

## Appendix E - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

### SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Note: This proposal to discontinue Knocknagor PS from 31 August 2028 or as soon as possible thereafter.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

|                             |        |                          |          |                          |      |                                     |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|
| Developing a                | Policy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strategy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Adopting a                  | Policy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strategy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Implementing a              | Policy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strategy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Revising a                  | Policy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Strategy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Plan | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Designing a Public Service  |        | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |                          |      |                                     |
| Delivering a Public Service |        | <input type="checkbox"/> |          |                          |      |                                     |

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Proposal to discontinue Knocknagor Primary School on 31 August 2028, or as soon as possible thereafter.

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The policy is to ensure all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum in a school that is educationally and financially viable and sustainable. The proposal supports the aims of the Department of Education Sustainable Schools Policy (2009) to ensure all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs in sustainable schools within a diverse system of education.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

☒

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

☐

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

☐

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

NA

*Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.*

NA

*Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.*

NA

## SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes

☒

No

☐

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section 2E.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

There are several potential impacts on people in this rural area if the proposal was approved.

Potential impacts include.

- The loss of Knocknagor PS from the existing shared education partnership with Queen Elizabeth 2 PS.
- The closure of a school building if an alternative community use cannot be found.
- Potential loss of a community hub that has been instrumental in contributing to increased sharing within the community.
- Increased travel to school for some pupils.
- Some pupils may not be able to access extra-curricular activities which take place beyond the school day, due to transport restrictions.

In addition, pupils would be afforded the opportunity to enrol in schools with fewer sustainability challenges which could ensure the following benefits.

- Greater opportunities for pupils to be taught in their own age groups.
- Increased number of classes of no more than two-year groups.
- Additional potential for appropriate levels of differentiation in teaching and learning.
- Increased opportunities for peer group interaction.
- Improved opportunities for participation in extra-curricular activities, particularly team-based sports.
- Additional opportunities for specialist teaching and professional development of staff in a larger school with increased staff numbers.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

This proposal may impact pupils in this rural area differently from urban areas as pupils may have to travel further if they wish to attend their nearest maintained school.

Most pupils will have increased access to more sustainable maintained schools as they will be guaranteed transport assistance where they live further than two miles from their nearest suitable school, if a proposal progresses and is approved.

Due to increased distances required to travel to school for some, limitations on transport could negatively impact pupils' ability to attend morning clubs or after school activities.

In a rural area, there is less potential for the availability of classes before school, afterschool classes and afterschool activities. There is potentially less availability of childcare arrangements, and this impacts parental preference for schools.

The facilities available in the area may decrease if the Knocknagor PS school building is not maintained for community use.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses

☐

Rural Tourism

☐

Rural Housing

☐

Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas

☐

Education or Training in Rural Areas

☒

Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas

☐

Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas

☐

Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas

☐

Poverty in Rural Areas

☐

Deprivation in Rural Areas

☐

Rural Crime or Community Safety

☐

Rural Development Agri-Environment

☐

Other (Please state)

☐

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

NA

## SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes ☒ No ☐ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section 3E.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

|                                                                              |                                     |                      |                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Consultation with Rural Stakeholders                                         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Published Statistics | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Consultation with Other Organisations                                        | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Research Papers      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Surveys or Questionnaires                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Other Publications   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below). |                                     |                      | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

CCMS has been in discussion with the Board of Governors representatives about the options available. CCMS has sought feedback from the Board of Governors regarding any options they wish to be considered. CCMS has signposted the Board of Governors to the relevant contacts where options are led by others, e.g. joint faith school option or an integrated education option.

CCMS are consulting with stakeholders to receive feedback on the proposal to close Knocknagor PS and seek suggestions of alternative proposals. The rural needs impact assessment will be reviewed after the consultation.

Census data (<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/statistics>, <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/>) was used to determine past enrolment and future projected enrolment in the area.

The Sustainable Schools Policy (2009) <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/sustainable-schools> details the educational, social and economic arguments for change.

The DE Policy Team has previously confirmed "Attendance at a sustainable school underpins the fundamental principles of the special educational needs (SEN) Code of Practice which focuses on the continuum of needs and a continuum of provision which may be made in a variety of forms. Children with SEN require the greatest possible access to a broad and balanced education, including the Northern Ireland Curriculum." <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/dp-610-barnish-primary-school-0> p74.

The Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision sets the strategic direction of Area Planning for these five years and spans the academic years 2022-2027. This proposal is in line with the current strategic direction for sustainable provision. <https://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/area-planning/strategic-area-plans-2022-27>

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

CCMS and the other Education Public Authorities (Department of Education/Education Authority) have identified the need for all children to have access to a high-quality educational experience, through a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs, in educationally and financially viable schools, within a diverse system of education.

The then Education Minister, in a statement setting the priorities for the next regional Area Plan for the education sector in Northern Ireland advised, "It is incumbent upon the managing authorities and sectoral body representatives to scope and bring forward proposals to address the issue of primary pupils being

taught in composite classes of more than two year groups. Despite the best efforts of teachers, it becomes more difficult to deliver a high-quality education if pupils are taught in composite classes of more than two year groups.” <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/ministerial-statement-setting-priorities-next-regional-area-plan-9-august-2021>

The number of pupils in the school has been below the recommended minimum size for a rural school (105) for many years. There are composite classes of more than two-year groups in a class.

The ETI Chief Inspector’s Report 2014-2016 (p11) comments.

“When the composite class spans more than two-year groups, ensuring adequate progression in learning and planning to meet individual needs across a wider range of abilities and stages of development can be more challenging for the teacher. It may also limit opportunities for the children to develop socially and emotionally with those of a similar age and stage.”

