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Northern Ireland Audit Office

Department of Education: Sustainability of Schools

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K J Donnelly   Northern Ireland Audit Office

Comptroller and Auditor General   30 June 2015

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Abbreviations

BELB	Belfast Education and Library Board
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CnaG	Comhairle na Gaelscolaiochta
CPD	Central Procurement Directorate
DE	Department of Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DFP	Department of Finance and Personnel
EA	Education Authority
ELB(s)	Education and Library Board(s)
ESA	Education and Skills Authority
Estyn	Education and Training Inspectorate for Wales
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
NEELB	North Eastern Education and Library Board
NIAO	Northern Ireland Audit Office
NICIE	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
PS	Primary School
QUB	Queens University Belfast
SEELB	South Eastern Education and Library Board
SMART	Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time-bound
SELB	Southern Education and Library Board
SRO	Senior Responsible Owner
UK	United Kingdom
WELB	Western Education and Library Board

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

1. The overall vision of the Department of Education (the Department) is to see *"every young person achieving to his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development"*[1]. Although the attainment levels of most pupils here compare favourably with the rest of the United Kingdom, there is a significant tail of underachievement, especially amongst pupils suffering from social disadvantage.

2. In December 2006, an Independent Strategic Review of Education[2] (the Bain Review) indicated that because of falling pupil numbers and Northern Ireland's many school sectors, there were too many schools in Northern Ireland. As a result, some would become educationally unsustainable. In order to address this problem the Department introduced the Sustainable Schools policy in January 2009.

3. Delivering sustainable schools in Northern Ireland is extremely difficult. The implementation of the Sustainable Schools policy is constrained by the fact that responsibility for the delivery of education is dependent on a number of different providers: Controlled schools; Catholic Maintained schools; Voluntary Grammar schools; other Maintained (including Irish-medium) and Integrated schools.

4. The Bain Review envisaged the proposed Education and Skills Authority (ESA)[3] taking forward the delivery of the Sustainable Schools policy; in the absence of the ESA, the statutory planning authorities, i.e. Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) were responsible for delivery.

5. A key tool in the achievement of sustainable schools has been the development of Area Planning. Announced in September 2011, the overriding objective of Area Planning is to raise educational standards by creating a network of educationally strong and sustainable schools. It is about anticipating the educational needs in an area and planning to meet those needs in an effective and efficient way through a network of sustainable schools.

6. Overall there has been some progress in implementing the Sustainable Schools policy through the delivery of Area Planning. Area plans were produced for both the post-primary and primary sectors in 2013 and 2014 respectively. These plans intend to produce an estate of sustainable schools. In 2015, the Department reported that schools' approved enrolments had reduced by around 24,000 since 2006 (a 6 per cent decrease) and that the school estate had been reduced by 89 schools (an 8 per cent decrease). Subject to concerns we have over data accuracy (see paragraph 12), the Department reported that, in 2014-15, there were 71,000 (20 per cent of capacity) surplus school places, a reduction of 12,000 since 2009.

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1 Department of Education Northern Ireland: Corporate Plan 2012 - 2015

2 Schools for the Future: Funding, Strategy, Sharing: Report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education, (Professor George Bain), December 2006

3 The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) was proposed in 2007 and was to be the single authority for the administration of education, subsuming the functions, assets and liabilities of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Staff Commission and the Youth Council. However, in 2014, because of political disagreement, the Northern Ireland Assembly decided against the implementation of ESA.

7.   Almost three quarters of the surplus places are in the primary sector and 299 primary schools (36 per cent) had less than the Bain Review recommended minimum number of pupils.

8.   Assessing the wider delivery of the Sustainable Schools policy has been hampered because of difficulties with the quality of management information.

9.   There have been overall improvements in schools performance, but there are still significant problems with underachievement and the quality of leadership and management is not good enough in a significant minority of post-primary schools.

10.   We believe that the Department's approach to Area Planning and delivering sustainable schools could have been better. Not all stakeholders were clear on their role and responsibilities in delivering a sustainable schools network.   Guidance on Area Planning has been limited with a lack of clarity on the measurement of the criteria for sustainable schools. The Department has not set targets around reducing surplus places or milestones for delivery, there is little clarity among stakeholders in terms of what the successful outcomes are and there is no communication strategy.

11.   The delivery of sustainable schools is made more difficult because of the tension with parental preference (the ability of parents to send their children to a preferred school). The Department must work to align these policies.

12.   The quality of management information in this area is not sufficiently robust. The methodology for the calculation of surplus places has changed since the Bain Review. Approved enrolment data for many schools is based on out of date information. Therefore, the Department has no assurance that surplus places information is accurate.

13.   The Department has not estimated the financial costs of surplus places so it is unclear what level of resources can be released to the frontline and redeployed as a result of the Area Planning process. However, we do know that £36 million was paid to schools in 2014-15 because they are small.

14.   The Bain Review recommended that the ESA would assume operational responsibility for Area Planning. In the absence of ESA the ELBs assumed this role. ELBs planned for controlled schools and the CCMS planned for Catholic Maintained schools. The other sectors have not been full participants in the process. Because of this approach, many stakeholders within the Area Planning process feel disconnected with the decision-makers and this has led to resistance to change in many areas.

Executive Summary

Summary of Recommendations

Part Two: Review of Area Planning Progress

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Department reviews the qualitative indicators attached to the criteria in the Sustainable Schools policy to ensure they are fit for purpose. The Department must also develop enhanced advice and guidance on the application of the sustainable schools criteria.

Recommendation 2

It is vital that the Department has accurate information on school capacity in order to be able to establish a robust baseline for the Area Planning process. We recommend that the Department urgently reviews the way it calculates school capacity and, as a result, surplus places.

Recommendation 3

Children with special educational needs statements and those admitted by the Exceptional Circumstances Body or on appeal represent a substantial number of the school population. Excluding these children from the calculation of actual enrolments means it is likely the number of surplus places is overstated. We recommend that the Department establishes a methodology for calculating surplus places that takes appropriate account of **all** pupils in mainstream schools.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Department together with the Education Authority and CCMS (as statutory planning authorities) do more to address the over-provision of school places particularly at primary school level. The Area Planning process must be further developed so that the Department, planning and managing authorities agree prioritised and timetabled action plans to maintain and implement the proposals within the Area Plans. These proposals should address sustainability issues and result in the reduction of surplus school capacity.

Recommendation 5

Small schools require additional funding to deliver the required curriculum and remain financially sustainable. However there is no demonstrable evidence that educational attainment at small schools is better than their larger counterparts. The Department should, as a matter of urgency, work with the planning and managing authorities to identify exceptional circumstances in which an otherwise unsustainable small school could be considered for retention and additional financial support.

Part Three: Review of Department's Oversight of Area Planning

Recommendation 6

The Sustainable Schools policy and Area Planning process lacks a communication strategy. This is vital in a programme of this nature. We recommend that the Department develops a strategy to better communicate the aims of the Sustainable Schools policy and the Area Planning process to the wider public and elected representatives.

Recommendation 7

The cost of surplus places in schools is a key piece of information in determining the sustainability of schools. Currently the Department does not have any indication of how much surplus places cost. We recommend that the Department assesses the cost of surplus school places in the Northern Ireland education system and considers whether these costs are capable of releasing efficiencies.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Department, in conjunction with the Education Authority and CCMS, reviews the assistance given to schools showing signs of being unsustainable. Steps should be taken to be more proactive regarding the appropriate mechanism to provide advice, support and assistance to those schools that require help. Clear lines of communication should be established for such circumstances, and a specialist advice and support group considered.

Key Facts

In 2014-15 there were

- 836 primary schools

- 208 post-primary schools

and:

- 308,101 school pupils

- 165,548 at primary schools

- 142,553 at post-primary schools

The Education and Training Inspectorate Chief Inspectors Report (2012-2014) indicated that:

- 59 per cent of all primary schools inspected for overall effectiveness were rated as 'very good' or 'outstanding';

- GCSE and A level outcomes are rising;

- fewer pupils are leaving school with no GCSE's;

- 14 per cent of post-primary schools inspected for achievement and standards were rated as 'outstanding';

- leadership at all levels in post-primary schools requires further improvement;

- there is a need to raise achievements and standards in 15 per cent of post-primary schools inspected; and

- 60 per cent of pupils from non-grammar schools are still not achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C (or equivalent) including GCSE English and Maths.

Within the schools estate in 2014-15 there were:

- 71,000 surplus places;

- 50,000 in primary schools; and

- 21,000 in post primary schools.

In 2014-15:

- 299 primary schools were under the Sustainable Schools Policy's enrolment thresholds for urban and rural schools;

- 98 post-primary schools have fewer than 500 pupils at years 8-12; and

- 31 post-primary schools have fewer than 100 pupils at 6th form.

Part One:
Introduction and Background

Part One:
Introduction and Background

1.1 The overall vision of the Department of Education (the Department) is to see *"every young person achieving to his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development"*[4]. Although the attainment levels of most pupils here compare favourably with the rest of the United Kingdom, there is a significant tail of underachievement, especially amongst pupils suffering from social disadvantage.

1.2 In December 2006, an Independent Strategic Review of Education[5] (the Bain Review) indicated that because of falling pupil numbers and Northern Ireland's many school sectors, there were too many schools in Northern Ireland. As a result, some would become educationally unsustainable. In order to address this problem the Department introduced the Sustainable Schools policy in January 2009. The Area Planning process, announced in September 2011, was the method to be used to develop a network of sustainable schools.

Area Planning is difficult to implement due to a number of factors

1.3 We acknowledge that Area Planning exists in a challenging and diverse educational environment. There are five main education sectors – Controlled schools, Catholic Maintained schools, Voluntary Grammar schools, Integrated schools and Irish-medium schools (these sectors are explained more fully at **Appendix 2**). There are two statutory planning authorities – the Education Authority (since April 2015) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). The Education Authority has statutory responsibility for planning overall, and is required by the Department to seek and consider input from the other sectors in the Area Planning process. CCMS has a planning role for the Catholic Maintained sector. There are also a number of important factors which make Area Planning difficult to implement. The Department told us that:

- as the establishment of the Educational and Skills Authority (ESA) did not progress and the intended benefits of a single planning authority were not realised, the implementation of the Sustainable Schools policy and Area Planning has been taken forward in an environment where the creation of a single planning authority was uncertain and Area Planning was operating in a more fragmented way to that envisaged by the Bain Review.

- Area Planning is a highly contested space with close and continuous scrutiny by political representatives, community leaders, church leaders, parents and a range of other stakeholders. Communities have close attachments to local schools and have strong feelings about their retention regardless of their sustainability or implications for the wider area. This is evidenced not only through scrutiny by the Northern Ireland Assembly (the Assembly)

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4   Department of Education Northern Ireland: Corporate Plan 2012 - 2015

5   Schools for the Future: Funding, Strategy, Sharing: Report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education, (Professor George Bain), December 2006

and the Education Committee but also through the level of Assembly questions, correspondence, meeting requests and media coverage relating to individual schools as well as the wider strategic Area Planning process. This level of interest is leading more frequently to litigation and scrutiny by the courts in particular cases.

- the policy of open enrolment means that parents can apply to have their children enrolled in schools outside the area they live in and by-pass the nearest school. It is therefore very difficult to predict demand for places in schools. While the trend in demand for school places can be predicted from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) data on school populations in District Council areas, the need for school places in individual areas and in particular schools can be much harder to plan for as there are many factors influencing parental preferences. Physical changes to the schools estate cannot be made rapidly, particularly if significant capital investment is required and in the context of significantly reducing capital budgets.

The Bain Review (December 2006)

1.4   In March 2006 the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Hain commissioned the Bain Review *"to examine funding of the education*

system, in particular strategic planning and organisation of the schools' estate, taking account of the curriculum changes including the wider provision for 14-19 year olds, and also demographic trends". One of the key areas addressed was the strategic planning of the schools estate.

