

**Area Planning**

**Case for Change**

**Dunmullan Primary School**

**Development Proposal No 603**

**Proposal to: Discontinue**

<b>Case for Change: Supporting Information - Summary/Overview</b>	
Area Planning District	Fermanagh and Omagh
Development Proposal Number	DP 603
Proposer	Michele Corkey Director of Education Education Authority
School(s) Name	Dunmullan Primary School
School(s) Reference	201-2378
Sector	Primary
Management	Controlled
Development Proposal Publication Date	Week Commencing 20 September 2021
Proposal	<b>Dunmullan Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter</b>

## Case for Change: Statutory Consultation

*Note: It may be necessary for documentary evidence to be provided to show that the statutory procedures have been followed. It is essential that relevant parties retain this information.*

The following is to be completed by the Proposer and signed off by them.

### EDUCATION AUTHORITY COMMENTARY ON PRE-PUBLICATION STATUTORY CONSULTATION

#### Proposer

Provide detail of consultation with the Board of Governors, teachers and parents of the affected school(s) – dates of meetings/letters. Good practice suggests all staff (including non-teaching) should be consulted as well as pupils.

Summary and assessment of views received – how were these taken into account before publication of the DP?

In accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, the Education Authority's Area Planning Service undertook pre-publication consultation with:

- Staff: Consultation Session - 18 November 2019 - 3.00pm
- Board of Governors: Consultation Session - 18 November 2019 - 6.00pm
- Parents/Guardians: Consultation Session - 21 November 2019 – 7.00pm
- Local Schools (22): Letter – 22 November 2019,  
Reissued 2 December 2020

#### **Re-Fresh Pre-Publication Consultation: 6 May 2021–1 July 2021**

On 18 March 2020, as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister announced that schools would close to pupils at the end of the school day on Friday 20 March. This resulted in area planning activity being stood down. Area planning activity was given permission to resume by the Department of Education on 21 October 2020.

In recognition of the time period from the pre-publication consultation, 18 November 2019 to 11 February 2020, it was considered that a re-fresh of the pre-publication consultation should be undertaken.

In accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, the Education Authority's Area Planning Service undertook pre-publication consultation with:

- Staff: Letter and Questionnaire – 6 May 2021
- Board of Governors: Letter and Questionnaire – 6 May 2021
- Parents/Guardians: Letter and Questionnaire – 6 May 2021
- Local Schools (22): Letter and Questionnaire – 6 May 2021

A pre-publication consultation document and response form were available on the Education Authority's website for the periods, 18 November 2019 - 11 February 2020 and 6 May 2021 - 1 July 2021.

The Education Authority received a total of 24 responses (22 from the original pre-publication consultation and 2 from the refresh). The information below provides summary/emerging themes of the responses received.

<b>Table 1: Dunmullan Primary School - Original Pre-Publication Consultation Responses</b>				
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>Total</b>
Governors – Dunmullan PS		4		4
Staff – Teaching and Non-Teaching		5		5
Parents/Guardians		11		11
Other – Ulster Farmers' Union		1		1
Other - Controlled Schools' Support Council			1	1
<b>Refresh Pre-Publication Consultation Responses</b>				
Other (unknown)		1		1
Other - Controlled Schools' Support Council			1	1
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>24</b>

- Concerns over children having to move in their final year of primary school and then again the following year into post-primary.
- Concerns around teachers in larger schools not being able to offer the same time and patience to individual children as is the case in Dunmullan PS.
- The Sustainable Schools Policy (2009) is outdated and should be reviewed before being applied to small schools.
- Do not believe the children would receive a better education in a larger non-rural school.
- Concerns around transport only being provided to the nearest school.
- Composite classes are not detrimental to children's education, as in larger schools the work is differentiated anyhow.
- More time was requested to explore the option around possible amalgamation with St Eugene's PS.
- The school has collaborated with other schools to share and lend resources as part of the shared education partnership with St Eugene's PS but also the bigger Shared Education Hub with McClintock PS, St Colmcille's PS, Roscavey PS and St Eugene's PS. Closure would result in a loss of this important collaboration and sharing of expertise.
- Closing schools in rural areas is of detrimental effect on children's and communities' lives.
- Low school enrolment numbers are a normal feature in rural areas – the enrolment number will increase again as is the pattern of life in a country area.

