

**From the Interim Permanent Secretary
and HSC Chief Executive**



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Dear Daniel

Memorandum Of Reply on Mental Health Services

Thank you for your letter dated 16 January 2026, in which you have requested a further update to the Memorandum of Reply, outlining the current position in respect of all recommendations, and detailing how the PAC recommendations will be addressed by the recent deliverability review and resulting work, including timescales for delivery against the recommendations. You have also requested an update on waiting times, work undertaken in schools and for the committee to have sight of the Reset Report and the EY report on the Community and Voluntary sector.

Please find the requested update on the PAC recommendations attached. A table has been provided setting out the position in relation to each recommendation, with some grouped together where they relate to the same workstream.

Also attached are the Reset Report and the Community and Voluntary Workforce review.

Waiting times

SPPG continue to review the validity of data provided via Encompass in conjunction with Trusts. At this point we cannot provide an update on waiting lists and waiting times based on the current confidence levels being reported.

Work within Schools

The Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Wellbeing in Education Framework, jointly funded by the Department of Health and the Department of Education, was launched in February 2021. Since its introduction, a wide range of important projects and pilot programmes have been delivered through this Framework, each aimed at strengthening the emotional and mental wellbeing of pupils across Northern Ireland.

A key strand of this work is the Department of Health led Emotional Wellbeing Teams in Schools (EWTS) project, which focuses on building capacity around social-emotional wellbeing and ensuring post-primary schools are aware of appropriate pathways for support.

In its first year (2023/24), the project worked with 46 schools and engaged 34,000 pupils. During 2024/25, it expanded to reach 55,000 pupils across a further 70 post-primary schools. For the current academic year (2025/26), the programme is expected to run in 49 post-primary schools, including Education Other Than at School (EOTAS), with the remaining 51 schools scheduled for delivery in 2026/27.

Complementing this, the REACH (Resilience in Education, Assisting Change to Happen) programme, delivered through the Education Authority's youth service, supported approximately 8,000 pupils in more than 100 schools in 2023/24, helping young people aged 6 to 19 develop emotional resilience, improve learning readiness, and strengthen positive mental health.

Schools have also benefited from the Being Well Doing Well programme, which supports them to review and embed emotional health and wellbeing practices. A total of 130 schools participated in 2023/24, with 160 projected to take part in 2024/25; the programme has already reached full capacity for the 2025/26 school year.

Further support for younger pupils is provided through RISE (Regional Integrated Support for Education), a health-led, multi-professional early intervention service for pupils up to Primary 7. While the KS2 service is currently available only in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area, resources for education staff are accessible online via the RISE KS2 website.

Taken together, these programmes aim to strengthen early intervention and preventative support in school settings. This approach is already having a strong reach across the sector, with over 50% of 1,110 education settings (including nursery, primary, post-primary, and special schools) engaging with at least one Framework-funded project during 2023/24. The intention is that by equipping children and young people with the right support at an early stage, the number of referrals to statutory services will reduce over time as their needs are addressed earlier and more effectively.

For 2024/25, the Department of Education committed £3.84m, alongside £1.43m from the Department of Health, bringing total joint investment to £5.27m to support the continuation of these initiatives. Unfortunately, despite this commitment, a funding shortfall of £1.1m in the 2024/25 academic year meant that several projects had to be scaled back.

For example, the Text-a-Nurse service was reduced by 50% and concluded in March 2025; the School Nursing pilot ended in December 2024; and the planned School Staff Wellbeing project could not proceed. These decisions reflect the challenging financial climate rather than the value or effectiveness of the projects themselves.

The Department of Education has now begun a review of the Framework and its associated projects during the 2025/26 academic year. This review will help determine how best to sustain and strengthen support for children and young people moving forward, ensuring that the resources available are targeted where they can have the greatest impact.

I trust you find this response helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Farrar".

MIKE FARRAR

Encs