

Every CHILD

Department
of Education's
Corporate Plan
2023-28

"Every child and
young person is
happy, learning
and succeeding"

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1 Permanent Secretary's Introduction

I am delighted to present **Every CHILD**; our new Corporate Plan for 2023-2028 which sets out our key priorities for the next five years and provides a focus for everyone working within our education sector to deliver positive outcomes for our children and young people.

I am proud of the work that has gone into developing **Every CHILD**, which reflects the extensive engagement and buy-in from our many stakeholders, both during the public consultation and beforehand, and many months of effort from officials in the Department.

Our education sector faces unprecedented contemporaneous challenges; significant financial constraints coupled with the need to address teachers' pay; the exponential growth in supporting Special Educational Needs; changing and increasingly complex societal needs for children and young people; tackling the gap between our most and least disadvantaged children and young people; and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Every CHILD provides us with a framework to address these challenges, deliver the ambitious programme of transformation that is needed and ultimately to bring meaningful, positive change for our children and young people.

I believe we should have high aspirations for all our children and young people – regardless of their ability or background – and that their needs are foremost in everything we do. That is why our new Vision for the Department is “Every child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding”. Underpinning this bold yet simple Vision are five new Strategic Priorities which help shape what actions we will take over the next five years, and where we believe we can make the biggest difference.

This is very much a collective effort. We are committed to working in partnership with our schools, youth services and other educational settings; our Arm's Length and Sectoral Bodies; businesses, the wider community and voluntary sector; trade union side; parents/guardians and – most importantly of all – our children and young people, in the delivery of **Every CHILD**. Together, I believe we can succeed in delivering on the ambition of this Plan, and in making Northern Ireland a place in which every child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding.

Dr Mark Browne
Permanent Secretary



2 What is Every CHILD?

Introduction

The Department of Education (DE) has developed a new five-year Corporate Plan, **Every CHILD**, which is intended to provide a clear strategic focus in the medium-to-long term. It outlines our priorities and will help us focus our efforts on making the best difference for children and young people in the context of finite resources.

DE's priorities are guided and informed by its responsibilities under the [Draft Programme for Government](#) (PfG), the [Children and Young People's Strategy](#) (CYPS), [A Fair Start](#), and the [New Decade, New Approach](#) (NDNA) agreement. The strategic priorities within **Every CHILD** align with these wider strategies, providing clarity to staff and stakeholders on our focus over the coming years.

Every CHILD will be underpinned by annual Business Plans, which provide more detail on the specific actions the Department will undertake in order to deliver on the priorities and outcomes specified within the Corporate Plan.

Our Vision

Every child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding

Our Values

All in the Department of Education seek to uphold the [Northern Ireland Civil Service values](#) of:

Integrity;
Honesty;
Objectivity; and
Impartiality



3 How we developed Every CHILD

Development Process

Work commenced on **Every CHILD** in October 2021. As a first step, DE commissioned an externally led and independent engagement project (including focus groups and depth interviews) with a broad range of internal and external education sector stakeholders (children and young people, Arm's Length Bodies, schools, Boards of Governors, parents, staff and unions) to seek their views on what the key priorities for education should be. This research helped us identify the expectations of internal and external stakeholders for the new Corporate Plan at an early stage.

The results of this engagement exercise, along with additional internal discussion, informed an initial draft of **Every CHILD**, which included our Vision, Strategic Priorities, planned actions and Enabling Priorities.

A number of workshops were held during the summer of 2022 to test this draft Plan ahead of a public consultation. These included engagement with Arm's Length Bodies, sectoral bodies and staff focus groups to help refine the strategic direction and to achieve internal and external buy-in.

Public Consultation

Every CHILD launched for public consultation on 20 September 2022. The consultation lasted for 8 weeks and concluded on 15 November 2022. A total of 72 stakeholder responses were received, the results of which can be found in our published consultation report which is available at [Corporate and business planning | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/corporate-and-business-planning). This Corporate Plan was further shaped through the feedback we received during the consultation, and we would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate and engage with us.

