between school, parents and families, recognising their role and that of the local community on pupil outcomes.

### **School organisation/leadership**

Regarding leadership, training and development, mentor support programmes are in place to support newly-appointed leaders. Leaders are encouraged to develop professional partnerships/critical friends and networks to support them in their work. The District Inspector often provides support and challenge for principals. Boards of Governors (BOG) have a high degree of responsibility regarding both challenging and supporting the work of the principal. The work of the BOG is assessed on all inspection processes. ESaGs sees the BOG as central to its aim of involving community and describes the role of governors as 'an opportunity for the community to play its part in helping all young people to achieve their full potential'. There is a focus on the need for distributed leadership and, in recent years, a particular focus on middle leadership. This recognises the key role the Head of Department and Head of Year play in the success of the school. Leadership at all levels is measured as part of the inspection process.

### **Pedagogy/high quality learning and teaching**

To maximise on the potential to improve Learning and Teaching, DE has sought to improve the links/strengthen collaboration between Initial Teacher Education, Induction, Early Professional Development and Continuing Professional Development. Professional Development focuses on teacher competences.

Additionally, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) clearly defines the key characteristics/indicators of good learning and teaching in its document 'Together Towards Improvement'.

Its recent publication, entitled 'Learning Leaders', clearly identifies the key characteristics of successful teachers. It states the vision for the teaching profession as 'Every teacher is a learning leader, accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people'. The Strategy focuses on five key areas:

- Teacher Professional Learning Framework
- Development and Dissemination of Good Practice
- Building Professional Learning Communities
- Building Leadership Capacity
- Engagement.

### **Increasing attainment and reducing gaps between different groups of learners**

ESaGs clearly sets out its vision for reducing attainment gaps in the following statement:

*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. To this end, policies in relation to SEN [special educational needs], Traveller Children and Alternative Education provision will be revised.*

It also recognises the significant gap in achievement between those most and least economically and socially-disadvantaged. To mitigate the impact of disadvantage, schools with a high percentage of Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME) pupils receive additional funding (Targeting Social Need/TCN funding) based on the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals. Schools located in areas of disadvantage/neighbourhood renewal areas receive additional funding entitled Extended Schools funding. Extended Schools funding can be used by schools to deliver extra-school enrichment activities which can be either academic in nature (e.g. booster classes) or which build learners' confidence (e.g. music, sport, public speaking, etc.). Based on the percentage of pupils with a Statement of Entitlement (disability), schools also receive additional funding.

### **2020 targets**

ESaGs (2008) sets out targets for 2020 which focus on literacy and numeracy as follows:

- 85% of pupils should reach expected levels of literacy at Key Stage 2;
- 86% of pupils should reach expected levels of numeracy at Key Stage 2;
- 70% of all pupils should achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A\*–C, including maths and English;
- 65% of all FSME pupils should achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A\*–C, including maths and English.

In its Count, Read, Succeed policy (2011), DE sets the following targets for 2020:

- 90% or more of pupils should achieve the expected levels of Communication and Using Maths at Key Stage 2;
- 85% or more of pupils should achieve the expected levels in Communication and Using Maths at Key Stage 3;
- 70% or more of all school leavers should achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A\*–C, including maths and English (and Gaeilge for those in Irish Medium schools).

Schools are required to set targets in relation to performance at all levels and to self-evaluate their performance against NI Benchmarking averages. The Benchmarking data takes into account the school's FSME and levels are set and measured based on FSME (e.g. 0–19.99% FSME). Schools are measured/evaluated as falling into the Lower, Median or Upper Quartile as well as being in the 95<sup>th</sup> Percentile.

### **The use of learner focused measures (such as mentoring, nurturing approaches, personalised learning, assessment for learning, use of ICT)**

Schools have a statutory obligation through the School Development Planning Guidelines to plan and set targets for supporting pupils with additional needs and also in relation to the promotion of e-learning to support and promote learning.



Schools have an obligation to provide support for pupils with additional needs. They do this in a number of ways, including the support of Learning Support Assistants/mentoring programmes. These may involve peer mentoring or teacher mentoring and support in regard to literacy and/or numeracy, etc. Additionally, many primary schools in areas of deprivation have established Nurture Units aimed at mitigating the inherent disadvantages which many learners from low income homes suffer. The Early Years' Strategy 0–6 is aimed at supporting learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. All learners on the SEN register have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and those with a Statement of Entitlement have an Annual Review Meeting.

