Knocknagor Primary School

Responses to questions raised in consultation.

The following sets out responses to the questions raised by consultees during the pre-publication consultation on primary provision in the Trillick and Irvinestown area, which began on 8 October 2026. It reflects questions submitted in advance and raised at the consultation information meetings with staff, the Board of Governors and parents/guardians of Knocknagor Primary School. Where similar questions were raised by more than one group, they have been combined into a single question.

Consultees are reminded that the consultation information meetings were not a formal response mechanism. Written consultation responses remain the most important means through which views and evidence can be considered.

Educational provision and outcomes

How will educational outcomes be measured, and what evidence is there that closure would improve pupils' education when they currently do well at Knocknagor PS?

Area planning looks at the needs of an area rather than a single school. The Strategic Area Plan 2022–27 aims to make sure pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum in a school that is educationally and financially viable, and to reduce duplication of provision. A Ministerial priority is to address primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two-year groups.[1]

All schools have a duty to provide high-quality education. Pupils' educational outcomes and progress would continue to be measured through the receiving schools' assessment systems which would include school-based assessments and end of year standardised tests which allow for comparison with previous results. Receiving schools have experience of additional pupils joining and have systems in place to support continued teaching and learning.

Some consultees spoke strongly about the quality of education and the supportive learning environment at Knocknagor PS and have questioned whether a move to a larger school would lead to better outcomes. These views should form part of any consultation responses so that they can be considered by decision makers.

Where is the evidence and policy basis for saying children get a better education in a class that is not a composite of more than two year groups? Did the school's own inspection raise composite classes as an issue, and has CCMS considered research showing pupils do well in small rural schools?

The policy context is the Sustainable Schools Policy published by the Department of Education (2009), which drew on research including the Bain Report (2006). The priority of reducing composite classes of more than two year groups was set by the then Minister of Education in a statement to the Assembly on 9 August 2021. It remains in place and recognises the needs of both pupils and teachers. The Education and Training Inspectorate has echoed this, pointing to the workload and additional demands that such classes place on teachers.[2]

[1] Trillick/Irvinestown Area Knocknagor Primary School (203-2628) OCTOBER 2026 consultation document p14.
[2] Trillick/Irvinestown Area Knocknagor Primary School (203-2628) OCTOBER 2026 consultation document p9.

The priority forms part of the Operational Plan's focus on delivering Ministerial priorities and the Sustainable Schools Policy. The policy direction is that larger, more sustainable settings better support age-appropriate class structures and curriculum breadth.

Composite classes were not noted as an issue in the school's own most recent inspection report. Consultees also referred to recent research, including work linked to the University of Strathclyde and Queen's University Belfast, suggesting that pupils do well in small schools, though the QUB report highlights, also, the difficulties faced by staff in a small school. Anyone who wants this research, or other evidence, to be considered should include it in their consultation response. Responses are reviewed and analysed before the Education Provision Committee considers whether to proceed.

What assessment has been made of the disruption to pupils preparing for the transfer test?

All schools have a duty to provide high-quality education, and receiving schools have systems in place for pupils joining at different stages. If a proposal proceeds and is approved, CCMS will work with Knocknagor PS and the receiving schools on a transition plan, including visits to receiving schools in advance where appropriate.

Has CCMS been in contact with the receiving schools, and what was the nature of that contact?

It would be premature for CCMS to engage in detailed planning with receiving schools while the pre-publication consultation is under way. It is not known whether a development proposal will proceed, whether it would be approved or which schools parents/guardians would want their children to move to. Any contact with other schools to date has related to their current provision, including provision for special educational needs.

Special educational needs and transition

How would children with special educational needs cope with a move, and what would happen to those who are currently thriving at Knocknagor PS? This includes pupils with autism, pupils who are deaf and rely on staff trained in British Sign Language, and pupils with Down's syndrome, sensory, behavioural or learning needs, some of whom will need a high level of support for years to come.

