Audit of Inequalities

March 2018

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1.0. Executive summary

1.1. Age
- There are 171,612 pupils in primary schools (years 1 – 7);
- 140,413 pupils are enrolled in post primary schools;
- 23,825 pupils in funded pre-school education; this is 92% of three year olds in the population;
- More than one quarter of young people in Northern Ireland live in the 25% most deprived wards, however in both Belfast and Derry and Strabane District Councils this figure stands at more than 50% of young people;
- Approximately 100,000 pupils in all schools in Northern Ireland are entitled to free school meals and this represents about three in ten of all pupils;
- There is an attainment gap of 17.6% in children entitled to FSM (71.8%) achieving 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C compared with children not entitled to FSM (89.4%); and
- More than one third of young people from Northern Ireland live in communities that have been defined as rural.

1.2. Gender
- Under the education system in Northern Ireland, girls perform better than boys;
- There is an attainment gap of 7.4% between boys (64.2%) and girls (71.6%) in achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A* - C or equivalent, including GCSE English and Mathematics. This represents a continuing decline from almost 10% since 2011/12;
- The attainment gap between males and females begins in primary school and continues throughout schooling to GCSE and A-Level;
- Just over half (50.2%) of female school leavers went on to higher education, compared with just over a third (34.7%) of male school leavers;
- 77.5% of female FSME pupils achieved 5 or more GCSEs (including equivalents) at grades A*-C compared with 65.7% of males, a gap of 11.8 percentage points (2016-17);
- Females have a lower share of the enrollees in STEM (Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology) subject areas in higher education;
- Transgender pupils reported that their experience in post primary school had a negative or very negative impact on attainment (38.5%), attendance (41.5%) and career planning (35.9%); and
- 73.8% of trans pupils experienced a negative or very negative impact on their emotional wellbeing and a majority of trans respondents to research (63.1%) felt that transgender issues had been handled badly or very badly.
1.3. Disability (including Special Educational Needs)

- The disaggregation of data, between those with an SEN and those with a disability and no SEN is poor;
- Annual spending on SEN is increasing and in 2015-16 was over £250 million, of which £217 million related to EA expenditure;
- 21.3% of children with a statement of SEN achieved 5 A* - C GCSEs, including Maths and English;
- 38.5% of children with SEN who do not have a statement achieved 5 A* - C GCSEs, including Maths and English (excluding special and independent schools);
- 8.4% of people with a disability hold a degree or equivalent qualification, compared with 23.7% of non-disabled people;
- The attainment gap, for those obtaining 5 GCSEs A*-C between SEN 1-4 pupils and those with no SEN decreased from 46 to 23 percentage points;
- Similar to non-SEN or disabled pupils, females outperform their male counterparts in all measures of attainment, for each SEN group;
- Children and young people with an SEN or a disability are much more likely to experience incidents of bullying than their non-disabled peers;
- 70% of children and young people who suffer mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age; and
- 29% of 16 year old respondents had serious personal emotional or mental health problems, with a much higher percentage (43%) from ‘not well off backgrounds’ doing so.

1.4. Sexual Orientation

- There is a lack of quantitative data available on the sexual orientation of young people in the education system;
- LGB young people often self-exclude from school;
- Almost 1 in 5 LGB people (19.4%) said that their experience as an LGB pupil in post-primary school had an impact on their attainment;
- Just over 1 in 5 LGB people (21.9%) said that their experience as an LGB pupil in post-primary school had an impact on their attendance;
- 15% said that their experience as an LGB pupil in post-primary school had an impact on their career planning;
- 48.4% of LGB people had experienced bullying as a result of their sexual orientation;
- A majority of LGB research respondents (66.5%) said that they did not feel welcomed or valued within the school; and
- 61.3% experienced a negative or very negative impact on their emotional wellbeing.
1.5. Dependents

- There are approximately 30,000 young carers in Northern Ireland.
- Young carers often miss out on opportunities that other children have to play and learn, they are often bullied they become isolated and are often afraid to ask for help.
- During 2016-2017, 136 young mothers were supported by the School Aged Mothers programme.
- At 31 March 2016, 2,890 children were looked after in Northern Ireland.
- Two thirds (66%) of looked after children attained at least one GCSE/GNVQ at grades A* to G; this compared with close to 100% of the general school population.
- 54% of looked after children in 2014/15 achieved 5 GCSEs grades A* - C, compared to 83% of the general school population.
- 27% of looked after children have a statement of educational needs compared to 5% of the general population.
- 39% of children from abusive homes / homes with domestic violence had difficulties in school.