Due to increasing and anticipated funding pressures and financial uncertainty in the education sector, **Every CHILD** will be continually reviewed. Whilst available resources will impact on the pace of progress, our medium to longer term ambitions for our children and young people remain unapologetically bold.

4 Our Department

The Department of Education (DE) is responsible for setting policy, strategy and for the central administration of education and related services in Northern Ireland.

DE has a wide and complex range of functions, impacting on all areas of a child's education and wellbeing. As well as being responsible and accountable for the quality of education in grant-aided schools, youth organisations and those offered by early years providers, it also has responsibility for leading the development of the NI Executive's Children and Young People's Strategy and its Early Learning and Childcare Strategy.

While the Department inputs to a number of draft Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes, it has a particular role in the draft Outcome **"Our children and young people have the best start in life"**.

The Department has a staffing complement of over 500 Full Time equivalents based in Rathgael House, Bangor and Waterside House, Derry/Londonderry. The Department is structured around four Divisions:

- Resources and Reform
- Education Policy & Children's Services
- Sustainability and Infrastructure
- Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)

The ETI, which is part of the Department, provides inspection services and information about the quality of education and policy advice.

Arm's Length Bodies

DE is supported in delivering its functions by a range of Arm's Length Bodies, each of whom is accountable to the Department:

- [Education Authority \(EA\)](#)
- [The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools \(CCMS\)](#)
- [The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment \(CCEA\)](#)
- [The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education \(NICIE\)](#)
- [Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta \(CnaG\)](#)
- [Middletown Centre for Autism \(MCA\)](#)
- [The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland \(GTCNI\)¹](#)
- Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI)²
- Exceptional Circumstances Body (ECB)³

Sectoral Bodies

DE also provides grant support to a number of third party organisations who represent the interests of sectors within the education system, namely:

- Controlled Schools' Support Council
- Catholic Schools' Trustee Service
- Governing Bodies Association

¹ GTCNI Council stood down by the Education Minister on 13 December 2021.

² Following expiry of the term of office for Board members, YCNI has not been operational since 1 April 2019.

³ Tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body



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In implementing this Corporate Plan, the Department will deliver actions and commitments within:



Championing the needs and aspirations of all our children and young people and the positive impact of education

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We want our Department and all our education partners to put children and young people at the core of everything we do. By 2028 we aspire to:



(a) Put the interests of children and young people first and provide them with a greater voice in shaping their own future.

To achieve this, we will:

- Engage with, and co-design our policies with children and young people, through the development of a participation network; to ensure their views are sought and form an integral part of policy and decision making which impact on their educational experience; and
- Work across government to ensure the interests of children and young people and the education sector are at the fore. This will include monitoring cross-government implementation of the Children and Young People's Strategy, education representation and collaboration on NICS-wide groups and working with other Departments to align current and future government strategies.



Key to show how actions link to

- Children and Young People's Strategy Delivery Plan
- 'A Fair Start'
- ▲ New Decade, New Approach



(b) Develop a properly resourced education system that actively seeks to promote the benefits that education brings to our society.

To achieve this, we will:

- Build the case for appropriate investment in education to support the delivery of our education services and improve outcomes for our children and young people;
- Publish a 10-year Capital Investment Strategy;
- Promote intra and cross-departmental working (including opportunities for secondment of school staff) and identify, share and encourage research and best practice to inform policy development and implementation; and
- Facilitate the completion of the Independent Review of Education and commence implementation of agreed recommendations.

Helping all our children and young people by supporting their well-being and learning

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We want to unite families, communities and educators around a shared vision to nurture healthy, confident children and young people, supported to learn and equipped to lead fulfilling lives.
By 2028 we aspire to:



(a) Ensure every child and young person with additional or Special Educational Needs (SEN) has their needs identified and assessed as early as possible and receives provision which is timely and appropriate.

To achieve this, we will:

- Implement the new SEN policy and legislative Framework in collaboration with our partners and shape future SEN policy development through engagement and research which deliver improved outcomes through high-quality and cost-effective SEN services;
- Improve support for our learners with additional educational needs; enhance educational psychology services and improve training on restorative practice and other evidence-based approaches in schools; and
- Work with the Department of Health (DoH) to enhance identification, assessment and provision of support to early years children with SEN; and provide joint oversight of services for children with SEN who require therapies and other health support to be delivered in schools.

