

## Extended Schools Evaluation of Effective Clustering

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# CONTENTS

<b>SECTION</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1. Background	1
2. Purpose	1
3. Method	2
4. Executive summary of key findings	3
5. Indicators of effective clustering and lessons learned	4
6. Conclusion	13
7. Recommendations to the Department of Education	14
8. Recommendations to the Education Authority	14

## APPENDICES

1. Case Studies
2. Data Table
3. Eligibility Criteria 2017/18
4. Eligibility Criteria 2018/19
5. Questionnaire Questions

## 1. BACKGROUND

The Extended Schools (ES) programme stems from the strategy 'Our Children, Our Young People', launched by the Secretary of State in March 2006<sup>1</sup>. The aim of the strategy is:

*'To reduce underachievement and improve the life chances of children and young people by enhancing their educational development and fostering their health well-being and social inclusion through the integrated delivery of the support and services necessary to ensure every child has the best start in life.'*<sup>2</sup>

The impetus behind the subsequent ES Programme is compelling; to make a significant contribution to reducing differentials and improving the quality of life for children and young people. ES funding has consequently been allocated to schools serving the most disadvantaged communities; and schools must meet set criteria based on social deprivation measures. (Appendices 3 & 4)

Clustering of funded schools has been a feature of the programme since the outset, with its particular purpose to address issues affecting the communities served by the schools. Additional funding is allocated to schools that engage in clustering, amounting to 15% per school plus a further 15% for engagement with parents (2017-2018). Almost all schools in the 2017-2018 ES Programme (99.8%) were members of clusters and 45% of all schools in Northern Ireland received ES cluster funding.

When the ES Programme was evaluated by The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in 2009<sup>3</sup>, the recommendations included: *"a need to disseminate examples of effective clustering (in local learning communities in the case of the post-primary sector) and to improve cross-community collaboration and working with neighbourhood renewal initiatives and the Youth Service in order to reduce duplication"*.

When the ES Programme was evaluated by ETI in 2010<sup>4</sup> the report found that: *"in the less effective practice, the clustering arrangements are not effective. Within a few clusters, some schools are isolated and the benefits of the arrangement for them are less discernible"*.

This is the first ETI evaluation focussing specifically on ES clustering.

## 2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this evaluation is to identify indicators of effective ES clustering and provide supporting examples of good practice. The evaluation reports on:

- how schools ensure the most vulnerable pupils are the focus of ES provision and how these pupils are monitored through the ES funding programme;
- the impact of ES clustering provision on reducing barriers to learning and improving pupil outcomes; how this is monitored and evaluated at school or cluster level; including, how the identified priorities for the ES cluster are integrated into the improvement process and development plan for each school involved;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/ten-year-strategy-children-and-young-people-northern-ireland-2006-2016-0>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/extended-schools-policy-document.pdf>

Extended Schools: schools, families, communities -working together Page 1 (1.1)

<sup>3</sup> <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/11225/1/an-evaluation-of-extended-schools.pdf> Page 15 (6.4)

<sup>4</sup> <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/943/1/an-evaluation-of-extended-schools-july-2010.pdf> Page 9

- the balance of cluster provision against the existing ES five high level intended outcomes (i) being healthy, (ii) enjoying learning and achieving, (iii) living in safety and with stability, (iv) experiencing economic and environment well-being and (v) contributing positively to community and society;
- how effective ES clustering is in promoting social inclusion, parental and community involvement and how this is making a difference;
- how the quality and impact of external agency intervention is monitored by the cluster;
- how effective the organisational arrangements for ES clustering are in achieving effective collaboration; and
- the strategies to disseminate best practice.

### **3. METHOD**

3.1 The findings of the evaluation arise from the evidence gathered from nursery, primary, post-primary, special, integrated, and Irish medium sectors. Three hundred and fifty-two schools (almost 70%) allocated ES funding for 2017-2018 were asked to complete an online questionnaire (Appendix 5) and there was a very positive level of return, with 220 schools (62% of those asked; 42% of all ES cluster schools) submitting responses. Interviews by ETI Associate Assessors (AAs) were conducted with the lead school in 25 clusters across Northern Ireland. Meetings took place between ETI inspectors and stakeholders from the education service, including meeting with officers of the Education Authority (EA). The ETI inspectors also accessed the online Northern Ireland Extended Schools Information System<sup>5</sup> (NIESIS), the system designed to support schools in the development, co-ordination and evaluation of their Extended Schools' programmes, holding school and cluster information, such as action plans, evaluations.

3.2 The survey was conducted during a period of action short of strike in schools. Four of the teaching unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute. This included non-co-operation with the ETI. However, the leadership of the cluster in the majority of schools contacted, cooperated in arrangements to meet with the inspectors.

3.3 The work conducted by the ETI AAs in schools included:

- a meeting with the principal of the lead school in the cluster with optional attendance by further representatives from the cluster;
- analysis of a range of documentation, such as ES annual reports, action plans, budgets and school development plans; and
- identification of examples of good practice for case-studies. (Appendix 1).

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<sup>5</sup> NIESIS.org

## 4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The evaluation found that the most vulnerable pupils in ES funded schools are being identified for support, interventions are targeted toward need and the outcomes are monitored. However, there are several aspects of the provision that warrant elucidation:

4.1 Schools report that the complexity in the nature of vulnerable pupils is increasing; the features of vulnerability are diverse, although the schools are adept at identifying them. Schools are applying discerning judgement, using a breadth of criteria relevant to their context, to identify the vulnerable pupils in need of support.

Free School Meal entitlement (FSM) of at least 37%, and/or designation as an area of social deprivation, represent the eligibility criteria for the allocation of ES funding, by the Department of Education (DE). Evidence indicates that the FSM entitlement and social deprivation criteria, while reflecting a level of need in the most disadvantaged communities, are not exclusive indicators of need. There will be pupils with similar needs in non-ES funded schools who do not have access to the additional support it can provide. While the programme is intended to reduce differentials, it also serves potentially to increase them between the vulnerable pupils in schools who are funded for support and the vulnerable pupils in schools who are not.

DE therefore may wish to consider further research-based work on the current indicators of need, the question of equality of provision for vulnerable pupils, and a redefinition of vulnerability in the current social context.

4.2 Schools are becoming increasingly reliant upon ES funding to pay for what they view as vital services, for example, breakfast clubs or literacy support. The range of needs being identified for support through ES funding is becoming increasingly diverse and complex; and is often addressed through specialist interventions such as counselling, various therapies, and work with parents. Schools find it particularly challenging to provide intervention services if their ES funding allocation is reduced or they cease to meet eligibility criteria. Ceasing to be eligible for funding does not equate with no longer requiring the services. School responses have indicated that without ES funding important services could not be provided. One principal commented: *“The extended schools funding is a lifeline to schools in this area of deprivation, social issues and trauma. It ring fences money that goes straight to the core services for our pupils that may get lost elsewhere in the middle of budget cuts”*.