1.6. Ethnicity

- Traveller children comprise 0.3% and Roma children 0.08% of the pupil population in Northern Ireland schools.
- Of the 1,002 Traveller pupils, 80% were in receipt of free school meals compared to 30% of the general population.
- From 2003/4 to 2009/10 only 11 Traveller children achieved 5 GCSE’s A*-C, none went on to higher education.
- Of the 283 Roma children, in Northern Ireland schools, 74% are entitled to free school meals compared to 30% of the general population.
- Traveller pupils continue to have exceptionally poor educational outcomes with only 10 out of 105 school leavers over the five year period 2003/04 to 2008/09 achieving at least 5 (A*-C) GCSEs and none of these went onto higher education.
- The absence rate for children from a minority ethnic background fell from 5.7% to 5.5% while the rate for white children remained unchanged in 2015/16.
- Concerns of racist bullying have been raised for minority ethnic pupils.
- In 2016/17 there were approximately 14,000 newcomer pupils in schools accounting for 4.1% of the school population.
- In 2016/17, there are more than 80 languages spoken by pupils, with Polish and Lithuanian being the most common behind English; and
- Young people in Northern Ireland are three times more likely to make contact with members of minority ethnic groups in school than through social events or through work.
1.7. Religion
- Protestants continue to have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE and A Level. Fewer Protestant school leavers enter higher education that do Catholics; and
- Statistics on educational underachievement have identified concerns about under achievement among working class boys and in particular Protestant working class boys.

1.8. EA Workforce
- In terms of participation, there is a persistent employment gap between people with and without disabilities, inequalities with women with dependants, lone parents, carers, Irish Travellers and also those aged 18-24 have higher unemployment rates than those aged 25 year and older; and
- In terms of sustainability of employment, there are issues for women, lone parents with dependants, carers and migrant workers.

2.0. Introduction
Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) requires the Education Authority to comply with two statutory duties.

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 nine equality categories:

- religious belief;
- political opinion;
- racial group;
- age;
- marital status;
- sexual orientation;
- men and women generally (gender);
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.
The second duty, the Good Relations duty, requires that public authorities in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different:

- religious belief;
- political opinion; and
- racial group.

The Education Authority’s (EA) Equality Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission on 26 February 2016. The Scheme contained a commitment to conduct an Audit of Inequalities which would inform the development of an Equality Action Plan.

The Commission, in its guide, ‘Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - A Guide for Public Authorities’ defines an Audit of Inequalities as a systematic review and analysis of inequalities which exist for service users and those affected by a public authority’s policies.

The Guide for Public Authorities recommends that:

*In order to effectively demonstrate that a public authority has paid due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations through the implementation of its equality scheme, a public authority should develop action measures/action plans to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.*

The Audit of Inequalities is used to identify the range of key inequalities which EA’s functions are intended to, or are likely to, address. The Equality Action Plan details the action measures and timeframes which have been put in place to address identified inequalities.

The Equality Action Plan has been drafted within the parameters of EA’s Resource Allocation Plan. The plan is aligned to the EA Strategic Plan 2017-2027. Our first plan will therefore cover a four year period (2018-2022) followed by a further five year period (2022-2027). Progress will be measured annually with opportunities to amend the plan should this be necessary during each monitoring cycle.

### 2.1. Profile of the Education Authority

The Education Authority was established on 1 April 2015 under the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. It replaced the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and the Staff Commission as a regional authority with responsibility for the delivery of education services in Northern Ireland.

EA is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy, responsible under legislation for ensuring that efficient and effective primary and secondary education and educational services are available to meet the needs of children and young people and for ensuring the provision of efficient and effective youth services.
We work in partnership with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG); the Transferor Representatives’ Council (TRC); the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE); the Governing Bodies Association NI (GBA) and the Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC).

EA’s duties and responsibilities include:

- providing a wide range of functions for the funding and delivery of local education and youth services;
- ensuring there are sufficient schools providing primary and post-primary education to meet the needs of all the people in Northern Ireland;
- providing all the finance for controlled schools (i.e. grant-aided schools under the direct control and management of EA);
- equipping, maintaining and meeting other running costs of maintained schools (i.e. grant-aided schools which are not under the direct control and management of EA);
- providing milk and meals, free books, and free transport for eligible pupils;
- enforcing school attendance;
- providing a range of support services for schools;
- securing the provision of youth service facilities;
- providing a curriculum advisory and support service to all schools; and
- managing the third level student grant function for the Department of the Economy.

EA has a budget of approximately £1.6 billion annually which includes revenue and capital. It is Northern Ireland’s largest employer with over 39,000 staff including teachers, school-based support staff, office based and other non-school-based staff.

As the employing authority for teachers in controlled schools, EA is responsible for the management of the teaching appointments processes for teachers and principals and the provision of learning and development opportunities for teachers.

In addition, EA has duties in relation to Shared Education and the community use of school premises. In April 2016, EA also subsumed the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI) and became the funding authority for voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools.

A long term change programme is currently being implemented to manage the transition from the previous five autonomous Education and Library Boards, which had responsibility for delivery of education services, to a single Education Authority. In time, the result will be that education policies are delivered in a consistent manner, regardless of which school you attend or where you live.
EAs structure comprises five directorates and the Chief Executive’s Office.

Each Directorate is responsible for a range of services and functions.

**Human Resources and Legal Services**
The HR & LS Directorate is responsible for HR Policies and Procedures; Employee Welfare; Recruitment; Employee Records; Equality Monitoring; Equal Opportunities; Equality and Human Rights; Legal Services; Industrial and Employee Relations and HR Advisory Services for Schools.

**Operations & Estates**
The Operations and Estates Directorate is responsible for Capital Development; Estate Services and Maintenance; Energy Management and Efficiency; Health and Safety; Catering Service; Emergency Management and Planning; Free School Meals and Clothing; Transport Service; Schools Admissions; Corporate Planning; Student Finance and Corporate Planning and Performance.

