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## GBA News – Friday 29th May 2026

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### GBA AGM 2026 - Overview

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The GBA's Annual General Meeting was held on Wednesday 13th May at Lagan Valley Island and was attended by member school Principals, Governors, Bursars and GBA Consultants.

The AGM was very well received, with speakers attracting particularly positive feedback, and we were delighted by the many encouraging comments received from attendees.

GBA Chairperson, Ronnie Hassard, opened proceedings with the formal business of the AGM, including a review of the GBA's work over the past year, and updates on Area Planning and the Management Side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee.

Following the formal AGM business, delegates were provided with an overview of the financial health of voluntary grammar schools, based on

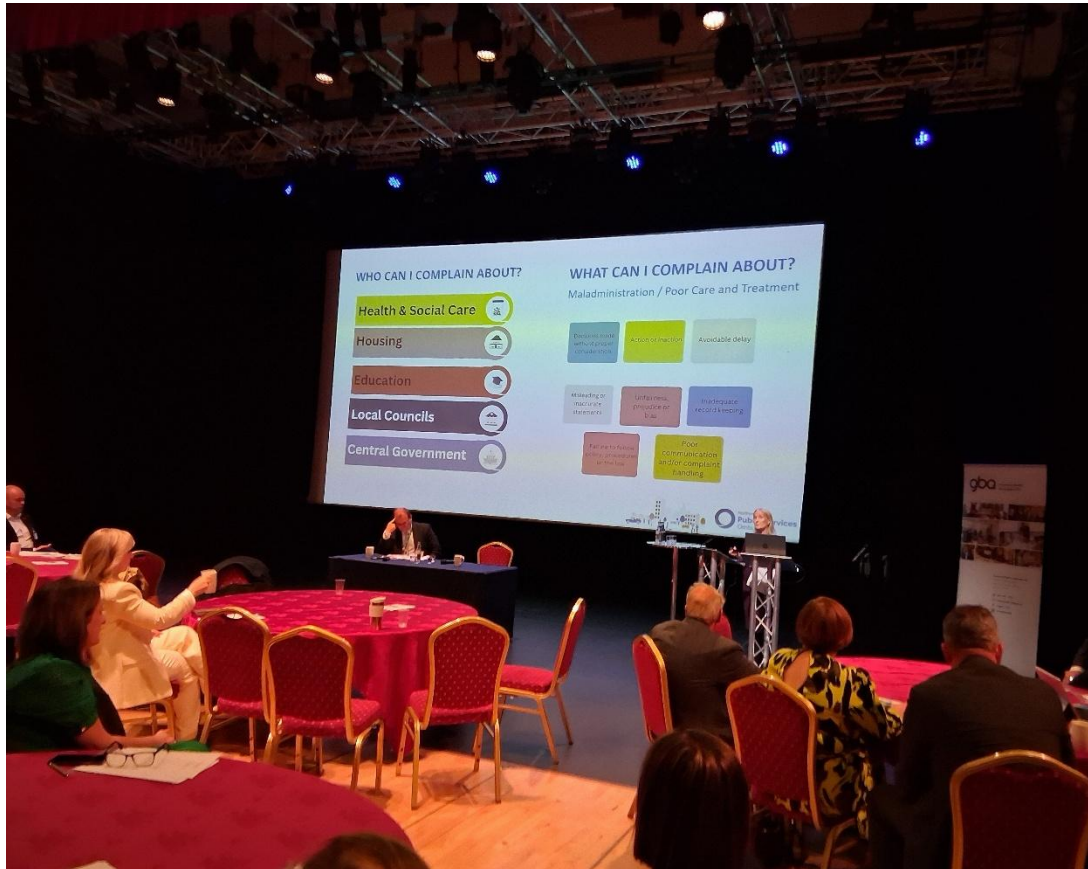
findings from our recent survey. This provided much-needed reassurance that many schools are facing similar financial challenges and also offered an important opportunity to recognise the dedication and hard work of school leaders operating within constrained budgets.

Delegates then heard from Craig Donnachie, Programme Director for SEND Transformation at the Education Authority, who outlined a proposed [enhanced model of SEN provision](#) designed to significantly improve the current support framework and respond more effectively to the growing demand within the education system. Craig was joined by Dr Stephen Reid, Principal at Larne High School, for a panel discussion on how the proposed model works in practice, in the context of both the voluntary grammar sector and wider education system.



The afternoon session opened with a presentation from Margaret Kelly, the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and Sean Martin, Deputy Ombudsman, focusing on Complaints Handling in Schools.

The session provided a useful opportunity for school leaders to discuss the nuances around complaints handling and sharing of best practice. NIPSO's presentation is available [here](#) and includes links to support and resources for schools.



Frances McCandless, Chief Executive of the Charity Commission for NI addressed delegates on a number of matters including schools and charity registration, challenges facing schools, and constructive leadership in challenging times. Again, this was a helpful opportunity for face-to-face engagement with the Charity Commission in the context of the NI education system. Frances' presentation is available [here](#).