Assessment for Learning is key to the Revised Curriculum introduced in 2007 and aims to ensure that pupils' skills and personal capabilities are fully developed.

Through DE's E-Strategy and the provision of the national/regional c2k system, to which all pupils and staff have access both at home and at school, a clear strategy is in place to support learning through e-learning. The Fronter platform supports the development of collaborative learning at school level as well as across schools.

### **Improve learner health and well-being**

In 2007, DE began work in partnership with all key statutory and voluntary and community sectors and interested parties to develop a Pupils' Emotional Health and Well-being Programme. The programme focuses on positive prevention by building coping skills in children and young people. It complements the personal development strand of the NI Revised Curriculum. To ensure the implementation, there are a raft of policies and circulars in place to promote positive health and well-being. Schools also have access to counselling support and the services of the Education and Welfare Service.

### **Provide additional support for schools achieving lower learner outcomes**

Based on the outcomes of the Inspection process, schools which are not attaining in line with expected outcomes for learners or which are not deemed as satisfactory enter the Formal Intervention Process. They receive support targeted at the areas of weaknesses identified by ETI. The process may involve the need to replace members of the BOG and always involves re-inspection/follow-up. The process is outlined in the Every School a Good School Policy.

### **Improve transition between phases of education**

All schools are required to provide data in relation to pupils transitioning from one phase to the next. One of the most recent initiatives introduced by the Education Authority is the KS2/KS3 Transition Programme. This is proving very effective in the sharing of learning and expertise between the primary and post-primary phases. Teachers at both key stages have the opportunity to observe each other and to share resources in the key areas of literacy and numeracy.

### **Increase involvement of parents/local communities**

All schools are obliged to provide a written report once a year to parents and also to report to parents at the end of each key stage. Through the Extended School Policy and Full Schools Network programme, school connect with their local communities. While



there is no obligation to have a parents' association, schools are encouraged in this regard. There is an obligation through the statutory school development planning process for schools to seek the views and opinions of parents. Schools are encouraged to work with their local community of schools through participation in their Area Learning Communities. These encourage schools to collectively care for all learners in a specified area. The financial support provided by EF (Entitlement Framework) drove the policy for widening access to all pupils to a broad range of subjects. Involvement of parents and local communities are promoted strongly in Count, Read, Succeed, as well as ESaGs.

### **3. What information/data are collected at national level on attainment and achievement?**

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At national level, DE gathers data in relation to national tests and qualifications:

- Performance in literacy and numeracy at KS1 and KS2
- Performance in Communication and Using Maths at KS3
- Performance at 5 passes at Grades A\*–C, performance at 5 passes at Grades A\*–C including English and mathematics
- Above data in relation to pupils with FSME
- Performance at 7 passes at Grades A\*–C, performance at 7 passes at Grades A\*–C including English and mathematics (particularly in respect of pupils in selective schools)
- Performance at Grades A\*–G in the above – focusing on % entered
- Percentage of pupils achieving three passes at Grades A\*–C at A Level
- Percentage of pupils achieving two passes at Grades A\*–C at A Level
- Above data in relation to pupils with FSME
- Percentage of pupils achieving three passes at Grades A\*–E at A Level
- Percentage of pupils achieving two passes at Grades A\*–E at A Level
- All above benchmarked against NI averages
- Progression between KS4 and KS5 and between Year 13 and Year 14
- Progression to Higher and Further Education.

Wider 'measures' of learning to learn, learner well-being/welfare, personal/social development, etc.:

- Attendance data, information on suspensions and expulsions
- Data on pupils in alternative education
- Participation rates in extended school activities

The majority of above are measured via the Inspection process.



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#### **4. What information/data on attainment and achievement (including the wider areas outlined above) are collected at school level?**

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As above

#### **5. What information/data are used for school evaluation and quality assurance at national/local level?**

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##### **Self-evaluation**

- Classroom observation: Observation Frequency – 1 hour via PRSD, depends on school;
- Book looks/Collegial Book Looks and Discussion – regular intervals throughout the year;
- Stakeholder surveys – Voice (Perception questionnaires completed by pupils, staff, parents and agencies with whom school works), Perception Questionnaires – usually once a year;
- Data from external examination results including at whole school, departmental and individual class level. Also:
  - residual data, which informs cross-school variation in performance;
  - data on attendance;
  - data on progression between KS4 and KS5 and between Year 13 and Year 14;
  - uptake figures for individual subjects;
  - progression to Higher and Further Education;
  - Performance Data.

