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Community audit: views on education provision in Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown, Co Tyrone

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Executive Summary

A community audit was undertaken in Augher, Clogher, and Fivemiletown in March 2017 with regard to views concerning education provision in these areas.

The work was commissioned and funded by the Integrated Education Fund and undertaken by an independent research team from the School of Education, Ulster University.

The location of Augher, Clogher, and Fivemiletown for the community audit was selected by the Integrated Education Fund, in discussion with the Education Authority.

The overall aim was to establish the views of communities in these areas regarding local education provision.

The research team engaged with local community members through a range of methods, namely: a parent survey; focus groups with school principals, parents and school governors; and a public engagement event. The focus groups and the public engagement event also made use of micro-polling, and visual minutes were created by artists in real-time as part of the public engagement event.

The work was undertaken within a tight timeframe and this undoubtedly had an impact on the number of people that participated in the audit.

While the findings cannot be generalised or said to be representative of all the residents of Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown, they do provide a snapshot of what some of the primary concerns and views are regarding education provision.

The main findings from the community audit were:

- concern over the fact that the research was taking place and the rationale for it;

- concern over the vulnerability of small rural schools and an emphasis on resourcing and maintaining the schools that currently exist;

- an emphasis on the rural nature of these communities and schools and that small schools that are at the heart of their community are best suited to the needs of rural populations;

- recognition that shared education links between schools were positive for the pupils and the wider area, and that generally there were good inter-community relationships; and

- mixed views regarding integrated education and whether there was a place for an integrated school in the community audit area.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

The education system in Northern Ireland is divided by religion in that most children attend predominantly Protestant ('Controlled') schools or Catholic ('Maintained') schools; by ability (and to a large extent social background) in that a selection system operates at age 11 to decide which children attend grammar schools; and by gender, particularly in second level education where a quarter of the secondary schools and almost half of all grammar schools are single sex.

The Northern Ireland education system is administered centrally by the Department of Education (DE) working with the Education Authority (EA) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). Most recent figures (from the Department of Education, Statistical Bulletin, 2/2017) show that it caters for approximately 317,000 pupils in 821 primary schools, 135 secondary schools, 66 grammar schools and 39 special schools. These numbers include 65 integrated schools, with a total enrolment of 22,600 pupils (7% of the total pupil population). Just under 6,000 pupils participate in funded Irish medium education. In addition, there are 10 independent Christian schools associated with the Free Presbyterian Church which do not receive government funds.

Government provides funding for a number of sectoral bodies which represent the interests of the schools in their sector and often provide them with support and advice. The sectoral bodies include CCMS, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG), which are non-departmental public bodies, as well as a number of other bodies including the Controlled Schools Sectoral Council (CSSC).

The Education Authority (EA) Strategic Area Plan (2017–2020), underpinned by the Sustainable Schools Policy (2009), "*sets out the parameters within which the statutory planning authorities, managing authorities and sectoral support bodies identify future education needs and develop solutions to meet those needs on an area basis*" (2016, p.1)[1].

The six criteria of the Sustainable Schools Policy are:
- 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.

The objective of this study was to undertake a community audit in Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown to facilitate community engagement in education planning.

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[1]Under the Education Orders, responsibility for education planning for all grant-aided school sectors rests with the EA from 1 April 2015. CCMS is unaffected by the formation of the EA and retains a subsidiary planning role in relation to Catholic maintained schools. Sectoral bodies are not planning authorities but act as advocates for their school sectors.
(AREA PLANNING GUIDANCE For Primary and Post-primary Schools Issued – 27 September 2016, point 3.4)

The tender was awarded in February 2017; it was agreed that the fieldwork would be undertaken during March 2017 and all work completed by the end of May. The location of Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown was identified and agreed by the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), in discussion with the Education Authority (EA). Other community audits and reports in Northern Ireland have shown general dissatisfaction in relation to communication and consultation on education provision, with much of the criticism directed towards education authorities (Kilkeel Community Audit, Lucid Talk, 2016; Northern Ireland Assembly, Committee for Education, 2016; Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2015; Strabane Community Audit, Lucid Talk, 2015). To address some of these concerns, this community audit adopted a creative consultation approach, blending traditional approaches of survey, focus groups and micro polling with innovative appreciative inquiry (a strengths-based approach to community engagement) and visual minuting, to produce uniquely quantitative, qualitative, and visual results that are more meaningful and accessible to community members and that are of value to education provision stakeholders in Northern Ireland.

Education is inseparable from the fabric of social life (Share et al., 2012), and for many pupils, school plays a significant role in nurturing their intellectual, social, physical and emotional development. In undertaking this community audit, two particular aspects of community life shaped the dialogue and indeed the overall project: the rural dimension and the religious identities of the local communities involved.

The adjacent wards of Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown lie in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency and the Mid Ulster council district / area-based planning district for school provision. The three settlements associated with each of these wards are comparatively small; according to the most recent population statistics, only Fivemiletown was considered large enough to have been officially classified as a 'village' (NISRA, 2015). They are connected physically by the arterial A4 – the main road between Belfast and Enniskillen. There are, however, distinct differences in the character of each and in the pattern of educational provision available.

Figure 1: Map Showing Augher, Clogher, Fivemiletown and Surrounding Areas
(Google Maps 2017)

1.2 Augher: Demographics and Current School Provision

The population of the Augher wards (which include the village and surrounding area) in 2015 was estimated as 2,280, representing an increase of 5.3% over the previous 10 years. An estimated 506 (22.8%), of the population were aged between 0 and 15, compared to a slightly lower proportion (20.8%) for the whole of Northern Ireland (NISRA 2016).

The 2011 Census recorded that almost all (99.5%) of the Augher population was ethnically white and that a very small proportion (2.0%) did not have English as their first language. The Census also recorded over half (58.7%) of the population as belonging to, or having been brought up in, the Catholic religion and just over a third (39.5%) as belonging to, or having been brought up in, a Protestant or Other Christian (including Christian related) religion (NISRA / NINIS Website).