All schools have a statutory duty to take reasonable steps to identify and provide for pupils with SEN. A statement of educational needs sets out the provision a pupil must receive, and that entitlement, together with reasonable adjustments based on the child's needs, does not change if the child moves school. The expectation is that a child would receive the required level of support, in a receiving school, and receiving schools have a duty of care to every pupil who joins them.

The Department of Education's policy team has confirmed that "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." An estate of educationally and financially viable schools can support more equitable access to specialist resources for pupils.

If the proposal proceeds, CCMS will work with Knocknagor PS and the receiving schools on the transition, including meetings with the SENCo and other relevant staff in each receiving school. Parents can also arrange to talk to the SENCo and class teacher at any receiving school. Additionally, the receiving schools collaborate with the Education Authority and any relevant specialist services to ensure that every pupil with SEN receives appropriate support and that all required adjustments are made, including early transfer of statements and individual education plans/personal learning plans. Specialist provision is managed by the Education Authority and supported by CCMS.

If you have concerns about the ability of alternative schools in providing the necessary specialist support, please include that within your response to the consultation.

What assessment has been made of how individual needs would be met, and what guarantees can be given? Published inspection reports suggest some receiving schools do not compare well with Knocknagor PS. Would families be expected to accept weaker provision?

If a proposal proceeds and is approved, CCMS will work with Knocknagor PS and the receiving schools on a transition plan for pupils, including visits to receiving schools in advance where appropriate. Detailed arrangements would be developed with parents, the schools, SEN coordinators and the Education Authority, as appropriate. The receiving school would work with the Education Authority and other relevant external agencies where required to ensure that all pupils with SEN receive appropriate support and that all required adjustments are made in the receiving school. Statements and individual education plans/personal learning plans will transfer early. Receiving schools follow the SEN Code of Practice and reasonable adjustments will continue. Transport assistance will be provided for eligible pupils in line with Education Authority policy.

It is unfortunate that due to action short of strike, there are no recent published inspection reports for the schools, reflecting current leadership, management and educational provision. At the same time, ETI reports, although dated, are the most up-to-date third-party verifiable information available for schools.

What about pupils who have additional needs but no statement, and what happens if a child does not settle in the new school?

The receiving school would liaise with parents and staff in Knocknagor PS. Assessments would be completed so that the needs of all pupils, not only those with a statement, are understood and met.

If a child does not settle, the receiving school would work with parents to address any concerns and adapt support for the pupil as necessary.

Is there additional funding for pupils who transfer? Is there a budget in receiving schools to train or upskill staff for children with SEN? There is no guarantee schools will train staff as needed.

There is no separate additional funding for transferring pupils; they are funded through the receiving school’s budget in the normal way.

All schools have a duty to make appropriate provision for all pupils with SEN. The receiving schools work with the Education Authority who develop and implement training programmes designed to enhance the skills of staff working with pupils with a range of special educational

needs. The provision required for a pupil with a statement for special educational needs is set out in the statement.

What happens if a large number of pupils transfer to one school and support is spread more thinly? For example, if a class already has three pupils with SEN and two more join, how will they be accommodated given class sizes?

Decisions about classroom support and class organisation in these circumstances are made by the Education Authority and the school. This will be clearer if a development proposal proceeds, is approved, and it is known where pupils will be going. Schools can also apply for a Temporary Variation if additional places are needed (see the section on receiving schools).

A statement of special educational needs sets out the provision a pupil must receive. That entitlement belongs to the child and does not reduce because other pupils with SEN are in the same class or school. Receiving schools have a statutory duty to identify and provide for every pupil with SEN and to make reasonable adjustments. If a proposal proceeds, transition planning would involve parents, SENCos/any other relevant school staff from both schools and the Education Authority as appropriate, so that the needs of pupils moving to the same school are known and planned for before they arrive.

Pastoral care and safeguarding

What safeguarding risk assessment has been carried out?