	<p><b>Section 75</b></p> <p>No Section 75 comments from questionnaires were received.</p>																
<p><b>Confirmation by the Proposer</b></p>	<p>I confirm that the Board of Governors, Staff and Parents of pupils of Dunmullan Primary School were consulted on 18 November 2019 and again on the 6 May 2021. Equality Screening of the proposal has been carried out and the statutory requirements of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 (where appropriate) have been considered.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="539 551 1398 842"> <tr> <td data-bbox="539 551 772 611">Name:</td> <td colspan="3" data-bbox="772 551 1398 611">Michele Corkey</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="539 611 772 672">Office Held:</td> <td colspan="3" data-bbox="772 611 1398 672">Director of Education</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="539 672 772 779">Signed:</td> <td colspan="3" data-bbox="772 672 1398 779"><i>Michele Corkey</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="539 779 772 842">Date:</td> <td colspan="3" data-bbox="772 779 1398 842">7 September 2021</td> </tr> </table>	Name:	Michele Corkey			Office Held:	Director of Education			Signed:	<i>Michele Corkey</i>			Date:	7 September 2021		
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<p><b>Associated Proposals</b></p>	<table border="1" data-bbox="539 896 1437 1128"> <tr> <td data-bbox="539 896 730 999">Proposal</td> <td colspan="3" data-bbox="730 896 1437 999">Gillygooley Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="539 999 730 1128">DP Number</td> <td data-bbox="730 999 831 1128">602</td> <td data-bbox="831 999 1059 1128">Date Published</td> <td data-bbox="1059 999 1437 1128">Strategic Planning and Policy Committee – 7 September 2021</td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" data-bbox="539 1178 1437 1344"> <tr> <td data-bbox="539 1178 730 1281">Proposal</td> <td colspan="3" data-bbox="730 1178 1437 1281">St Eugene's Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="539 1281 730 1344">DP Number</td> <td data-bbox="730 1281 831 1344">666</td> <td data-bbox="831 1281 1059 1344">Date Published</td> <td data-bbox="1059 1281 1437 1344">TBC</td> </tr> </table>	Proposal	Gillygooley Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter.			DP Number	602	Date Published	Strategic Planning and Policy Committee – 7 September 2021	Proposal	St Eugene's Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter.			DP Number	666	Date Published	TBC
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## Case for Change: Statutory Consultation

### EDUCATION AUTHORITY COMMENTARY ON PRE-PUBLICATION STATUTORY CONSULTATION

*The following is to be completed and signed off by the EA.*

#### The Education Authority (EA)

I confirm that the schools which the Education Authority consider might be impacted by this proposal were consulted on 22 November 2019 with a return date of 11 February and again on the 6 May 2021 with a return date of 1 July 2021.

Name:	Michele Corkey
Office Held:	Director of Education
Signed:	
Date:	7 September 2021

Provide detail of consultation with schools that may, in the EA's opinion, be affected by the proposal - list of schools, dates of letters issued to schools/meetings.

Summary of views received (number of responses, recurring themes, petitions, community support or opposition).

Responses/Assurances in respect of issues raised during consultation.

Dates of EA meetings e.g. Education Committee/ Board etc.

Details of issues raised by members of EA Board




In accordance with Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, a copy of the proposal was sent on 22 November 2019 and reissued 2 December 2020, to schools which, in the opinion of the Authority, might be affected by the proposal. A total of 22 local schools were forwarded correspondence. Comments were invited from the Boards of Governors and Trustees, to be returned to the Education Authority by 11 February 2020 and 1 July 2021.

No responses from local schools were received. Two responses were received from the Controlled Schools' Support Council.

#### **Controlled Schools' Support Council**

- Recognises the uncertainty the process brings for pupils, parents and staff.
- EA should endeavour to ensure parents and staff are fully informed of the process and implications.
- Requests that the educational experiences of pupils and the welfare of pupils and staff are paramount throughout all aspects of the consultation.

This development proposal was discussed by the Education Authority's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee at its meeting on 7 September 2021.

<p><b>EDUCATION AUTHORITY COMMENTS</b></p> <p>In the context of planning on an area basis - what is the EA's view of the proposal, taking into account any pre-publication consultation. Does the EA support the proposal?</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Name:</td> <td>Michele Corkey</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Office Held:</td> <td>Director of Education</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Signed:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Date:</td> <td>7 September 2021</td> </tr> </table>	Name:	Michele Corkey	Office Held:	Director of Education	Signed:		Date:	7 September 2021	<p>The Education Authority, as the proposer, supports Development Proposal 603 that Dunmullan Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2022 or as soon as possible thereafter.</p> <p>Pre-publication consultations were undertaken with governors, staff and parents/guardians outlining the Education Authority's Case for Change detailing the rationale for the proposal. During the consultations undertaken with governors, staff and parents/guardians the following recurring themes emerged:</p> <p><b>Relocating children to different local schools</b></p> <p>The Education Authority will, should the proposal be approved, liaise with the parents, local schools, managing authorities and the Department of Education to endeavour to ensure that pupils affected by the proposal be accommodated, where possible and within current guidance/policies.</p> <p><b>Children with Special Educational Needs</b></p> <p>The support, which the Education Authority provides for the pupils, will continue regardless of the school they attend, to ensure that the needs of all children are met and they reach their full potential.</p> <p><b>Alternative Options</b></p> <p>The Education Authority has explored alternative options, inviting suggestions from Dunmullan Primary School's Board of Governors at the meetings held in advance of the pre-publication consultation. The Education Authority is satisfied that a proposal to discontinue is the only sustainable option.</p> <p><b>Composite classes</b></p> <p>The Education and Training Inspectorate's Chief Inspector's Report 2014-16 stated that it is more difficult for a teacher to ensure adequate learning progression and meet all learners' needs in composite classes spanning more than two year groups. It also suggested that such classes can limit children's opportunities for social and emotional development with peers. This was further reinforced in the Education and Training Inspectorate's Chief Inspector's Report 2016-18 which noted that too many schools are too small to provide</p>
Name:	Michele Corkey								
Office Held:	Director of Education								
Signed:									
Date:	7 September 2021								

