



## Statement on investment in the future of our children

### Education Finance – An Urgent Call for Action

We write as the Chief Executives of bodies that manage, support and provide services to Northern Ireland's schools to express profound concerns about the deepening financial crisis facing our education system. Alongside school leaders, principals' associations, teaching unions and governors, we have consistently warned that chronic underfunding is placing unacceptable pressure on schools and disproportionately harming our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

The Independent Review of Education, Investing in a Better Future (December 2023), was unequivocal in its assessment that education in Northern Ireland is grossly underfunded. The Review highlighted the long-term risks of continued underinvestment and set out 25 costed, achievable recommendations to support reform and transformation. Now, rather than moving towards implementation, the system faces an unprecedented funding crisis that threatens its stability.

Around 70% of schools are already in financial deficit. With over 80% of the education budget committed to staffing, and 85–90% of individual school budgets allocated to staff costs, there is little flexibility left in the system. The proposed draft multi-year Budget for 2026–2029/30 would require the Department of Education to find savings of £826 million in 2026–27 alone, almost half of the current Aggregated Schools Budget. This funding gap would increase further in subsequent years. As the Minister of Education has acknowledged, reductions on such a scale would necessitate extreme measures with long-term consequences extending well beyond education into health, justice and the wider economy.

As Chief Executives, we recognise our collective responsibility to pursue efficiency and transformation and to make the best possible use of available resources. However, efficiency alone cannot address a funding gap of this scale. While we understand the difficult fiscal context facing the Northern Ireland Executive and the constraints of the Block Grant settlement, the implications for education are stark and must be clearly understood.

There are clearly difficult decisions to be made. The choice is between investing in the future of our children or managing the decline of our education system.



We urge all stakeholders, parents, staff and the wider public, to engage with the Department of Finance's budget consultation before the 3 March 2026 deadline. As education partners, we believe that how we invest in our children today is a measure of the society we wish to become tomorrow. The education of this generation, and those that follow, depends on it.

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