According to the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) (2010), Augher generally experiences less deprivation than the average in NI. However, although it is in the top 20% of wards in terms of levels of Education, Skills and Training, it also features in the 5% of wards that experience the greatest deprivation in Proximity to Resources (NISRA, 2010).

There are three primary schools and no post-primary school in Augher. The most recent school survey data (2016-17) from the Department of Education (Department of Education, 2017) indicates:

Augher Central Primary is a Controlled school and has been in existence since the early 1940s. It has a total enrolment of 85 (45 boys and 40 girls) and an approved enrolment of 100. Of this school population, approximately 15% (n=13) are in receipt of free school meals and just under a fifth (n=16; 18.8%) are identified as having special educational needs (Stage 1-5 on the Code of Practice). The majority of pupils (n=74; 87.1%) come from a Protestant background, no pupils come from a Catholic background, and the remaining pupils come from other Christian, non-Christian, no religion or unknown backgrounds. There are no newcomer pupils. Pupils are distributed across five classes (P1-2, P2-3, P4, P5 and P6-7) and are taught by a staff team of six teachers (including a teaching principal).

St Brigid's Primary is a Catholic Maintained school and, as such, is managed by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). It was opened in 1967. It has a total enrolment of 17 (10 boys and 7 girls) and an approved enrolment of 80. Of this school population, fewer than five pupils are in receipt of free school meals[2] and over a third (n=6; 35.3%) are identified as having special educational needs (Stage 1-5 on the Code of Practice). All pupils come from a Catholic background and there are fewer than five newcomer pupils[3]. Following a community consultation, the CCMS document "St Brigid's PS, Augher – Case for Change" (December, 2016) proposed *that the educational needs of the pupils could be met within the neighbouring Catholic maintained primary schools St Patrick's, Aughadarragh and St Macartan's, Clogher".* On 14th February, 2017 the Education Authority issued Development Proposal 502 which stated that *"St Brigid's Primary School, Augher will close with effect from 31 August 2017 or as soon as possible thereafter".*

St Patrick's Primary is also a Catholic Maintained school managed by CCMS and has been opened since 1964. The school is situated in Aughadarragh, four miles outside Augher and close to the border with Monaghan in the Republic of Ireland. It has a total enrolment of 78 (38 boys and 40 girls) and an

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[2] Data is considered sensitive where figures fall below five cases.
[3] Ibid.

approved enrolment of 79. Of this school population, approximately 13% (n=10) are in receipt of free school meals and 11.5% (n=9) are identified as having special educational needs (Stage 1-5 on the Code of Practice). The majority of pupils (n=77; 98.7%) come from a Catholic background, no pupils come from a Protestant background, and the remaining pupils come from other Christian, non-Christian, no religion, or unknown backgrounds. There are no newcomer pupils. Pupils are distributed across four classes: P1-2, P3-4, P5-P6 and P7. The staff team comprises six teachers including a teaching principal.

1.3   Clogher: Demographics and Current School Provision

NISRA statistics show that the population of the Clogher ward in 2015 was 2,286 – an increase of 8.4% in a decade. In 2015, 529 or almost a quarter (23.1%)of the Clogher population were aged between 0 and 15 years, a higher proportion than for the whole of Northern Ireland (20.8%) and the highest proportion in the three wards.

The 2011 Census recorded that almost all of the population of Clogher was ethnically white (99.3%) and that a small proportion (3.2%) did not have English as their first language. The Census also recorded almost two thirds (63.5%) as belonging to, or having been brought up in, the Catholic religion and just over a third (35.1%) as belonging to, or having been brought up in, a Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related) religion.

According to the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) (2010), Clogher has above average levels of deprivation generally. It is among 5% of wards that face the greatest deprivation in Proximity to Resources although it also has higher levels of Education, Skills and Training than over 70% of wards in NI.

There are currently two primary schools and no post-primary school in Clogher. The most recent school survey data (2016-17) from the Department of Education indicates:

Carntall Primary is a Controlled school situated approximately two miles outside the settlement of Clogher. Following the closure of Clogher Regional Primary School in 2011, Carntall absorbed many of its pupils. It has a total enrolment of 72 (35 boys and 37 girls) and an approved enrolment of 82. Of this school population, approximately 15% (n=11) are in receipt of free school meals and just under a fifth (n=13; 18%) are identified as having special educational needs (Stage 1-5 on the Code of Practice). The majority of pupils (n=65; 90.3%) come from a Protestant background, no pupils come from a Catholic background, and the remaining pupils come from other Christian, non-Christian, no religion or unknown backgrounds. There are no newcomer pupils. Pupils are taught across three composite classes (P1-2, P3-4 and P5-6-7) and the teaching team comprises four teachers and a teaching principal.

St Macartan's Primary is a Catholic Maintained school managed by CCMS. It has a total enrolment of 61 (27 boys and 34 girls) and an approved enrolment of 136. Of this school population, just over a fifth (n=13; 21.3%) are in receipt of free school meals and approximately 10% (n=6) are identified as having special educational needs (Stage 1-5 on the Code of Practice). Sixty pupils (98.4%) come from a Catholic background, no pupils come from a Protestant background, and the remaining one pupil comes from other Christian, non-Christian, no religion, or unknown background. There are fewer than

five newcomer pupils[4]. The school operates with four teachers (including a teaching principal) and lessons are conducted in three composite classes – P1-2, P3-4 and P5-6-7.

Carntall Primary, St Macartan's Primary and Augher Central Primary schools are linked through a shared education initiative.

1.4   Fivemiletown: Demographics and Current School Provision

In contrast to the population increases observed in the other two wards, the population of the Fivemiletown ward in 2015 was estimated to have decreased by 0.3% over the previous 10 years to a figure of 2,101 (NISRA 2016). In addition, the youth population of Fivemiletown is also slightly below the NI average, with 425 (20.2%) of the population aged 0-15 years.

