



Area Plan for Catholic Primary Schools in Kilclief and Strangford

St Joseph's PS, Strangford
St Malachy's PS, Kilclief

**Pre-publication Consultation Response Booklet for
Parents, Staff, Pupils and Members of the Board of
Governors**

Closing Date: 01 MAY 2026

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is contained in this consultation response booklet?

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) consult with parents/guardians, governors, pupils and staff, on any proposed change to a school before they make a final decision on a proposal. This booklet outlines opportunities and challenges facing the schools in the area and the options which were considered to respond to these. It outlines the proposal being consulted on that CCMS consider will ensure the current and future of high-quality primary education in the area. The booklet contains relevant information for consultees.

1.2 What is the proposal being consulted on for the schools?

The proposal being consulted on for the schools are as follows.

St Malachy's PS will close as an educational institution 31 August 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter.

St Joseph's PS will expand its admissions/enrolment number from 13/91 to 15/105, 01 September 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter.

The two schools in the parish will consult with the stakeholders with a view to changing the name and uniform of the expanding school to reflect the shared parish heritage that was served through the two school institutions.

1.3 Who is making the proposal being consulted on?

CCMS has a statutory duty, under Article 142 of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 to promote and co-ordinate the planning of the effective provision of Catholic maintained schools in consultation with the Trustees of the St MacNissi's Educational Trust. The Department of Education sets policy for the management of sustainable schools, the Sustainable Schools Policy 2009. The Education Minister makes the ultimate decision on whether to approve any proposals or not, if a proposal proceeds to that stage.

1.4 Where did this proposal being consulted on come from?

The proposal being consulted on came from analysis conducted by CCMS to determine the future of primary provision in the area. The overarching objective of the proposal is to give pupils the best start in life by delivering strategic change to Catholic-managed primary provision in the Kilclief and Strangford area. The key conclusions drawn are that the sustainability of school provision needs addressed and the benefits of improving the provision are highlighted below.

The change to school provision will allow for the:

- effective management of the current and anticipated local school population; and
- management of the significant financial pressures schools are facing that make it increasingly challenging to sustain quality education within a financially viable school.

The proposal being consulted on for one school to serve the parish provides an opportunity to enhance provision to secure and sustain the following outcomes for all pupils.

- Greater opportunities for all pupils to be taught in their own age groups.
- Eliminating classes of more than two-year groups in the parish.
- Additional potential for appropriate levels of differentiation in teaching and learning.
- Increased opportunities for peer group interaction.
- Increased opportunity for pupils to be with those of a similar age and stage.
- Improved chances for participation in a wider range of extra-curricular activities.
- Additional opportunities for specialist teaching and professional development of staff.

1.5 What were the relevant policies and strategies for the project?

The aim of the DE Area Planning Strategy is to ensure the development of a network of sustainable schools across Northern Ireland. It states that schools should be able to provide access to a range of education provision that is appropriate to the needs of pupils.¹ Its strategy aims to ensure that every pupil has:

- access to a broad and balanced curriculum with opportunities to realise his or her potential;
- an education in which the learning outcomes are appropriate to his/her needs;
- access to quality teaching delivered in a caring and supportive environment; and
- an education delivered in modern, well-resourced facilities, suitable for the provision of education in the twenty-first century.

The proposal being consulted on is in line with the following policies and strategies.

- Sustainable Schools Policy 2009.²
- Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 - Planning for Sustainable Provision.³
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).⁴
- Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).⁵ and
- Rural Needs Act (2016).⁶

1.6 What happens once this pre-publication consultation finishes?

Once the consultation finishes the responses will be reviewed and a decision will then be made by the Education Provision Committee (EPC) on whether to proceed with the proposal. If any consultee provides an alternative option, this will be considered. The school and Governors will be informed about the date of the EPC meeting well in advance to facilitate the opportunity to request a deputation to address EPC members.

If CCMS decides to progress with a proposal they will instruct the Education Authority (EA) to carry out a consultation on the proposals with local schools as well as initiating an 8-week public objection period on the proposal. The DE will consider all information received from consultees during this time and make a proposal to the Education Minister who will make the decision on the proposals. The Department of Education (DE) has produced detailed guidance on development proposals, which is how proposed changes to schools are made. The guidance is available on the DE's website.⁷

¹ <https://www.eani.org.uk/publications/providing-pathways-strategic-area-plan-2017-2020>

² <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/a-policy-for-sustainable-schools.pdf>

³ [Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 - Planning for Sustainable Provision 0.pdf \(eani.org.uk\)](#)

⁴ https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1990/09/19900902%2003-14%20AM/Ch_IV_11p.pdf

⁵ <https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf>

⁶ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ni/2016/19/pdfs/ni_20160019_en.pdf

⁷ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/circular-201709-guidance-publication-development-proposal-updated-september-2018>

2. BACKGROUND TO SCHOOLS

2.1 School Provision in the parish

The two schools in the project are located within the parish of Kilclief. St Malachy's PS was originally founded in 1867, St Joseph's PS was opened in 1964.

St Malachy's PS, school site is in Kilclief, approximately 3 ½ miles from the Strangford village. There are currently 4 classrooms in the school (one currently used as a principal's office), a library and a dining hall. St Joseph's PS is located in Strangford and is currently operating 4 classrooms.

St Malachy's PS, Kilclief benefits from plenty of play space and room to expand within the school grounds (subject to all relevant statutory approvals). The school operates three classrooms, and a small sensory room for all pupils. The principal's office could be used as a fourth classroom. If this happened, somewhere else in the school would need to be re-purposed as a principal's office. The school Board of Governors advised there is an option of the current resources store (PE store) being re-purposed. The school benefits from a new drop off area and parking for the benefit of parents/guardians and staff. The school has a grass pitch, an artificial pitch, numerous play areas, and additional ground around the school.

St Joseph's PS currently contains four classrooms. The school has an outdoor classroom facility, soccer pitch on the tarmac, activity trail area and two play space areas. Capital works have commenced at the school for additional accommodation. The works include repurposing of accommodation to improve the facilities as well as ensuring two of the four classrooms will be new, as well as additional storage and toilets.

2.2 Enrolment Statistics for schools in the area

Enrolment Statistics: St Joseph's PS Strangford – Currently operating 4 classes								
Approved Admissions Number: 13 pupils Approved Enrolment Number: 91 pupils***								
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Total
2015/16	8	7	9	11	7	4	3	49
2016/17	11	9	8	8	9	7	4	56
2017/18	8	11	11	8	10	10	7	65
2018/19	11	7	12	12	9	13	11	75
2019/20	8	12	7	13	10	10	12	72
2020/21	14	11	13	9	15	11	10	83
2021/22	12	15	12	13	9	14	11	86
2022/23	10	11	13	12	14	10	15	85
2023/24	10	9	13	15	12	19	9	87
2024/25	6	10	10	13	15	12	20	86
2025/26	3	6	9	10	13	16	12	69
2026/27 projected**	13	3	7	9	10	13	16	71

Table 1: Enrolment Statistic Source: DE Census

* The enrolment figure includes supernumerary pupils (which are pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs).

** confirmed by school

*** This means the school can accommodate 91 pupils plus supernumerary pupils before applying for a Temporary Variation for additional pupils.

Enrolment Statistics: St Malachy's PS Kilclief– Currently operating 3 classes								
Approved Admissions Number: 10 pupils Approved Enrolment Number: 69 pupils***								
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Total
2015/16	10	11	12	9	13	9	11	75
2016/17	9	10	11	13	11	11	9	74
2017/18	10	8	9	10	11	11	11	70
2018/19	7	9	9	9	10	11	10	65
2019/20	3	7	9	8	9	10	11	57
2020/21	6	3	7	9	8	9	11	53
2021/22	1	6	3	8	9	7	9	43
2022/23	6	1	6	4	7	9	7	40
2023/24	5	6	1	4	5	4	10	35
2024/25	7	5	6	1	5	5	5	34
2025/26	6	7	5	6	1	5	5	35
2026/27 projected**	5	6	7	5	6	1	5	35

Table 2: Enrolment Statistic *Source: DE Census*

* The enrolment figure includes supernumerary pupils (which are pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs).

** confirmed by school

*** This means the school can accommodate 69 pupils plus supernumerary pupils before applying for a Temporary Variation for additional pupils.

Combined enrolment 2025/26								
School Name	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Total
St Joseph's Primary School	3	6	9	10	13	16	12	69
St Malachy's Primary School	6	7	5	6	1	5	5	35
Total	9	13	14	16	14	21	17	104

Table 3: Combined Enrolment Statistics *Source: DE Census*

* The enrolment figure includes supernumerary pupils (which are pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs).

