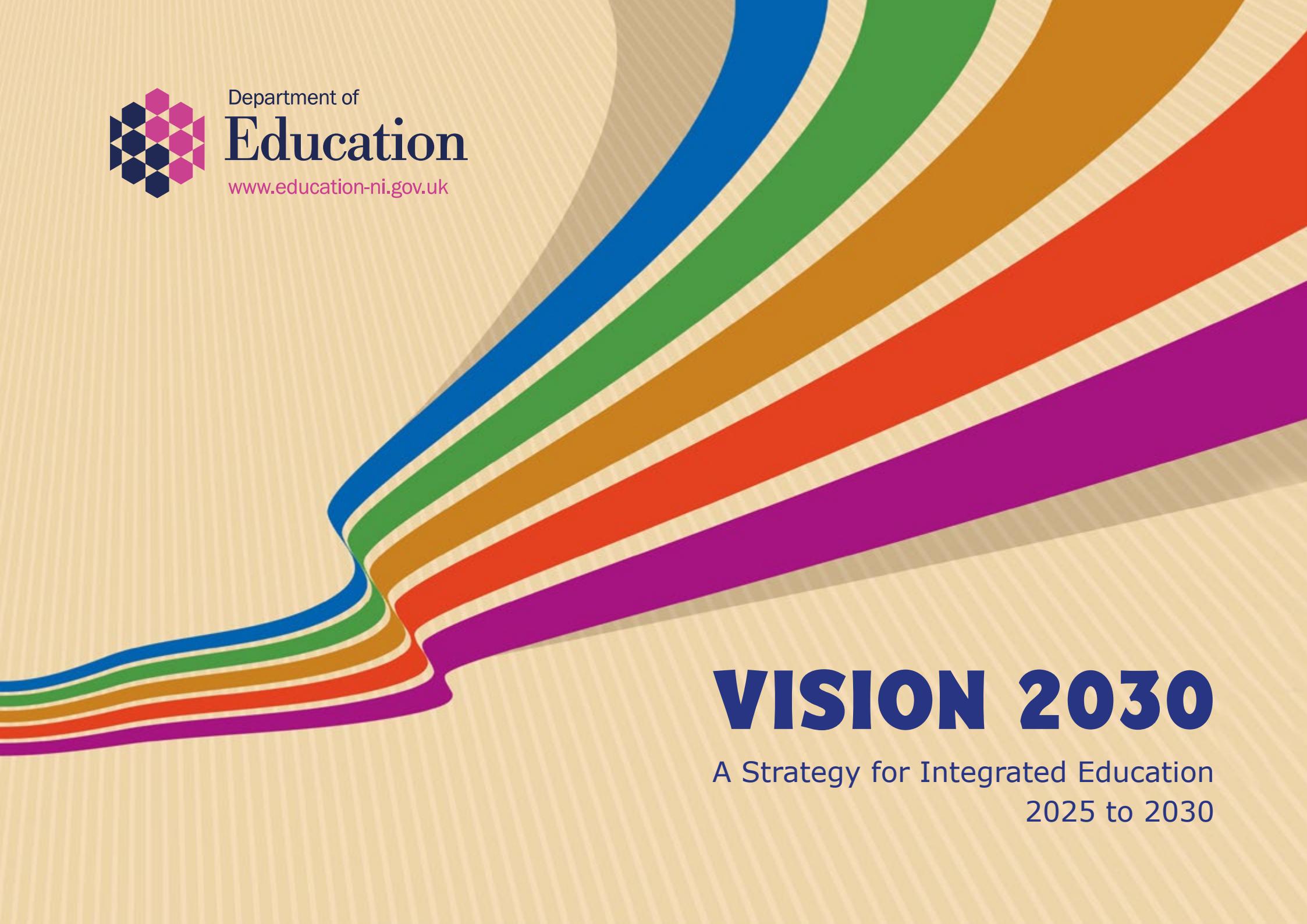




Department of
Education
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VISION 2030

A Strategy for Integrated Education
2025 to 2030

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What is Integrated Education?

Section 1 of the Integrated Education Act 2022 provides a legal definition of Integrated Education which has been extended beyond that set out in previous legislation around reasonable numbers of Protestants and Catholics to include the education of those from different cultures, differing socio-economic backgrounds and abilities.

Integrated Education is now formally defined in legislation as:

The education together, in an Integrated school, of

- those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, including reasonable

numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons;

- those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not; and
- those of different abilities.

Integrated education shaped my education by allowing me the chance to feel safe, welcomed and respected in a school environment. The education broadened my horizons and enabled me to meet others I would not have had the opportunity to meet or interact with.

Nicholas Emery,
formerly Lagan College

The Integrated Education Act goes on to define an Integrated school as:

A school which intentionally supports, protects and advances an ethos of diversity, respect and understanding between those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, between those of different socio-economic backgrounds and between those of different abilities, and has acquired grant-maintained integrated status, or controlled integrated status under the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

Part VI and Schedules 5 and 6 of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 set out the management and governance arrangements for Integrated schools - which can either be grant-maintained or controlled Integrated schools.

The Development of Integrated Education

The origin of Integrated schools may be traced to a campaign in the early 1970s by a group of parents called 'All Children Together' who wished to explore the idea of sharing their children's education with other families of differing religious affiliations and cultural traditions in the form of a new type of school, the "Integrated school". Subsequently, the Education (Northern Ireland) Act 1978 allowed existing schools to transform to Integrated status.

Lagan College was established as the first independent, Integrated school in 1981. By 1987, there were seven newly established Integrated schools. In that year, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) was formed as a charitable organisation to co-ordinate efforts to develop Integrated Education and support parent groups through the process of opening new schools.

The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 provided a statutory framework for the development of Integrated schools. Integrated Education was defined in the Order as 'the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils' and a statutory duty was placed on the Department to encourage and facilitate Integrated Education. The Order continued to set out the arrangements for the establishment, management and governance of grant maintained and controlled Integrated schools. Subsequently, in 1991, Brownlow College in Lurgan became the first existing school to transform to controlled Integrated status.

In 1992, the Integrated Education Fund was co-founded by the Department of Education, the Nuffield Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, as an independent charity to be a financial foundation for the growth and development of Integrated Education. Since its establishment, the Department of Education has donated over £4.3 million to the IEF.

In 1998, the Education (Northern Ireland) Order made provision under Article 20 for the ability to

create Integrated Nursery schools, providing an Integrated Education pathway across all education phases and, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement directly referenced integrated education in Article 13. 'An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing'.

In 2014, in a judgment relating to a legal challenge by Drumragh Integrated College, Justice Treacy provided further clarity that 'Article 64 of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 applies only to "Integrated Education" as a standalone concept within the confines of part VI of the 1989 Order'. He went on to define Integrated schools as not having a predominant ethos of one faith, together with a balanced representation on the Board of Governors.