adequately for their pupils, particularly primary schools with more than two year groups in composite classes.

The Sustainable Schools Policy and the Ministerial priorities note that there should be a minimum of 4 teachers in each primary school, which recognises both the needs of the pupils and the demands on the teachers. Currently Dunmullan Primary School operates as a two teacher school.

**Health and Wellbeing**

The Education Authority in taking forward the proposal, if approved, will work with staff, parents, pupils and schools to endeavour to ensure that all are supported throughout the process

**Sustainable Schools Policy**

Schools for the Future – A Policy for Sustainable Schools is a Department of Education policy and is the key driver for Area Planning.

**Transport**

Any transport arrangements will be in accordance with transport regulations and identified preference school.

**Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016**

The Education Authority has a statutory duty under the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and delivering public services. The areas from which Dunmullan Primary School attracts pupils is, according to the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, defined as rural. The discontinuance of Dunmullan Primary School will have an impact on the local area. The provision of home-to-school transport will provide for the safe transportation of pupils from the area to their nearest school. Transport will be provided for children who meet eligibility criteria.

## 1 BACKGROUND

Dunmullan Primary School is situated in the town land of Knockmoyle, approximately six miles outside Omagh, County Tyrone. Most of the children attending the school come from the surrounding area.

The school serves the community surrounding the school and has an enrolment of 15 pupils. In consideration that the school now operates as a two teacher school and with a declining enrolment, the school was identified in the Annual Action Plan 2019-21 as 'Managing authority to consult on options for future primary provision in Omagh Town by February 2020'.

The school has an approved enrolment of 78 pupils and an admissions number of 11.

Over the past number of years the school has experienced a downturn in enrolment numbers.

Table 1, below, details the historical and current enrolment figures.

<b>Table 1: School Enrolment History</b>									
	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Total
2009/10	3	8	10	13	5	9	7	12	67
2010/11	0	5	9	9	14	5	8	9	59
2011/12	2	4	5	8	10	13	5	9	56
2012/13	2	4	4	5	7	10	13	4	49
2013/14	2	6	4	4	5	8	10	13	52
2014/15	0	4	7	4	2	5	4	10	36
2015/16	0	8	4	7	4	2	5	4	34
2016/17	2	4	8	4	7	4	2	5	36
2017/18	0	4	4	8	4	7	4	2	33
2018/19	1	3	4	4	8	5	7	3	35
2019/20	0	1	3	4	2	8	4	5	27
2020/21	1	0	1	0	3	1	5	4	15