1.5   The Bain Review identified a number of concerns with arrangements for planning education provision. It found a *"lack of integration, co-ordination and consistency for planning in education provision"*. There was a lack of strategic planning in the Integrated and Irish-medium sectors, where planning was in response to potential, rather than actual, demand. Planning arrangements generally focused on individual schools rather than taking a broader view, tended to over-estimate demand and were not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that investment was directed at those schools in greatest need. The Bain Review also found a lack of robust and consistent information on the condition and suitability of the school estate.

1.6   The Bain Review commented that the multi-sector school system, combined with the rural nature of parts of Northern Ireland, single-sex schools and a selective system of education had resulted in a large number of schools and a high proportion of small schools. In primary schools, the proportion with fewer than 105 pupils was 38 per cent in 2005-06 (36 per cent 2014-15). In post-primary schools 46 per cent had

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Introduction and Background

fewer than 500 pupils at years 8-12 in 2005-06 (47 per cent in 2014-15). At 6th form, 32 per cent had fewer than 100 pupils in 2005-06 (18 per cent in 2014-15).

1.7 The Bain Review concluded that fewer, larger schools were needed, which are educationally sustainable and maximise the potential of their resources. It also recommended that a clear policy on school sustainability needed to be developed and that minimum school sizes were central to school sustainability, recommending minimum pupil enrolments outlined in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Minimum enrolment thresholds

School type	Urban areas*	Rural areas
Primary	140	105
Post-primary (years 8-12)	500	
Sixth-form	100	

*Urban areas are Belfast and Derry City Council areas only. Schools in all other areas are designated as rural (the Department's Sustainable Schools policy).

Source: The Bain Review

1.8 Schools with enrolments below the relevant thresholds were to be reviewed and schools that were found to be educationally unsustainable should close, regardless of their economic position or the non-educational services they provided.

1.9 The Review proposed that Area Planning would be the central feature of the new strategic approach to planning education. Area Planning is the process

where the educational needs of an area are anticipated and planned for through an estate of sustainable schools, within a strategic framework of vision, policy, principles and guidelines provided by the Department. At this time, the Bain Review envisaged that the new ESA would have overall operational responsibility for area-based planning.

1.10 The Bain Review specified a number of guiding principles underpinning the planning of the schools' estate to ensure that communities are served by successful schools that :

- provide high quality educational experiences and outcomes for all pupils;

- reflect the pluralist nature of Northern Ireland;

- ensure equality, accessibility, diversity and parental choice;

- taken together, are effective in meeting the needs of all pupils in the community;

- are educationally and financially viable;

- operate cost effectively, maximising expenditure on the things that really matter in respect of quality and standards;

- optimise the use of their facilities for the good of all through agreed models of collaboration and sharing; and

- represent good value for money in relation to capital and recurrent expenditure.

1.11   The Bain Review concluded that this set of principles, provided a foundation for planning. It stated that some of the principles are in tension, but they are not contradictory. There is for example, a trade off between choice and diversity, and the notion of affordability and good value in respect of capital and recurrent expenditure through provision that is cost-effective and sustainable. This tension is magnified in the existing patterns of provision when there has been reluctance to address the challenge of the implications of falling enrolments. Nonetheless, it is clear that there is considerable scope for reconciling these competing interests.

The Department's Sustainable Schools Policy (January 2009)

1.12   In response to the Bain Review the Department published its policy for Sustainable Schools in January 2009. The policy *"sets out the criteria and indicators for use by the Department, the education authorities, school Boards of Governors and the wider community, to help assess whether a school may be considered as fit for purpose, or whether action is required to address emerging problems of viability. The objective is to improve the quality of education offered to pupils of all ages and backgrounds. The criteria should also have a role in*

helping a school to monitor and self review its current position and consider how it might be strengthened and improved".[6]

1.13   Previously, concerns about a school's viability were only addressed if enrolments had declined to a critical level and rationalisation was the only option. The criteria are much broader than enrolment thresholds and are intended to provide a framework for earlier review and intervention so that a number of options can be considered which best meet the educational needs of the local community. The Sustainable Schools policy claimed that the criteria provide a framework for helping consider issues of school sustainability. It stated that the criteria would ensure transparency, consistency and equity in decision-making on sustainability across schools and sectors.

1.14   School sustainability should be first and foremost about the quality of pupils' educational experience. There are a number of quantitative and qualitative criteria and indicators linked to consideration of the longer-term viability of a school:

- quality educational experience;

- stable enrolment trends;

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Introduction and Background

- sound financial position;

- strong leadership and management by Boards of Governors and Principals;

- accessibility; and

- strong links with the community.

1.15 Assessment against these criteria is intended to provide a view of how effectively a school is performing. It is clear that the criteria are inter-related and there should be significant correlation across sustainability factors. For example, poor educational outcomes may lead to a reduced intake, causing financial pressures, which can lead to poor staff morale spiralling into increasing problems. Similarly, poor leadership may lead to parents choosing an alternative school, leading to reduced intake. Poor leadership can also manifest itself in a failure to establish and maintain positive attitudes to learning amongst pupils and resulting in a fall in educational performance. In such circumstances, unless schools recover their positions and become sustainable, the quality of education for their pupils will suffer and they will face further decline and eventual rationalisation.

1.16 The assessment of each school's sustainability under these criteria provides a framework to inform the preparation of Area Plans. This should ensure the optimum education provision for that area which will support the vision *"to ensure that every learner achieves*

his or her full potential at each stage of development".

1.17 The Bain Review had recommended that a new ESA assume operational responsibility for the strategic planning of the schools' estate. ESA was proposed in 2007 as a single authority for the administration of education, subsuming the functions, assets and liabilities of the five Education and Library Boards, the CCMS, the Staff Commission and Youth Council. However, the Assembly decided against the implementation of ESA. In the absence of the creation of ESA, the responsibility for planning education provision remained with the ELBs and the CCMS, working closely with the other school sectors (Grant Maintained Integrated, Voluntary Grammars and Irish-medium). In September 2014 the Northern Ireland Executive agreed that the Department should work towards replacing the five ELBs with a single Education Authority in April 2015.

Area Planning (September 2011)

1.18 The Area Planning process was announced in September 2011, with the overall objective of developing a network of viable and sustainable primary and post-primary schools through a process of collective, strategic planning of education. It was hoped that the Area Planning process would ensure that there was the right type and size of schools, in the right places, to meet the needs of pupils.

1.19   The Department told us that much had changed between the Bain Review and the introduction of Area Planning:

- changes in demographics including falling school enrolments;

- implementation of the revised curriculum and Entitlement Framework;

- publication of the Sustainable Schools policy;

- restoration of Devolution in May 2007; and

- a constrained economic environment leading to severe cuts in the Department's budget.

1.20   As a precursor to Area Planning, and to inform the process, the ELBs and CCMS, working in close conjunction with other sectors were tasked with undertaking viability audits of all schools to identify those schools which were evidencing 'stress' in relation to sustainable enrolment levels, delivery of quality education and financial viability. These audits were used to identify those schools where action was needed in the short term to protect the education of pupils and to provide an initial assessment of the potential level of stress facing the system as a whole.

Scope of Study

1.21   This report evaluates the progress made by the Department in delivering sustainable schools since the Bain Review (2006). **Part Two** of the report reviews the progress of Area Planning in delivering sustainable schools. **Part Three** examines the Department's oversight of the Area Planning process. **Appendix 1** contains details of our study methodology, **Appendix 2** includes an overview of the education sectors in Northern Ireland, **Appendix 3** outlines the key issues raised at our School Principals' Focus Groups, **Appendix 4** contains detail on the latest Area Planning Support Structure (April 2015) and **Appendix 5** details the papers reviewed as part of our research into school planning and provision. It is important to note that the report does not examine the Shared Education Campus Programme.[7]

1.22   If managing authorities propose changes to schools to secure sustainable provision the results can have very positive outcomes for pupils (see **Case Study 1**).

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7   The Shared Education Campus Programme seeks to invest in innovative projects involving the need for new shared facilities. The Programme is part of the Executive's 'Together building a United Community' initiative announced by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in May 2013.

Part One:
Introduction and Background

Case Study 1:

St Killian's College opened in March 2010 as a result of the amalgamation of St Aloysuis High (Cushendall), St Comgalls College (Larne) and St MacNissi's College (Garron Tower). It was an amalgamation of two Maintained secondary schools with a Voluntary Grammar school. In 2009-10, the schools had 43,153 and 609 pupils respectively. The new school now operates from one site – Garron Tower, is non-selective and has 800 approved places with an actual enrolment of 846 in 2014-15. A 2012 Education and Training Inspectorate report rated the new school as 'very good' with the school's mathematics, pastoral care and leadership and management rated as outstanding. The College has been able to introduce new subjects to meet the Entitlement Framework which are opening up new career paths for its students. These include Health and Social Care, Engineering, Construction, Level 3 ICT and Sports Studies.

Educational attainment is consistently above the Northern Ireland average for non-selective schools, with 85 per cent of pupils achieving A-C at A level and 80 per cent of pupils achieving at least five GCSEs including English and Maths, in 2014[10].

St Killian's had its application for a new build approved and was included in the Department's capital investment programme announced in June 2014.

Part Two:
Review of Area Planning Progress

Part Two:
Review of Area Planning Progress

Post-primary and Primary Area Plans were published in 2013 and 2014 respectively

2.1   The Bain Review was published in December 2006. Two years later the Department issued its Sustainable Schools policy (January 2009). In December 2011, in the absence of the creation of ESA, the Department commissioned the ELBs, working in close conjunction with CCMS and actively engaging with the other school sectors, to undertake Area Planning. To inform this work the Department commissioned Viability Audits, for each school, looking at school enrolments, attainment and finances (three of the six sustainable criteria in the Sustainable Schools policy).

2.2   The Viability Audit was published in February 2012. These evolved into Annual Area Profiles and are expected to be published on a yearly basis. Ultimately, Post-primary Area Plans for each of the ELBs were published in February 2013 and Primary Area Plans published in July 2014.

Delivery against broader sustainable schools criteria is difficult to gauge

2.3   As noted in Paragraph 1.14, the policy for Sustainable Schools identified six criteria to assess sustainability:

- quality educational experience;

- stable enrolment trends;

- sound financial position;

- strong leadership and management by Boards of Governors and Principals;

- accessibility; and

- strong links with the community.

2.4   The purpose of the Viability Audit was to identify all primary and post-primary schools facing significant viability challenges in terms of enrolment trends, delivering quality education and financial stability. However, they did not consider strong leadership, accessibility and strong links to the community. The Viability Audit identified those schools where action was required to protect the education of pupils. It informed the ELBs and CCMS of those schools which needed to be considered in detail as part of the Area Planning process. The Department told us that while the Viability Audit was much maligned at the time, it proved to be valuable information and it was later developed into what is now the Annual Area Profile.

2.5   Strong leadership and management, accessibility and strong links with the community are less measurable on a quantitative basis than educational outcomes, enrolments and finances. The ELBs relied on officials' local knowledge to provide information for Area Plans. Without any system of measurement

the information for the above three criteria was subjective and schools were measured on an inconsistent basis. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) provide an assessment on school performance but these are not available in the same time frame for all schools as the ETI cannot inspect all schools, every year.

2.6 We acknowledge that it was not the intention of the criteria to be applied mechanistically, (but to provide an indication on how effectively a school was functioning). We also acknowledge that all six criteria are fully assessed in Developmental Proposals.[9] Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess the delivery of the wider Sustainable Schools policy. Good practice would suggest that the outcomes of major policies should be able to be measured. This means that, at the outset of the policy, clear baselines should be set along with SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound)objectives and outcome focused targets. These should be amenable to ongoing monitoring and evaluation, in order to assess the success of the policy.

