

Planning for Special Education Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27

Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Primary and Post-Primary Schools

29 June 2022

‘Plan on a Page’

Aim

The aim of Area Planning for Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools is to ensure pupils have access to a placement that best meets the needs of children and young people with a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

Vision

All pupils in Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools have the opportunity to achieve their full potential; by having the best educational experiences, equality of opportunity and pathways that meets their needs.

Mission

Focus on meeting the needs of children and young people with a Statement of Special Educational Need. To do this we will provide:

- availability at their nearest suitable special school/nearest suitable mainstream school with specialist provision;
- pupils with equitable access to excellent provision and meets the individual needs of the child or young person;
- pathways of provision for all ages and stages of development;
- special school provision in a single 3-19 school or through collaborative 3-19 provision;
- for changing educational, physical and medical needs;
- for inclusivity, providing opportunities for education alongside mainstream peers.

Key Themes

- Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways
- Promote cooperation, collaboration and sharing between all Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools across all sectors (as appropriate)
- Maximise resources and capacity
- Inform strategic infrastructure planning and investment.

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Foreword

On behalf of the Education Authority (EA) I am delighted to present 'Planning for Special Education Provision', Northern Ireland's *first* Special Education Strategic Area Plan for the period 2022–2027. This plan has been developed by the Education Authority, working in partnership with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and collaborating with the Catholic Schools' Trustee Service, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, Controlled Schools' Support Council, Governing Bodies Association, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and Transferor Representatives' Council, as part of the implementation of the SEN Frameworks which were endorsed by the Minister in October 2021. It sets out the strategic direction for future educational provision for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) across Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstreams Schools in Northern Ireland. The plan will shape priorities for proposed changes to special education provision over the next five years.



The Education Authority is committed to providing services in a child-centred and inclusive way that will support our children and young people to get the best start in life. This is particularly important for children with special educational needs. We want to ensure that our children have access to excellent provision throughout their educational journey which is appropriate to their needs and close to where they live.

I believe that the Special Education Strategic Area Plan will help us to achieve this, enabling positive outcomes for children across Northern Ireland and enhancing consistency in the accessibility of our services.

In the development of this plan, we have engaged with a number of stakeholders across the system and I would like to thank each and every one of you for your contribution and engagement, in particular the Special Schools' Strategic Leadership Group and Principals' Reference Groups. The plan is without doubt much more comprehensive and meaningful as a result of your efforts. We will continue to work alongside all our partners, including our partners in health and social care, and the voluntary and community sectors, as we seek to improve services for children and young people.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Long'.

Sara Long
Chief Executive, Education Authority

Section 1

Introduction, Vision and Mission Statement

1.1 Introduction

This is the first regional Special Education Strategic Area Plan for Northern Ireland 2022 - 2027. The Special Education Strategic Area Plan sets the strategic direction of Special Education Area Planning for the next five academic years 2022-2027. This strategy has been informed by two overarching Special Education Area Planning Frameworks (namely the Special Schools Area Planning Framework and the Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (<https://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/area-planning/sen-frameworks-and-draft-special-education-strategic-area-plan-2022>)). These frameworks act as the drivers for strategic planning of Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools and in Special Schools in the same way that Schools for the Future – A Policy for Sustainable Schools (Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) is the driver for Area Planning for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

The Special Education Strategic Area Plan will be the roadmap for Special Education Area Planning, in accordance with the:

EA's SEN Responsibility:

It is the responsibility of the Education Authority to ensure sufficient education provision for children and young people with a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

Aim of Special Education Area Planning:

The aim of Area Planning for Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools is to ensure that all pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs have access to a placement that best meets their assessed needs.

Special Education Area Planning Frameworks:

The Education Authority Special Education Area Planning Frameworks, have informed the special education area planning priorities which will be the focus of the Special Education Strategic Area Plan over the next five years.

Priorities: A Special School Placement which:

- is available at a pupil's nearest suitable special school;
- provides pupils with equitable access to excellent provision and meets the individual needs of the child or young person;
- is either in a single 3-19 school or through collaborative 3-19 provision; and
- is responsive to changing educational, physical and medical needs.

Priorities: A Specialist Provision in Mainstream Placement which:

- is available at their nearest suitable mainstream school with specialist provision;
- provides pupils with equitable access to excellent provision which meets the individually assessed needs of the child or young person;
- provides a pathway of provision for all ages and stages of development;
- is responsive to changing educational, physical and medical needs; and
- is inclusive, providing opportunities for education alongside mainstream peers.

The Special Education Strategic Area Plan will cover Special Education Area Planning for all Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools. A separate Strategic Area Plan, "Planning for Sustainable Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27" (SAP 2), has been developed for provision in primary and post-primary schools. Both plans will dovetail to meet the needs

of pupils in specialist provision in primary and post-primary schools and will be implemented in accordance with Area Planning governance arrangements to include reporting to Area Planning Local Groups, Area Planning Working Group and Area Planning Steering Group.