In addition to the two parish schools, there is another school in the local area in close proximity to St Malachy's PS, Kilclief. The table below demonstrates St Mary's PS in Dunsford is 3.5 miles away from St Malachy's PS, Kilclief. A pupil distribution map for the three schools is included in Appendix A.

Approximate distance between the three primary schools (source www.google.co.uk/maps)			
	St Joseph's PS, Strangford	St Malachy's PS, Kilclief	St Mary's PS, Dunsford
St Joseph's PS, Strangford		3.8 miles	6.7 miles
St Malachy's PS, Kilclief	3.8 miles		3.5 miles
St Mary's PS, Dunsford	6.7 miles	3.5 miles	

Table 4: Distance between nearby schools

Enrolment Statistics: St Mary's PS Dunsford								
Approved Admissions Number: 12 pupils Approved Enrolment Number: 81 pupils***								
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Total
2015/16	11	12	12	14	17	8	12	86
2016/17	9	11	12	11	15	17	8	83
2017/18	11	9	12	13	11	15	18	89
2018/19	15	12	9	13	14	11	15	89
2019/20	12	15	12	9	13	14	11	86
2020/21	13	14	15	12	12	14	14	94
2021/22	8	13	13	15	14	13	15	91
2022/23	12	9	13	13	16	14	11	88
2023/24	13	11	8	13	12	16	14	87
2024/25	11	13	11	8	13	12	15	84
2025/26**	5	11	12	11	8	14	12	73

Table 5: Enrolment Statistic Source: DE Census

* The enrolment figure includes supernumerary pupils (which are pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs).

** confirmed by school

*** This means the school can accommodate 81 pupils plus supernumerary pupils before applying for a Temporary Variation for additional pupils.

School	Distance from St Malachy's PS	Approved enrolment	Actual enrolment	Supernumerary pupils	Available places
St Joseph's PS, Strangford	3.8 miles	91	69	8	30
St Mary's PS Dunsford	3.5 miles	81	73	*	!
St Nicholas' PS Ardglass	5.8 miles	269	148	27	148

Table 6: Available places in the area 2025/26 based on census data

* When calculating the unfilled places, the Department of Education excludes supernumerary pupils from the calculation. Consequently, the unfilled places added to the enrolment may not match the approved enrolment number.
 ! Denotes omission of figures to avoid possible identification of individuals.

Table 6 demonstrates available places in the area. The temporary variation process allows for a school to take in additional pupils above its approved enrolment number. This process can be utilised if a development proposal was approved for a school closure and neighbouring schools were at capacity. It is noted both St Joseph's PS and St Mary's PS currently operate as 4 class base schools and it has been confirmed each has capacity for additional pupils. This proposal being consulted on also seeks to expand the admissions and enrolment number in St Joseph's PS to 15/105. The table above also demonstrates some capacity at St Mary's PS Dunsford and St Nicholas' PS Ardglass.

3. THE REASONS WHY DISCUSSIONS WERE COMMENCED ON SCHOOLS IN THE AREA

3.1 Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision

In strategically planning for primary education, the Education Authority in partnership with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools published the Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision on 29 June 2022. The aim and vision of the Plan has the child/young person as its focus:

- Aim** The aim of Area Planning is to ensure that all primary and post-primary pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their educational needs in a school that is educationally and financially viable and sustainable.
- Vision** All children will 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.

This Area Plan sets the strategic direction of Area Planning for the next five years and spans the academic years 2022-2027. The plan is developed in accordance with the Department of Education’s Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools (Sustainable Schools Policy) and will address Ministerial priorities for Area Planning. The mission of the plan is:

Focus on improving the quality of educational provision for all pupils.

To do this Area Planning will:

- *address school provision which is not educationally and/or financially sustainable;*
- *explore realistic, innovative, shared and collaborative solutions with a view to ensuring there is a viable and sustainable level of quality educational provision;*
- *aim to find solutions which deliver sustainable education provision in rural areas;*
- *address issues and challenges specific to local areas, by ensuring there are sufficient places which may result in increasing places in some areas while reducing places in others.*

Providing a network of viable and sustainable schools that are of the right type, the right size, located in the right place at the right time with a focus on raising standards.

3.2 Operational Plan 2: 2024-26

Published alongside the *Planning for Sustainable Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27, Primary and Post-Primary Schools*, on 1 September 2022, the Education Authority published Operational Plan 1: 2022-24. The Operational Plan 1: 2022-24 outlined area planning activity for the first two years of the five year strategy. Operational Plan 2: 2024-26 was published on 16 January 2025, and it included the following workstream.

Strangford and Kilclief Area Primary Provision	Background / Engagement	
	The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools is proposing to review maintained primary school provision in the area.	
	Statutory Duty / Ministerial Priority	Key Theme(s)
	Primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two year groups	Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways Promote cooperation, collaboration and sharing across all sectors Maximise resources and sustainability Inform strategic infrastructure planning and investment

Table 7: Extract from Operation Plan 2 2024-2026

4. SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS POLICY (2009)

4.1 Quality educational experience

4.1.1 Composite Classrooms and number of teachers

The SSP indicates the following criteria for a sustainable school: “No more than two composite year groups in a single classroom at primary school level. A minimum of four teachers at a primary school. This recognises both the needs of pupils and the demands on teachers.”⁸

The SSP section on Educational Experience for Children contains the following comments.

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.⁹

The ETI Chief Inspector’s Report 2014-2016 made the following 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.¹⁰

The DE Policy Team has previously outlined 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.”¹¹

If the proposal being consulted on progresses and there is one school to serve the parish, there will be enough pupils to ensure there will be no composite classes spanning more than two-year groups for any pupil in the area.

4.1.2 The standards and the quality of learning and teaching at the schools

The most recent ETI Reports relating to the standard of teaching and learning in each of the schools is detailed in Appendix F and Appendix G. It is noted the leadership and management has changed at St Malachy’s PS since the previous inspection.

⁸ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/schools-future-policy-sustainable-schools>
Schools for the Future – A Policy for Sustainable Schools (DENI 2009) (p.47)

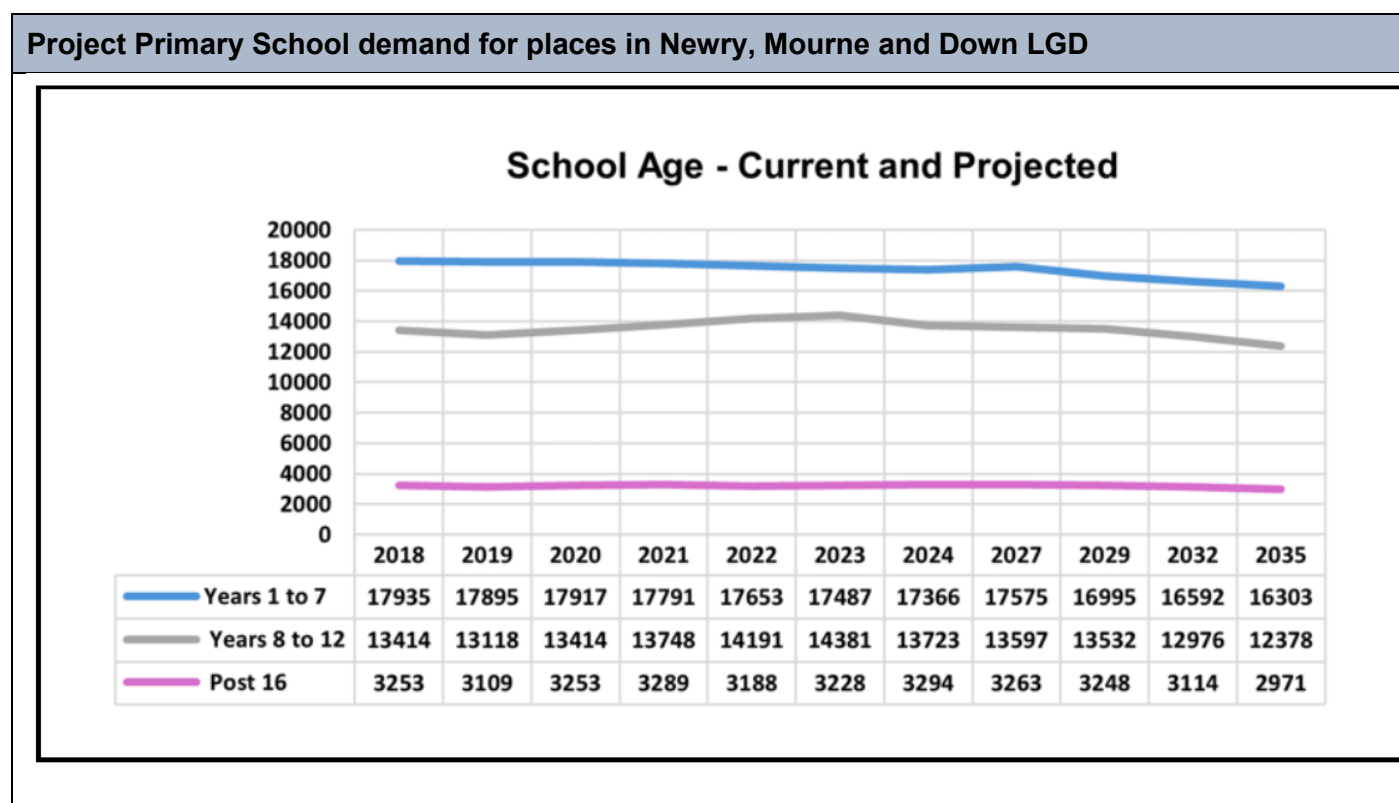
⁹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/schools-future-policy-sustainable-schools> (p.20)