2.7 The Department told us the key driver for sustainability is sustainable enrolment and that leadership and community links are supporting and reinforcing factors (and sometimes temporary ones) which are characteristics of sustainable, but also unsustainable schools.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Department reviews the qualitative indicators attached to the criteria in the Sustainable Schools policy to ensure they are fit for purpose. The Department must also develop enhanced advice and guidance on the application of the sustainable schools criteria.

There is overall improvement in schools performance, but problems remain

2.8 The overall vision of the Department is to see *"every young person achieving to his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development"*. The ETI Chief Inspector's report (2012-14)[10] (the Report) states that the overall effectiveness of primary schools inspected which was rated as 'good' or better was 84 per cent with 59 per cent of these schools inspected rated as 'very good' or 'outstanding'. The ETI reported that there had been an improvement in the overall quality of provision in English and Mathematics, with 85 per cent of the schools inspected in the period evaluated as providing 'good' or better provision for English and 84 per cent for Mathematics. In the same period, for post-primary schools, GCSE and A level outcomes overall are rising; fewer pupils are leaving school with no GCSEs and in 14 per cent of schools inspected, achievements and standards were evaluated as 'outstanding'.

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9 These are required from school managing authorities before any significant change can be made e.g. opening, amalgamation, closure or increase or decrease in enrolment.

10 Chief Inspector's Report (2012-2014): The Education and Training Inspectorate.

Part Two:
Review of Area Planning Progress

2.9　　Although the attainment levels of most pupils here compare favourably with the rest of the United Kingdom, in 2012-13 more than one fifth of school leavers failed to attain five GCSEs at A*-C grades; 38 per cent of school leavers failed to achieve five GCSEs including English and Maths; and 372 school leavers did not achieve any GCSEs[11]. The Report indicates that the quality of achievement and standards in 15 per cent of our post-primary schools was evaluated as less than satisfactory. These low standards affect some of the most vulnerable children.

2.10　　The Report also states that while educational outcomes are improving, variations in provision and achievement reflect a system that serves some better than others. Northern Ireland's education system has unacceptable variations and persistent shortcomings, which need to be addressed urgently if the provision and outcomes are to improve from average to world-class.

2.11　　Overall effectiveness needs to improve in the 37 per cent of the post-primary schools inspected which were evaluated as less than 'good' and leadership at all levels in post-primaries requires further improvement. It remains a priority for the Department to raise the inadequate achievements and standards in 15 per cent of schools inspected and the GCSE outcomes for pupils entitled to free school meals and in particular, boys in non-Grammar, Controlled schools. These shortcomings are illustrated by the statistic that 60 per cent of pupils from non-Grammar schools are not achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C (or equivalent) including GCSE English and Maths.

2.12　　Variation in the quality of provision and outcomes for many of our disadvantaged young people and inconsistency in the quality of leadership and teaching remain a challenge in some schools. There is a need to ensure that all of our schools have the capacity, capability and commitment to develop all children to their full potential.

The number of schools and approved enrolments has fallen since 2006

2.13　　**Figure 2** clearly demonstrates that there has been some progress in both reducing the number of schools and the approved enrolments (i.e. the approved number of pupils a school can admit). The number of schools has decreased by 89 (8 per cent) in the period 2005-06 to 2014-15 and the number of approved enrolments has fallen by around 24,000 (6 per cent) over the same period.[12]

11　Qualifications and Destinations of Northern Ireland School Leavers 2012-13: Statistical Press Release, 29 May 2014, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

12　 It should also be noted that after 2006-07 until 2011 primary school enrolments fell and have since risen to exceed 2006-07 levels. Post-primary school enrolments have fallen consistently over the period.

Figure 2: Reduction in schools and approved enrolment numbers (2005-06 to 2014-15)

School	Number of schools			Approved enrolment numbers		
	2005-06	2014-15	Difference	2005-06	2014-15	Difference
Primary	903	836	-67	221,935	208,530	-13,405
Post-primary	230	208	-22	167,441	156,366	-11,075
Total	**1,133**	**1,044**	**-89**	**389,376**	**364,896**	**-24,480**

Notes: Reduction of number of schools is a net figure – 98 primary schools have closed since 2005-06 (including three Voluntary Grammar Preparatory schools). 27 post-primary schools have closed since 2005-06.

Source: NIAO based on the Department of Education statistics

2.14 The Department also told us that the number of school places has fallen by almost 14,000 since 2008, as a result of approved Development Proposals. The Department provided information on the numbers of Development Proposals, to demonstrate the marked increase from 2011 when Area Planning commenced. **Figure 3** illustrates this and the reduction in school places.

Figure 3: Development Proposals and reduction in school places 2008- 2015

Number of Development Proposals	
2008	12
2009	11
2010	12
2011	10
2012	18
2013	32
2014	47
To April 2015	6

School places added

New Schools	1,940
Increased Enrolments	3,929
Total	**5,869**

School places removed

Amalgamations	-6,832
Closure	-11,447
Decreased Enrolments	-1,388
Total	**-19,667**
Net places Removed	**13,798**

Source: Department of Education

2.15 The Bain Review estimated over 53,000 surplus places in schools (15 per cent of the 2005-06 school capacity). Audit Commission work concluded that an acceptable benchmark for surplus capacity should be 25 per cent in individual schools but, when distributed across a school system, surplus capacity should not exceed 10 per cent[13]. The Bain Review reported that there was support for a 10 per cent maximum surplus capacity among the education stakeholders in Northern Ireland.

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13 The Audit Commission response to the DfES White Paper Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils, January 2006

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Figure 4: Surplus school places 2005-06 to 2014-15

School Type	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Primary school surplus places	34,420	36,658	36,421	63,733	67,057	66,706	62,867	58,046	53,998	50,389
Post-primary school surplus places	18,735	18,464	19,101	19,643	18,515	17,781	19,475	20,258	20,350	21,151
Total surplus places	**53,155**	**55,122**	**55,522**	**83,376**	**85,572**	**84,487**	**82,342**	**78,304**	**74,348**	**71,540**

Source: NIAO based on the Department of Education statistics

2.16 **Figure 4** illustrates the number of surplus school places in both the primary and post-primary sectors from the time of the Bain Review in 2006 up to 2015.

2.17 The figures (from 2008-09) have been calculated based on the approved enrolment number of each school less actual enrolment numbers at the school census date (for 2014-15 this was 10 October 2014)

2.18 It is important to note that these figures exclude pupils in receipt of a statement of special educational needs (10,971 pupils in 2014-15 – primary 5,005 and post-primary 5,966), and a small number of pupils admitted on appeal or by direction of the Exceptional Circumstances Body. Statemented pupils attend the schools named in their statements as best suited for their particular needs. Some of these pupils attend full and oversubscribed schools which have no surplus places

so subtracting the total number of these pupils from the total surplus places figure will not give a new accurate surplus places figure.

2.19 If a school has enrolled more pupils than its approved enrolment figure, then it is considered to have zero surplus places (i.e. if a school has an approved enrolment capacity of 200 and an actual enrolment of 205, the difference is "minus" 5 but the number of surplus places is taken as zero). In 2014-15 there were 2,222 pupils admitted to primary and post-primary schools above their approved enrolment number.

The method of calculating approved school enrolments and therefore surplus places has changed over time

2.20 Within the information at **Figure 4**, we noted a significant increase of 75 per

cent in the number of surplus places in primary schools from 2007-08 to 2008-09 (i.e. from 36,421 to 63,733). We asked the Department to explain such a large difference in one academic year.

2.21   The Department told us that at the time of the Bain Review, it was acknowledged that there was no precise methodology for calculating surplus places as accommodation across the education estate was being used to deliver the curriculum, but not necessarily in the way it was originally intended, e.g. some teaching spaces were converted into ICT suites and libraries. The figures in the Bain Review were an estimation based on the best available information at that time. The Bain Review also acknowledged that the Department was considering a change in approach to estimate the number of surplus places. The Bain Review noted that a different approach was adopted for primary and post-primary schools which account for the significant upward swing in primary surplus places when the same methodology began to be used for both in 2008-09.

2.22   The calculation of post-primary surplus places before and after the Bain Review has been based on approved enrolments less actual enrolments. For primary schools, the calculation of surplus places up to 2007-08 was more complicated. The Department calculated surplus places as the difference between capacity and actual enrolment. Capacity was

based on the number of classrooms each school had, and pupil number ranges, taken from the Primary Schools Building Handbook[14]. The maximum of the range was based on a classroom size of 50m^2 or above, which was assumed to accommodate 29 pupils. However, because older schools were likely to have smaller classrooms, or some classrooms were used for other purposes, the minimum of each range was used as the figure to calculate surplus places. For example, a seven classroom school would have been assigned a capacity range of 176-205 pupils, and the surplus places calculation would have based on a capacity of 176 less actual enrolments. Since that was the standard approach at the time of the Bain Review, it was used in the report.

2.23   From 2008-09 onwards the calculation of surplus places for primary schools is the same as for post-primary schools – the approved enrolment of a school less the actual pupils attending.

2.24   The approved enrolment represents the size of a school in terms of permitted pupil numbers. For new schools, this is usually set as part of the approval of the Development Proposal by which the school is opened. For existing schools, it is set by the annual review of approved enrolments.

2.25   Historically, the approved enrolment has been influenced by the number of children a school's classrooms could

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14   Department of Education School Building Handbooks (Nursery, Primary and Secondary) provide advice and guidance on the planning and design of new school buildings and the standard to which they should conform.

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accommodate. In determining how many children a classroom in a primary school could hold (and therefore the maximum approved enrolment), from 2008-09, the Department used a classroom size of 50 m^2 or above, which is suitable for 29 pupils, as the starting point. Classrooms smaller than 50 m^2 had a capacity determined on a pro rata basis by dividing the square meterage by 1.72 (29=50 /1.72). Therefore, since 2008-09 there is a single and consistent methodology applied to assessing capacity for the purposes of determining approved enrolment.

2.26 Building Handbooks specify the accommodation required in a school to deliver the curriculum for the number of pupils in that school, and are used to inform the design of new school buildings. They provide guidance and schedules of accommodation for modern schools, based on standard size classrooms and a suite of suitable ancillary rooms – libraries, laboratories, kitchens, etc. They are not, however, used in the calculation of surplus places – once a school is built, its capacity is determined by the approved enrolment process described above.

2.27 In summary, it is apparent that over a period of time the way in which approved enrolments (and therefore surplus places) in primary schools was calculated has changed. A standard baseline was not used across all schools to measure capacity.

Case Study 2:

Dunmurry Primary School has an approved enrolment of 262 pupils. However, the Principal of the school indicated to the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) that it would be operating at capacity with a pupil population of 210 and would have not have room for an additional 52 pupils. The SEELB assessed the school building based on the handbook standards and agreed with the Principal. SEELB concluded that with Development Proposal approval, a relatively small spend from minor works earmarked funds, the school could be 'right sized' to 210 pupils.

The 2014 Area Profile for the school continues to state capacity at 262 pupils. The actual enrolment of the school in 2014-15 was 171 pupils.

Recommendation 2

It is vital that the Department has accurate information on school capacity in order to be able to establish a robust baseline for the Area Planning process. We recommend that the Department urgently reviews the way it calculates school capacity and, as a result, surplus places.

2.28 As indicated at paragraph 2.18, children in receipt of a statement of special educational needs and children admitted to post-primary schools on appeal or by direction of the Exceptional

Circumstances Body are not included in the actual enrolment figure. In 2014-15 there were 10,971 children with special education needs statements in mainstream schools. A further 68 children were admitted through the Exceptional Circumstances Body or on appeal. These exclusions will lead to an overstating of the number of surplus places in the education system.

