



A study into current provision
within CCMS Nursery Schools
and Nursery Units — 2018/2021



CCMS
Council for Catholic
Maintained Schools





Contents

- Introduction
- Context
- Update January 2021
- Methodology
- Current research
- Support Initiatives
- Case Study Findings
- CCMS survey questionnaire
- Special Educational Needs
- Key Findings
- Key Recommendations
- Conclusion
- Appendix

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Clare McAllister St Michael's Nursery School, Belfast
Rioghnaigh Doherty St Peter's Nursery School, Belfast
Ursula O'Hanlon St Mary's Primary School, Dunamore
Paula McCormick St Columba's Primary School, Kilrea
Anne O'Sullivan St Comgalls Primary School, Antrim
Catherine Stewart St Colmcilles Primary School, Ballymena
Malachy Crudden CCMS
Mairead Logue CCMS
Alana Willis CCMS
Geraldine McCormick CCMS Associate

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— As a managing authority CCMS is committed to supporting our nursery schools and nursery units in responding to the challenge of providing excellent early educational experience and opportunities for all pupils

— Introduction

THE Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) acknowledges the importance of continuously raising standards in pre-school education in order to provide the best start to life for our children and young people.

This is evidenced in the following corporate goal ‘Giving children and young people the best start in life by continuously raising standards’ and is in line with the Children and Young People’s Strategy 2019 (CYPS) which details a range of strategies to ensure ‘We give our children and young people the best start in life’

Whilst the Catholic Maintained nursery sector is non-denominational, a vision for a just society in which the dignity of all people is recognised and the rights of those who are vulnerable is central to the ethos of our schools.



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In September 2018, the CCMS commissioned a work stream to explore the current preschool education provision across the Catholic maintained sector in Northern Ireland. This paper is a summary of the work stream findings.

The aim of this paper is to identify current provision within the CCMS pre-school sector; namely nursery schools and nursery units within primary schools. The paper will identify best practice highlighted by research, the Chief Inspector’s Report (16-18), Inspection Reports, and the experience of leaders and practitioners in Catholic maintained nursery schools and units.

The paper will also highlight the challenges faced within the nursery sector and propose recommendations to improve the learning experience and the outcomes of the children.



Update on Coronavirus Pandemic January 2021

SINCE writing this report the Coronavirus Pandemic has impacted on the lives of children and adults across the world.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the Covid-19 a pandemic on the 12 March 2020 and as a result a full lockdown was undertaken on 23 March 2020 in Northern Ireland.

Four hundred and six schools remained open in Northern Ireland for limited numbers of vulnerable children and children of key workers while approximately 344,000 pupils remained at home (Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, August 2020).

In January 2021 a second lockdown was imposed and a switch to online learning was necessary for many pupils with only the key worker and vulnerable children being facilitated for supervision in schools.

Whilst it was important to close many schools to suppress the spread of the virus it is anticipated that the impact of the closure of schools and vital services will impact on the lives of children and families for many years to come.

Jiao, WT et al (as cited in CYPSP 2020) states that

'Children are not indifferent to the dramatic impact of the COVID-19 epidemic. They experience fear, uncertainties, physical and social isolation and may miss school for a prolonged period' (CYPSP 2020)

CCMS believes that, more than ever, children need to experience a high quality early years' environment and families and children will need access to a wider range of services and support mechanisms to help deal with the aftermath of the pandemic.

As a practitioner notes in the CYPSP report

'One could argue that the more concerning impact will be on 3-4 year olds who have lost nearly 5 months of play based curricula during a crucial developmental period. That impact of lost time will be greatest on the most disadvantaged families... The danger is that the health and social gradient that exists pre-COVID and was amplified very publicly over the last 5 months, will be wider and sharper in 5 and 10 years' time for today's 3 year olds' (CYPSP 2020)

Children are not indifferent to the dramatic impact of the COVID-19 epidemic. They experience fear, uncertainties, physical and social isolation and may miss school for a prolonged period



— Context

THE most recent Chief Inspectors Report (2016-2018) provides a broad overview of both the performance and the needs of the nursery sector across Northern Ireland.

One key statistic was the variation in experiences of pupils in the sector. Of the voluntary and private settings inspected, outcomes in a majority (59%) were very good and outstanding, which is comparable with the outcomes achieved in a majority (58%) of nursery units.

Outcomes in most (87%) nursery schools were evaluated as being very good or outstanding (Chief Inspectors Report 2016-2018).

CCMS data indicates that within CCMS nursery schools most (94%) are currently very good or outstanding and a majority (78%) of nursery units are deemed to be outstanding or very good.

Whilst it is positive that almost all children in CCMS nursery schools and a majority of CCMS nursery units experience very good or better outcomes more needs to be done to ensure all children have the same opportunity.

Across the nursery sector in Northern Ireland the gap between the delivery of 'Very good' or 'Outstanding' outcomes for their pupils sits at 19%. CCMS aims to close that gap within the Catholic Maintained sector.

The report also noted that when the Northern

Ireland pre-school curriculum guidance is implemented effectively, nearly all children make good to outstanding progress across the six areas of learning. In addition, the report highlighted a growing trend to introduce, prematurely, activities that are too formal and not age and stage appropriate.

— Methodology

Throughout the academic year 2018/19 CCMS officers carried out numerous fact-finding visits to schools in both urban and rural communities.

During this period, the officers held discussions with a number of leaders and practitioners to obtain further background information and scrutinised recent ETI inspection reports and the Chief Inspector's report (2016-2018) to identify common strengths and areas for improvement in nursery provision.

In addition, a questionnaire was drawn up in the third term 2018/19 and sent to all CCMS nursery schools and primary schools with nursery units to ascertain the views of staff on the current provision.

Several schools were invited to take part in case study visits. While the CCMS findings highlight many strengths in provision serious concerns were identified across the sector and, if left unaddressed, may have a detrimental impact on all aspects of the provision.



Current research with a bearing on preschool education in Northern Ireland

RECENT Northern Ireland specific research, undertaken by Save the Children (2017), has shown that children who attend high quality provision enjoy a broad range of benefits which in turn improves their performance in school and can lead to better economic and social outcomes in later life. By the time a child begins their pre-school education there can already be a gap of as much as 19 months.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF 2018) published Northern Ireland specific data in 2018 which stated that 370,000 people in Northern Ireland are living in poverty, 100,000 of which are children.