¹⁰ <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/chief-inspectors-report-2014-2016> (p.11)

¹¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/dp-588-ballyhackett-primary-school-education>

4.2 Enrolment Trends

4.2.1 Population Trends



Graph 1: Anticipated demand for places in Newry Mourne and Down LGD

Live Births – Ward Areas										
Wards	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24
Strangford	35	53	36	43	52	48	35	46	39	35
Year 1 Start	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29

Table 8: Live Births by Academic Year

The Live Births information in the ward does not indicate an increased number of births in the area. The annual number of live births within the local electoral ward area(s) is helpful in predicting trends in a school's future enrolments. The enrolment may be impacted on by various factors including parental choice. As one or more of the wards used may extend beyond the school's traditional catchment area, some children may attend a primary school in a neighbouring ward, some children from outside the ward(s) may attend the primary school, some children may leave the ward(s) before reaching compulsory school age and some children born outside the ward(s) may take up residence in the ward(s). It would be reasonable to expect the schools in Strangford and Kilclief to be catering mainly for children living in Strangford, Kilclief and the surrounding area.

The Long-Term Enrolment (LTE) can be used to project the overall school enrolment for the area. It is calculated by adding Y1 to Y3 in the schools, dividing by three and multiplying by seven. Based in the combined Years 1-3 enrolments, the LTE for the Strangford/Kilclief area is 84 (i.e. $(9+13+14)/3*7$).

The population projections, birth rates in the area, LTE projection and the school's projection on the number of pupils are important as they help determine what possible options there are for sustainable provision in the area.

4.2.2 The enrolment trends and projected demand in the area

Section 2 highlights the enrolment trends for the schools. Table 1 and Table 2 demonstrates the enrolment figures for St Joseph's PS and St Malachy's PS remain consistently below the recommended minimum threshold of 105 contained within the SSP. Section 4.2.1 indicates there is no evidence of increase in the school population. CCMS is of the view there is insufficient evidence of a potential increase in demand to meet the sustainability enrolment threshold in either school. The enrolment for both schools combined demonstrate enough pupils for one sustainable school.

4.3 Financial Position

4.3.1 Small Schools Support Factor

Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) Common Funding Formula, the level of funding is determined by pupil numbers. All schools receive delegated budgets and have authority to determine expenditure from these budgets.¹²

The Small Schools Support Factor is a lump sum equivalent to 1.0 times the salary of a teacher on point UPS 1 of the Teachers' Upper Pay Scale. It is allocated to schools of up to 100 pupils, tapering to zero at 300 pupils. Small Schools Support funding is intended to target more resources towards smaller schools to facilitate the delivery of the curriculum.

The Primary Principal's Release factor is intended to provide resources to help ensure principals of smaller primary schools have at least two days per week release from teaching duties. This release from classroom duties aims to allow these principals to concentrate on their leadership, management, and administrative duties. Primary schools with enrolments of up to 100 pupils will receive a maximum lump sum amount as determined by the Department, tapering to zero at 300 pupils.

St Joseph's PS and St Malachy's PS each received the full entitlement of £51,829 of Small School Support Factor for 2024/25. Each school received the full entitlement of £16,420 of Primary Principal's Release Time Factor for 2024/25.

4.3.2 Sound financial position

Appendix D and Appendix E demonstrate the financial projections for each school based on the status quo. It demonstrates, that based on the schools' own projections, both will have financial challenges in the future. The schools' annual finances, approved by the Boards of Governors, indicate that they will not be able to live within their delegated budget. The schools' financial trends indicate that they will not be able to live within their annually delegated budget with the 3 Year Financial Plan. The schools' 3 Year Financial Plan based upon realistic assumptions, indicate that the deficit cannot be substantially reduced or recovered.

One school for the parish has the potential to deliver a financially sustainable school. This raises the potential of the school expenditure being in line with its allocated budget and potentially having surplus budget that could be utilised for the benefit of the pupils in the area and improving the offer. This increases the educational sustainability of school provision.

¹² Guidance for schools requires that they should not accumulate surpluses or deficits in excess of 5% of their delegated budget or £75,000, whichever is the lesser. (unless they are being accumulated for specific purposes detailed in their financial plans and approved by the EA) - GUIDANCE ON FINANCIAL AND MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONTROLLED AND MAINTAINED SCHOOLS FUNDED UNDER THE COMMON FUNDING SCHEME

4.3.2.1 Financial Position of the Network of Schools

A sustainable school can allow for efficient use of educational resources including the deployment of teaching and support staff. It can also provide increased opportunities for the professional development of all staff as a larger staffing complement allows for increased interaction with peers and can facilitate more opportunities for training/development.

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.”¹³ The SSP also makes the following comment “The costs associated with providing additional support to smaller schools or schools which are considered non-sustainable inevitably means that there is less funding available to distribute across all schools.”¹⁴ Appendix D and Appendix E provide details on the cost of provision in each of the schools and provides a comparison with sustainable provision.

Planning for Sustainable Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 notes that the objectives of Area Planning are set out in the Department of Education’s Area Planning Guidance and that the system should :

maximise the use and sharing of the existing schools’ estate including potential for collaborative models of shared and/or co-located facilities (including colocation of mainstream and special schools); and
maximise the impact of available resources by reducing duplication of provision and the number of available places.¹⁵

This proposal being consulted on should address the additional cost associated with supporting provision that is not sustainable.

4.3.3 Strong leadership and Management

The Board of Governors at St Joseph’s PS and St Malachy’s PS benefit from a wide range of skills and include the school principal and representation from parents/guardians, teachers, Trustees, and the Department of Education.

4.3.4 Accessibility

Both St Joseph’s PS and St Malachy’s PS are accessible to the pupils in the local area. St Mary’s PS, Dunsford is also accessible to pupils in the area, particularly those that live in Kilclief. This proposal being consulted on takes account of demand for provision in the area and available places nearby.

4.3.5 Community links

Both schools have strong links within the parish of Kilclief. This is noted in Appendix H and Appendix I. One sustainable school for the parish will be more aligned to the fact the pupils are not divided within their community activities. For example, the parish has a vibrant gaelic team and soccer team.

¹³ Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools p11.

¹⁴ Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools p33.

¹⁵ www.eani.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Strategic%20Area%20Plan%202022-27%20-%20Planning%20for%20Sustainable%20Provision_0.pdf

5. OPTIONS

5.1 What options were considered for the future of Primary Provision in Kilclief and Strangford?

The options noted below were reviewed as part of considering the way forward for the Catholic sector's primary schools in Kilclief and Strangford. Any proposals for change seek to further enhance and embed best practice within financially viable provision.

5.2.1 Option 1 No change

This option, based on current enrolments, does not comply with the Sustainable School's Policy. It does not deliver the following key components.

- Educationally and financially sustainable schools to serve the parish.
- Greater opportunities for all pupils to be taught in their own age groups.
- Eliminating classes of more than two-year groups in the parish.
- Additional potential for appropriate levels of differentiation in teaching and learning.
- Increased opportunities for peer group interaction.
- Increased opportunity for pupils to be with those of a similar age and stage.
- Improved chances for participation in a wider range of extra-curricular activities.
- Additional opportunities for specialist teaching and professional development of staff.

It is not a sustainable model for the area and does not best serve the current and future needs and aspirations of pupils in the area.