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(b) All our children and young people enjoy active lives and healthy minds.

To achieve this, we will:

- Work with DoH to promote the emotional health and well-being of children and young people;
- Promote active lifestyles and healthy eating, including the implementation of revised nutritional standards for school food; and
- Address the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people's wellbeing and education through high quality interventions which support their learning and engagement.



(c) All children and young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are able to participate fully in education, leading to improved learning outcomes.

To achieve this, we will:

- Work with the EA to support the needs of children with social, behavioural, emotional and well-being needs including through the Nurture in Education Programme;
- Take forward DE actions in "A Life Deserved - A Strategy for Children Looked After".
- Support families who need help with the cost of education through delivery of accepted recommendations from the reviews of Free School Meal Entitlement, and a review of the cost of school uniforms.
- Work collaboratively and more effectively with schools, the voluntary and community sector and other government Departments in order for children and young people to develop and progress; and
- Work across all appropriate Departments and Agencies to share relevant information and agree actions to continue to learn and update procedures and guidance on child protection and safeguarding, including membership of the multi-Departmental Child Protection Senior Officials Group.

Inspiring all our children and young people to make a positive contribution to society

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We want an outward-looking and engaged Department working in partnership with others to raise aspirations and develop children and young people to make valuable contributions to society. By 2028 we aspire to:



(a) Encourage more children and young people from different backgrounds to engage together, building societal cohesion and learning to understand, respect and celebrate difference.

To achieve this, we will:

- Set out a vision and roadmap for an inclusive education system which welcomes and includes all pupils and supports their learning;
- Contribute to the implementation of government strategies including on racial equality, refugee integration and social inclusion, along with other Departments and partners in other sectors;
- Encourage, facilitate and promote Shared Education through: expansion into Early Years and Youth sectors, continued support of Shared Education programmes, and progression of the Shared Education Campus (SEC) programme, including the flagship Strule SEC;
- Encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-Medium Education, including through progressing the relevant recommendations of A Fair Start;
- Encourage, facilitate and support the development of Integrated Education, including through the implementation of the Integrated Education Act (NI) 2022;
- Work with the EA's Addressing Bullying in Schools Team to provide support and advice to educational settings in implementing the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016; and
- Support newcomer pupils and Traveller children to access learning through a revised Newcomer Pupil policy and a review of the Traveller in Education Framework.



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Key to show how actions link to

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(b) Provide all children and young people with the opportunity, knowledge, skills, experience and support to equip them to make a positive contribution to the economy and society

To achieve this, we will:

- Work with the Department for the Economy and wider stakeholders to provide an efficient, effective and well understood 14-19 education and training system that meets the needs of our young people, society and the economy and in support of DE and wider government strategies;
- Contribute to tackling climate change through the curriculum, development of the school estate and school transport;
- Progress programmes in partnership with the voluntary, community and youth sector in support of the Fresh Start Agreement / Tackling Paramilitarism and Organised Crime Programme; and
- Co-design regional and local youth development plans and work with statutory and voluntary youth work organisations to meet assessed needs of young people and develop their personal and social skills.

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Meeting the Learning needs of our children and young people and developing their knowledge and skills, enabling them to fulfil their potential

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We want every child to enjoy a high-quality education and learning experience from Early Years to post-primary. By 2028 we aspire to:



(a) An inclusive curriculum that gives equal emphasis to skills and knowledge and empowers all children and young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives.

To achieve this, we will:

- Work closely with all education delivery partners to raise standards through more effective implementation of the NI Curriculum and provide learning opportunities for each young person to develop as a contributor to society, the economy and the environment.
- Design, develop and implement new arrangements for Key Stage 1-3 assessment in Northern Ireland;
- Work with the CCEA to provide a suite of qualifications that supports the delivery of the curriculum, the development of knowledge and economically relevant skills, and facilitates progression to further/higher education, training and employment;
- Review our policy and develop a new strategy and programme to support effective school improvement across our education system;
- Support children and young people with SEN to access the curriculum, enabling them to participate at a level that meets their individual learning needs and goals; and
- Use our inspection resources efficiently to promote improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and enhance achievement across the education system.

