

Area Planning

Case for Change

Straid Primary School

Development Proposal No 623

Proposal to: Discontinue

Case for Change: Supporting Information - Summary/Overview	
Area Planning District	Antrim and Newtownabbey
Development Proposal Number	623
Proposer	Michele Corkey Director of Education Education Authority
School(s) Name	Straid Primary School
School(s) Reference	301-0570
Sector	Primary
Management	Controlled
Development Proposal Publication Date	Week commencing 20 September 2021
Proposal	Straid Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter

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?

Pre-Publication Consultation Period: 10 March 2020 to 21 May 2020

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 - 10 March 2020 - 3.30pm
- Board of Governors: Consultation Session - 10 March 2020 - 5.30pm
- Parents/Guardians: Consultation Session - 10 March 2020 - 7.00pm
- Local Schools (32): Letter – 12 March 2020

Re-Start Pre-Publication Consultation Period: 6 May 2021 to 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 2020. This resulted in area planning activity being stood down. Area planning activity was given permission to resume by the Department of Education on 8 October 2020.

In recognition of the time period from the pre-publication consultation, 10 March 2020 to 21 May 2020, it was considered that a re-start 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 to 1 July 2021
- Board of Governors: Letter and Questionnaire: 6 May 2021 to 1 July 2021
- Parents/Guardians: Letter and Questionnaire: 6 May 2021 to 1 July 2021
- Local Schools (32): Letter and Questionnaire: 6 May 2021 to 1 July 2021

The Education Authority received a total of 89 responses. The information below provides a summary/emerging themes of the responses received.

Respondent	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Total
Board of Governors		1		1
Board of Governors – Affected Schools		2		2
Governors	1	1		2
Staff – Teaching/Non-Teaching		1		1
Parents/Guardians		43		43
Pupils		4		4
Other - Past Pupil/Parent of Past Pupil		5		5
Other - Grandparents		5		5
Other - Straid Village and District Community Group and Women's Institute		2		2
Other – Local Residents		17		17
Other – Local Business		1		1
Other – Controlled Schools' Support Council			1	1
Other – Unknown	1	4		5
Total Responses	2	86	1	89

A summary of comments in support of the proposal:

- Enrolment numbers clearly indicate that there is no longer viable support from within the community. With small numbers children do not have the breadth of experience or opportunity that will prepare them fully for secondary school.
- Smaller classes do not equate to better teaching and small staff numbers make the logistics of fulfilling all the roles and responsibilities difficult and expensive.
- One larger school would mean that students would get access to a more enriched education and this could be more attractive to new teachers. It would also be a more efficient use of money. Ballynure PS site may need to be relocated to a new, bigger site as it doesn't have scope for expansion and has poor outdoor space.

A summary of comments not in support of the proposal:

- We are told the six criteria in the Sustainable Schools Policy are equally weighted.
- The activities of EA related to Area Planning have undermined this provision by repeatedly putting the future of the school up for debate.
- It must be noted that the argument to close small schools, it seems, is to save money.
- It is of prime importance at this time that we consider the needs of our children. In the last 18 months they have experienced tremendous and damaging upset to their education and social life.

- Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK where the numerical viability headcount is the same in small rural communities as in much larger urban settings.
- The closure of the school creates difficulty in the drop up and pick up of children.
- Other schools in the area, like Ballynure PS or Ballyclare PS, have already heavy pedestrian and vehicle traffic at both those schools.
- Do not wish to see the additional traffic that is likely to be brought by additional parents and children attending Ballynure PS.
- The school fosters positive community links with eg the WI, village association and church.
- At present class sizes are small allowing teaching and non-teaching staff to cater for the needs of all children including those with SEN. The school provides quality teaching and learning opportunities as evidenced in the inspection report. There is a high level of pastoral care where the children feel valued, safe and supported.
- Straid PS is an integral part of the rural community
- The community in Straid depends on the school, for a place to gather and hold meetings, to bring people together.
- The larger sized schools and classes do not suit every child and a one size fits all approach cannot be applied to education. Many children require a smaller, more personal approach in order to thrive. Therefore, the closure of these schools is a discrimination against those children.
- Believe that the number of pupils to teacher ratio would allow our child to receive a greater 1:1 tuition than any large school can offer.
- Should be given time and opportunity to re-build their numbers without the threat of closure putting off perspective parents.
- Some parents have started to move their children because of the way the consultation is written as if it is a foregone conclusion that the school will close - which is completely unfair and sneaky.
- When the current Principal was appointed, she was assured by the EA that she would be given time to work to turn things around at Straid. The EA did not honour its commitment to support the school through the brief downturn in numbers.
- Parental choice to choose a small rural primary school is being denied.
- The impact on pupils' emotional wellbeing, together with Ballynure PS being overcrowded, reduced outdoor space and parking and traffic will also be an issue.
- Consultation at this time has already caused a significant increase in stress and is unfair and unjustified at this time.
- Disgusted with only one meeting directly before Covid lockdown.
- Awaiting responses to questions submitted.
- Straid PS is a very safe environment in respect of covid-19 protocols and restrictions. Due to the small size of the school, social distancing has been adhered to at all times.
- The EA's definition of rural is totally inadequate. To claim that anywhere outside of Belfast and Londonderry is rural shows a total lack of understanding of truly rural communities.
- Children are being discriminated against for living in a rural setting.