The Children's Society have conducted research into the impact of poverty on children which demonstrated that 'poverty affects a child's mental health, their happiness and their chances in life'. They state:

Children living in poverty are more likely to:

- **Have poor physical health**
- **Experience mental health problems**
- **Have a low sense of well-being**
- **Underachieve at school**
- **Have employment difficulties in adult life**
- **Experience social deprivation**
- **Feel unsafe**
- **Experience stigma and bullying at school** (childrensociety.org.uk)

In a study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020) as cited in the CYPSP study it was highlighted that many families who had been experiencing financial hardship before lockdown have now had their incomes further reduced and are finding it difficult to cope. The study found that:

'While families are reeling from effects of lockdown, it is simply not right that children

should have to face the additional worry of feeling hungry or being evicted' (JRF 2020).

As a result of a poll conducted by JRF it was discovered that around 7 in 10 families with children claiming Universal Credit or Child Tax Credit are having to cut back on essentials including food, utilities, nappies and activities for children such as books and toys, with around 50% cutting back on food (JRF, Cited in CYPSP 2020).

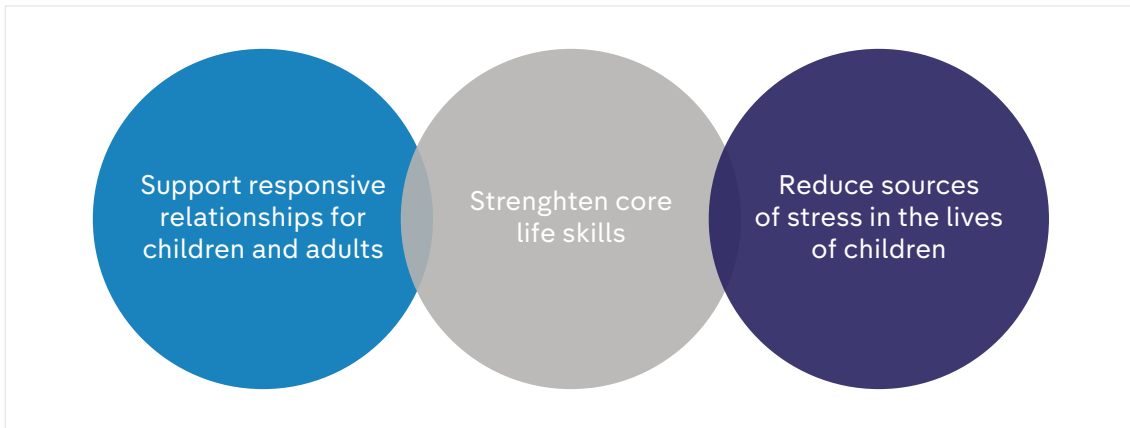
In addition, there are many other adverse experiences which children may be faced with during a lockdown period. Violence and domestic abuse in the home as well as the poor mental health of their care givers can also have a detrimental effect on the ability of children to thrive.

Many studies into brain development provide a valuable insight into how these adverse experiences can effect/manifest themselves in children and young people throughout their lives.

A study by Harvard University (2017) on the '3 Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families' explains that 'experiencing significant adversity early in life can set up our body's systems to be more susceptible to stress throughout life, with long-term negative consequences for physical and emotional health, educational achievement, economic success, social relationships and overall well-being'.

However these negative experiences can be somewhat alleviated through a strong alignment of policies and services which focus on:

Many families who had been experiencing financial hardship before lockdown have now had their incomes further reduced and are finding it difficult to cope



Source: Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families, Harvard University, 2017

CCMS recognises the vital role that nursery schools and units play in child development and learning as, in many cases, they are the first formal educators of pupils experiencing adverse childhood experiences.

The research clearly indicates that timely interventions and support must take place in the lives of the young people and indeed their parents in order to diminish the negative effects of trauma and hardship.

CCMS also recognises that the parents and care givers are the first educators of their children. This paper will demonstrate that staff within the nursery sector are already focussed on supporting children and their care givers through a wide range of tried and tested interventions. This hard work and effort needs to be recognised, supported and encouraged by policy and proper investment.

Whilst there is a clear moral case to improve the experiences of children in their early years of life there is also a significant fiscal benefit. Sinclair (Sinclair A, 2007) found when programmes are targeted at higher risk families there is a cost benefit ratio of up to 1:17 or more. Research has also shown that investment in early years is more cost effective than investment in later life.

A study into the financial benefits of early intervention in Scotland predicted that there was a potential net saving of £37.5k per annum per child in severe cases and £5.1k saving per annum per child in moderate cases. This model demonstrates a medium term saving to the public sector of £131 million per annum (The Financial Impact of Early Years Interventions in Scotland: Joint Ministerial Foreword, 2019).

The Early Intervention Foundation in May 2018 published 'The Cost of Late Intervention in Northern Ireland' a report which was commissioned by the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP). They found Northern Ireland spends around £536 million a year on late intervention, the equivalent of £288 for every Northern Ireland resident per year, or £1,166 per child.

This compares to a total of £20 billion spent on all services in 2015/16. CCMS is advocating for a review of the Common Funding Formula so that resource is redirected to early years intervention.

In order to support that call, CCMS has commissioned work to establish the baseline financial provision for the nursery sector with an estimate of the additional financial support considered necessary to support the provision of genuine early intervention to pupils in their pre-school year.





Support Initiatives that are having a positive impact on provision

THIS section will provide an overview of some of the initiatives which are currently in place in Northern Ireland. These support initiatives demonstrate that the sector is already engaging with young people and their parents with a view to supporting those most in need. This aligns with the research conducted by Harvard University (2017) which advocates for 'Public policies and human service programs that are specifically designed to support the skills and environments that foster responsive relationships between children and those who care for them support healthy development and improve child outcomes'.