Pupils, where there are no suitable schools within 2 miles of their home, require transport assistance.

If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

NA

## SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Firstly, CCMS considered the types of questions included in the RNIA Guidance. A response to each of these considerations is included below the questions. For those in Irvinestown and Knocknagor who choose to continue to receive primary school education in the area, there are two maintained primary schools and two controlled schools in the area (subject to availability of places). The capacity in the schools may need to be reviewed in the future. The answers to the questions below are based on pupils at Knocknagor PS continuing primary school education within a Catholic school, in the event of Knocknagor PS closing.

### **Is there appropriate infrastructure in place to allow people to access the service?**

Yes. Transport assistance will be available where a pupil lives more than two miles from their nearest suitable school.

### **Could it cost people disproportionately to access the service?**

No, transport assistance to a suitable school is provided in Northern Ireland, as appropriate, and prevents disproportionate costs associated with transport to school.

### **Could there be a disproportionate impact on people from rural areas that rely on public transport?**

No. The transport assistance policy ensures access to transport assistance where a pupil lives more than 2 miles from a suitable school.

### **Could there be a disproportionate impact on people from rural areas who do not have access to high quality broadband?**

No. This proposal does not impact people regardless of their access to broadband.

### **Could there be a disproportionate impact on people from rural areas whose access to mobile communications is variable?**

No. This proposal does not impact people regardless of their access to mobile communications.

**Could the policy have different outcomes for people in a rural area as opposed to being in an urban area due to lower population densities?**

Yes. This is covered in Section 2C.

**Could there be a disproportionate impact on people operating business in rural areas?**

No.

**Will the policy impact on people travelling to rural areas for recreation or tourism?**

It is not anticipated the policy will have any impact on this.

**Could there be a disproportionate impact on people in rural areas travelling longer distances for employment?**

There could be an impact on individuals, depending on what their arrangements are for leaving their children to school. The impact is not disproportionate, and in line with other rural areas where there aren't sufficient pupils attending a school for sustainable provision.

**Could there be a disproportionate impact on people in rural areas due to childcare arrangements?**

No. There will be an impact on some due to childcare arrangements, however this would not be disproportionate.

**Will the policy affect people in rural areas disproportionately? For example – seasonal workers, farmers, farm families, older people, younger people or people with disabilities that do not have access to transport?**

No. Attending a sustainable school may require travelling a longer distance for some pupils. Transport assistance would be provided where pupils live more than two miles from their nearest suitable school, <https://www.eani.org.uk/financial-help/home-to-school-transport>

Knocknagor PS participates in Shared Education with Queen Elizabeth 2 PS. The Board of Governors highlighted how important this shared education partnership is. CCMS will work with the EA and support alternative schools in forming effective shared education partnerships should the option proceed.

There are seven pupils with a statement of educational needs. The DE Policy Team has previously confirmed "Attendance at a sustainable school underpins the fundamental principles of the special educational needs (SEN) Code of Practice which focuses on the continuum of needs and a continuum of provision which may be made in a variety of forms. Children with SEN require the greatest possible access to a broad and balanced education, including the Northern Ireland Curriculum." This proposal helps strengthen the sustainability of rural educational provision in the area. This proposal meets the needs of pupils, from a rural area, with SEN.

The proposal increases the opportunity for pupils to attend a school with a minimum of 4 teachers. In line with the SSP, four teachers in a school recognises the needs of the pupils and demands on teachers. When staff are re-deployed to larger schools, it provides additional opportunities for specialist teaching and professional development of staff.

There is a potential for the building and site to be used for community use, if the proposal proceeds. This aspect is not within the scope of this proposal.

There are extra-curricular activities in schools which take place after the school day. This has the potential to limit the participation of those who live further away from the school. From experience, any receiving school will try to be as flexible as possible to ensure a range of activities are included for those who need to travel further to the school.

*Planning for Sustainable Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 Primary and Post-Primary Schools* has a mission to find solutions to deliver sustainable education in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> This proposal helps strengthen the sustainability of provision in this rural area.

## SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes

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No

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If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **5C**.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The basis for sustainable school provision in Northern Ireland is the Sustainable Schools Policy (2009) <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/sustainable-schools> and this proposal is in line with this policy, having reviewed the potential solutions for sustainable provision. The development of this policy, and this potential proposal, has the needs of pupils in rural areas in mind.

This option is focused on improving the quality of educational provision for pupils in this rural area. This option addresses school provision which is not sustainable in a rural area.

Realistic, innovative, shared, and collaborative solutions were explored in detail within CCMS and with the Board of Governors of Knocknagor PS, and is now subject to pre-publication consultation, with a view to determine a viable and sustainable level of quality educational provision. This option has the potential to strengthen rural education provision for the area.

If the response to Section **5A** was **YES** GO TO Section **6A**.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

NA

## SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

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Rural Needs Impact  
Assessment undertaken by:

Cormac Quinn

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/area-planning/strategic-area-plans-2022-27>

|                                               |                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Position/Grade:                               | Area Planning Officer           |
| Division/Branch                               | Area Planning                   |
| Signature:                                    | Cormac Quinn                    |
| Date:                                         | 28/04/26                        |
| Rural Needs Impact<br>Assessment approved by: | Edel Teague                     |
| Position/Grade:                               | Area Planning Programme Manager |
| Division/Branch:                              | Area Planning                   |
| Signature:                                    | Edel Teague                     |
| Date:                                         | 30/04/26                        |