**Finance & ICT**
The Finance and ICT Directorate is responsible for Budgetary Control; Management Accounting; Financial Accounts; Financial Planning; LMS; Payroll and Pensions; Accounts Payable; Accounts Receivable; Cash Management; Income Generation; Reprographics; Registry and ICT.

**Education**
The Education Directorate is responsible for School Improvement; Professional Learning and Development; Strategic Area Planning; Community Planning; Shared Education and Community Use of Schools.

**Children & Young Peoples Services**
The Children and Young People’s Services Directorate is responsible for Special Education Operations and Provision; Pupil Support Services; Pupil Welfare Services (including Child Protection); Youth Service and Early Years.

**Chief Executives Office**
The Chief Executive’s Office is responsible for Strategic Leadership and Operational Delivery; Change Management; Financial Management and Governance; Communications and Internal Audit. The Chief Executive is EA’s Accounting Officer.
3.0. Methodology

In conducting the Audit of Inequalities, EA has examined an extensive range of information sources, both external (relevant research and engagement with stakeholders, etc.) and internal (user feedback, statistical information, complaints, etc.).

The development of this Audit is timely, as there has been a range of detailed research undertaken recently by a variety of statutory agencies into inequalities in education. These reports offer up to date and valuable data and information assisting EA to establish baselines and measure progress of our work in tackling inequalities.

The Audit is informed by a wide range of research and evidence, as well as direct engagement. Recent evidence we considered includes:

- the Equality Commission’s Draft Statement ‘Key Inequalities’ in Education (October 2015) and updated version August 2016 and revised October 2017;
- NICCY ‘Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper’ (July 2017);
- The Northern Ireland Audit Office report into Special Educational Needs (June 2017); and
- DE funded research into Post-Primary School Experiences of 16-21 Year Old People Who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT) (April 2016) – published October 2017.
- EA Youth Service Regional Assessment of Need 2017-2020

In addition to desktop assessments the Audit and Action Plan was also supported by a series of engagement events. EA offered to meet individually (or collectively by sector) with all the organisations on our Section 75 contact list. One to one meetings were held with all those that requested a meeting, including:

- Angel Eyes NI
- Children’s Law Centre
- Focus The Identity Trust
- RNIB / Guide Dogs NI
- SAIL
- Save the Children
- Sinn Fein
- The Equality Coalition
- The Rainbow Project

These meetings were also complemented by a Joint Consultative Forum (JCF) event which focused on the Audit of Inequalities, to further elicit views from consultees. Tailored focus groups also took place directly with children and young people via a number of school councils, and the Northern Ireland Youth Service Youth Councils.

In addition to this, EA staff and Board members were engaged in the process through internal structures including the:
3.1. Identifying Inequalities
An assessment of the key educational inequalities was carried out across the nine section 75 categories alongside a comprehensive assessment of the functions of EA and the services we deliver.

During the research for the Audit a number of factors became apparent. These were reiterated and confirmed by the engagement and input to the process from a range of stakeholders, across the community and voluntary sector and by children and young people.

Firstly, it is clear that the inequalities exist across the education system that extend beyond the remit of the Education Authority alone, and therefore would require a wider approach to tackling those inequalities.

EA therefore took a decision to carry out a whole system analysis of inequalities, based primarily on the comprehensive work of the Equality Commission, NI Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Department of Education and reflect this in our Action Plan.

Secondly, it became clear that there are common themes across education that relate to all or most of the section 75 groups. It was therefore prudent and more effective to develop actions under themes, in order to tackle whole system inequalities.

This is reflected in our action plan, which seeks to tackle inequalities under identified themes across education. Where EA, within our remit and functions, can take action and tackle inequalities, we will. Where a wider educational approach is required, either in addition to, or as a standalone approach, then EA will seek to adopt that approach and engage our partners to undertake actions as part of a wider partnership.

In developing the Action Plan, the Authority has considered what inequalities can be addressed through the exercise of our specific functions, as well as those that require a wider sectoral approach, and what opportunities exist to promote equality of opportunity and good relations for the nine equality categories. The Action Plan describes the desired outcomes the Authority aims to achieve along with related performance indicators and timescales.

It is important to highlight that the Action Plan has been designed to be flexible, adaptable and responsive to changing circumstances and needs.
4.0. Key Inequalities

4.1. Age

Based on the annual school enrolments for 2016/17\(^1\), there are 171,612 pupils in primary schools (years 1 – 7) and this has risen by almost 3,000 pupils this year to the highest total since 2000/01. In total 140,413 pupils are enrolled in post primary schools, dropping to the lowest level since records began thirty years ago. There are 23,825 pupils in funded preschool education; this is 92% of three year olds in the population.

The Education Authority provides services for children and young people across our Pre-School / Nursery, Primary School and PostPrimary School sectors. Our Vision, as articulated in our Strategic Plan 2017-2027, is ‘to inspire, support and challenge all our Children and Young People to be the best that they can be. We seek to do this by providing a high quality education for every child.’\(^2\)

According to the Education Authority’s Youth Service Regional Assessment of Need, significant numbers of young people live in areas of multiple deprivation as identified by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The Multiple Deprivation Measure is made up of seven key indicators including, income deprivation, employment deprivation, health deprivation, education deprivation, proximity to services, crime and disorder and the living environment. More than one quarter of young people in Northern Ireland live in the 25% most deprived wards, however in both Belfast and Derry and Strabane District Councils this figure stands at more than 50% of young people\(^3\).