Annual, but patterns from year to year will be evaluated. Additionally, schools and DE use the three-year average data for measuring subject performance;

- Value-added data based on baseline data.

##### **Inspection**

Same as above, plus:

- the percentage of lessons which fit into categories (satisfactory, good, etc.);
- measure of leadership;
- ICT usage to promote learning.

The performance of pupils with additional needs is also measured.



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### **Analysis of learner achievement/other school level data**

Schools collect data annually on pupil participation in extra-curricular activities, detention figures, attendance at whole-school, year and individual levels.

#### **Purpose/use of data**

The data is mainly used to evaluate performance at all levels. Its key and most important function is that it informs strengths and areas for improvement, as it provides the necessary information to enable schools to self-improve.

## **6. Are there any specific initiatives in place to support/enable teachers and/or school leaders to raise the attainment and achievement of all learners?**

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- Collegial Observation and feedback;
- Sharing of best practice across all aspects of the school's provision at school level and also across schools;
- Belonging to wider school network such as the Area Learning Community, which improves access to subjects for all pupils across a geographical area. This mitigates against the disadvantages which pupils experience when attending a small school.

## **7. What other policies may influence levels of attainment and achievement for all learners?**

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The level of autonomy affects some schools, as a centralised approach to appointing principals and school leaders in specific sectors can cause log jams for the schools and unnecessary delays in appointments.

Depending on the size and budget of an individual school, the school may not be able to provide the most appropriate curriculum for individual pupils. The Sustaining Schools Policy and EF (Entitlement Framework) Strategy are aimed at preventing this, but there is a gap between the policy and practice in some areas.

Current financial difficulties will lead to many of the excellent policies (which have led to school improvement) being stymied.

## **8. Please provide a short commentary/critical reflection on the main policy challenges**

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In the light of current financial constraints, many challenges will present themselves to schools, e.g. their ability to meet the Entitlement Framework.

Limitations to access to Learning Support Assistants will provide challenges for schools in supporting pupils with additional/special needs.





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Current Workforce Planning and Redundancy Policy schemes militate against refreshing the workforce and introducing the new subjects that the economy requires, e.g. Software Engineering.



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## **ANNEX 1. EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE TO RAISE LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT**

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Contact person: Carol McCann – Principal of school/member of West Belfast Area Learning Community

### **1. Location of school/learning community and short description of context**

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The schools in the West Belfast Area Learning Community (WBALC) are located in, and draw the majority of their learners from, the West Belfast area.

West Belfast is an area which includes the most disadvantaged and deprived communities of Northern Ireland.

As with many parts of Belfast, the area experiences a legacy of industrial decline and post-conflict restructuring. This manifests itself in low employment, poor health and, particularly in many communities, low educational attainment.

These factors are considered within government research and, in particular, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agencies (NISRA) work on multiple deprivations measures (MDM). NISRA research measures factors across a number of domains and calculates a comparative ranking for all super output areas (SOAs) in Northern Ireland. West Belfast continues to be recognised within these rankings as the area suffering most from a range of multiple deprivations.

Of the 12,443 Belfast school children statemented/SEN 1–5, approximately 3,552 (28%) live in West Belfast wards.

Approximately 86% of the school-age population of West Belfast are living in health deprivation areas. Challenges include:

- social mobility;
- marginalisation;
- unemployment;
- under-age pregnancy;
- poor health including sexual health;
- opportunities for training;
- sectarianism/Interface conflict;
- influence of dissident paramilitaries;
- mental health issues and self-harm.



## 2. Summary information on school/learning community

There are nine schools in the learning community.

**Table 1. West Belfast Area Learning Community – Types of school/number of learners**

School Name	Number of learners	Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME)	Type
1. Corpus Christi College	311	72.7%	All-ability Boys' School
2. Christian Brothers' Secondary School	498	63.7%	All-ability Boys' School
3. Coláiste Feirste	605	Data not on DE site	Co-ed Irish Medium School
4. St. Dominic's GS for Girls	1,031	28.7%	Selective All Girls' School
5. St. Gerard's Resource Centre	250	74%	Special school providing outreach support for literacy to mainstream schools
6. St. Louise's Comprehensive College	1,474	56.6%	All-ability Girls' School
7. St. Mary's GS	1,186	38.5%	Selective All Boys' School
8. St. Rose's Dominican College	273	68.5%	All-ability Girls' School
9. Belfast Hospital School	Varies: 20–60	Varies	Specialist school for pupils with mental health/depression/school phobia issues