Whilst the Special Education Strategic Area Plan seeks to set out the roadmap for Special Education Area Planning, the Operational Plans will provide the detail in relation to proposed actions to address the priorities of the Special Education Strategic Area Plan over the next five years.

1.2 The Vision

All pupils in Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools have the opportunity to achieve their full potential; by having the best educational experiences, equality of opportunity and pathways that meets their needs.

1.3 Mission Statement

Focus on meeting the needs of children and young people with a Statement of Special Educational Need. To do this Area Planning will provide:

- availability at their nearest suitable special school/nearest suitable mainstream school with specialist provision;
- pupils with equitable access to excellent provision that meets the individual needs of the child or young person;
- pathways of provision for all ages and stages of development;
- special school provision in a single 3-19 school or through collaborative 3-19 provision;
- for changing educational, physical and medical needs; and
- for inclusivity, providing opportunities for education alongside mainstream peers.

Section 2

The Special Education Area Planning Environment

2.1 Objectives

The objectives of Special Education Area Planning are set out in Special Education Area Planning Frameworks. These objectives, in a strategic and regional context, should seek to enable:

- a consistent, child-centred, inclusive model across all areas of Northern Ireland;
- a flexible model to meet the individual needs of children and young people with a Statement of Special Educational Needs which recommends placement in a specialist or special school setting;
- provision for children and young people from early years and primary, through to post-primary, including Post 16 (known as 3 – 19)
- equitable access to specialist pupil support services;
- access to a broad and balanced curriculum to meet the diverse needs of pupils delivering improved pupil outcomes;
- strategic decisions to be made in relation to sufficient long-term capacity in Special and Mainstream Schools to meet demand for places and taking account of both rural and urban areas (as defined by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/review-of-the-statistical-classification-and-delineation-of-settlements-march-2015.pdf>) in relation to Specialist Provision Area Planning;
- collaborative work with health and social care trusts to ensure there is an integrated and tiered model of therapeutic support for children and young people with special educational needs (referred to by health as universal, targeted, specialist).

2.2 Special Education Area Planning Frameworks

The Minister of Education, Michele McIlveen, endorsed the Frameworks in October 2021. The Frameworks will inform the Special Education Strategic Area Plan and its implementation through the Operational Plans.

In meeting the objectives of special education Area Planning, four key themes and associated actions have been developed in order to drive forward the changes required to realise the vision.

Key Themes

Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways

Promote cooperation, collaboration and sharing between all Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools across all sectors (as appropriate)

Maximise resources and capacity

Inform strategic infrastructure planning and investment

Section 3

Opportunities and Drivers for Change

The Department of Education's (DE) vision for education in Northern Ireland is *'a system that is recognised internationally for the quality of its teaching and learning, for the achievements of its young people and for a holistic approach to education'*.

As stated previously, the Special Education Area Planning Frameworks will act as the drivers for strategic planning for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools and Special Schools. These Frameworks set out the priority for a flexible and agile model of special educational needs provision across Special School and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools to ensure all children and young people will have access to the most appropriate Special Educational Needs placement.

In order to realise this vision and to achieve the aim, mission and objectives of Special Education Strategic Area Planning, change will be required. Some changes may be minor, but in many cases a major change requiring co-operation and collaboration across all stakeholders will be needed. Change can bring uncertainty and challenges but also opportunity, anticipation and enthusiasm.

3.1 The Drivers and Challenges for Change

In taking forward the Special Education Strategic Area Plan, it is acknowledged that:

- There is significant growth in the number of children with Special Educational Needs. In the last five years there has been a 26.44% increase in the number of pupils accessing a placement in a Special School and in the same period there has been a 24.1% increase in the number of pupils accessing a placement in Specialist Provision in Mainstream. Based on the Department of Education projections this trend is expected to continue.
- There is a changing profile of pupils, often with a multiplicity of needs. The complexity of pupil need and the profile requires a special school to be adaptable to meet the multiplicity of need. This has a direct impact on the type of accommodation, teaching and ancillary support, the size of classes as reduced pupil: adult ratios are required in many circumstances have an impact on Special School provision.