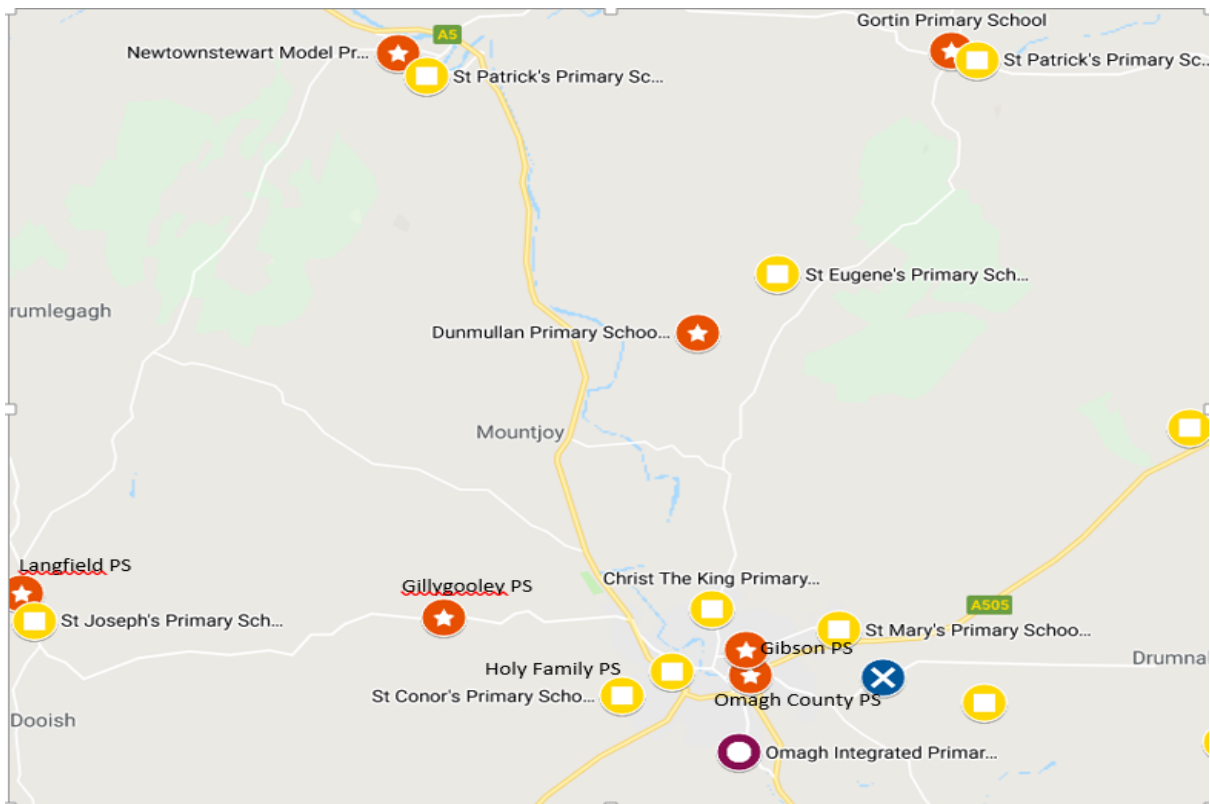
From September 2014, Dunmullan Primary School has experienced a downturn in enrolment. At September 2020, the school had an enrolment of 15 pupils. The school had no Year 1 pupils at September 2020 and with four Year 7 pupils, it is expected that the numbers will fall further in September 2021.

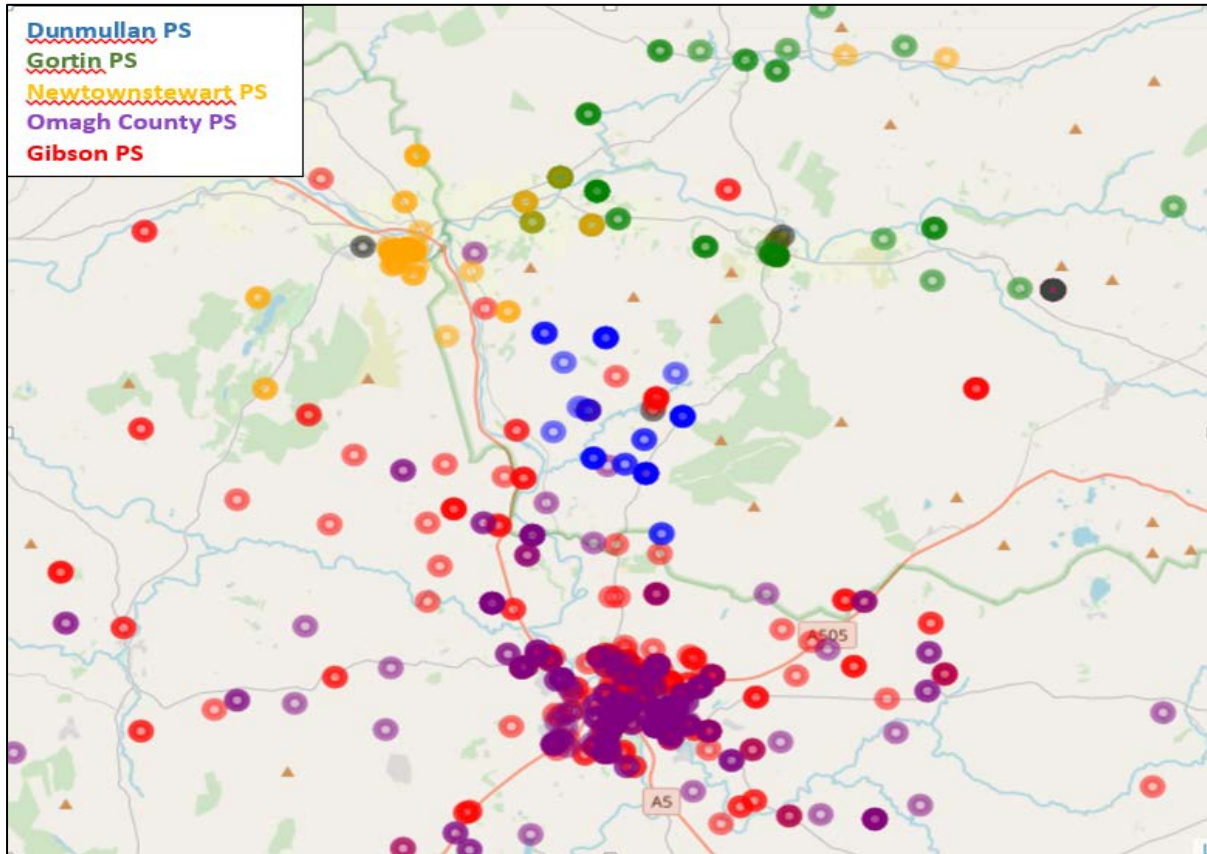
Table 2 lists the schools closest to Dunmullan Primary School. The distribution map below shows in context the pupil distribution and the local schools. There is capacity within the local schools as detailed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Local Schools - Distance from Dunmullan PS**

