Equality in Education

Priorities for action

October 2018

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There is a pressing need to secure change in relation to tackling prejudice-based bullying; and addressing inequalities in attainment and access experienced by Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children. "

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We also call for prompt action to advance childcare and early-years provision; to drive attainment via collaborative approaches involving family and the wider community; and to put in place a system for learning from successful interventions. "

Summary: Education - Priorities for Action

1. The Commission considers, following engagement with stakeholders and wider consideration, that there are immediate opportunities and/or a particular pressing need to secure change in relation to:

   • **tackling prejudice-based bullying;**

   • **addressing inequalities in attainment and access experienced by Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children**.

2. We also consider it important to seek to ensure progress on a number of the **recommendations** *'of benefit to all children'* which we consider have the potential to deliver benefits to children and young people from across the equality categories, including those also entitled to free school meals (and specific groups therein - for example, boys, including those from Protestant backgrounds).

3. In particular, we call for prompt action to **advance childcare and early-years provision** to meet the diverse needs of all children; to **drive attainment via collaborative approaches** involving family and the wider community; and to put in place a **system for learning from successful interventions**.

Equality in education

4. Education plays a key role in determining an individual's life chances. The Commission recognises and reinforces the wider value of education, beyond solely the achievement of qualifications. It can provide exposure to literature, language, sport, activities, art, and music; as well as allowing individuals develop an understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and backgrounds.

5. The Commission is aware of the proactive steps taken by a range of bodies, including government departments and the education sector more broadly, to promote equality in education across the equality grounds. We both recognise and welcome the progress made in advancing educational outcomes.

6. Whilst we recognise and support this work, it is clear however that significant challenges remain.

7. Developed from a range of research, evidence sources, stakeholder engagements, and the Commission's wider work over a number of years, this document sets out the Commission's priorities for action regarding education public policy and practice.

Wider recommendations

8. In addition to the priorities set out in this document, we also encourage action by stakeholders and government to advance our full range of recommendations, with a particular focus on tackling the inequalities identified in our 2017 *Statement on Key Inequalities in Education*.

9. The Commission has identified the following overarching areas where it considers that wider action could serve to address key inequalities, and advance equality of opportunity and good relations:

- **Improve equality data and analysis**

- **Advance a shared society through education**

- **Tackle prejudice-based bullying and challenge stereotypes**

- **Address inequalities in attainment and access**

- **Mainstream equality in education and in teacher development**

This short guide sets out only our immediate *priorities for action*. Further information on our wider recommendations can be found at: **www.equalityni.org/Education/Policy**

Tackle prejudice-based bullying and challenge stereotypes
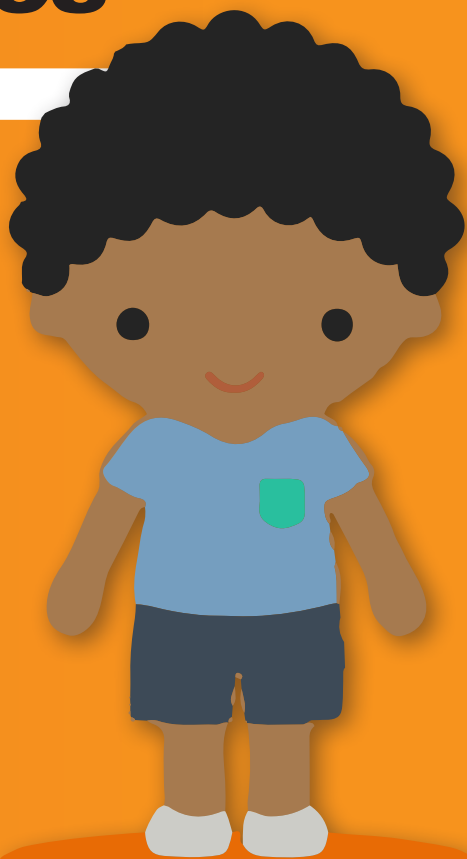
Tackle prejudice-based bullying and challenge stereotypes

Ensure actions to tackle one-off incidents and unintentional acts of prejudice-based bullying, which may not be covered by the statutory definition of bullying, are adequately dealt with in guidance from the Department of Education.