Recommendation 3

Children with special educational needs statements and those admitted by the Exceptional Circumstances Body or on appeal represent a substantial number of the school population. Excluding these children from the calculation of actual enrolments means it is likely the number of surplus places is overstated. We recommend that the Department establishes a methodology for calculating surplus places that takes appropriate account of **all** pupils in mainstream schools.

2.29   For the purposes of comparison and assessment of progress in this area, we have compared 2014-15 performance to 2008-09, because the latter is the first year when calculations for both primary and post-primary schools were on a consistent basis.

Figure 5 shows that overall total number of surplus places have decreased by 11,836 (83,376 less 71,540) (14 per cent) in the period from 2008-09 to 2014-15. Analysis of this reveals that there has been a reduction in surplus places in primary schools of 13,344 (63,733 less 50,389) (21 per cent) but a marginal increase in post-primary surplus places of 1,508 (21,151 less 19,643) (8 per cent). An element of these changes is attributable to changes in the size of the school population.

2.30   Despite the reduction in the number of schools, approved enrolments and surplus places in recent years, the underlying trend on surplus places is still unacceptably high. In 2014-15, there were 364,896 approved school enrolments (see **Figure 2, paragraph 2.13**). The 71,540 surplus places (see **Figure 4, paragraph 2.16)** for the same period represents around 20 per cent of school capacity, double that which the Bain Report recommended as acceptable. To put this in perspective, around 36,000 surplus places would represent 10 per cent capacity, so current levels would need to decrease by around 35,000 to reach these levels.

Figure 5: Changes in surplus school places 2008-09 to 2014-15

School type	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Primary school surplus places	63,733	67,057	66,706	62,867	58,046	53,998	50,389
Post-primary school surplus places	19,643	18,515	17,781	19,475	20,258	20,350	21,151
Total surplus places	**83,376**	**85,572**	**84,487**	**82,342**	**78,304**	**74,348**	**71,540**

Source: NIAO based on the Department of Education statistics

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2.31 A further analysis of surplus places by ELB and school sector is shown at **Figure 6**. This clearly shows that the majority of surplus places, 50,389 out of 71,540 (70 per cent) are in primary schools. There were 299 primary schools with fewer than the minimum pupils as recommended by the Bain Review. Similarly, 98 post-primary schools had fewer than the recommended 500 pupils in Years 8-12 and 31 had fewer than the recommended 100 sixth form pupils.

2.32 We recognise the difficulties in forecasting school enrolments. There are a range of social, economic and demographic factors which means that school forecasting operates in a constantly changing environment. However, with issues of high proportions of surplus places in primary schools and the continuing large number of small primary schools persisting eight years after the Bain Review, more action on these issues is required from the Department.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Department together with the Education Authority and CCMS (as statutory planning authorities) do more to address the over-provision of school places particularly at primary school level. The Area Planning process must be further developed so that the Department, planning and managing authorities agree prioritised and timetabled action plans to maintain and implement the proposals within the Area Plans. These proposals should address sustainability issues and result in the reduction of surplus school capacity.

There are still too many small schools which require additional funding

2.33 The vast majority of the smallest schools in Northern Ireland (mainly primary) are located in rural areas. Many of these schools are central to rural communities, helping to ensure their sustainability whilst providing valuable facilities. However, the effective delivery of the

Figure 6:
Surplus places 2014-15 by ELB

Education & Library Board	Primary	Post-primary	Total
Belfast	8,095	2,862	10,957
Western	12,544	4,249	16,793
North Eastern	11,780	4,617	16,397
South Eastern	8,634	3,580	12,214
Southern	9,336	5,843	15,179
Total	**50,389**	**21,151**	**71,540**

Surplus places 2014-15 by school sector

School sector	Primary	Post-primary	Total	% of surplus places
Controlled	23,574	8,401	31,975	45
Voluntary	–	728	728	1
Catholic Maintained	24,649	10,692	35,341	49
Other Maintained	877	40	917	1
Controlled Integrated	901	637	1,538	2
Grant Maintained Integrated	388	653	1,041	2
Total	**50,389**	**21,151**	**71,540**	

Source: Department of Education

curriculum in these schools presents particular challenges and difficulties

2.34 Generally, these schools are more expensive to run relative to larger urban schools and receive specific funding because of their smaller enrolments. The Small Schools Support funding (an element of the Department's Common Funding Scheme) is intended to target resources towards smaller schools to facilitate the delivery of the curriculum. The 2014-15 school budgets included small schools support funding of £27.5 million. This was shared between primary and post-primary schools as follows:

- Primary: £21.3 million

- Post-primary: £6.2 million

2.35 In primary schools, those with enrolments up to 100 pupils received the maximum support of £42,008 reducing on a sliding scale to zero for 300 pupils. In 2014-15 there were 271 primary schools with fewer than 100 pupils. Post-primary schools with an enrolment up to 200 pupils received maximum support of £142,826, again reducing on a sliding scale to zero for 550 pupils. In 2014-15 there were 17 post-primary schools with fewer than 200 pupils.

2.36 In 2014-15 a further £8.3 million funding was distributed in the primary Principals' release time factor. This is funding allocated to smaller primary schools, to provide resources to help ensure that Principals of these schools have at least two days per week release from teaching duties to devote to leadership, management and administrative duties. Primary schools with enrolments up to 100 pupils received the maximum lump sum of £16,420 tapering to zero at 300 pupils. In effect, around £36 million (just over 3 per cent) of school budgets for 2014-15 has been allocated to schools because they are small.

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The small school support factor can act as a barrier to change

2.37   As noted at Paragraph 2.34, Small Schools Support funding is intended to target more resources towards smaller schools to facilitate the delivery of the curriculum. However, it can also be seen as a grant to maintain a school which is financially unsustainable. When

an amalgamation is proposed between two small schools this could lead to significant savings in the new budget compared to the old school budgets (see **Case Study 3**):

Small schools have larger costs per pupil

2.38   **Figure 7** highlights a cross section of large and small primary schools and their pupil numbers and budgets. This illustrates how the cost to educate children is directly affected by the school size.

Figure 7: Small Primary Schools cost more per pupil than larger schools

School (*)	Number of pupils	School Budget (£)	Cost per pupil based on School Budget (£)
A	416	1,371,000	3,296
B	353	1,205,305	3,414
C	329	945,898	2,875
D	199	633,456	3,183
E	160	540,852	3,380
F	166	566,086	3,410
G	135	446,369	3,306
H	90	345,268	3,836
I	81	393,879	4,863
J	71	290,153	4,087
K	55	223,234	4,059
L	47	267,192	5,685
M	38	264,350	6,957
N	35	182,120	5,203
O	21	98,686	4,699
P	19	90,392	4,757

Source: SELB Primary Schools Area Plan (June 2014)

*The names of the schools have been withheld and replaced by letters.

Case Study 3:

In September 2012, **Holy Family Primary School** in Omagh opened following the amalgamation of two single-sex Catholic Maintained primary schools; Loreto Convent PS and St Colmcille's PS. The schools were located a ¼ mile apart and enrolments at both schools had declined with both schools experiencing significant levels of surplus places. The total number of surplus places at both schools was 599 – 235 at Loreto Convent PS and 364 at St Colmcille's PS.

Savings from an amalgamation on to a single site in relation to staffing and recurrent costs were estimated to be in the region of £147,000 (12.5 per cent) two years after amalgamation.

Year	Budget	
2010-11	£1,211,361	Two schools budgets combined
2011-12	£1,180,355	Two schools budgets combined
2012-13	£1,153,840	Single Holy Family school budget
2013-14	£1,032,905	Single Holy Family school budget
2014-15	£1,060,466	Single Holy Family school budget

2.39 Despite education costing more in small schools there is no link to improved outcomes. Estyn (Education and Training Inspectorate in Wales) issued a report in December 2013 on School size and educational effectiveness[15]. This confirms findings from earlier reports[16] that there is little difference in the standards achieved by pupils in small primary or post-primary schools when compared to other schools in Wales. As part of our review we examined the results of the ETI inspections over a three year period and were unable to establish a link between the size of a school and educational attainment.

2.40 A Review of the Common Funding Formula[17] in January 2013 found that there are some small schools which are clearly essential, serving pupils in isolated areas or communities, and these small schools require additional resources to cover costs linked to their small size. However, the additional support provided by a formula for all small schools, regardless of their circumstances, is not consistent with the Sustainable Schools policy.

Recommendation 5

Small schools require additional funding to deliver the required curriculum and remain financially sustainable. However there is no demonstrable evidence that educational attainment at small schools is better than their larger counterparts. The Department should, as a matter of urgency, work with the planning and managing authorities to identify exceptional circumstances in which an otherwise unsustainable small school could be considered for retention and additional financial support.

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15   School size and educational effectiveness, Estyn 2013

16   Small schools in Wales, Estyn 2006 and Estyn evidence submitted to the Welsh Rural-Development Sub-Committee, 2008

17   Salisbury Report – An Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme, January 2013

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The Sustainable Schools policy implementation has been strengthened over time

3.1   As indicated at paragraph 1.12, in response to the Bain Review, the Department issued a Sustainable Schools policy in January 2009 and in late 2011 the ELBs were commissioned to carry out Area Planning.

3.2   Area Planning is an important driver in delivering the Department's vision *"to ensure that every learner fulfils his or her full potential at each stage of development"*. In order to achieve this, schools need to be of the right type, right size, located in the right place and focused on raising standards. Delivery of sustainable schools requires re-organisation of schools including closures, amalgamations, expansions and reductions – some of which may require considerable capital investment.

3.3   The Department published the terms of reference for Area Planning in December 2011[18] and Area Planning Guidance in February 2012[19]. Part of the guidance recommended that an Area Planning Co-ordination Group (APCG) would be established at regional level. The membership of this group reflected those organisations with statutory responsibility for planning education provision, namely the five ELB's and CCMS. The role of this group was to provide strategic direction and to co-ordinate the process of Area Planning within the guidelines. It was recognised that a consistent approach was needed, with common practices developed across the five ELB areas.

3.4   Evidence indicates that there has been an inconsistent approach across the Boards. Processes differed from Board to Board: the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) included the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and Comhairle na Gaelscolaiochta (CnaG) in early discussions but others didn't. Approaches to engagement with schools and parents varied with some engaging in the early fact finding stage while others chose to present proposals.