In 2016 an Independent Review of Integrated Education was undertaken at the request of the then Minister, Peter Weir. The report was published in March 2017 and its recommendations informed operational work throughout the period until the restoration of the Assembly in 2020.

A key outworking of the Independent Review of Integrated Education was the subsequent development of “Integration Works”. This updated guidance for schools considering transforming to Integrated status, was published by the Department in 2017. The aim of the guidance was to refresh and reinvigorate the Transformation Process to make it a rewarding and enriching process for schools and their communities that provides unique opportunities to enhance children and young people’s educational experiences.

In 2022, the Northern Ireland Assembly passed the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (the Act), updating the legislative framework that underpins Integrated Education in Northern Ireland with the intention of supporting future growth of the Integrated sector. The Act obtained Royal Assent on 26 April 2022 following its passage through the Assembly. All provisions, unless otherwise specified, came into force six months after the Act received Royal Assent: 26 October 2022.

The Act obtained Royal Assent on 26 April 2022 following its passage through the Assembly.

The first Integrated Education Strategy and Action Plan were subsequently published on 26 April 2023 (available [here](#)) and the Department’s statutory report (the Section 10 Report) on Integrated Education published on 26 April 2024 (available [here](#)).

The Independent Review of Education published in December 2023 has made recommendations to significantly increase the numbers of children educated together from different backgrounds,

including by increasing the number of Integrated schools or jointly managed community schools. The review highlights that all families should have such options within a realistic travelling distance as soon as possible.

The Department has accepted the purpose of this recommendation and will seek to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to learn alongside individuals from other communities and backgrounds. A key element of responding to this recommendation is the Strategy for Integrated Education.

Integrated Education Today

Integrated Education has grown remarkably in the period since 1981. This development has, for the most part, been parent driven utilising the supportive legislative framework that has been in place since 1989. Today, there are 73 Integrated schools educating over 27,000 children and young people (8% of all pupils).

The tables below set out the overall growth in both Integrated schools and the pupil population. They also highlight the consistent ability of Integrated schools to attract significant numbers of pupils from Protestant, Catholic and other backgrounds.

Table 1.

Growth in Integrated Education since 1981

	1981	1991	2001	2011	2021	2024	2025
Number of Integrated Schools in Northern Ireland	1	13	46	62	67	71	73

Table 2.

Growth in the number of pupils attending Integrated schools

	Pupil enrolment 2009/10	Pupil enrolment 2024/25	Percentage increase
Integrated Primary	8,615	12,094	40.4%
Integrated Post-Primary	12,099	15,398	27.3%
Total	20,714	27,492	32.7%

Table 3.

Religious Breakdown of Integrated Schools in 2024-25

	Protestant pupils	Catholic pupils	Other Christian / non-Christian / no religion / unknown pupils
Primary	27.7%	33.8%	38.5%
Post-primary	37.3%	33.2%	29.4%
Overall	32.9%	33.5%	33.6%

Table 4.
Change in religious balance post Transformation

Percentage of pupils from the minority religious background	Year of Transformation (Number of Schools)	2024-25 (Number of Schools)
10% or less pupils	12	8
Over 10% to 20%	12	13
Over 20% to 30%	*6	13
More than 30%	6	2

* Data in year of Transformation unavailable for one primary and one post-primary school.