4.3 The percentage of ES cluster funding used for mental health and family support, including counselling programmes is increasing, and in 2017-2018, nine per cent of ES cluster funding (£252,349) was allocated to this area; a corresponding four per cent (£251,195) was allocated from the main ES school funding allocation. These percentages have slightly but steadily increased in each of the last three years. (Appendix 2) During this evaluation the EA reported that *“there are numerous examples of schools/clusters stating that this provision is a priority to be continued irrespective of budget cuts. This was borne out by the expenditure remaining steady in 2017/18 despite the 11% ES budget cut applied that year”*.

4.4 Some schools are breaking down barriers in communities involving mental health and well-being. One principal reported that: *“The counselling service offered by this cluster is our school community’s life line.”* Schools’ eligibility for funding can fluctuate, and therefore the critical importance of continuity in counselling/mental health provision needs to be considered. DE may wish to review the source of funding for such services, so that there can be greater certainty in this provision for schools. The pressures on staff in schools dealing with mental health problems, with limited resources, is also a concern.

4.5 Schools are working beyond their traditional remit with families in the community. This work and the successes arising from it are largely unseen or acknowledged. Schools are increasingly supporting parents to develop parenting skills, for example: promoting the benefits of reading to children, supporting children's learning in mathematics, providing family counselling, promoting internet safety, mental health awareness and healthy eating. There is evidence of raising aspirations of parents to re-engage in adult education and employment. Some of these interventions are relatively new and provide examples of schools responding to the needs of their local and wider communities.

4.6 It is difficult to separate the impact of ES clustering from wider ES work and indeed from the multiple interventions; and, or organisations such as the health trust, Shared Education programme, and Neighbourhood Renewal working collaboratively to achieve outcomes. This is due to the impact of certain interventions on the social, behavioural and emotional well-being of the learners and their families, being difficult to measure in quantifiable form.

It will be important to ensure that in the search for robust quantitative monitoring and evaluation tools, that clusters are not dissuaded from using their more qualitative knowledge of pupils, families and communities, and being innovative, where appropriate, in addressing need.

4.7 To optimise outcomes across the regions, best practice in clusters needs to be disseminated; successes may also have relevance system-wide, for example in the sharing of strategies for engaging parents. This should be accomplished through a cost effective but coordinated approach by the EA.

4.8 Many schools reported that the timing of the allocation of ES funding and the distribution method to the lead school impedes long term planning and is labour-intensive to manage.

4.9 While there is great variation in size of clusters, there is flexibility to alter the make-up of an existing cluster to improve effectiveness. The evaluation did not reveal an ideal cluster size or make-up; the effectiveness of the cluster and the quality of its impact on the provision for learners is more dependent upon the potential for all members to identify shared priorities and put in place appropriate actions, the impact of which are monitored and evaluated over time.

## **5. INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVE CLUSTERING AND LESSONS LEARNED**

### **5.1 How do schools ensure that the most vulnerable pupils are the focus of extended schools provision and how are these pupils monitored through the ES funding programme?**

All of the lead cluster schools visited by the ETI were found to be committed to the ES philosophy and confident they are targeting support to the most vulnerable pupils; many have developed this expertise during long-term involvement in the programme.

The responses from the schools, obtained from the interviews and the questionnaires, indicate that participating schools do not regard social deprivation or FSM entitlement as an entirely accurate indicator of need, as *one principal commented: "Not all FSM children are the ones that need it."*

5.1.1 Schools apply a multidisciplinary approach to assessing pupil need which is reflected in the broad range of need identified and the equally wide range of interventions applied to support children, their families and their communities. Means of identification include data from literacy and numeracy assessments to identify and monitor pupils who have such difficulties; and teacher professional judgement which is used to monitor pupils' attitudes, dispositions, behaviours and acquire knowledge of personal circumstances that can significantly impact on pupils.

5.1.2 The most commonly used indicators of vulnerability are: FSM entitlement, performance data and other information including attendance, English as an additional language status, staff professional judgement, discussion with parents, pupils at transition stage from pre-school and year 7/8, and the use of already established target groups of learners including those with special education needs. These indicators extend beyond social FSM entitlement and social deprivation criteria. The complexity involved in selecting and targeting pupils is evident.

5.1.3 By using a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data to identify the most vulnerable pupils, schools are able to target the children most in need of additional and focused support. These pupils may not exclusively be the pupils who attracted the funding through application of the eligibility criteria. Schools agree that vulnerable pupils are not exclusively those from a background of social deprivation, and all schools will have pupils who may be vulnerable for a range of reasons. The Children and Young People's Strategy 2017-2027 draft consultation document acknowledges this: *"To protect those who are most vulnerable in our society we must ensure that we provide all children regardless of background or special educational need or disability with the knowledge and skills that will support them into adulthood"*.<sup>6</sup>

5.1.4 The range of needs being targeted by ES funding has changed considerably during the lifespan of the programme. It is now common for ES funding to be targeted at specialist speech and language support and to pupils with mental health issues, which would not have been the case 12 years ago. It is challenging for schools to address the increasing complexity of need arising, and as a consequence, the number of partnership bodies, agencies, and professionals independently working with schools, including those funded by ES has grown over this time.

During this evaluation, the EA reported that: *"schools and clusters use their funding to provide additional language and communication support mainly from two sources. In many cases an arrangement is made with the local Health Trust speech and language manager to provide additional therapist (and therapy assistant) support in the school. The advantage of this is that the school/clusters develop links with the Health Trust speech and language section and this helps when referring children on and signposting to other services within the Trust. In other cases the Trust are unable to provide the required services. Schools/clusters may then source private speech and language therapist support or engage commercial organisations that provide language and communication services"*. One school principal reported: *"I would like to add how beneficial this funding is in supporting the needs of our most vulnerable pupils. We are addressing issues that the Health Board hasn't got the resources to support i.e. Speech and Language Therapy"*.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/education/Children%20and%20young%20people%27s%20strategy%20%284%29.pdf>  
page 62 (6.7.3) (Draft document)

5.1.5 A small minority (8%) of respondents to the questionnaire openly expressed their preference for including all learners in the activities saying for example: *“We ensure that our extended schools programme is accessible to all. The funding we receive allows us to pay for extended schools so all families can use it without financial worry”*.

To do so brings into sharp focus the vulnerable children in schools that do not receive ES funding. *One school justified the practice by saying: “It is not always easy to target the most vulnerable children in the cluster schools without identifying such pupils ...”. “The cluster primary schools usually send whole classes to the planned activities meaning that no obvious identification of vulnerable pupils is required.”* However, if the programme is intended to reduce differentials, it also serves to potentially increase them between the vulnerable in schools who are funded for support and the vulnerable in schools who are not. Schools that are not in receipt of ES funding can struggle to provide the same level of support.