— The Early Intervention Transformation Programme

The Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP) was a Delivering Social Change (DSC)/ Atlantic Philanthropies Signature Programme which was funded jointly by five government Departments (Department of Health, Department of Education, Department of Justice, Department for Communities and Department for the Environment) and Atlantic Philanthropies. The main aim of the EITP was to 'transform ways of working through embedding early intervention knowledge and evidence-based approaches to commissioning and delivering services for children, young people and families to achieve better outcomes.' There were four work streams within EITP

— EITP Work stream 1

Aimed to equip all parents with the skills needed to give their child the best start in life and focussed on key parenting stages through the Getting Ready for Baby, Getting Ready for Toddler, Getting Ready to Learn; and Play Matters projects.

— EITP Work stream 2

Aimed to support families when problems arose before they needed statutory involvement and

focused on the delivery of an integrated regional model of early intervention for these families through the Early Intervention Support Service.

— EITP Work stream 3

Aimed to positively address the impact of adversity on children through a range of projects including Home on Time, Edges, Building Better Futures, Raising the Educational Outcomes of Looked After Children, Early Intervention Child Care (Thrive), Children of Imprisoned Parents, and the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC).

— EITP Work stream 4

Consisted of a Professional Development Project which aimed to strengthen the culture of inter-professional working practice, with a focus on Adverse Childhood Experiences by supporting professionals to train together as well as embedding commonality in prevention and early intervention approaches.

This programme was clearly focussed on early intervention and targeted the needs of the parent and child in a holistic way. It was a clear example of the impact and pace of change that can occur when a cross departmental approach is taken. By supporting first time mothers whilst they were pregnant early intervention was clearly demonstrated.

As the mother and baby progressed from birth a joined-up approach from Health and Education was taken, ensuring the needs of the child were met fully.

This took the form of both health checks as well as health visitor sessions within the pre-school setting.

Key parenting stages were supported through several initiatives and the focus was on both health and education again such as 'Happy Healthy Kids' and 'Big Bedtime Read'.



THE EITP ended in 2019 however many Departments have continued to operate the programmes initiated under EITP, for example in the Department of Education the Getting Ready to Learn programme has been mainstreamed and is now funded by the Department.

The Department has invested £500k per annum in Getting Ready to Learn (GRTL). CCMS welcomes this investment as it provides access to training opportunities for pre-school practitioners and funding for the purpose of home lending resources and to cover costs of engagement with parents.

CCMS supports a guarantee of the availability of funding over the next five years in order to facilitate better long term planning.

— The West Belfast Partnership Board

Another example of an intervention where the needs of the pupil/child 'as a whole' are being met is the West Belfast Partnership Board. The WBPB is a broad-based social partnership with community, statutory, political and business members who are dedicated to the regeneration of West Belfast.

The mission of the Partnership is to:

"Involve people who live and work in West Belfast in generating social, economic, physical and cultural development and to ensure West Belfast makes a full contribution to and benefits equitably from, developments in the city as a whole."

The West Belfast Partnership Board runs several initiatives which support the community and have an impact on the needs of the child. It has a clear 'social welfare focus' where the needs of the community as a whole are addressed.

By focussing on health, unemployment, housing needs and the environment this will have a positive impact on the children in the community. Running alongside this is a very well-established system of support which focuses on educational achievement.

There is a clear focus on early intervention in which nursery settings and Sure Start centres work closely together.

There is also a common transition proforma which is used across all settings as the child progresses through his/her educational journey. This helps to ensure that the needs of the child are fully met.

A range of support mechanisms are in place for the parent and child from 'starting school' packs to

parenting support classes. Another key feature of the WBPB is the very successful 'Area Learning Community' (ALC). There is a culture of openness and support amongst the nursery, primary and post primary principals and nursery leads. Participants of the cluster share what effective practice looks like in their setting. Sessions have been led by principals/leaders and teachers on a range of areas from 'Messy Maths' to 'Engaging Boys'. The work of the WBPB is focussed on improving the lives of those who live in West Belfast. Again, the focus is on communication and effective partnerships between the home and school as well as other agencies. Staff report that engaging the parents/carers and supporting their wellbeing has a positive impact on the lives of the children.

— Sure Start

Sure Start is a programme targeted at parents and children under the age of four living in the most disadvantaged areas. Projects delivered by Sure Start offer a wide variety of services which are designed to support children's learning skills, health and well-being, and social and emotional development. An ETI Report into Sure Start [Feb 2020] found that;

- A key strength of all the Sure Start projects (visited) continues to be the respectful, welcoming and supportive ethos in which parents are valued
- In the most effective practice the role of the parent as the child's first educator is very evident and a range of supporting materials and advice are provided, helping parents/carers to take and replicate their learning into their own home environment

From engaging with schools through the survey and the case studies it is clear that in the examples of best practice there is a high emphasis placed on parental involvement and engagement.

By focussing on health, unemployment, housing needs and the environment this will have a positive impact on the children in the community



Case Study Findings

— Nursery Visits

ALL of the nurseries chosen to participate in the case study exercise had been recently inspected by the ETI and had secured a grade of 'Very Good' or 'Outstanding'. In order to gain a true reflection of provision a range of both nursery schools and units across a wide geographical spread and a range of socio economic backgrounds were identified.

— Curriculum

In terms of the delivery of the Northern Ireland Pre-School curriculum in all of the settings visited practitioners reported that they offer a wide range of quality opportunities and experiences across the six areas of the curriculum. There was a wealth of talking and listening opportunities planned with a range of resources to encourage role play opportunities. All settings followed and built upon the interests and needs of the pupils. Topics were adapted according to the needs of the children with a flexible yet focused approach to meet the interests of the particular group.

— Parental Engagement

All settings offer a wide variety of courses and engagement sessions for parents. Several case studies demonstrated the extent of ongoing contact with parents in the form of apps such as 'Seesaw' and '2 Simple' as well as monthly reports on the children's progress and any specific key targets.

A significant feature across all settings is the use of a clear and common language when identifying targets and reporting on the children's progress to parents. The staff report this helps the parents to have a better understanding of the terminology used and how to actively take part in working towards achieving the set targets at home.

All settings also spent considerable time forging close links with outside agencies in order to better support the children and their parents.

Many settings have established close links with Sure Start and the local Regional Integrated

Support for Education (RISE) teams, provided by the Health and Social Care Trust.

