



STRANGFORD AND KILCLIEF, Q + A

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

STRANGFORD AND KILCLIEF - FAQ

1.0 Travel and Transport Assistance

1.1 What is transport assistance policy for pupils at this school who may have to transfer to another school as a result of a closure of this school?

Current transport assistance policy means that where you live beyond 2 miles of your nearest “suitable” school, you are entitled to transport assistance to any suitable school.

1.2 What is the transport assistance policy if a parent wants to move their child to another school now?

“Transport assistance should not normally be provided for any pupil who lives within statutory walking distance of the school or institution of further education attended. A board/ESA may however, consider whether there are circumstances sufficiently exceptional to set aside normal consideration.”¹

1.3 What is the transport assistance policy for anyone with a statement of Special Educational Needs?

A special transport need may arise where the pupil has a level of impaired mobility which necessitates the use of a wheelchair or the pupil has a medical condition/severe learning difficulty. This is determined by the Education Authority, which indicates that special transport arrangements must be made. Where pupils have special transport needs, officers of the Authority, drawing upon medical and other advice as required, will assess the pupil’s transport needs and make appropriate arrangements in accordance with this policy.

2.0 Community Matters

2.1 Are parents being deprived of the opportunity to choose a local school for their child’s education?

There currently are primary schools in the area and details of these are contained within the consultation documentation.

2.2 Is this all about the money?

This is about area planning which aims to provide a network of sustainable schools in all area.

“In some areas of Northern Ireland there are too many school places for the size of the population, while in other areas, there are not enough places. Area planning aims to establish a network of viable schools that are of the right type, the right size, located in the right place, and have a focus on raising standards. Therefore, the aim of area planning is to ensure that all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum in sustainable, fit-for-purpose schools.”²

The SSP recognises the importance of having a system of sustainable schools. “A general principle of the education system is that, so far as it is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training, and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils shall be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents.”³ The SSP also makes the following comment “The costs associated with providing additional support to smaller schools or schools

¹ <https://www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/DECircular%20199641%20%20School%20Transport%20%28updated%202009%29.pdf>

² <https://www.eani.org.uk/thirdareaplanningactionplan>

³ Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools p11.

which are considered non-sustainable inevitably means that there is less funding available to distribute across all schools.”⁴

The Education Authority confirmed, *“The education budget has been unable to provide the level of investment in the existing estate that is required. Demand for new and improved facilities has consistently exceeded the resources that have been made available. In seeking to maximise resources for teaching and learning in the classroom, it is incumbent on all management authorities to review the existing profile of school provision.”*⁵

3.0 Move to new schools

3.1 What about pupils with special education needs?

A school is generally notified by parents of any particular special education needs of pupils. Once this information is known the schools can be proactive and prepare appropriately to offer the required support and care strategies to enable pupils to make progress in moving from one school to another.

The Department of Education, 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.”*⁶

3.2 How will pupils with special needs manage the change?

Staff in a pupil’s current school and staff in any alternative school have expertise in catering for pupils with special needs and they will ensure that there is the required level of care in place. Individual education plans will set out the nature of support pupils require and the expertise to deal with pupils in this situation is already there. Individual education plans will transfer across to the new school with the pupils who have them in place.

4.0 Consultation Process

4.1 What consultation is planned for the children of the school and the future stakeholders of the school as per current DE guidance?

The children are represented through their parents/legal guardians/carers and the school has the opportunity to put plans in place to discuss the matter with pupils in an age appropriate manner.

4.2 What if the school, BoG and parents are firmly against this proposal?

Different proposal(s), from that currently under consideration, can be put forward in this consultation process. Any proposer needs to present demonstrably workable options that create sustainable provision under the current policy and funding arrangements.

⁴ Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools p33.

⁵ Area Planning - a Brief Summery p3.

⁶ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/DP%20588%20-%20Ballyhackett%20Primary%20School%20-%20Section%206%20-%20Appendices.pdf> (Appendix C)

4.3 How open and transparent will this consultation process be?

The process is open and transparent. All views expressed are recorded and summarized to form part of the consultation report. Equally, all opinions, alternative options, etc. submitted are scrutinised and articulated in the same report. The results of this consultation will be summarised and made available if CCMS decides to proceed with this option. CCMS has met with the Boards of Governors, and continued communication with them, to discuss options.

4.4 Has a decision already been made?

A decision has not been made as this proposal is at pre-publication consultation stage. Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 describes the process regarding the discontinuance of a school. This process requires the publication of a development proposal.