Key to show how actions link to

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- 'A Fair Start'
- ▲ New Decade, New Approach

(b) Develop an Early Years partnership approach - educators, health providers, parents, families and communities working together to ensure all children are supported in their early learning so they are at their appropriate stage of development when they reach school age.

To achieve this, we will:

- Work with delivery bodies to establish effective advice and support services for DE-funded pre-school settings, and focus attention on target age pre-school education;
- Support disadvantaged pre-school children (0-4 years) and their families through a collaborative approach involving parental engagement and cooperation with the Department of Health and the voluntary and community sectors;
- Review our Early Years programmes and collaborate with Health practitioners to support the learning and development of all children;
- Promote learning through play throughout the early years of childhood, including outdoor learning; and
- Lead on the development of an Executive 'Early Learning and Childcare Strategy' in partnership with other Departments, which supports child development and parents in accessing appropriate childcare to meet their needs.

(c) Reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people's learning, and embed improvements in education delivery arising as a result of the pandemic

To achieve this, we will:

- Develop whole community participative approaches to education, including through the implementation of the Reducing Educational Disadvantage programme;
- Continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on educational attainment and identify areas for improvement; and
- Improve access to learning and reduce digital poverty by completing the roll-out of digital devices to learners as far as existing stock permits; and supporting the use of assistive technology.

Delivering an effective, child-first, collaborative and high-quality education system

We want a sustainable education system which is appropriately resourced, works in partnership, invests in its workforce and is committed to excellence and equity. By 2028 we aspire to:

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(a) Deliver more modern, sustainable schools and other education settings, which are committed to excellence and equity for every learner.

To achieve this, we will:

- Introduce a more agile and responsive Area Planning process which will bring forward area-based solutions that create more sustainable education provision (with a focus on exploring sustainable provision in rural communities), increasing the number of children in sustainable education provision;
- Prioritise available capital investment to ensure schools remain open and safe for all pupils; provide better access to education for pupils with Special Educational Needs; and enhance facilities and ICT infrastructure to support delivery of the NI curriculum and improve pupil outcomes; and
- Develop a new equality scheme and work with partners such as the Equality Commission for NI to embed equality in our policies and governance.

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(b) Deliver a highly skilled, motivated and high-functioning education workforce, which is provided with adequate support and training to enable it to meet the needs of every learner and stakeholder it serves.

To achieve this, we will:

- Support the learning and development needs of our education workforce and develop its capacity and resilience through implementation of the Learning Leaders strategy and increased access to health and wellbeing initiatives;
- Develop and implement a DE People Plan to enhance staff development, internal communications and support hybrid working within the Department; and
- Lead the way in undertaking Children's Rights Impact Assessment training.



(c) Deliver an efficient and sustainable education system which works in partnership to meet the needs of children and young people.

To achieve this, we will:

- Review DE's organisational structure to ensure our staffing and resources are allocated to the right priorities;
- Enhance our visibility; make information more accessible and provide better signposting of support services; and
- Legislate to create a professional body to support the teaching profession in Northern Ireland; commission regular reviews of each of our Arm's Length Bodies; and work in partnership whilst continuing to maintain good governance and fulfil our statutory obligations.

6 How we will measure success

We will use a range of Indicators to gauge our progress towards the achievement of our desired outcomes (whether we are ‘turning the curve’). DE has developed a live ‘dashboard’, which shows how each Indicator is aligned to each of our Strategic Priorities; their current position; and previous trend. These Indicators are under development and will be made available separately. They will be regularly monitored for the duration of **Every CHILD**.

It is important to remember that Indicators are a high-level assessment of a desired outcome for a population, and only provide a broad snapshot of progress. They are not wholly within the control of the Department or indeed the sector so are not to be considered as measures of organisational performance. They help us to understand and react to what is happening; to focus our attention on priority areas and inform the development of the targeted actions we need to take.