- Would like to point out that the document produced is factually incorrect, in that it repeatedly states that the school enrolment numbers have consistently declined over the past years, when in fact the numbers have increased since 2018/2019.
- It is felt that the EA has not taken into account the increase in live births within the Ballynure electoral ward.
- The EA has not fully considered the 3 Tier Model and should have more evidence included for improved quality of education and the benefits of removing composite classes.
- The school shouldn't close because it's been there for 190 years.
- My teachers are the best and I don't want to be separated from my friends. We know each other very well as there are not many other boys and girls in the class.
- I'm scared about going to a new school.
- Would appeal to the Education Authority to rethink its plans for Straid PS. This school is central to our community and our members have supported the school for many years. The closure of Straid PS would mean the closure of the Straid's Women's Institute, an educational and social facility for the women of this district.
- Historical Society have a great desire to retain the unique identity of our village and the retention of Straid PS is key to this.
- Straid PS has been an integral part of the area for many years, closing it will force children to travel unnecessarily while tearing the heart out of the village community.

Section 75

15 responses commented on Section 75. These responses, together with all of the responses to the consultation, have been taken into account when undertaking the equality and rural screening of the proposal.

- Straid PS is an all-inclusive school who caters for the individual needs of children to the highest order! It is necessary to keep the lines of communication wide open in the active community.
- The support that students with learning difficulties and disabilities will be impacted and their ability to adapt to a new environment will be deeply challenged. The plan offers no support in this.
- I have some great friends at school, and they are in all different age groups.
- Kids can all go to Straid PS and it doesn't matter what their religion is and they can all be friends.
- If the closure gets the approval from the board at the EA this will have an adverse effect on the mental wellbeing of children.
- Closing the school would prevent people of different religions and age coming together.
- The proposal discriminates against anyone to have the choice to send their child to a rural school with reasonable class sizes. This takes away the identity of rural children and forced them to travel further for education.

Confirmation by the Proposer	I confirm that the Board of Governors, Staff and Parents of pupils of Straid Primary School were consulted on 10 March 2020 and 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.																		
	Name:	Michele Corkey																	
	Office Held:	Director of Education																	
	Signed:																		
	Date:	7 September 2021																	
Associated Proposals	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Proposal</td> <td colspan="3">Ballynure Primary School will increase its admissions number from 22 to 30, with an increase in the enrolment number from 154 to 210 with effect from 1 September 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DP Number</td> <td>625</td> <td>Date Published</td> <td>Strategic Planning and Policy Committee – 7 September 2021</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Proposal</td> <td colspan="3">Upper Ballyboley Primary School will discontinue with effect from 1 September 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DP Number</td> <td>624</td> <td>Date Published</td> <td>Strategic Planning and Policy Committee – 7 September 2021</td> </tr> </table>			Proposal	Ballynure Primary School will increase its admissions number from 22 to 30, with an increase in the enrolment number from 154 to 210 with effect from 1 September 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter.			DP Number	625	Date Published	Strategic Planning and Policy Committee – 7 September 2021	Proposal	Upper Ballyboley Primary School will discontinue with effect from 1 September 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter.			DP Number	624	Date Published	Strategic Planning and Policy Committee – 7 September 2021
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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 12 March 2020 (suspended) and **6 May 2021** with a return date of 21 May 2020 (suspended) and **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 12 March 2020 (suspended) and 6 May 2021, to schools which, in the opinion of the Education Authority, might be affected by the proposal. A total of 32 local schools which might be affected by the proposal were forwarded correspondence. Comments were invited from the Boards of Governors and Trustees, to be returned to the Education Authority by 21 May 2020 (suspended) and 1 July 2021.

Two responses were received from affected schools. One response was received from the Controlled Schools' Support Council.

Doagh PS and Toreagh PS - Do not support the proposal

- Wish to express our support for Straid PS in their campaign against closure in September 2023. A village school is more than a place for teaching and learning – it is a hub of the community for everyone and we sincerely and strongly support them in their endeavour to remain an essential part of Straid village as they have been for years.
- The Governors of Toreagh PS would ask that Toreagh is put forward as an alternative school for the children of Straid when it closes. As a school, we

would like to take those children for whom Toreagh is the closest school.

Controlled Schools' Support Council

- Notes the low enrolment in Straid PS and recognises the challenges this presents for the Board of Governors and staff. In all aspects of the consultation CSSC would request that the educational experiences of the pupils and staff are paramount.
- Without pre-empting the decision to progress these proposals and ultimately the outcome, CSSC would emphasise the importance of ensuring sufficient capacity in alternative controlled schools for those children displaced from Straid PS.
- If the Education Authority is minded to progress the proposal to discontinue Straid PS, CSSC would support the proposed increase to the admissions and enrolment numbers at Ballynure PS whilst being mindful of the potential for parental preferences to indicate a preference for other controlled provision in the area.