5.1.6 Lead schools for clusters reported that they consult with the local community organisations or neighbourhood renewal partnerships to widen their perspective on area need and obtain greater understanding of issues impacting on families. Such collaboration is highly effective in addressing the issues affecting communities and therefore pupils. Two principals reported: *We are clustered by geographical area and so are meeting children from similar socio-economic backgrounds and identify the needs and priorities with this in mind. We are working to include the whole family and have established links with the Hub and other local services.” “We have worked very closely with neighbourhood renewal partnership in our area to develop programmes and to ensure that we are reaching the vulnerable children in our school and local community.”* This dimension to school life is largely unseen and unrecognised beyond the immediate community. Inspectors reported no duplication of provision between neighbourhood renewal and ES.

5.1.7 Schools are required to monitor and evaluate the impact of the interventions funded by the ES programme and report the outcomes within the NIESIS. In the best practice, schools skilfully and rigorously monitor the outcomes through the use of qualitative and quantitative data. For example: one ES cluster tracked the progress of children against parental involvement in ES activities. *“In year 5, 100% of children whose parents were involved in courses funded by the ES programme made progress; and in year 7, 83% of pupils whose parents were involved in various activities funded by ES programmes made progress in their standardised scores”*.

There are several limitations to the monitoring and evaluation process. It is difficult to separate the impact of multiple interventions. For example: organisations such as Health Trusts work collaboratively with ES and neighbourhood renewal initiatives to achieve outcomes. Furthermore, certain interventions impact on the social, behavioural and emotional well-being of the learners and their families; evidence is difficult to quantify. The impact may manifest itself quickly, in areas such as an improvement in attendance which may in turn lead to improvements in learning, or it may manifest itself very slowly, perhaps taking years to reveal an outcome. It is therefore important that ongoing longitudinal monitoring and evaluation is in place.

Schools' own procedures for monitoring and evaluating have become more rigorous in response to EA requests for evidence. Monitoring before and after an event is common.



## **5.2 What is the impact of ES clustering provision on reducing barriers to learning and improving pupil outcomes; how this is monitored and evaluated at school or cluster level; including, how the identified priorities for the ES cluster are integrated into the improvement process and development plan for each school involved.**

5.2.1 Ninety-one percent of respondents to the questionnaire said that the ES clustering has improved outcomes for pupils; two per cent said it did not improve outcomes and seven per cent said that they did not know. The percentages for those schools that said outcomes did not improve and those who did not know, mirrors the percentage of schools that reported less effective practice within their cluster. For example, six per cent of respondents said their cluster met less than once per year; seven per cent said they either did not have a cluster coordinator, or did not know who it was, which indicates, potentially, a correlation between effective clustering and impact on outcomes.

5.2.2 The most common tools used by school and cluster for evaluation of outcomes include: schools' own assessment data; questionnaires to parents, staff and pupils; photographic evidence; use of SIMS; public examination standards; observations; and discussions, therefore utilising qualitative and quantitative data, which is proving effective. There is a need to ensure that in the search for robust quantitative monitoring and evaluation tools, that clusters are not dissuaded from using their qualitative knowledge of pupils, families and communities, and being innovative where appropriate in addressing need.

One principal reported: *“During meetings we look at attendance records and feedback from all including children. We use photo mind mapping to ask the children what they would like to see, self-evaluate this and then make plans. At the end of the school year - data including attendance records, observations and feedback from staff demonstrate an improvement in the children’s overall health and well-being.”*

5.2.3 Responses provided numerous examples of clustering impact, where barriers to learning have been reduced and there has been improvement in pupil outcomes. For example, principals reported: *“Through using the cluster funding to fund a language support assistant for three hours a day and a speech and language therapist for three hours a week we managed to move a cohort from having 85% of children who were below the level of language expectation (September 2016) to 85% at or above language expectations (May 2017); and “Our cluster action plan is based on reading programmes with other schools. It has had a huge impact on our literacy results which was reflected in the PTE results. Reading ages of younger children have shown significant improvement when they have been targeted for the programme. Teachers and parents have also noted considerable improvement in children’s confidence and emotional well-being.”*

5.2.4 Funding is being used to access specialist support to address complex life-impacting issues. Funding is also being directed to specialist provision during the school day as well as after school; in particular for literacy support, a range of therapies and counselling services. The criteria stipulating use of ES funding out of school hours is considered by some schools to be a limitation on achieving maximum benefit from the funding, and some flexibility in application of this criteria is in evidence.

Examples of specialist support reported by schools include: *“As a special school, we have worked on therapeutic art as a form of counselling through our cluster group. This allows our pupils to avail of counselling that does not require verbal output, a challenge for many of our pupils which impedes ‘traditional’ counselling. We have seen improvements in self-esteem and self-expression which have led to improvements in learning.”*

*“Music therapy helps children who are experiencing difficulty in all areas, for example: a child who had attachment issues due to death of a parent engaged in music therapy and learned to recognise and express her feelings in a meaningful way rather than via inappropriate behaviours. Vast improvement in school and at home.”*

*“Cluster funding provides for an in-school counselling service. There have been many instances over the past few years that the availability of such expertise has been invaluable in dealing with pupil and family trauma, including bereavement, parental illness, anger management, and emotional well-being”.*

*“Involvement in a technology awareness campaign last year increased parents awareness of time spent on technological devices and the impact this had on their children’s ability to attend and learn within the school setting. Parents were previously unaware of the important role they played in the social development and early communication skills of their young child.”*

5.2.5 Schools have a statutory requirement to draw up a School Development Plan (SDP) that includes outlining school priorities related to needs of pupils. It would be expected that there will be a connection between the SDP and ES provision as it should contribute to achieving school targets and objectives. The connection between the two and embedding of ES within SDPs is becoming more common, as one principal reported: *“Extended Schools is a vital area in our SDP, more specifically in our Literacy and Numeracy Action Plans. It has been a crucial part in not only enhancing our children's learning and academic development but in their social and emotional well-being”.* *“If funding for ES was to receive further cuts, we feel it would have a significant impact on our school”.* However, embedding of the aims of ES in SDPs should be explicit, to ensure optimum benefit is obtained from ES across all schools.

The value placed on the ES programme by schools participating in this survey is summed up well in the following comment: *“The impact of ES is immense, it adds so much to our school provision our pastoral care and our community base within the area. It has made a real difference. Our pupils and families are richer for it. Its true impact is in the confidence resilience and personal development of everyone involved”.*

### **5.3 What is the balance of cluster provision against the existing ES five high level intended outcomes (i) being healthy, (ii) enjoying learning and achieving, (iii) living in safety and with stability, (iv) experiencing economic and environment well-being and (v) contributing positively to community and society?**

5.3.1 The five high level outcomes associated with ES have not changed since the inception of the programme in 2006. According to schools in this survey they remain relevant and their generic nature allows for flexibility and creativity in devising and agreeing priorities and strategies. The questionnaire responses indicate that focus across the five high level intended outcomes is imbalanced, indicating that all intended outcomes are not of equal relevance to schools. One respondent suggested that outcomes (i)-(iii) are more applicable to all stages of learning whereas (iv) and (v) are more applicable to KS3 and above.