The Indicators are underpinned by Performance Measures which tell us how well individual services, projects and interventions are working (how much we do; how well we do it; and is anyone is better off). The Performance Measures are aligned to each Strategic Priority and can be found in the annual Business Plans published on the DE website – these will measure our performance on a yearly basis.

To access the dashboard and annual Business Plans, please visit the [DE Corporate and Business Planning homepage](#)

7 Making it happen - our Enabling Priorities

Every CHILD will be used to guide our priorities, decisions and investments over the next five years, but the Vision and outcomes of the document are long-term aspirations that extend beyond 2028.

Every CHILD sets out what we want to do, though we also need to consider how we will deliver on this. As such, we will shape how we work based on the following 'CORE' enablers:



Collaborating

Partnering with all our stakeholders to support co-production and achievement of shared outcomes.



Optimising

Prioritising, modernising and making most efficient use of our resources to achieve the greatest impact, including stopping or changing activities that don't make the difference we want.



Responding

Anticipating and planning to proactively address the emerging challenges and needs faced by our children and young people and the education workforce.



Engaging

Communicating and consulting with our stakeholders to help shape our future services.

We also want to make better use of data insights and research to enable evidence-informed policies and strategies, aligned to **Every CHILD**, and in the interests of children and young people.

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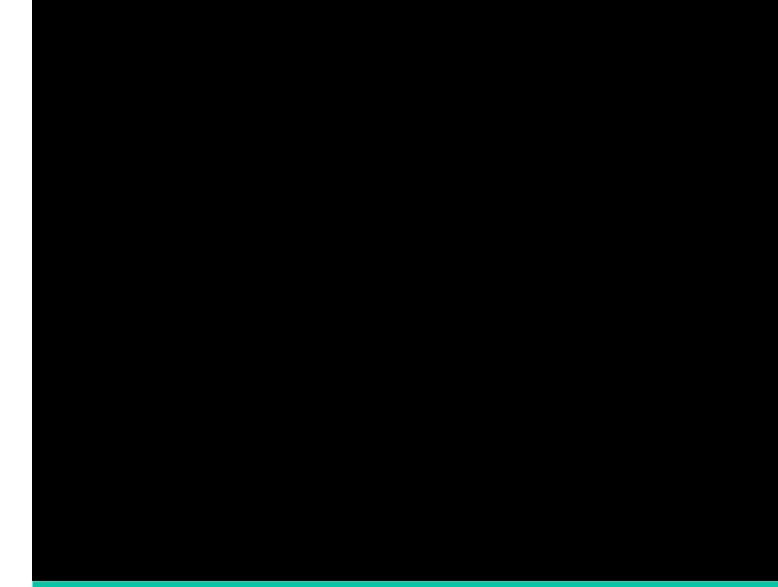
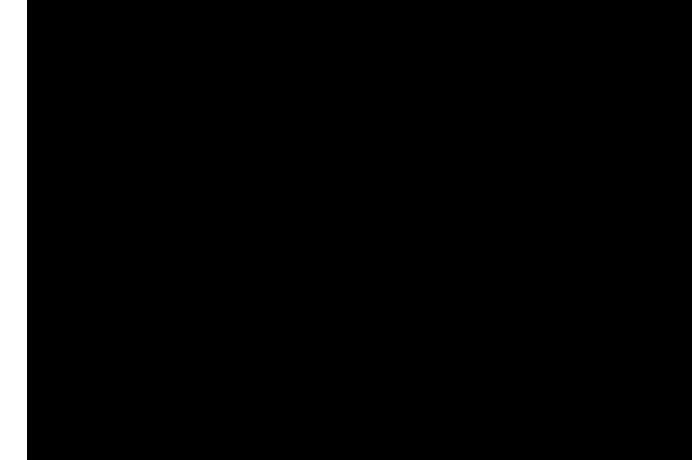


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8 Making it happen - our People

In DE we have over 500 staff working in Rathgael House in Bangor and Waterside House in Derry/Londonderry, including the Education and Training Inspectorate. To deliver on **Every CHILD** we need to align our staff to our priorities and ensure we have the right skills and knowledge to succeed.

The NICS People Strategy was published in June 2018. It was developed through engagement with the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Board, Top Leaders' Forum and staff across the NICS.