Figure 1

Location of Integrated primary schools

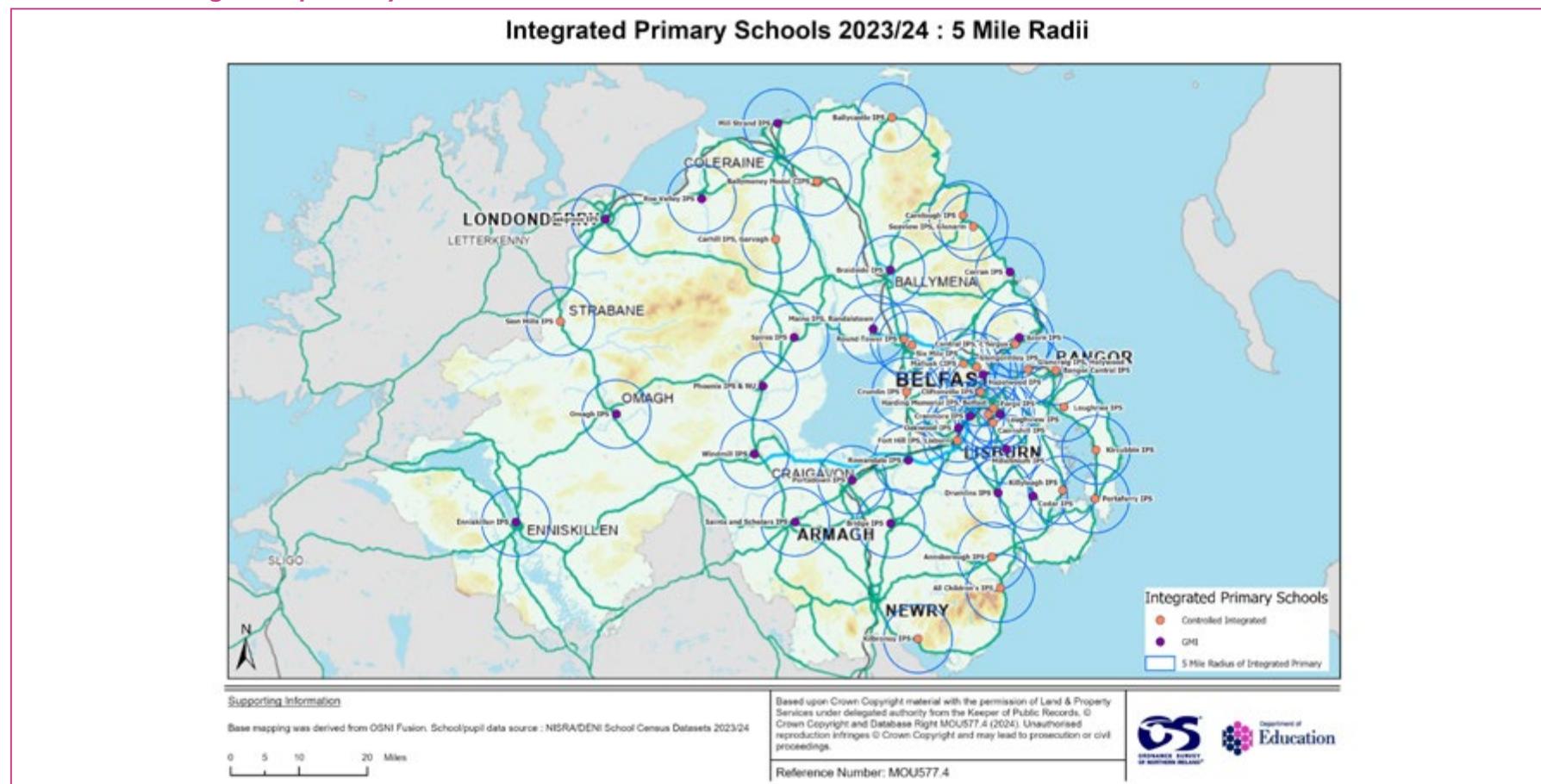
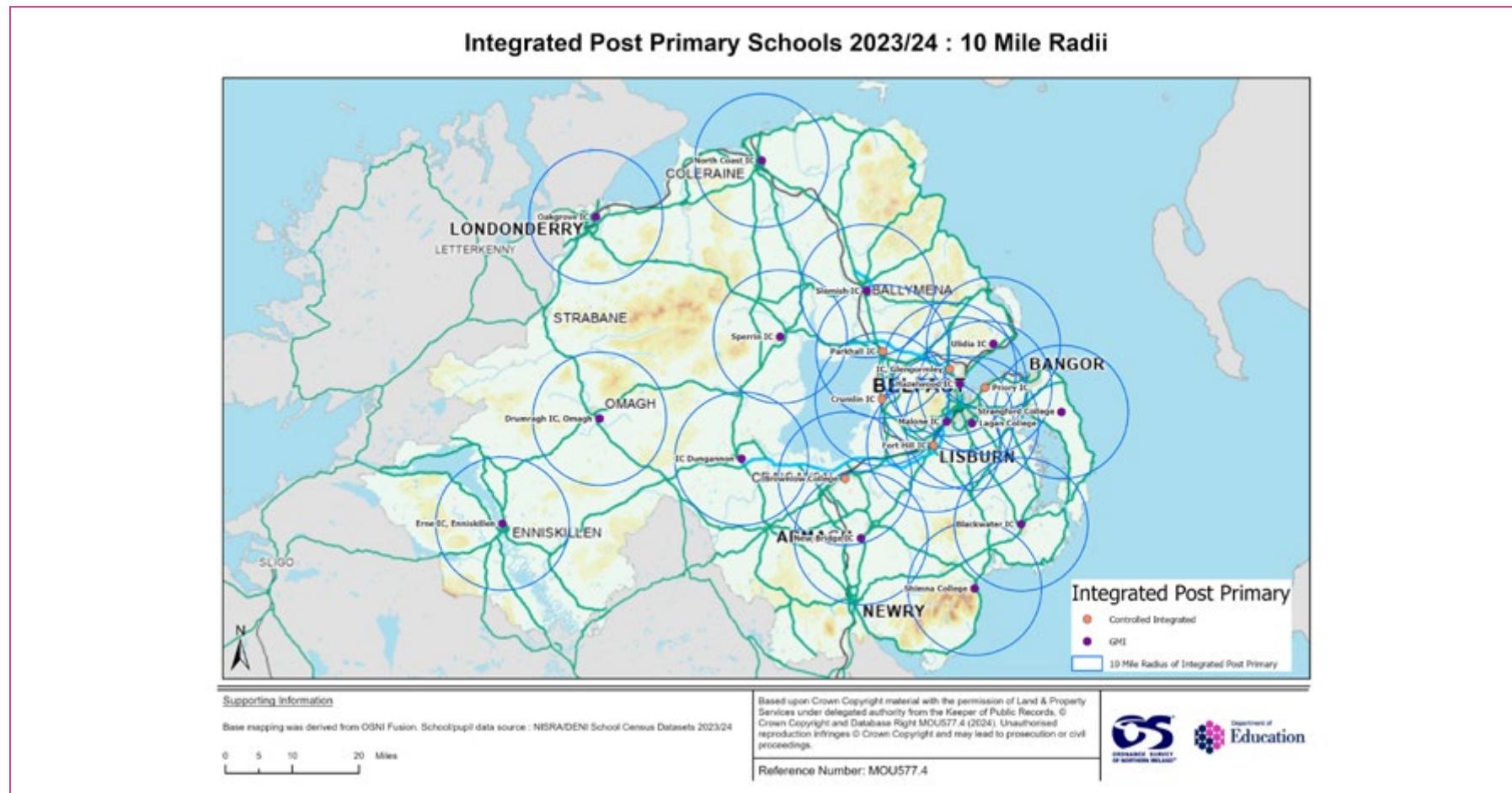


Figure 2

Location of Integrated post-primary schools



A Strategy for Integrated Education

2025-30

This second strategy for the development of Integrated Education has been informed by public consultation on the first strategy and the Department's statutory report on the delivery of Integrated Education (The Section 10 report) and, by engagement with sector representatives. This has included consideration of the outcome of consultation on a revised draft Strategy and action Plan with NICIE, IEF, and CSSC as statutory consultees, as well as continuing engagement with AlumNI, APTIS, EA, CCMS and other wider education stakeholders.

This strategy covers the period 2025 to 2030. It aims to set out clear targets and benchmarks for the development of Integrated Education during that period. The strategy encompasses short, medium, and longer-term actions that will enable us to make

progress towards achieving our overarching vision for Integrated Education:

'a vibrant and supported network of sustainable Integrated schools providing high-quality Integrated Education to children and young people.'

Specifically, this strategy has been designed to meet the requirements of the Integrated Education Act as follows by:

- setting out the resources which will be earmarked to encourage, facilitate and support Integrated Education, including in the establishment of new Integrated schools, the expansion of existing Integrated schools and the transformation of existing schools into Integrated schools;

- clarifying how the Department will facilitate the maintenance and protection of the ethos of existing and new Integrated schools;
- establishing the arrangements for access for Integrated schools to training and resources provided by the Education Authority and other services accessible by publicly funded schools; and
- providing an Action Plan which includes targets and measurable benchmarks prepared in consultation with persons with knowledge and experience of Integrated schools including teachers, governors, pupils, families, and sectoral and community bodies. The plan also includes provision for review.



Chapter 2: **Integrated Education in Context**

Key Organisations

The Department has taken a key role in supporting, encouraging and facilitating the development of Integrated Education since its inception. It does this by providing a range of bespoke sector specific support and also adapting key policies and processes such as transport and temporary variation policy to ensure they encourage, facilitate and support the development of Integrated Education.

The Department was a co-founder and key funder of the IEF and now provides annual recurrent funding to support NICIE. Significant capital investment has been provided to develop new Integrated schools and provide modern fit for purpose facilities. Most recently

this has included provision of investment in Shared and Integrated Education through the Fresh Start Programme. Financial support is also provided to transforming schools.