5.2.2 Option 2 Closure of St Joseph's PS and expansion of St Malachy's PS

This option would result the following.

- Utilisation of the additional green space as part of the school grounds in Kilclief, in comparison to St Joseph's PS, Strangford.
- Capital expenditure to repurpose accommodation to ensure St Malachy's PS could accommodate the increased number of pupils.
- Disruption of a significant number of pupils from Strangford village by moving the school population away from the village, to the countryside.
- Increased travel for the majority of the pupils in the area.
- Closing a larger school in support of retaining a smaller school.
- There is current capital investment for school provision in St Joseph's PS, Strangford, that would not be utilised if the school building closed.
- Closure of a school with a stable history of effective leadership and management.

The cost of repurposing the internal accommodation required to revert the principals office to a classroom would need to be costed if this option was to proceed.

Any transport arrangement would be in accordance with transport policy. Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs would receive transport assistance where a special transport need has been identified and who are attending their nearest suitable school.

5.2.3 Option 3 Cross Sectoral Options, including Integrated Education.

(i) Shared education option

There are no shared education options that provide the basis for sustainable provision. Whatever option proceeds, maintaining and enhancing (where possible) any shared education links would be important.

(ii) Jointly managed school option

A jointly managed faith school is where a school is established by two or more faith groups. This is an option that would be led by the trustees of the schools involved (St MacNissi's Educational

Trust). The school BoG should contact the trustee should the school BoG wish to pursue this matter further. The first point of contact would be the Catholic Schools Trustee Service (CSTS) who would liaise with the trustee.

There is a demand for Catholic maintained school provision in this area. The existing provision also caters for all faiths and none. There are not sufficient numbers of any other faith to bring forward a successful, sustainable proposal for the area that is not centred around Catholic education.

(iii) Integrated Education

As a result of the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which came into force on 26 October 2022, integrated education is the education together of:

- a. those of different cultures and religious beliefs and of none, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons;
- b. those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not; and
- c. those of different abilities.

If any school wishes to explore integrated provision more fully, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) can support this. CCMS has advised the school Board of Governors for St Malachy's PS and St Joseph's PS to contact NICIE should either school wish to pursue this option any further.

5.2.4 Option 4 Amalgamation

CCMS's assessment of a potential amalgamation for any school is based on a number of factors. Some key elements are detailed below.

5.2.4.1 Distance

Amalgamations of primary schools are usually between schools in one parish or area. In rural areas, the distance between amalgamating schools, in a parish or area, depends on their geographical span.

5.2.4.2 Links

For an amalgamation to have a strong basis for success, it is helpful if the schools involved have substantial links with each other.

5.2.4.3 Shared commitment

An amalgamation requires participating schools to have a shared commitment to address the sustainability of maintained provision in an area/parish. Schools must be open to the potential that a newly amalgamated school may not be located on their particular site.

5.2.4.4 Capital investment

An amalgamation between St Malachy's PS and St Joseph's PS would not require additional capital investment for new school accommodation for the pupils if it was to be on the St Joseph's PS site. This is because there will be available space in St Joseph's PS once the planned capital works are completed. If the school was to be on the St Malachy's PS site, the capital costs would need to be determined.

5.2.4.5 Disruption in the area

The potential amalgamation of schools was investigated and discussed with the Board of Governors of St Malachy's PS and St Joseph's PS. It is highly likely there would be a lack of community support from the Strangford community, and there would be greater disruption to a more significant number of pupils/staff than a closure/expansion. It is CCMS's assessment that an

amalgamation between St Malachy's PS and St Joseph's PS or any other school is not an appropriate solution.

This is an option has the potential to deliver sustainable education. However, CCMS Officers consider this is not the most appropriate solution given a number of factors.

- There is evidence of a sustained period of excellent educational leadership and provision in St Joseph's PS.
- There is a significant difference in the enrolment numbers in the parish schools.
- This option has the potential to unsettle the larger school community and staff.
- St Joseph's Primary school has a history of financial and educational stability.

5.2.5 Option 5 - Closure of St Malachy's PS. Expansion of admissions/enrolment of St Joseph's PS from 13/91 to 15/105.

This option would deliver the following key components:

- enriching St Joseph's PS by welcoming pupils of St Malachy's PS;
- long term sustainability for provision for all pupils in the parish;
- access to a broad and balanced curriculum within a sustainable school;
- a potential for a wider range of curricular and extra-curricular activities for pupils;
- management of financial pressures;
- capacity to withstand fluctuations in enrolment numbers;
- bringing together the pupils in the area; and
- the parish school being located in the village.

St Joseph's PS currently has an admission/enrolment number of 13/91. This means that currently, without any change to school provision or need for any sort of approval, the school can accommodate 91 pupils plus those with a statement of Special Educational Needs. In effect, this means the school could currently accommodate around 100 pupils. In the recent past (2023/24) there were 87 pupils enrolled in the school.

St Joseph's PS has capital works underway and will have the capacity to facilitate all the additional pupils, if all transfer from St Malachy's PS, Kilclief. There are a number of families who may still choose to go to alternative school provision.

Although there will be the necessary accommodation to facilitate the additional pupils, like many schools, the outdoor playing space on the St Joseph's PS site would benefit from being enhanced. Although it is not a requirement for the proposal to proceed, investigation would be carried out on the potential to secure additional land current adjacent to the St Joseph's PS site.

It is not anticipated there would be any additional works required to facilitate a larger number of pupils. Previously, St Joseph's PS had investigated the potential of having a School Crossing Patrol, and due to the findings of the inspection carried out by the Education Authority, it was not deemed that one was appropriate. In the event this proposal proceeds and is approved by the Education Minister, CCMS will liaise with the Education Authority and any Statutory Body to determine if any additional work or services are needed to support additional pupils in the school. This will, in part, be clearer when it is evident what the actual enrolment of the school will be.

Any transport arrangement would be in accordance with transport policy. Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs would receive transport assistance where a special transport need has been identified and who are attending their nearest suitable school.

5.2.6 Option 6 – Closure of St Malachy's PS and pupils disperse to alternative primary schools.

This option would meet all strategic area planning and operational planning criteria and requirements. This option also reflects the possibility that not all pupils will go to St Joseph's PS if St Malachy's PS closes. There are two schools in close proximity to St Malachy's PS that would be able to accommodate additional pupils. St Joseph's PS Strangford and St Mary's PS Dunsford both currently operate as 4 class base schools. This means that although their admissions and enrolment suggest limited space, their accommodation and their school staffing profiles could facilitate additional pupils. All pupils would be taught in classes with no more than two-year groups in one class. This option would also enhance the financial sustainability of the neighbouring schools, improving the sustainable educational offer for the pupils. In addition to these schools, St Nicholas' PS in Ardglass is less than 6 miles from St Malachy's PS Kilclief and has available space.

Any transport arrangement would be in accordance with transport policy.¹⁶ Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs will receive transport assistance where a special transport need has been identified and who are attending their nearest suitable school.

Although this option is an effective area planning solution, it is not as optimal as Option 5. This option does not best reflect what happens in the community outside of educational provision. If, following the pre-publication consultation, it is decided not to proceed with a closure/expansion, this option serves the need for educational provision in the area. This option would mean that school provision and numbers could be reviewed in future years to determine if any further changes are required.

5.3 What would the educational impact of the proposed change be?

Option 5, one parish school is the basis of the proposal being consulted on. The change would facilitate the effective and efficient use of facilities and create the opportunity to enhance existing resources. The implementation of this would give pupils (including those with SEN) the opportunity of engaging in a broader range of curricular and pastoral activities within sustainable provision. Pupils with special educational requirements would continue to have their needs met in the St Joseph's PS. CCMS would work together with the Education Authority's (EA) Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) to ensure the smooth transition of pupils.

Staff in larger sustainable schools have access to greater opportunities for professional interaction and mutual support. This can, in turn, lead to improved pupil outcomes.

At the heart of this proposal is one school that reflects the need in the area. The plan is to build a sustainable educational community which will improve opportunities for all pupils.

5.4 Views and Alternative Sustainable Options

This is a pre-publication consultation process and consultees should contribute their views and any alternative options to CCMS. All views received will be given due consideration and will inform the decision on whether to progress with these proposals or proceed with an alternative option highlighted earlier.

There are primarily two potential sustainable options for consideration, namely Option 5 and Option 6. It is the view of CCMS Officers that the closure of St Malachy's PS Kilclief and the expansion of St Joseph's PS, Strangford is the most appropriate option to serve the current and future needs of the community.