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

EDUCATION AUTHORITY COMMENTS

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?

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

The Education Authority, as the proposer, supports Development Proposal 623 that Straid Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter.

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:

Availability of places and accommodation in local schools

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. The Education Authority recognises that there are limited places within the local area, hence the associated Development Proposal to increase the admissions and enrolment numbers in Ballynure Primary School. The Education Authority also acknowledges there are other schools within the local area with some additional capacity.

Children with Special Educational Needs

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.

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 Straid Primary School attracts pupils is, according to the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, defined as rural. The discontinuance of Straid 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.

Increased Enrolment Numbers

Concern was expressed that the consultation document inaccurately reported that pupil numbers had declined since 2009. The final Case for Change has been updated to reflect the upturn of 8 pupils for the 2020/21 year from the previous year and also indicating a projected slight decrease in pupil numbers for 2021/22.

1 BACKGROUND

Straid Controlled Primary School is situated in the village of Straid in County Antrim. The majority of the children attending the school come from the village and within a five mile radius of the school.

The school serves the community surrounding the school and has an enrolment of 53 pupils. In consideration of a declining enrolment, the school was identified in the 2018/19 Annual Action Plan as 'Managing Authority to consult on options for future provision by March 2019.

Straid Primary School is a three class base primary school, has four teachers with composite classes for Years 1-2, Years 3-4, Year 5-6 and Years 6-7. There are four non-teaching staff.

1.1 Statistical Information

The school has an approved enrolment of 119 pupils and an admissions number of 17.

The school experienced a downturn in enrolment numbers from 2015/16 until 2018/19. There was an upturn in numbers of 8 pupils in 2020/21 and there is a projected slight decrease in pupil numbers for 2021/22. Table 1, below, details the historical and current enrolment figures.

Table 1: Enrolment Statistics – Straid Primary School									
	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Total
2013/14	0	9	13	7	12	13	15	10	79
2014/15	0	11	9	13	7	12	14	15	81
2015/16	0	9	11	9	12	7	13	13	74
2016/17	0	10	9	10	9	9	7	12	66
2017/18	0	7	8	7	6	6	3	6	43
2018/19	0	9	6	8	6	5	3	4	41
2019/20	0	6	8	7	6	7	6	5	45
2020/21	0	10	6	9	8	7	7	6	53

The enrolment statistics show that the school population numbers have declined since 2009 resulting in 53 pupils currently enrolled at the school (based on DE Enrolment census figures).

Table 2 lists the schools closest to Straid 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.

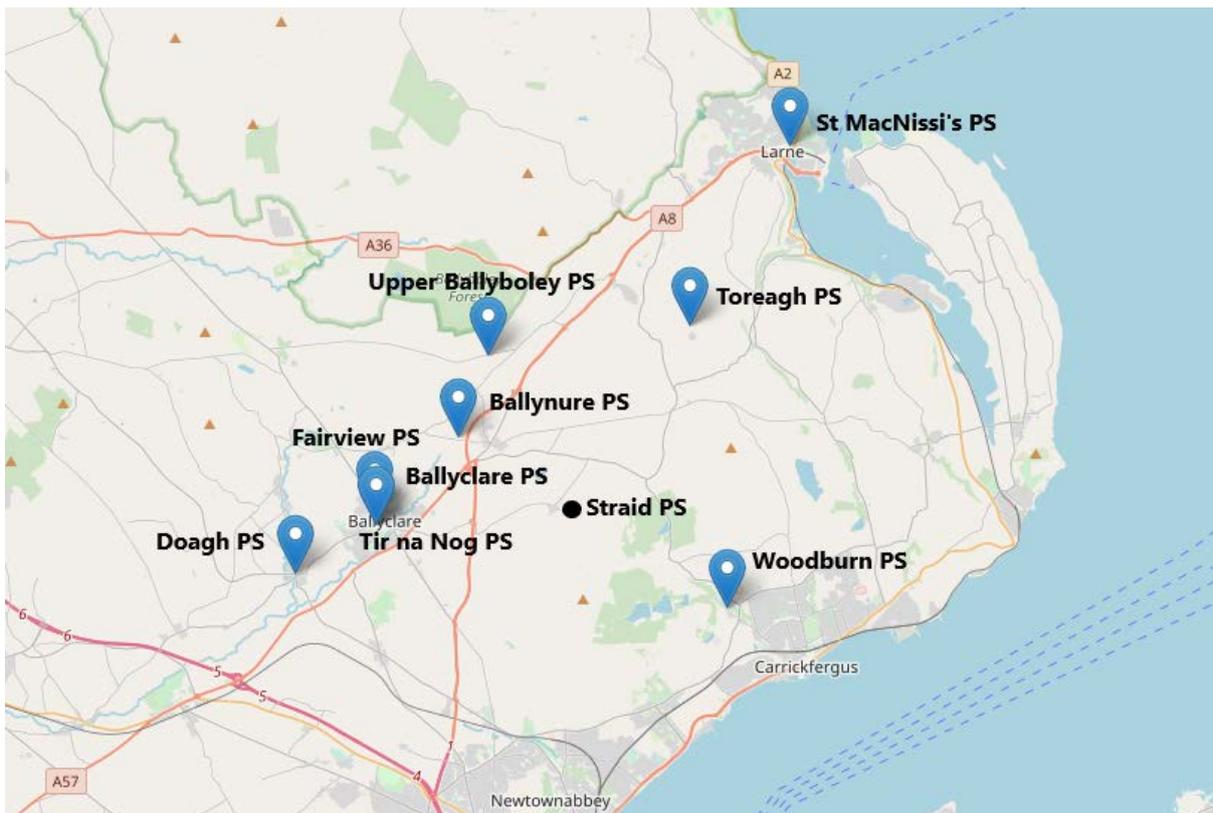
Table 2: Local Schools – Distance from Straid Primary School