Approximately 100,000 pupils in all schools in Northern Ireland are entitled to free school meals and this represents about three in ten of all pupils\(^4\).

Free school meal entitlement (FSME) is one of the measures used as an indicator of deprivation experienced by a school’s population. It should be noted however that whilst there is a link between FSME and performance, many other factors can affect school assessment and examination results. Some schools with a high proportion of pupils with FSME perform well whilst others with a proportionally lower number of pupils with FSME perform less well.

In 2016/17, 71.8% of Year 12 FSME pupils achieved 5 or more GSCE’s (including equivalents) at grades A*-C. In the same year, 89.4% of non-FSME pupils achieved this indicator, a gap of 17.6 percentage points.\(^5\)

There is growing evidence across the UK and internationally that there is a strong link between poverty (low income) and cognitive outcomes in the early years.

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\(^1\) Pupil enrolment Statistics 2016/17, Department of Education Northern Ireland (Revised March 2017)
\(^2\) Interim Strategic Plan 2017-2027, Education Authority
\(^3\) Regional Assessment of Need 2017-2020, Education Authority Youth Service
\(^4\) Department of Education: Annual Enrolments at grant aided schools in Northern Ireland 2017/18
\(^5\) Department of Education: Year 12 and Year 14 Examination Performance at Post- Primary Schools in Northern Ireland 2016/17
Young children growing up in poverty are much less likely to do as well as their peers in meeting a range of early learning outcomes at age five, and this early gap can persist right through school.  

Internationally, socio-economic background is a key predictor of underachievement and in Northern Ireland it has a greater influence on achievement at post primary than on average across OECD countries. Factors within the control of the education system include classroom teaching, which has the greatest in-school influence on outcomes, followed by school leadership.

The EA Youth Service Regional Assessment of Need 2017-2020 also highlights that young people living in rural areas face particular barriers. More than one third of young people from Northern Ireland live in communities that have been defined as rural. In Newry, Mourne and Down more than half of all young people, in Mid Ulster almost two thirds of young people and in Fermanagh and Omagh almost three quarters of all young people live in rural areas. For many children and young people, living in a rural community presents many challenges. There is a lack of facilities, such as cinemas or clubs, which their peers in urban areas take for granted. This isolation from services is often exacerbated by a lack of transport options and hidden poverty.

4.2. Gender

Under the education system in Northern Ireland, girls perform better than boys. The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People recently published a position paper; Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper, July 2017, in which she highlights the attainment gap between boys and girls.

The report highlights that an attainment gap of 7.4% between boys (64.2%) and girls (71.6%) in achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A* - C or equivalent, including GCSE English and Mathematics. While the attainment gap is quite wide, it represents a continuing decline from almost 10% since 2011/12.

Removing GCSE Maths and English, the attainment gap between girls (87%) and boys (79.6%) in achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A* - C or equivalent is also 7.4%.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland recently published their updated Statement of Key Inequalities in Education –2017, in which they highlight that not only do males continue to have lower levels of attainment than females, but this begins in primary school and continues throughout schooling to GCSE and A-Level.

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6 Tackling the Poverty-Related Gap in Early Childhood Learning in Northern Ireland, Report, Save the Children (2018)
10 Regional Assessment of Need 2017-2020, Education Authority Youth Service
11 Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, July 2017
12 Statement of Key Inequalities in Education, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, October 2017
The attainment gap increases, to the determent of males, as pupil’s progress through both primary and secondary education. The Equality Commission notes that this is a key inequality which is ongoing and persistent\textsuperscript{13}.

As noted by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland\textsuperscript{14}, in 2014/15 just over half (50.2\%) of female school leavers went on to higher education, compared with just over a third (34.7\%) of male school leavers. This is a gap of 15.6\% and is likely to therefore have an impact on the composition of the future graduate workforce.

Females entitled to free school meals perform better than their male counterparts in all performance indicators. In 2016/17, 77.5\% of female FSME pupils achieved 5 or more GCSEs (including equivalents) at grades A*-C compared with 65.7\% of males, a gap of 11.8 percentage points. This gap is 4.6 percentage points wider than that reported for all pupils and has increased by 0.4 percentage points since 2015/16, due to a greater increase in the performance of female pupils compared to male pupils.

The Department of Education and the Department of Justice funded a five year longitudinal study (2006-2011) carried out by The Centre for Young Men’s Studies at the University of Ulster (now Ulster University); Taking Boys Seriously, A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Male School Life Experiences in Northern Ireland, 2012. The report sought to increase understanding of a range of issues, including those factors that may contribute to male academic underachievement.