At the same time, the closure of St Malachy's PS Kilclief (option 6) would also address the sustainability challenges for the area. Both St Joseph's PS and St Mary's PS will have the accommodation and staffing profile to support additional pupils, depending on parental preference.

¹⁶ <https://www.eani.org.uk/parents/pupil-applications-and-grants/home-to-school-transport-0>

Option 6 would mean that St Joseph's PS and St Mary's PS would apply for Temporary Variations depending on parental preference and CCMS could review the enrolment numbers in both schools, in the future, to determine whether to seek an increase to the approved admissions/enrolment numbers of both schools.

6. EQUALITY SCREENING

6.1 Explain the objectives of the proposal being consulted on and the desired outcomes if approved – for example to reduce number of available places or to increase enrolment to meet demand. Detail how this aligns to Departmental policies and consideration given to Statutory Duties.

The proposal being consulted on will support an area planning solution for the area in that it is addressing issues of sustainability, ensuring that school places are located as required and is consistent with Every School a Good School,¹⁷ the Sustainable Schools Policy,¹⁸ Providing Pathways,¹⁹ and the Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Sustainable Provision.²⁰

The proposal being consulted on will meet the educational needs of pupils. It will also continue to provide additional support to those who require it, ensuring those pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) realise their full potential. Pupils with SEN will continue to have their special educational requirements met, supported by Children and Young People Services (CYPS). Sections 1-4 above outline how the proposal being consulted on will contribute to the delivery of education provision within the area.

6.2 Equality Duty

Equality screening of the proposal being consulted on has been carried out. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: A Guide for Public Authorities advises:

The first duty is the Equality of Opportunity duty, which requires public authorities in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the nine equality categories of persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependants and persons without.²¹

The evidence received to date suggests that there are no major impacts on the protected groups within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

As part of your response to the proposal being consulted on, you may want to consider the following questions.

- a. Are there any data needs or issues in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories that have not been identified in Equality Screening consultation document? If so, what are they? Please provide details.
- b. Are there any adverse impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in the Equality Screening document? If so, what are they?
- c. Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts that have been identified by CCMS or that you have identified.

6.3 Voice of the Child

¹⁷ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/every-school-good-school-esags>

¹⁸ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/schools-future-policy-sustainable-schools>

¹⁹ <https://www.eani.org.uk/publications/providing-pathways-strategic-area-plan-2017-2020>

²⁰ Planning for Sustainable Provision: Strategic Area Plan 2022-27 Primary and Post-Primary Schools 29 June 2022

²¹ <https://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf>

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: A Guide for Public Authorities p7.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 12 (1) of the UNCRC notes:

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely on all matters affecting the child, the views of the child given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.²²

Consultation engagement with pupils is being managed by the schools.

6.4 Rural Needs Act 2016

Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 ('the Act') requires public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or reviewing a policy, strategy or plan and when designing or delivering a public service. The obligation to "have regard to" in section 1 of the Rural Needs Act only imposes an obligation to consider the relevant issues, not to give them any particular weight. The relevant issues have been considered in this first draft of the document. The areas from which each school attract pupils is, according to the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, defined as rural.²³

This document considers the potential of options for primary provision in Kilclief and Strangford. The options are now part of the consultation with staff, BoG, parents/guardians and pupils of the schools. This ensures information is received from the impacted stakeholders on all matters, including rural needs.

In determining whether to proceed with this proposal being consulted on, due consideration will be given to the balance between meeting the enrolment, educational and financial requirements of the SSP and maintaining provision as it is.

The intention of this proposal being consulted on is to advance the aspirations, aims and objectives of the SSP: "It is important that children in rural communities have access to a quality education in cost effective provision."²⁴ The proposal being consulted on meets this requirement.

As part of your response to the proposal being consulted on, you may want to consider the following questions.

- a. Are there any data needs or issues in relation to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment that have not been identified? If so, what are they? Please provide details.
- b. Are there any adverse impacts in relation to rural needs that have not been identified in the Rural Needs Impact Assessment? If so, what are they?
- c. Please state what action you think could be taken to reduce or eliminate any adverse impacts that have been identified by CCMS or that you have identified.

²² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child p5.

²³ https://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/documents/ur_report.pdf

²⁴ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/a-policy-for-sustainable-schools.pdf> p27.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

7.1 What happens if the Department of Education approves the change proposed?

If the DE approve the proposal, CCMS, will support the schools through the change process.

7.2 What is the timeline for the consultation and approval process?

Trustees and CCMS are required to publish a development proposal with a Case for Change outlining the proposed changes to schools. The timetable below is provisional and is subject to approval to proceed to public consultation. The timeline can also be impacted if CCMS decides not to proceed with a Development Proposal or the Department of Education's decision-making process.

Development Proposal Timeline	
	Proposed Timeline
Information to Governors	Pre Summer 2025
Consultation with Governors, Staff, Parents/Guardians	March 2026
Consultation Responses to be forwarded	By 01 May 2026
Responses will be considered and presented to CCMS Education Provision Committee along with a recommendation	June 2026
If Development Proposals Proceed	
CCMS forward a development proposal to the EA for publication.	August 2026
4 weeks affected schools consultation.	September 2026
Case for Change and development proposal to be taken to the Education Authority's Education Committee ahead of publication.	December 2026
Statutory Objection Period (2 months) Objections/comments to be forwarded to the Department of Education	January 2027
Await Ministerial/Department of Education Decision	TBC
Implementation If approved, the Development Proposals would take effect from 31 August 2027 and 01 September 2027, or as soon as possible thereafter.	

Table 9: Development Proposal Timeline

HOW TO RESPOND

CCMS would encourage you to respond by **01 MAY 2026** using the online version of the pre-publication Consultation questionnaire via that is on the website with the consultation documents.

Or alternatively by e-mail:

strangfordkilclief@ccmsschools.com

Please indicate in your response if you are a:

- Parent/Guardian of a child.
- Member of the Board of Governors.
- Member of staff.

The pupils' views will also be considered as part of the consultation process.

All responses to be returned by 01 MAY 2026

St Joseph's, St Malachy's and St Mary's Primary Schools & Pupil Locations



- ★ St Joseph's Primary School, Strangford
- ★ St Malachy's Primary School, Kildief
- ★ St Mary's Primary School, Ardglass(Dunsford)
- St Joseph's Primary School, Strangford
- St Malachy's Primary School, Kildief
- St Mary's Primary School, Ardglass(Dunsford)

Appendix B - Annual Area Profile St Joseph's PS, Strangford

DE Ref No	School Name	Status	Council Area
4033005	St Joseph's Primary School, Strangford	Catholic Maintained	Newry, Mourne and Down

Annual Census Information			
Year	Total pupils Y1-Y7	IMU	FSME % ¹
2019/20	72	0	9.7%
2020/21	83	0	22.9%
2021/22	86	0	19.8%
2022/23	85	0	18.8%
Approved Reception-Year 7 enrolment number			91
Approved Reception-Year 7 admissions number			13
Year 1 Pupils 2022/23			10
First Preferences Applications 2022/23			10

Formal Intervention	
In formal intervention any period 1 April 2022-31 March 2023	

Budgets			
Year	Available Delegated Resources £	Surplus/Deficit £	Surplus/Deficit %
2019/20	296,823	22,593	7.61%
2020/21	311,491	10,014	3.21%
2021/22	358,885	21,099	5.88%

KEY TO SYMBOLS & TEXT USED IN DATA ABOVE	
Symbol/Text	Definition
*	Relates to fewer than 5 cases
#	Means that a figure greater than or equal to 5 had been treated to prevent disclosure of a small number elsewhere
-	School not open in the relevant academic year
Total pupils Year 1-Year 7 includes IMU and statements	
Total pupils, IME, FSME % includes pupils in Year 1-Year 7 classes only	

Appendix C - Annual Area Profile St Malachy's PS, Kilclief

DE Ref No	School Name	Status	Council Area
4031350	St Malachy's Primary School, Strangford	Catholic Maintained	Newry, Mourne and Down

Annual Census Information			
Year	Total pupils Y1-Y7	IMU	FSME % ¹
2019/20	57	0	22.8%
2020/21	53	0	24.5%
2021/22	43	0	32.6%
2022/23	40	0	35.0%
Approved Reception-Year 7 enrolment number			69
Approved Reception-Year 7 admissions number			10
Year 1 Pupils 2022/23			6
First Preferences Applications 2022/23			5

Formal Intervention	
In formal intervention any period 1 April 2022-31 March 2023	

Budgets			
Year	Available Delegated Resources £	Surplus/Deficit £	Surplus/Deficit %
2019/20	354,094	58,744	16.59%
2020/21	324,894	42,759	13.16%
2021/22	319,164	17,903	5.61%

KEY TO SYMBOLS & TEXT USED IN DATA ABOVE	
Symbol/Text	Definition
*	Relates to fewer than 5 cases
#	Means that a figure greater than or equal to 5 had been treated to prevent disclosure of a small number elsewhere
-	School not open in the relevant academic year
Total pupils Year 1-Year 7 includes IMU and statements	
Total pupils, IME, FSME % includes pupils in Year 1-Year 7 classes only	

Appendix D - Financial Plan St Joseph's PS, Strangford

The table below provides information from the school's 3-year financial plan 2025-28. Appendix B is the Annual Area Profile for the school for 2023. The financial plan indicates a surplus of £6,257 in 2025/26, a deficit of £56,309 in 2026/27 and £126,107 in 2027/28 financial year. These calculations are based on pupil enrolments of 70 in October 2025, 70 in October 2026 and 70 in October 2027.