The 2011 Census recorded just under a quarter of the population (23.6%) as belonging to, or having been brought up in, the Catholic religion and almost three quarters (72.8%) as belonging to, or having been brought up in, a Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related) religion. The Census also recorded that almost all of the population (99.4%) of Fivemiletown was ethnically white and that a small proportion (3.5%) did not have English as their first language.

According to the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM), in 2010 the population of Fivemiletown had below average levels of Education, Skills and Training and was also among the 15% of wards that faced the greatest deprivation in Proximity to Resources.

There are two primary schools, and one post-primary school in Fivemiletown. The most recent school survey data (2016-17) from the Department of Education indicates:

Fivemiletown Primary School has a history pre-dating the introduction of the National School system in 1831 and is now managed within the Controlled sector. It has a total enrolment of 188 (101 boys and 87 girls) and an approved enrolment of 203. Of this school population, just under a quarter (n=44; 23.4%) are in receipt of free school meals and just over a quarter (n=54; 28.7%) are identified as having special educational needs (Stage 1-5 on the Code of Practice). The majority of pupils (n=150; 79.8%) come from a Protestant background, a small proportion (n=21; 11.2%) comes from other Christian, non-Christian, no religion or unknown backgrounds and a minority (n=17; 9.0%) comes from a Catholic background. Just over a fifth of pupils (n=21; 11.2%) are newcomers. Pupils are taught by a staff of eight teachers (with a non-teaching principal) across eight classes (one class for each year with two classes for P2).

St Mary's Primary is a Catholic Maintained school lying on the outskirts of Fivemiletown, managed by CCMS. It has a total enrolment of 28 (16 boys and 12 girls) and an approved enrolment of 87. Of this school population, just over one fifth (n=6; 21.4%) are in receipt of free school meals and just over a quarter (n=8; 28%) are identified as having special educational needs (Stage 1-5 on the Code of Practice). Almost all pupils (n=26; 92.9%) come from a Catholic background, no pupils come from a Protestant background, and a minority (n=2; 7.1%) comes from other Christian, non-Christian, no religion, or unknown backgrounds. There are fewer than five newcomer pupils[5]. The school operates with two teachers (including a teaching principal) and lessons are conducted in two composite classes, P1-2-3-4 and P5-6-7.

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[4] [5] Data is considered sensitive where figures fall below five cases.

St Mary's and Fivemiletown Primary are linked through a Shared Education initiative.

Fivemiletown College is a Controlled secondary (non-grammar) school and is the only government-funded provider of post-primary education in the three wards. It has a total enrolment of 372 and an approved enrolment of 425. Of this school population, just over a quarter (n=98; 26.3%) are in receipt of free school meals and just over a quarter (n=95; 25.5%) are identified as having special educational needs (Stage 1-5 on the Code of Practice). The majority of pupils (n=333; 89.5%) come from a Protestant background, a small proportion (n=23; 6.2%) comes from other Christian, non-Christian, no religion or unknown backgrounds and a minority (n=16; 4.3%) comes from a Catholic background. There is a very small proportion (n=6; 1.62%) of newcomer pupils. The school has been running over budget for the last three years and was placed in "formal intervention".

1.5   Other School Provision

The prerogative of parental choice, the availability of post-primary education and access to special education means that many children attend schools beyond the boundaries of Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown:

- Clogher Valley Independent Christian School (ICS) was founded in 1989 and is managed by the Presbytery Education Board of the Free Presbyterian Church in Ulster. It receives no direct funding from the Department of Education and instead is financed solely from parental contributions and other investments. Clogher Valley ICS takes pupils aged 4-16 years drawn from a wide catchment area, stretching from Drumquin, 25 miles to the North, to Enniskillen, 20 miles to the West.

- Pupils whose parents wish them to receive their post-primary education in the Catholic Maintained sector typically travel to St Ciaran's College in Ballygawley.

- Pupils whose parents wish them to attend voluntary Grammar schools travel either to Enniskillen: Mount Lourdes (Girls') Grammar, St Michael's (Boys') or Enniskillen Royal Grammar School, to Dungannon: St Joseph's Grammar School or the Royal School, Dungannon, or to Omagh: Omagh Academy.

- The nearest Integrated primary and post-primary schools are located in Dungannon (Windmill IPS and Integrated College Dungannon) and Enniskillen (Enniskillen IPS and Erne Integrated College).

- Pupils who require the specific support of a special school environment must travel to Enniskillen (Willowbridge School) or Dungannon (Sperrinview).

- The nearest primary school for children to be educated through the medium of the Irish language is Gaelscoil Uí Néill in Dungannon.

2.0 Methodology

The methodology for the community audit involved collecting data through:

- A community survey
- Focus groups
- A public engagement event
- Micro-polling

2.1 Community Survey

A survey of parents living in Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown was undertaken throughout March 2017. The survey included questions on where the respondent lived, religious affiliation (if any), number and age of children, the school they currently attended, distance travelled to school and preferences for school provision at primary and post-primary levels.

An electronic version of the survey was initially administered. Schools were approached and invited to view the survey and share details on, and link to, the survey via the school Facebook page and/or school web site. However, none of the schools shared the survey through social media (in many cases there was some reluctance from boards of governors), although most either sent information home to parents with pupils or emailed the details to parents. The post-primary school in the area was unable to share the survey with parents as they did not have the support from their Board of Governors for this.

Paper copies of the survey were also distributed for completion at each of the focus groups and the public engagement event to any parents who had not yet completed it.

Due to a low response rate, a telephone survey was also undertaken using the edited electoral register as a sampling frame. This was not an ideal method for identifying individuals for the telephone survey as a high percentage of people opt-out of being included in the edited register. The edited register does not include full contact details, so, for the purposes of the survey, individuals also had to be listed in the telephone directory. The telephone survey did not significantly add to the response rate (Table 1).