The report offered a range of observations and recommendations that they believed to be of value to the education system. Observations included:

- Teachers believed that barriers to learning were usually evident by, and within Year 8, and had been present in primary school;
- There is an absence of gender specific approaches to teaching, possibly due to a lack of evidence of their effectiveness;
- A higher number of boys reported abnormal levels of conduct, hyperactivity and peer and social problems than UK averages, and understanding and appreciating age specific issues associated with this is crucial;
- The ways in which adolescent males construct their understanding of masculinity and being a man and why certain boys do not seek emotional support is crucial;
- Schools physical environment was strongly associated with levels of misbehaviour and negative attitudes towards learning and the very formal nature of the classroom left a significant number of boys feeling bored\textsuperscript{15};

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid
\textsuperscript{15} Dr Ken Harland, Sam McCreedy; Taking Boys Seriously A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Male School-Life Experiences in Northern Ireland, 2012; Centre for Young Men’s Studies in Collaboration with Youth Action Northern Ireland
Some of the barriers to learning from the boys perspective included:

- Falling behind in coursework and feeling they couldn’t catch up;
- The lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills being carried forward into secondary school are not being attended to early;
- Getting bored easily and allowing this to show itself in disruptive behaviour
- Poor teacher / pupil relationships;
- A lack of connection between subjects and boys everyday lives;
- Boys from lower academic class streams perceiving they were not given the same opportunities to learn as those from higher academic class streams;
- The lack of belief that success in school would actually lead to a job; and
- The pressures that start to build around Year 10 and carry on through to Year 12 and their need for dedicated support during this time.\textsuperscript{16}

Whilst girls perform better than boys, there is some evidence that gender stereotypes may be determining subject choices or how schools are promoting various subjects or vocations amongst boys and girls.

Thorough engagement with children and young people there is anecdotal evidence of primary schools setting up ‘construction areas for the boys’ or boys being discouraged from ‘playing kitchen’ as early as pre-school. The out workings of this may be that, for example, females have a lower share of the enrollees in STEM (Maths, IT, Engineering and Technology) subject areas in higher education\textsuperscript{17}. These subject areas are likely to lead to higher waged, more secure forms of employment in future.

The ‘Grasping the Nettle’ (2013) report identified the key issues which face transgender young people in education\textsuperscript{18}. The report found that information regarding issues of gender identity, gender dysphoria and transgender are absent from the NI revised curriculum which makes it unlikely therefore that trans people would get access to appropriate information in school. Trans young people reported that how they were able to express themselves, i.e. whether a school facilitates a young person to express themselves in terms of their gender identity or not, had a huge impact on stress levels, anxiety and discomfort for the young person. In turn, it could cause self-exclusion through truancy.

The report also found that experiences of transphobic bullying were commonly found to involve sustained verbal abuse. Young trans people not offered support were left profoundly isolated and suffered depression, self-harm and had suicidal thoughts\textsuperscript{19}.

Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACCE) were funded by the Department of Education to research the Post-Primary School Experiences of 16-21 Year Old People Who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT) which was published in October 2017.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid
\textsuperscript{17} Key Inequalities in Education, Draft Statement, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, October 2015
\textsuperscript{18} Ruari-Santiago McBride, ‘Grasping the Nettle: The Experiences of Gender Variant Children and Transgender Youth Living in Northern Ireland’ Institute of Conflict Research 2013
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid
The report highlights that transgender respondents reported that their experience in post primary school had a negative or very negative impact on attainment (38.5%), attendance (41.5%) and career planning (35.9%).

A majority (73.8%) of trans respondents experienced a negative or very negative impact on their emotional wellbeing and a majority of respondents (63.1%) felt that transgender issues had been handled badly or very badly.

Key issues identified in the research for trans young people included a lack of visibility; trans people don’t tend to be represented in the school curriculum, which links with a lack of understanding of the needs of trans young people, including use of names, uniforms, toilets and changing facilities and use of pronouns. Sexual health education was also identified as ignoring the needs of trans people, with respondents reporting that they largely taught themselves about sexual health issues. Wider teaching and learning needs of educators and school based staff was also identified, with participants saying that teacher training is an important step in improving the experiences of trans young people in schools.

At present, little is known about the exact rates of educational attainment of transgender young people, or their progression and their destinations after leaving education, but from what is known about the barriers they face in their educational journeys, much more could be done centrally in order to give schools and educational institutions directives on how to support transgender young people and deal with transphobic bullying and discrimination.

4.3. Disability (including Special Educational Needs)
Disability discrimination in education is covered by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO) as amended. This places duties on bodies responsible for the provision of education to, among other things:

- Make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to all policies, procedures and practices to ensure that a disabled pupil is not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled pupils (this duty is both anticipatory and a reactive duty);

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20 65 respondents identified as transgender. The authors note that the percentages should be treated with caution due to the small numbers of respondents. 
21 Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACEC) were funded by the Department of Education to research the Post-Primary School Experiences of 16-21 Year Old People Who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT) April 2016 – published October 2017.
22 Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACEC) were funded by the Department of Education to research the Post-Primary School Experiences of 16-21 Year Old People Who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT) April 2016 – published October 2017.
23 Burns et al, Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland, Summary Report, March 2015, Queen’s University Belfast.
• Work towards making school life and the education experience more accessible to disabled pupils and prospective pupils, for example, in terms of premises, the curriculum and information.\(^{24}\)

Not all children with a disability have a Special Educational Need (SEN) and not all children with an SEN have a formal statement of SEN issued by the Education Authority. Special Educational Needs can affect a child’s ability to learn and children may require help to achieve their potential.