5.3.2 Almost 63% of respondents indicated that their cluster has made the most impact on enjoying learning and achieving; 26% on being healthy; 21% on contributing positively to community and society; 15% on living in safety and with stability; and seven per cent on experiencing economic and environment well-being. Respondents were able to select more than one objective when selecting where the highest impact occurred, therefore the percentages quoted above tally to greater than 100%. There is no DE ES guidance to suggest that all high level outcomes are intended to have equal weighting. Inspectors reported that the breadth of achievements represented in the high level outcomes allows for flexibility in practice.

5.3.3 In agreeing priorities within their cluster, only 27% of respondents said that all of the high level outcomes were a focus for their cluster; 34% of respondents said they view some of the high level intended outcomes as being more important than others; eight per cent said they do not consider the outcomes explicitly when making decisions and 30% said that they identify their own objectives based on their own priorities. However, when annual reports are written and submitted, and action plans are written for the following year, it is a requirement that ES high level outcomes are clearly identified.

#### **5.4 How effective is ES clustering in promoting social inclusion, parental and community involvement and is this making a difference?**

5.4.1 Eighty-seven per cent of respondents to the questionnaire said that there has been an increase in parental involvement through the ES programme, 26% saying the increase had been significant.

5.4.2 The ES cluster funding is enabling schools to work more closely with families and community and often this work is strategic and dynamic. For example: through employing a family support worker, employing independent speech and language therapists, or providing specialist music, art and play therapies. Questionnaire responses reported that for *“Difficult to engage parents, (the) best way is through community; community allows us to break down barriers.”* *“Parents’ experience of school was negative - now the links with parents are excellent.”* and *“Staff feel privileged to have built up this community through the very hard work continually and consistently of this cluster.”*

The ES clustering that has a particular focus on parents and community may be credited with making a very specific and important difference, as one principal reported: *“I believe the ES funding has been instrumental in making schools think outside of their own building. Schools now see themselves as part of a community and have a better understanding of the pressures and challenges that challenge these communities”.*

Such responses indicate that the role of the school in areas of social deprivation is complex but important. The parameters within which the schools are working are often outside the traditional responsibility of schools and are individual to the community. There is no DE guidance for schools working with communities, and time and effort expended on this work by schools is largely unknown. Expertise in this aspect could be gained by schools from discussions with the EA youth sector where engagement with the community is at the core of their work and vital to its success.

Numerous examples of community involvement and impact were provided by the questionnaires and the visits to schools including: *“Cluster has created a Parents’ Centre which all parents from all schools in the cluster use.”* *“The cluster employed a family support worker to work with the families in the community across the age range 3-19 integrating in each of the school’s settings. Many parental workshops were organised and attended. Alongside this the family support worker signposted and set up Back to Work 1-1 information sessions to facilitate necessary training in order for parents to up-skill themselves in preparation for re-entering the world of work”* and *“All parents of children involved in cluster group activities have been invited into the school, both at the beginning and throughout the support. This has meant that parents have become more familiar with coming into the school and are more willing to engage in other activities, outside of the ES activities.”*

The benefits, of involvement in the programme, reported reflect well the core philosophy of the ES programme for parents, families and communities. Inspectors reported that parents express gratitude for the difference made to families by counselling services. As an indication of how the role of schools is changing, inspectors reported incidences of parents seeking support from schools; counselling for pupils is extended to families in some cases. Extended Schools cluster funding is facilitating this work.

*“The cycle of unemployment is broken as so many of our parents achieve (Essential Skills / GCSE) and obtain employment”.*

*“The parents with EAL obtained accreditation in English with one now working as a classroom assistant”.*

*“At the beginning of the cluster, our intense auditing process detected that the community had no homework club. We created one – very beneficial.”*

5.4.3 Promoting social inclusion, parental and community involvement is an area in which dissemination of best practice could have significant impact across all schools, not just those within the ES programme, as one questionnaire response stated: *‘The clusters with their cross community and cross-phase elements have different types of benefits for the pupils and the community - less easy to measure but extremely important’.*

## **5.5 How the quality and impact of external agency intervention is monitored by the cluster.**

5.5.1 The schools within the ES programme use a broad range of external agencies. Monitoring and evaluation of the work of these agencies is primarily the responsibility of the school and/or cluster, based on first-hand experience of services. In a cluster, the monitoring and evaluation of external agency intervention has the potential to be more comprehensive and effective, given the number of perspectives provided by the member schools. Schools use a range of monitoring and evaluating procedures which include: feedback from staff, parents and pupils both orally and through questionnaires; assessment data, and attendance records.

5.5.2 Some external providers create their own monitoring data as another school reported: *“(A named charity) ... has a robust monitoring, evaluation and review process and have clear data which proves the valuable impact in terms of the social and emotional”.*

5.5.3 All providers are required to be checked via AccessNI in accordance with school safeguarding procedures. It is imperative that schools have in place robust procedures for safeguarding and for monitoring and evaluating the impact of external providers. It is currently the responsibility of the individual schools to ensure that quality assurance procedures are comprehensive and that all providers provide a good service.

## **5.6 How effective are the organisational arrangements for ES Clustering in achieving effective collaboration?**

All cluster schools have access to the document ‘Developing Effective Clusters’ on NIESIS, written by the Extended Schools’ Regional Co-ordinators Group, to support ES clusters as they strive to develop effective services and activities for their children and young people, their families and communities.

5.6.1 The most effective clusters are often long established. They are confident in choosing priorities; members communicate regularly; equity and trust has been built up over time. Clusters vary considerably in size (from two schools to more than 16), often encompassing different phases, sectors and a wide geographical area; this can present challenges. Thirty-four per cent of schools responding to the questionnaire are members of small clusters consisting of two to five schools; precisely 50% said they were members of clusters consisting of five to 10 schools; 11% were members of clusters consisting of 11-15 schools and five per cent of schools said they were members of clusters containing 16 or more schools. Therefore, 84% of respondents are members of small to medium size clusters. For some clusters there have been insurmountable logistical challenges, such as distance between schools, and scheduling of meetings that suit all members. The flexibility to choose the size and character of the cluster, and to alter the make-up of an existing cluster when it is not working, exists within the programme, and is frequently applied. One principal commented: *“We feel the size of the cluster should be limited. With too many schools in one cluster, it is sometimes difficult to reap the full benefit of working together. The logistics of meeting and sharing good practice is more difficult with a larger number of schools which span a wide range of age groups. From our own experience, we have found a smaller cluster of schools working together to be more successful”*.

The effectiveness of the impact of the cluster on the provision for learners is dependent upon the potential for all members to identify shared priorities.

5.6.2 In the most effective clusters the quality of the leadership and management at school level and the motivation and commitment of the cluster co-ordinator are integral to the success of the work of the cluster. A cluster’s in-depth understanding of community context; their perception of need; their ability to foster positive relationships and respond meaningfully, correlate with their ability to make a positive impact. In the least effective clusters, in a minority of cases, the size of the cluster inhibits progress, leadership is weak, and communication is infrequent.