One particular setting had been trained in the Solihull approach, to support emotional health and well-being, and is registered with the British Psychological Society as Educational Test Users.

Most settings reported that parental engagement has been ensured through the funding opportunities provided by the Department of Education's Getting Ready to Learn initiative.

— Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating

All settings took a collegiate approach to planning the provision. The staff had specific time to meet and discuss observations and evaluations and to set priorities for the following week.

The views and ideas of all staff members were sought and valued and everyone was encouraged to be creative and to consider new ideas for activities in the nursery.

In all settings visited, staff reported that their planning was focused on the needs and interests of the pupils. For this reason, planning was tailored year on year and flexible themes were introduced within the nurseries. Activities were often open ended and allowed for experimentation and adaptation by the children.

— Expectations

On each of the case study visits it was evident through discussions that staff set high but realistic expectations for all the children.

A parent's induction meeting at the beginning of the year highlights the importance of this early stage in the child's development and learning and the key role they play in it.

By introducing them to the opportunities for tailored courses and events, starter packs and a lending library the importance of a partnership with parents during the pre-school year is emphasised. This is reflected in the attendance levels of pupils at the nurseries-on average 95%.



Main Findings from the CCMS survey questionnaire

FINDINGS from the survey indicate a dedicated and professional workforce who, due to additional workload and pressures, at times find it challenging to continue to maintain the high standards of pre-school education that they have worked hard to provide in their schools.

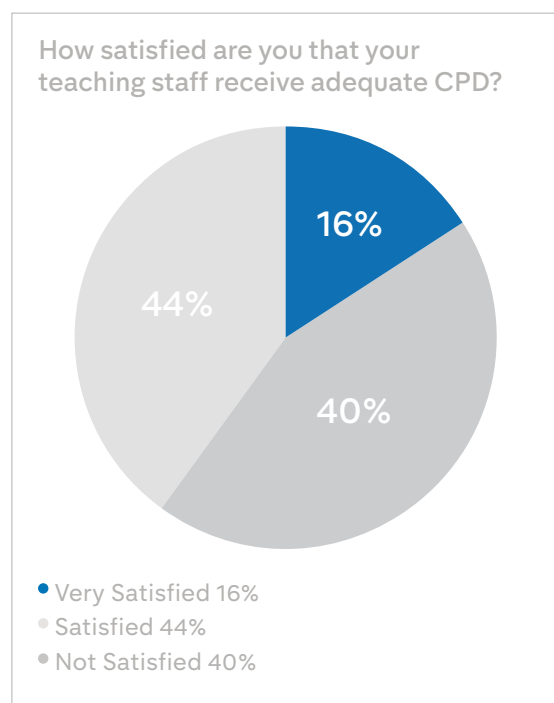
The survey also demonstrates a sector who are committed to supporting pupils and their parents by engaging with parents/carers through a range of workshops and interventions often resulting in additional workload for the staff and often without additional funding.

The survey involved all 31 Nursery Schools and 90 Primary Schools with a nursery unit. (See appendix 4 for a full list of all nursery schools and units). The overall response rate was 39% with 52% of nursery schools responding and 34% of nursery units.

Below is a summary of responses.

The settings which recorded 'satisfied' provided 'in house' training or attended a variety of cluster events. Some of the settings also accessed CPD/TPL (Continuous professional development/Teacher professional learning) through Shared Education funding and the Getting Ready to Learn (GRtL) programme.

GRtL data from the Education Authority indicates



that 99 CCMS pre-school settings availed of the programme within the 2018-19 academic year.

A small number of settings stated that they have had to use private nursery consultants for training needs at a cost to their budget.

We keep up to date with all training that is available, however, there is not enough nursery/early years specific training available. To ensure that all staff are engaged in CPD/TPL relevant to the needs of our setting and the developmental needs of our children, we plan, organise and facilitate our own bespoke CPD/TPL. This includes using outside facilitators and staff led training. **Nursery Principal**



Most settings indicated that classroom assistants do not receive any CPD/TPL other than that provided by their nursery or school leadership. The respondents cited several reasons for this:

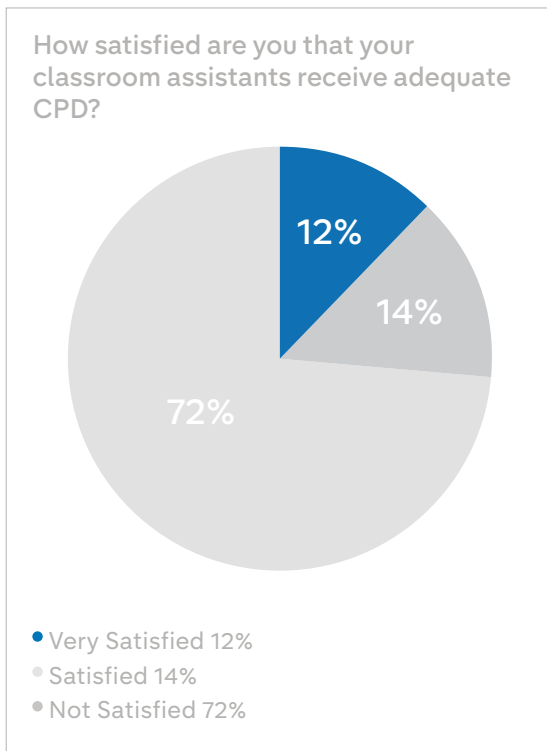
- **Lack of funding**
- **Difficulty getting cover**
- **Fewer opportunities/courses available**

A small number of settings have accessed training through the 'Lisburn Early Intervention Programme' on 'Incredible Years' and 'Early Talk Boost'. From the responses, there is a desire for training for nursery assistants with comments such as:

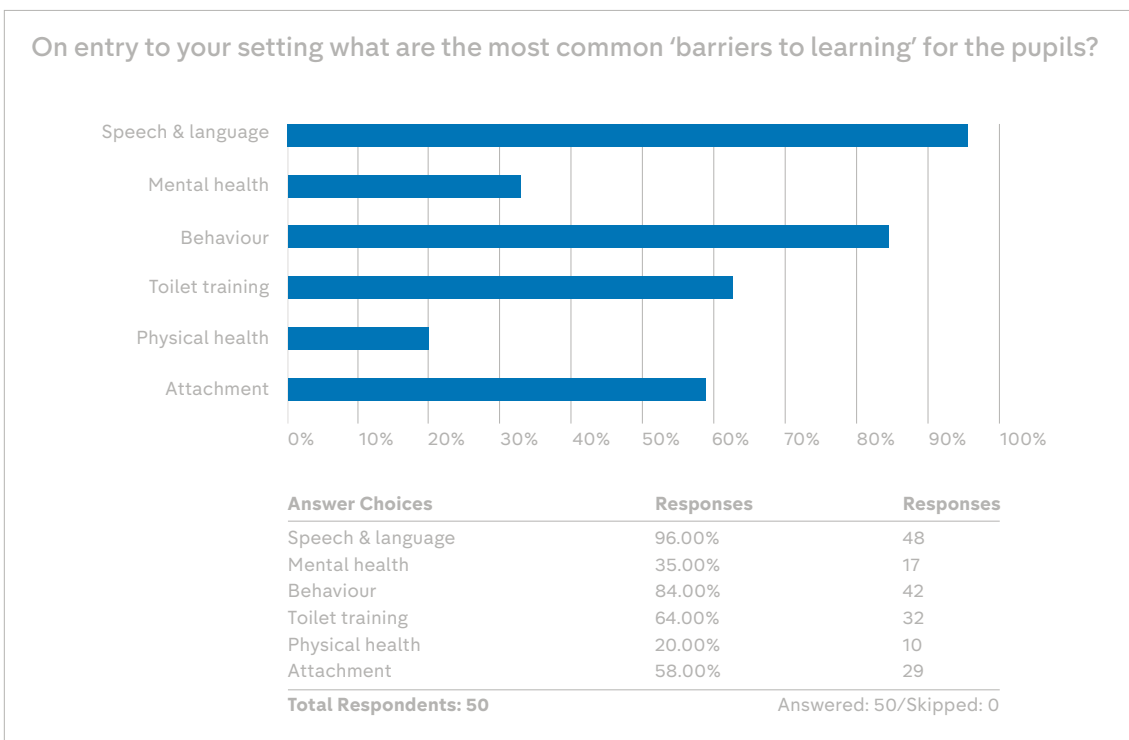
'It would so much boost morale and self-confidence if training was available' and 'a motivated nursery assistant is an invaluable member of staff'

When asked if the nursery budget allows for adequate CPD/TPL 59.18% responded 'no', 36.7% stated 'partially' and 6.12% stated 'yes'.

A key objective for the survey was to discover the range of 'need' that the children present with on entry to the nursery and what support is made available to both the pupil and the nursery setting. It was reported through the survey that on average the range was from 20%-80%.



The survey indicated that thirty nine percent of pupils enter nursery education with one or more 'barrier to learning'. These barriers are identified in the diagram below:





Had any of these children had interventions/support from health organisations prior to starting your Nursery. Were you made aware of this?

MOST settings reported that while the child may have had intervention before starting nursery information on the intervention was not always available.

A small number of settings reported that they have a pre-induction meeting prior to entry into the nursery to ascertain the level of need. In one case an ASD referral was made by parents after a Sure Start recommendation. Another issue identified by a small number of settings was the extensive waiting lists to access services.

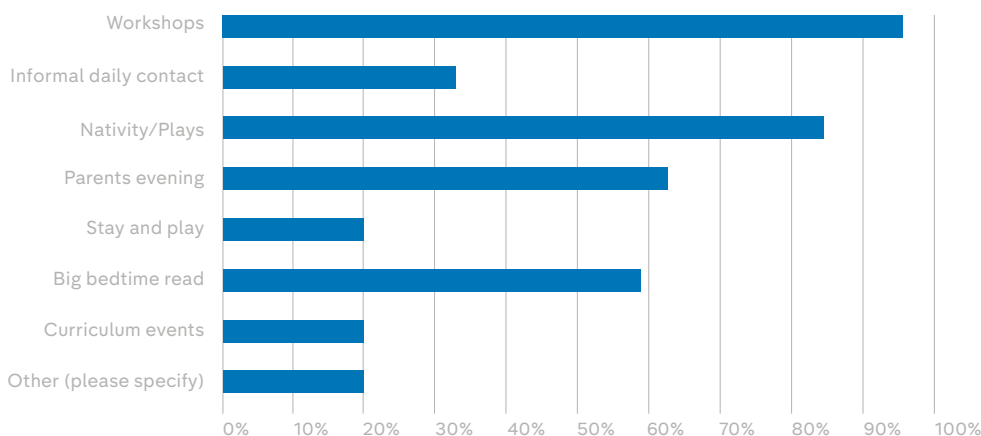
Additional comments highlighted the pressure this is placing on staff in many nursery settings. In some cases, 41% of pupils entering the nursery

had speech and language needs. Attention and listening difficulties are also reported to be on the increase. The children's lack of exposure to valuable play experiences which lead to poor fine and gross motor skills was also reported by a small number of settings.

Many settings found the adult child ratio of 1 staff member to 13 children difficult when dealing with the wide range of issues.

Several comments also highlighted a range of both special educational needs and social/parenting support needs. The majority of nurseries facilitate a range of parenting courses/workshops to support both the child and parent as identified below.

Does your nursery host any of the following events for parents?



Answer Choices	Responses	Responses
Workshops	80.00%	40
Informal daily contact	98.00%	49
Nativity/Plays	96.00%	48
Parents evening	76.00%	38
Stay and play	82.00%	41
Big bedtime read	94.00%	47
Curriculum events	80.00%	40
Other (please specify)	Responses 54.00%	27

Total Respondents: 50

Answered: 50/Skipped: 0



THE findings indicate that both parents and staff found these initiatives beneficial. The impact ranged from children being more engaged in story time to parents being more aware of the importance of bedtime routines and healthy eating.

Except for the 'Getting ready to Learn' programmes and some funding from the West Belfast Partnership Board these interventions are unfunded. They also require staff to plan for and lead sessions.

As Nursery Principals and Lead staff do not receive release time and the current staff ratio is set at 1:13 these events often have to take place after the children have gone home adding to the additional workload of the staff.