Table 1: Survey responses

	No of completed questionnaires
Online survey	27
Paper survey	14
Telephone survey	7
Total	48

2.2   Focus Groups

Five focus groups of approximately 45 minutes duration were carried out in March 2017. Three of these took place in Fivemiletown College Youth Annexe and two in the Clogher Valley Community Centre (one aimed at the Augher community and one at the Clogher community). The first of the focus groups, which took place in Fivemiletown, was with school principals from the community area, and the remaining four were with members of the local community (parents, school governors, and teachers):

Focus Group 1 (21 March), School Principals, 8 participants (7 female, 1 male)
Focus Group 2 (24 March), Clogher community, 6 participants (5 female, 1 male)
Focus Group 3 (24 March), Augher community, 4 participants (3 female, 1 male)
Focus Group 4 (27 March), Fivemiletown community, 1 participant (1 female)
Focus Group 5 (27 March), Fivemiletown community, 1 participant (1 male)

The following themes were explored in the focus groups:

- What makes a 'good school'?
- Positive aspects of current school provision
- Gaps in current education provision
- Education provision going forward
- Integrated and shared education

Each focus group was facilitated by two members of the research team.

At the outset of each of the focus groups and the public engagement event, participants were asked to identify specific issues of concern and write these onto Post-it notes which were placed on an 'issues wall'. This ensured that we were able to capture the concerns of those present, in case such issues did not come out of the focus group discussion.

2.3   Public Engagement Event

The public engagement event took place on the evening of 30 March 2017 at the Valley Hotel, Fivemiletown. The event included a short presentation of local educational research by Ulster University researchers, and an appreciative inquiry workshop on perceptions, aspirations and visions for local education provision using the medium of visual minutes. Participants came from the local communities of Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown (parents, teachers, school principals, school governors), as well as stakeholders from the Education Authority, the Integrated Education Fund, and the Controlled School Support Council. CCMS were also invited to attend but were unable to (however, one of the stakeholders was also a council member of the CCMS).

2.3.1   Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry focuses on envisioning positive change. It is described as a *'strengths-based change approach'* and is used as a means of engaging stakeholders in a cooperative process to explore positive outcomes and self-determined change. The appreciative inquiry approach offers huge

benefits to community engagement in a Northern Ireland context as it focuses on what unites people rather than what divides them. The appreciative inquiry session involved engaging participants in discussion and reflection on a series of questions, which centred around:

- What factors are important in choosing a school?
- What are the perceived strengths of current education provision?
- What are the perceived weaknesses and gaps in current education provision?
- Integrated and shared education
- What are your wishes for education in this area for the future?

Discussions at the public engagement event were visually minuted. Visual minutes are described as '...*a live, illustrated record of conferences, events or meetings. It's about listening and then visualising ideas in a dynamic way. The minutes unfold during the event and the information is brought to life with illustrations and colour. Visual minuting or graphic recording pulls out the key themes and messages making the information digestible.'* As an innovative research approach, visual minuting offers an immediate and accessible compilation of participant voice with enhanced opportunity for knowledge transfer to the various audiences (http://www.morethanminutes.co.uk/visual-minutes/).

2.4   Micro-poll

The researchers conducted a micro-poll at the end of each of the focus groups and the public engagement event (using hand-held voting devices or pen/paper). This enabled the collection of quantitative data relating to the participants' preferences for education provision in the local area. In each of the micro-polls, a series of multiple-choice questions were put to participants. Although the micro-polling technology would have enabled the display of responses directly to participants, this was not done due to the small numbers in attendance at the events where the micro-polling was used.

2.5   Ethical approval

Ethical approval to undertake the community audit research was sought from and granted by Ulster University.

3.0 Findings

While the findings cannot be generalised or said to be representative of all the residents of Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown, they do provide a snapshot of what some of the primary concerns and views are regarding education provision in these areas.

3.1 Survey Findings

Of the 48 completed surveys, 44% of respondents came from Fivemiletown, 31% from Augher, 21% from Clogher, and 4% from surrounding areas. Fifty-two percent had one or more child/ren of pre-school age, 71% had one or more child/ren of primary school age, and 46% had one or more child/ren of post-primary school age. Fifty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they most closely identified with the Protestant community, 39% with the Catholic community, and 4% with another religion. None of the respondents indicated that they most closely identified with no religious community.

Reflecting the rural locality of the audit area, there was quite a variance in terms of distance pupils travelled to schools with those, particularly at post-primary level, travelling five or more miles each way (Figures 2 and 3).

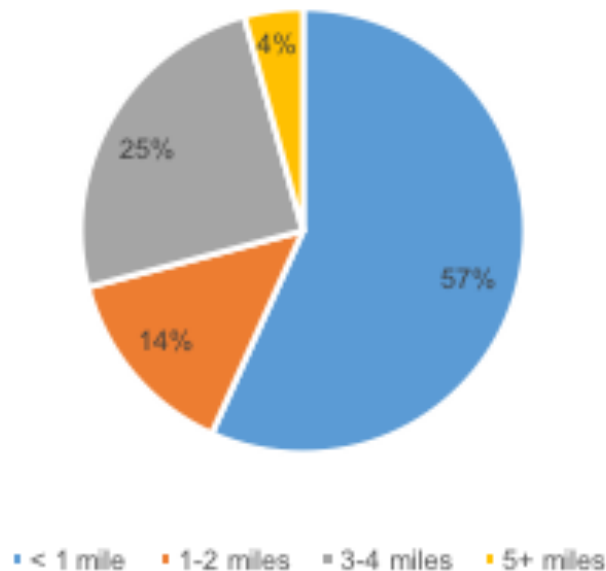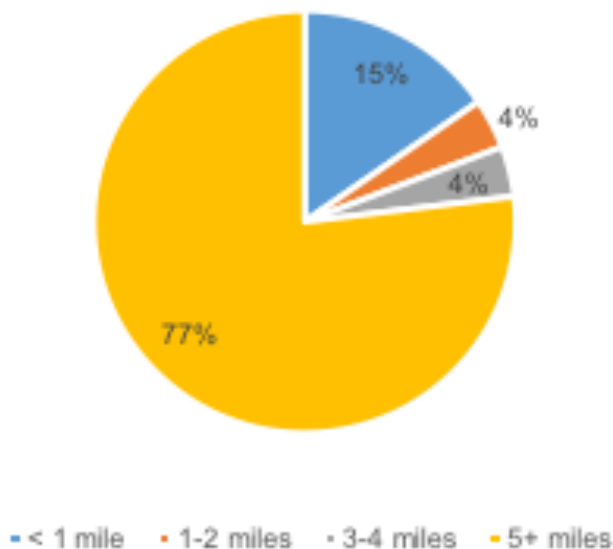Figure 2: Distance travelled to school one-way (primary level)