- The historic descriptors of some Special Schools are often not wholly reflective of current pupil populations which have resulted in significant variation in the type of provision offered across the Special Schools' estate, with some Local Government Districts offering a greater range of provision than others. While the historic school type and age range have been identified, the Education Authority fully accepts that the current provision is changing and schools have adapted to meet the changing needs of children and young people within their area.
- There is a lack of a consistent Special School model which caters from Early Years to Post 16 (known as 3 – 19). Different models of provision and support existed across the former Education and Library Boards. With the establishment of the Education Authority and the recommendations of the Ministerial Review (2015), the Special Education Strategic Area Plan will aim to provide a consistent model of provision from Early Years to Post 16 (3 - 19 model), with children and young people being educated at their nearest suitable school.
- The impact of additional Specialist Provision in Mainstream on the availability of places in Special Schools presents a challenge in relation to projecting the number of places required; ensuring provision meets the needs of individual children and young people; and supporting the right for children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) to be educated in mainstream schools.
- Capital funding is required to deliver additional Special Educational Needs capacity across Special and Mainstream Schools. The accommodation within the current schools' estate (special schools and mainstream schools) limits many of the Special Education Strategic Area Planning solutions. There needs to be alignment of strategic capital development and Special Education Strategic Area Planning. In the context of the Special Education Area Planning Frameworks and the implementation of Special Education Strategic Area Plan solutions through the Operational

Plans and Annual Plan of Arrangements/Development Proposals. The challenge is that there needs to be greater alignment between the capital programme and the outworking of the Special Education Area Planning approval processes (Annual Plan of Arrangements/Development Proposal) to ensure that Area Planning informs strategic infrastructure planning and investment. It is important for the Education Authority to continue to work with the Department of Education in the early commitment to capital investment.

3.2 Creating Opportunities for Change

3.2.1 Collaborative Working

Area Planning is well embedded with all educational partners, particularly to work with the Special Schools' Strategic Leadership Group and Principals' Reference Groups. The defined structures provide for engagement and robust discussion on work streams.

Collaborative practices and partnership working will be a priority throughout this Special Education Strategic Area Plan to take forward innovative and cross sectoral working, particularly to ensure specialist provision in all areas, in the best interests of pupils in both urban and rural areas. The Special Education Strategic Area Plan will seek to address geographical, sectoral and linguistic sector inconsistencies which currently exist in Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools to provide equity for pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

Working in partnership to achieve Special Education Strategic Area Planning solutions will be vital to secure the best possible outcomes for children and young people. In keeping with all legislation, policy, Special Education Area Planning Frameworks and working with Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools to develop opportunities; and to help explore and shape collaborative models together, will help meet Special Education Strategic Area Planning objectives.

Collaboration with and across Special Schools and Mainstream Schools will support pathways of provision within geographical areas, on a cross phase and cross sectoral basis, in achieving the best possible education provision. It will be important to build on existing good practice across Area Learning Communities and clusters. This will also provide for greater collaboration internally and externally, dovetailing with Statutory Assessment and Review Service and support services as part of the Education Authority's Children and Young People's Services Directorate and working more closely with the health and social care trusts to ensure there is an integrated and tiered model of support which helps meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs.

3.2.2 Supporting Integrated and Irish Medium Education

Area Planning will seek to identify, explore and bring forward proposals to encourage and facilitate both Irish Medium and Integrated education to provide specialist provision in mainstream schools to meet the needs of pupils within an area. Both Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education will provide guidance on how best to meet that need working with all education partners.

3.2.3 Supporting Schools and Communities

While the legislation, policy, Special Education Area Planning Frameworks and guidance outlines the responsibilities of the Department of Education, managing authorities and sectoral bodies, an integral part of success of achieving the vision is the engagement of governors, principals, staff and parents/guardians, all of whom have a major role and responsibility in the implementation of Area Planning as part of the big picture.

3.2.4 Engaging with Governors, Staff, Parents and Pupils

It is acknowledged that Special Education Area Planning discussions are often difficult for governors, particularly as many are from the local community and often have historical connection with the school. However, it is imperative that the educational needs of all pupils in an area are considered as opposed

to individual institutions. The challenge, therefore, is for governors to consider whole area solutions rather than focusing on their own school and in all engagements with school governors the focus will be on the needs of an area, rather than single institution. A programme of governor training on Area Planning will be delivered throughout the lifespan of this strategy to enable governors to increase their awareness and understanding of Special Education Area Planning in order to play a fuller role in the process.

School leaders, staff and parents/guardians also have important role to play in the implementation of Special Education Area Planning as those most directly impacted by any change. In any change, the managing authorities and sectoral bodies will consult on any proposed change with the responsibility of staff and parents/guardians to engage in the consultation process. In ensuring order to ensure more active parental participation, Area Planning will continue to engage with key parent representative organisations.

Effective engagement with children and young people is also imperative. In meeting the requirements of Article 12 of the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Area Planning will actively listen to the views of Children and Young People. To ensure the participation of children and young people, Area Planning will continue to work collaboratively with the Education Authority's Youth Service, and/or other Youth Organisations, to create engagement programmes for Area Planning activity.

3.2.5 Clearly Defined Aim, Policy and Statutory Process

The publication of the Special Education Area Planning Frameworks provides clear guidance and direction in planning for and meeting Special Education Strategic Area Planning priorities. The clearly defined process and governance provides clarity of purpose and direction for Area Planning to meet the Aim, Vision and Key Themes for the Special Education Strategic Area Plan.