Therefore, as part of the pre-publication consultation on a potential development proposal, CCMS is seeking any objections and/or other comments from the Boards of Governors, teaching staff, non-teaching staff and parents/guardians of children attending St Joseph's PS and St Malachy's PS. The officers involved in carrying out this consultation are not decision makers. The first decision will be made by CCMS's Education Provision Committee (EPC). EPC will review the consultation documentation and responses. It will decide whether to proceed with a proposal.

It is important to establish the difference between any decision making by CCMS to request a development proposal and a subsequent decision by the Education Minister on the development proposal. If a decision to proceed is made by CCMS, this is only a decision by CCMS and does not necessarily mean the proposal will be accepted. If CCMS's proceeds, the Education Authority will carry out a 4 week consultation with affected schools. The EA will subsequently initiate an 8 week public consultation period for response to this proposal. The Department of Education receives the information collated during the public consultation period.

The Department of Education will then present a recommendation to the Education Minister, which may be as recommended by CCMS, or which may differ from CCMS' recommendation.

4.5 Why is this school closing before others?

CCMS is tasked to carry out its duties in line with policy and Department of Education priorities. Addressing the sustainability of two and three teacher schools remains a priority and CCMS prioritises these based on the sustainable schools criteria. It would not be appropriate to speculate about other schools.

5.0 Other Matters

5.1 The school is a central hub of the community. Where will these activities take place?

The continued use of the St Malachy's PS as a community facility will be reviewed if a proposal proceeds.

6. Educational Points

6.1 Is it not in the best interests for pupils to stay where they are? [Pupils will not get a better education elsewhere]

Over 50% of classes in Northern Ireland are composite. However within that 50%: 87% have 2 year groups and 11% have 3 year groups in one class.

There are opportunities and challenges to composite classes.

<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Challenges</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small class size• Continuity of education• Younger children: Exposure to more advanced materials• Role models• Older children: Opportunity to revise subject content• Leadership and nurturing roles• Independent learning skills• Family atmosphere• Pastoral care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wide curriculum challenge-especially when a class spans more than one key stage• Large ability range [high to low achievers as well as young and old children]• The teacher has to deliver the correct curriculum for pupils age whilst cater for their ability also.• Time constraint - in order to deliver the correct curriculum to each child there will be times where children are working independently• Younger children can try to move onto more formal methods too quickly• Older children can get disengaged with repetition of Curriculum• Social and emotional needs of pupils - They need to interact with peers of their own age• Pupils could be missing out on key primary school events such as P7 school production, leavers events such as a school disco.• Team sports - For example-School Gaelic/hurling team? Camogie/Netball?• There also isn't the same opportunity to read and interrogate class novels and texts in classrooms

The opportunities noted above are based on the notion that there are no more than 2 year groups in one class

“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.” ETI Chief Inspector’s Report 2014 – 2016 (p.11).⁷

⁷ <https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/CIR%20Report%20November%202016.pdf>

A Republic of Ireland study into composite classes of 3 year groups or more noted: *“Children spent a large proportion of time working at a desk without teacher attention.”* [as cited in the Northern Ireland Assembly: Research and Information Service Briefing Paper on Composite Classes-11th Jan 2017].⁸

6.2 Is there a lack of professional development for staff?

“Teachers in small schools face problems of having less scope for professional interaction and mutual support. The school is unlikely to provide a wide programme of extra-curricular activities and will have a smaller range of teacher specialisms e.g. music.

The smaller numbers of children in each year group limit the opportunities for working alongside peers, social interaction and challenge, and participation in extra-curricular activities including team-based experiences.” Schools for the Future – A Policy for Sustainable Schools (DENI 2009) (p.20).⁹

6.3 Will CCMS help me find a school for my child?

Yes, if it is necessary in the future to find alternative schools for your children, CCMS would work closely with the Principal and parents/guardians.

6.4 What can we do now? How do we save this school?

Put forward a robust and informed response to the consultation.

6.5 By going to consultation you’re effectively closing the school. Parents will vote with their feet and we won’t get any new starts.

We recognise that parents may be unsettled following a consultation and that is why we give assurances that if the school were to cease provision that it wouldn’t be until August 2027. However we have a duty to inform parents of anything that may impact their children.

⁸ <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/29220/1/0517.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/a-policy-for-sustainable-schools.pdf>