All schools have safeguarding, child protection and pastoral care responsibilities. Receiving schools have established safeguarding policies and procedures (including risk assessment procedures). If a proposal proceeds, transition planning will include arrangements for the transfer of relevant information and continued support. Schools are used to pupils joining at different stages and will work with parents so that the transition is as smooth as possible.

Will there be transition planning for every pupil, and how would trusted relationships and pastoral support be kept in place? Staff at Knocknagor PS know every child and can tell when a child is having a bad day.

CCMS would support receiving schools and Knocknagor PS with the development of an inclusive transition plan for all pupils transferring, including advance visits where appropriate. Transition planning for pupils with SEN would be tailored to individual needs as appropriate. Individual class teachers in receiving schools would support all new pupils who join their classes.

The aim is to help children, especially those who find change difficult, to settle into a new setting. Receiving schools have systems for pupils who join mid-year or at other points.

When will teachers in receiving schools have time to communicate with parents, and what level of support will transferring pupils actually receive?

Individual class teachers would be responsible for supporting the pupils who join their classes and the transition plan would include contact with parents.

Receiving schools would liaise with Knocknagor PS and with parents as part of the transition plan. Receiving schools have experience of working with parents when pupils join at different stages. Receiving schools follow the SEN Code of Practice to identify, assess and make appropriate provision, including reasonable adjustments. for all pupils with SEN as required.

The support a pupil receives is based on that child's needs. Where a pupil has a statement, the statement sets out the provision required.

Receiving schools — capacity and resources

Do receiving schools have the capacity, staffing, classroom accommodation and classroom assistant support for the additional pupils? How far can capacity be stretched, and what is the financial position of those schools?

The information in the pre-publication consultation is the most up-to-date verified information available at the time. If a proposal proceeds and is approved, CCMS will work with school leaders to find out where parents want their children to go. Accommodation constraints in receiving schools are a consideration, but they form only part of the broader assessment, and parental preference will be supported.

The Board of Governors of a receiving school would assess the demand for places and, if needed, apply for a Temporary Variation to increase its admissions or enrolment number. CCMS will support any school that does so. The Department of Education is reviewing the Temporary Variation policy, with a presumption of approval at primary level if the changes go ahead.

Receiving schools would consider any additional staffing requirements when they know the number of and individual needs of pupils transferring into each class. School leaders in receiving schools would consult with their Boards of Governors, CCMS and the Education Authority on staffing requirements as necessary. CCMS will liaise with the receiving school, the Education Authority and any relevant statutory body to determine whether additional work or services are needed to support additional pupils. This will be clearer when the actual enrolment of each school is known. If any school indicates that it needs support, CCMS officers will support it as appropriate.

Concerns about the management and existing pressures in receiving schools have been noted. The Education Provision Committee will take all consultation responses into account.

The financial case for the proposal is set out in the Case for Change and related documents. Area planning aims to make the best use of available resources by reducing duplication and the number of surplus places. Transferring pupils are funded through the receiving school's budget in the normal way. CCMS will not be commenting on the financial position of other schools. The financial position at the end of the 2025/26 of all schools is published by the Education Authority on its website.

Can the class structure in the receiving schools be made available?

Class structures can change from one year to the next, depending on the number of pupils in each year group, and could also change if a number of pupils joined or left a school. Any information provided now may therefore not reflect the position at the point of transfer. Most schools have their current class structures on their website, for anyone interested.

If a proposal proceeds and is approved, CCMS will first work with school leaders to establish where parents wish their children to go. Receiving schools would then plan their classes around the actual number of pupils joining. Affected schools will be consulted on this proposal if it proceeds.

Has account been taken of new housing being built in Irvinestown?

There is significant capacity in schools in the nearby area at present. When developments are built, they do not necessarily result in significant increases in local primary schools' enrolment numbers. Various factors in this area are in play such as the availability of places in the schools in the wider area. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate how many additional pupils new housing will generate. If the need arises, provision in the area would be reviewed in the future, however, NISRA predicts that there will be a significant drop in school-age children between now and 2032 with a drop of 14.4 % of 0–15-year-olds in the Fermanagh and Omagh LGD

Community, Shared Education and parish life

What consideration has been given to Shared Education partnerships and cross-community relationships?