It confirms the vision for the NICS of the future to be:

- well-led;
- outcome focused;
- high performing.

Within DE we are committed to realising the vision of the NICS Board as well as responding to these challenges. With this in mind, the Department developed a People Plan 2021-24, which has three key priorities:

- New Ways of Working and Accommodation;
- Health and Well-being; and
- Developing and Communicating.

The basis for the People Plan has been the 2020 survey work undertaken by NICS Human Resources around the impact of the pandemic and the New Ways of Working Policy, as well as the results of the NICS People Survey 2021. The delivery of our People Plan is supported by an internal Staff Engagement Forum, which is made up of representatives across all grades and directorates in the Department.

9 Making it happen - our Partners

We know that the ambition of **Every CHILD** can only be delivered as a combined effort across the education sector, communities, businesses and society.

The key partners for Every CHILD are too numerous to list in full, with these including but not limited to:

- Children and Young People
- Parents
- Our Arm's Length Bodies
- Our Sectoral Bodies
- Our Schools (nursery, primary, post-primary and special) and other Educational Settings
- Our Youth Service providers (statutory and non-statutory)
- Our Early Years and Pre-School settings
- Our Teaching and Non-Teaching Workforce
- Trade Unions
- The Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Other NICS Departments and the wider public sector
- Community Planning Partnerships and Local Councils; and
- The wider business, voluntary and community sectors.

Together, we can achieve better outcomes for our children and young people and help realise our vision that every child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding.

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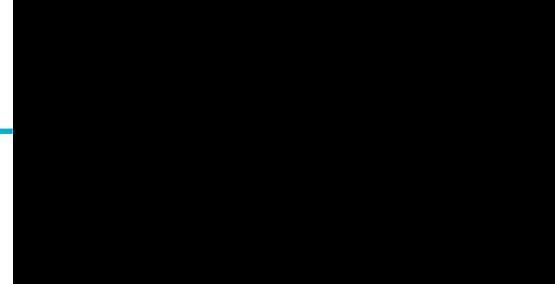
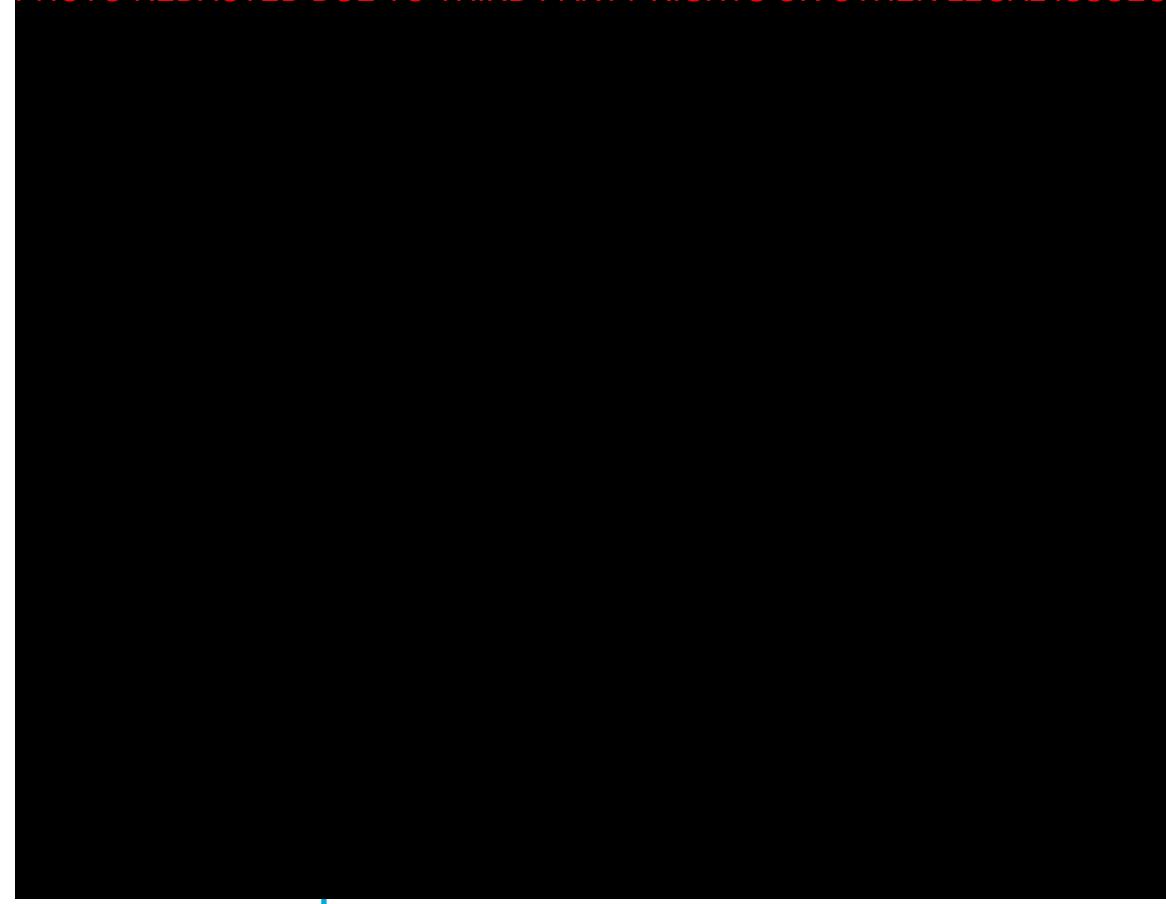