Section 4

Achieving the Vision - Planning for Special Education Provision

4.1 Key Themes: Actions

The four key themes and associated actions have been developed in order to drive forward the changes required in order to realise the vision and meet the objectives of Special Education Area Planning. Within the life span of this Special Education Strategic Area Plan, the actions associated with the key themes are outlined below.

Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways

Plan with Special Schools to return repurposed space, back to its original use

Ensure provision is appropriate to meet individual pupil needs

Identify and address shortfalls in Special School provision including Pre-school and Post 16 provision

Identify and address the shortfall in provision from Primary to Post-Primary in Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools and in Special Schools

Increase parity of access in both urban and rural areas

Provide appropriate placements, taking account of changing and more complex presentation of special educational needs

Increase inclusion and integration with peers in Specialist Provision in Mainstream

Promote cooperation, collaboration and sharing between all Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools across all sectors (as appropriate)

Identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions through engagement with Special Schools, to develop 3 - 19 models – single school and/or collaborative provision involving area solutions

Minimise the uncertainty associated with transition between Special Schools by streamlining pathways from Early Years to Post 16

Work with all stakeholders (internal and external) including health and social care trusts to ensure appropriate resources, training and consistency of provision across the sector, as part of an integrated and tiered model of support

Maximise resources and Capacity

Increase capacity across the region, beginning with the areas where the greatest demand exists for Special Schools and for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools, in the nearest suitable school.

Increase the number of specialist provision in sustainable mainstream schools

Continue to develop robust data to inform future Area Planning for Special Education

Inform strategic infrastructure planning and Investment

Identify, for a Special Education Area Planning action, the capital requirement essential for implementation

Engage with the Department of Education to strengthen links between capital investment and implementation of Special Education Area Planning approvals

Seek approval to commence the business case for major capital investment in conjunction with appropriate Special Education Area Planning approvals

Prioritise capital investment for appropriate Special Education Area Planning approvals

Section 5

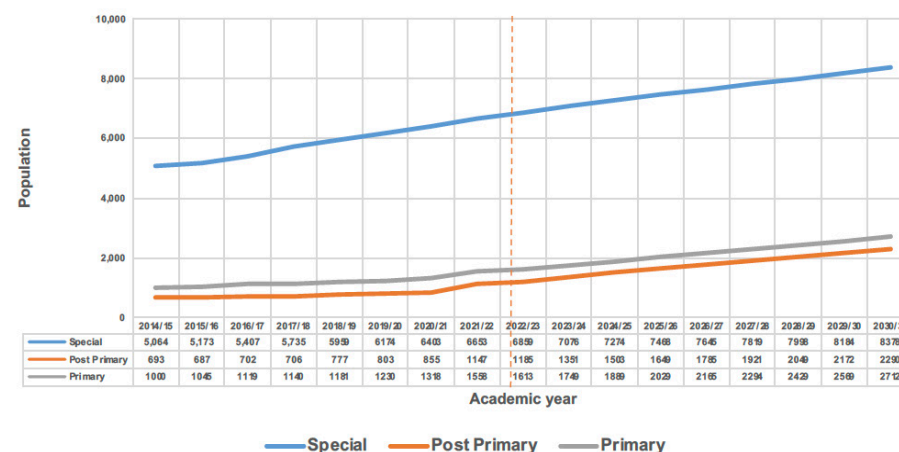
Northern Ireland Summary Data

Graph 1, details the past, current and projected pupils in attendance at Special Schools and within Specialist Provision in Mainstream in Northern Ireland.

- Over 6,600 pupils are enrolled in 40 dedicated Special Schools
- The number of pupils placed within Special Schools rose from 5,064 in 2015/16 to 6,653 in 2021/22 (a change of + 31.38%)
- Over 2,705 pupils are educated in Specialist Provision in Mainstream Primary and Post-Primary Schools
- The number of pupils placed within Specialist Mainstream Provision rose from 1,751 in 2015/16 to 2,705 in 2021/22 (a change of +54.49%)