CCMS recognises that Knocknagor PS takes part in Shared Education partnerships and that closure would affect those arrangements. The equality screening and the Rural Needs Impact Assessment record the impact on Shared Education, cross-community relationships, transport and access to extra-curricular activities. It is important, as the consultation documentation advises, to let us know if you think any area has not been covered as part of the consultation documentation.

What weight has been given to the risk that families will leave Catholic education altogether, or travel to Ederney rather than Irvinestown? Some parents have already chosen not to use one of the proposed receiving schools. Would transport be provided if a family chooses a different school?

Parental preference is supported. If a proposal proceeds, CCMS will work with school leaders to establish where parents wish their children to go. Alternative Catholic maintained provision remains available in the area. CCMS recognises the wider role of schools in local communities and understands the difficulties when there is any change to existing provision. It is also our responsibility to take forward options based on educational and financial sustainability. Viable, sustainable school provision remains available locally.

Home-to-school transport assistance is provided where a pupil lives more than two miles from their nearest suitable school.

Why are families being asked to move parish? Knocknagor PS is served by two parishes and has historically served two communities.

The proposal concerns the provision of primary school places in the area. Area planning looks at the needs of an area rather than a single school, and each case is considered on its own circumstances and merits. CCMS recognises the wider role of schools in local communities and rural economies, but it must take forward options based on educational and financial sustainability. Parental preference is supported, and alternative Catholic maintained provision remains available in the area. If a proposal proceeds, CCMS will work with school leaders to establish where parents wish their children to go. The school's history of serving two parishes and two communities is recorded, and the impact on community cohesion forms part of the equality screening and the Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

CCMS recognises that Knocknagor PS serves pupils from more than one parish and historically has served more than one community. There are currently a number of places

available in another parish school, but it is understood others may have to attend school outside the parish, if a proposal proceeds and is approved. Parental preference for some, if a proposal proceeds, may be for education outside the parish, given the where pupils live.

Who would be responsible for any deficit, and how would closure affect Trillick parish? Will CCMS leave the parish without help, given clawback of funding and the burden of disposing of property?

Financial arrangements for a closing school, including any deficit, are managed by the Education Authority, and any deficit will revert to the EA. Questions about parish liability, including any clawback, are for the Trustees and the Department of Education.

Closing a school does not mean the building and site would no longer be available to the community. However, the future use of the school site, if a development proposal proceeds and is approved, is not within the scope of this consultation.

Transport, family arrangements and rural impact.

How would the morning club that supports working parents be replaced, and what happens if a receiving school has no wraparound care?

Different schools have different levels of wraparound care, morning and after-school provision, along with any extra-curricular activities beyond the school day. It is understood that if a proposal proceeds and is approved, parental preference will include factors like what wraparound care is available at different schools at the time.

How has the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 been applied, and how does CCMS apply the rural needs guidance?

A Rural Needs Impact Assessment is completed as part of the process and will be updated to reflect consultation responses. It considers transport, access and the longer-term sustainability of the rural area, and is published with the equality screening.

Home-to-school transport assistance is provided where a pupil lives more than two miles from their nearest suitable school. The Education Authority decides the exact arrangements once it is known where pupils will go.

How does Transport Policy impact the situation for those currently attending Knocknagor PS?

Transport assistance is in line with transport policy. Given specific queries raised, the following was confirmed by the Education Authority.

General confirmation of transport assistance - *If a pupil resides more than two miles from all suitable schools within their category, they would qualify for transport assistance. However, pupils attending a school that is not deemed their nearest suitable school may find that the available transport arrangements are less convenient.*

For specialist transport assistance - *Where bespoke transport is required and approved, it would normally only be provided to the nearest suitable school within the relevant category.*

For pupils currently at Knocknagor Primary school that live within two miles of Tummery Primary School - *If Tummery PS has been issued with a confirmed closure date and is due to close in the near future as part of the agreed closure process, we would be content to discount*

it as a similar suitable school for the purposes of transport eligibility assessments. This would avoid a situation where parents could be deemed ineligible for transport assistance based on the availability of a school that has already been approved for closure by the Minister.