	Distance (miles) From Dunmullan PS	Sector	Enrolment 2020/21	Approved Enrolment Number 2020/21	Available Places 2020/21
Gibson PS	5.1	Controlled	324	436	112
Omagh County PS	5.4	Controlled	292	393	101
Gortin PS	6.2	Controlled	61	106	45
Newtownstewart PS	6.7	Controlled	66	145	79
Omagh Integrated PS	6.7	Integrated	265	365	100
St Eugene's PS, Tircur	2.0	Maintained	31	48	17
Christ the King PS	4.2	Maintained	181	337	156
St Patrick's PS, Newtownstewart	6.3	Maintained	115	145	30
St Conor's PS	6.1	Maintained	391	408	17
Holy Family PS	5.4	Maintained	373	380	7
St Mary's PS, Killyclogher	5.0	Maintained	316	406	90
St Patrick's PS, Gortin	6.5	Maintained	81	142	61

The maps below show the nearest schools and pupil distribution for Dunmullan Primary School.





In consideration of the distance of the local schools, home-to-school transport arrangements will be implemented within transport regulations.

## 2 SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

The main focus of the Area Planning process is embedded in the Sustainable Schools Policy first published in 2009 and applies to primary and post-primary schools. The policy outlines the criteria that school managing authorities should consider when making decisions affecting the best use of resources in order to deliver an excellent education to children and young people. The policy sets out 6 sustainability criteria, and associated indicators, which are identified as the key references for assessing existing and future education provision to ensure it adequately meets the needs of pupils.

### 2.1 Quality of Education

Dunmullan Primary School is situated in the townland of Knockmoyle, approximately six miles outside Omagh, Co Tyrone. Most of the children attending the school come from the surrounding area.

The enrolment has remained consistently low over the last two years which has resulted in the school operating as a two teacher school.

The Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) focused inspection of Dunmullan Primary School in May 2012, report indicated:

*'The exemplary behaviour of the children, the very good quality of the pastoral care, the very good use made of play-based learning in the foundation stage, the good provision for children requiring additional support with their learning and the valuable links established with the parents, other schools and the wider community.'*

The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out two interim follow-up visits and a follow-up inspection in November 2013.

The school was subsequently involved in a Sustaining Improvement Inspection (SII) in January 2017.

The ETI report indicated:

*'The previous inspection in November 2013, evaluated the overall effectiveness of Dunmullan Primary School as 'good'. In the interim period, a member of staff was appointed to the post of acting principal in September 2015 and to the post of principal in September 2016. The enrolment remains steady at 36 children and includes two children in a reception group.'*

### **Key findings**

- *The staff have developed effectively the role of the co-ordinators and the processes for monitoring and evaluating the children's learning in literacy and numeracy using a range of evidence. The school's internal data indicates a reduction in the number of children underachieving; almost all of the children are achieving good to very good standards in literacy and numeracy including those with additional needs.*
- *The staff have identified appropriately that the children benefit from their increased levels of motivation to learn from exploration and problem-solving activities. A more robust, whole-school approach to monitoring and evaluating the children's scientific and information and communication technology skills is a timely, ongoing priority for development.*
- *The review of the reception provision for a small group of children included more appropriate planning for provision of a pre-school programme based on the requirements of the Curricular Guidance for Pre-School. The early year's assessment system for learning through play remains an ongoing priority for development.*
- *It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff. In addition, the school governors need to review further, the admission criteria to enrol reception age children, throughout the school year, particularly, those who do not have a funded pre-school place.'*

### **ETI Report Conclusion**

*'Dunmullan Primary School continues to demonstrate the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will continue to monitor how the school sustains improvement.'*

## **2.2 Stable Enrolment Trends**

Dunmullan Primary School has, as detailed in Table 1, experienced a downturn in pupil numbers over the last seven years. The September 2020 enrolment was 15 pupils with one reception pupil and no pupils starting in Year 1. Based on admission trends, the school's enrolment is projected to fall further in September 2021. The school's enrolment falls well short of the Sustainable Schools Policy criteria for a rural school, 105 pupils. In addition there are more than two year groups within a classroom as the school operates as a two teacher school.