	Distance (miles) From Straid Primary School	Sector	Enrolment 2020/21	Approved Enrolment Number 2020/21	Available Places 2020/21
Straid Primary School	-	Controlled	53	119	66
Ballynure Primary School*	1.9	Controlled	148	154	6
Upper Ballyboley Primary School**	5.0	Controlled	28	100	72
Toreagh Primary School	4.7	Controlled	111	105	0
Mossley Primary School	4.9	Controlled	609	610	1
Ballyclare Primary School	3.7	Controlled	555	572	17
Fairview Primary School	4.1	Controlled	501	525	24
St Macnissi's Primary School	5.2	Maintained	185	210	25
Woodburn Primary School	4.2	Controlled	188	193	5
Woodlawn Primary School	5.4	Controlled	180	310	130
Earlview Primary School	5.5	Controlled	227	221	0
Doagh Primary School	5.7	Controlled	115	138	23

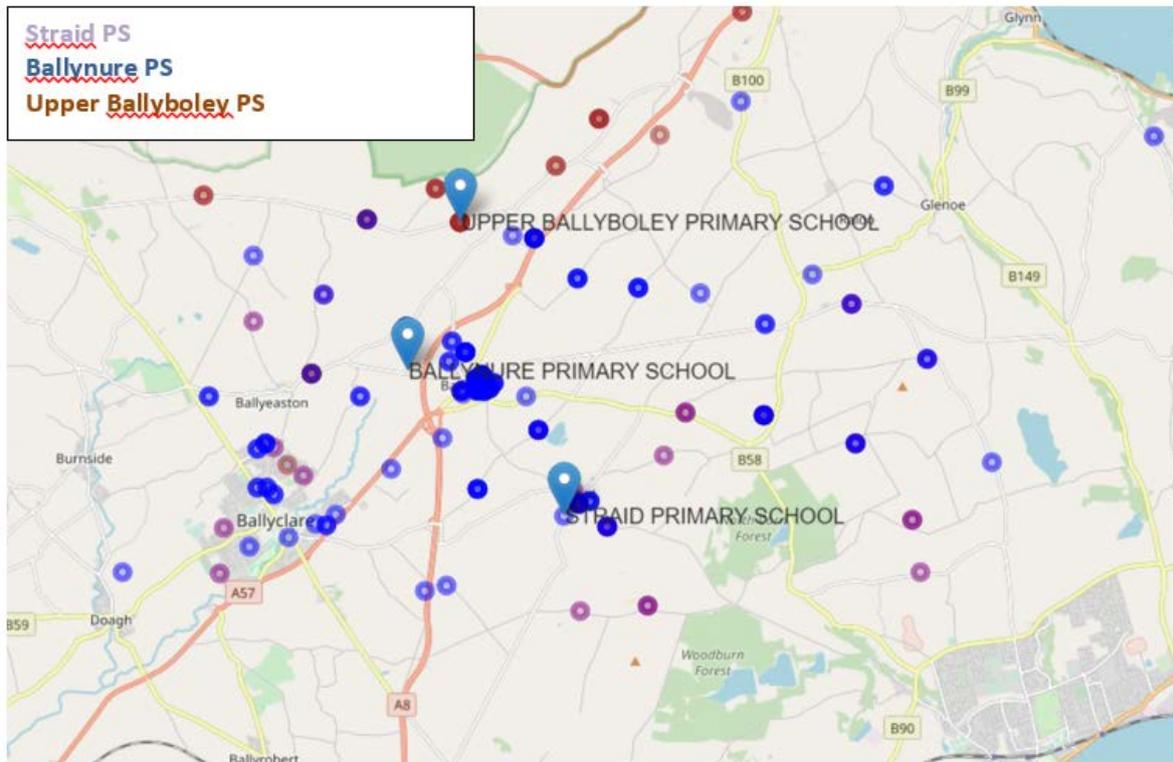
* associated proposal to increase the Ballynure Primary School's admission and enrolment number

** proposal to discontinue Upper Ballyboley Primary School is being brought forward by the Education Authority

Map 1: Highlights the schools within the surrounding area



Map 2: Highlights the current pupils attending Ballynure Primary School, Straid Primary School and Upper Ballyboley Primary School



Analysis of the above information shows there are a number of available places in the alternative schools. In terms of the existing catchment, there are a number of children within the Straid Primary School area attending other local schools, particularly Ballynure Primary School. The Education Authority is taking forward a development proposal to increase provision within the area through a proposed increase in the admission and enrolment numbers at Ballynure 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

Straid Primary School is a controlled primary school situated in a rural community of approximately 3.8 miles from the town of Ballyclare. The majority of the children attending the

school come from the surrounding area. The school enrolment has experienced a decline in pupil numbers over the past number of years.