The disaggregation of data, between those with an SEN and those with a disability and no SEN, has been raised by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland as a gap which needs attention.\(^{25}\) Annual spending on SEN is increasing and in 2015-16 was over £250 million, of which £217 million related to EA expenditure.\(^{26}\) This is a considerable spend. Despite this children with a disability or Special Educational Need do not perform as well as children with no disability or SEN at GCSE or A-Level and are therefore less likely to go on to higher education.

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People recently published a position paper; Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper, July 2017,\(^{27}\) in which she highlights the attainment gap between those with a disability or SEN and those with no disability or SEN. The report states that:

• More than 76000 pupils (22.4%) of the school population have some form of SEN;
• More than 17000 (5%) have a statement of SEN;
• The number of people with SEN has been steadily rising;
• 21.3% of children with a statement of SEN achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs, including Maths and English;
• 38.5% of children with SEN who do not have a statement achieved 5 A*-C GCSEs, including Maths and English (excluding special and independent schools);
• 8.4% of people with a disability hold a degree or equivalent qualification, compared with 23.7% of non-disabled people.\(^{28}\)

The Equality Commission’s recent Statement of Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland report highlights that the attainment gap, for those obtaining 5 GCSEs A*-C between SEN 1-4 pupils and those with no SEN decreased from 46 to 23 percentage points. While SEN 5 pupils have also experienced increases in attainment, it has not been to the same extent as SEN 1-4 pupils.\(^{29}\)

\(^{24}\) Disability discrimination law in Northern Ireland – a short guide; Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, April 2011
\(^{25}\) Statement of Key Inequalities in Education, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, October 2017
\(^{26}\) Special Educational Needs, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office, June 2017
\(^{27}\) Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, July 2017
\(^{28}\) Ibid
\(^{29}\) A five-staged approach is used in identifying and dealing with a child’s special needs. Stages 1 and 2 are carried out by the child’s school and parents should be kept informed of what is happening. At stage 3 the school may request outside help, e.g. from an educational psychologist. Statutory assessment is the focus of stage 4. This is where the involvement of the Special Education Section of EA begins. The issuing of a statement involves the Authority either in making additional resources available to a mainstream school or indicating that a change of placement may be necessary for the child, this is Stage 5.
\(^{30}\) Statement of Key Inequalities in Education, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, October 2017
Moreover, similar to non-SEN or disabled pupils, females outperform their male counterparts in all measures of attainment, for each SEN group.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland considers the lower attainment levels of students with any SEN or disability to be a persistent inequality\textsuperscript{31}. The 2008 NI Commissioner for Children and Young People review on children’s rights raised some concerns about the ability of mainstream schools to meet the additional needs associated with SEN\textsuperscript{32}. The Northern Ireland Audit Office report into Special Educational Needs (2017) also highlighted that mainstream schools are finding it increasingly difficult to strike a balance that allows all children to learn at a different pace and often in a different way\textsuperscript{33}.

It remains the case that children and young people with an SEN or a disability are much more likely to experience incidents of bullying than their non-disabled peers\textsuperscript{34}. A report by the previous Education and Library Board’s (2010) also demonstrated a clear link between incidents of bullying and SEN\textsuperscript{35}.

There are a range of issues and barriers which may be faced by young people with a learning disability including limited social contact, limited access to transport and bullying. Other barriers can include having access to information, being included in youth programmes and other services, lack of choice, environmental factors such as noise and negative attitudes and perceptions. It has also been observed that parents understandably may be overprotective of their disabled children until they are assured that they are in a safe environment where their needs are met\textsuperscript{36}.

In their submission to the consultation on the Children and Young People’s Strategy 2017-2027, the British Deaf Association (BDA) highlighted that their experience demonstrates that if a child has a variety of needs, it is important that they are all supported equally without one need taking precedence. An example they cite is one in which a deaf child with a learning disability being allocated classroom assistant support, but with the classroom assistant not being equipped with the appropriate communication skills\textsuperscript{37}.

Through engagement with a range of community and voluntary groups in the disability sector as part of the Audit development, this issue was raised several times. The needs of the child in terms of building greater independence was not being adequately addressed, this view was expressed by RNIB and Guide Dogs NI who said that is some cases the classroom assistant is coming from a health and safety perspective and not encouraging the independence of the child. This can have a negative impact on the child’s development.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid
\textsuperscript{32} NICCY 2008 Children’s Rights: Rhetoric or Reality, NICCY
\textsuperscript{33} Special Educational Needs, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office, June 2017
\textsuperscript{34} The Nature and Extent of Bullying in the North of Ireland, Department of Education, October 2011
\textsuperscript{35} Northern Ireland Education and Library Boards (2010); It’s Good to Listen – Experiences of Pupils with Special Educational Needs
\textsuperscript{36} Regional Assessment of Need 2017-2020, Education Authority Youth Service
\textsuperscript{37} Consultation Response to the consultation from the NI Executive and the Department of Education on ‘Children and Young People’s Strategy 2017-2027” BDA, March 2017
Visually impaired charities also raised issues of the visual impairment not, in some occasions, featuring on the statement, as the young person has other needs which are considered more important.