## **2.3 Sound Financial Position**

Dunmullan Primary School had a deficit of -£28,126 at 31 March 2019 and this deficit increased further to -£34,937 at 31 March 2020. Additionally, it should be noted that Dunmullan Primary School currently does not operate within its in-year budget.

## **2.4 Strong Leadership and Management**

A new principal was appointed in 2016. The ETI report on Sustaining Improvement Inspection in January 2017 stated that the:

*'The staff have developed effectively the role of the co-ordinators and the processes for monitoring and evaluating the children's learning in literacy and numeracy using a range of evidence. The school's internal data indicates a reduction in the number of children underachieving; almost all of the children are achieving good to very good standards in literacy and numeracy including those with additional needs.'*

*The staff have identified appropriately that the children benefit from their increased levels of motivation to learn from exploration and problem-solving activities. A more robust, whole-school approach to monitoring and evaluating the children's scientific and information and communication technology skills is a timely, ongoing priority for development.'*

## **2.5 Accessibility**

The school can be accessed by car and bus. The majority of pupils attending the school are from the local area.

## **2.6 Strong Links with the Community**

The school has links with the community as the school sits within the centre of close knit rural community.

Dunmullan Primary School has a very strong PTA committee and events such as table quizzes, summer BBQ and fun nights, community walks in the local Gortin Glen forest park, Christmas party, Halloween discos are all very well supported by parents, friends and local neighbours. The school has also organised Pilates Classes and Jiving Classes which take place over a number of weeks in the winter months.

The local Glens History Group visits the school regularly and pupils took part in a local concert organised by the History Group. Another social event was a 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party which was attended by over 200 people. Visitors travelled from as far as away as Larne, Donegal and Portstewart to attend this event.

The school also takes part in CASE Shared Education, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council Environmental Youth Speak, Music Service for Pipes & Drums cic, The Cancer Focus Healthy Living Programme, Omagh Feis and Omagh Show Artwork. The pupils also attend local Churches to take in their services to sing various pieces of music. Local Clergy take weekly assemblies and special assemblies are held at different times throughout the year.

Dunmullan Primary School supports a different Charity every year and the pupils organise various fundraising events throughout their school year before presenting a substantial amount to the Charity Representative at the end of June. Pupils organise a Poppy Collection every November and at Christmas time pupils collect items for a local refuge centre.

The school holds yearly Christmas plays which are supported by families, friends and neighbours. The pupils also visit the two local homes for the elderly at Christmas to perform Christmas Carols. Pupils also visit Knockmoyle Care Home twice a month and they enjoy their artwork and craft activities with the residents.

Dunmullan Primary School has many After School Clubs – Basketball, Gardening Club, Cycling Proficiency, Netball Club, Keep Fit, Junk Art, Photography Class, Learn French and Guitar Lessons.

Pupils take part in many school trips throughout the year – Omagh Library, We are Vertigo, Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh Show, Gortin Glens, Marble Arch Caves, Ulster Transport Museum, Strule Arts Centre to name but a few.

The school organises a Book Fair every year which raises funds for the School Library and the neighbouring community are invited to come along and spend an afternoon in school enjoying the company of the pupils.

Sports Day is another social day with friends and neighbours invited to spend the day at school and enjoy a lunchtime with everyone. The pupils also take part in the Omagh Leisure Centre swimming tournament each year and have taken part in annual Football tournaments run by the local council.

Past pupils return to school to take part in Work Experience and this important time in a student's path of discovery cannot be underestimated.

Dunmullan Primary School's Shared Education link with St Eugene's Primary School has been ongoing for a long of years and many of our pupils' parents also shared this experience when they attended Dunmullan Primary School with lasting friendships made for many years.

The school also has an information session for parents at the start of each school year with all key documents available to parents. Annual meetings to discuss pupils' progress are also held.

### 3 AREA PLANNING IMPACT

The proposal aligns with the key themes of Area Planning. The Area Plan for Northern Ireland aims to ensure that all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs in sustainable schools within a diverse system of education. It sets out the key priorities and objectives in providing access to a network of sustainable schools for the Education Authority, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectoral bodies in the light of Department of Education policy, in particular the need to raise standards and close the attainment gap through a network of sustainable schools. The focus of the plan is on the educational best interests of children and young people.