When reporting on the 'dual role' and the workload associated with being a nursery principal or nursery lead the sector was split. 50% found their workload 'manageable' and 50% found it 'unmanageable'. It is worth noting that most respondents who found it 'manageable' were nursery leads as opposed to principals.

Also, those who cited their workload was manageable stated it was only because of working in the evenings and weekends.

Some of the most common reasons for an 'unmanageable' workload was an increase in paperwork, updating and reviewing a of range of policies, updating the School Development Plan, making time to contact specialists and follow up referrals/support from outside agencies.

Regular maintenance issues were also found to be time consuming.

The health and wellbeing of nursery staff, excluding leadership, was cited as being better with 61% described as 'good or better' but this was largely down to the principal/leader managing the additional workload of staff.

Like all my colleagues I work long hours and manage the best I can whilst trying to maintain some kind of work life balance. There is no release time for nursery principals and it is increasingly difficult to take time out from the classroom due to reducing budgets, skeleton staff and increased needs so work needs to be done after school **Nursery Principal**

— Special education needs

OVERALL one of the main issues highlighted by the nursery sector was the growing number of children with Special Educational Needs.

This trend is captured by the Department of Education (DE) Census data which reflects a high level of SEN in pre-school settings.

As annual data is captured early in October of each academic year, the figures indicate early identification by the settings.

Pupils recorded as SEN Stage 1-4	Percentage of settings
25% of pupils	41.9%
25 – 49.9% of pupils	38.7%
50% pupils	19.4%
SEN Stage 5	11 Statements of Need recorded

Source: DENI Census Data October 2019. Data is available for Nursery schools only due to the nature of data held at whole school level for Nursery Units

The practitioners who engaged with CCMS officers reported that the needs of the children are becoming more difficult to support.

They cited the staffing ratio of 1:13 as being too high to fully meet the needs, in particular, of the children identified as requiring additional support.

Staff feel the ability to access support for children whilst the statementing process is ongoing would be beneficial and, in addition, an increase in the number of trained staff in the nursery setting would also help greatly.



Firstly we value parents as the child's first educator. We feel strongly that parents and nursery work closely together to provide the best environment for children to thrive and develop.

Over the year, we have received very positive feedback from parents and carers about the information they receive about how their children are learning in nursery and how they can further support and enhance their development.

Parents have also commented on their increased confidence to take learning forward and have praised the staff for the ideas they have shared on how to support learning at home-Getting Ready To Learn Programme.

The children are excited and motivated to see their parents becoming involved in their nursery school.

These shared opportunities are a platform to allow the children to understand the importance of their own work in nursery school and how special it is that their parents want to see.

Nursery Principal



— Key Findings

In the best practice:

- Settings demonstrate that planning reflects the needs, experiences and interests of all the learners, the staff work collaboratively to plan, and evaluate the opportunities for learning within all areas of the curriculum
- High yet realistic expectations are set and interactions with the children are of a high quality
- Nursery settings liaise closely with settings such as Sure Start to ensure transitions are purposeful and benefit the children
- High value is placed on engagement with parents in pupil's learning including effective communication and a clear and common language used when discussing key targets
- Clear benefits to the capacity building of staff were identified from working together in clusters and Area Learning Communities
- When a multi-agency approach is applied, for example through the Early Intervention Transformation Programme [EITP] and the West Belfast Partnership Board [WBPB] programmes, the effect on the children, parents and staff can be very positive

Concerns were raised by nursery leaders and staff that:

- Children are starting nursery with a much wider range of complex needs. Many of these needs arise from their personal home circumstances, the social environment that they live in and a range of medical or health issues
- Accessing quality support for children presenting with complex needs in nursery settings continues to be an issue and there are valuable missed opportunities to support children whilst formal processes are being undertaken
- Many of the support initiatives require additional time and effort beyond normal working hours and rely heavily on the good will of the staff. Staff report that this impacts on their stress levels and on their own personal and family time
- Managing the 'dual role' of a nursery principal places excess pressure on nursery principals and adversely impacts their ability to maintain a healthy work life balance

- Current staffing ratios do not support or facilitate the opportunity for staff to collaborate, to avail of continual high quality professional development or to have the opportunity to work with parents in the way they feel would be most beneficial to all parties

— Key Recommendations

CCMS recommends:

- A review of the Common Funding scheme, including the Common Funding Formula (CFF). Further investment in the nursery sector would allow for a more equal and consistent approach to appropriately funded and resourced support interventions and programmes for all children and their parents and enable staff to provide high quality teaching and learning within a manageable workload
- Investment in the workforce to increase the ratio of adult to pupil, provide for development of support programmes for additional needs and parenting workshops, permit tailored programmes of Continuing Professional Development and an allocation of funding to allow for principal release time for the delivery of strategic and administrative tasks
- A review of the Special Educational Needs process for nursery children to enable children to access appropriate support prior to the formal processes of gaining a Statement of Need
- Establishment of Area Learning Clusters to ensure high quality collaborative opportunities for all staff and to disseminate best practice beyond social boundaries and between nursery schools and units
- Establishment of more effective and more formal lines of communication between nursery settings and the Health Service, Sure Start and other preschool providers to ensure important information is recorded and shared at key times and a smooth transition in a child's educational journey
- CCMS would advocate all initiatives intended to give children the best start in life should be planned and supported across government departments as outlined in the Children and Young People's Strategy and through full implementation of the Children's Cooperation Act (2015)



— Conclusion

THIS paper reinforces the research by Harvard University (Harvard 2020) that if intervention happens early and if the model of intervention is one which supports responsive relationships for children and adults, strengthens core life skills and reduces the sources of stress in the lives of children and families then real progress can be made. CCMS believes the nursery sector must be appropriately resourced to deliver the highest quality provision for all children.

CCMS acknowledges that one of the biggest drivers of future poverty is the educational attainment of children when they leave full time education therefore government departments and educational bodies, must listen to key staff in the schools and parents in order to plan and implement effective pre-school strategies which benefit all children, especially the most vulnerable.

It is clear from the research, case studies, surveys and discussions with practitioners that a large number of children in Northern Ireland are embarking on their pre-school year with a range of complex needs. It is imperative that this issue is addressed in order to help support the children fully and ensure they have the best start in learning to cope with the demands of the challenging world in which they live.

