
GBA News – Friday 29th November



Area Planning Update

Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools

The need for places for pupils with SEN continues to outstrip availability within the schools' estate, and the opening of specialist classes in mainstream schools is proceeding at pace.

To support this need, the GBA is currently involved in a series of Area Planning workshops, along with colleagues from all sectors, EA SEN support teams, EA School Improvement Professionals, and EA Operations and Estates.

The purpose of the workshops is to identify future pressures and bring forward schools with an interest in Specialist Provision.

Following the workshops there will be further engagement with schools.

If you would like to have a conversation with us regarding specialist provision please [contact us](#).

A list of mainstream schools with a provision in place and case studies can be accessed [here](#).

ETI Publishes Reports on Special Educational Needs

Report 1: Specialist Provisions in Mainstream Schools

This ETI report examines the effectiveness of the arrangements, and the quality of the provision, for the growing number of pupils in specialist provisions in mainstream schools (SPiMS) classes. The report draws on evidence from visits to 78 primary schools and 35 post-primary schools. Some of the findings were as follows:

- A view of a minority of the schools was that the EA decision to establish a specialist provision was based on the availability of space and/or accommodation, with a focus on finding places rather than the 'right place'.
- Leaders have committed to all of their staff, pupils and parents seeing the specialist provision as an integral and valued part of the school.
- In most of the post-primary specialist provisions, a wide range of subjects were offered, at appropriate levels, either within the specialist class or through joining their peers in mainstream classes.
- In all post-primary schools, a range of general and applied qualifications were available to all pupils at KS 4. There was evidence of the schools reviewing the curriculum provision well in advance of pupils transitioning from KS 3 into KS 4, to ensure

sufficient time to plan and prepare for the introduction new courses that were relevant to the individual needs, interests and abilities of the pupils.

The report emphasises that where pupils access their learning should be needs informed: "*For some, this will mean they will be best placed to learn and progress in a mainstream setting, for others in SPiMS classes and for others, in a special school.*"

Report 2: The Statutory Assessment (Statementing) Process

This report explores whether the current process of statutory assessment, or 'statementing', for children who may be presenting with special educational needs is meeting the needs of those children. It focuses on the practicalities of the statutory assessment and review process and on issues relating to the implementation of educational statements.

Both ETI reports can be accessed [here](#).

GBA Attends Launch of Marie Curie Grief Education Report



The GBA recently attended the launch of Marie Curie's "[Compassionate Schools Communities](#)" report, which was a cumulation of a significant body of work: [The Schools Bereavement Programme](#), looking at grief education and bereavement support for pupils.

Part of the programme included the development of teacher training focusing on supporting pupils in the school environment who have experienced loss and bereavement.

The training was delivered by Marie Curie in conjunction with CRUSE to 327 teachers across 162 schools in Northern Ireland. This included 21 voluntary grammar schools, some of which were represented at the report launch by pupils and staff who spoke passionately about their participation in the programme.

An evaluation of the training found that teachers, including very experienced teachers, reported developing a deeper understanding of children and young people's behavioural responses within school following a bereavement, and a new appreciation of how children often display grief differently to adults.

It was also reported that where schools already had a bereavement policy, the training provided up-to-date knowledge they could use as part of a policy review. Within other schools, the training brought their attention to a need for a dedicated bereavement policy. For some this meant separating bereavement from their schools existing critical incident policy.

The report provides five key recommendations:

- Strengthen Department of Education-led education policy guidance and support.
- Require every school in Northern Ireland to have a bereavement policy.
- Give all teaching staff a range of opportunities to receive bereavement training.
- Ensure the education curriculum offers a range of opportunities for pupils to discuss bereavement and grief.
- The Health and Education sectors should build on good practice by identifying all opportunities for collaboration that would strengthen wider societal understanding of how children experience grief and how to support them.

The evidence from the report will be used by Marie Curie for ongoing engagement with MLAs/MPs, Department of Education and the Education Authority.

Further information is available by contacting:

Joan McEwan

Associate Director of Policy and Public Affairs for Northern Ireland

joan.mcewan@mariecurie.org.uk

Christine Irvine

Senior Policy Manager for Northern Ireland

christine.irvine@mariecurie.org.uk

GBA Media Training Session

The media landscape is complex and ever-evolving. Recognising and understanding what is/isn't a potential crisis for an organisation, knowing how to handle it, and ensuring that spokespeople have the capability to convey key messages clearly, concisely, and empathetically when an issue arises, can be challenging.