5.6.3 Inspectors reported on the transient access to ES funding which impedes long term planning for some schools as one principal reported: *“sometimes you meet the criteria, sometimes you don’t.”* The removal of funding presents a significant challenge for schools, it has a significant negative impact on provision and therefore on pupils and families. At times a school may cease to be a member of a cluster. Furthermore within this evaluation several instances were encountered where schools remain part of the cluster, despite the withdrawal of ES funding.

5.6.4 Thirty-two per cent of questionnaire responses indicated that external partners are included in the cluster’s management, 51% reported that there are no external partners and 17% said they did not know.

5.6.5 There is successful collaboration among cluster schools to ensure reports are completed on time and submitted to the EA. One principal reported: *“All schools submit a report and have an opportunity to present their data at the annual review meeting. These individual evaluations all feed into the final report. Both qualitative and quantitative data is used”*.

5.6.6 Almost 65% of questionnaire responses agreed that the current model of financial allocation and monitoring is fit for purpose, while 35% disagreed. Schools reported that the process of distributing funds is unnecessarily complicated to manage and lodgement of funds is not aligned to the academic year. These difficulties apply both to administering ES funding and ES cluster funding. Specifically, when all the cluster funding is placed within the Local Management of Schools budget of the lead school it can be difficult to administer and to allocate an allowance to each school in the cluster. Some schools report that a separate

coding of ES funding is required. Almost all of the schools visited reported that late arrival of funding has an impact on planning, and delays the start of the programme. One principal commented in the questionnaire: *“The financial allocation is manageable but the onus is on the principal of the lead school to lead, organise and coordinate the programme. At certain times of the year this is an additional workload.”* A funding allocation over two or three years would be more beneficial to strategic and sustainable planning.

5.6.7 A small number of schools in receipt of the ES funding expressed an opinion that all schools should have access to ES funding, as all schools have vulnerable pupils. One principal commented: *(There) “should be an allocation per child per school regardless of meeting a specific financial criteria (37% free school meals)”*.

There is a need to move away from stereotypical assumptions of the nature and cause of vulnerability in children and young people and where these young people are in the education system. Vulnerability is no respecter of boundaries and within today's social, educational and financial landscape vulnerability in children and young people can manifest itself in many forms. Therefore there is a need to think in wider terms of what vulnerability is, how it is manifested and where it can be found.

Another principal explained: *“We have benefitted greatly over the years from being invited to cluster with schools who receive ES funding. This has been beneficial to the pupils in our school but in addition has built supportive relationships between the clustering schools. I feel that clustering opportunities should be available to every school and should not just be for those schools who are lucky enough to receive an invitation.”*

In relation to the funding model, one principal commented: *“The current model for financial allocation works well but we feel the timeframe set out for the three monitoring periods isn't fit for purpose. The sole reason for this is that the monitoring for Period 1, which is from April to August is normally when little or no ES activities take place in schools and can be a pointless exercise. We suggest that there should only be two monitoring periods”*

5.6.8 Most schools report that the online NIESIS has been a worthwhile addition, and is an effective and useful system for reporting and managing information. However, one principal commented: *“The system used to complete the Annual Report is extremely unreliable. While there are prompts to save your work as you go along, there are numerous occasions where completed work is still lost on the system. This contributes to an inefficient use of valuable time. The drop down boxes used in the monitoring cycle cannot be printed out to show the full content of the boxes”*.

## **5.7 What strategies are in place to disseminate best practice?**

5.7.1 Clusters have achievements they are proud of and are keen to share, such as a transition programme, parental involvement and improvements in literacy attainment. Schools also welcome opportunities to learn from other clusters, in particular from clusters with similar contexts. NIESIS holds a number of individual case studies that illustrate examples of good practice as well as copies of extended schools newsletters from earlier in the programme, for download. The newsletters contain some examples of effective clustering but there is a need for more recent material. Communication through an online newsletter would be worth reinstating as a means of disseminating effective practice with the inclusion of hyperlinks and podcasts of case study materials.

5.7.2 The depth of collaborative working across schools, the strategy, the innovation and the impact on community would be of great value to share with others. Similarly some schools have had considerable success in engaging parents in, for example, attendance at workshops while others have not. *“Parents don't come, no matter what you do”*.

In 2009 the ES evaluation by the ETI reported that dissemination was an area for improvement. *“There is a need to disseminate examples of effective clustering (in local learning communities in the case of the post-primary sector) and to improve cross-community collaboration and working with neighbourhood renewal initiatives and the Youth Service in order to reduce duplication.”*<sup>7</sup> Dissemination of good practice has improved. Schools within a locality are clustering and sharing practice. However, there are still reciprocal benefits to be gained from the further dissemination of examples of effective practice on a wider geographical scale and across phases on approaches to effective clustering and on the work of schools directly with community. One principal commented: *“Would love if EA could create an inventory of ideas (relating to the core themes...)”*.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 This evaluation concludes that schools are using their ES cluster funding with care and to good effect to address needs of pupils in their schools and communities. Clustering, when it is implemented appropriately, adds value and contributes well to the achievement of the five high level intended outcomes, by enabling schools to work collaboratively to address disadvantage at a community and school level. ES clustering is increasing involvement of schools within communities, which subsequently benefits learners.

6.2 The characteristics of effective clustering are: schools’ commitment to reducing differentials and improving the quality of life for children and young people; ability of all member schools to communicate well, on a regular basis, and agree shared goals; strong cluster leadership which includes critical evaluation of outcomes; and the vision to build on progress, sometimes with creativity and innovation.

6.3 The partial autonomy that ES funding provides, enables schools to identify interventions available through the private sector, and apply them where need is most prevalent, which may or may not be to the pupils who have drawn the funding into the school. It is a recurring finding at every stage of this evaluation; that pupils with FSM entitlement are not exclusively the pupils who need the intervention.

6.4 Schools are becoming increasingly reliant on the funding to address diverse and specialist needs, and losing funding when they cease to meet eligibility criteria creates a significant challenge for them.

6.5 Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of ES cluster funding on pupils and communities is being conscientiously implemented by schools, in the challenging context of a diverse range of interventions which do not lend themselves naturally to quantitative data. It is important to recognise the value of both qualitative and quantitative data.

6.6 There remains a question of equity of provision and opportunity for vulnerable, disadvantaged pupils and their families, which is dependent upon the school they attend and whether that school meets the eligibility criteria for ES funding or not.

6.7 Dissemination of the best practice in clustering and the impact on learners, their families and the community would be beneficial to the wider school community.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/11225/1/an-evaluation-of-extended-schools.pdf> Page 15 (6.4)

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

7.1 To consider the indicators of vulnerability and disadvantage, in light of the multidisciplinary approach being applied in schools to identify pupils in need.

7.2 To investigate interventions that are in place to reduce the differentials for pupils in schools that are not receiving ES funding.

7.3 To investigate the impact of loss of funding on therapies and mental health support, including counselling, when schools cease to be eligible for funding.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY**

8.1 To disseminate effective clustering best practice: to enable sharing of successful strategies and increase further the outcomes for pupils, their families and their communities across Northern Ireland; and optimise the outcomes from the financial investment in the programme.