Graph 1

Special School and Specialist Provision Population – Current and Projected

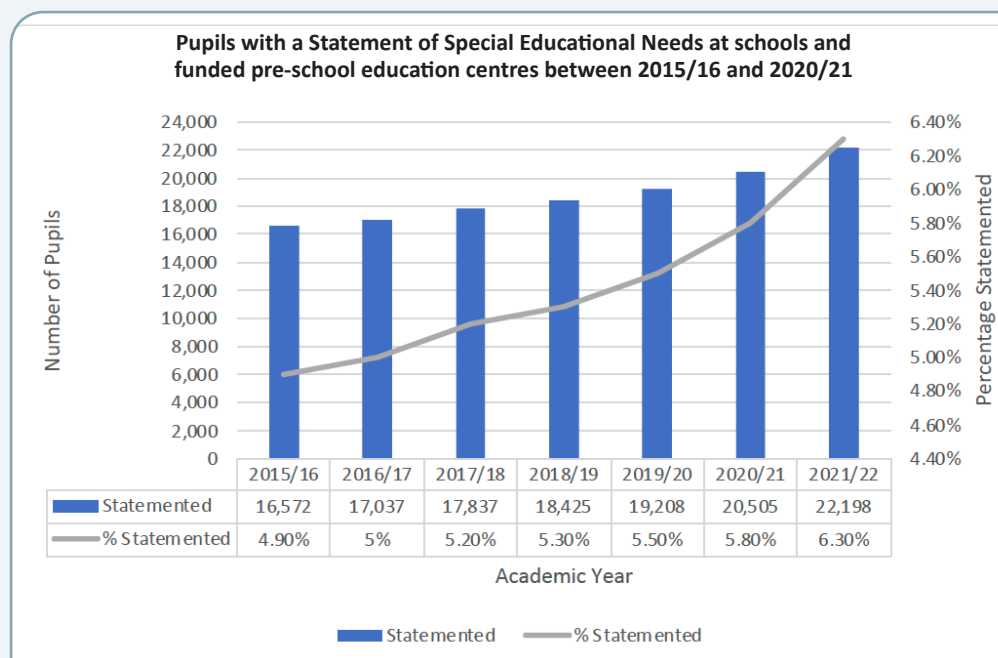


Source: DE projections 2020/21; NI school census for figures up to 2021/22; NI population projections (2018 based)

Graph 2, details Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs at schools and funded pre-school education centres between 2015/16 and 2020/21.

- Almost 22,200 pupils (6.3%), have a Statement of Special Educational Needs
- The number of pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs rose from 16,572 in 2015/16 to 22,198 in 2021/22 (a change of + 33.95%)

Graph 2



Source: DE - NI school census for figures 2015/16 to 2021/22

Special Schools

**40
Special
Schools**

- 38 Controlled
- 1 Catholic Maintained
- 1 Other Maintained

**Age Range
of Provision
(Original
Designation)**

- 3 – 19 Provision (23 schools)
- 3 – 11 Provision (2 schools)
- 3 – 8 Provision (1 school)
- 3 – 6 Provision (1 school)
- 4 – 19 Provision (1 school)
- 4 – 18 Provision (1 school)
- 4 – 17 Provision (1 school)
- 4 – 16 Provision (4 schools)
- 8 - 19 Provision (1 school)
- 8 - 11 Provision (1 school)
- 11 - 14 Provision (1 school)
- 11- 16 Provision (1 school)
- 11 - 19 Provision (2 schools)

**School Type
(Original
Designation)**

- 16 Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD)
- 9 Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)
- 6 Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) & Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD)
- 3 Social, Behavioural, Emotional and Wellbeing (SBEW)
- 2 Physical and Medical (P&M)
- 1 Speech and Language (S&L)
- 1 Hearing and Visually Impaired (H&VI)
- 1 Medical (M)
- 1 Physical Difficulties (PD)

**Anticipated
Growth
(2022-2027)**

- 960 additional pupils

Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (SPM)

**784
Primary
Schools****192
Post-Primary
Schools****89 PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH SPM**

- 48 controlled
- 34 Catholic maintained
- 4 controlled integrated
- 2 grant maintained integrated
- 1 Irish medium

45 POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH SPM

- 20 controlled
- 21 Catholic maintained
- 2 controlled integrated
- 1 grant maintained integrated
- 1 Irish medium

**Primary
Pathways
for SPM****LEARNING**

- 23 schools have Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 & Key Stage 2
- 1 Early Years & Foundation Stage
- 1 Foundation Stage
- 2 Foundation Stage & Key Stage 1
- 4 Key Stage 1
- 3 Key Stage 1 & Key Stage 2
- 14 Key Stage 2

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

- 7 Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 & Key Stage 2
- 15 Foundation Stage & Key Stage 1
- 11 Key Stage 1
- 4 Key Stage 1 & Key Stage 2
- 2 Key Stage 2

SPEECH & LANGUAGE

- 3 Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 & Key Stage 2
- 10 Foundation Stage & Key Stage 1
- 1 Key Stage 1

HEARING IMPAIRED

- 1 Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 & Key Stage 2

PHYSICAL DIFFICULTIES

- 1 Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 & Key Stage 2

**Post-Primary
Pathways
for SPM****LEARNING**

- 18 Key Stage 3 & Key Stage 4
- 7 Key Stage 3

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

- 12 Key Stage 3 & Key Stage 4
- 10 Key Stage 3 only

HEARING IMPAIRED

- 1 Key Stage 3 & Key Stage 4

SOCIAL, BEHAVIOUR, EMOTIONAL & WELLBEING

- 1 Key Stage 3 & Key Stage 4

PHYSICAL DIFFICULTIES

- 1 Key Stage 3 & Key Stage 4

**Planning for
Provision - pupils in
mainstream schools
with a Statement of
Special Educational
Need (2022 - 2027)**

- 3.8% of the primary school enrolment
- 5.1% of the post primary school enrolment

As the number of pupils who require a special school or specialist provision placement continues to grow this will be an important strategic priority within Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022 - 2027.