An ETI inspection was undertaken in October 2011 with the overall findings of the inspection as very good:

The ETI report indicated:

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children, and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

The most recent ETI inspection was conducted in March 2019 (Involving Action Short of Strike), while the inspection still proceeded, it was not possible for ETI to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership and governance; impact of middle leadership; and action to promote and sustain improvement.

2.2 Stable Enrolment Trends

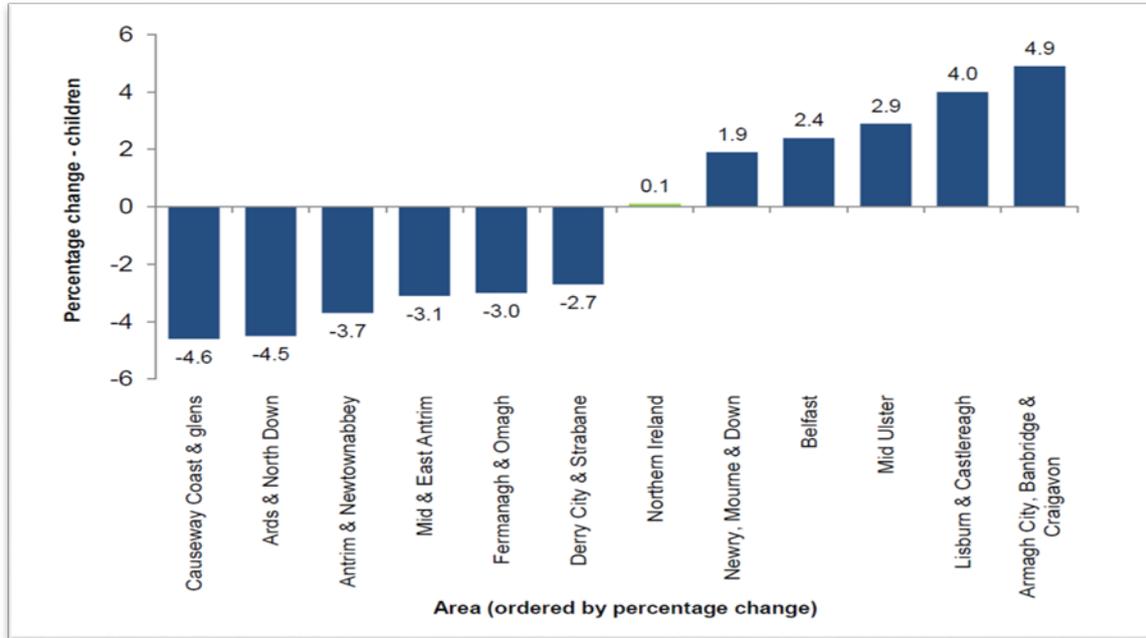
The school experienced a downturn in enrolment numbers from 2015/16 until 2018/19. The September 2019 enrolment was 45 pupils. There was an upturn in numbers of 8 pupils in 2020/21 and there is a projected slight decrease in pupil numbers for 2021/22, see Table 1 above. The school enrolled 10 Year 1 pupils in September 2020, and as a consequence the enrolment is 53 pupils. The school's enrolment falls well short of the Sustainable Schools Policy criteria for a rural school of 105 pupils.

2.3 Population Change

Table 3 indicates a projected population reduction of children aged 0-15 years, within the Antrim and Newtownabbey LGD between mid-2016 and mid-2026. In Mid and East Antrim LGD there is also a reduction of 3.1% between mid-2016 and mid-2026. In addition the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency predicts the population of children (4-11 years), in the Antrim and Newtownabbey to decrease by 5.9% (mid-2016 to mid-2026) and similarly the prediction for the reduction of 4-11 year olds in the Mid and East Antrim LGD is 9.4%

Table 3: Projected Population Change

Projected Change in Number of Children (i.e. those aged 0-15) by Local Government District (mid-2016 to mid-2026) (Source: NISRA)



The live birth information is:

Table 4 – Live Births (Source: NISRA)

Ward Name	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	% Change from 2010 to 2018
Ballynure*	33	27	27	29	34	34	40	35	35	+6%
Kilwaughter	87	93	93	95	88	93	60	74	89	+3%
Glenwhirry	37	28	36	22	36	36	40	29	29	-22%
Doagh	51	46	51	39	52	46	42	53	34	-33%
Ballyclare Nth	51	60	49	44	52	68	49	44	61	+19%
Ballyclare Sth	71	42	63	64	42	47	41	34	42	-40%
Glynn	20	12	20	18	9	16	18	15	17	-15%
Woodburn	32	22	31	23	23	25	24	15	25	-22%
Total	382	330	370	334	336	365	314	299	332	
Year 1 - Year	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	

*Straid Primary School is located in the Ballynure Electoral Ward

2.4 Sound Financial Position

Straid Primary School does not operate within its in-year budget. At March 2021 it had a deficit of -£162,922. It is projected that by the end of the current three year financial plan (2020-2023) the school will have a deficit of -£320,561.