Charities raised concerns with, and stressed the need for reform of, the statementing process, both in terms of timeliness and also outcome. The system they stress, particularly for visually and deaf / hard of hearing pupils, does not facilitate and promote independence with the young person, nor allow for the classroom assistants to develop specialist skills. They stress the need for system transformation which enables a whole system approach. The NI Audit Office stressed that while a wide range of training is offered, there remains a desire for further comprehensive training for all school staff, including an enhanced focus on SEN as part of initial teacher training\textsuperscript{38}.

The BDA reported that some teacher’s low expectations of young deaf pupils is transferred to many young people who report that they are ‘not expected to achieve’\textsuperscript{39}.

Mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and conduct disorder affects around one in ten young people. However, 70% of children and young people who suffer mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age\textsuperscript{40}.

The Northern Ireland Young Life and Times survey reported that 29% of 16 year old respondents had serious personal emotional or mental health problems, with a much higher percentage (43%) from ‘not well off backgrounds’ doing so\textsuperscript{41}.

The Children’s Commissioner also raised the issue of anxiety and children’s mental health in her Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper. The Commissioner outlines that ‘anxiety in schools is an area which has repeatedly been raised through NICCY’s engagement with hundreds of children and young people... Children’s mental health is an extremely serious issue’... The Commissioner goes on to note that, ‘Northern Ireland remains the region in the UK with the highest child suicide rate. Incidents of self-harm have significantly increased among young people in Northern Ireland and are higher than in the Republic of Ireland and a number of other UK regions’\textsuperscript{42}.

For the Commissioner, the well-being of children and young people in schools is therefore a serious issue\textsuperscript{43}.

\textsuperscript{38} Special Educational Needs, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office, June 2017

\textsuperscript{39} Consultation Response to the consultation from the NI Executive and the Department of Education on ‘Children and Young People’s Strategy 2017-2027’ BDA, March 2017

\textsuperscript{40} https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/c/children-and-young-people

\textsuperscript{41} Schubotz, D. & McMullan, G. (2010). Mental and Emotional Health of 16-year olds. Belfast: Accessing Research Knowledge, Queens University Belfast and University of Ulster

\textsuperscript{42} Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, July 2017

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid
4.4. Sexual Orientation

In their statement of Key Inequalities in Education, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland highlight a lack of quantitative data available on the sexual orientation of young people in the education system. From existing data, they highlight that the young lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people in school are more likely to be bullied than those that report an opposite sex attraction\(^44\).

The statement goes on to cite research by Queen’s University Belfast, which demonstrates that consequently, LGB young people often self-exclude from school\(^45\).

The Department of Education published research in October 2017; Post-Primary School Experiences of 16-21 Year Old People Who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT). This report confirms those experiences around bullying and exclusion, and also explores schools ability to address issues and LGB young people’s emotional wellbeing.

The report highlights that:

- Almost 1 in 5 LGB people (19.4%) said that their experience as an LGB pupil in post-primary school had an impact on their attainment;
- Just over 1 in 5 LGB people (21.9%) said that their experience as an LGB pupil in post-primary school had an impact on their attendance; and
- 15% said that their experience as an LGB pupil in post-primary school had an impact on their career planning.

The report also went on to highlight that:

- 48.4% of LGB people had experienced bullying as a result of their sexual orientation;
- 36.1% of LGB people said that teachers had presented and managed LGB issues badly or very badly, while a similar percentage (35.7%) said that this had been presented or managed well or very well; and
- A majority of respondents (66.5%) said that they did not feel welcomed or valued within the school.

On young LGB people’s emotional wellbeing, the report stated that:

- 61.3% experienced a negative or very negative impact on their emotional wellbeing.

On access to information, a majority (92.1%) of LGB people who took part in the research stated that there was insufficient information available in relation to LGB&T issues within their post-primary school.

It is also worth noting that the report highlights that a majority (69.4%) of young LGB people had spoken to other pupils about their sexual orientation and many felt supported by their peer group.

\(^{44}\) Statement of Key Inequalities in Education, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2017

\(^{45}\) Burns et al, Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland, March 2015, Queen’s University Belfast.
While they were less likely to have spoken to a member of staff about their sexual orientation, a majority of those that did reported being supported or very supported by the response.46

4.5. Dependents
The Education Authority has identified young people with caring responsibilities, school aged mothers and looked after children and young people under the category of Dependents.

Young Carers
It is estimated that there are approximately 30,000 young carers in Northern Ireland.47 Although there is little evidence available on the long term impact caring has on a young person’s educational achievement, according to Barnardo’s:

- young carers often miss out on opportunities that other children have to play and learn;
- they are often bullied; and
- they become isolated and are often afraid to ask for help as they fear letting their family down or being taken into care.48

The 2015 report Young Carers too49 by Paula Devine and Katrina Lloyd, reported that the 2010 Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey asked 16 year olds living across Northern Ireland questions about their caring responsibilities. Within the survey, a young carer was defined as a 16 year old whose life is significantly affected by caring for a family member who has an illness or disability or has a problematic use of drugs or alcohol.