What has been clearly demonstrated throughout the engagement of the work stream with the nursery

sector is the dedication of the workforce. There is a real commitment to engage with a range of services and organisations in order to provide the best opportunities for the children.

Settings are also working closely with parents/carers to support them and engage them in the learning of their child. However, in many cases staff are working above and beyond their contractual hours and this is impacting on the wellbeing of staff. This is an issue which has to be addressed if the highest standards of education in our nursery sector are to be achieved and maintained.

The Department of Education are currently working with representatives from the nursery sector to explore the issues around pupil teacher ratios; lack of administrative support; increase in workload demands from SEN; lack of C2k support; and Covid-19.

CCMS has commissioned work to establish the baseline financial provision for the nursery sector with an estimate of the additional financial support considered necessary to support the provision of genuine early intervention to pupils in their pre-school year.

CCMS believes that investing in early educational experience helps to ensure all children and young people are given the best start in life and therefore will continue to work with and support the staff in the nursery sector and advocate on their behalf.



— Appendix 1

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— Appendix 2

Nursery Schools and Nursery
Units who took part in the survey



Nursery Schools and Nursery Unit who took part in the survey		
Nursery School	Nursery Unit	Nursery Unit
Drumnamoe Nursery School	Cill Chluana Parish Nursery	St Joseph's Convent Nursery Unit
Good Shepherd Nursery school	Holy Family Nursery Unit	St. Joseph's Nursery Unit Crumlin
Holy Rosary Nursery School	Holy Family Primary School Nursery Unit	St.Lawrence's Nursery Unit
Holy Trinity Nursery School	Hollybush Primary School and Nursery Unit	St Malachy's Nursery Unit
Little Flower Nursery School	Holy Evangelists' Nursery Unit	St Mary's Nursery Unit
Matt Talbot Nursery School	Long Tower Nursery Unit	St. Mary's Primary School Killyclogher
St. Anthony's Nursery School Larne	Rosemount Nursery Unit	St Oliver Plunkett Nursery Unit
St Bernadettes Nursery School	St Aloysius Nursery Unit	St Oliver Plunkett Nusery and Primary School
St Colmcille's Nursery school	St Anne's Nursery Unit	St Patrick's Primary School Nursery Unit Castledearg
St John the Baptist Nursery School, Portadown	St Colmcille's Primary School Carrickmore Nursery Class	St. Patrick's Nursery and Primary School
St Joseph's Nursery School, Antrim	St Colmcilles Primary School Claudy	St Patricks Nursery Unit Newry
St Michael's Nursery School	St Eugene's Primary School Derry	St Patrick's Primary School & Nursery Units Dungannon
St Oliver Plunkett Nursery School	St Francis Primary School Lurgan	St Peters Nursery Unit
St Peter's Nursery School	St James's Nursery Unit Whiteabbey	St Ronan's Nursery Unit
St. Teresa's Nursery School	St. John's NU Middletown County Armagh	
St Therese Nursery School	Saint John's Nursery Unit Middletown	
	St. Joseph's Convent Primary School Newry	



— Appendix 3

Copy of survey



Early Years Work Stream

THIS survey is part of the Early Years Work Stream and has been designed by the members of the group.

The aim of the work stream is to produce a position paper on the Early Years Sector which is informed by the practitioners.

The paper will provide an overview of current practice whilst acknowledging any barriers and making suggested ways forward.

The aim of this survey is to identify the current provision within the Early Years sector and the areas which need to be addressed.

I would urge you to complete this survey in order to make your voice heard.

It is vital that our pupils are given the best start in life through a high quality education system and this position paper will be putting forward what support the sector needs in order to deliver this.

— The members of this Review Group are:

Clare McAllister

St Michael's Nursery School, Belfast

Riognach Doherty

St Peter's Nursery School, Belfast

Ursula O'Hanlon

St Mary's Primary School, Dunamore

Paula McCormick

St Columba's Primary School, Kilrea

Anne O'Sullivan

St Comgalls Primary School, Antrim

Catherine Stewart

St Colmcilles Primary School,

Geraldine McCormick CCMS

Mairead Logue CCMS

Alana Willis CCMS

1 What is the name of your Nursery School/Unit?

2 How many Children are on roll in your setting?

3 How satisfied are you that your teaching staff receive adequate CPD (Professional development)?

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not satisfied
Please rate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please comment



4 How satisfied are you that your classroom assistants receive adequate CPD (Professional development)?

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not satisfied
Please rate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please comment

5 Do you have the opportunity to welcome students into your setting?

- Yes
- No

If so, what has been your experience of having a student?

6 Is there a cluster group or Area Learning Centre (ALC) in your area?

- Yes
- No

If yes, who has the opportunity to attend. How is this then disseminated to staff?

7 How could the cluster/ACL be further developed

8 What are the main training needs in your nursery?

9 Does your budget allow for CPD opportunities for all staff?

- Yes
- Partially
- No

Please comment



10 On entry to your setting what are the most common 'barriers to learning' for the pupils? Please tick as appropriate

- Speech and language
- Mental health
- Behaviour
- Toilet training
- Physical health
- Attachment

Other (Please specify)

11 In the last 5 years what percentage (average) of pupils have presented with one or more 'barriers to learning' as described above?

12 Had any of these children had interventions/support from health organisations prior to starting your Nursery. Were you aware of this?

13 Of these pupils how many were classified as 'Free School Meals' or "Socially Disadvantaged' pupils?

14 Do you have any specific training relating to SEN in the past 5 years?

- Yes
- No

If 'yes' please provide additional information



15 Have you been able to access any outside support for any specific SEN related issues?

- Yes
- No

If 'yes' please provide additional information

16 How do you engage parents prior to enrolment?
Please tick as many as appropriate

- Open day
- Meetings
- Home school visits
- Settling in day
- Other

Other (Please specify)

17 Does your nursery host any of the following events for parents?
Please tick as many as appropriate

- Workshops
- Informal daily contact
- Nativity/Plays
- Parents evening
- Stay and play
- Big bedtime read
- Curriculum events
- Other

Other (Please specify)



18 How do these parental events impact on the pupils in your setting.
How do you know?

19 As a Nursery Principal/lead how do you manage a 'dual role'? Please comment

20 Please rate your workload using the following scale?

	Very manageable	Manageable	Unmanageable
Please rate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What are the main reason for this?