- < 1 mile
- 1-2 miles
- 3-4 miles
- 5+ miles

57%, 25%, 14%, 4%

Figure 3: Distance travelled to school one-way (post-primary level)

Legend: < 1 mile · 1-2 miles · 3-4 miles · 5+ miles

Pie chart values: 15%, 4%, 4%, 77%

For the respondents living in Augher who had children of primary age, 46% attended Augher Primary School, 38% attended St Patrick's Primary School and 15% attended St Brigid's Primary School. All of those respondents who sent their child/ren to Augher Central Primary School were of a Protestant background, and all of the respondents who sent their child/ren to either St Patrick's or St Brigid's primary schools in Augher were of a Catholic background.

For the respondents living in Clogher who had children of primary age, 57% attended St Macartan's Primary School and 43% attended Carntall Primary School. All of those respondents who sent their child/ren to St Macartan's were of a Catholic background and all of the respondents who sent their child/ren to Carntall Primary School were of a Protestant background.

For the respondents living in Fivemiletown who had children of primary age, there was a greater spread in terms of where children attended school. Fifty percent attended St Mary's Primary School, Fivemiletown and 14% attended Fivemiletown Primary School. However, 43% of respondents from Fivemiletown who had children of primary age, had one or more child/ren attending a primary school outside the village (29% were at Carntall Primary School, Clogher; 7% at St Macartan's Primary School, Clogher, and 7% at St Brigid's Primary School, Augher)[6]. It is not possible to determine whether there is any statistical significance in the number of Fivemiletown parents choosing to send their child/ren to primary schools outside of the village due to the small sample size of the survey. For the Fivemiletown respondents who had a child/ren attending St Mary's Primary School, 71% were from a Catholic background, 14% from a Protestant background, and 14% from another religious background that was neither Catholic or Protestant. All of the Fivemiletown respondents who sent their child/ren to Fivemiletown Primary School were of a Protestant background, as were the

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[6] Totals for Fivemiletown exceed 100% as, in some cases, respondents had children at more than one school.

Fivemiletown respondents who sent their child/ren to Carntall Primary School in Clogher. Similarly, the Fivemiletown respondents who sent their child/ren to either St Macartan's, Clogher or St Brigid's, Augher, were of a Catholic background.

The two respondents from outside of the Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown areas did not have children of primary age.

In relation to post-primary education, there is one post-primary school located within the audit area, which is Fivemiletown College. Nineteen percent of survey respondents who had a child/ren of post-primary age sent their child/ren to Fivemiletown College. Thirty-eight percent of respondents who had a child/ren of post-primary age sent their child/ren to nearby St Ciaran's College, Ballygawley. However, 48% of survey respondents who had a child/ren of post-primary age sent their child/ren to a post-primary school further away. These schools included: Enniskillen Royal Grammar School, Omagh Academy, Mount Lourdes, Enniskillen and the Royal School, Dungannon. For the respondents that sent their child/ren to Fivemiletown College, 75% were of a Protestant background, with the remainder not answering this question. All of the respondents who sent their child/red to St Ciaran's College were of a Catholic background. For those respondents who sent their child/ren to another post-primary school, 90% were from a Protestant background and 10% from a Catholic background.

In the survey, respondents were asked their preference regarding the type of school they would want their child/ren to attend at primary and post-primary levels (Figures 4 and 5).

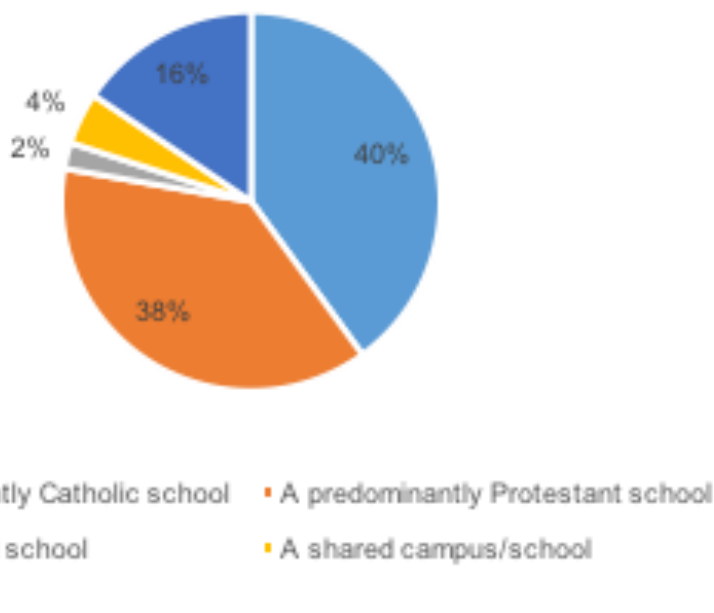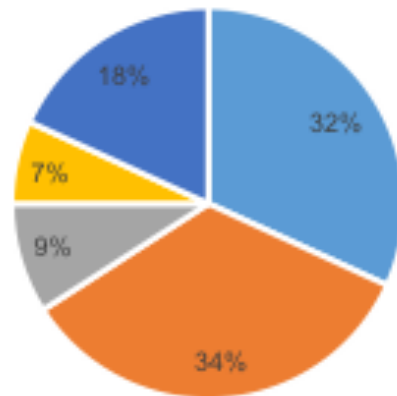Figure 4: Preferred type of school, primary level