10. The common definition of bullying included in the 2016 Act should contribute to ensuring a consistent approach is taken across schools to tackling prejudice-based bullying.

11. However, we consider that guidance for schools to support the implementation of the legislation should also encourage schools to address *unintentional acts* by pupils that can cause harm, fear or distress to pupils for reasons associated with their equality characteristics.

12. Further, where *one-off incidents* of prejudice-based behaviour are dealt with under the school's disciplinary procedure, we recommend that they should be accurately recorded, including as regards nature, motivation and outcome.

Improve the monitoring of bullying incidents by education providers across the equality grounds.

13. We support the requirement for all grant-aided schools to centrally record complaints of bullying behaviour, including motivating factors behind the bullying and outcomes.

14. We however retain our concerns about the focus and range of motivating factors included in the legislation. We therefore recommend the inclusion of 'community background' in the list of motivations included in the legislation; use of the term 'gender identity' rather than 'gender reassignment'; the race category being further broken down, as a minimum by Roma and Irish Traveller; and the inclusion of a wider set of indicative motivations, such as being an asylum seeker, refugee, entitled to free school meals, or associated with social class.

15. We further recommend that the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the inspection process to assess how schools are addressing prejudice-based bullying, particularly for those groups where evidence shows that there is a persistent problem as regards racist, homophobic, transphobic and disablist bullying.

The Department of Education should provide guidance to schools on how to comply with the recording requirements in the legislation.

16. We note that the Addressing Bullying Schools Act does not explicitly include detail as to how schools should report on the incidents of prejudice-based bullying that they have recorded (or how they will use the information gathered), or as to how their anti-bullying policy has been implemented.

17. Departmental guidance as to how recording requirements are intended to operate; how the Department will ensure compliance; and how the Department will publish information, will likely therefore be required.

18. We reiterate our recommendation that any duty placed on schools should include appropriate safeguards to encourage them to be open about reporting incidents of prejudice-based bullying.
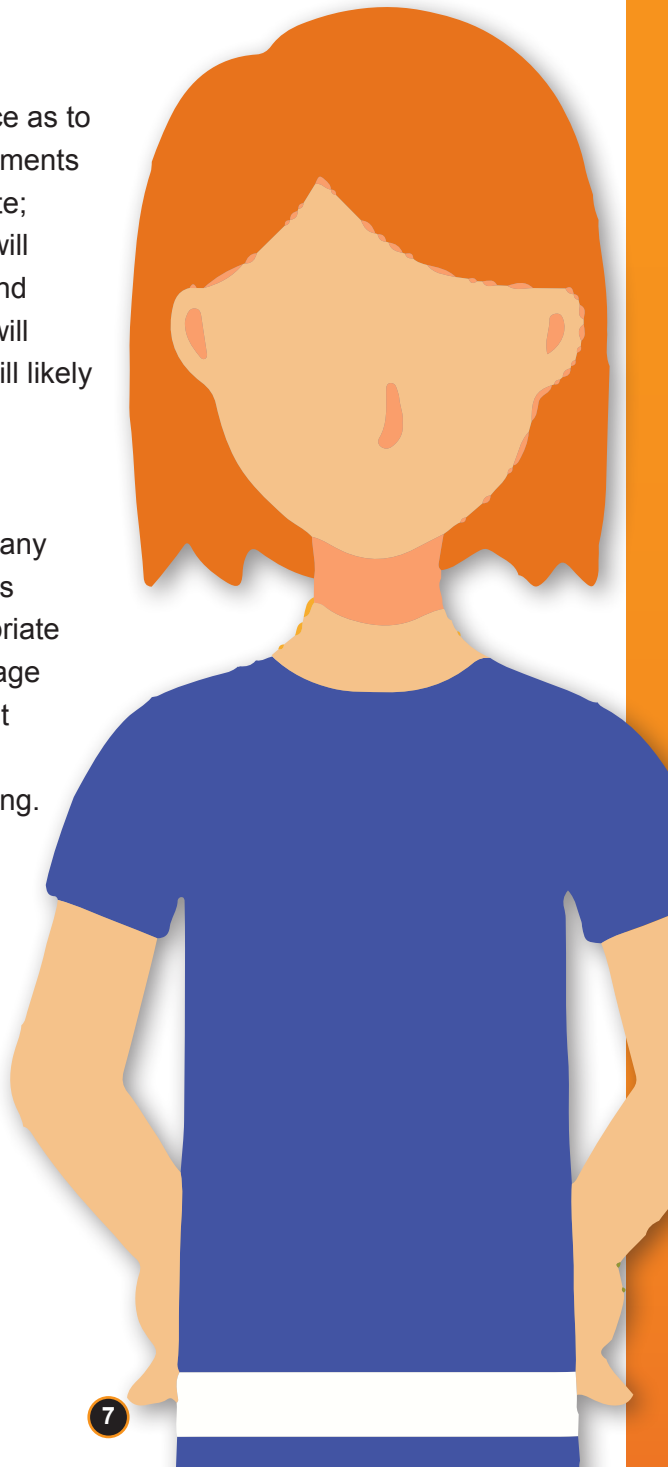
Education