Other bodies have an important role in supporting the development of Integrated Education:

- The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) is the Department's primary ALB in supporting Integrated Education. The Department funds NICIE to encourage, facilitate and promote Integrated Education. NICIE carries out a support role for all Integrated schools, a representative function for Grant Maintained Integrated

schools, as well as supporting schools considering transformation and for at least 5 years post-transformation. NICIE also plays a leading role in the development of new schools. It represents Integrated Education at all levels of the Area Planning structures which look strategically at where sustainable, high quality educational provision is needed in each area for each phase of education. NICIE also works with other partner organisations to: support ethos development in existing Integrated schools; provide anti-bias training and support to existing Integrated schools; and support schools considering transforming to Integrated status. NICIE is the key delivery partner for this Strategy.

- The Education Authority (EA) is the owner and managing authority for controlled Integrated schools and is responsible for assisting the Department in discharging its statutory duties, including those relating to Integrated Education. The EA has established

a Shared Education and Sectoral Support Team which works with NICIE to support Integrated schools, including those who are in the process of transforming.

- The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is a voluntary body, funded by the Department of Education, to provide sectoral representation and support to individual controlled schools and the sector as a whole. CSSC represents the interests of controlled schools across the functions of the organisation (advocacy, ethos development, school governance, raising standards, estate planning, external relationships), working in collaboration with the Education Authority and with NICIE in respect of controlled Integrated schools. CSSC is recognised as a relevant body under Section 3 of the Act.
- The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) is an independent charitable foundation whose focus is supporting the growth and

development of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland including providing financial support to transforming schools.

More information is provided on each of these key organisations in the Appendices to this document.

The Education System in Northern Ireland

This strategy for the development of Integrated Education is set within the wider context of diverse school system, with a variety of publicly funded school categories and a range of important statutory duties.

As recognised by the Independent Review of Education an excellent education system should respect the reasonable rights of parents to ensure that children are educated in accordance with their religious and philosophical convictions. The Review emphasises that the system should promote excellent educational

outcomes for all learners. Such an approach can accommodate parental preferences.

Without integrated education my parents wouldn't have been able to raise me in their mixed marriage the way they wanted to, outside the world of religion. It allowed me to be educated without having to attend conventional RE in a non-integrated school and left me in a position to make an educated decision for myself when I was old enough on if I wanted to follow a religion after being taught about acceptance and understanding.

Stephen Mackessy, formerly Hazelwood Integrated College

Parental preference is a key element of the legislative framework governing the operation of the school system in Northern Ireland. Article 44 of the 1986 Education and Libraries Order sets out that '**the Department ... shall**

have regard to the general principle that, so far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils shall be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents.'

All school sectors are therefore valued for their important contribution to the education system and in developing our young people as individuals, contributors to society, the economy and the environment. Many schools from all school sectors are now educating children and young people with a range of abilities from diverse religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Schools often collaborate through Area Learning Communities or Shared Education, which aims to provide opportunities for pupils from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds to be educated together.

Schools have become much more adept and skilled at addressing the areas of community relations and

diversity. The statutory curriculum includes the learning areas of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU), Local and Global Citizenship, and Learning for Life and Work. These were developed specifically to enable young people to:

- learn about themselves and others; and
- develop tolerance, respect and open-mindedness through understanding similarities; and respecting differences between people in the local community and beyond.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum is delivered by all publicly funded schools, and requires schools to help children and young people to:

- develop as responsible citizens who show respect for others;
- understand different beliefs and cultures; and
- develop informed, ethical views of complex issues.

The Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education (CRED) policy specifically aims to ensure that children and young people, at each stage of their development, have an understanding of and respect for the rights, equality and diversity of all without discrimination.

In their 2024 report entitled 'How effectively are children being prepared for living in and contributing to a diverse society' ([available here](#)) the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) found that the majority of schools demonstrate effective CRED practice in helping children and young people to build relationships with others from different backgrounds and traditions.

The Benefits of Integrated Education

Within this context Integrated Education has much to offer the school system and society as a whole. As

children and young people prepare to live and work in a global, multicultural and pluralistic society, the benefits of educating them together are becoming increasingly recognised.

We live in a society emerging from conflict. Therefore, building a strong and shared community is a key objective for government. Improving social attitudes among our young people is critical to achieving this aim.

Integrated schools aim to provide an environment where pupils from different community backgrounds can interact, formally and informally, on a daily basis. Since the 1980s, Integrated Education has demonstrated that it can:

- help break down barriers;
- develop more positive social attitudes; and
- nurture and improve community relations among young people.

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. A number of studies which have demonstrated explicitly the benefits of intergroup contact specifically between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (including school and university students, and representative community samples), showing its association with lower levels of prejudice and increased trust.

Research evidence also indicates that Integrated schooling has a significant and positive social influence on the lives of those who experience it. This is most

I care about integrated education because it enables us to celebrate rather than fear difference. It taught me that you did not have to agree with everyone else's opinions or views but that you did need to respect them. It values the individual and their aspirations whatever they may be. To me integrated education is key to the development of an inclusive Northern Ireland.

Laura Mullin, formerly
North Coast Integrated College

notable in fostering cross-community friendships, reducing prejudicial attitudes and promoting a sense of security in religious, racial or ethnically diverse environments.

At its core, Integrated Education is about encouraging children and young people to recognise what they share in common, as well as understanding and respecting differences. This helps them to develop a positive attitude towards others and become aware of bias.

It is also increasingly shown that when we interact with people who are different from ourselves in the context of problem-solving and learning activities, we create the dynamics needed for cognitive work that

can develop new capabilities. The following activities provide opportunities to improve intellectual capacity:

- confronting challenges to assumptions;
- tackling novel problems that do not have obvious solutions; and
- dealing with opposing viewpoints and interpretations of events.

Shared and Integrated Education

Integrated Education and Shared Education both aim to educate Catholic and Protestant children and young people together in a mutually respectful environment. However, Shared Education is not a type of school. It encourages all types of schools to collaborate with other schools to provide

I care about integrated education because it allows children from different backgrounds to interact and socialise with each other and helps to break down the barriers of prejudice and intolerance between different communities.

Keir Herink,
formerly Lagan College

opportunities for pupils from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds to be educated together. Schools retain their individual ethos, collaborating together in partnership for the benefit of their pupils. The aim is to improve educational attainment, promote efficient and effective use of resources, and break down the barriers in communities.

Together, Sharing Works (2015) and the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, provide a policy and legislative framework which seeks to enable collaborative working between educational settings, on a cross sectoral basis, providing children and young people from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds with opportunities to learn with and about each other.