- A predominantly Catholic school: 40%
- A predominantly Protestant school: 38%
- An integrated school: 2%
- A shared campus/school: 4%
- Other: 16%

Figure 5: Preferred type of school, post-primary level

- A predominantly Catholic school 32%
- A predominantly Protestant school 34%
- An integrated school 9%
- A shared campus/school 7%
- Other 18%

Survey respondents were asked an open-ended question regarding what factors influence their school choice. Forty of the respondents provided an answer (with most providing more than one factor) and the most recurrent of these were categorised as listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Factors that Influence School Choice

Factors	% of respondents
Quality of education / school reputation / results / inspection reports	46%
Good teachers / friendly, approachable teachers	25%
Distance to school / location	33%
Religious ethos	29%
Good resources / facilities	15%
Small class sizes	8%
Range of extra-curricular activities	8%
Range of subjects / broad curriculum	8%
Good pastoral care	6%
Links to the local community	6%
Child's choice / happiness of the child	6%

Other factors listed included: inclusivity within the school, sense of school community, friendly environment, after-school provision, the behaviour of pupils and discipline within the school, provision of transport to the school, whether the school had been attended by a parent, quality of outside play area, provision of hot school meals, school numbers, a holistic approach to child development, if it was an integrated school, and connections to other schools in the area.

Respondents were also provided with an opportunity to add any further comments and 25 chose to do so. For the most part, these comments reflected respondents' satisfaction with the schools in the area and their desire to see no changes to current provision. For example:

- *Provision in the area is currently excellent. Schools cater for all religions, nationalities and abilities.*
- *I feel the primary schools are excellent and I think any change would be negative in the area.*
- *I find the school meets all my child's education needs.*
- *Our children are more than happy in the school environment that they are currently in and under no circumstances would I be willing to jeopardise their educational experience by moving them from an environment that they are comfortable and thriving in to a new integrated school. It is important they attend a Catholic school where they learn more about the ethos and values of their religion.*
- *We are extremely happy with the care and quality of teaching our child is receiving.*
- *Each school in the area has its own very individual and specific identity and serves each section of the community very effectively. We are very lucky to have this and it is a situation to be treasured and celebrated.*

The importance of small class sizes and strong local community links were mentioned by a small number of respondents. For example:

- *As parents, we feel that children attending smaller schools have an advantage over children at larger schools, as there are less children for the teacher to work with, so each child receives more attention, which naturally influences their understanding in learning.*
- *At primary education level it is important that there is a primary school facility within each community/village as the school is pivotal to the community spirit.*

A small number of respondents referred to good relations between local schools and shared education projects. For example:

- *Schools currently work very well through shared education and other activities.*
- *They have had lots of opportunities for cross-community work.*

There were also a small number of instances where respondents highlighted the issue of competition between schools for pupils. For example:

- *Historically, there has been rivalry between the 3 villages over the siting of schools and their catchment areas.*
- *This is a very 'clicky' [sic] community in which the catholic primary schools don't want to integrate with each other, never mind with another denomination.*

Other responses included:
- *All school budgets should be equal and not favoured towards one sector. School budgets are tight - give more money to current schools.*
- *Parents do have quite a range of personal choice. Schools have a range of pupils from all backgrounds and faiths.*

- *We are privileged to have an outstanding school which is naturally integrated with several families from mixed marriages attending. I believe this is true integration of education.*
- *Integrated was tried and failed in the area.*
- *I have no issues against integrated. I just know that in my children's primary education life span it will never happen in time for them to enjoy it. It is an issue rolling on for years and the community of either denomination have made very little progress towards it.*
- *I'm not a fan of integrated education, but also I don't see the point of sustaining small schools with small numbers of pupils, that's not beneficial to a child's learning environment.*
- *My view for the way forward with education in Northern Ireland is for shared campuses with all children attending wearing a new neutral uniform with the forward aim to have integrated education as the norm.*

3.2 Focus Groups

3.2.1 The 'Issues Wall'

The image below shows the main issues that were identified by focus group participants when they were asked to record any issues they were particularly concerned about onto Post-it notes at the start of each session.

Figure 6: The 'Issues Wall' from the Focus Groups

3.2.2 What Makes a 'Good School'?

The responses and discussions relating to what makes a good school were broadly similar to the factors that influence school choice in the survey. They included:

- Standards of education
- Quality of teaching
- Building infrastructure, facilities, resources, and availability of activities for pupils
- An ethos that reflects home ethos
- Accessibility of the school – geographically close
- Spirit within the school and the community and a school that is part of the community
- Rural values

3.2.3 Positive Aspects of Current School Provision

Reponses reflected and emphasised the rural nature of the area. Close proximity of schools to their school community was particularly valued and there was a strong sense that the schools reflected the localities and what is going on in a rural area. Quotations from the focus groups that illustrate this include:

"Schools are very much part of fabric of local community"
"A school is a big part of the community, particularly primary schools"
"Closing the school would lose the heart of the village"

Comments were also made relating to the perceived strengths of small schools and class sizes: *"A large school does not suit a rural area"*. The point was made that *"rural life needs small schools."* Generally, parents did not feel that their children were missing out on a broader curriculum or wider range of extra-curricular activities that might be present in a larger school, but rather that their children benefitted educationally and socially from being in a smaller school.