21 How would you describe your wellbeing using the following scale?

	Very good	Good	Poor	Very poor
Please rate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What are the main reason for this?

22 How would you describe the wellbeing of staff using the following scale?

	Very good	Good	Poor	Very poor
Please rate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What are the main reason for this?

23 Please add any comments/information you would like the work stream to consider



— Appendix 4

Breakdown of location and enrolment
in Catholic Maintained Nursery
schools and units (2020)



Locality 1	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Mid Ulster District Council Fermanagh and Omagh District Council		
NS	College Farm NS	54	
	Drumnamoe NS	105	
	Little Flower NS	53	
	St John the Baptist NS	53	
NU	Christ the King Primary School	NU-26	
	Christian Brothers' Primary School	NU-26	
	Holy Family Primary School	NU-52	
	Holy Trinity Primary School	NU-54	
	Holy Trinity Primary School	NU-79	
	Primate Dixon Primary School	NU-53	
	St Anthony's Primary School	NU-78	
	St Brendan's Primary School	NU-53	
	St Colman's Primary School & All Saints Nursery Unit	NU-26	
	St Colmcille's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Conor's Primary School	NU-53	
	St Francis' Primary School	NU-77	
	St John's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Joseph's Primary School	NU-18	
	St Lawrence's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Mary's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Mary's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Mary's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Mary's Primary School	NU-27	
	St Oliver Plunkett's Primary School	NU-25	
	St Patrick's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Patrick's Primary School	NU-106	
	St Paul's Primary School	NU-28	
	St Peter's Primary School	NU-27	
	St Ronan's Primary School	NU-54	



Locality 2	Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Derry City and Strabane District Council Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council		
NS	St Anthony's Nursery School	52	
	St Joseph's Nursery School	78	
	Bunscoil Cholmcille	NU-26	
NU	Glendermott Primary School	NU-26	
	Good Shepherd Primary & Nursery School	NU-52	
	Hollybush Primary School	NU-52	
	Holy Child Primary School	NU-54	
	Holy Family Primary School	NU-61	
	Longtower Primary School	NU-30	
	Mount St Michael's Primary School	NU-52	
	Nazareth House Primary School	NU-30	
	Rosemount Primary School	NU-52	
	St Bernard's Primary School	NU-52	
	St Brigid's Primary School	NU-30	
	St Canice's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Catherine's Primary School	NU-52	
	St Colmcille's Primary School & Nursery Unit	NU-26	
	St Columba's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Eugene's Primary School	NU-26	
	St James' Primary School & Nursery Unit	NU-78	
	St John's Primary School	NU-37	
	St Joseph's Primary School	NU-104	
	St Joseph's Primary School	NU-51	
	St Mary's Primary School	NU-105	
	St Mary's Primary School	NU-27	
	St Mary's Primary School	NU-49	
	St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	NU-26	
	St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School	NU-52	
	St Patrick's Primary School	NU-50	
	St Patrick's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Patrick's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Paul's Primary School	NU-26	
	Steelstown Primary School	NU-27	
	Termoncanice Primary School	NU-52	



Locality 3	Belfast City Council Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council Ards and North Down Borough Council		
NS	Bethlehem Nursery School	52	
	Cathedral Nursery School	52	
	Convent of Mercy Nursery School	52	
	Good Shepherd Nursery School	52	
	Holy Child Nursery School	52	
	Holy Cross Nursery School	52	
	Holy Rosary Nursery School	53	
	Holy Trinity Nursery School	52	
	Kircubbin Community Nursery School	52	
	Matt Talbot Nursery School	52	
	Our Lady's Nursery School	52	
	Seaview Nursery School	78	
	St Bernadette's Nursery School	52	
	St Colmcille's Nursery School	52	
	St Kieran's Nursery School	52	
	St Luke's Nursery School	52	
	St Malachy's Nursery School	52	
	St Maria Goretti Nursery School	52	
	St Martin's Nursery School	52	
	St Mary's Nursery School	52	
	St Michael's Nursery School	52	
	St Oliver Plunkett Nursery School	52	
	St Peter's Nursery School	52	
	St Teresa's Nursery School	52	
	St Therese Nursery School	52	
NU	Ballymacrickett Primary School	NU-28	
	Christ the Redeemer Primary School	NU-53	
	Holy Child Primary School	NU-26	
	Holy Evangelists' Primary School	NU-52	
	Holy Family Primary School	NU-52	
	Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School	NU-52	
	St Aloysius' Primary School	NU-26	
	St Anne's Primary School	NU-52	
	St Bride's Primary School	NU-53	



Locality 3	Belfast City Council Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council Ards and North Down Borough Council		
	St Clare's Abbey Primary School	NU-52	
	St Clare's Primary School	NU-52	
	St Ita's Primary School	NU-60	
	St Joseph's Convent Primary School	NU-52	
	St Joseph's Primary School	NU-57	
	St Joseph's Primary School	NU-53	
	St Malachy's Primary School	NU-52	
	St Malachy's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Malachy's Primary School	NU-51	
	St Malachy's Primary School	NU-27	
	St Malachy's Primary School	NU-53	
	St Mary's Primary School	NU-26	
	St Mary's Primary School	NU-53	
	St Mary's Primary School	NU-31	
	St Matthew's Primary School	NU-51	
	St Moninna Primary School	NU-55	
	St Patrick's Primary School	NU-52	
	St Patrick's Primary School	NU-58	
	St Patrick's Primary School	NU-52	
St Patrick's Primary School	NU-27		
St Patrick's Primary School	NU-26		
St Paul's Primary School	NU-52		
St Peter's Primary School	NU-28		
St Vincent De Paul Primary School	NU-26		





CCMS
Council for Catholic
Maintained Schools

CCMS Lisburn
Linen Hill House
23 Linenhall Street
Lisburn, BT28 1FJ

Telephone: 028 9201 3014
Email: info@ccmsschools.com

www.onlineccms.com