	2025 - 26	2026 - 27	2027- 28
Anticipated Enrolment	70	70	70
Planned Teaching Complement	4.4	4.4	4.4
Total Budget (£)	408,958	354,088	354,088
Opening Cumulative Surplus/deficit (£)	11,356	6,257	-56,309
Total Expenditure (£)	414,057	416,654	423,886
In Year Surplus/Deficit (£)	-5,099	-62,566	-69,798
Closing Balance (£)	6,257	-56,309	-126,107
Pupil/Teacher ratio	15.9	15.9	15.9

St Joseph's PS Financial Plan 2025/26 - 2027/28, approved by the Board of Governors.

The school's annual finances, approved by the Board of Governors, indicate that it cannot live within its delegated budget. The school's financial trends indicate that it will not be able to live within its annually delegated budget with the 3 Year Financial Plan. The school's 3 Year Financial Plan based upon realistic assumptions, indicate that the deficit cannot be substantially reduced or recovered.

In 2024/25, the average calculated cost per pupil across all primary schools was £4,400. The average for schools of 104 pupils and below was approximately £5,800 per pupil and for schools of 105 and above it was approximately £4,300. In EA outturn figures, the average cost per pupil in St Joseph's PS for 2024/25 was £4,743.

Appendix E - Financial Plan St Malachy's PS, Kilclief

The table below provides information from the school's 3-year financial plan 2025-28. Appendix C is the Annual Area Profile for the school for 2023. The financial plan indicates a deficit of £243,358 in 2025/26, £327,700 in 2026/27 and £410,556 in 2027/28 financial year. These calculations are based on pupil enrolments of 36 in October 2025, 38 in October 2026 and 38 in October 2027.

	2025 - 26	2026 - 27	2027- 28
Anticipated Enrolment	36	38	38
Planned Teaching Complement	3.6	3.6	3.6
Total Budget (£)	229,671	236,530	243,389
Opening Cumulative Surplus/deficit (£)	-156,437	-243,358	-327,700
Total Expenditure (£)	316,592	320,872	326,245
In Year Surplus/Deficit (£)	-86,920	-84,342	-82,856
Closing Balance (£)	-243,358	-327,700	-410,556
Pupil/Teacher ratio	10.0	10.6	10.6

St Malachy's PS Financial Plan 2025/26 - 2027/28, approved by the Board of Governors.

The school's annual finances, approved by the Board of Governors, indicate that it cannot live within its delegated budget. The school's financial trends indicate that it will not be able to live within its annually delegated budget with the 3 Year Financial Plan. The school's 3 Year Financial Plan based upon realistic assumptions, indicate that the deficit cannot be substantially reduced or recovered.

In 2024/25, the average calculated cost per pupil across all primary schools was £4,400. The average for schools of 104 pupils and below was approximately £5,800 per pupil and for schools of 105 and above it was approximately £4,300. In EA outturn figures, the average cost per pupil in St Malachy's PS for 2024/25 was £8,118.

Appendix F - ETI Report St Joseph's PS Strangford

In December 2016, ETI carried out an inspection in St Joseph's PS. The inspection outcome was as follows. Extracts from the Report are contained below.

Overall Effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Achievement and standards	Very Good
Provision for learning	Very Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding

Across all key stages, the standards in numeracy are very good. The children display very high levels of engagement and enjoyment in their numeracy lessons. From the foundation stage, the children know and use mathematical language accurately and show flexibility in their mathematical thinking. By the time they reach KS2, the children use very well a wide range of mental mathematical strategies to find answers to problems and are able to articulate well their thinking and reasoning. The children across the school interact well with digital technology including programmable devices and tablets to support their learning; they are very competent in the use of information and communication technology (ICT).

The children's attitudes and dispositions towards learning are outstanding; they are highly motivated, work very effectively independently and with one another in pairs and small groups. The children's interactions with other children and with adults reveal very high levels of respect, kindness and consideration; their behaviour is excellent.

Provision for learning

All of the lessons observed during the inspection were effective in promoting learning; most were very good or outstanding. These lessons were characterised by highly effective questioning, skilful differentiation and multi-sensory, active approaches which encouraged in-depth thinking and collaborative learning. The teachers' knowledge of the needs of individual children and the thorough analysis of the school's wide range of data are used very effectively to inform the provision for learning, provide tailored support for individual children and track each child's progress. The children who require additional support with aspects of their learning benefit from excellent support including that provided by the highly skilled classroom assistants.

The provision for numeracy is highly effective. The teachers model well for the children the effective use of mathematical language and through well-planned and challenging learning tasks, they develop well the children's abilities to clarify and articulate their thinking. The development of mental mathematics strategies are a prominent feature of numeracy lessons and are infused very well through the taught programme. Numeracy is developed well through connected learning experiences and the children benefit from frequent opportunities to consolidate their mathematical learning in the outdoor learning environment. Information and communication technology is integrated effectively to support and enrich the learning experiences, particularly in the area of handling-data.

The provision for pastoral care is outstanding; it is highly effective in promoting the well-being of every child and in creating a very close-knit school community. The school gives outstanding attention to promoting healthy lifestyles; this is realised effectively through the curriculum, the wide range of sporting activities and effective engagement in initiatives with external partners. This work has been recognised by accredited awards over a sustained period of time.

Leadership and management

The school leadership at all levels is underpinned by a strong sense of collegiality and a clear focus on meeting the needs of the children, enhancing their learning experiences and improving

further their standards and achievements. The leadership is diligent, highly reflective and works tirelessly to promote further improvement. The staff have benefitted from a very good range of professional development opportunities which have enhanced their professional expertise and are impacting positively on learning and teaching. There is extensive evidence that the school is living out its vision statement, 'A school at the heart of the community, community at the heart of the school.' There are excellent levels of consultation and communication with the children and the parents and the leadership inspires the confidence of the wider school community.

The school development plan is well-informed by highly effective self-evaluation processes and excellent levels of consultation; it highlights clearly a range of appropriate priorities for further development and the associated action plans guide well the improvement work across the school. There are highly effective collaborative processes in place to monitor and evaluate regularly the outworking of the action plans.

Based on the evidence available at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors bring a range of skills and expertise to their roles and play a key role in the school improvement process. They are very well informed about the work and life of the school, have established very effective working partnerships with the staff and are proactive in bringing about school improvement. The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, children in KS2 reported that they are very happy and secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

Overall effectiveness St Joseph's Primary School has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.

Appendix G – ETI Report St Malachy’s PS, Kilclief

In May 2017, ETI carried out an inspection in St Malachy’s PS. Extracts from the Report are contained below. It is noted that the Leadership and Management at the school has changed since this report.

The recently appointed principal has consulted widely with the whole school community in order to inform the new school development plan which is fully compliant informed by a robust analysis of data and underpinned by well-constructed action plans.

The staff have implemented a new handwriting style, increased children’s awareness of using the correct grammar and punctuation through proof reading and engaging in independent writing, and provided more frequent opportunities for the children to engage in problem-solving activities in numeracy. The learning co-ordinators now need to monitor the impact of this school improvement work on the learning, teaching and outcomes for the children. Currently, the teachers’ evaluations do not inform sufficiently the next cycle of planning. In general, differentiation is not clear enough in the medium-term planning for both literacy and numeracy.

It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the children and the staff.

Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that arrangements for safeguarding continue to reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Departments.

Conclusion

St Malachy’s Primary School has not demonstrated sufficiently the high level of capacity for sustained improvement; this will be reflected in the future arrangements for inspection of the school.

