



Chairperson's Message

Dear member school,

I trust and hope that you are keeping well in what continues to be a very challenging environment.

It has been a turbulent start to the school year with the pressures placed upon our schools. The additional burdens of contact tracing, testing, admissions appeals and grading appeals have added to the stresses of one of the busiest times of the school year.

I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to school leaders and staff for all their work and for the commitment they have shown. The resilience and dedication of our schools to the education of our young people does not go unrecognised.

Undoubtedly, a sense of normality would be welcomed by all and we hope to achieve this in the near future. If you have any issues or feedback you would like to take forward, please get in touch.

With best wishes,

GBA Chairperson,
Jacqueline Weir

Announcement of Panel - Independent Review of Education

Education Minister, Michelle McIlveen, has announced the independent panel which will undertake the review of education.

The five panel members are: Chairperson Dr Keir Bloomer, Vice-Chairperson Sir Gerry Loughran, Marie Lindsay, Robin McLaughlin and Isabel Nisbet. Information on member biographies is available [here](#).

The [terms of reference](#) for the review were previously agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive and outlined the need for the appointed Panel to develop an agreed vision for education in Northern Ireland as well as considering issues relating to education journey and outcomes; support for schools and settings; and system level design and administration.

Speaking about the review, the Education Minister said: "...This review is a wide-ranging and challenging assignment. I am confident that the panel has the breadth of expertise and experience to set out a vision for what a high quality, innovative and inclusive education system looks like in Northern Ireland in the 21st century..."

Commenting on the establishment of the panel, Jacqueline Weir Chairperson of the GBA said: "We very much welcome the announcement of the panel drawn from a broad education perspective locally and beyond. This review provides a rare opportunity to take a holistic look at the delivery of education in Northern Ireland..."

The GBA looks forward to meeting with the Committee and discussing the Voluntary Principle with them. There is no single formula for a good school, but the voluntary system in Northern Ireland has demonstrated how the devolution of power, responsibility and accountability to individual schools combined with strong community roots can bring real excellence and quality to education."

Call for Lateral Flow Testing

Lateral Flow testing is well known as one of the measures a school can take to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. A school's participation in the testing of their staff and pupils is entirely voluntary however we would encourage uptake of lateral flow testing as much as possible.

The aim of the testing is to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the school setting, and the wider community.

The Education Authority has detailed guidance on testing if you require clarity on any aspect of the process (available [here](#)).



Correspondence Update

The GBA has been made aware of correspondence received by some member schools regarding liability for vaccination programmes. If in receipt of such correspondence, the advice from the Education Authority in responding is:

1. If the letter is signed by a parent or identified individual(s), the school should bring it to the attention of the Board of Governors and reply acknowledging receipt.

2. If it is not signed by a parent or identified individual(s), once again it should be brought to the attention of the Board of Governors and noted. No reply is necessary.

We have not been advised of any official plans to roll out any kind of vaccination programme in schools however the issue of indemnity has been raised with the Department of Education. The DE will meet with the Department of Health this week to discuss the matter. We will provide you with an update in due course.



Consultations - September 2021

Consultation on Creating Complaints Handling Standards for the Northern Ireland Public Sector (Closes: 30th September 2021)

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) has plans to improve complaints handling across the public sector in Northern Ireland. These plans will affect public bodies across Northern Ireland including in education, requiring organisations to adapt to new, clearly defined standards for how complaints must be treated and handled.

A statement of principles, a draft model complaints handling procedure and a suggested approach have been outlined by NIPSO for consideration. The consultation documents and survey link to respond are available [here](#).

Consultation on Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) (Closes 5th November 2021)

The Department of Justice is seeking views on proposals on amendments to the Regulations that govern the procedure of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST).

These amendments are required as a result of the intention of the Department of Education to commence aspects of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the SEND Act). The consultation documents are available [here](#).

Call for Evidence - Integrated Education Bill Inquiry (Closes 10th October 2021)

The Integrated Education Bill has passed Second Stage, the debate on the principles of the Bill. This means that the Northern Ireland Assembly has delegated responsibility for scrutiny of the Bill to the Education Committee, which is the relevant statutory Committee. The Committee stage entails a call for written evidence, followed by invited oral evidence briefings. For more information and to respond to the Committee's survey, please follow this [link](#).

Northern Ireland Assembly Updates

Last week at the Assembly, Education Minister, Michelle McIlveen, answered oral questions from members during Monday's plenary session. Question topics included:

- Contingency plans in place for P7 transfer tests should disruption continue from COVID-19.
- Plans to mitigate the impact of disruption on the delivery of education this year.
- Ventilation in schools.

The full session is available [here](#). You can also access the official report using this [link](#).

The Education Committee met last Wednesday and heard a briefing from the

Education Minister on current issues and priorities within her department. Chief Medical Officer, Sir Michael McBride, also joined the meeting to provide assurances about a change in approach to contact tracing as announced last week.

Regarding the vaccination of 12-15 year olds, Dr McBride advised that the department is preparing information leaflets for children and parents and said, *“we hope to start the vaccination of those age cohorts in the very near future, certainly if not the end of September in early October and the minister will confirm the dates in due course,”*.

Members then heard a briefing from Department of Education Officials on the Integrated Education Bill. The full session is available [here](#).



Taking Boys Seriously Conference

Boys as Relational Learners

Contributions from:
Michelle McIlveen, MLA, Minister for the Department of Education,
Mary Curnock Cook, CBE, **Barry Mulholland**, Chairperson of the board of Education Authority and **Dr Ken Harland**.

20th October 2021
Conference time:
10:00 to 13:00

For more information:
ulster.ac.uk/tbs

Ulster University
YouthAction NORTHERN IRELAND
CCMS Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CSSC Catholic Schools Support Council

Area Planning

As you will be aware, the GBA represents voluntary grammar schools on the various Area Planning Groups (Area Planning Steering Group, Area Planning Working Group and the Area Planning Local Groups). Discussions regarding the next Strategic Area Plan are underway. If you have any ideas for area solutions in your location please [contact us](#).

Information on current published Development Proposals is available [here](#). This includes the formal proposal and associated Case for Change.

Teaching & Non-Teaching Vacancies

The GBA provides a free advertising service for our member schools. Job vacancies are posted on our website and Twitter page. There is also a link to our job listings on the Education Authority website in the job opportunities section.

As we are currently receiving a high volume of job requests, please use our [job template](#) and allow one working day for posts to be uploaded. This does not include bank holidays and weekends.

If you would like us to host a vacancy for your school, please [contact us](#).

Shared Education

Sharing through the curriculum and extra-curricular activity are some ways in which the vision of shared education can be achieved. The Department is also exploring ideas such as shared management of projects across schools from all sectors.

If you would like any views taken forward or have any comments, [please get in touch](#).

Newsletter Subscription

Please feel free to forward our monthly updates to your school Governors. If any of your Governors would like to subscribe, please [send us](#) their email address.

If you wish to unsubscribe to these emails, please [let us know](#).

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