It is not a question of either Integrated Education or Shared Education. They are not in competition with

each other. Shared Education includes Integrated schools, which are encouraged to share their knowledge, experience and good practice with others through Shared Education.

The Department of Education has a statutory duty to encourage, facilitate and support the development of Integrated Education and to promote, encourage and facilitate Shared Education. Both Shared and Integrated Education have valuable roles to play in continuing to shape a united, shared and reconciled community. Providing opportunities to learn together is crucial to forging the relationships that will underpin a future based on mutual respect and understanding and one in which diversity is embraced and celebrated.

Both Shared and Integrated Education are vital component elements within divided post conflict societies for several reasons:

- **Confronting Prejudice:** Shared and Integrated Educational experiences have been found to reduce prejudice and stereotypes

between religious and socio economic groups and among those with different abilities by fostering positive intergroup contact. Students get to know and interact with peers from different backgrounds, promoting empathy and understanding.

- **Peace and Cohesion:** Shared and Integrated Education help to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary to peacefully coexist in a diverse society. They develop critical thinking skills and learn to appreciate different perspectives, fostering tolerance and respect.

- **Addressing the legacy of the past:** Shared and Integrated Education can address the legacy of conflict by providing a platform for students to learn about the past in a balanced and objective way. This can contribute to healing and reconciliation by promoting mutual understanding of the causes, experiences and consequences of the conflict.

There is no doubt that much progress has been made across our society in moving towards a shared and united community. As a society that continues to build on the peace we now enjoy, there is still an important role for education to play in continuing to build good relations at a local level and to foster positive relationships that will form the foundations for the future. Within this context, Integrated Education alongside the other sectors in education, can play a critical role in continuing to build trust, mutual respect and inclusivity.



Challenges and Opportunities

As noted above, over 27,000 children and young people are now educated in Integrated schools. It is important to highlight that parent-led growth at this scale, and in a society emerging from conflict, is unique in the world.

Nonetheless, the growth of Integrated Education has faced several challenges. In particular,

- ➊ There remains a gap between broad support for the idea of Integrated Education as expressed in a range of surveys at societal level and the availability of Integrated Education within the school system.
- ➋ Engagement with schools and sectoral support bodies suggests that the process to create a new Integrated school or for existing schools to transform to Integrated status is overly complex and resource intensive.

This strategy presents an opportunity to address these challenges and sets out a range of targets and actions to support the further growth and development of Integrated Education.

Success depends on DE and stakeholders from across the education sector working together effectively. We know there are many organisations and groups working in this field, so we will seek opportunities to engage and work in partnership with all education ALBs and sectoral representatives.

Chapter 3: **Demand for Integrated Education**

Legislative Requirements

The Integrated Education Act requires the Department to support Integrated Education by:

- (a) identifying, assessing, monitoring and aiming to meet the demand for the provision of Integrated Education within the context of area planning and the overall sustainability of the school estate (including, in particular monitoring the number and success of applications for integrated education), and
- (b) providing sufficient places in Integrated schools to aim to meet the demand for integrated

education within the context of area planning and the overall sustainability of the school estate (including examining evidence of expected future demand).

Definition

Identifying, assessing, monitoring and aiming to meet demand for Integrated Education is a complex and ongoing process. To fully assess and measure demand, it is important to have a clear definition of demand that is understood by all stakeholders, and which will provide meaningful data on which we plan future education provision.

The Department will employ the following definition of demand:

Demand for Integrated Education is the level of support and desire for Integrated Education by parents and their expressed preferences for school admission.

Demand comprises two distinct elements which we have termed Societal Demand and Behavioural Demand and which we further express as follows:

Societal Demand

This is evidence of demand taken from a Northern Ireland wide survey of parents on their desire for Integrated Education and the factors they consider when expressing school preferences and from successful parental ballots held to consider Transformation proposals.

Behavioural Demand

This is evidence of demand indicated by school preference as expressed via the school

admission system at entry to pre-school, primary and post-primary school by surveying parental inclination/aspirations of parents and, from successful parental ballots held to consider Transformation proposals.

Evidence and Data

Evidence and data will be at the heart of the Department's approach to assessing, monitoring and aiming to meet demand for Integrated Education.

Robust evidence will provide the foundation for informed decision making and allow the Department to prioritise actions which will have greatest impact on growing the sector.

Building in the initial findings within the Department's Section 10 report which identified six localities where oversubscription data suggests there is unmet demand for Integrated Education (Belfast, Lisburn and Castlereagh, Ards and North Down, Antrim and Newtownabbey, Mid and East Antrim, and Newry, Mourne and Down), to gather more comprehensive

evidence on demand during the lifetime of this strategy, the Department will:

- Analyse annual school admissions data to build up a thorough picture of demand for Integrated Education across Northern Ireland.
- Consider results from parental ballots held in Transformation proposals to further understanding of societal and behavioural demand for Integrated Education as expressed by parents.
- Use evidence from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey undertaken annually by [ARK](#) to develop a more rounded understanding of societal level demand for Integrated Education and the factors that parents consider when making school preference decisions.
- Survey parents who have recently made school preference decisions via the EA admissions portal to further explore the demand for Integrated Education.

- Work with EA to record and consider the preferences of parents of children outside the mainstream school admissions process for Integrated Education, including during statutory assessment consultations and annual reviews.

In analysing and reviewing this evidence, the Department will work collaboratively with sectoral representatives, key delivery partners and academics.

From Data through to Action

During 2025, and annually thereafter, the Department will develop and publish a comprehensive update on demand for Integrated Education informed by the evidence gathered in regard to both societal and behavioural demand.

Every stakeholder will have access to the collected data. We expect the EA will use the IE report on demand for Integrated Education to meet its statutory obligation to aim to meet demand for

Integrated Education and include such information into Area Planning processes and future strategies within the context of providing sustainable education provision across Northern Ireland.

The Transformation process

The legal process of Transformation is defined and described in the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, available at www.legislation.gov.uk. The process has not been amended or updated by the passage of the Integrated Education Act. It remains the case that only the parents or governors of a school can formally initiate Transformation, during which Electoral Reform Services conducts a secret ballot of parents. If a simple majority of those who vote in the ballot is in favour of Transformation, and at least half of those eligible to vote have done so, the Board of Governors must submit a Development Proposal supported by a Case for Change to the EA.

A Development Proposal is the statutory means of proposing significant changes to education provision. The Development Proposal is published in one or more newspapers, consulted on before publication and, once published, there is a statutory two month objection period when views for and against can be made. Departmental officials analyse the case for Transformation and make a recommendation. Then the Education Minister or, in the absence of a Minister, the Permanent Secretary of the Department makes a decision. After the Development Proposal is approved, the legal change to integrated status happens on a date the Department has specified.