3.5   In January 2013 the Area Planning Working Group (a sub-group of APCG) was commissioned to undertake a review of the Area Planning process for the post-primary sector to learn lessons from the consultation process and take account of the views submitted. The review identified a number of issues including a lack of common structure and format in the draft Area Plans, variances in content and level of detail and poor oversight and governance arrangements to ensure draft plans were approved by Boards/CCMS prior to release. The review also noted feedback from Departmental officials that included:

•   plans did not translate options into proposals for future provision in local areas;

•   lack of robust evidence that there had been extensive engagement;

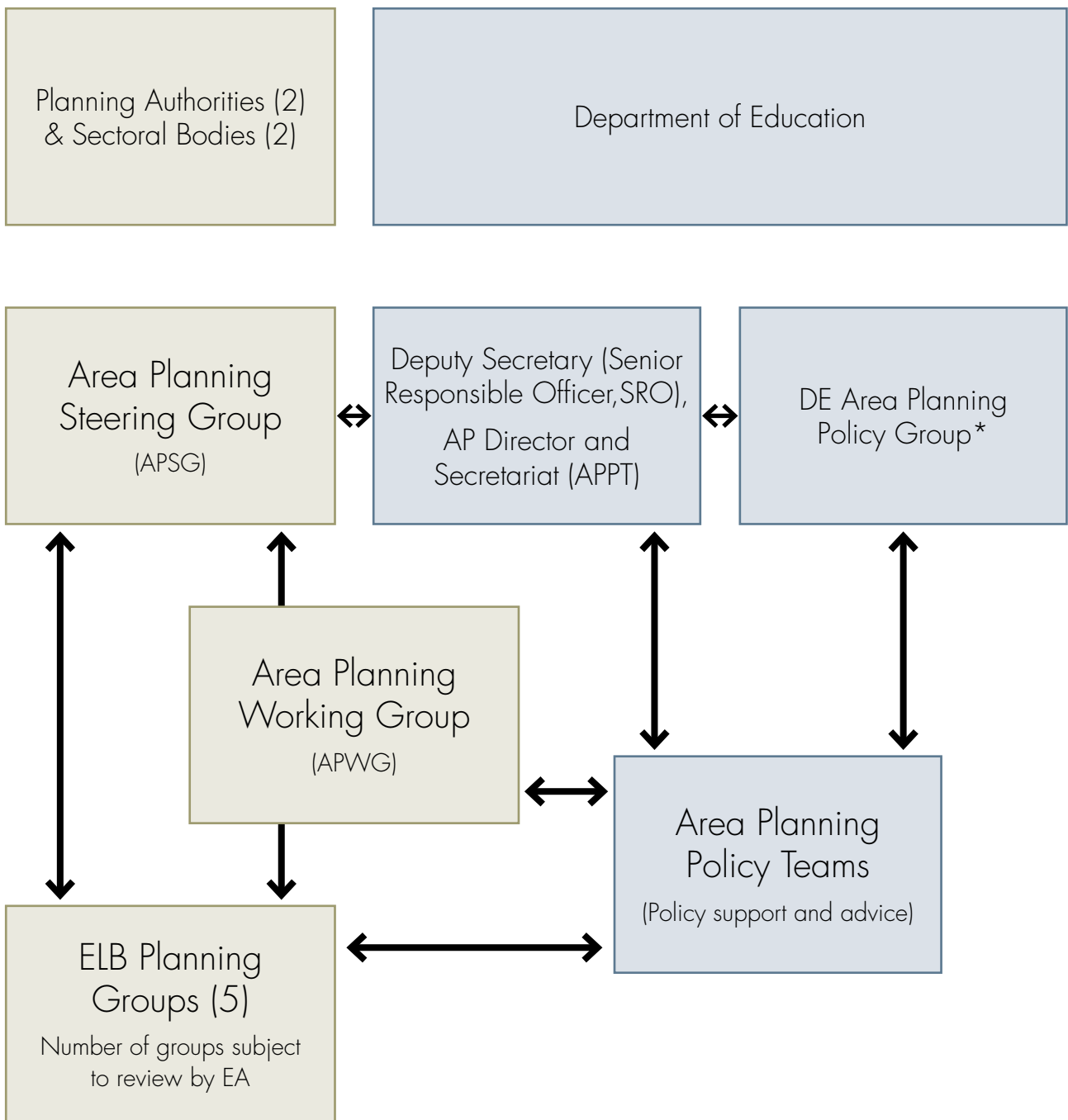18   Area Planning – Terms of Reference, Department of Education for Northern Ireland, 15 December 2011

19   Department of Education Area Planning Guidance, 14 February 2012

with other sectors, particularly the Integrated Education sector;

- planning essentially segregated by the two largest sectors – Maintained and Controlled; and

- little evidence of sharing information across sectors.

3.6   To address the issues identified, the APCG was replaced by the Area Planning Steering Group (the Group) in April 2013 to play a strategic role in supporting the further development of Area Planning to be embedded across the education system. The expanded and more inclusive Group membership consisted of a senior representative from the Department, and the Chief Executives of the ELBs, CCMS, NICIE and CnaG. A representative from the Department for Employment and Learning joined the Group in November 2013, to represent the interests of Further Education. The Group meets monthly and is chaired by the Minister on a quarterly basis. This Group is taking forward a number of issues as part of its work programme including:

- structures for Area Planning programme;

- guidance for Development Proposals;

- principles for the retention of small schools; and

- issues arising from school amalgamations.

3.7   During the preparation of our report, in April 2015, the Department reviewed and enhanced Area Planning Support Structures. These are shown in **Figure 8.** More detail on the Group, the Area Planning Working Group and the Planning Groups is given at **Appendix 4**.

3.8   Although this represents a strengthening in the implementation of the Sustainable Schools policy and Area Planning, more should have been done earlier. It would have been better to deal with the issues noted at paragraph 3.5 and 3.6 at the planning stage of this programme of change to ensure consistency across all ELB areas. The Department told us that this was a new concept in planning for education provision and as such was untested. The Department also said it would therefore have been extremely difficult to anticipate many of the issues at the outset. They stated that it was only as Area Planning progressed could the processes and approaches be tested and many of the issues identified.

3.9   In our view, until April 2015, delivery of sustainable schools has not been managed as a programme of change in line with Department for Finance and Personnel (DFP) best practice[20] as evidenced by the following factors:

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Figure 8   Area Planning Support Structures (April 2015)

*Ad hoc group to be convened by Deputy Secretary and Area Planning Director to address specific issues as they emerge.

Source: Department of Education

- the Gateway Review Process within programme management is a key assurance mechanism designed to provide an objective view of a programme's ability to deliver at key stages. However, to date, the Department's programme has not been subject to the Gateway Review Process.

- Area Planning is a programme about delivering change which is complex, risky and requiring careful management of different stakeholder interests. Despite this, it was not always a key item for discussion at Departmental Board level

- the Department has not clearly identified the outcomes which will determine the successful delivery of this programme. We asked the ELBs what success would look like. We were given a number of different responses ranging, from Ministerial approval for development proposals, improved performance in measurable sustainable criteria; to no specific measures of success.

3.10 Without robust and best practice project management, it is difficult to determine how the Department could effectively oversee the delivery of a sustainable schools network. In order to deliver an outcome it is important to identify what that outcome should be. However the Department has not set any SMART targets or objectives around reducing the number of surplus places in the school sectors.

3.11 The Department's Accounting Officer told us that the implementation of the Sustainable Schools policy is not a programme to be managed under a programme management structure. The Department stated that it is the Minister's policy and will continue to be implemented until such times as he or another Minister changes it. The Department stated it is not appropriate to measure the Department's work on this against DFP best practice for programme or project management methodologies or structures which are entirely different in nature.

3.12 In our view, good practice principles such as the appointment of an SRO, Gateway Reviews and SMART objectives are standard and can only improve the implementation of major policies.

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The Department has not developed a communication strategy for the Sustainable Schools policy and Area Planning

3.13   The DFP best practice guidance indicates that effective communication is at the heart of successful change. A change programme must incorporate a clear approach to communication which is strongly linked to engagement with stakeholders. A Communications Strategy should be produced which documents how information will be disseminated to, and received from, all stakeholders involved in that change programme. It identifies the means/ medium, the message(s) and frequency of communication between the different parties. It is used to establish and manage on-going communications throughout a programme.

3.14   Planning for the delivery of education involves a number of stakeholders including the Department, ELBs, the various schools sectors, parents, school governors, school principals and trade unions. In order to ensure that information is communicated to stakeholders in a consistent and timely way, there should be a communication strategy.

3.15   The Sustainable Schools policy and Area Planning do not have a communication strategy. Without this, stakeholders have adopted different processes for communicating with schools. The general view from the participants on

our School Principal's Focus Groups was that they felt marginalised and that communication within the process was poor.

Recommendation 6

The Sustainable Schools policy and Area Planning process lack a communication strategy. This is vital in a programme of this nature. We recommend that the Department develops a strategy to better communicate the aims of the Sustainable Schools policy and the Area Planning Process to the wider public and elected representatives.

Area Planning is being carried out on a sectoral basis

3.16   In the absence of ESA, the Department decided that the ELBs should lead the development of Area Plans in line with the current legislation. Article 6 of the 1986 Education and Libraries Order requires that *"each board shall secure that there are available in its area sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education …. sufficient in number, character and equipment to afford for all pupils opportunity for education … as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes …"*.

3.17   However, ELBs told us that, although they are the planning authority for education, they only have managing authority over the controlled sector. Because of this limitation, the process that developed

could not be considered as fully inclusive. The managing authorities for the controlled and the Catholic Maintained sector developed plans for their sectors which were later combined to form the Area Plans. These sectors account for 94 per cent of the primary school population and 60 per cent of the post-primary population. To be fully effective and inclusive however, Area Planning needed the input and engagement of all other education delivery sectors i.e. Voluntary Grammars, Integrated and Irish-medium education (see **Case Study 4**).

Case Study 4:

A Grant-aided school in the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) area had 20 pupils and a financial deficit in 2013-14. The school had more than two composite year groups in a single classroom; a staff of 2.15 teachers and 41 unfilled places. All these indicators pointed to an unsustainable school – there was less than the minimum number of pupils (105), there was a financial deficit and there should be no more than two composite year groups and a minimum of four teachers per primary school. However SELB cannot make decisions for this school without the full agreement of the schools managing authority. The latest Area Plan for primary schools in SELB proposes *"the managing authority - will keep this school under review on an annual basis within the context of the DE Sustainable Schools Policy and the local area."*

3.18   The education sectors without direct statutory planning responsibility in the Area Planning process have major

concerns about the process. Many Integrated and Irish-medium schools are independent of any managing authority, being owned and managed by school Boards of Governors. However, they are collectively represented by the advisory bodies NICIE and CnaG, funded by the Department with the objective of promoting and encouraging Integrated and Irish-medium education. Although both NICIE and CnaG are represented on the Area Planning Steering Group they raised the following concerns with us:

• NICIE told us that *"the process of area-based planning has failed. Area planning was to identify the best delivery model for meeting the educational needs of an area, however the process has been conducted in silos and the main driver has been to protect the status quo rather than meet the needs of the areas."*

• CnaG stated *"under the terms of reference it is a requirement that Boards engage and seek input from all sectors. In spite of this requirement, the level of engagement by the Boards with the Irish-medium sector varied from satisfactory to wholly inadequate. Demand for Irish-medium education has not been tested as part of area-planning – this option has not been offered as part of proposals for change. This is not in the spirit of DE's* [the Department] *statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education."*

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3.19   Despite educating a large proportion of post-primary children (33 per cent 2013-14), Voluntary Grammar schools do not have a strategic role in Area Planning. They were not represented on the Area Planning Steering Group. The position is however, being kept under review. The Department told us that Voluntary Grammar schools do not have a representative body that can speak on behalf of all Voluntary Grammar schools, but also stated that they are now represented on the Local Planning Groups.

3.20   It is clear that not all sectors are properly engaged in Area Planning. The Integrated and Irish-medium sectors feel excluded from the process and the Voluntary Grammar sector does not fully engage with the process.

3.21   Without full participation of all major education sectors, Area Planning will not produce solutions which are complete and appropriate to all localities. We would therefore urge the Department to do more to include all sectors in the Area Planning process.

The Area Planning timetable was challenging for ELBs

3.22   As noted in Paragraph 3.3, in December 2011 the Department issued Area Planning Terms of Reference which indicated the following timescales; submission of Area Plans for:

- special schools by 28 February 2012;

- post-primary schools 31 March 2012; and

- primary schools 30 June 2012.

3.23   The Department supplemented the terms of reference with Area Planning guidance in February 2012. The guidance stated that, in delivering an Area Plan the Boards, working with CCMS and engaging extensively with other school sectors, should take account of the guidance issued by the Department and seek to fulfil the following aims/objectives to:

- ensure a network of sustainable schools, within reasonable travelling distance for pupils and capable of delivering effectively the revised curriculum and, in post-primary schools, the Entitlement Framework;

- identify and meet the needs of all children and young people in the area;

- enhance the quality of provision and raise standards;

- reduce the number of surplus places;

- reduce the duplication of provision;

- identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross sectoral basis;

- maximise the use and sharing of existing school estate;

- identify potential co-location of mainstream and special schools;

- take full account of appropriate and relevant Further Education sector provision for 14-19 year olds; and

- explore opportunities for cross border planning.