Table 5 shows the school's position compared to the sector average:

Table 5: Sector Averages				
Straid Primary School	Sector Average*	Year 1 (2019-2020)	Year 2 (2020-2021)	Year 3 (2021-2022)
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	17.5	15	15.29	15.29
Expenditure per Pupil	£4,477	£5,543	£5,703	£6,111
Staff Costs per Pupil	£4,308	£5,372	£5,438	£5,834

*Planning assumptions include Cost of Living Pay Award Estimate at 1% each year and estimated rate of inflation for Other Costs as 2% each year

Small Schools Support

The Small Schools Support factor is intended to target more resources towards smaller primary schools to facilitate the delivery of the curriculum. The amount to be allocated to eligible schools is determined by the number of pupils in the school. A lump sum equivalent to 1.0 times the salary (inclusive of employee and employer contributions) of a teacher on point UPS 1 of the Teachers' Upper Pay Scale as at October 2017, will be allocated to schools of up to 100 pupils tapering to zero at 300 pupils.

Straid Primary School receives the maximum amount of £47,726.

Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) Common Funding Formula, the level of funding is determined by pupil numbers. In a declining enrolment it is more challenging to live within the budget allocation.

2.5 Strong Leadership and Management

Straid Primary School operates with 4 teachers, including a teaching principal, appointed in April 2019 (in a temporary capacity).

The ETI report in October 2011 stated that the quality of leadership and management of the school was very good.

The Principal has been in post for 12 years, and gives very high priority to the current and future development and sustainability of the school. She has been successful in establishing a wide range of effective links with the local community and further afield through, for example, the Comenius programme. She holds a very high regard for the children's well-being and education and the welfare of the staff.

There are appropriate action plans to support the school development plan (SDP) and performance data is being used effectively to identify priorities for development. There is a developing culture of self-evaluation across the school to bring about improvement. There are many examples of where the school has self-evaluated aspects of the provision and put

in place developments which have led to improvement. Through this process the school has identified appropriate priorities for further development.

The leadership and management of literacy, numeracy, ICT and SEN is very effective. The school has appropriately identified the need to develop the role of co-ordinators further in supporting curricular changes and enhancing professional development.

It should be noted that subsequent to Straid Primary School's ETI Inspection in 2011 the school has since had two changes of school principal, one of whom has also now moved post and the most recent principal appointment commenced in April 2019 in a temporary capacity at the start of 2019/20 school year.

2.6 Accessibility

Straid Primary School is situated in a rural community, with a number of pupils transported to school by bus and car.

Many of the pupils already attending Straid Primary School come from the same geographical area as those pupils attending Upper Ballyboley Primary School and Ballynure Primary School - See Map 2.

2.7 Strong Links with the Community

Straid Primary School has excellent and long standing relationships with parents and the community e.g. The Women's Institute and Straid Historical and Cultural Society are welcomed and encouraged to use the school premises and facilities. The school offers an after school club and a breakfast club. The children benefit from the use of facilities at Straid Congregational Church for PE classes and concerts. The local church also use the facilities in the school for special events e.g. Bicentenary Event and the Christmas Tree lights switch on.

Straid Primary School has for many years cooperated with Tír Na nÓg Primary School, Doagh Primary School and Upper Ballyboley Primary School by organising professional development days, sharing expertise and support. Straid Primary School was also involved with Tír Na nÓg Primary School (closed on 31 January 2020) and Doagh Primary School in a Shared Education Partnership.

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 2018/19 and 2019-21 identified a key issue for Straid Primary School as 'address school provision where sustainability is an issue' with the action 'Managing authority to consult on options for future provision of Straid Primary School by February 2020'. As a result the Education Authority engaged with the Board of Governors of Straid Primary 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

Straid Primary School have explored the concept of education together with those of a different religious belief, those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not. Whilst the links with other schools including the shared education project with Tír na nÓg Primary School (closed on 31 January 2020), are to be commended, there is little evidence of an effective partnership that will bring sustainable benefits to pupils and the community beyond. There have been opportunities for some collaboration in areas such as sport between the children.

In order to be more viable and effective partnerships schools should be building towards shared opportunities for learning and sharing of resources across sites that would bring both efficiencies and increased effective use of resources and economies of scale. Both schools were keen to develop 'greater sharing' however, whilst it is accepted that this may be further developed in the future, any change to be affected would be longer term and not a realistic sustainable option.

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, a shared solution would not improve the sustainability of Straid 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.

The Board of Governors at Straid Primary School identified 'Federation' as their preferred option. Various staffing structures, key stage permutations and options were explored by Straid Primary School and Upper Ballyboley Primary School [in conjunction with the Education Authority and Controlled Schools' Support Council], but no feasible nor sustainable federation option could be identified by the Education Authority.