Appendix H – Links with the Community in St Joseph’s PS²⁵

Our school vision statement is that we are ‘A school at the heart of the community with community at the heart of our school’.

‘There is extensive evidence that the school is living out its vision statement, ‘A school at the heart of the community, community at the heart of the school.’ There are excellent levels of consultation and communication with the children and the parents, and the leadership inspires the confidence of the wider school community’.

- ✓ (Quoted in most recent ETI Inspection report)

In our most recent parental questionnaire in June 2024, 100% of parents agreed with the statement that ‘links between the school and the local community are very good’ (93% of parents strongly agreed)

Evidence examples of how we are a school very much connected to our community:

- ✓ St Joseph's host a Breakfast Club, daily, from 8am at the cost of £1 per day. This club is very well attended and supports working parents.
- ✓ St Joseph's has a well established and very comprehensive After School Enrichment programme which is richly varied to cater for a wide range of extra curricular engagement. Some examples, sports (soccer, ActiSport, Gaelic football, hurling, camogie and athletics), music (song, rhythm and rhyme, guitar club, tin whistle),
- ✓ Speech and Drama club (we are very fortunate to have an accredited Drama teacher employed as a classroom assistant in our school), Gardening Gang, ICT, Construction Club, Cookery, Arts and Crafts, Ceramics and Film Club.
- ✓ We donate Food Hampers annually, during Kindness Week, to Fountain Foodbank and every Christmas to our local SVP.
- ✓ We also have a clothing bank in our school grounds, used by the community.
- ✓ In addition to our nominated school charity work for Children's Heartbeat Trust, this year we are organising a huge community event for NI Hospice. To unite the community in care and compassion.
- ✓ Annual shared Education partnership with Portaferry Integrated and Ballywalter PS - Increased collaboration, shared educational experiences and shared best practice amongst teaching colleagues.
- ✓ A key area of Shared Education is Community Connections. The objective within our partnership for this academic year is to promote opportunities for pupils to share their Shared Education experiences within the local community, through forging positive and meaningful relationships with our community’s ‘Over 50s’ group through a range of Physical Health and Wellbeing workshops. We will also make full use of our community centre and Forest School during these sessions, working alongside Playboard NI for a series of 5 lessons. The focus of which will be to encourage inclusivity and acceptance of differences and to gain an increased knowledge of community.
- ✓ We have been part of the Lecale Cluster for many decades. This offers an excellent platform for effective collaboration (at leadership level and amongst all staff and pupils) with neighbouring schools and it offers pupils the opportunity to mix with their peers from other schools through a variety of planned activities. On numerous occasions we have welcomed pupils from St Malachy’s to join our school Gaelic, hurling and camogie teams. (They already play together as part of the same teams outside of school for their club).

²⁵ Provided by the school and not verified by CCMS

- ✓ Collaboration with our local preschool 'Playlinks' through drawing up an annual Transition Action Plan together to support pupils' transition to our school. (Focus for this year is on promoting children's Physical Health and Wellbeing linked to our School Development Planning)
- ✓ We have a very active (and updated on daily basis) Facebook page to keep the wider community informed of our day-to-day learning experiences.
- ✓ We use the 'SeeSaw' app and 'email drops'/ text messaging service for daily communication with our parents. Pupils also showcase their learning to parents on a daily basis through the SeeSaw app.
- ✓ The local businesses regularly support and display our poster/flyer information campaigns.
- ✓ We welcome students (past pupils) on work experience/school-based placement every year from Lecale, Assumption Grammar and SERC.
- ✓ We lead a monthly Parish school Mass (every 2nd Saturday night of each month) in which the children fully participate in the Liturgy. The children of St. Joseph's also provide the choir. This is very welcomed by parishioners young and old and brings our school community together at the Mass.
- ✓ We have forged very strong links with our local GAC club, Kilclief Ben Dearg (coaches from the club lead after-school Gaelic football and hurling/camogie coaching every summer term).
- ✓ Down GAA Development coaching in the Autumn term at the Links Playing Field for hurling and fundamental skills development.
- ✓ IFA grassroots programme takes place in the school throughout the Autumn, Winter and Spring terms.
- ✓ Strangford Football club have provided sponsorship for our school sports kit and our PTFA have very recently been a match ball sponsor for the club.
- ✓ The Youth Co-Ordinator of Strangford FC is a member of our Board of Governors and he is also a coach for the Kilclief Ben Dearg Juvenile Camogie team.
- ✓ Another member of our Board of Governors, is a prominent committee member of Strangford Coastal Rowing Club.
- ✓ New school Gaelic kit sponsorship 2024-25- donated by local business owner (Parent).
- ✓ Swimming at Down Leisure Centre Weekly.
- ✓ We have strong and tangible links with all local businesses within the village:
 - Annual Halloween trick or treat trail and Easter Egg Hunt around all the businesses and residences.
 - Eco schools composting programme whereby the Eco Committee collect coffee beans and vegetable peelings from local restaurants weekly.
 - Big Christmas Breakfast in the Artisan Cookhouse annually.
 - Local shops' generous sponsorship of all student council fundraising initiatives.

WAU topics: connecting learning (A small sample of planned activities linked to our community)

- ✓ Healthy Lifestyles topic: Class visits to Strangford Dental Practice (Oral Hygiene), Strangford Pharmacy (Safety around Medicine (PDMU)) and The Cuan restaurant (Balanced Diet and healthy eating) with the chef showing the children around the kitchen and preparing a healthy, balanced meal.
- ✓ Houses and Homes topic: Class walks around the village to observe, talk to residents and record the different types and ages of houses in our historic village.
- ✓ Local architects Gary Patterson and Melanie Hamill who live in the village come in the school annually to deliver workshops to the children as well as practical workshops delivered by a local bricklayer, plumber and electrician.

- ✓ Annual guided tour of Castleward House as an example of 'Homes from the Past'. This offers an excellent first-hand experience, and it is right on our doorstep.
- ✓ Music tuition from local drummer and band member of 'The Answer'
- ✓ A local resident offers weekly recorder tuition to our P4 class voluntarily.
- ✓ A Year 14 student from Assumption Grammar, currently delivers tin whistle tuition and French and Spanish lessons on a voluntary capacity.
- ✓ Farmers from the local community regularly bring live newborn animals into the school (lambs, calves, chicks etc) for the children to learn about, pet and feed.
- ✓ Local volunteers support our Better Reading programme by volunteering their time to be trained Reading Partners and engaging in structured reading programmes with the children.
- ✓ We have a very active PTFA who organise community, fund raising and social events throughout the year. For example, Community Bingo, Quiz nights, Afternoon Tea, Movie Nights, Cake Sales...
- ✓ Strangford Sailing Club host St Joseph's in an annual 'Day of Sailing' for P7 pupils at Strangford sailing club.
- ✓ Our school gifts sponsorship of the Seashore Scavenger Hunt organised by QUB to the Strangford Community Festival Committee as part of the community summer festival.
- ✓ We also open our carpark as the assembly point for the marching band for the community fancy dress parade during the festival.
- ✓ Strangford Community and Residents' Association- Spring and summer planting in the square is facilitated by the children of St. Joseph's.
- ✓ The children also supply artwork to enhance the community 'Picnic Area' throughout the year.
- ✓ The children decorate the village Christmas tree annually through arts and crafts clubs as well as:
 - Annual Carol singing on the village green.
 - Carol singing on the Strangford Ferry 'Carol Ship' in the lead up to Christmas.
 - Community Christmas play and Nativity annually in Inverbrenna Community Hall.
 - Community annual Carol Singing for SVP dinner in The Cuan restaurant.
 - Castleward - annual Carol Singing at the National Trust craft fair
- ✓ Spring and summer floral display where parents and members of the local community donate flowers, bulbs and plants for our wellington boots and summer buckets and spades to display on our school exterior fencing.
- ✓ Parent led gardening gang.
- ✓ Annual Grandparents' Day with assembly, drama and lunch.
- ✓ We are a Level 3 Accredited 'Forest School' and we make full use of our local woodland in collaboration with the Woodland Trust at 'The Avenue' for our weekly outdoor 'Forest Friday' sessions in our purpose-built Forest Classroom.
- ✓ Eco Schools 'Adopt a Spot' programme- termly litter picks in The Links Playing Fields and play park and monthly litter pick in our local woodland/seashore.
- ✓ As a Sustrans Active Travel Gold Award school, we participate in a termly Walking School Bus with everyone in our school community walking to school before enjoying tea/coffee/healthy breakfast together.
- ✓ Use of both the Inverbrenna community centre and the Church of Ireland community hall next door to our school for indoor sporting activities and community events.
- ✓ Community Walking Path in The Links is used daily by our pupils for extending our Daily Mile initiative (Linked to our Promoting Physical Health and Wellbeing Action Plan)

- ✓ Newly strengthened links with Strangford's 'Over 50s' club- planned half termly with Arts and Crafts and Games sessions both in our school and in the Inverbrena Community Centre.
- ✓ Throughout the year we link with our wider community and essential services on an annual basis:
 - PSNI for road safety, internet safety and personal safety
 - Fire and Rescue Service on fire and electrical safety
 - Annual visit to the RNLI Portaferry lifeboat station on safety around water and basic water survival skills
 - Ambulance Service for their CPR/Heart Start programme
- ✓ We also avail of the many educational programmes provided by Castleward (National Trust) as it is in walking distance from our school.
- ✓ As an accredited Beach School, we also participate in Shore Scavenger Hunts and Big Cleans on the shores of Strangford Lough and down at the Quay and we visit Kilclief Beach for Beach School days in the summer term.
- ✓ For 8 consecutive years we annually donated in the region of +£1200 each year to our nominated school charity 'NI Cancer Fund for Children'. In the last two years we have supported The Children's Heartbeat Trust and donated £1381 in April 2025.