3.24　At this time no additional resource was made available to take forward Area Planning: ELBs were already working with resource pressures due to the vacancy control direction[21] in advance of the creation of ESA.   Additional allocations have been made to support Area Planning in the 2014-15 financial year as follows:

Figure 9: 2014-15 Area Planning allocations

Education & Library Board	Allocation (£000s)
Belfast	44
North Eastern	44
South Eastern	47
Southern	54
Western	34
Total	**223**

Source: Department of Education

3.25　The Department told us that ELBs were already engaged in and resourced to carry out strategic planning prior to the Minister's announcement in September 2011 as it is part of their statutory duties. However, although June 2012

was the deadline set for completion of all plans, the plans were not completed until two years later. Draft Area Plans for primary schools were released for consultation in March 2013 with the final plans published in July 2014. Draft Area Plans for post-primary schools were released for consultation in July 2012 with the final plans published in February 2013.

3.26　Area Plan proposals to reduce/ increase the enrolment of a school, or close or amalgamate a school require the Education Authority to publish a development proposal for approval by the Department. This process also incorporates a formal statutory consultation at pre and post publication stages. This can be a time and resource consuming procedure and may take up to two years. During this time a school has an uncertain future which can impact school life in a number of ways:

- pupils move schools as parents pre-empt change;

- yearly pupil enrolments decline in the face of uncertainty;

- staff become demoralised as their future is uncertain; and

- working with other schools becomes more challenging.

3.27　In order to ensure the success of changes to the delivery of education it is vital that planning authorities work towards securing the support of all stakeholders. There have been several high-profile

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21   Department for Education Vacancy Control Policy, October 2006

Part Three:
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cases where proposed changes have become the subject of judicial reviews. These cases have been challenges to the Department's decisions to:

- approve the amalgamation of Newtownbreda and Knockbreda High Schools;

- reject the proposal from Clintyclay Primary school parents to transform the school to integrated status; and

- reject the proposal to increase enrolments at Drumragh Integrated College.

There have also been instances of schools threatened with closure successfully lobbying to change the proposal before it was published or to persuade the Minister to reject a published proposal.

3.28 The short timetable presented to the ELBs reduced the capability for meaningful engagement with all stakeholders in order to develop support prior to the publication of proposals. Time limitations and a lack of a clear communication strategy are likely to have contributed to the resistance to change in some communities.

The Department does not know the cost of surplus places

3.29 The Bain Review highlighted that unused teaching space is an inefficient use of

resources. It stated that the amount of surplus capacity broadly indicates the value for money that a school system represents and the degree to which resources are used efficiently and effectively[22].

3.30 There has been no attempt to identify the cost of retaining surplus places in the school system in Northern Ireland. The Department has stated that because funding follows the pupil (school budget is allocated per pupil head), there is no cost for the retention of surplus places in schools. However, there are other cost considerations:

- schools with a reduced enrolment will be benefiting from small school funding support;

- fixed contracts for cleaning, repairs and maintenance costs, etc will remain irrespective of the number of pupils attending a school;

- the Common Funding Scheme allocates a percentage of a school's budget according to size of it's building regardless of pupil numbers; and

- other substantial financial savings may be made by the closure of schools due to the existence of surplus places – teaching costs, senior management positions, support services/administration costs.

3.31 As part of our Study, we visited the Education and Training Inspectorate for

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22 Schools for the Future: Funding, Strategy, Sharing: Report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education, (Professor George Bain), December 2006 (paragraph 7.38)

Wales (Estyn). Estyn carried out research into surplus school places[23].   This found that those local authorities that calculated the cost of surplus places found the information useful in persuading the school communities and decision makers of the need to reduce surplus places. Their view was that their work would be strengthened by national use of an agreed standardised method that would calculate a statistical average cost of surplus places across the many complex school funding arrangements of different local authorities.

3.32   The research also found that the potential savings from removing surplus places in existing schools are relatively small in comparison to the savings achievable by school closure. Estyn's research found that in Wales in 2011-12, the average cost of a surplus place was £260 in the primary sector and £510 in secondary sector. Estyn calculated that £63,500 would be saved for each primary school closure and £113,000 saved for each secondary school closure.

3.33   The Department told us that it is extremely difficult to determine the cost of surplus places. In their view, it does not cost any more to employ teaching, non-teaching staff, or indeed heat and light a classroom for 25 pupils compared to one with 20 pupils. The Department also stated that, in order to make appropriate cost assessments, a range of other 'indirect costs' would need to be considered: many of which relate to centre support services and administration; and these are not readily

disaggregated at a school or pupil funding level – for example: rates; rent; maintenance; administrative; travel; IT and communications infrastructure; capital; peripatetic support etc.

3.34   In the current financial climate of budget cuts it is crucial that the Department is getting value for money from schools. In our view the cost of surplus places in schools is an important factor to provide evidence to support the promotion and delivery of sustainable schools. If the Department does not capture this information, it cannot quantify the potential savings and educational benefits in removing surplus school places.

Recommendation 7

The cost of surplus places in schools is a key piece of information in determining the sustainability of schools. Currently the Department does not have any indication of how much surplus places cost. We recommend that the Department assesses the cost of surplus school places in the Northern Ireland education system and considers whether these costs are capable of releasing efficiencies.

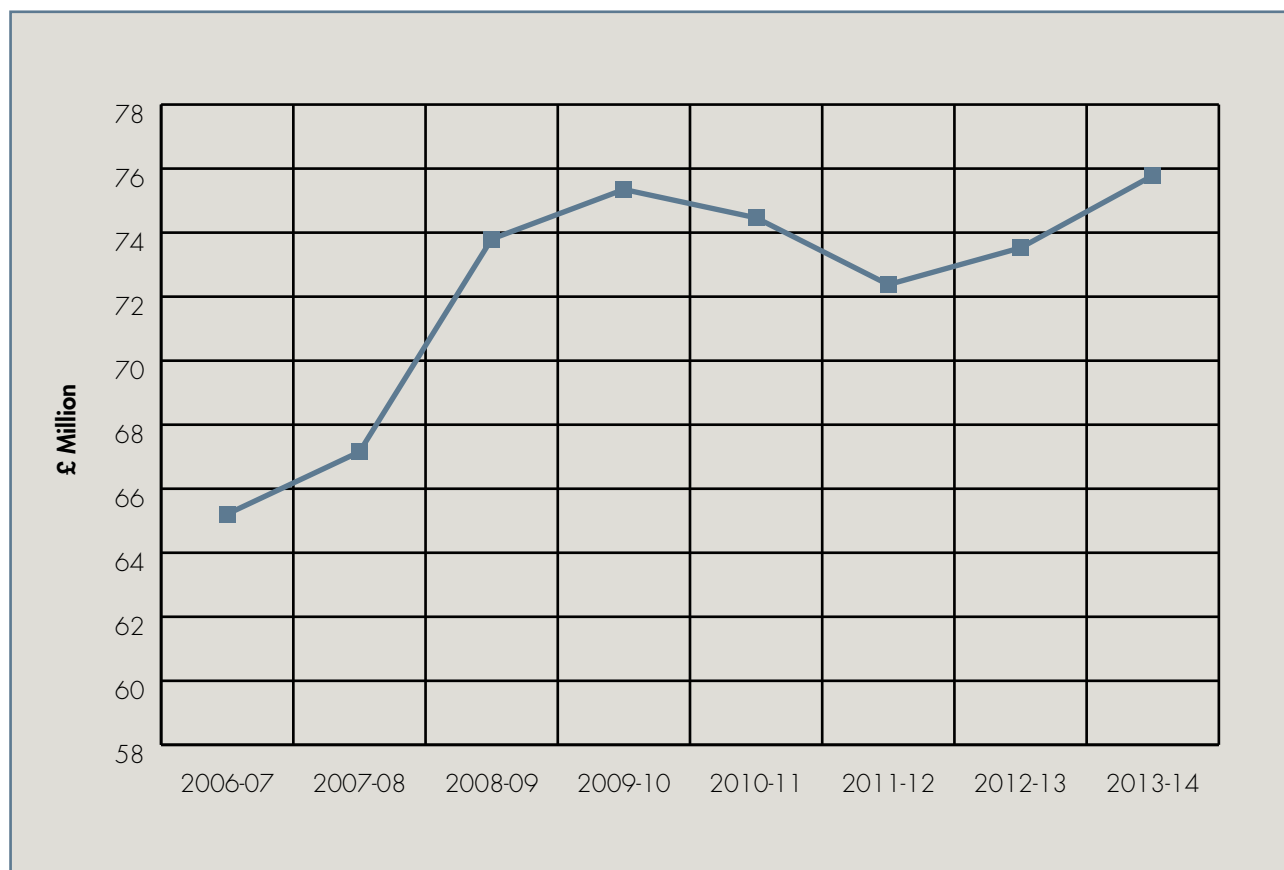## Policy conflict - parental preference impacts on Area Planning and school transport costs

3.35   In reviewing the wider policy environment in which the Sustainable School Policy sits, in our view, parental preference creates difficulties for the Area Planning process.

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23   How do surplus places affect the resources available for expenditure on improving outcomes for pupils?' Estyn, May 2012

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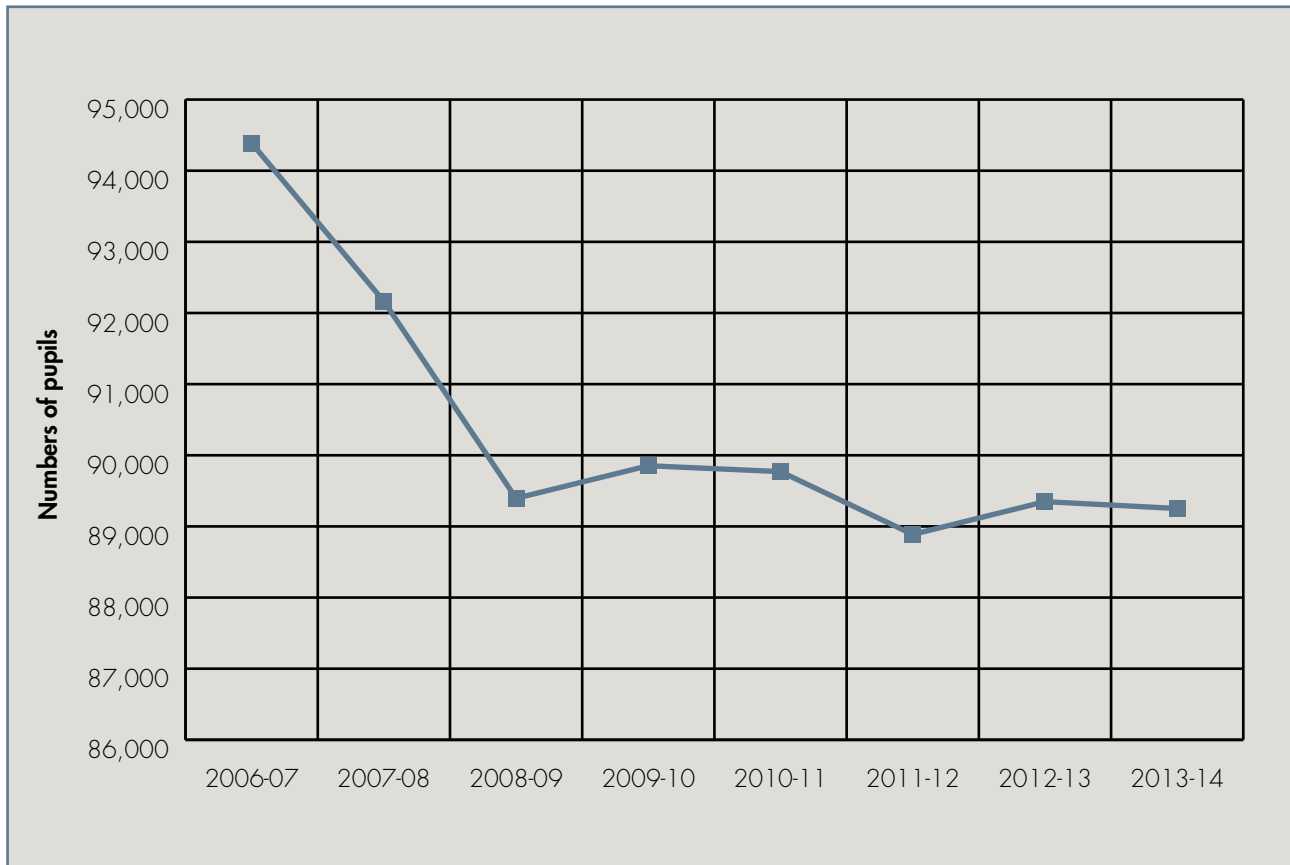**Figure 10: Home to school transport costs**

Source : Department of Education

3.36 The ability of parents to send a child to a preferred school militates against an effective Area Planning policy. With such freedom of choice it is very difficult to forecast and plan the future supply and demand for places in any particular school. Some school Principals we met during our Focus Groups stated that because of parental preference, certain schools have suffered falling numbers. As a consequence, parents become reluctant to send their child to these schools and their demise can become inevitable.