This process, by its nature is both lengthy and complex and places a significant burden on schools to provide robust evidence to meet the statutory requirements. A key action proposed within this strategy is therefore to review the Integration Works guidance to ensure it is fit for purpose by November 2025.

Chapter 4: A Strategy for Integrated Education

Delivery Approach

This strategy sets out the Department's long-term vision for Integrated Education. The vision is underpinned by five key strategic aims, each of which has associated targets to be achieved and actions which will deliver the targets.

Figure 3:
Components of the Strategy
for Integrated Education



Vision and Strategic Aims

The Department's vision for Integrated Education, which will be achieved through this strategy is for:

'A vibrant and supported network of sustainable Integrated schools providing high-quality Integrated Education to children and young people'

This vision is underpinned by the five strategic aims set out below. These are the important goals we wish to achieve through this strategy, and which will provide direction and purpose, guiding our actions and resources over the period of the strategy.

Our Strategic Aims	
1.	Increased access to Integrated Education
2.	High-quality support services for Integrated Education
3.	Development, maintenance and protection of the Integrated Ethos
4.	Increased public knowledge and understanding of Integrated Education
5.	Increased school collaboration and a more shared society

Targets

As required by the Integrated Education Act, The Department has worked in conjunction with sectoral representatives and has developed key targets (including timetables) which will demonstrate the achievement of our strategic aims. Chapter 4 of the

strategy in turn sets out the actions that will drive delivery of these targets.

Increased access to Integrated Education

- By 2030, we will aim to achieve a reduction in the post-primary gap between the percentage of first preferences for Integrated Education being met (currently 87%) and the Northern Ireland post-primary average (currently 90%).
- By September 2025, we will consider the impact of admissions criteria on parity of access to Integrated Education and deliver a DE policy paper for ministerial consideration.
- By March 2026, the Strategic and Operational area plans will be informed by the initial findings on demand set out within the S10 report on Integrated Education (available [here](#)) and the annual report on demand for Integrated Education.

- By April 2025, we will have conducted a survey assessing the level of societal inclination for Integrated Education.
- By April 2025, we will have conducted a survey of parents who have recently expressed admission preferences, to gain an understanding of the factors driving parental preferences for Integrated Education or otherwise.
- By June 2025, we will develop and collate survey and admissions data relating to demand and set out our analysis and conclusion in a comprehensive report.

High-quality support services for Integrated Education

- By September 2025, we will review the objectives, resources and funding of NICIE and prepare a report for Ministerial consideration.
- By December 2025 we will review the school governance arrangements within Integrated

Education and in particular the strengths and challenges of the Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) governance model and prepare a report for Ministerial consideration.

- By December 2025 we will review the strengths and weaknesses of the statutory governance arrangements for Integrated schools and prepare a paper and recommendations for Ministerial consideration.

Development, maintenance and protection of the Integrated Ethos

- By December 2025 we will work with NICIE and other IE stakeholders to review how the Integrated ethos is developed and promoted by schools and report on these findings. The review should also consider whether there is a common ethos across all Integrated schools and how it is potentially different from those in other sectors.

- By March 2026 all schools exploring transformation and for 5 years post-transformation are using the Framework.
- By March 2030, 80% of eligible Integrated schools are engaged in the Excellence in Integrated Education Award scheme.

Increased public knowledge and understanding of Integrated Education

- By March 2026 DE will commission both qualitative and quantitative research on the extent of public understanding and knowledge about Integrated Education.
- By September 2025, we will work with NICIE to develop and publish a communication and engagement plan focused on improving public understanding of Integrated Education.



Increased school collaboration and a more shared society

- By March 2026, we will commission research on the impact of Integrated Education on Northern Ireland society over time.

Chapter 5: **Delivering Integrated Education**

The Department of Education is committed to encouraging, facilitating and supporting Integrated Education. This chapter sets out the actions and interventions that we will take to support the development of Integrated Education during the period 2025-30. The actions will be subject to regular refresh and review and progress will be formally recorded annually against the associated Action Plan.

In partnership with stakeholders and supported by departmental statisticians, we have developed a suite of benchmarks and indicators of success which will be used to monitor delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan. These benchmarks are set out within a separate Benchmark and Indicators of Success document.

Strategic Aim 1: Increased access to Integrated Education

Action 1: DE will commission NICIE to engage with Integrated schools and EA in the six localities currently identified where Integrated Education is oversubscribed.

NICIE and other educational stakeholders will engage in partnership with Integrated schools in Belfast, Lisburn and Castlereagh, Ards and North Down, Antrim and Newtownabbey, Mid and East Antrim, and Newry, Mourne and Down to review their enrolment numbers and school capacity and, as required prepare, and bring forward Development Proposals with their Board of Governors to increase admissions and enrolment numbers.

- This work is completed by NICIE as the Department will be the decision-maker on the Development Proposals and must not compromise the operation and outcome of that key statutory process.

Action 2: DE will commission NICIE to engage with local communities in those localities identified where Integrated Education is not currently available.

- NICIE and other educational stakeholders working in partnership will engage with communities to identify whether there is sufficient community support to develop new or transformed Integrated provision and provide a detailed report on this engagement.

Action 3: Support and enhance the transformation process.

- The Department will review the Integration Works Guidance for transformation to ensure it is fit-for-purpose by November 2025.

- The Department, NICIE and EA will commence a programme in support of Transformation in September 2026.
- The Department will work with NICIE and wider educational stakeholders to improve understanding of what legally constitutes Integrated Education with reference to Section 1 of the Integrated Education Act.
- The Department will undertake research within schools in the voluntary and maintained sectors regarding their attitude to transformation.
- The Department will also conduct a wider review of the operation of the transformation process to ensure that it is working effectively for stakeholders; how it can best develop and promote the Integrated ethos for transforming schools; and to ensure it is continuing to work well to promote the expansion of Integrated Education.

NICIE and other educational stakeholders working in partnership will continue to provide guidance and support for schools that are interested in transformation.

Action 4: DE will commission NICIE to issue a 'Call for Transformation'.

The 'Call for Transformation' will be issued no later than February 2026 and will be particularly directed at schools with sustainable enrolments or where Transformation could lead to a sustainable enrolment in priority localities. The Call will bring a fresh visibility, prominence and momentum to the transformation process and should act as a catalyst for the further growth of Integrated Education. It will commence on conclusion of work to update the existing Transformation guidance.

Action 5: DE report on Demand for Integrated Education published by June 2025 and annually thereafter.

As set out in Chapter 3, the Department will gather more

comprehensive evidence on demand to inform a detailed report on demand for Integrated Education, which will provide the foundation for informed decision making and allow the Department to prioritise actions for the development of Integrated Education which will have greatest impact.