Strong and visible leadership from the school Principal, senior management team and board of governors is needed to promote an anti-bullying culture in every school

BULLYING

There is a close link between how pupils treat one another and how well leaders communicate expectations about pupil behaviour.*

Supplementary guidance to support the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act, should provide clear guidance to schools, including governors and senior management on their specific roles.

19. The Commission welcomes the duty on boards of governors to secure measures to prevent prejudice-based bullying. We however recommend that supplementary guidance be provided to assist schools, including the senior management team and Governors, on the specific remit and role(s) that they will be required to discharge. This should be supplemented with training for Boards of Governors.

20. The guidance should ensure that: schools take steps to consider the views of pupils, parents, carers and staff, as well as Section 75 groups, when implementing, monitoring and reviewing bullying policies and practices; that training on prejudice-based bullying is incorporated within initial teacher training; and that schools provide regularly updated in-service training to staff on the impact of prejudice-based bullying and on the strategies to tackle and prevent it.

Strong and visible leadership from the school Principal, senior management team and board of governors is needed to promote an anti-bullying culture within every school.

21. High-level leadership is essential to ensuring the consistent and robust implementation of policies and practices designed to address bullying, including bullying experienced by Section 75 groups.

22. We also consider that schools should proactively promote awareness of the existence, content and intent of the anti-bullying policy and procedure within the school; and respective roles, responsibilities and expected behaviours.

23. We consider that for schools to develop a strong anti-bullying culture, it is important that they go beyond the measures included in the Act.

Education

The Department and other stakeholders should ensure that support materials and opportunities within the curriculum address prejudice-based bullying

48% of 16-21 year old students experienced bullying as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

50% stated that issues about transgender or sexual orientation had not come up in any of their classes.*

The Department and other stakeholders should ensure that support materials and opportunities within the curriculum address prejudice-based bullying.

24. We have impressed upon the Department the need to ensure that equality and good relations are embedded within the curriculum, and that opportunities within it

are used to draw attention to prejudice-based bullying and to encourage a greater understanding of and respect for pupils covered by the Section 75 grounds. This includes, for example, gender identity; ethnicity; and sexual orientation.

Gender identity

25. The 2013 Grasping the Nettle report[1] highlighted *that '[t]he exclusion of trans issues from the school curriculum reduces trans equality and inhibits good relations from developing.'* The report acknowledged that while the Department of Education (DE) is undertaking work to address this problem, *'much more needs to be done to increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of trans issues in educational settings.'* We recommend that steps are taken to increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of trans issues in educational settings.

Ethnicity

26. We reiterate our recommendation that the Department should seek to ensure that ethnic minority children see their culture and language reflected in the classroom and school curriculum; disseminate best practice procedures around induction and admissions; and provide guidance on promoting the participation of newly-arrived children in the wider life of the school.

27. We note the proposed action in the Racial Equality Strategy for OFMDFM (now the Executive Office (TEO)) to work with the DE to identify ways to tackle racist bullying in schools. We call on the TEO to set out, as a matter of urgency, how it intends to implement this 2015 proposal.