In taking forward the priorities of the Special Education Area Planning Frameworks, the Key Themes and associated actions of Special Education Strategic Area Plan will be reflected in the Operational Plans.

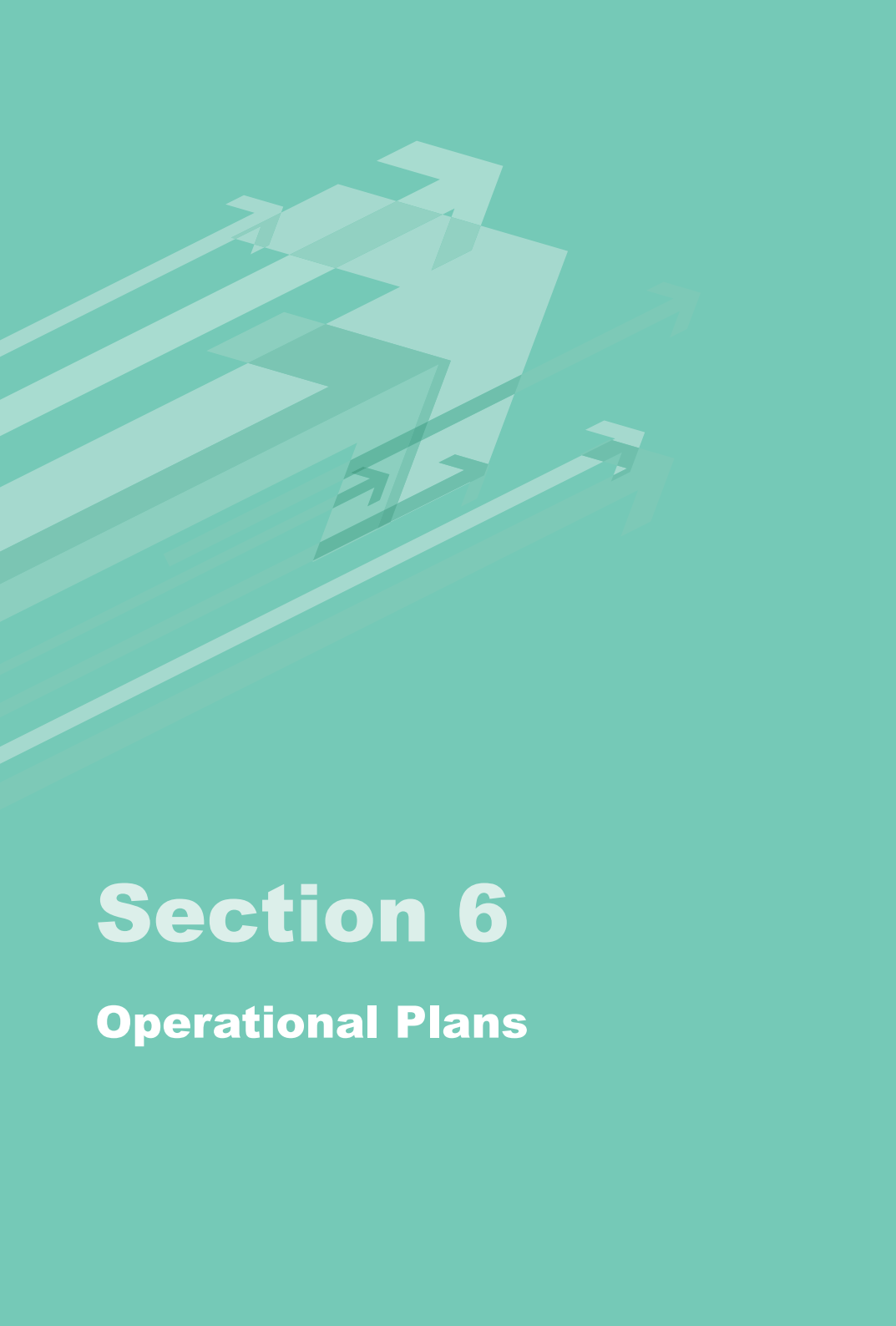
Short and medium term work to be taken forward within the four key themes to:

Special Schools

- Develop solutions with Special Schools to meet capacity needs to provide options to attend nearest suitable special school and return repurposed space
- Develop solutions with Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream to ensure appropriate placements to meet the individual assessed needs of the child
- Develop solutions with Special Schools to provide single school or collaborative pathways for provision from Early Years to Post 16 (known as 3 – 19) that meet the needs of the families in that area
- Develop solutions with all stakeholders, including the Education Authority's Statutory Assessment and Review Service, Education Authority's support services and health and social care trusts to ensure most efficient and effective service delivery
- Engage with the Department of Education to ensure appropriate levels of capital and revenue funding to implement provision

Specialist Provision in Primary and Post-Primary Mainstream Schools

- Develop solutions with schools to meet capacity needs to provide options to attend nearest suitable school with specialist provision
- Develop solutions with Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream to ensure appropriate placements to meet the individual assessed needs of the child
- Develop solutions with schools to ensure there is inclusion, integration and tiered models of support
- Develop solutions with schools to provide appropriate pathways and minimise transition
- Develop solutions with all stakeholders, including the Education Authority's Statutory Assessment and Review Service, Education Authority support services and health and social care trusts to ensure most efficient and effective service delivery
- Engage with the Department of Education to ensure appropriate levels of capital and revenue funding to implement provision
- Encourage and facilitate the development of specialist provision in the Integrated Sector
- Encourage and facilitate the development of specialist provision in the Irish Medium Sector
- Encourage, facilitate and promote the development of specialist provision in Shared Education



To achieve the vision of the Special Education Strategic Area Plan, the associated Operational Plans will translate the vision into the practical workings of Area Planning and proposed changes to the current Special School estate and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools. The Operational Plans will dovetail with the Education Authority's new Annual Plan of Arrangements (APA) when it is introduced through the enactment of the SEND Act (2016) and Code of Practice.

The Operational Plans will focus and deliver on the:

- Ministerial Priorities including opportunities for innovative and creative working
- Sustainable Schools Policy
- Special Schools Area Planning Framework
- A Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools
- Delivery of the Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Providing for Sustainable Provision
- Delivery of the Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Providing for Special Education Provision.

The Operational Plan 1: 2022-24 can be accessed on: [LINK](#)

Section 6

Operational Plans

6.1 Bridging the Gap

In October 2021, the Minister approved the outworkings of a pilot exercise and the introduction of a new process developed by the Education Authority (on Department of Education's behalf) to effect changes to Specialist Provision at Mainstream Schools without the need for a statutory Development Proposal in the context of the introduction of the new Special Education Strategic Area Plan (2022-2027). Due to the delayed implementation of the SEND Act (2016), Code of Practice and the introduction of the Education Authority's Annual Plan of Arrangements, the Minister also agreed to a further Special Education Needs Pilot as a contingency to bridge the gap to help ensure that pupils with Special Educational Needs will have the places they require in the right place and at the right time.

This will provide an opportunity to test the efficacy of the Special Education Area Planning Frameworks, including the criteria and indicators, as set out in the Frameworks. This will enable the Education Authority to bring forward proposals to meet the needs of children and young people within Special Schools, initially, through the Development Proposal process for immediate priorities, to test the robustness of the Special Schools Area Planning Framework, as a mechanism against which future proposals of this type could be progressed by the Education Authority (as part of a Development Proposal process or as part of the Annual Plan of Arrangements, without the need for a Development Proposal). This pilot will also afford the opportunity for the Education Authority to bring forward proposals to establish, close or change specialist provision in mainstream schools (without the need for a Development Proposal) and aligning with the Special Educational Needs Annual Plan of Arrangements, when it is agreed. All proposals will be subject to consultation before being considered by the Department of Education and the Minister.

The first priority in taking forward this pilot will be to review and formalise the temporary Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools.

When a Development Proposal is required, it is taken forward in accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and is subject to a consultation process.

Section 7

How will we know we have been successful?

Area Planning activity will be monitored and evaluated through the Operational Plans, and measurements below:

Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways

Number of repurposed rooms returned to original purpose in Special Schools

Number of pupils accessing Pre-school Provision in Special Schools

Number of pupils in approved Primary and Post-Primary Specialist Provision

Number of approved specialist provision pathways across all key stages within a school

Number of pathways between primary and post primary within an LGD in Specialist Provision in Mainstream

Number of pupils placed in nearest suitable Special School or Specialist Provision in Mainstream

Promote cooperation, collaboration and sharing between all Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools across all sectors (as appropriate)

Number of pupils attending 3-19 Special Schools or schools involved in a collaborative 3-19 model

Number of schools offering 3-19 provision either individually or as part of a collaborative model

Maximise resources and capacity

Number of Specialist Provision in primary schools, with a minimum of seven class bases.

Inform strategic infrastructure planning and investment

Number of pupils/schools benefitting from capital investment

Level of capital investment linked directly to Area Planning activity

The Education Authority, working in partnership with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and collaborating with sectoral support bodies will report to the Department of Education on the achievements against the Key Themes on the completion of each Operational Plan. In addition, an engagement programme with schools and other stakeholders undertaken annually for feedback on what is working well and what changes are required to continually improve the Special Education Area Planning process.