8.2 To encourage and facilitate schools to engage with EA youth leadership to potentially build on their knowledge and understanding of working with the wider community.



## CASE STUDIES

### Case Study 1: A small inner city cluster

#### **An extended schools parents' centre promoting social inclusion and community involvement**

This well-established cross sector cluster comprises a large primary school and three nursery schools. At the heart of the cluster is the well-used parent's centre, which was created through Extending School's Cluster funding in 2007.

When the cluster was initiated, an audit of over 700 parents was conducted, views were gathered from staff in each of the cluster schools and data from community organisations was sought. The cluster identified the importance of working with parents as they considered parental support to be essential to pupil achievement.

The parents' centre was established in the lead school and comprises of a large mobile building with adjoining crèche facilities where parents from the schools can congregate for meetings, training courses and activities, while their children are being cared for in the crèche facilities next door.

Initially, a teacher was appointed in a full time post as Parent Support Officer of the centre; the role is now filled by a parent who follows the established routines.

Annually, the school principals meet and evaluate the evidence they have gathered from the parents' centre, to aid them in the formation of action plans to maintain provision in the parents' centre. Collaboratively, the schools negotiate a common strand or theme that addresses the needs of each individual school such as offering parent courses to the parents of all the schools. A shared calendar of events and courses is displayed in each of the schools where parents are signposted so that they can sign up and avail of the services.

The cross phase aspect of this cluster activity not only aids pupils' transitioning from one school to another, it is supportive to all parents, particularly, to newcomer parents as the continuity of service in the Parent's Centre is available to parents from their child starts nursery until their child's primary education ends.

The schools can provide evidence of involvement with external agencies and quantitative and qualitative evidence which demonstrates the change of culture and attitude amongst their community's parents towards education.

Education is now viewed by the community as a positive step to a brighter future. Through the many courses provided through the parents centre, many are achieving certificates for the first time in their lives and some are achieving accredited qualifications. One principal said:

*"Many of these parents are now employed in the local area including our schools and so, they are continuing to be good role models for our current pupils and parents and to think this has derived as a result of good teamwork using Extended School's funding to create".*

Evidence demonstrates improved interaction between parental and children's learning; family relationships; mental health; and communication with the schools. Assessment data demonstrates the improvement in children's learning. There is also anecdotal evidence to suggest a sense of pride in the communities in which they live.

## **Case Study 2: A medium size rural cluster**

### **Collaborative work on multiple community challenges**

This rural cluster comprises of nine schools including primary and post-primary schools.

As a well-established partnership with over ten years of experience, relationships have been cemented. The schools liaise with a range of external partners and community groups, consult regularly with parents and students while taking into account the priorities from their individual school development plans when deciding the nature of ES programmes they offer.

Last year they decided to focus on 3 key areas; ICT as a Teaching and Learning Tool, Improving Literacy and Numeracy and Removing Barriers to Parents and Children Working Together with Schools.

Targets were achieved for: parents, staff and students being up-skilled in ICT; improvement in pupils' numeracy and literacy attainment; increased engagement with parents which included participation in certified training courses and gaining qualifications.

The cluster is particularly proud of the success they have had with the FAST Programme (Families And Schools Together Programme), an after-school, multi-family group programme which is offered to pupils and their families, now in its third year. The objectives are to enhance family functioning, prevent young people from experiencing failure in school, prevent substance misuse, reduce stress and strengthen relationships with a view to promoting social capital. Every cycle is evaluated by FAST UK. In January 2016, six students delivered a presentation in London on the success of FAST in their area. Their programme was recognised as the most successful of all the schemes running across the UK.

There is also a youth group promoting healthy eating and exercise. Student mentors take on leadership roles and work with transitioning children across the key stages. After ten weeks the programme finishes with a graduation ceremony and a celebration. In the previous year, the parents organised a celebration event at which a well-known musical band performed and the Minister for Education presented the certificates to participants.

The cluster is committed to building upon their strong inter-school and cross-community relationships. In an area where until relatively recently there was no meaningful cross-sectoral programmes running in a sustained way such as that of the cluster work, schools recognise the vital role their work is playing.

A small number of children are now opting to transition cross-sectorally when moving from primary to post primary thus avoiding long journeys out of their local area. This new trend was attributed to the parental and student engagement through ES provision.

The ES cluster offers all parties a very effective platform for meeting with neighbouring schools and sharing ideas, resources and good practice to the benefit of all children in the area. This shift towards porous boundaries and a common purpose is very evident within the cluster.

### **Case Study 3: A small urban cluster**

#### **Collaboration in devising community focussed activities**

This small urban cross-phase (primary and post-primary) and cross community cluster, initially involved seven schools but it was found to be too difficult logistically to co-ordinate the planning and agree priorities. The revised smaller cluster of 4 schools, including primary and post-primary, in this context, has proved to be more workable.

In this context, clustering has built upon schools' experience of using their own ES funding to address particular needs of vulnerable children and families in their own school. The schools share information regarding strategies and interventions that have been successful, so that cluster schools may learn from one another.

The cluster subsequently built upon this work by using cluster funding to address common concerns held by the four cluster schools. For example: a key priority in the local community is the need to promote healthy lifestyles and sporting activities are organised to promote engagement in sport and encourage healthy lifestyles.

The schools devised a programme to benefit all pupils in years 6, 7 and 8 with the intended impact to be experienced by all the children, parents and the wider community.

Connections were also made with artists to support professional development for staff, raise aspirations for pupils and give children access to a level of expertise that generally an ordinary class teacher cannot provide. It was successful in widening children's knowledge and experience and demonstrated how people can use their gifts and talents in their job.

The cluster ran a successful cross-community project engaging the help of a contemporary Northern Irish artist (*Ross Wilson*) to celebrate the work of two renowned poets who were born in Northern Ireland (*Seamus Heaney and John Hewitt*). The project was supported by related cultural societies to work on the literature element. A piece of art work created by the children for the whole community to be displayed in the town centre was the finished product.

The current cluster activity focus is on numeracy attainment from primary to post-primary (transition phase), development of ICT skills and continuing sporting activities to promote engagement in sport and healthy lifestyles.

The schools have noted a great improvement in the ability of pupils and parents to socially engage with those from different community backgrounds over the years and in the emotional resilience of pupils; and the training provided for staff during this process will enable schools to continue with this good work.

### **Case Study 4: A large cross-phase cluster**

#### **A specific primary project within a cross phase cluster for parental involvement 'developing the whole person.'**

This large cluster consisting of nine primary schools, two post primary schools and one special school is coordinated by a post-primary college. Action plans for the cluster are grouped in general themes and flexibility is provided for schools to develop specific projects. There is emphasis on outdoor education in various forms - developing gardens, a mini farm on the coordinating school site and use of Forest Schools. Staff have received training from the Forest Schools and some are qualified hill walkers.