3.4 Three School Model

The Board of Governors of Straid Primary School put forward the option of a Three School Model. The model, see below, would provide for Foundation/Key Stage 1 in Straid Primary

School, Upper Ballyboley Primary School and Ballynure Primary School with Key Stage 2 provision in Ballynure Primary School only.

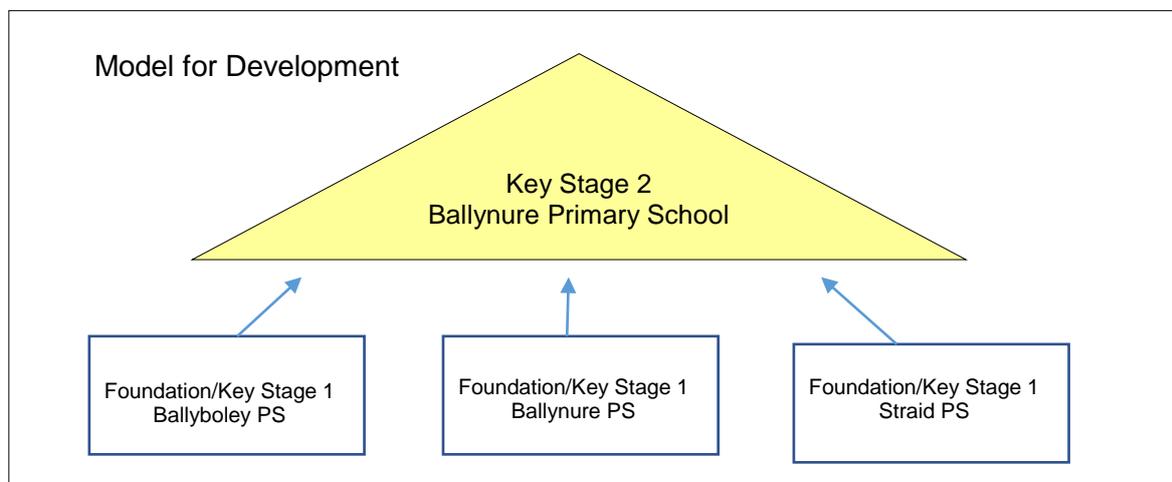


Table 6: Enrolment Projections: Three School Model: based on current 2020/21 enrolments

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Total
Straid Primary School	10	6	9	8				33
Upper Ballyboley Primary School	1	3	3	11				18
Ballynure Primary School	19	24	20	15	34	35	31	178

Straid Primary School indicated that under the above model:

- A school would be retained in each community.
- Pupils may start school close to home.
- Age appropriate approach and opportunity to use facilities and management tailored to pupil needs and close working relationships and positive pupil experiences promote progression towards Key Stage 3.
- Key Stage 2 provider can benefit from 'natural referral'.
- Overall staffing may be saved, staff development by collaboration in federation.
- Principal led and lead staff with responsibility.
- Single Board of Governors representative of communities with a sub-committee to oversee and review harmonisation.

The three school model would provide a federated model with a single Board of Governors and Principal with senior teachers within each school.

As indicated in Table 6, there would be fewer than 20 pupils on one site and less than 35 pupils on another site. The small number of pupils would result in financial difficulties for the two Foundation/Key Stage 1 schools as the expenditure would exceed income and result in an accumulating deficit. This model would present particular challenges in the delivery of the Key Stage 1 curriculum in Straid Primary School and Upper Ballyboley Primary School as numbers are small, 33 pupils and 18 pupils respectively. This model could:

- reduce opportunities for pupils to interact with their peer group and between Key Stages and therefore limiting the development of their social and emotional skills - the proposal from the Education Authority supports creating a 7 class base school in Ballynure Primary School thus 'creating a vibrant sustainable primary school where each pupil is in a class with a single year group';
- limit the potential for after school activities including team-based experiences;
- result in staff members having to contend with unduly demanding workloads and fewer opportunities for the delegation of roles and tasks, for example, dealing with the impact of the changes in Special Educational Needs legislation; and
- limit teacher professional learning opportunities, staff will have less scope for professional interaction and mutual support.

For the Three School Model to be a workable solution it would also require the participation of all three schools, Straid Primary School, Upper Ballyboley Primary School and Ballynure Primary School. Having explored in detail the Three School Model this option is not considered by the Education Authority to be sustainable, **educationally or financially**.

3.5 Amalgamation

The Education Authority examined the sustainability of amalgamating Straid Primary School and another local school. The nearest school, by distance, to Straid Primary School is Ballynure Primary School, as outlined in Table 2 above.

As with the options above, sustainability is the most important consideration. In accordance with DE policy on amalgamations (Circular 2018/15) it states that: *'...it should also be helpful to those who are considering a DP to amalgamate two or more schools of a similar size to create a new school regardless of management type'*.

Ballynure Primary School currently has an enrolment of 148 pupils and Straid Primary School has a current enrolment of 53 pupils. An amalgamation with both schools would not be in accordance with DE Circular 2018/15 as the schools are not similar in size.