Section 8

Supporting Schools Through Change

The Department of Education, managing authorities and sectoral support bodies acknowledge that change is difficult and all education partners are available to provide support to schools throughout all stages of the Area Planning Process

8.1 Implementation Plans

In taking forward change, an implementation plan, tailored to the specific needs of the change, will be prepared. In ensuring an implementation plan and support is available to schools, the proposer will work with the school as the main link providing support, guidance and direction throughout the process and will also engage with and support staff, parents/guardians and pupils through the implementation plan.

It is only by all working together that the aim of Area Planning for Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools can be achieved:

To ensure pupils have access to a placement that best meets the needs of children and young people with a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

ANNEX A: Legislative and Policy Landscape

1. Legislative Landscape

The Special Education Strategic Area Plan is being taken forward within a suite of relevant legislation. Existing legislation provides the landscape in which Special Education Area Planning activity operates, with extracts of the relevant legislation contained in the Special Education Area Planning Frameworks (<https://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/area-planning/sen-frameworks-and-draft-special-education-strategic-area-plan-2022>).

It is of particular relevance to the Special Education Strategic Area Plan to reference the following which sets some legislative context:

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland)

SEND Act 2016

The SEND Act 2016 will have a phased implementation. This legislation broadens special educational needs to include disabilities. The SEND Act further strengthens the rights of children and young people with special educational needs and disability to be educated in mainstream schools and is therefore a key strategic priority for the Education Authority. The Act is set in the context of the raising standards agenda and includes ensuring the child is placed firmly at the centre of the processes of early identification, assessment, provision and review; the special educational needs provision for all children is met by the school and, as appropriate, complemented by the Education Authority; the capacity of all schools to address special educational needs; and a clear focus on learning and outcomes for pupils with special educational needs. This will have particular relevance in taking forward Special Education Area Planning working with internal and external stakeholders in best meeting the needs of children and young people.

As the Education Authority commences the implementation of duties linked to the **SEND Act (2016)** this will enable further transparency to our provision in both Special Schools and in Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools

to meet the needs of children and young people with special educational needs. This will be reflected in the Education Authority's Annual Plan of Arrangements for Special Educational Needs.

The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015

The Act requires improved cooperation amongst Departments and Agencies and places a duty on children's authorities, as defined by the Act, to co-operate where appropriate, in order to deliver services which will improve the well-being of children and young people. This duty has particular relevance within the Special Education Area Planning context as the Education Authority strives to have increased equity in educational and therapeutic provision.

Statutory Duties for Shared Education, Integrated Education and Irish Medium Education

The Department has a duty to ensure that its Arm's Length Bodies effectively deliver the full suite of education policies. The Education Authority in its duty to plan for special education provision will assist the Department, through their planning activities, to exercise these duties.

Integrated Education

Under Article 64 of the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 there is a duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Integrated Education.

In March 2022 the Northern Ireland Assembly approved the Integrated Education Bill which gained Royal Assent in April 2022. The Integrated Education Act (NI) 2022 comes into effect on 26 October 2022. The Bill adds to the duty to encourage and facilitate by placing a statutory duty on the Department of Education and Education Authority to support Integrated Education.

Area Planning will seek to identify, explore and bring forward proposals to encourage and facilitate Integrated Education to provide specialist provision in mainstream schools to meet the needs of pupils within an area. The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education will provide guidance on how best to meet that need working with all education partners.

Irish Medium Education

Under Article 89 of the Education (NI) Order 1998 there is a duty to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish Medium Education.

Area Planning will seek to identify, explore and bring forward proposals to encourage and facilitate Irish Medium Education to provide specialist provision in mainstream schools to meet the needs of pupils within an area. Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta will provide guidance on how best to meet that need working with all education partners.

Shared Education Act

Under the Shared Education Act (NI) 2016 there is a duty to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education.

Consistent with the Special Education Area Planning Frameworks, the Special Education Strategic Area Plan will address geographical, sectoral and linguistic sector inconsistencies which currently exist, to provide equity for pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

2. Policy Landscape

In addition to the Special Education Area Planning Frameworks and Special Education Area Planning will be taken forward in the context relevant policy, which includes:

The **new SEN Regulations** and the **new SEN Code of Practice** will impact on work of the Special Education Area Planning, particularly in relation to the Annual Plan of Arrangements.

The Department of Education published **Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools** which has, as its vision, an estate of educationally sustainable schools planned on an area basis, with a focus on sharing and collaboration. It is important to note that the Sustainable Schools Policy does not apply to special schools but, by contrast, the core elements of this policy are particularly relevant when considering the establishment of specialist provision in mainstream schools.