Since 2011, statutory planning authorities and school managing authorities have been engaged in implementing the objectives of the Sustainable Schools Policy through Area Planning. The first four objectives are:

- ensure that the excellent quality of education available to some young people is made available to all, in both urban and rural settings, in accessible, modern, fit-for-purpose accommodation;
- improve outcomes for all but, in particular, to provide additional support to those who require it, including those children with special educational needs, to realise their full potential;
- encourage schools to co-operate in sharing best practice to support children with special educational needs and those with other barriers to learning; and
- sustain strong, successful and viable schools, well-led by their governors representing local stakeholders, principals and their staff, to be the centre of the education system, supported by effective administrative and strategic direction;

As detailed in above, Area Planning is focused on the Sustainable Schools Policy. In October 2016, in the publication of the draft Education Authority's Providing Pathways - Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-2020, the Minister of Education, Peter Weir, MLA, stated:

*'The Sustainable Schools Policy, which is implemented through the Area Planning process, focuses on providing children and young people with high quality education that meets their needs and enables them to achieve their full potential.....*

*The educational experience of our children and young people is greatly enhanced when they attend schools that are educationally and financially viable. The Sustainable Schools Policy is a framework for assessment of the sustainability of primary and post-primary schools. The six criteria and supporting indicators clearly illustrate what a sustainable educational experience should look like. Schools must: deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, offer extensive extracurricular activities, have high quality pastoral care systems and have the confidence of the communities they serve.*

*In primary schools pupils should be in a class with no more than two year groups but ideally they should be in single year group classes. They should be able to interact with peer groups and have the best chances to prepare for successful transition to post primary school. .... However there are still a significant number of schools that are struggling, for a wide range of reasons, to deliver the best for their pupils. This is particularly evident in the primary sector and, despite the best effort of teachers, it becomes harder to deliver a high quality education*

*if pupils are taught in composite classes. We have too many small primary schools with more than two year groups in a single class. ....'.*

The Providing Pathways Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-2020 Annual Action Plans for Primary, Post-Primary and Special Schools 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019-21 identified a key issue for the Omagh Town and surrounding area 'address school provision where sustainability is an issue and ensure school places are located as required' with the action 'Managing authorities to consult on options for future primary provision in Omagh Town and surrounding area by February 2020'. As a result the Education Authority engaged with the Board of Governors of Dunmullan Primary School as a school within the area operating as a two teacher school. Engagement discussions focused on the current position of the school and sustainable options for the school. Discussion focused on five options:

### **3.1 Do Nothing**

This option would result in no change to the current provision. In consideration of the Annual Action Plan, the downturn in enrolment numbers and the school's financial position, do nothing is not an option.

### **3.2 Shared Education**

Dunmullan Primary School is part of a partnership with St Eugene's Primary School, Tircur and engages in shared educational experiences and in promoting cross-community links.

As the Education Authority has a duty to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education the Education Authority discussed the potential for sustainable shared education within the area. However, given the close proximity of the school to other schools, a shared solution would not improve the sustainability of Dunmullan Primary School.

### **3.3 Federation**

A federation would involve local schools coming together either through a soft federation or hard federation. A soft federation would provide each school with its own governing body, own budget, with representatives on a joint committee. The schools would share a Principal, common goals, joint committee recommendations but it would be up to the individual governing bodies to authorise decisions/plans. A hard federation would provide for a single governing body with common goals and while each school would receive individual budgets, these could be used to pool budgets across the schools in the federation. In considering a federation, the sustainability of a federated school within the local area would not provide for a sustainable provision and would not improve the financial position of the school.

### **3.4 Amalgamation**

As with the options above, sustainability is an issue. The area is served by four schools, Gortin Primary School, Newtownstewart Primary School, Gibson Primary School and Omagh County Primary School. Due to the size of Dunmullan Primary School an amalgamation was not considered as both Gibson Primary School and Omagh County Primary School are not of a similar size. An amalgamation with either Gortin Primary School or Newtownstewart Primary School would not provide for sustainable provision.

### **3.5 Discontinue**

In considering the future of Dunmullan Primary School, all of the options for the school did not provide a sustainable provision for the school. In discussions with the Board of Governors, there was disappointment that the work of the governors could not provide a sustainable solution for the school. Governors put forward proposals to promote the school. However, with only one pupil in Year 1 for September 2019, none in 2020 and current enrolment trends not projecting an upturn in numbers, sustainability is difficult. The Education Authority recognises the commitment of the governors but the current circumstances would not provide for the curricular provision of pupils currently attending Dunmullan Primary School.

In consideration of the options above, the Education Authority recommends that Dunmullan Primary School discontinues with effect from 31 August 2022.