The Education Authority is also taking forward a Development Proposal for the discontinuance of Upper Ballyboley Primary School which also has Ballynure Primary School as its closest school (2.6 miles). As with Straid Primary School, Upper Ballyboley Primary School has sustainability issues with a current enrolment of 28 pupils. To expand an amalgamation to include all three schools would again not be in accordance with DE Circular 2018/15 as both Straid Primary School and Upper Ballyboley Primary School are not similar in size to Ballynure Primary School.

Therefore, as such a school could not be identified that would satisfy the requirements of DE policy, an amalgamation was not a suitable option for Straid Primary School. Table 2 identifies the schools within the area where there is surplus capacity with the potential to accommodate pupils from Straid Primary School in the event of discontinuance of education at Straid Primary School.

3.6 Discontinue

In considering the future of Straid 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, these did not provide for future sustainability. The Education Authority recognises the commitment of the governors but the current circumstances would not provide for the curricular provision of pupils currently attending Straid Primary School.

In consideration of the options above, the Education Authority recommends that Straid Primary School discontinues with effect from 31 August 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter.

To provide for available places, the Education Authority is proposing to take forward an associated proposal for the increase in admission and enrolment numbers for Ballynure Primary School.

The Education Authority is also proposing the discontinuance of Upper Ballyboley Primary School, a school 5.0 miles from Straid Primary School.

4 RATIONALE FOR PROPOSAL

Straid Primary School has experienced a downturn in pupil numbers since 2014/15 when it had an enrolment of 81 pupils. The enrolment has now fallen to 53 pupils. The school was identified in the Annual Action Plans 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019-21, identified as 'address school provision where sustainability is an issue' with the action 'Managing authority to consult on options for future provision of Straid Primary School by February 2020.'

In September 2020, the school admitted ten pupils in Year 1. This has resulted in an enrolment of 53 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.

The closure of Straid Primary School in conjunction with the proposal to increase admissions and enrolments in Ballynure Primary School will support an area planning solution for the Antrim and Newtownabbey and Mid and East Antrim areas in addressing issues of sustainability and ensuring that school places are located as required. This is based on children availing of places in other local sustainable schools including Ballynure Primary School, who with an increase to admissions and enrolment numbers, will have sufficient places available to accommodate the pupils from Straid Primary School, consistent with ESaGS, the Sustainable Schools Policy and 'Providing Pathways'.

The discontinuance of Straid Primary School will result in the redistribution of approximately 53 pupils from Straid Primary School, supported by one further Development Proposal to increase admissions and enrolments in Ballynure Primary School.

The proposal will meet the outcomes for all including additional support to those who require it, ensuring those children with Special Educational Needs realise their full potential. Pupils with SEN will continue to have their special educational requirements met within local schools, supported by Children and Young People Services.

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 Straid Primary School attracts pupils is, according to the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, defined as rural. The discontinuance of Straid 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.

In the case of any proposed action at Straid Primary School, the Education Authority has to consider the likely impact of removing controlled provision from the area. The area solution would seek to consolidate controlled provision in the area.

5 EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

The proposal would provide for the education needs of pupils in the area. Straid Primary School has a declining enrolment and, as a four 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. Some local schools in the area have capacity and an associated Development Proposal to increase the admission and enrolment numbers at the nearest primary school, Ballynure Primary School, will provide places within sustainable provision. 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 may 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 Straid 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 Straid Primary School. As there are currently unfilled places within some local schools, there will be a requirement for additional accommodation to facilitate the relocation of pupils (to be identified by parental preference resulting from the consultation process). The Education Authority is taking forward an associated proposal to increase the admission and enrolment numbers of Ballynure Primary School.

There will be a cost saving in the recurrent costs of operating a school.

Finance The operational cost of Straid Primary School will be a cost saving from this proposal inclusive of a saving of £47,726 in terms of the Small Schools Support Factor would also be made.

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

Most of the pupils attending Straid Primary School live within close proximity to the school and do not receive home-to-school transport. The discontinuance of Straid 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 for Straid Primary School. Additional accommodation needs will be required at Ballynure Primary School as detailed in the Case for Change for a proposed increase in admission and enrolment numbers at Ballynure Primary School.

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 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter. The timetable, pending approval from the Education Committee, for the consultation process is:

Development Proposal Timeline	
Proposal: Straid Primary School will discontinue with effect from 31 August 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter.	Proposed Timeline
Consultation with Governors, Staff, Parents – (8 weeks) Consultation Responses to be forwarded to the Education Authority. 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 Education Authority’s Strategic Planning and Policy Committee or the Board meeting.	6 May 2021 – 1 July 2021
Consultation with other affected Schools (8 weeks) Consultation Responses to be forwarded to the Education Authority Responses will be considered and a Case for Change document compiled before submission to the Education Authority’s Strategic Planning and Policy Committee.	6 May 2021 – 1 July 2021
Strategic Planning and Policy Committee to seek Approval To Publish Case for Change to be taken to the September 2021 Education Authority’s Strategic Planning and Policy Committee for consideration. 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.	7 September 2021

Statutory Objection Period (2 months)	September 2021 – November 2021
Objections/Comments to be forwarded to the Department of Education	
Await Ministerial/Department of Education Decision	January 2022
Implementation	
If approved, the Development Proposal would take effect from 31 August 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter.	