Staff believe that the development of skills in the outdoor environment greatly assist especially low and under achieving pupils to focus on staying engaged - with positive effects for those same pupils in the traditional academic environment. A number of the programmes seek parental involvement and this has greatly increased parental engagement in their children's education.

Primary staff worked with the coordinator at one school on a programme that involved building coracles (small round boats made of wickerwork, covered with a watertight material). Parents, especially fathers of the year 4-7 boys, were encouraged to attend the school on a Wednesday evening over an eight week period for two hours per evening. Staff brought their own children along and worked alongside the parents. As everyone had the same skill level (i.e. none), parents saw the staff from a very different perspective and as much more approachable.

Much fun was had at the Saturday excursion to the local river where the coracles were tested, with varying degrees of flotation success! There was a palpable sense of achievement and the overall benefits for the school have been that a significant group of parents engage much more readily with the school, working in partnership to promote increased academic success for their child. The school has also observed those parents attend other activities such as 'Reading Breakfast' that previously would not have been the case. Parents also communicate much more readily with the school and a lot of 'issues' that would previously have demanded a lot of staff attention are quickly resolved in a low key manner.

Over the years activities have developed and evolved, with the school now offering deep sea fishing trips for parents with their pupils. Parents always comment on how these activities provide them with quality time with their child, away from the demands of busy home life and they also are able to take away ideas of learning experiences to do with their children at home as a result of attending.

**Extended Schools – Expenditure on Mental Health and Family Support programmes (including counselling)**

Years	% of combined ES budget	% of ES cluster budget only	% of ES school budget only
2015/16	4.1%	8.56%	2.20%
2016/17	4.9%	8.80%	3.17%
2017/18	5.5%	9.19%	3.92%

## Extended Schools Programme 2017/18

### Eligibility Criteria

Extended Schools funding is targeted at those schools serving the most disadvantaged communities. To qualify for Extended Schools funding, schools must meet set criteria in order to ensure those in the greatest need receive additional support.

To determine which schools are eligible for the Extended School programme, DE identifies the most disadvantaged schools according to the proportion of their pupils which are entitled to FSM or live in an area classified as disadvantaged, using the FSM and pupil postcode information gathered as part of the annual School Census.

To help establish whether the postcodes for the children attending each school falls into a disadvantaged area, the current official measure of deprivation developed by the Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency (NISRA); the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 (NIMDM) is issued.

Sometimes referred to as the “Noble Index”, the NIMDM is made up of 7 areas or “domains” which help to illustrate the level of deprivation in any given area; these are income, employment; health & disability; education, skills and training; proximity/access to services; living environment; and crime and disorder. These domains then combine into the overall NIMDM. The Measure ranks electoral wards according to their level of deprivation in comparison to each other, from most to least deprived (both for the overall NIMDM and each of the domains).

Given that there is often great variance of size and population between wards, NISRA have also developed "Super Output Areas" (SOA's) in an attempt to improve the reporting of small area statistics. These smaller SOA's are then ranked in the same way as electoral wards.

For Extended Schools purposes, the eligibility criteria which currently apply **across all school sectors** state that a school must have:

- 51% or more of their pupils living in either a Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) **or** the 30% most deprived wards/Super Output Areas (using both the NIMDM and Education Domain) **and/or**;
- 37% or more of pupils with a FSME. In the case of Nursery Schools, 37% or more of pupils with a FSME or parents in receipt of Income Support or Income Based Job Seekers Allowance.

**Extended Schools funding for individual eligible schools is calculated on the basis of a formula as follows:**

A 'Core' allocation made up of:

- a. a block allocation to each school of £3,000; and
- b. a sliding scale whereby:
  - the first 100 pupils are funded at £100 each
  - the next 100 at £75 each
  - the next 100 at £50 each

- the next 150 at £25 each
- the next 100 at £20 each
- all remaining pupils at £10 each

\*\* Note that the core allocation due to each school based on above formula is re-calculated in accordance with the overall level of resources available for the programme in any given financial year.

*Plus*

- c. A further allocation of 15% for schools choosing to Cluster.
- d. An additional 15% uplift for clustering schools provided specifically for parenting programmes (see '**Clustering**' section below for further detail).

## Clustering

A key feature of Extended Schools policy to date has been to encourage three or more schools in the same geographical area to collaborate and work together in partnership, otherwise known as “Clustering”. Clustering has many benefits such as the sharing of resources and expertise or being able to offer joint programmes for pupils and the local community. Schools choosing to work in a cluster receive a standard additional 15% funding on top of their core allocation to encourage partnership working between schools.

A further allowance of 15% continues to be provided for clustering schools specifically aimed at providing programmes which involve parents in the life of the school and which can help them to support their child’s learning, in particular the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

Therefore, for those schools choosing to cluster, they currently each receive a total of **30%** of additional funding on top of their core allocation.

## Buffer Zone

When applying the eligibility criteria, it is possible that some schools can slip below the qualifying threshold one year and then qualify the next. This is likely to happen in smaller schools where one or two pupils can make a big difference. Therefore, DE currently operates a “buffer zone” which allows previously funded schools that fall a few percentage points below the qualifying threshold (currently 51% of pupils from disadvantaged areas or 37% in receipt of Free School Meals/equivalent for Nursery schools), to be partially funded for a period of 1 year (receiving 50% of what the school would have received had it remained eligible).

If eligibility has not been re-established after that year, schools will exit the programme.

Buffer zone for:

- Disadvantaged areas: 45 - 50%;
- FSME: 34-36%.

## Exiting Schools

Some previously funded schools that fail to meet the eligibility criteria (and the ‘buffer zone’ outlined above does not apply) have to exit the programme. In recognition of the plans that such schools may have already made up to the end of the academic year, resources are currently provided to cover the period April-June of the applicable financial year (i.e. receiving 25% of core allocation).



## Extended Schools Programme 2018/19

### Background

Extended Schools funding is targeted at those schools serving the most disadvantaged communities. To qualify for Extended Schools funding, schools must meet set criteria (which are indicators of socio-economic disadvantage) in order to ensure those in the greatest need receive additional support.

Each year, DE determines which schools are eligible for the Extended School programme by identifying the most disadvantaged schools according to the proportion of their pupils which are entitled to FSM or live in an area classified as disadvantaged. This is worked out using FSM and pupil residence data gathered as part of the annual School Census exercise.

### Multiple Deprivation Measure

To help establish whether the children attending each school are drawn from a disadvantaged area, DE uses the official measure of deprivation developed by the NISRA entitled the NIMDM which is updated periodically.

Sometimes referred to as the “Noble Index”, the NIMDM is made up of seven areas or “domains” which help to illustrate the level of deprivation in any given area; these are income; employment; health & disability; education, skills and training; proximity/access to services; living environment; and crime and disorder. These domains then combine into the overall NIMDM. The Measure ranks areas according to their level of deprivation in comparison to each other, from most to least deprived (both for the overall NIMDM and each of the domains).