Action 6: DE to commission a report and assessment on the impact of admissions criteria on access to Integrated Education to inform next steps.

The report will consider in detail the impact of admissions criteria on access to Integrated Education and produce a detailed assessment of key issues and potential next steps.

Action 7: NICIE to prepare a comprehensive sector profile in the context of the Sustainable Schools Policy.

Development of a sector profile in partnership with EA will consider how each existing Integrated school meets the viability criteria within

the Sustainable Schools Policy and identify those schools which require support to fulfil these requirements.

Strategic Aim 2:

High-quality support services for Integrated Education

Action 8: **DE will review current support services (HR, legal, professional learning, governor support) for Integrated schools in order to improve and streamline services and to ensure appropriate access for Integrated schools.**

■ The Department will work with EA and NICIE to review existing arrangements and develop mechanisms to ensure Integrated schools who wish to avail of EA services can do so. We will survey principals and governors of Integrated schools on a biennial basis and utilise

the survey findings to refine service delivery.

Action 9: **DE will review the school governance arrangements within Integrated Education and in particular the strengths and challenges of the Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) governance model.**

■ The Department will work with NICIE and existing GMI schools to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the model and inform potential next steps.

Action 10: **DE will review the objectives, resources and funding of NICIE and prepare a report for Ministerial consideration.**

■ In recognition that this Strategy will have considerable impact on the role of NICIE, the Department will commission the Innovation and Consultancy Service (ICS), within the Department of Finance to review the

objectives, resources and funding of NICIE.

Strategic Aim 3:

Development, maintenance and protection of the Integrated Ethos

Action 11: DDE will work with NICIE and other educational partners to review how the Integrated ethos is developed and promoted within Integrated schools and report on these findings to support further guidance.

- ▀ This report will provide detailed information on Integrated schools current ethos practice and their views on future development and enhancement. It will make recommendations on how it can be further enhanced.
- ▀ The action will support the Department's statutory requirement

to report on the development, maintenance and protection of the Integrated ethos.

Action 12: DE will promote the use of a school-based self-evaluation 'Framework for Integrated Education' Toolkit.

- ▀ This toolkit has been developed by EA and NICIE to help Integrated schools (and those seeking to Transform) evaluate the nature, extent, and quality of their Integrated ethos. The Framework offers a progressive pathway within which all Integrated schools can develop, expand, promote and embed their Integrated ethos and actions are evolving to the stage where they may wish to consider pursuing formal recognition within the Excellence in Integrated Education award scheme.

Action 13: DE will support the use of NICIE's Excellence in Integrated Education Award.

■ This award scheme developed by NICIE recognises and champions good practice within existing Integrated schools. It sits alongside and complements the Department of Education's 'Every School a Good School', the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) Policy, and the Education and Training Inspectorate's Self-Evaluation Frameworks. It is at heart a process for school improvement set within the context of the Integrated ethos and the legal definitions of the new Integrated Education Act (2022).

Action 14: DE will work with the Higher Education Institutions to incorporate Integrated Education/inclusion considerations within initial teacher training courses in Northern Ireland as appropriate.

■ We want our education workforce equipped to meet the diverse needs of our society.

**Strategic Aim 4:
Increased public knowledge and
understanding of Integrated Education**

Action 15: DE will commission qualitative and quantitative research on the extent of public understanding and knowledge about Integrated Education.

■ The Department recognises that public understanding of Integrated

Education could be improved and undertaking survey work will inform future plans to improve understanding and knowledge.

Action 16: DE will work with NICIE to develop and publish a communication and engagement plan focused on improving public understanding of Integrated Education.

■ Promoting Integrated Education is a key objective for NICIE. DE will work with NICIE to support it in undertaking this role.

Strategic Aim 5: **Increased school collaboration and a more shared society**

Action 17: We will work with the Executive Office, other government Departments and their agencies to support ongoing implementation of the Together Building a United Community (TBUC) strategy.

■ TBUC sets out the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and building a united and shared society.

Action 18: We will encourage Integrated schools and education professionals to collaborate and share good practice in exploring controversial issues.

■ We will utilise existing Shared Education initiatives to highlight how Integrated schools explore potentially controversial issues in a diverse classroom.

Action 19: We will encourage Integrated schools to engage with Aspire PeacePlus.

■ We will work with EA and other stakeholders to encourage Integrated schools to engage in the Aspire Programme.

Chapter 6: Resourcing and Next Steps

Resourcing

In line with the requirements of the Integrated Education Act and in the context of other statutory requirement, the Department will support the implementation of the strategy. In addition, to the funding provided to Integrated schools, it is envisaged that, subject to budget availability, key resources will be provided in the period 2025-30 to support implementation of the strategy as follows:

- A minimum of £650,000 per annum to support NICIE to encourage, facilitate and support Integrated Education.
- Subject to available resources, an additional £65,000 per annum to facilitate NICIE

delivery of the additional actions associated with implementation of the strategy.

- £50,000 annually to meet the costs associated with the implementation tasks of engagement and surveying to assess demand. This includes developing surveys, holding workshops and legal advice and support.
- Meeting the costs associated with balloting parents in schools considering transformation (total costs are demand led).
- When a Development Proposal is approved for a new Integrated school, recurrent funding will be provided on the basis of need via the

Common Funding Scheme. The Department will also provide all funding required for Day 1 accommodation. The amount of capital funding required will be determined on a case-by-case basis dependent on identified need and following completion of a feasibility study and business case (total costs for each project will vary dependent on need). All Capital funding is subject to budget availability.

- When a Development Proposal is approved to increase enrolments at an Integrated school, additional recurrent funding will be provided on the basis of need via the Common Funding Scheme. The amount of capital funding required will be determined on a case-by-case basis dependent on identified need and following completion of a feasibility study and business case (total costs for each project will vary dependent on need). All Capital funding is subject to budget availability.
- A minimum of £23,000 per annum to support schools immediately post transformation. This funding stream will be kept under review and adjusted to reflect numbers of schools transforming each year.
- When a Development Proposal is approved for a new Integrated school, recurrent funding will be provided on the basis of need via the Common Funding Scheme. The Department will also provide all funding required for Day 1 accommodation. The amount of capital funding required will be determined on a

case-by-case basis dependent on identified need and following completion of a feasibility study and business case (total costs for each project will vary dependent on need). All Capital funding is subject to budget availability.

