

# GBA News – Friday 27th February 2026

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## GBA AGM - Save the Date

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The GBA's Annual General Meeting will take place on **Wednesday 13th May 2026** at [Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn](#).

This will be a full day event and will include the AGM Business, a panel discussion on Specialist Provision, and presentations from:

- The Public Services Ombudsman, Margaret Kelly.
- France McCandless, Chief Executive of the Charities Commission.
- Former Irish Navy Captain, Marie Gleeson who will present on decision-making, resilience and team-performance in challenging environments.

Please look out in your inbox for the AGM invite and registration form.



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## GBA Governance Roadshows

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Three of the five scheduled Governance Roadshows have taken place at Rainey Endowed (5 February), Methodist College (19 February) and Foyle College (26 February). The remaining two events take place **in Loreto, Omagh on 5 March and St. Patrick's Armagh on 12 March.**

There are still some spaces available for both events. Please use this link to register: <https://forms.gle/Y2Aghqz1BsUmopAn7>

The sessions have focused on the principles underpinning effective governance, HR issues and financial matters and the feedback to date tells us that attendees have found the events informative and insightful.

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## Governance Matters

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### *Key Documents*

#### ['Every School a Good School' - The Governors Role - Full Governor Guide](#)

'Every School a Good School – The Governors' Role' is an online reference guide about the roles and responsibilities of school Boards of Governors. It provides school governors with easy access to information, and it can assist governors to identify their training needs.

It is updated periodically to take account of changes in policy and legislation.

## [Scheme for the Management of Voluntary Grammar Schools](#)

This scheme provides for the membership of the Board of Governors and sets out procedures and guidelines for managing the school and the functions to be exercised by the Board of Governors and the principal. The Board of Governors is required to operate in accordance with the Scheme of Management which reflects good management, practices and procedures.

### ***Recent DE Circulars***

- [School Operational Days and Hours](#)

This circular provides the most up to date advice on the number of full days schools must be open to all pupils and the minimum hours of instruction. **The only change is to paragraph 21 in respect of the specified dates for the TransformED Development Days in 2026/27.**

- [Admissions and Enrolment Numbers - Temporary Variations Requests](#)

This circular supersedes Circular 2019/04 which issued on 1 February 2019 to explain the Temporary Variation (TV) Policy. All primary and post primary TV applications should be submitted using the appropriate [TV Pro-forma](#).

- [Changing School Numbers](#)

The purpose of this circular is to introduce the policy that enables the Department to make use of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 to change a school's approved numbers where there is sufficient evidence to do so without the need for a Development Proposal (DP).

Part of this policy relates to the increasing of admission/ enrolment numbers. The Department will, on an annual basis, identify all schools that have exceeded their approved admissions and/or enrolment numbers through TVs in

three out of the most recent four years and these schools will move forward for consideration of a change.

If a change is to be made, this will be for a period of three years, before it is reviewed. This is to provide schools with a horizon of certainty of their numbers. After three years the position will be reviewed, and the change may be extended 5 for another three-year period or considered permanent. Alternatively, the approved numbers may return to their previous level.

- [Accounting for Children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs: Changing the Supernumerary Status](#)

The Department consulted on proposed changes to the existing practice during Spring/Summer 2025. As the system is not currently in a state of readiness to move forward to the complete removal of the supernumerary status of children who have a statement of SEN, the proposed change was a phased approach to the complete removal of the supernumerary status.

Phase 1: Account for children who have a statement of SEN as supernumerary for the year of admission only, and only where a change of placement is necessary.

Phase 2: The complete removal of supernumerary status; no child with a statement of SEN will ever be considered supernumerary. Further work and engagement is required to take this forward.

Having taken into account the views expressed during the consultation period, the Minister has agreed to proceed to implement Phase 1 from September 2026. The details and timing of Phase 2 will be the subject of further consideration in the future.

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## **DE Budget Strategy - Consultation on Proposals for Reform**

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The Department of Education is seeking views on proposals for a [Five-Year Education Budget Strategy](#) which identifies a number of reform areas including:

- 1. Home to School Transport** - *including reviewing and tightening eligibility criteria for transport assistance, and addressing reliance on taxis.*
- 2. School Meals Service** - *for example, consolidation of smaller kitchens or meals transported to school from larger central kitchens.*
- 3. SEN in Mainstream Schools** - *reviewing the classroom assistant model of support in mainstream schools and looking at a broader range of interventions.*
- 4. Sustainability of the School Estate** - *appointment of an independent commission to carry out a viability audit of all schools and make evidence-based recommendations for restructuring the school estate.*
- 5. Improving Financial Management** - *including consideration of a centralised staffing system to be used for schools in significant deficit and offered to any school wishing to adopt it.*

The GBA is currently developing a response to the proposals. Please [contact us](#) if you wish to submit any written feedback in relation to the consultation or school finances.

The consultation closes on 3rd April 2026.

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## Other Live Consultations & Calls for Evidence

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### Call for Evidence on Review of the Religious Education Core Syllabus (Closes 20th March 2026)

The Department of Education has launched a Call for Evidence on the Review of the Religious Education (RE) Core Syllabus for Northern Ireland via an online survey.