The quality of teaching and learning and positive inspection reports were also highlighted by participants across the focus groups.

3.2.4 Gaps in Current Education Provision

Very few gaps in education provision were identified in the focus groups. Instead, participants focussed on what they perceived to be the strengths of their local schools. The gaps that were identified related to the lack of dedicated special needs school provision in the area – although there was recognition from some that there were not sufficient numbers for this. A minority of focus group participants also identified the lack of an integrated school in the area as a gap in current education provision – although there was no consensus that this should be part of education provision in the area going forward.

3.2.5 Education Provision Going Forward

The overwhelming desire across the focus groups was to see increased investment in the schools that currently operate in Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown. Parental choice (in terms of the current availability of schools) and shared education opportunities were emphasised. Both were used as arguments for a continuation of existing provision and organisation of schooling in the area. For the

majority of those who engaged in this audit, the priority was to protect and make the case for further investment in existing schools and to reject any alternatives that would be perceived to jeopardise the status quo.

Rather than close St Brigid's, Augher, participants in the Augher focus group stated that they would like to see the school amalgamated with other nearby Catholic maintained schools (St Patrick's and St Macartan's) on a split site, although some individuals expressed concern about the distances between the split sites, and that some children would be travelling more than five miles to school.

There was a desire to see greater community consultation and involvement of the EA in relation to education planning in the area.

3.2.6 Integrated and Shared Education

The majority of those who participated in the focus groups felt that the current level of shared education activity between schools within the area was appropriate and that this provided pupils with opportunities to meet and get to know children from a background different to their own. Participants generally emphasised the need for pupils to be educated in a school that shared the same religious / Christian values as the family home. One participant voiced her concern that within an integrated school, "*children do not have the same opportunities to have their individual beliefs, they would lose some of their individual traditions and beliefs.*" There was also a concern that any move towards establishing an integrated school would take away resources (and pupils) from the current schools in the area.

One of the focus groups was more open to the longer term possibility of having an integrated school in the area, with one participant saying: "*integrated education makes sense; we should get to the point where it is the norm rather than step by step*", and another adding: "*Shared education is a good option for paving the way.*"

3.3 Public Engagement Event

The public engagement event was held on 30 March at The Valley Hotel, Fivemiletown. It had been promoted through flyers placed on notice boards in common community areas throughout the Clogher Valley and schools had also been asked to promote the evening amongst parents. Those who had attended the previous daytime focus groups in Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown were asked to encourage others to attend. Regrettably, the event clashed with a fundraising table quiz scheduled by Fivemiletown Primary School for the same evening and this may have had a negative impact on the level of attendance.

The event was attended by 16 participants (school principals, school governors, and parents) and by six observers from key stakeholder organisations. Two participants identified as being associated with schools in the Clogher ward, three with schools in Augher and eleven with schools in Fivemiletown. Two artists from the visual minuting company *More Than Minutes* were also present to visually record the discussion and issues raised by those in attendance. Participants were presented with a range of questions for discussion. Their responses are presented thematically below and are also graphically captured in the visual minutes (see Figure 8).

3.3.1 The 'Issues Wall'

The image below shows the main issues identified by attendees at the start of the public engagement event.

Figure 7: The 'Issues Wall' from the Public Engagement Event

3.3.2 What Factors are Important in Choosing a School?

- Quality education and strong teachers
- Religious education / Catholic education / Christian ethos
- Good resources and facilities
- Meets the needs of all children, inclusive ethos and principles
- Inclusivity for pupils with SEN
- Pastoral care
- Reputation of the school
- Growing school numbers

3.3.3 Perceived Strengths of Current Education Provision

- Parental choice
- Long history of schools working together
- Good inspection reports from the ETI
- Transport is an issue for rural schools so primary schools in near vicinity is important
- Good school facilities

- Pre-school availability locally
- Parental choice at post-primary level, wide range of options

3.3.4 Perceived Weaknesses and Gaps in Current Education Provision

- Lack of special needs unit in the area.
- There is scare mongering and uncertainty. Consultations on education provision leave uncertainty for parents.
- In a culture of not knowing it is difficult for parents and teachers to plan forward.
- Schools being seen as a financial entity/business rather than focusing on children's needs.

3.3.5 Rural Dimension

When asked about the best way forward for education provision in the area, the discussion heavily focussed on the rural nature of the area and the schools within it. The following points or issues were raised by participants (although this does not mean that there was consensus around all the points).

- Pupil numbers will always be low in rural areas. Pupil numbers is not the only criteria for maintaining a school, the other criteria should also be given equal weighting.
- It is unfair to throw children into a large school.
- It is not a disadvantage to come from a small school and go to a big one.
- Large class size does not give the chance of 1-1 education.
- Losing a rural school will tear the heart out of the community. It is part of village life, like an extended family.
- There is the question – how do you justify resourcing a small school? – but the social and community benefits are well worth resourcing. You can't quantify it.
- The current funding formula makes children a commodity and is the wrong way round. You market a school to attract children.
- All schools in the area are family schools, every child is known; it develops them and instils an inner confidence to go into different situations and flourish.

3.3.6 Integrated and Shared Education

There was a lack of consensus around the issue of integrated education. Some participants felt that existing schools were sufficiently inclusive which made introducing an integrated school redundant. As one participant expressed: "*it is not a divided community, separation does not exist. We do not have problems, we don't need a model imposed on us*."

Conversely, there was also the view that when there had been an integrated school in the area it had worked well. However parents were then faced with having to move their children on when that school was closed. Another participant suggested the adoption of a secular model to educate all children together.

3.3.7 Wishes for the Future

- Stability and proper funding
- Good support from the EA
- Less focus on numbers
- Provision of schools with proper facilities

- Provision of a SEN unit
- Shared education to continue but with less paperwork

3.3.8 The Visual Minutes

Two artists attended the event and captured the discussions in their visual minutes. This was a most successful aspect of the community audit and was well-received by those attending the public engagement event as it enabled them to see their comments being recorded visually in real-time.

