

GBA News - Friday 15th December



Independent Review Panel Publishes Final Report



The Panel for the Independent Review of Education has published its final report, "Investing in a better future".

The report was launched at the Stormont Hotel, Belfast, on Wednesday 13th December and was attended by various stakeholders including educationalists, community and sectoral bodies, political representatives and school pupils. The GBA was in attendance and issued a statement following the event. GBA Chairperson Leo O'Reilly said:

"We will study the recommendations contained in the 3 volumes in detail and seek the views of our member schools in anticipation of further engagement with counterparts across the education system. This report is published at a time of great challenge for schools with significant financial pressures and ongoing industrial action. It is therefore disappointing that the report is published at a time when there is no functioning Executive or Assembly. It remains to be seen if the political will or the finance is in place to support the recommendations of the Review."

The Report consists of three separate (but linked) documents:

1. [Volume 1](#) is an overview. It describes the task, the priority areas for reform and key recommendations.
2. [Volume 2](#) provides greater detail. It describes the current strengths, weaknesses and modes of operation of the education system. It sets out the Panel's rationale for the recommended courses of action. Each chapter of Volume 2 contains a full suite of recommendations, including the key recommendations within Volume 1.
3. [Volume 3](#) includes a number of Appendices that provide further background information relevant to the Review.

Please click on the links above for the respective report sections. An Irish language version of Volume 1 has also been produced, available on the [review website](#).

Comment from Sir Gerry Loughran, Vice Chair of Independent Review

Sir Gerry Loughran, Vice-Chairperson of the Independent Review of Education, is a former Permanent Secretary and Head of the (NI) Civil Service. He is also heavily involved in education, currently serving as Chair of the Board of Governors of St Malachy's College, and until March 2021 served on the board of the Education Authority as the nominated representative of the GBA.

Sir Gerry said of the review:

"During my time as Vice Chair for the review, we listened to, read and analysed a plethora of wide-ranging evidence and information, taking into account the views of various groups of stakeholders. My fellow panel members and I have now reached the point where we have examined all of the evidence and published an extensive report, with key recommendations to be considered and implemented across the system.

The recommendations are interlocking and hopefully will be treated as such. Some will be more difficult than others and many require long implementation periods, hence, patience and persistence will be required.

The most important factor is prioritising investment in education, and the immediate need to uplift the education budgets by £291m annually. Equally pressing, is the need for having the political structures in place, and willingness to implement positive change."

Having taken a leave of absence from the GBA Executive Committee while the review work took place, Gerry will soon be re-joining the Committee to contribute to the discussions on how the GBA can continue to support schools, especially in light of the review.

Education Chief Executives issue joint letter to NI Secretary of State

Chief executives of the seven main education bodies in Northern Ireland, including Nuala O'Neill representing GBA, recently issued a joint letter to the Northern Ireland Secretary of State.

The CEOs have collectively repeated their call for sustained funding, fair pay for all and continued investment in the transformation of services.

And they warned the Northern Ireland secretary: "As we move into 2024 we would ask you, as you continue to oversee the financial allocation to and within Northern Ireland, to remember that education is not an optional extra but is the foundation upon which a peaceful Northern Ireland is built.

It is critical that education in Northern Ireland is funded equitably in line with

other UK regions."

A full copy of the letter is available [here](#).

Live Consultations

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee has launched an inquiry into integrated education.

The Committee will look at the potential costs and benefits of integrated education, and the effect of recent legislation on this type of education in Northern Ireland. It will also consider policy recommendations for Northern Ireland's education system.

The committee wants to hear your views and welcomes submissions from anyone with answers to the questions in the call for evidence.

The inquiry is open until **Thursday 18 January 2024**.

[Read the inquiry launch](#)

[Read the call for evidence and terms of reference](#)

The GBA will be submitting a response to the inquiry, reiterating the points which we have raised through other relevant forums and consultations, for example:

- Measurement of demand for school places should be in the context of all education sectors.
- We should continue to look at the educational and financial sustainability of the school estate as a whole.
- Importance of defining what is meant by integrated education in a modern and multicultural society, and acknowledgment of levels of integration in schools across all sectors.

We will be reaching out to member schools in the new year for your thoughts. You can also submit your comments by [contacting us](#).

Department of Health Publishes Autism Strategy

An updated [Autism Strategy](#) has been published to support the needs of autistic people throughout their lives.

This cross-departmental strategy, which runs until 2028, sets out the key commitments and actions needed to enhance and improve support for autistic people and their families.

Peter May, Department of Health Permanent Secretary, said: “*The growing prevalence of autism places a responsibility on us, as a society, to be more equipped and informed in our understanding of autism and in the delivery of our services.*”

I welcome the publication of this Strategy and the opportunity for us all to work towards a more inclusive society, one in which everyone has an opportunity to participate and feel valued.”

The actions contained within the Strategy are set out under the following five commitments:

- Improving regional pathways of care;
- Working in partnership to ensure autistic people are supported and understood throughout their education;
- Increasing understanding of autism in the workplace;
- Increasing understanding of the housing needs of autistic people;
- Promoting the development more widely of inclusive environments to support the needs of autistic people, their families and carers.

An initial [two-year Delivery Plan](#) has been developed to implement the actions contained within the Strategy in a managed and sustainable way, taking account of the challenging financial context.

Progress will be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis.

Area Planning - Operational Plan 2 and Specialist Provision Classes

Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 - Planning

If you are considering a significant change to your school that may require a Development Proposal, such as a change in size or character, please [contact us](#) to have this included as part of the discussions at the Area Planning Local Group meetings. As part of the Area Planning process, it is essential that these conversations take place during the planning year, in advance of the publication of Operational Plan 2.

Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools - Current and Future Pressures

Work continues to identify current and future pressures for school places for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

If your school is interested in this type of provision, or would like more information, please [contact us](#). You can also access further information using the link below.

Background

[Specialist provision in a mainstream school](#) provides a modified learning environment with an enhanced Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) suited to a pupil's learning profile. Pupils, where appropriate, also benefit from experiencing a level of inclusion, commensurate with their level of need, within mainstream classes.

Collaborative Projects and Shared Education - Share your Experiences with us

The GBA is keen to showcase examples of positive collaborative practice on our website, to help inform, promote and increase confidence. This may include recent, ongoing or historical Shared Education projects, or other collaborative experiences.

Please [contact us](#) and include a short synopsis of the project, the benefits you

feel it brings and photographs, if applicable (and permissible).



We are also keen to update our website with more photographs of activity in member schools. If you would like to share media with us, and it is permissible to do so, please get in touch using the link above.

Advertising of Teaching & Non-Teaching Vacancies on the GBA Website

The GBA provides a free advertising service for our member schools. Job vacancies are posted on our website and Twitter page. The Education Authority website also links to the GBA jobs section.

If you would like us to host a vacancy for your school, **please contact us, using our [job template](#) and allow at least TWO WORKING DAYS for posts to be uploaded, noting the GBA office closure dates above.**

Any outstanding job requests should reach us no later than 5pm on Monday 18th December. Thank you for your cooperation with this.

🎄 GBA Christmas Closure Dates 🎄

Please note that the GBA office will be closed from **12.30pm on Thursday 21st December 2023, until Wednesday 3rd January 2024, inclusive**. We will reopen as normal on Friday 5th January 2024.

Please note the cut off date of **5pm on Monday 18th December** for any outstanding job post requests. Thank you.

We would like to wish all of our member schools a very happy and restful Christmas break.

Copyright © Governing Bodies Association (NI) All rights reserved.