

# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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**Paul Givan, Minister**  
Rathgael House, Balloo Road  
Bangor, BT19 7PR

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**Cathy Mason MLA**  
**Parliament Buildings**  
**Ballymiscaw**  
**Stormont**

3 April 2025  
AQW 24601/22-27

Cathy Mason MLA has asked:

To ask the Minister of Education to detail (i) the criteria used to determine how Pupil Allocation Number is allocated; and (ii) whether the criteria differs between statutory and non-statutory settings.

ANSWER

Pupil Allocation Numbers (PAN) are only applicable to non-statutory pre-school settings.

The EA has written to all non-statutory providers setting out in detail the criteria for the allocation of PANs and the review process. A copy of this letter has been placed in the Assembly library.

Statutory pre-school settings are not allocated a PAN, but rather they are set an admissions and enrolment number via a legislative process as set out in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. Unlike non-statutory

settings, statutory settings cannot change the number of places offered to reflect either an increase or decrease in demand without following the relevant legislative processes.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Paul Givan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

**Paul Givan MLA**  
**Minister of Education**

7 February 2025

Dear Pre-School Provider

**Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP), Pupil Allocation Numbers**

The Pupil Allocation Numbers for your setting will be uploaded to the portal today. I have attached for your information (Appendix 1), the criteria used to set the allocation for all non-statutory settings for September 2025. These criteria are applied consistently and fairly, with the aim of facilitating stability across the entire pre-school sector. You will be aware that the Pre-School Standardisation Programme (PSP) was established in 2024 to progress the aim of transitioning, over a period of time, all pre-school education provision funded under the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) to 22.5 hours per week (full-time). The Minister of Education approved 106 pre-school settings to transition to full-time from September 2025. As expected, the popularity of full-time provision has led to an overall increase in applications for these settings. It is important to remember that full-time and part-time provision operating side by side has been a feature of our system for several years and is currently the position in many local areas. This is not a new situation being created by standardisation. We also know that parents take a wide range of factors into account when selecting their preferences for pre-school settings; not just session length.

It should be noted that the Minister of Education has been clear that settings that have transitioned to the standardised session length will not be given preferential treatment by the EA above those yet to transition, in the allocation of funded places. In practice, this means that while the EA has increased places in funded settings to meet an overall shortfall of provision in an area, it has done so irrespective of the session length offered by the setting.

You will note from section (b) of the attached document, that there is only a limited number of criteria that can facilitate changes to a PAN during the Admissions process. Please do not contact the PSEP team to request any changes other than for these specific reasons.

Finally, the Education Authority wishes you well as the portal opens and you begin your selection of applicants.

Regards

Chris Scott  
Chairman, Pre-School Education Group (PEG)  
Pre-School Standardisation Programme Director

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**Education Authority**

40 Academy Street, Belfast, BT1 2NQ

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## Appendix 1

### Criteria for the allocation of Pupil Allocation Numbers (PANs)

#### a. Provisional PAN allocations (when Stage 1 application period closes)

- For the majority of settings, the provisional PAN will be based on the uptake of funded places as reported in October of the previous year. For settings that were not allocated a PAN in the previous year, PSEP will base their calculation on the average of the three most recent PANs allocated over the past five years.

Changes to the provisional PAN may be made if any of the following criteria apply to the individual setting:

- The need to address areas of under-provision. This applies in areas where demand for pre-school places (as indicated by first preference applications at Stage 1) exceeds available places in statutory and non-statutory settings. If an increase of places in the area is deemed necessary, the total number of additional places will be apportioned equally across all non-statutory settings in the area that have the capacity to facilitate an increase to their PAN.
- The need to address areas of over-provision. This applies in areas where available places in statutory and non-statutory settings exceeds demand for pre-school places (as indicated by first preference applications at Stage 1). If a decrease in places in the area is deemed necessary and where possible, the total number of decreased places will be apportioned equally across all non-statutory settings in the area that have the capacity to facilitate a decrease to their PAN.
- The PAN for an Irish Medium pre-school setting will be increased to accommodate all first preference applications up to a maximum of the registration number, unless such an increase would displace applications from another Irish Medium pre-school setting.
- Settings with no other provision within a 5-mile radius (rural settings) will have the PAN increased to accommodate all first preference applications up to a maximum of the registration number.
- The minimum provisional PAN to be allocated will be 8.
- Changes to the provisional PAN will be subject to any “Cap” on numbers previously notified by a setting.

#### b. Increases to a PAN during the Admissions process (Stage 1 and 2)

An increase to a PAN may be considered in the following circumstances:

- Multiple births, i.e. twins/triplets.
- Following a request from Social Services eg. Child Looked After.
- Security reasons.
- To facilitate a child who has a Statement of Special Educational Needs.
- Following notification of closure of a setting in the PSEP.

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c. Changes to a PAN when the Admissions process closes (end of Stage 2)

A change to a PAN may be considered in the following circumstances:

- When a child has not secured a place during the Admissions process (parent has engaged in all stages of the process). Requests for additional funded places may be granted following assessment of the availability of places in the local area of the pre-school provider making the request. The local area is defined as a 5-mile radius of the setting, and 2-miles in the cities of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry.
- A child has moved to Northern Ireland from another jurisdiction.
- A child has changed home address during the process.
- Following a request from Social Services eg. Child Looked After.
- Security reasons.
- To facilitate a child who has a Statement of Special Educational Needs.
- Following notification of closure of a setting in the PSEP.

A decrease to a PAN may be considered in the following circumstances:

- The uptake of pre-school places will be monitored throughout the process. A decision to reduce PANs may be taken if the number of available places at the end of the process significantly exceeds demand.

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