3.37 Parental preference can also lead to excessive transport costs. The Bain Review found that many pupils travel long distances to their schools and by-passed nearer suitable schools. Pupils are eligible for transport assistance if they travel more than:

- two miles to their chosen primary school; or

- three miles to their chosen secondary school; and

Figure 11: Number of pupils transported from home to school

Source : Department of Education

- they have been unsuccessful in gaining place at all suitable schools closer to home.

3.38 There are five main forms of home to school transport[24], with Translink buses accounting for over half of all pupils transported. The Department envisages that the Area Planning process will result in an effectively planned, sustainable and affordable pattern of schools. This should ensure that there is the right type and size of schools, in the right places, to meet the needs of pupils and young people. The current policy of transporting large numbers of pupils to schools of choice does not assist Area Planning. It can also lead to significant additional costs. We are aware that a Review[25] has been carried out in this area. **Figure 10** shows that the total cost of transporting pupils in 2013-14 was £75.8 million. Home to School transport costs for the eight years to 2013-14 has amounted to over half a billion pounds. **Figure 11** shows that an average of around 90,000 pupils per year were given free transport since 2006-07.

24 Translink (Ulsterbus and Metro), Education and Library Board vehicles, privately operated vehicles, taxis and daily allowances

25 'Independent Review of Home to School Transport', December 2014

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Overall, despite the fact that the number of pupils using public transport each year has fallen by 5 per cent, costs have risen by 16 per cent.

Evaluation has found Area Planning consultation and advice was inadequate

Consultation

3.39 The Boards issued draft Area Plans for post-primary schools for public consultation in July 2012. In December 2012 (to inform the draft Area Plans for primary schools and the review noted at paragraph 3.5) the Central Management Support Unit (which co-ordinates information for the five ELBs) produced a summary report of the public consultation exercises for Area Planning for the Post-Primary School Sector. There were over 49,000 responses to the consultation exercise. Some cross boundary issues were raised by respondents, including:

- an apparent lack of collaboration between BELB, NEELB and SEELB;

- the Area Plans are disjointed and uncoordinated across Boards; and

- an apparent lack of evidence of cross-ELB and cross-sector solutions.

3.40 In August 2013 the Central Management Support Unit produced a similar summary report of the public consultation exercise for Area Planning

for the Primary School Sector. There were almost 8,000 responses. Some of the common themes arising from the consultation exercise included:

- lack of confidence or concern over the consultation process;

- the process was not addressing the issue of surplus places;

- a lack of detail in the Area Plans; and

- more imaginative solutions were required in Area Plans which lacked vision.

3.41 Evaluation by the Queen's University of Belfast (QUB) School of Education found that the approach to Area Planning consultation was top-down and led by the sectors. It found that some Boards were better than others in the level of consultation, but there did not appear to be significant facilitation of creative options in local areas. A variety of views were presented in the consultation process, but little changed when the revised proposals came forward.

3.42 Additional evaluation by the University of Ulster[26] found that opportunities to respond to the process were very formulaic. Consultation was limited to a number of questions and although there were opportunities for open responses, most did not respond in this way.

3.43 There was also concern expressed over the adequacy of the consultation exercise at our Focus Groups with

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26 Northern Ireland Assembly – Committee for Education – Official Report – Area-based Planning : Queen's University Belfast and University of Ulster

School Principals. Some felt that the consultation was a *'tick box exercise'* and some held the view that decisions had already been made within the Boards and the Department.

Advice for Schools with Sustainability Issues

3.44   Evaluative work performed by QUB/ University of Ulster identified problems with schools getting advice and support when struggling with sustainability issues. This was especially so when schools were trying to enter into partnerships. It was not clear to schools wanting to collaborate with other schools, where they could go. It was felt that there was nowhere for them to go for advice in the Boards or CCMS. In some cases schools contacted QUB for advice and assistance.

3.45   As regards the wider Area Plans, it was also felt there was no support for schools to take them forward. In giving evidence to the Assembly's Education Committee, a representative from QUB said *"There is a bit of frustration in school communities that we work with, for good or for ill. These plans were written on their behalf; they want and are willing to take them forward; they have done a lot of background work with governors, parents and pupils; and they recognise the benefits in some cases of taking them forward for the pupils in order to offer an enhanced and wider breadth of provision, but when they go to their managing authority, they cannot get any support, be it actual resource support or*

even advice and guidance."

3.46   We also found that there could be more advice and support for schools with potential sustainability issues. At our 'School Principles Focus Groups' (see **Appendix 4**), some School Principals stated they were given no support when they were suffering problems. This appeared to be particularly the case where schools were asked to work together. If one of the schools felt reasonably safe as regards future viability they felt no onus to co-operate.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Department, in conjunction with the Education Authority and CCMS reviews the assistance given to schools showing signs of being unsustainable. Steps should be taken to be more proactive regarding the appropriate mechanism to provide advice, support and assistance to those schools that require help. Clear lines of communication should be established for such circumstances, and a specialist advice and support group considered.

Appendices

Appendix 1:
Study Methodology

Methodology	Purpose
Meetings with Officials from the Department and each of the Education and Library Boards.	To gain Departmental and Education and Library Boards views on Area Planning.
Meetings with CCMS, NICIE, CnaG and the Governing Bodies Association.	To gain these organisations' views on Area Planning.
Focus groups attended by school Principals and Governors from schools impacted by the proposals in the Area Plans.	To gain school Principals' and Governors views on Area Planning.
Review of relevant documentation from the Department and the ELBs.	To gain an understanding of the policies and procedures in this area.
Analytical review of the Department's statistics on approved school places and enrolment.	To produce information and analysis on surplus school places.
Desk-based review of research on school planning and provision.	To gain background knowledge and an understanding of current issues in Area Planning.

Appendix 2:
The Education Sectors in Northern Ireland

The Education Authority and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools have statutory responsibility for planning education provision. However, education in Northern Ireland is delivered by five main sectors, all of which have different management, funding and ownership arrangements. This can present difficulties for area-based planning. The sectors are:

- **Controlled schools (including controlled Integrated and some controlled Irish-medium)** are owned and funded by the Education Authority and managed through Boards of Governors. The Education Authority is the contracting authority for capital projects and direct providers of maintenance and facilities management services to schools. The Education Authority has the responsibility for the planning of education delivery in the controlled sector.

- **Catholic Maintained schools** are owned by Trustees and managed through Boards of Governors. The running costs of the schools are funded through the Education Authority who provides maintenance and facilities management services. Capital costs are funded directly by the Department. The Trustees are normally the Bishops of Dioceses and/or their nominees, or senior members of religious orders or congregations that have provided the school. They are the contracting authority for capital projects. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) is responsible for the planning of education provision in this sector, and for providing advice and support.

- **Voluntary Grammar schools** are owned and managed by Board of Governors or Trustees and are funded directly by the Department. The Board of Governors or the Trustees of each school are the contracting authority for capital projects and services.

- **Grant-maintained Integrated schools** are owned and managed by Boards of Governors and funded directly by the Department. The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) fulfils the role of contracting authority in the provision of accommodation to establish a school. The role of contracting authority for capital projects and services transfers to the Board of Governors once the viability of the school is established and it qualifies for capital funding. NICIE is a publicly funded advisory and promotional body for the integrated sector. It does not have any responsibility for planning education delivery.

- **Irish-medium schools**, in which teaching is through the medium of the Irish Language, are almost all owned and managed by their Boards of Governors. The running costs of the schools are funded through the Education Authority. Comhairle na Gaelscolaiochta (CnaG) fulfils the role of contracting authority in the provision of accommodation for new schools. The role of contracting authority for capital projects and services transfers to the school's Board of Governors when the school qualifies for capital funding. CnaG is a publicly funded advisory and promotional body for the Irish medium sector. It does not have any responsibility for planning education delivery.

Although the Education Authority and CCMS have the statutory responsibility for the planning of provision of education, the Minister of Education is the decision maker on published development proposals for any significant changes to schools e.g. school amalgamations, expansions, closures etc. The Department of Education also has to be mindful of its duty to 'facilitate and encourage' Integrated and Irish-medium education.

Appendix 3: (paragraph 1.21 and paragraph 3.46)
Key Issues discussed at School Principals Focus Groups

Key area 1: Area Profiles/viability audits

How much consultation/involvement did you have in area profiles/viability audits?

- Was there initial consultation/discussion?

- Do you agree with the information published in the area profiles?

- Three of the six sustainable school criteria are measured – is it fair to publish data on three criteria only?

- How valid are the other criteria in measuring sustainability?

- Are these measured effectively?

Do you see benefits in the compilation/publication of area profiles annually?

- What do you understand is the status of the area profiles within the process of Area Planning?

- Do you believe area profiles show an accurate picture of the sustainability of the school?

- How does the school community: parents; teachers; etc view the area profile?

- Does the information have an impact on parental preference?

Key area 2: Area Planning process

What is your understanding of Area Planning and how was this presented to you by the Board/CCMS?

- How was Area Planning introduced to you?

- What do you see is the driving force behind Area Planning?

- How did the Board/CCMS engage with you in the Area Planning process?

- Did you feel this was adequate?

- Did you feel consultation was meaningful?

- Did the Board/CCMS explain clearly the decisions made?

- Your school has been highlighted as requiring change (to ensure sustainability within the Area Plan) – had there been an awareness of this need to change prior to the Area Planning process?

- How did the Board/CCMS engage with school to plan prior to Area Planning?

- Is the school in agreement with the Board/CCMS's proposals?

- Has the school offered alternative solutions? If so, does the school feel these have been adequately considered?

Given that Area Planning is intended to be a cyclical process can you see where improvements could be made in the future?

Key area 3: Impact on school

Has there been any effect on school life as a result of Area Planning?

- Do you think it is influencing parental preference to send their children to your school?

- Are you more proactive in trying to attract children to your school?

- Is budgeting a bigger priority?

- Has there been a change in how you appoint new staff (i.e. temporary appointments only)

Appendix 3: (continued)

- Has there been any reaction from your teaching/non teaching staff (increased staff turnover, increased sick leave, less flexibility etc).

- How are pupils and their education experience impacted?