In November 2017, NISRA introduced an updated version of the NIMDM. The NIMDM 2017 has been adopted as the measure for determining (area-based) eligibility for the Extended Schools (ES) programme, and replaces the previous 2010 version of the NIMDM (which had been used for ES purposes over the last number of years).

In simple terms, this means that, under the NIMDM 2017, some areas will now be ranked (relative to one another) as less deprived than under the previous NIMDM 2010 and others more so. This is due to demographic changes in the interim seven years. In addition, the NIMDM 2017 has only provided data on smaller SOAs to date and not electoral wards as was the case under the earlier NIMDM 2010. More detail on the specific eligibility criteria currently in place is set out below.

### 2018/19 Eligibility Criteria

For the 2018/19 financial year, the eligibility criteria which applied **across all school sectors on an equal basis**, stated that a school must have the following to access full ES resources:

- 51% or more of their pupils living in either a Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA) **or** the 30% most deprived SOA (using both the NIMDM 2017 and Education Domain) **and/or**;
- 37% or more of pupils with a FSME. In the case of Nursery Schools, 37% or more of pupils with a FSME or parents in receipt of Income Support or Income Based Job Seekers Allowance.

**The above qualifying thresholds have remained unchanged from previous years.** The only difference in 2018/19 is with regards to the methodology employed for the area based element of the criteria (i.e. use of the updated NIMDM 2017 as highlighted above).

### **Impact on Schools**

Due to the introduction of the updated NIMDM 2017, some schools which met the criteria for ES funding in 2017/18 do not meet the updated criteria this year and will therefore have to exit the programme in 2018/19. In contrast, some schools not previously eligible for ES funding in 2017/18 will enter the programme in 2018/19.

Whilst the outcome of the 2018/19 ES eligibility process will be disappointing for many schools which have been adversely affected, the NIMDM 2017 represents a more up to date and accurate picture of deprivation across Northern Ireland and its adoption helps to ensure a continuing focus of available ES resources on those schools who can demonstrate the greatest degree of need.

### **Calculation of Funding for Eligible Schools**

**Extended Schools funding for individual eligible schools is calculated on the basis of a formula as follows:**

A 'Core' allocation made up of:

- a. A block allocation to each school of £3,000; and a
- b. Sliding scale whereby:
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\*\* Note that the core allocation due to each school based on above formula is re-calculated in accordance with the overall level of resources available for the programme in any given financial year.

*Plus*

- c. A further allocation of 15% for schools choosing to Cluster.
- d. An additional 15% uplift for clustering schools provided specifically for parenting programmes.

### **Clustering**

A key feature of Extended Schools policy to date has been to encourage three or more schools in the same geographical area to collaborate and work together in partnership, otherwise known as "Clustering". Clustering has many benefits such as the sharing of resources and expertise or being able to offer joint programmes for pupils and the local community. Schools choosing to work in a cluster receive a standard additional 15% funding on top of their core allocation to encourage partnership working between schools.

A further allowance of 15% continues to be provided for clustering schools specifically aimed at providing programmes which involve parents in the life of the school and which can help them to support their child's learning, in particular the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

Therefore, for those schools choosing to cluster, they currently each receive a total of 30% of additional funding on top of their core allocation.

### **Buffer Zone**

When applying the eligibility criteria, it is possible that some schools can slip below the qualifying threshold one year and then qualify the next. This is likely to happen in smaller schools where one or two pupils can make a big difference. Therefore, the Department continues to operate a "buffer zone" which allows previously funded schools that fall a few percentage points below the relevant thresholds (currently 51% of pupils from the most disadvantaged areas or 37% in receipt of Free School Meals/equivalent for Nursery schools), to be partially funded for a period of 1 year (receiving 50% of what the school would have received had it remained eligible).

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### **Exiting Schools**

Some previously funded schools that fail to meet the eligibility criteria (and the 'buffer zone' outlined above does not apply) will unfortunately have to exit the 2018/19 programme. In recognition of the plans that such schools may have already made up to the end of the academic year, resources are currently provided to cover the period April-June 2018 (i.e receiving 25% of core allocation).

**Questionnaire Questions.**

Q1 Please identify your education sector:

- Nursery
- Primary
- Post-primary
- Special
- Other

Q2 What size is your school?

- Fewer than 60 children
- Between 61 and 105 children
- Between 106 and 350 children
- Between 351 and 500 children
- More than 500 children

Q3 Is your cluster cross-phase (e.g. nursery/primary/post-primary/special)?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If 'Yes', please identify all the phases involved:

- Nursery
- Primary
- Post-primary
- Special
- Other

Q4 Is your cluster cross-sector (eg controlled/maintained/integrated)?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If 'Yes', please tick all the sectors involved:

- Controlled
- Maintained
- Integrated
- Irish-medium
- Voluntary grammar
- Independent
- Other

Q5 How many schools are in your cluster?

- 2-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16 or more

Q6 How long has your Extended Schools cluster been established?

- 0-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10 years or over
- Don't know

Q7 Is your school the lead school in the cluster?

- Yes
- No

Q8 Has a co-ordinator or lead school been appointed to the cluster?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If 'yes', briefly outline the role of the lead school/co-ordinator:

Q9 Have external partners been invited and included in the cluster's management?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If 'yes', please provide the external partners' field of work and a brief outline of their role(s):

Q10 How often does your cluster meet?

- Less than once per year
- 1-2 times per year
- or more times per year

Q11 Over the history of your cluster, which of the five high-order objectives of Extended Schools do you consider you have made the most impact on? Please rate in descending order (1 being the most impacted upon and 5 the least):

- Being healthy
- Enjoying learning and achieving
- Living in safety and with stability
- Experiencing economic and environmental well-being
- Contributing to community and society

Q12 The five key objectives have been the focus since the beginning of the programme. Please consider and tick ONE of the following:

- The five objectives are a key focus for our cluster
- We view some objectives as being more important than others
- We don't explicitly think in terms of the key objectives when making decisions
- We identify our own objectives based on our own priorities
- Other

If you responded 'Other' to the above question, please describe your approach to the five key objectives below:

Q13 How does your cluster ensure that it targets the most vulnerable children in each school?

Q14 Does your cluster use feedback and outcomes from the previous year's actions to inform future actions?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If 'Yes', please indicate the nature of the feedback used to inform future actions eg performance data, questionnaires, school or/and eco council, parent and/or community group feedback:

Q15 Has involvement in the Extended Schools cluster improved outcomes for the pupils in your school, in qualitative and/or quantitative terms?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If 'Yes', please give a recent example:

Q16 Has the Extended Schools Programme increased parental involvement with your school?

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, moderately
- No
- Don't know

If 'Yes', please give an example of how the Extended Schools programme has impacted positively on increased parental involvement with your school:

Q17 Is the current model of financial allocation and monitoring fit for purpose?

- Yes
- No

If `No`, please explain how it should be changed:

Q18 If there are areas of the Extended Schools programme that have not been covered in this questionnaire and you would like to comment on; or you wish to suggest improvements to the programme, please use this box:



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## Extended Schools Evaluation of Effective Clustering

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March 2019