Figure 8: Visual Minutes from the Public Engagement Event
(More Than Minutes)

3.4 Micro-poll Results

3.4.1 Micro-poll Results from the Focus Groups

3.4.1.1 Focus Group: Fivemiletown 1

Q1. Have your views regarding local education changed during the focus group?

Yes	0%
No	100%

Q2. Preferences for primary education in Fivemiletown.

Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown PS and St Mary's Primary School.	100%
Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown PS and St Mary's Primary School but increase shared education between them.	0%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive primary school for the area.	0%
I have another preference.	0%

Q3. Preferences for post-primary education in Fivemiletown.

Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown College and St Ciaran's, Ballygawley.	100%
Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown College and St Ciaran's, Ballygawley but increase shared education between them.	0%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive post-primary school for the area.	0%
I have another preference.	0%

3.4.1.2 Focus Groups: Fivemiletown 2 & 3

Q1. Have your views regarding local education changed during the focus group?

Yes	0%
No	100%

Q2. Preferences for primary education in Fivemiletown.

Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown PS and St Mary's Primary School.	50%
Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown PS and St Mary's Primary School but increase shared education between them.	50%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive primary school for the area.	0%
I have another preference.	0%

Q3. Preferences for post-primary education in Fivemiletown.

Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown College and St Ciaran's, Ballygawley.	50%
Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown College and St Ciaran's, Ballygawley but increase shared education between them.	50%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive post-primary school for the area.	0%
I have another preference.	0%

3.4.1.3 Focus Group: Clogher

Q1. Have your views regarding local education changed during the focus group?

Yes	0%
No	100%

Q2. Preferences for primary education in Clogher.

Maintain current provision in Carntall PS and St Macartan's Primary School.	20%
Maintain current provision in Carntall PS and St Macartan's Primary School but increase shared education between them.	60%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive primary school for the area.	0%
I have another preference.	20%

Q3. Preferences for post-primary education.

Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown College and St Ciaran's, Ballygawley.	20%
Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown College and St Ciaran's but increase shared education between them.	80%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive post-primary school for the area.	0%
I have another preference.	0%

3.4.1.4 Focus Group: Augher

Q1. Have your views regarding local education changed during the focus group?

Yes	25%
No	75%

Q2. Preferences for primary education in Augher.

Maintain current provision (proposed from Sept' 17) in Augher Central PS and St Patrick's PS. (St Brigid's due for closure in 2017.)	25%
Maintain current provision in Augher Central PS and St Patrick's PS but increase shared education. (St Brigid's due for closure in 2017).	75%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive primary school for the area.	0%
I have another preference.	0%

Q3. Preferences for post-primary education.

Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown College and St Ciaran's, Ballygawley.	50%
Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown College and St Ciaran's but increase shared education between them.	50%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive post-primary school for the area.	0%
I have another preference.	0%

3.4.2 Micro-poll Results at the Public Engagement Event

Q1. Have your views regarding local education changed during the evening?

Yes	0%
No	100%

Q2. Preferences for primary education in Fivemiletown.

Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown PS and St Mary's Primary School.	80%
Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown PS and St Mary's Primary School but increase shared education between them.	13%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive primary school for the area.	7%
I have another preference.	0%
I have no interest in primary education in Fivemiletown	0%

Q3. Preferences for primary education in Augher.

Maintain current provision in Augher Central PS and St Patrick's PS. (St Brigid's due for closure in 2017).	50%
Maintain current provision in Augher Central PS and St Patrick's PS but increase shared education. (St Brigid's due for closure in 2017).	13%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive primary school for the area.	6%
I have another preference.	25%
I have no interest in primary education in Augher	6%

Q4. Preferences for primary education in Clogher.

Maintain current provision in Carntall PS and St Macartan's Primary School.	63%
Maintain current provision in Carntall PS and St Macartan's Primary School but increase shared education between them.	25%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive primary school for the area.	13%
I have another preference.	0%
I have no interest in primary education in Clogher	0%

Q5. Preferences for post primary education in Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown.

Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown College and St Ciaran's.	69%
Maintain current provision in Fivemiletown College and St Ciaran's but increase shared education between them.	25%
Have one integrated, fully inclusive post primary school for the area.	6%
I have another preference.	0%
I have no interest in post primary education in Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown	0%

4.0 Conclusion

The audit was undertaken within a very tight time frame and this impacted on the research team's ability to facilitate community engagement in any depth or breadth. There was also some concern and suspicion amongst local residents as to why the Augher, Clogher, Fivemiletown area had been selected for this community audit, and the research team found it difficult to convince all participants that this was an independent study with no hidden agenda or prior motive.

The findings, however, provide a useful snapshot of views regarding education provision in Augher, Clogher and Fivemiletown, albeit from a small number of individuals.

The individuals who participated in the community audit, for the most part, had strong feelings about ensuring the future of the school(s) to which they had a connection. Over the course of the audit, people were keen to highlight the rurality that underpinned school provision and the need for local schools to be at the heart of their communities. Schools, particularly at primary level, were viewed not only as a community hub but as an extension of the ethos and religious values of the home.

Clearly there is an issue of sustainability, with figures showing most of the schools in the audit area operating under capacity. However, there was a reluctance to consider any alternative models to local education provision and participants in the audit were quick to point out that 'school numbers' is not the only criteria in considering whether a school is sustainable.

There were a small number of individuals who saw the longer term future in either shared or integrated education, and who believed this would be a positive development for the area.

Recommendations for similar future audits need to ensure a longer time-frame for the work. This would enable greater confidence and trust to be developed between the research team, the local communities and the schools in the area. It would also enable more widespread advertisement of, and recruitment to, the study (for example in local press), and it would enable relationships to be established with key members of the wider community such as local political representatives, business community, and other stakeholder organisations in the community sector.

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