The Terms of Reference set out the “Review Principles” for the new RE syllabus as follows:

- a) Treat RE as an academic discipline – structured in an objective manner to promote intellectual engagement and respect for diverse perspectives.
- b) Develop critical and analytical skills – fostering analytical and critical thinking by engaging pupils in interpreting texts, evaluating arguments and understanding historical and cultural contexts.
- c) Retain Christianity as the central focus – recognising the historical, cultural and legal context of Northern Ireland and the enduring role of Christianity as the predominant religious belief in shaping education and society in Northern Ireland.
- d) Be Pluralist and Inclusive – ensuring pupils explore a range of religious and non-religious worldviews and encourage engagement with questions of belief, ethics, identity and meaning, reflecting the diversity of contemporary society.
- e) Prepare children and young people for Future Learning and Citizenship by promoting respect, tolerance and understanding of different beliefs and cultures.

The survey is available [here](#). Feedback will inform the work of a group of experts, teachers and school leaders which has been set up to take forward the Review.

### **Consultation on Draft Executive Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Strategy (Closes 24th March 2026)**

The draft ELC Strategy is the Executive’s draft plan for more affordable, accessible, high-quality early learning and childcare.

The strategy builds on work already undertaken to enhance early learning and childcare provision in Northern Ireland and seeks to consolidate and expand on these developments.

The Department is hosting a number of in-person and online engagement

events, as well as an online survey, details of which can be found [here](#).

**Consultation on a Pupil Attendance Strategy - "Attendance Matters"  
(Closes 6th March 2026)**

The Department of Education is consulting on a new Pupil Attendance Strategy and is keen to get as widespread a response as possible. The GBA has developed a response to the consultation based on feedback from our member schools. We will share this with you in our next monthly bulletin. The strategy and details on how to respond are available [here](#).

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## Area Planning Updates

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### *Operational Plans*

Operational Plan 2: 2024-2026 will conclude in August 2026. Any final requests from Voluntary Grammar schools to submit a Development Proposal should be submitted to the Education Authority as soon as possible (please [contact us](#) for details). This will allow for the necessary consultation processes within the timeframe of OP2.

Operational Plan 3 is due to commence in September 2026 and will span one year to accommodate the completion of outstanding projects from previous plans, as well as the inclusion of some new short-term workstreams/ proposals.

If you have any new proposals please [contact us](#) so that we can take these forward through the relevant Area Planning Local Group.

### *Recent Development Proposal Decisions*

- Slemish College will increase its admissions and enrolment numbers from 140 to 165 and from 880 to 1065, with effect from 1 September 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter - Approved by the Education Minister on 20th February 2026

- Ben Madigan Preparatory School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2026, or as soon as possible thereafter - Approved by the Education Minister on 22nd January 2026

Current Development Proposals are available [here](#).

Development Proposal decisions are available [here](#).

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## School Uniform Guidelines Ratified

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The School Uniforms Guidelines, which have now been laid in the Assembly and issued to schools, become statutory for schools to adhere to with immediate effect. This means that school uniform policies for the 2026/27 school year must follow all the requirements set out in the Guidelines.

Please [contact us](#) if you wish to raise any challenges you may be experiencing as a result of the guidelines coming into effect so that we can raise any issues with policymakers.

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## Shared Education News

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[PEACEPLUS ASPIRE](#) recently held two sessions on 'Leading a highly effective shared education partnership' one in Newry and one in Antrim.

There were 71 attendees representing Early Years, Primary and Post Primary, North and South of Ireland.

The sessions were delivered by Mark Barr and Peter Geoghegan, retired ETI Inspectors with input from all education settings on their experience to date. Partnerships there ranged from having less than one year's engagement with Shared Education to those with several years collaboration.

The sessions explored:

- What leadership skills and attributes are needed in collaborative leadership

- What are the key sources of evidence needed to provide an effective, informative and accurate evaluation of our provision
- What skills, attitudes and dispositions are needed to engage in focused discussions about learning and teaching in the context of Shared Education

Both practitioners and facilitators shared examples of how learners perceived their progress in Shared Education and how their school leaders modelled their vision for shared working on a daily basis and the impact on the local community.

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## **Employ a Language Assistant at Your School - British Council Opportunity**

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Modern Language Assistants are speakers of French, German, Irish, Italian, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish who can help students in the UK build their cultural capital by developing their linguistic and cross-cultural skills.

### Deadlines to host a language assistant for 2026-27

- Applications open 25 February 2026
- Applications close 30 April 2026
- Applications for Chinese Language Assistants close 1 April 2026

Further information is available [here](#).

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## **Advertising of Teaching and Support roles on the GBA Website**

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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.

**\*\*PLEASE NOTE THAT OUR JOB TEMPLATE HAS BEEN UPDATED AND IS AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD [HERE](#)\*\***

If you would like us to host a vacancy for your school, **please contact us, with the completed job template for each post, and allow at least TWO WORKING DAYS for posts to be uploaded.**

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