## Membership

The Principals of the schools meet formally five to six times per year. The group is distinctive in that its work is greatly enhanced by working in collaboration with a number of key agents/agencies:

- ETI: the District Inspector supports the work of the group by attendance and inputting at the meetings.
- The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) Advisor provides support, advice and data analysis for the whole area.
- The West Belfast Partnership Board: a community-led improvement agency which advises and supports schools in a number of practical ways. These include sourcing additional funding streams/financial support for schools to support learners and promote the learning and achievement of all learners in the area. The West Belfast Partnership Board, working with the Area Learning Community, facilitates the vital link between the community/local services and the schools. It organises intensive summer and Easter schools in literacy and numeracy at transition and GCSE levels.
- Links with Dublin City University (DCU) researchers: participation in international research.

## Development

Area Learning Communities were established across Northern Ireland in 2007. The aim is to promote collaborative work among schools to ensure that the curriculum entitlement of all learners (aged 14–19) in an area is met. Initially, the West Belfast Area Learning Community (WBALC) struggled to meet the challenge set by the Department of Education for schools and was resistant to working collaboratively. Some learning communities have not moved beyond the challenge. The West Belfast Area Learning Community is recognised for its good practice.

## Development and current work

The West Belfast Area Learning Community has developed significantly and this is an evolving process. It has moved beyond its remit to provide access to courses and to meet a number of times per year by establishing and developing a number of committees to progress a collaborative approach to raising the achievement of all learners in a number of key areas:

- staff development and Building Leadership capacity across all the schools;
- collaborative approach to leadership development: shared staff development activities and a focus on sharing best practice across schools, as well as leadership development courses/activities at middle and senior leadership levels;
- a shared drive and focus on school improvement activities and sharing best practice in the areas of:
  - ICT development;
  - Careers Education, Information and Guidance (CEAIG);



- SEN,
- Improving attainment and, in particular, raising attainment in Literacy and Numeracy;
- Pastoral Care;
- improved transition and improvement in communication/sharing expertise between primary and post-primary providers.

The West Belfast Area Learning Community (WBALC) has begun a formal process of engaging with primary schools to inform best practice and improve transition from primary to post-primary education. It aims to improve literacy and numeracy levels and the overall educational outcomes of all learners in all schools in the WBALC.

### **3. Summary of key feature/strengths of current practice**

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- The principals meet regularly and discuss areas of common interest and concern. They can collectively present issues of concern and ideas for improvement to DE and request that they are addressed.
- The number of sub-groups which have been established has enabled staff across the schools to learn from and share with one another: a pooling of ideas and expertise.
- The excellent CEAIG (careers) team works collectively and collegially in the interests of all learners in the area.
- Access to a wider curriculum for all learners in the area has been particularly beneficial for pupils in the smaller schools.
- There is collective buying power for areas of expertise required by all the schools – e.g. for staff development.
- The excellent link made by all the schools with the Education Section of the West Belfast Partnership Board has established access to a range of services/agencies who work in the local community.
- There are improved outcomes across all schools

### **4. Data/information available**

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- Baseline testing scores – Progress in English, Progress in Maths, CAT scores, attitudinal survey data;
- Benchmarking data – Annual attendance figures and benchmarking data which provides comparative data for:
  - the performance of individual schools benchmarked against Northern Ireland averages for similar schools;
  - the performance of the pupils who attend the schools in the West Belfast area benchmarked against Northern Ireland and Belfast averages;



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- Teacher assessment scores and use of online systems to record and track;
  - Use of a variety of self-review processes, some of which lead to external accreditation, e.g. Investors in People Award (IIP), BECTA (ICT Self-review);
  - Development planning – All schools have three-year strategic development plans and annual operational plans which include targets for Key Stage 3, GCSE and A Level (Years 10, 12 and 13);
  - Recent inspection reports for the majority of the schools in the Area Learning Community;
  - Effective use of online data tracking systems which measure performance and inform areas for areas for improvement leading to improved outcomes.

There has been significant improvement in the performance of the majority of schools in recent years. Two of the schools in the area were the highest performing schools in Northern Ireland in 2013.

## **5. Focus of example/work to raise achievement**

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## **6. Summary information about developments/current work in this area**

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## **7. Key learning points from this example**

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## **8. Supporting materials (web links, papers, presentations, etc.)**

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