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**Consultation on the future of primary
provision in Strangford and Kilclief
Pre-publication Consultation – Start Date
11 March 2026**



Aims of the Presentation



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- The Strangford and Kilclief area is included in the Education Authority's (EA) 2024-26 Area Planning Operational Plan 2. The requirement is to address primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two year groups; increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways and maximise resources and sustainability
- The aim of this presentation is to:
 1. provide an overview of the Sustainable Schools Policy;
 2. provide an overview of current provision in the area within the context of this policy;
 3. outline CCMS' proposal for future provision; and
 4. provide stakeholders with sufficient information to comment on the proposal.





Agenda

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1. Context
2. Options
3. The Proposal
4. Next Steps





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Section 1 - Context



Sustainable Schools Policy



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The Sustainable Schools Policy (2009) established 6 criteria for considering the sustainability of schools.

- Quality educational experience
- Stable enrolment trends
- Sound financial position
- Strong leadership and management
- Accessibility
- Strong links with the community





Quality Educational Experience - Challenges Faced by Smaller Schools

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“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)

“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



Quality Educational Experience

The Sustainable Schools Policy identifies a number of indicators in regard to enrolment at primary schools.

- No more than two composite year groups in a single classroom at primary level.





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Quality Educational Experience

St Joseph's PS (Source: St Joseph's PS)

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Classroom	Year Group	Number of Pupils
Classroom 1	1	3
	2	6
Classroom 2	3	9
Classroom 3	4	10
	5	13
Classroom 4	6	16
	7	12





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Quality Educational Experience

St Malachy's PS (Source: St Malachy's PS)

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Classroom	Year Group	Number of Pupils
Classroom 1	1	6
	2	7
Classroom 2	3	5
	4	6
	5	1
Classroom 3	6	5
	7	5





Quality Educational Experience – Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) Inspection Report

In December 2016, ETI carried out an inspection in St Joseph’s PS. The inspection outcome was as follows.

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

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.





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Quality Educational Experience – Education Training Inspectorate (ETI) Inspection Report

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In May 2017, ETI carried out an inspection in St Malachy's PS. It is noted that the Leadership and Management at the school has changed since this report.

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.



Stable Enrolment Trend



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The Sustainable Schools Policy notes the following in regards to enrolment at primary schools.

- Ideally a primary school should have at least seven classrooms (one for each year group).
- The minimum (not optimal) enrolment for newly established schools or existing schools should be **140** in urban areas and **105** in rural areas.



Stable Enrolment Trend

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

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Stable Enrolment Trend

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



Stable Enrolment Trend



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St Joseph's PS has had admissions into Y1 between three and twelve pupils each year within the past five years. St Malachy's PS has had admissions into Y1 between one and seven pupils each year within the past five years.

The current combined enrolment of both schools (2025/26) is 104 (P1-P7). There is no evidence, based on past enrolments, or future predicted enrolments, to suggest either school can meet the requirement of the Sustainable Schools Policy of **105** pupils, if the status quo remains.





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Demographics

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The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) predicts a population decrease of children aged 4-11 years, in the Newry, Mourne and Down LGD, to decrease by 6.1% (-1,063) 2024 to 2035.

Source: Operational Plan 2



Sound Financial Position



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The Sustainable Schools Policy notes the following in relation to school finances.

- The school's annual finances should indicate that it can live within its delegated budget.
- The school's financial trends should indicate that it will continue to be able to live within its annually delegated budget.
- The school's three year financial plan, based upon realistic assumptions, should indicate that where there is a deficit, this can be substantially reduced or recovered.



Sound Financial Position

The school's budget is determined by a range of factors, including.

The number of pupils.

The size of the school building.

Principal release funding.

Small school support.



Financial Position 2025-2028

St Joseph's PS, Financial Plan.

Year	2025 - 26	2026 - 27	2027 - 28
Anticipated Enrolment	70	70	70
Total Budget (£)	408,958	354,088	354,088
Total Expenditure (£)	414,057	416,654	423,886
Closing Balance (£)	6,257	-56,309	-126,107

These figures are from the school's 3 Year Financial Plan.



Financial Position 2025-2028

St Malachy's PS, Financial Plan.

Year	2025 - 26	2026 - 27	2027 - 28
Anticipated Enrolment	36	36	38
Total Budget (£)	229,671	236,530	243,389
Total Expenditure (£)	316,592	320,872	326,245
Closing Balance (£)	-243,358	-327,700	-410,556

These figures are from the school's 3 Year Financial Plan.





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Financial Position

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EA's policy is that schools should not have a surplus/deficit in excess of 5% or £75,000, whichever is the lesser, of their delegated budget.

Based on the status quo, neither school will be able to operate within the recommended parameters of $\pm 5\%$ of the allocated budget, as required.





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Leadership and Management

The Sustainable Schools Policy notes the need for strong leadership and effective management.

There is no current ETI Inspection that refers to the leadership and management in St Malachy's PS. The Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection in May 2017 did not refer to the leadership and management of the school, other than noting a change in leadership.

The Report of an Inspection December 2016 refers to the leadership and management in St Joseph's PS. It notes the Leadership and Management as Outstanding.



Accessibility



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The Sustainable Schools Policy notes:

home to school transport travel times of less than 30 minutes for primary pupils (i.e. 1 hour per day in total).



The schools are therefore accessible to pupils who live in the local area.





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Strong Links with the Community

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The Sustainable Schools Policy highlights the importance of the degree of parental involvement in the school, the number of children in the vicinity attending the school, and the contribution of the school to the community.

The schools have highlighted the contribution they make to the community in the consultation document.





