

Ms Aoibhinn Treanor  
Clerk to the Committee for Education  
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30 March 2026

Dear Aoibhinn

## **SL1 - THE EDUCATION (SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANS) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2026**

The Department of Education (DE) proposes to make a Statutory Rule, The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026. DE proposes to make this rule under powers conferred on it by Article 13(3) of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, as it relates to school development plans in grant-aided schools.

The Statutory Rule is subject to **draft negative resolution** before the Assembly.

### **Purpose of the Statutory Rule**

The proposed Rule will revoke and replace The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 and associated Schedule in its entirety.

### Context

Article 13(2)(b)(i) of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 requires the Board of Governors (BoGs) to prepare, and from time to time revise a School Development Plan (SDP). In preparing the plan, the BoGs must consult the school principal and is required to consider any guidance given by the Department of Education (DE), the Education Authority (EA) and (in the case of a Catholic maintained school) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). The BoGs must also consider the findings of any inspection as part of the SDP process.

This overarching primary legislation also requires the Department to make secondary legislation in the form of regulations to:

- a) prescribe the matters to be dealt with by a school development plan;
- b) prescribe the period for which a plan is to have effect;
- c) prescribe the manner in which a plan is to be published;

d) provide for the revision of a plan.

### Review of School Development Planning

Following a Departmental review, the Education Minister has approved the Department's proposals for change to the SDP process. A core objective of the proposals is to alleviate unnecessary bureaucratic burdens associated with the planning process and ensure that the process has greater impact.

The review found that a considerable amount of bureaucracy stemmed from the requirement for School Development Plans to include all of the matters listed in the Schedule of the Regulations and to undertake action planning across the next three academic years. This was considered to limit the ability of schools to take account of the strengths and challenges within their individual contexts and drove schools to focus on the end product (and the production of excessively lengthy and detailed documents) rather than a robust and continuous process of self-evaluation.

An [Executive Summary](#) of the review findings and agreed recommendations was published on the Department's website.

As a result, the Department intends to revoke and replace the regulations on this matter (The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010).

Moving forwards, it is intended that the School Development Plan (SDP) will be a living document, setting out a strategic forward look across the forthcoming three year period with a set of actions developed annually for the immediate year ahead only.

Upon commencement of the new Statutory Rule, every SDP shall be prepared in line with Department of Education guidance and should include a brief overview of the following:

- a. the school's vision and ethos;
- b. the school's context;
- c. the evaluation and evidence that informed the SDP;
- d. the school's key areas of focus across the next three years as informed by (c);
- e. a set of actions to be delivered in the forthcoming academic year only.

In addition to the above, the new Statutory Rule will confirm that:

- i. The period of the SDP will be for three years.
- ii. The school must monitor and review the progress made during each school year against the plan and revise it as necessary.
- iii. The school should revise the plan:

- Annually, in respect of (e), the set of actions for the forthcoming year;
  - Every three years, in respect of a - d;
  - No later than six months following the publication of an inspection report.
- iv. The plan must be published on the school's website and a copy provided to EA on request.

### **Consultation**

A public consultation was not undertaken on the proposals. However, the proposals stem from a review of the SDP process which included extensive engagement with a range of school leaders across all sectors and phases and with key delivery bodies including the EA, CCMS, sectoral support bodies and the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Implementation of the review, to include the co-design (with school leaders) of new guidance, is also a key commitment agreed with teacher unions, as outlined in the Heads of Agreement drawn up as part of the pay agreement in March 2025.

### **Position in Great Britain**

The proposed Rule applies to Northern Ireland only.

### **Equality Impact**

An Equality Screening Exercise has been carried out and the policy screened out.

### **Regulatory Impact**

The Rule has no impact on businesses, charities, social economy enterprises or voluntary bodies.

### **Financial Implications**

There is no cost to making the Regulations.

### **EU Implications**

None.

### **Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**

The proposed draft Rule does not infringe any of the provisions of section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which requires that it is compatible with Convention Rights and retained EU law.

### **Operational Date**

It is proposed that the Rule will come into operation on 1 August 2026. When the Rule, together with the Explanatory Memorandum has been laid at the Assembly Business Office, the Business Office will submit copies to the Committee.

You will wish to bring this matter to the attention of the Education Committee. I would appreciate confirmation as soon as possible that the Committee is content or if it requires further briefing.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Platt', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**George Platt**  
**Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer**

cc  
Human Rights Commission  
Legislative Programme Secretariat.