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1 McBride, RS (2013) Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland, Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research

Sexual orientation

28. A 2011 Cara-Friend/ Rainbow Project report[2] conveyed that there were ample opportunities within the statutory curriculum to challenge negative stereotypes and present the diversity of sexual orientation to children and young people, but that the experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) young people is that these opportunities are not taken up by teachers in schools. 2013 research by Rainbow[3] on the emotional health and well-being of young LGBT people found that 88.1% reported that teachers never or rarely talked about LGBT issues.

Measures to tackle bullying should include challenging gender roles to further the broader societal aim of preventing gender-based violence.

29. Evidence from the Department of Education's (DE) 2011 research[4] into bullying in schools revealed that boys and girls frequently experience bullying with a sexual context.

30. A 2014 survey for Girl-guiding[5] found that three in five of those aged 13 to 21 (59%) had experienced sexual harassment at school, college or work in the last year and one in five girls aged 7 to 12 had experienced jokes of a sexual nature from boys (22%). The 2017[6] survey

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2 Cara Friend and Rainbow Project (2011) Left out of the equation. A report on the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people at school
3 O'Hara (2013) Through our minds, exploring the emotional health and wellbeing of LGBT people in Northern Ireland, Belfast Rainbow
4 DENI (2011) Nature and extent of bullying in schools in the north of Ireland
5 Girlguiding (2014) Girls' attitude survey 2014
6 Girlguiding (2017) Girls' attitude survey 2017

found an increase in sexual harassment since 2014, in particular on social media. These findings demonstrate the need to challenge gender roles, including across the curriculum generally, and within relationships and sex education (RSE) specifically.

Extend to schools legislative protection from disability-based harassment.

31. The Commission continues to call for reform to Northern Ireland's disability discrimination laws.

32 Currently, under disability discrimination legislation in Northern Ireland, there is no freestanding protection for disabled people against harassment related to their disability outside employment and further and higher education. This contrasts with protection which exists under Northern Ireland equality law on other equality grounds and with legislation in Great Britain.

Address inequalities in attainment and access experienced by Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children

Address inequalities in attainment and access experienced by Traveller, Roma and Newcomer children.

Budget allocations for identified groups should be monitored to assess how they improve outcomes for pupils.

33. The common funding formula provides schools with a per capita payment, calculated on an annual basis for Traveller, Roma and Newcomer pupils. This payment is not ring fenced and can be spent at the school's discretion.

34. In 2016, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)[7] noted that there does not appear to be a clear system for monitoring how schools are spending funding received in terms of whether it is being used for evidence-based interventions that will raise the attainment of children from low-income backgrounds.

35. Barriers faced by black and minority ethnic (BME) groups such as a lack of English proficiency; stereotyping and low expectations; and, inability of mainstream schools to meet the needs of individual pupils could be tackled by ensuring *and* monitoring the targeted spend of this additional resource.

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7 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016) A Prosperous, poverty-free Northern Ireland, p. 10

Education

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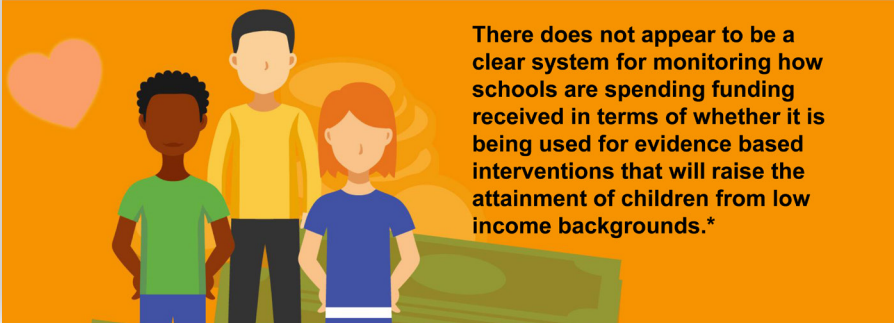
There does not appear to be a clear system for monitoring how schools are spending funding received in terms of whether it is being used for evidence based interventions that will raise the attainment of children from low income backgrounds.*

The Department of Education should put in place measures to support the education of Traveller and Roma children, particularly in relation to: data collection and analysis; admissions and registration processes; planning transitions; and examining segregated provision.