In summary

A living partnership.

St Joseph's is more than a school building – it is the heartbeat of the community. Every week our pupils, families, parish, local community groups and businesses come together in ways that enrich learning, strengthen community spirit and nurture the next generation.

We do not simply serve our community; we are integral to it. We grow with it, celebrate with it, and contribute to its life. At the same time, the community itself shapes and strengthens our school, ensuring that the vision 'A school at the heart of the **community** with **community** at the heart of our school' is more than just a motto but a daily reality.

Appendix I – Links with the Community in St Malachy's PS²⁶

- Breakfast club available from 8.15 daily and after-school clubs running until 4pm to help and assist parents. Many of our afterschool clubs are free for children to attend with staff and local parents helping to facilitate the variety of clubs that we offer; in the last 12 months we have offered the following:
 - Sports
 - Pottery / Clay
 - Lego
 - Bingo
 - Art
 - Glee
 - Quiz
 - Construction
 - Sensory
 - Drama
 - ICT
 - ECO
 - Crafts
 - STEM
 - Cookery
 - First Aid
 - Jewellery
 - Yoga
- As part of the ECO club which is held during the Springtime, the pupils make trips to the Kilclief community garden to tidy up and plant new bulbs and seeds for the year ahead.
- The school runs a very successful Parent and Toddler group twice monthly which is now called 'Little Learners'. This is led by members of the local community and are assisted by members of staff and P7 pupils from within the school. Due to closures of similar Parent and Toddler groups in the local area (Ballyhornan and Strangford), we are the only group / organisation that provide this to local families.
- The school and the PTA within the school host very popular and affordable community events such as a Halloween Pumpkin Patch and a Christmas Fayre on an annual basis. These events are very well supported by the local community as well as being very well attended by families with no links to the school and whose children attend other primary schools in the local area / Downpatrick area.
- The school host fundraising events for the local community e.g. Wear it Pink coffee morning on Thursday 23rd October for Macmillan Nurses was our most recent fundraising event. The school also raises money for Trocaire at Easter and Save the Children at Christmas.
- The PTA host children's discos regularly throughout the year for children in the local area - not just for the children of St. Malachy's. These events are all facilitated and overseen by parents and members of the PTA and have proven to be highly popular over the last few years.
- The school has a very active presence on social website and maintains an up-to-date website that allows the local and wider community to keep informed of what is happening in our school daily.
- There are very strong links with local GAA clubs (Kilclief Ben Dearg and Bright) in providing coaching to the children within the school (Camogie / Hurling and football) and access to their club minibus for transport to local blitzes and tournaments as well as other local events in the Downpatrick area.
- Down GAA provide coaching to pupils from P3-P7 throughout the second half of the school year and we have had pupils selected from these coaching sessions to represent the school at Down senior football and hurling championship games.

²⁶ Provided by the school and not verified by CCMS

- Pupils from P3-P7 attend weekly swimming sessions in Down Leisure Centre with many of the pupils' achieving awards for their success during these sessions.
- Pupils participate in weekly Bring and Swing Fridays where all pupils are encouraged to bring their hurleys and helmets to school on Fridays and they can improve their hurling and camogie skills at break and lunch time. Members of Kilclief senior hurling and camogie teams have joined the children for some of these sessions.
- Local members of the community make contributions to the school through sporting equipment and resources (footballs, hurleys and sliothars, etc.).
- The school participates in a number of different sporting clubs and organisations such as Netball and Soccer alongside numerous GAA competitions and events.
- The school participates in several Sustrans events throughout the school year that encourage and promote active travel to school. As a school community we meet at in the chapel carpark and walk / cycle / scoot to school as one group.
- The school choir attend St. Malachy's Chapel once a month (Sunday morning) and provide songs / music. The whole school also attend mass once a month (Friday morning) where they sing hymns and provide readers for the liturgy.
- The school celebrates Catholic Schools Week each year at the end of January which involves daily prayer services and coincides with Grandparents Day which we celebrate by having a Grandparent's Breakfast which is open to all Grandparents in the local area.
- The school community joins with the Kilclief Residents Association at Christmas time for the lighting of the Christmas tree in the Kilclief community garden. This involves the children, staff and parents walking together from the school to the community garden, singing a number of Christmas songs and being present for the switching on of the lights.
- The school provides its car park to the local chapel for large masses, funerals, etc. when required by the parish.
- The P6/7 pupils in our school participate in two programmes with the Nursing homes in Ardglass (Kings Castle and Ardview). The pupils' complete activities such as cookery, games, arts and crafts and gardening with the residents and have been recently allocated grant funding to improve the range of activities that can be offered to the residents. These programmes have been hugely instrumental in further developing the emotional intelligence of our pupils who have built up excellent bonds and relationships with some of the residents in the two different homes. The programme has been widely praised by staff within the residential homes and was also featured in the local newspapers.
- The Key Stage 2 pupils deliver Christmas cards to the elderly in the lead-up to Christmas. The cards are made and designed by the pupils in school.
- The families / pupils of the school donate items at Christmas time that are given to SVP for members of our local community who may be struggling in preparing for Christmas. These items are made into hampers or Shoe Boxes, and we find that it is an excellent way to make our pupils aware of other children / families in the local area who may not be able to celebrate Christmas in the way that many of us are able to.
- The school has built up a strong connection with Glebe House over the past number of years and both groups do a lot to help each other e.g. use their hall for plays, children in our school help with some of their youth programmes.
- The school regularly receives visits from local services to keep the children safe and informed of important messages and events.

- Local farmers and workers visit the school to speak to the children about the jobs that they carry out and the importance of these jobs in the local community.
- The pupils participate in weekly assemblies which have a focus within them that allow the children to celebrate and recognise important days and events throughout the school year. Some examples of these celebration events are Maths Week, National Storytelling Week (this is where members of the local community come into school and read stories to the children) and Science Week. Some examples of awareness days that the children have experienced recently are Jeans for Genes Day (Down Syndrome), Wear it Pink (Action Cancer) and Internet Safety Day as part of Anti-Bullying Week.
- The school has very strong links with the local playgroup in Strangford (Play Links) and has many different themed transition days for the pupils who attend Play Links (regardless of their choice of primary school). We would host the children for a mini-Pumpkin Patch, Easter Egg Hunt and Teddy Bear's Picnic as well inviting the staff and pupils to the dress rehearsal of our Christmas performance.
- The school is part of the Lecale Cluster group which presents opportunities for the staff and pupils to build and develop links with each other. These opportunities occur through staff development training days, meetings between staff of the different schools and the pupils competing against and with each other on the sporting fields.
- Members of the local community assist some of our children in school through the Reading Partnership scheme. These members are current parents as well as past parents and relatives.
- We are open to welcoming pupils from local secondary schools and as well as SERC into our school to for work-based placements for their respective educational courses.

St Malachy's Primary School is very much a community-based school where all stakeholders are firmly committed to promoting the spiritual, academic, social, physical and emotional development of each of the children. As a staff, we continually seek to create a safe and happy environment which is at the heart of everything we do. Each child is encouraged to fulfil their potential, both academically and socially, along with fostering a positive self-image, self-confidence, self-respect and respect for others. We believe that our motto of 'Learners Today, Leaders Tomorrow' is something that the school has placed great emphasis on over the 158 years of our school history and continues to do so