In such circumstances, it would be more appropriate to assess eligibility against the remaining suitable schools available to the pupil, rather than requiring consideration of a school that is effectively in the process of winding down its operations.

This approach would apply only to those pupils who may be affected by the closure of Knocknagor PS, and to any new pupils enrolling following that closure. For families who have previously chosen to bypass Tummery PS and enrol their child in a more distant school, other than Knocknagor PS, the existing transport eligibility criteria would remain unchanged until Tummery PS officially closes.

Financial sustainability and local economy

Has a full assessment been done of the effect on employment, local businesses and parish finances?

The financial case for the proposal is set out in the pre-publication consultation and related documents. Area planning aims to make the best use of available resources by reducing duplication and the number of surplus places.

The wider local economy and parish finances fall outside the direct scope of the educational sustainability assessment. CCMS recognises the wider role of schools in local communities and rural economies, but it must take forward options based on educational sustainability. These points are recorded as community concerns and will be given due regard when the Rural Needs Impact Assessment is reviewed. Anyone who wants specific information considered should include it in their consultation response.

On employment, staff in a closing school are supported in line with the appropriate guidance. Permanent teaching staff have employment protection under the School Reorganisation Agreement 2013/2. Permanent non-teaching staff have employment protection under the Collective Agreement (JNC Circular 224).

Equality duties

Has a full Equality Impact Assessment been completed? How have the impacts on Disability, Religious Belief, Age and Dependants been assessed?

Before the pre-publication consultation began, CCMS completed a draft equality screening and a draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment, and both form part of the consultation documents. The screening identifies impacts on the Section 75 categories, including Disability, Religious Belief, Age and Dependants, and records mitigations. Consultation responses will be reviewed and both documents updated to reflect them.

Process and next steps

What happens next, how will responses be considered, and in what circumstances might the proposal not go ahead?

All consultation responses are reviewed, analysed and summarized before the Education Provision Committee considers the proposal. A range of outcomes is possible: the proposal

may proceed, be amended, be the subject of a request for further information, or go no further. The school may make a deputation to the Committee before that meeting. The pre-publication consultation is the statutory consultation required by Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

If the proposal proceeds, the Education Authority consults the affected schools before a Development Proposal is published. The Department of Education then carries out a further two-month consultation. Officials prepare a submission to the Minister, who decides whether to approve the proposal. If it is approved, CCMS has a statutory duty to implement the decision and will begin work with the principal of the closing school and the receiving schools.

The consultation documents are on the CCMS website, and hard copies are available on request. CCMS officers are available to speak to any consultee.

Is there any point in responding, or has the decision already been made?

No decision has been taken on whether to proceed. There is not, and cannot be, any predetermination of the outcome. The officers involved in the process have no authority to decide what proceeds. The Education Provision Committee decides whether to proceed with a Development Proposal, and the only person with the authority to decide whether a school closes is the Education Minister. All responses are reviewed before the Committee meets, and the Committee can decide to take no further action.

Each proposal is considered on its own circumstances and merits, and progressing to publication is not automatic. After consultation, the Education Provision Committee may proceed with a proposal, amend it, ask for further information, or take no further action.

Should members of the Education Provision Committee attend the meetings to hear views first-hand? How far in advance do members receive their papers, and will the minutes of the Committee be published in enough detail to show that views were considered?

All consultation responses are reviewed and analysed before being presented to the Education Provision Committee. Members see the views and evidence submitted in writing. The school may also make a deputation to the Committee before that meeting, which allows the school community to put its case directly.

The Terms of Reference for EPC, determines that Briefing materials for each meeting of the committee will be supplied to members in good time, and no less than three working days in advance of the relevant meeting. The specific request regarding the minutes of EPC has been shared with the Senior Leadership Team.