The GBA is working with Morrow Communications and their media partners Donna Traynor and Ronan Kelly to offer a bespoke crisis communications workshop for our member schools.

The workshop will help members gain a broader understanding of the media landscape and how it operates and improve confidence in communicating successfully in a highly stressful environment. Knowing when and how to respond to a media inquiry – or to avoid the crisis situation escalating further – is the first step.

This half-day workshop will take place on Thursday 16 January 2025. Further information on the workshop and details of how to book will be issued to schools next week.

Live Consultations

Consultation on review of eligibility criteria for free school meals and uniform grants

The Department of Education has launched a consultation on the options considered as part of the review of the eligibility criteria for free school meals and uniform grants.

The Department has explored a number of options and has modelled the potential impact of each option in terms of the number of extra pupils that could benefit and the associated additional costs.

The Department is keen to hear the views of all stakeholders, particularly children and young people and parents.

The consultation will run until 5pm on Friday 14 February 2025.

Further information is available [here](#).

Department of Education Budget 2024/25 - Equality Impact Assessment

The Department of Education Budget 2024-25 sets out the spending plans for the period from April 2024 to March 2025. This [document](#) details the Department's Budget 2024-25 allocations and how they will impact on the Department's ability to deliver public services, in the midst of the current cost of living crisis.

The Department welcomes comment on any aspects of this document. Interested parties are encouraged to make responses by 10 January 2025, which will be used to inform further mitigation measures and reallocation of any additional funding available during 2024/25.

The GBA is currently developing a response to the consultation and will share this with you in due course. Please [contact us](#) if you wish to feed in any comments.

UK Parliament School Visits - Summer 2025



On 23 January 2025 you can apply for a visit to UK Parliament during the 2025 Summer Term.

If interested, we would encourage you to save the date as places typically fill up within a few days of applications opening.

UK Parliament visits are free for schools and offer a unique learning experience to pupils.

A subsidy scheme helps education groups visiting UK Parliament from Northern Ireland with their travel costs. If your group is eligible you could receive up to 85% of your receipted travel costs to the value of £2,400.

Further information is available [here](#).

NI Assembly Education Committee

This month at the NI Assembly, the Education Committee conducted a number of evidence sessions in relation to their inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE), including briefings from the Children's Law Centre and the NI Evangelical Alliance. Academics from Queen's University Belfast, Ulster University and various institutions across the UK also provided insights to the panel based on their research and expertise in the area.

Committee members also heard from Department of Education Officials in relation to DE's response on the Independent Review of Education. Officials discussed how the recommendations of the review will translate into a phased programme of work, representing a 20 year strategy for progressive reform and long-term transformation. Areas of focus include curriculum, assessment, qualifications, school improvement and educational disadvantage.

Audit Office Publishes Report on Schools' Estate

The Northern Ireland Audit Office has published a report - "Managing the Schools' Estate", which concludes that "The Schools' Estate in Northern Ireland is deteriorating and a new, more strategic, approach is required to make better use of the limited funding currently available."

Commenting on the report's findings, Comptroller and Auditor General Dorinnia Carville said:

"A well-managed schools' estate promotes operational efficiency. More importantly, however, it delivers a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning. While this report finds that the Department's existing estate management practices address some aspects of good practice, the absence of an overarching strategy risks storing up greater

challenges for the future.”

“The schools’ estate is recognised as a vital public asset, but our findings suggest that the Department does not have a full understanding of its true condition. That is why this report recommends, among other things, the completion of regular condition surveys to inform future decision-making. This data will be vital in supporting a move towards better planning, prioritisation and preventative action which will support schools’ sustainability and deliver better value for money.”

The full report is available [here](#).

Advertising of Teaching and Support roles on the GBA Website

The GBA provides a free advertising service for our member schools. Job vacancies are posted on our website and Twitter page. The Education Authority website also links to the GBA jobs section.

PLEASE NOTE THAT OUR JOB TEMPLATE HAS BEEN UPDATED FOR THE 2024/25 ACADEMIC YEAR AND IS AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD [HERE](#)

If you would like us to host a vacancy for your school, **please contact us, with the completed job template for each post, and allow at least TWO WORKING DAYS for posts to be uploaded.**



Copyright © Governing Bodies Association (NI) All rights reserved.