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Section 2 – Options



CCMS has identified and assessed a series of options which include.

Option 1 – Maintain the status quo.

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

Option 3 – Shared/Integrated options.

Option 4 – Amalgamation.

Option 5 – Closure of St Malachy's PS and expansion of St Joseph's PS

Option 6 – Closure of St Malachy's PS

The following slides provide commentary on each option.



Option 1 – Maintain the Status Quo

St Joseph's PS and St Malachy's PS are retained.

- Parental preference for two local schools is maintained.

The school continues to face the following challenges of:

- more than 2 year groups being taught together in a single classroom in the area;
- Educational and financial challenges;
- less than 4 teachers in one of the schools;
- creating opportunities for staff development in smaller schools; and
- low enrolments below the Sustainable Schools Policy threshold of **105**.



Option 2 – Closure of St Joseph’s PS and Expansion of St Malachy’s PS

St Malachy’s PS is retained

- Parental preference for those choosing St Malachy’s PS is maintained.
-
- Disrupting a significant number of families and staff from a larger, more sustainable school.
 - Increased travel for the majority of pupils in the area.
 - Closing school provision in a rural village and retaining provision in the rural countryside.
 - Closure of a school with a history of effective leadership and management.
 - Additional capital expenditure needed to repurpose accommodation in St Malachy’s PS.



Option 3 – Shared/Integrated Options

There are a number of shared options that are used by schools.

- “Shared education” provision is where schools, from different sectors, secure resources to carry out shared activities/classes.
- A “Shared campus” model is where schools agree to locate on the one site in order to maximise resources and facilitate closer working together. The shared campus model requires schools to be able to address the challenges of the Sustainable Schools Policy (2009).
- A ‘joint faith’ model is where a school is established by two or more faith groups.
- Integrated Education brings children and staff from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other beliefs (and no beliefs), cultures and communities together in one school.

It is challenging to see how these options could address the long term sustainability issues facing school provision in the area.



Option 4 – Amalgamation

The term amalgamation is described in the Sustainable Schools Policy Section 6.13 that a new school is formed to replace 2 or more schools of similar size coming together and usually means a new name, uniform, etc.

- An amalgamation is achieved by the closure/discontinuance of 2 or more schools. The new school is a coming together of the two or more schools that have been closed.
- 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.



Option 5 – Closure of St Malachy’s PS and Expansion of St Joseph’s PS

St Joseph’s PS is expanded

- Parental preference for those choosing St Malachy’s PS is not maintained
-
- 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.
 - the parish school being located in the village.



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

St Malachy’s PS is closed

- Parental preference for those choosing St Malachy’s PS is not maintained
-
- long term sustainability for provision for all pupils in the parish.
 - access to a broad and balanced curriculum within schools with at least 4 classes in a more sustainable school.
 - management of financial pressures with increased numbers in nearby schools.
 - Increased capacity in nearby schools to withstand fluctuations in enrolment numbers.
 - the parish school being located in the village.



EQUALITY/RURAL NEEDS ACT

CCMS has a duty to screen all policies, procedures and proposals to assess their impact on and give due regard to any matters relating to:

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998;

the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016; and

The responses from this stakeholder consultation will be considered prior to the completion of the final screening process.





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Section 3 – The Proposal



Recommended Option: - Option 5

Having given due consideration to the issues and options, CCMS is proposing, in line with the requirements of the Sustainable Schools Policy, discontinue St Malachy's Primary School 31 August 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter and increasing the admissions and enrolment of St Joseph's PS from 13/91 to 15/105 01 September 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter.

Should a consultee submit an alternative proposal which meets the Sustainable Schools Policy criteria, this will be considered in the consultation.

If this proposal was approved, pupils would have the ability to move to a school in the parish, St Joseph's PS. For those that want to attend nearby provision outside the parish, options are available. CCMS would support the school through the closure procedure to ensure the pastoral and educational needs of pupils are met.



Alternative Provision



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Alternative provision is any school of the parents'/carers' choice, subject to there being spaces and accommodation available.

In the event of a Development Proposal (DP) being approved, transport assistance will be provided to a suitable school of the parents'/guardians' choice if there is no suitable school within two miles from their home. [EA's Transport Policy].

The following table illustrates there is capacity in nearby schools to accommodate pupils from the school. If required, schools can make an application for a temporary variation to their enrolment number to accept pupils from a closing school.



Alternative Provision

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

Source: Local schools

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



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Section 4 – Next Steps



Roles and Responsibilities



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CCMS - reviews the consultation responses and if agreed by CCMS' Education Provision Committee, submits a Development Proposal (DP) to the EA.

Education Authority (EA) - issues the proposal to affected schools and publishes the proposal to commence a two month statutory objection period.

Department of Education (DE) - after this is completed, the DE compiles and assesses all the relevant information before making a recommendation to the Minister, who considers the information and the DE's recommendation before making the final decision.

As this consultation phase of the process is the responsibility of CCMS, DE would not comment on the proposal at this time.





How to Respond to the Consultation

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CCMS is seeking your views on the proposal discontinue St Malachy's Primary School 31 August 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter and increase the admissions and enrolment of St Joseph's Primary School from 13/91 to 15/105 on 01 September 2027 or as soon as possible thereafter.

CCMS would encourage you to respond by **01 May 2026** using the online version of the Pre-Publication Consultation questionnaire via:

- [Strangford Kilclief Consultation Response](#)

The link to this is on the website along with the other consultation documents.

- **Or alternatively by e-mail:**

strangfordkilclief@ccmsschools.com

Please indicate in your response if you are a:

- - Parent/Guardian/carer of a pupil at one of the schools;
- - 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