The AGM closed with a final keynote speech from Marie Gleeson, former Commanding Officer of the Irish Naval Service. Marie gave a personal and uplifting account of her life and career at the Irish Navy, resonating strongly with the challenges faced by school leaders in the current educational landscape.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all of our speakers, and also to the Health and Safety Executive NI and Consumer Council NI - both of which provided delegates with tailored information in relation to their individual schools.

Finally, thank you to all our attendees for your positive feedback and support. We look forward to organising our next AGM and hope you will find it just as engaging and worthwhile as this year's event.

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## Governance Matters

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### **School Governors and Access NI Checks - (Source: [Circular 2025/06](#))**

The Department is aware that both governor appointing authorities and schools have applied different arrangements for the checking of governors/AccessNI since 2012. The Department notes the importance of a consistent approach to AccessNI checking across all governors and has reviewed the arrangements. In view of the legislation, it is considered that as school governors do not normally have opportunity for unsupervised contact with pupils, they are not in 'regulated activity.'

As such, an AccessNI check is not required by default for school governors. This was agreed by the DE Board and then ratified by the Minister in May 2024.

However, schools are reminded that in the event a governor performs activities or functions that may fall within the definition of 'regulated activity,' it is expected that schools and BoGs, in their safeguarding and child-protection role, make a local assessment on whether an AccessNI EDC is required.

The option to request an AccessNI check, without a check of the barred list, is permissible under the legislation and schools/employing authorities may complete such checks if they have cause to use them as an additional safeguarding measure.

## Upcoming Webinars



### PRSD Governor Reviewers the Principal – Webinar

#2623

Contact: [govtraining@eani.org.uk](mailto:govtraining@eani.org.uk)

[View more contact details](#)

Book

This training will be delivered online via Teams.

**GDPR: IMPORTANT** - the EA will rely on legitimate interests as its basis for recording any event or meeting on Teams.

This event may be recorded for the specific purposes of sharing training to other governors. This is advance notice of that intention.

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Education Authority

**Audience:**  
School Governors

**Sub-Cover:**  
No

## Recent DE Publications

### [TransformED First Annual Report and Updated Delivery Plan](#)

This first annual report provides an update on delivery of TransformED NI, the Department's flagship programme to strengthen teaching and learning across Northern Ireland. The report highlights the key achievements and milestones in Year 1 of the programme, outlines the priorities for the year ahead and provides an updated Delivery Plan.

[Integrated Education Demand Evidence, Insights and Limitations May 2026](#) (also see article below for a summary of the report)

The report reflects the Department's commitment to monitoring and assessing demand in line with the Integrated Education Act and Vision 2030. By drawing on admissions data, survey findings and information from parental ballots, it offers a more comprehensive picture of how parents are engaging with the options available to them and where pressures or opportunities may arise.

### [Pupil Suspensions and Expulsions in Northern Ireland 2024/25: Official Statistics in Development](#)

The purpose of this report data is to present suspensions and expulsions figures for schools for the 2024/25 academic year. It includes information on pupil suspensions and expulsions and the reason for these suspensions and expulsions. Breakdowns by characteristics such as Key Stage, gender and school management type are also provided.

### [School Leavers 2024/25](#)

This statistical bulletin presents an analysis of the GCSE and A-level qualifications and destinations of pupils leaving post-primary schools in 2024/25.



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## Safeguarding Resources

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### **Protecting Your Setting's Images from AI Manipulation and Abuse**

Education settings across the UK and Northern Ireland are increasingly having to balance celebrating the achievements of their school communities online with the responsibility to protect children's images from misuse by third parties. This is a complex area of safeguarding, particularly as AI technology continues to develop at pace.

To support schools in managing these risks, the UK Online Harms Early Warning Working Group (EWWG) has developed the [best practice guidance](#). This guidance is also available through the UK Safer Internet

Centre (UKSIC) website.

Although this guidance does not constitute formal policy, it has been developed in collaboration with the SBNI and safeguarding partners across the UK and Northern Ireland and is supported by the Education Authority Child Protection Support Service.

### **SBNI Safer Recruitment Guidance**

Staff and volunteers are the backbone and are critical to the functioning of any organisation and it is vital that robust standards are applied when recruiting suitable staff to work with children and young people to create a safe and positive environment. [The Safer Recruitment guidance](#) has been developed to support organisations develop strong practices when creating and backfilling posts to deter and prevent unsuitable people from being in positions where they can cause harm to children and young people.

The guidance was developed by the SBNI with reference to online materials sourced from the NSPCC, Volunteer Now, AccessNI and the Department of Education. The NSPCC also offers CPD certified on training (online and in person) on safer recruitment.