- When a Development Proposal is approved to increase enrolments at an Integrated school, additional recurrent funding will be provided on the basis of need via the Common Funding Scheme. The amount of capital funding required will be determined on a case-by-case basis dependent on identified need and following completion of a feasibility study and business case (total costs for each project will vary dependent on need).
- When a Development Proposal is approved for a new Integrated school, recurrent funding will be provided on the basis of need via the Common Funding Scheme. The amount of capital funding required will be determined on a case-by-case basis dependent on identified need and following completion of a feasibility study and business case (total costs for each project will vary dependent on need).
- Progress and deliver new build projects for Integrated schools to an estimated value of £471m, including projects for New-Bridge IC, Shimna IC, Ulidia IC, Strangford IC, Rowandale IPS, Millstrand IPS, Phoenix IPS, Fort Hill College & IPS, Bangor Central IPS,

Drumragh IC, Forge IPS, Hazelwood IC, IC Dungannon, Millennium IPS, Priory IC, Slemish College and Portadown IPS.

- Progress and deliver extension and refurbishment projects to an estimated value of £13m for Killyleagh CIPS, Glengormley CIPS, Cliftonville CIPS, Glencraig CIPS.

In addition, as set out in the actions above, the Department will review the existing arrangements to provide operational support for Integrated schools which are currently spread over NICIE, EA and CSSC with a view to ensuring a high-quality service and maximising the use of resources.

The role of NICIE

NICIE will have a key role in supporting delivery of this strategy. The Department will work closely with NICIE as it reviews its corporate objectives and business plan to refocus on key delivery activities.

Reporting and Review

The Department will bi-annually review progress by preparing a report on the delivery of Integrated Education in line with Section 10 of the Integrated Education Act. We will lay this report before the Assembly and where necessary update the Integrated Education Action Plan.

Next Steps

The Department will continue to engage with representatives of Integrated Education as we deliver and later review this strategy. We will also encourage wider public participation in the discussions around the development of Integrated Education as we work to improve communication and improve public understanding of Integrated Education.

Six monthly updates on implementation of the action plan for the development of Integrated Education will be published on the Department's website.

Appendices

Integrated Education Action Plan

The detailed Action Plan is available [here](#).

IE Action Plan - Benchmarks and Indicators of Success

Detail of the benchmarks and indicators of success that will be used to monitor delivery of the Action Plan are available [here](#).

Departmental Arm's Length Bodies

The Department requires all its Arm's Length Bodies to support the delivery of this statutory duty, and to report back on actions taken during the business year.

However, four bodies play a key part in encouraging, facilitating and supporting Integrated Education.

The Education Authority

The EA is an executive Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) of DE and is responsible for securing adequate provision for pre-school, primary and secondary education; and for recreational, social, physical, cultural and youth service activities for grant-aided schools and other grant-aided educational establishments. The EA's duties and responsibilities include:

- ensuring there are sufficient schools providing pre-school, primary and post-primary education to meet the needs of all the people in Northern Ireland;

- ensuring that provision is made for pupils who have Special Educational Needs (SEN);
- statutory duty to encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education as well as promoting the community use of school premises;
- securing the provision of adequate youth service facilities and funding the provision of regional youth service activities; and
- assisting the Department as appropriate in discharging its statutory duties, including those relating to the encouragement and facilitation of both Integrated and Irish-medium Education. The EA also has a duty placed upon it by the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 to encourage, facilitate and support Integrated Education.

The EA is responsible for supporting the development of governors, principals, teachers and other

school-related staff and has duties to provide training, advice and support for schools to bring about improvement.

EA has set up a Shared Education and Sectoral Support Service that provides support for Integrated Education and Integrated schools via one dedicated School Improvement Professional within the following main areas:

- Support for schools exploring or undergoing the process of Transformation
- Planning for and implementation of the Integrated Education Act 2022
- Development of sector specific training for governors in Integrated schools
- In partnership with NICIE & CSSC, support for existing Integrated schools in the development of ethos and practice
- Management and development of EA's Integrated Education Hub

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)

The Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) seeks to promote reconciliation in Northern Ireland through Integrated Education. Established in 1987 as a charitable body to coordinate efforts in the development of Integrated Education, NICIE has been funded by the Department of Education (DE) since 1989. In 2012 NICIE was designated as a non-statutory executive Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) and is DE's primary Arm's Length Body in supporting Integrated Education. NICIE assist the delivery of the Department's statutory duties in relation to Integrated Education under the 1989 Education Reform Order (Northern Ireland) which were extended by the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

NICIE plays a pivotal role in facilitating the growth of Integrated Education by supporting all Integrated Schools through promotion, training and representation. This includes the development and

promotion of the Integrated ethos. NICIE assists existing schools in transformation to Integrated status, facilitates the growth of existing schools and supports the establishment of new integrated schools.

NICIE is the key delivery partner for the Vision 2030 Strategy.

Controlled Schools Support Council

The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is the sectoral support body for controlled schools in Northern Ireland. CSSC works on behalf of controlled schools and the wider controlled education sector to enhance the quality of education provision.

The controlled education sector is the largest, most diverse education sector in Northern Ireland comprising 49% of all schools across all phases: nursery, special, primary, secondary, grammar, Integrated and Irish medium schools. Controlled schools are managed by the Education Authority.

Controlled schools are #OpenToAll, welcoming children and young people of all faiths and none, richly diverse and inclusive, reflective of and embedded in the communities they serve.

CSSC became operational on 1st September 2016 as a result of The Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and is grant funded by Department of Education. CSSC is recognised as a relevant body under Section 3 of the Act.

CSSC's vision is to empower controlled schools to serve their communities by enriching the lives of their children and young people.

Integrated Education Fund

The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) was set up in 1992 as an independent charitable foundation supporting the growth and development of Integrated Education in Northern Ireland. Its mandate is drawn from the expressed demand from parents and schools

who seek an Integrated Education for their children and pupils.

The IEF shares the vision, held by the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland, of a united community and a shared future. Many believe that more integration and mixing between communities are essential to building a better and more reconciled society.

IEF funded surveys suggest that 67% of people believe Integrated Education should be the main model of education – where children from Protestant, Catholic, other faith backgrounds and none, are educated together in the same school and where the symbols, ethos and traditions of the entire community are valued and respected.

Since 1992 the IEF has raised and invested over £27million from supporters and donors to advance Integrated Education and support the development of Integrated schools.

Further information on Integrated Education

Key Departmental publications relating to Integrated education are:

- Transformation Works (available [here](#)).
- A Strategy for Integrated Education published on 26 April 2023 (available [here](#)).
- The report on the public consultation relating to the Strategy (available [here](#)).
- A statutory report on the delivery on Integrated Education (available [here](#)), and
- The Independent Review of Education (available [here](#)).

Further information on Integrated Education can be found at:

- [NICIE](#)
- [EA](#)
- [DE](#)
- [IEF](#)
- [CSSC](#)

Copies of this Strategy in other formats

On request, we can arrange to provide other formats of the documents above, such as:

- Paper copy
- Large print
- Braille
- Other Languages

To request an alternative format, please contact the Integrated Education Act Implementation Team via:

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