36. In 2008 the Commission highlighted that there was a need for more comprehensive data on attendance, participation, transitions and performance levels of Travellers at key stages so that comparisons could be made with non-Traveller children[8]. Such data could likely be collected by the DE C2K system, enabling the impact of policy interventions to be more effectively measured.

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8 ECNI (2008) Mainstreaming Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations for Traveller Children in Schools

37. The Commission continues to recommend flexibility in schools' admissions and enrolment processes as regards registration dates and bureaucracy required for both Traveller and Roma communities. Admissions processes should allow joint and temporary registration.

38. We reiterate our 2008 recommendation that schools should set up processes to ensure that transitions from primary to post-primary schools are carefully planned.

39. We also call for the issue of segregated education provision for Travellers and Roma to be examined. We reiterate our recommendation that the Department examines the issue of segregated provision for Traveller and Roma children. We would distinguish between targeted provision to groups such as Travellers and Roma in a mainstream setting to address known inequalities and separate or segregated provision per se.

The Intercultural Education Service (IES) should publish, and take account of, key outcomes arising from its delivery plan.

40. The regional Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) was set up in 2013 to progress the Traveller Education Taskforce recommendations. It has since merged with the Inclusion and Diversity Service to form the Intercultural Education Service (IES).

41. The key priority areas in the 2014 TESS annual delivery plan were to: improve attendance levels of Travellers in targeted areas; enhance Traveller pupil attainment in target groups; and have Traveller parents more engaged and supported (including through home school communication).

42. Both prior to, and since, the merger into IES, the Commission has not been able to identify the reporting of any related outcomes achieved to date. It is important that a focus on the issues associated with Traveller disadvantage in education is maintained.

More transparent monitoring and review of the Traveller Child in Education Action Framework is needed.

43. To progress the recommendations of the Taskforce on Traveller Education (2008), the Department of Education launched the Traveller Child in Education Action Framework. This Framework was to be monitored and reviewed biannually by a small monitoring and review group made up of representatives from the DE, the Education and Training Inspectorate, NGOs and Traveller support groups with progress reported biannually to the Minister of Education. This monitoring / review group was never established.

44. We reiterate the recommendation from our 2013 Racial Equality position paper that the Action Framework and TESS's (now IES) Traveller delivery plan should be subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation with progress reported at the Traveller subgroup (currently being set up by the TEO) of the Racial Equality Panel. Involving Traveller children and parents in the different processes (as reflected in the task force report) is required, to ensure the delivery of tangible outcomes.

The Department of Education should assist schools in making effective use of dual language resources to help Newcomer learners access the curriculum.

45. Newcomer children[9] face a number of barriers to educational achievement, including limited English language ability, lack of knowledge of the education system, racist bullying and social exclusion.

46. Barnardo's 2015 research *Feels Like Home[10]* explores the experiences of Newcomer pupils and school staff in primary schools across Northern Ireland. The findings from the research show there are a number of factors which impact on Newcomer children's experiences in

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9 The DE defines a Newcomer as 'a pupil who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language common with the teacher.'
10 Kernaghan D, Webb MA and Cariddi C, (2015) Feels Like Home: Exploring the experiences of Newcomer pupils in primary schools in Northern Ireland

the classroom including the language barrier, an unfamiliar education system and a feeling of isolation. Teachers also highlighted a number of challenges including low school readiness and difficulties in identifying a potential learning problem or special educational needs because of the language barrier. The research also pointed to a number of areas of good practice including after school clubs, translated newsletters and a growing use of technology to communicate with parents. Such good practice should be disseminated.

47. The DE is currently reviewing the Supporting Newcomer policy. It is important that the outcomes from this review address the issues of dual language resources.

Education

The Department of Education should assist schools in making effective use of dual language resources to help Newcomer learners access the curriculum

Newcomer children face a number of barriers to educational achievement, including limited English language ability, lack of knowledge of the education system, racist bullying and social exclusion.

The Department of Education should identify and address the complex emotional, educational and social needs of asylum seeking and refugee children; and ensure that adequate funding is available to meet the needs of those who arrive during the year.

48. The current system provides funding only for those children counted on the annual school census day. However, children may enter the school system throughout the academic year. Currently, schools are not allocated additional in-year funding to meet their needs[11].