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## **Integrated Education Demand Evidence, Insights and Limitations May 2026**

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The key findings of the Department of Education's report on demand for Integrated Education are as follows:

1. Demand for Integrated Education is uneven and localised

- Demand varies significantly by area and individual school rather than being system-wide.
- Oversubscription is concentrated in a small number of popular post-primary schools.
- Many other areas show undersubscription.
- Overall, pressures reflect school popularity and local factors, not a universal shortage of places.

## 2. Primary vs Post-Primary pattern

### Primary schools:

- No system-wide shortage of places.
- Around 500+ surplus places at Year 1 level.
- Most areas are undersubscribed, with declining demand in several councils.

### Post-primary schools:

- Also a net surplus (~229 places) overall.
- However, strong oversubscription persists in specific schools/areas.
- Significant regional variation: some areas heavily oversubscribed, others sharply underused.

## 3. Parental preferences vs actual choices

- Admissions data (behaviour) is the strongest indicator of demand.
- Surveys show higher support for Integrated Education than actual applications.
- This suggests:
  - Some latent or unrealised demand

- But also that preferences do not always translate into choices

#### 4. What really drives school choice

Across all sectors, parents prioritise:

- Quality of education (most important factor)
- Proximity to home
- Family/social connections and facilities
- Integrated ethos matters, but is secondary to practical factors.

#### 5. Level of support for Integrated Education

- About 31% of parents say they prefer Integrated Education.
- A further ~37% “don’t mind”.
- Public opinion (NILT survey) is even higher:
  - 55% of adults would prefer integrated schooling.

Overall: broad societal support exists, but it is not consistently reflected in applications.

#### 6. Regional differences are significant

- Higher support and demand in urban/suburban areas (e.g. Belfast, Ards & North Down).
- Lower demand in western/rural councils (e.g. Fermanagh & Omagh, Mid Ulster).

#### 7. Access and awareness issues

- Some parents report no nearby Integrated school, but:

- Many actually live within reasonable distance.
- Indicates possible:
  - Lack of awareness
  - Perceptions about access or suitability
  - Concerns about oversubscription or admissions criteria

#### 8. Admissions criteria influence patterns

- Criteria (e.g. prioritising pupils from Integrated primaries) can:
  - Shape who applies
  - Widen catchment areas
  - Contribute to concentrated oversubscription
- Oversubscription may reflect:
  - Reputation
  - Selection rules

#### 9. Parental ballots show strong local support — but limited scope

- 33 out of 35 ballots supported transformation to Integrated status.
- However:
  - They reflect individual school communities only
  - Not a reliable measure of wider demand

#### 10. Demographic trends will shape future demand

- School population projected to decline by ~8% by 2030/31.
- Bigger impact at primary level (-15%).
- This will likely:
  - Increase spare capacity
  - Affect sustainability of some schools

## Overall Conclusion

- There is clear but uneven demand for Integrated Education.
- Strong public support exists, but:
  - Demand is localised
  - Choices are driven more by quality, access, and reputation than ethos alone.
- The system currently shows:
  - Surplus capacity overall
  - With pressure concentrated in specific schools and areas

The report concludes that no single measure captures demand, and evidence must be interpreted holistically (admissions, surveys, ballots, geography).

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## **Enhanced Support Model for SEN - GBA Consultation Response**

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The GBA recently submitted a response to the EA's consultation on an enhanced support model for Special Educational Needs. Our submission is based on ongoing engagement and feedback from our member schools and wider educational stakeholders.

In summary, the GBA has called for a needs-based, flexible, well-resourced SEN support system built on collaboration, early intervention, and professional development to better meet pupils' complex needs.

Overall, we have stressed that successful implementation depends on increased investment and fair funding, noting that comparable investments in England are significantly higher, which impacts service quality and capacity.

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

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## Area Planning Updates

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Operational Plan 3 (OP3) 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.

Further information on the current strategic and operational plans is available [here](#).

Information on current development proposals is available here:

- [Development Proposals - Pre-publication consultations](#)
- [Published Development Proposals \(awaiting ministerial decision\)](#)

If you are considering a significant change to the size or character of your school please [contact us](#).

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## Shared Education News

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### **Strule Shared Education Campus: Site Visit**

Members of the Mainstreamed Shared Education team recently visited the Strule Shared Education Campus for an onsite update of building progress to date. Gavin Boyd, Strule Project Communications Lead (Strategic Investment Board) facilitated the visit from a designated viewing platform and showcased a replica classroom.

Click [here](#) for a short video overview of the current works on site.

### **Fifth Report on Advancing Shared Education laid to the Northern Ireland Assembly**

Education Minister Paul Givan has laid the fifth report on Advancing Shared Education to the Northern Ireland Assembly, covering the period April 2024 to March 2026.

The report outlines progress in delivering and supporting Shared Education over the reporting period across a range of education and sectoral bodies.

The 2026 Report is available on the DE website at: [www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/advancing-shared-education-report-northern-ireland-assembly-may-2026](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/advancing-shared-education-report-northern-ireland-assembly-may-2026).

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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.

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