Within the Omagh Town area, the Education Authority is engaging with Gillygooley Primary School. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools is undertaking pre-publication consultation on the proposed discontinuance of St Eugene's Primary School, Tircur.

## **4 RATIONALE FOR PROPOSAL**

Dunmullan Primary School has always been a small primary school with an enrolment over the past seven years not exceeding 40 pupils. The school was identified in the Annual Action Plans 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019-21, identified as a 'school provision where sustainability is an issue' with the action 'Managing authority to consult on options for future primary provision in Omagh Town and surrounding area by February 2020.'

In September 2020, the school admitted no pupils into Year 1. This has resulted in the enrolment falling to 15 pupils with projections that the enrolment may fall further in September 2021. This will place increased pressure on the financial resources of the school and also on the teaching staff.

Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 places a statutory duty on the Education Authority to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and designing and delivering public services. The areas from which Dunmullan Primary School attracts pupils is, according to the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, defined as rural. The discontinuance of Dunmullan Primary School will have an impact on the local area. The provision of home-to-school transport will provide for the safe transportation of pupils from the area to their nearest school.

## **5 EDUCATIONAL IMPACT**

The proposal would provide for the education needs of pupils in the area. Dunmullan Primary School has a declining enrolment and, as a two teacher school, this places pressure on the staff at the school.

The schools within the area received good/very good/ outstanding ETI reports and can provide for the educational needs of the pupils of the area. All the local schools have capacity. Resulting from the outcome of consultations with parents/guardians, discussions will be undertaken with the local schools regarding in year group capacity. The larger local schools

have pupil numbers which meet the Sustainable School Policy of no more than two year groups in a classroom. The larger schools will enhance the learning experience of pupils in the provision of after school activities and having class sizes to facilitate participation both in school and inter-school activities eg sports teams and extra-curricular activities.

The pupils from Dunmullan Primary School who have special educational requirements will continue to have these needs met within the local schools and supported through the Education Authority's Children and Young People's Service.

## **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

The proposal is for the discontinuance of Dunmullan Primary School. As there are currently unfilled places within the local schools, there may be a requirement for additional accommodation to facilitate the relocation of pupils (to be identified by parental preference resulting from the consultation process). There will be a cost saving in the recurrent costs of operating a school.

*Finance*                      The operation cost of Dunmullan Primary School will be a cost saving from this proposal.

*Staffing*                      The teaching staff is afforded employment protection under the School Re-organisation Agreement 2013/2 for two years. The non-teaching staff will be afforded employment protection for one year. The Education Authority will meet with staff to discuss options should the development proposal be approved and an action plan implemented for the discontinuance of the school.

*Transport*                      The discontinuance of Dunmullan Primary School would require the provision of home-to-school transport for a larger number of pupils. Communication with the Education Authority transport service is ongoing. Any transport arrangement will be in accordance with transport regulations and identified preference school.

*Accommodation*              No additional accommodation needs.

## 7 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (IF THE PROPOSAL IS APPROVED)

The proposal is being brought forward under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. The implementation date for the proposal is for 31 August 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter. The timetable, pending approval from the Strategic Planning and Policy Committee for the consultation process is:

<b>Development Proposal Timeline</b>	
<b>Proposal: Dunmullan Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter</b>	<b>Proposed Timeline</b>
<p>Re-fresh pre-publication consultation with Governors, Staff, Parents – (8 weeks)</p> <p>Consultation Responses to be forwarded to the Education Authority.</p> <p>Responses will be considered and a Case for Change document compiled before submission to the Education Authority’s Strategic Planning and Policy Committee. A deputation from the Board of Governors may also choose to attend the Strategic Planning and Policy Committee or the Board meeting.</p>	6 May 2021 – 1 July 2021
<p>Re-fresh pre-publication consultation with other affected Schools - (8 weeks)</p> <p>Consultation Responses to be forwarded to the Education Authority</p> <p>Responses will be considered and a Case for Change document compiled before submission to the Education Authority’s Strategic Planning and Policy Committee.</p>	6 May 2021 – 1 July 2021
<p>Strategic Planning and Policy Committee to seek Approval To Publish</p> <p>Case for Change to be taken to the September 2021 Education Authority’s Strategic Planning and Policy Committee for consideration.</p> <p>If approved to publish, a Development Proposal will be published in the local newspapers which begins the start of a two month statutory objection period.</p>	7 September 2021
<p>Statutory Objection Period (2 months)</p> <p>Objections/comments to be forwarded to the Department of Education</p>	September – November 2021
Await Ministerial/Department of Education Decision	January 2022
<p><b>Implementation</b></p> <p>If approved, the Development Proposal would take effect from 31 August 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter.</p>	