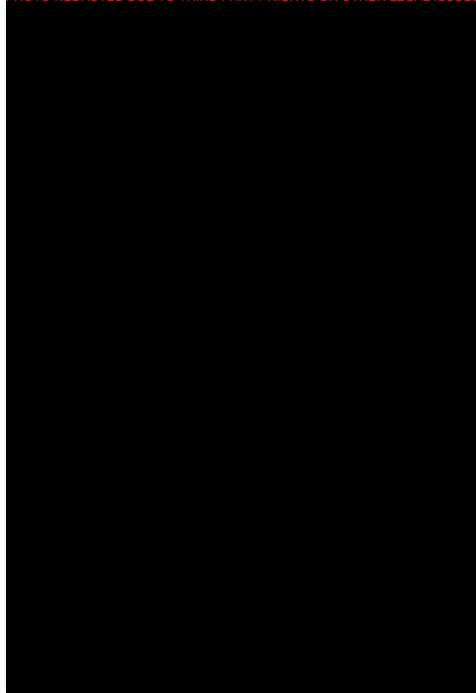
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10 Making it happen - our Funding

Delivering **Every CHILD** is a key focus for the Department. However, as we look ahead to the next five years, there are a number of significant challenges that will impact upon how we deliver our Corporate Plan.

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In the absence of an NI Executive, the Secretary of State allocated DE budgets for both the 2022-23 and 2023-24 financial years and outlined the requirement for “significant reductions in current spending trajectory levels in order to live within budgetary control totals”. However, the NI Block had to borrow £297m from the 2023-24 allocation to deliver a balanced budget in 2022-23. To repay the £297m, the Secretary of State committed any future funding packages (Barnett consequentials) coming to Northern Ireland to the repayment of this borrowing by 2024-25.

It is within this extremely constrained budget position that the Department has had to take challenging decisions not to fund or to fund certain areas of spend only partially in both years. The Department continues to face significant pressures in the form of inflation-led pay pressures, continuing increases in the level of SEN provision, capital funding reductions in the context of rising and increasing construction and maintenance costs; and the ongoing fiscal impact of pressures originating during both the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent conflict in Ukraine.

It is within this context that we acknowledge the delivery of **Every CHILD** will be impacted by the resource available, and that this will inevitably influence what can be achieved and the pace of achievement.

Nonetheless, we will seek to align the available resources we have to our priorities, and continuously look at and evaluate diverse ways of achieving outcomes, including through new, innovative approaches which seek to maximise the resources at our disposal.

Our financial resources also include our capital investment. We will seek to use the funds available to support the delivery of **Every CHILD**. Further information on the DE budget allocation and how it is spent is available at: Department budgets and accounts | Department of Education (education-ni.gov.uk)



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