With Area Planning proposals requiring planning and investment there is likely to be some delays in implementation – does this concern you?

The main findings of the Focus Groups are summarised overleaf.

Appendix 3: (continued)
School focus groups thematic report

Introduction

1. One of the key issues in the Bain report was the need for the Department to address the issue of surplus capacity in schools. It recommended the need for Area Planning. The Department accepted this recommendation and responded with its sustainable schools policy in 2009 and directions to ELBs to complete Area Planning in 2011. As part of our fieldwork we wanted to assess the impact of Area Planning on schools. To gather this evidence we selected ten schools (five primary and five post-primary) in each Board area and invited them to attend a focus group to discuss issues around Area Planning. This is not a representative sample as we selected schools from those that have been included in proposals for change within each of the Area Plans.

    Fifty schools were invited to attend a focus group, 22 attended with one school providing a written submission and another school requesting a separate meeting. The full list of participants is given below:

Education and Library Board	School
South Eastern	Dundonald High school Movilla High School St Columba's College Old Warren Primary School Belvoir Primary School
North Eastern	Coleraine College Rathcoole Primary School Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School St Joseph's College
Belfast	Blythfield Primary School Ashfield Boys High School Mercy College Christian Brothers Secondary School St Mary's Star of the Sea

Education and Library Board	School
Western	Lisneal College Donemana Primary School Holy Family Primary School St. Francis of Assisi Drumnabey Primary School Strabane Primary School
Southern	Foley Primary School St. John's (Kingisland) Primary School City of Armagh High School St. Brigid's High School St. Joseph's College

2. We directed questioning to three main areas:

    1. Area profiles

    2. The Area Planning process

    3. The impact of Area Planning on schools

    The following main points emerged.

Area profiles

3. A number of schools voiced concerns over the accuracy of the data published.

4. The enrolment figures do not acknowledge children with special needs or nursery school provision. In some schools this can be a substantial percentage of the pupil population. This gives the perception that these children do not count in terms of planning education delivery. Given that the Area Profiles are being used to identify schools in difficulty, there are concerns that information published is not accurate and does not reflect the whole school population.

Appendix 3: (continued)

5. A number of schools stated that the data collected in the Area Profiles had not been shared with them prior to publication, however, this was not the case for all schools.

6. The information provided in the Area Profile reflects three of the six criteria for sustainable schools only.

7. Key stage results are not a robust measure of achievement. Most education practitioners use other measures to determine a child's progress.

8. The impact on children cannot be captured in raw data as it does not measure value added to the pupil. This is a particular issue for schools with falling enrolments as most often the schools are left with the most challenging pupils. In many instances attendance is the key challenge with attainment in terms of 5 GCSE in some cases an unreasonable goal. Therefore schools must look to develop these children in other meaningful ways - however this will not be considered meaningful in terms of measuring achievement. Area profiles do not provide context to a schools sustainability data.

9. With schools in competition to maintain sustainable enrolments, the publication of the viability audits can have a negative impact on local area relationships.

Area Planning process

10. All participants agreed that there is a need for effective Area Planning to address the current problem of too many schools. Schools clearly stated that it is not the concept of Area Planning that they object to, but the process employed to make decisions about their schools' future. Schools feel marginalised within the decision making process, without any meaningful role or representation.

11. Many of the participants felt they were better placed to identify local solutions but were not being included in the decision-making process.

12. Schools feel that consultation is a 'tick box' exercise as decisions have already been made within the Board and Department. Schools see the ELBs and CCMS as intransigent in terms of looking at other options.

13. Controlled schools feel at a disadvantage to schools in other sectors. Integrated, Irish Medium, Catholic Maintained and Voluntary Grammar schools are supported by umbrella organisations which will act as advocates. Controlled schools relationships with the ELB, as their managing authority, is much more operational – ELB's cannot advocate for controlled sector because of its position in terms of determining Area Plans.

14. Schools see further inequities in the legislative support for the Irish Medium and Integrated Sectors. Integrated and Irish Medium schools have an inequitable advantage to grow because the statutory regulations state that the Department must *"facilitate and encourage"* these strands of education delivery.

Appendix 3:
School focus groups thematic report

15. Schools would challenge whether the concept of Area Planning has been applied as delivery sectors seem to be working in silos with little regard for others. It appears to them that the process is driven by institutions, with education sectors trying to protect their own areas of responsibility.

16. Communication within the process has been poor. There is a perception of a lack of transparency in the process, and communication of what is happening. Schools want to be involved in the decision process but failing that they should be kept informed. Schools want to see clear decisions being made and implemented quickly.

17. Within the post-primary sector, Principals believe that current arrangements favour grammar schools at the expense of non-selective schools. The admission of children with a lower academic ability to grammar schools is not in the best interests of a child as grammar schools may not be equipped to offer them the right support to ensure they achieve their best.   Meanwhile schools which can help these children achieve their full potential are 'withering on the vine' as parental preference will always favour the grammar option where available.

18. Parental perception is that grammar schools are best. Non-selective schools have to work much harder to achieve a good reputation even, when ETI inspection rates them as good as, or better than their grammar school counterparts.

Impact on school

19. Proposals can be divisive – schools are competing for survival. Schools are being forced to change when they don't agree and are mounting legal challenges, adopting a spirit of non-co-operation and generally making it difficult to deliver change.

20. Schools are left to decline: Boards allow temporary appointments only, no school investment – parents react by removing children or applying for enrolment elsewhere, leaving school closure or amalgamation inevitable.

21. Small schools can lose a substantial amount of funding through amalgamation – this is a financial disincentive to schools to increase enrolments. Small schools can have a much better teacher: pupil ratio because of the small school premium – disincentive to change. Many schools operating on reduced enrolments have been able to put the surplus capacity to good use by creating music rooms, libraries, and small group rooms. This will not be available in a school with a larger enrolment – disincentive to change.

22. Principals are left to cope with the outworkings from indecision and speculation which leads to staff being suspicious. This presents a major distraction to normal school life.

23. Although teachers will try to insulate their pupils from these issues, there are inevitable consequences for pupils:

Appendix 3: (continued)

- the reduction in funding will mean that some schools may have teachers delivering courses which are not their specialism;

- teachers are stressed because their future is uncertain;

- there is a higher turnover of staff as appointments are made on a temporary basis; and

- it can be difficult to attract staff to schools with an uncertain future.

Appendix 3: (continued)

Appendix 4:
Area Planning Support Structures (April 2015)

(paragraph 3.7)

Body	Functions	Meetings	Membership
Area Planning Steering Group (APSG)	The role of the Area Planning Steering Group is to support the Department in the implementation of Department policies as it delivers on the Programme for Government and Ministerial priorities and further embeds the process for Area Planning. It also provides a forum for Chief Executives to discuss and agree a common approach to issues which arise in relation to Area Planning and the implementation of the proposals within Area Plans.	Quarterly Chair: Department Deputy Secretary	Chief Executive and sub-regional Directors of the Education Authority. The Chief Executives of: • CCMS; • Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE); • Comhairle na Gaelscolaíocht (CnaG); • Controlled Schools Support Council (from 1 April 2015); and Department of Employment and Learning observer.
Area Planning Working Group (APWG)	The role of the APWG will be to bring together those in the planning authorities and the sectoral bodies who are involved with the operational aspects of Area Planning. It will provide a regular forum for discussing cross-sub -regional/cross-sectoral issues and concerns, agreeing solutions to be applied by all relevant bodies, or, where necessary, raising them to the APSG for consideration and resolution.		

Appendix 4: (continued)

Body	Functions	Meetings	Membership
	Members should be sufficiently senior to effectively represent their planning or sectoral role, preferably the most senior officer below sub-regional Director with Area Planning responsibilities.	Monthly Chair: to be agreed from within the membership of the APWG	EA CCMS NICIE CnaG Departmental officials will attend all meetings to provide support and advice on matters relating to Sustainable Schools Policy and the Area Planning process.
Local Area Planning Groups (5) (The number of groups may be subject to review under new EA structures)	Their role will be to bring together all local stakeholders – planning authorities, sectoral bodies and any other relevant interests, including FE, to: a) contribute to any review or revision of an existing Area Plan; and b) assist with the implementation process for area plans before sending to the EA for approval to submit to the Department.	At least once a term Chair: to be agreed from within the membership of the APWG	EA - sub regions CCMS NICIE CnaG Governing Bodies Association (Voluntary Grammar Schools) Further Education (FE)

Appendix 5: (paragraph 1.21)
Papers reviewed on school planning and provision

Schools for the Future : A Policy for Sustainable Schools Department of Education Northern Ireland, January 2009

Schools for the Future: Funding, Strategy, Sharing, Report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education, (The Bain Report), December 2006

An Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme (The Salisbury Report), January 2013

Future Post-Primary Arrangements in Northern Ireland (The Costello Report) : Advice from the Post-Primary Review Working Group

Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education, Published by the Scottish Government, April 2013

Planning School Places, Welsh Local Government Association , January 2008

An evaluation of performance of schools before and after moving into new buildings or significantly refurbished premises, Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, January 2007

How do surplus places affect the resources available for expenditure on improving outcomes for pupils? Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, May 2012

School size and educational effectiveness, Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, December 2013

Capital funding for new school places, National Audit Office, 15 March 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly research papers:

- Sharing and collaborating in education, September 2011
- Sharing education and Lisanelly, October 2012
- Planning school provision, February 2012
- Surplus school places, October 2012

- Rural Schools, February 2013
- The Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010, February 2013

NI Assembly Committee for Education - Area-Based Planning :   Queen's University Belfast and University of Ulster, 15 January 2014

NI Assembly Committee for Education – Area-Based Planning : Briefing by Professor Tony Gallagher (Queen's University Belfast), 22 January 2014

Education and Library Boards – Area-Based Planning for the Primary School Sector – Summary Report of the Public Consultation Exercise 19 March to 30 June 2013 (12 March 2014)

Education and Library Boards – Area-Based Planning for the Post-Primary School Sector – Summary Report of the Public Consultation Exercise 5 July to 26 October 2012 (7 December 2012)

Audit Commission : Trading Places – The Supply and Allocation of School Places, 1996

Department of Education & Department of Finance and Personnel Joint Efficiency Review – Review of Home to School Transport, January 2012

New Procurement and Delivery Arrangements for the Schools' Estate, PricewaterhouseCoopers, March 2005

Every School a Good School – A Policy for School Improvement, Department of Education for Northern Ireland, April 2009

Terms of Reference for Area Planning - Department of Education Northern Ireland, December 2011

Area Planning Guidance, Department of Education Northern Ireland, February 2012

Area Planning Steering Group (established April 2013) – minutes and papers

NIAO Reports 2014-2015

Title	Date Published
2014	
The Future Impact of Borrowing and Private Finance Initiative Commitments	14 January 2014
Improving Pupil Attendance: Follow-Up Report	25 February 2014
Belfast Metropolitan College's Titanic Quarter PPP Project	25 March 2014
Safer Births: Using Information to Improve Quality	29 April 2014
Continuous Improvement Arrangements in Policing	6 May 2014
Improving Social Housing through Stock Transfer	3 June 2014
Managing and Protecting Funds Held in Court	1 July 2014
Modernising benefit delivery in the Social Security Agency's local office network	11 November 2014
Local Government Auditor's Report - 2014	18 November 2014
Primary Care Prescribing	27 November 2014
Financial Auditing and Reporting: General Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland – 2014	9 December 2014
2015	
Continuous improvement arrangements in policing	17 February 2015
Cross-border broadband initiative: the Bytel Project	03 March 2015
Protecting Strangford Lough	31 March 2015
DRD: the effectiveness of public transport in Northern Ireland	21 April 2015
General Report on the Health and Social Care Sector 2012-13 and 2013-14	26 May 2015
Local Government Auditor's Report – 2015	23 June 2015