49. With regard to providing appropriate support for asylum seeker children, we recommend that the Executive and the DE work with the IES to understand and improve the experiences of and outcomes for asylum seeker children. This includes identifying and addressing any attainment differentials; assessing educational needs; reviewing the effectiveness of current English as an Additional Language (EAL) support; identifying appropriate strategies to support the teaching of Newcomer pupils and the provision of accessible information on the education system in Northern Ireland. Based on figures released by the Home Office to the Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership[12] nationalities represented here have principally come from China, Somalia, Sudan, Iran and Syria.

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11 Apart from those entering via the Vulnerable Syrian Relocation Scheme
12 NI Strategic Migration Partnership (2013): A Proposal for a Refugee Integration Strategy for Northern Ireland, page 3.

Ensure progress in areas of benefit to all children

Ensure progress in areas of benefit to all children

Provide, and monitor uptake of, appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare and early-years provision more generally to meet the diverse needs of all children.

50. We reiterate our 2013 policy position on Childcare, which calls for appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare provision to meet the diverse needs of all children, including children with disabilities, those from BME communities and new residents.

51. The Department of Education has recognised the importance of early-years' provision[13]. We recommend the monitoring of uptake by those equality groups

Education

Provide, and monitor uptake of, appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare and early years provision more generally to meet the diverse needs of all children

Research in Northern Ireland has found that children who did not attend pre-school showed poorer cognitive and behaviour outcomes than their peers who attended pre-school.*

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13 DENI (2016) Press release O'Dowd launches pathway fund for early years education

experiencing educational underachievement, with action taken to address any shortfalls.

Promote collaborative approaches to drive attainment, involving engagement with parents / families / carers and the wider communities of key equality groups.

52. The Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014[14] highlighted the benefits of broader family / community involvement in education noting: *"It is clear that schools alone cannot break the cycle of low outcomes; there is a need for greater coherence and connection between the learners, their families, their communities, their schools and the wide range of agencies and health support service providers that play a significant part in their lives."* These linkages were also among the common factors identified in the Executive Office's 2017 ILiAD research[15] as contributing to the enhancement of educational achievement across the seven wards included in the study. Lack of parental engagement has also been linked to poorer educational outcomes for those entitled to free school meals, particularly boys, including Protestant working class boys[16].

14 The Education and Training Inspectorate (2013) An Evaluation of Extended Schools - Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014, p26
15 TEO (2017) Investigating the Links in Achievement and Disadvantage
16 PUP (2015) Firm Foundations, Educational Underachievement and the Protestant Working Class Education: Getting it right for every child

53. Feedback[17] on the progress of two local partnership programmes involving children, parents, teachers and the wider community has been very positive with successful outcomes such as improved attendance and attainment recorded. The programmes highlighted appear to be effective in addressing attainment and broader educational issues by involving those outside the immediate school[18]. It is recommended that consideration of how those, such as BME groups and children with disabilities who may not live within socially deprived areas, could access such schemes, should they become more widespread.

The Education Authority should put in place a system for learning from successful interventions, and disseminate and share these lessons with other schools.

54. Currently, there does not appear to be any formal mechanism or procedure in place for schools to share their learning, both positive and negative, from different interventions or initiatives undertaken to raise attainment. The Commission has sought to highlight successful interventions through a number of video case studies.

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17 McMahon (2015) Full Service Extended Schools (FSES) and; Full Service Community Network (FSCN) Tackling barriers to Learning: the Policy Forum for Northern Ireland conference on Education in Northern Ireland: raising standards, school accountability and leadership
18 Report by the five ELBs (2015) Extended Schools Annual Report 2013-14
19 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016) A prosperous, poverty free Northern Ireland

55. JRF[19] recommends developing a 'what works' centre to compile and promote high-quality evidence of ways schools can improve attainment for low income pupils and evaluate how successful these are. This type of approach could be extended to include pupils from the different equality groups with organisations such as the IES feeding in.

56. The Education Authority, through its regional role, has the potential to provide and oversee a formal mechanism to make possible the sharing, across schools in Northern Ireland, of successful interventions.

19 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016) A prosperous, poverty free Northern Ireland

**For further information visit:
www.equalityni.org/EducationPolicy**

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