10% of the young people that took part in the survey indicated that they provided care for someone. A slightly higher proportion of females than males had caring responsibilities at the time of the survey (11% and 8% respectively), although this difference is not statistically significant. They also asked if young people had had caring responsibilities in the past but don’t have them now, and this was the case for one in ten young people. In summary, this means that approximately one in five 16 year olds taking part in the survey have had caring responsibilities at some time in their lives.

Within the 2010 YLT survey, when asked if they would describe themselves as young carers, 9% of 16 year olds indicated that they would and 3% said they did not know. Care was provided to grandparents (42%); siblings (32%), father (27%); mother (11%) and others (10%).

46 Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACEC) were funded by the Department of Education to research the Post-Primary School Experiences of 16-21 Year Old People Who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT) April 2016 – published October 2017
47 Carers Trust Northern Ireland https://carers.org/country/carers-trust-northern-ireland/
48 www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/young_carers.htm
49 Devine, Paula and Lloyd, Katrina QUB, Young Carers Too, ARK Research Update 76, 2015.
School Aged Mothers

During 2016-2017, 136 young mothers were supported by the School Aged Mothers programme. The aim of the School Age Mother’s programme is to maximise the opportunities for young women who are pregnant and parenting to continue in compulsory education and beyond, and by so doing enhance their educational attainment, opportunities for ongoing training and future employment.

The SAM programme addresses the educational, health, social and personal needs of the young women drawing on Education Authority support and other statutory and community resources. Social inclusion is promoted through the delivery of peer support and group work programmes.

Looked after children

Looked after children are defined as those in the care of, or who are provided with accommodation by, a Health and Social Care Trust.\(^{50}\)

At 31 March 2016, 2,890 children were looked after in Northern Ireland. This was the highest recorded number of looked after children since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, representing 67 children per 10,000 of the child population. Of those children looked after, a slightly higher proportion were male than female (53% and 47% respectively).\(^{51}\) This was similar to the gender split in the general children’s population.

Two thirds (66%) of looked after children attained at least one GCSE/GNVQ at grades A* to G; this compared with close to 100% of the general school population.

54% of looked after children in 2014/15 achieved 5 GCSEs grades A* - C, compared to 83% of the general school population and 27% of looked after children have a statement of educational needs compared to 5% of the general population.\(^{52}\)

Department of Education Statistics on Pupil attendance 2015/16 state that Looked after Children enrolled in postprimary schools have higher rates of both overall absences than other pupils (9.6% of total half days compared with 6.5%)\(^{53}\). While absence rates for other pupils have remained static from 2014/15, there was a reduction in absence figures for looked after children in 2015/16. In 2014/15, such pupils had an overall absence rate of 10.3% and an unauthorised absence rate of 5.2%. The rate of unauthorised absence among looked after children remained more than double that of other pupils at 4.7% compared with 2.1% for all other pupils.

\(^{50}\) Department of Education (2012) Looked after children [online] Available at:

\(^{51}\) Children’s Social Care Statistics 2015/16

\(^{52}\) Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, July 2017

\(^{53}\) Pupil attendance Statistics 2015/16, Department of Education Northern Ireland
Looked after Children and young people are also more likely to have been excluded or suspended from school and a study of 66 young people in care revealed that 41 had been suspended for more than 60 days. Looked after Children and young people also tend to move between schools frequently and often in difficult circumstances. Overall, this lack of consistency is cited as a contributory factor to poor educational achievements and issues around emotional well-being.54

**Children from abusive homes/ experiencing domestic violence**

Research has shown that domestic violence impacts upon all areas of children and young people’s lives. CAADA (now Safe Lives) research (In Plain Sight: 2014) drawing upon 877 cases of children exposed to domestic violence revealed that 39% had difficulties in school.

The impact on education is different for every child and is wide ranging, with many children and young people finding it difficult to concentrate because of what is going on at home. These children and young people are at risk of underachieving and at worst, disengaging completely from education. Many children and young people exposed to violence within the home struggle with low self-esteem and confidence and as such, do not reach their full potential within the education system.

The designated officers for child protection in the Education Authority are a statutory partner mandated to the Northern Ireland Domestic Abuse Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC).

The Authority gathers information about the children from the designated teachers in schools and then revert to schools with the information from the MARAC to support the safeguarding plan if needed. EA keep data on the numbers of referrals and report annually.

Women’s Aid in their Strategy *Our Place – Safe Space, A strategy for children and young people (2012 – 2017)* Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland, describe their model for working with children and young people and highlight the importance of having a safe space.

They highlight the adverse effects on children and young people as a result of domestic violence. It can impact upon all areas of life, including, health, education, the development of relationships, recreation and social activities.55

The effects of domestic violence on children are wide ranging and will differ for each child. A wealth of research has identified domestic violence as an underlying theme behind social issues such as, school dropout and exclusion, youth homelessness and young people engaging in risk taking behaviour. Children and young people have varying levels of resilience and all agencies that come into contact with children and young people who experience domestic violence have a responsibility to build upon this resilience.

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54 Burns et al, Education Inequalities in Northern Ireland, Summary Report, March 2015, Queen’s University Belfast.

Women’s Aid enable teachers to deliver two specific programmes linked to the NI Curriculum, namely “Helping Hands” - a preventative programme for primary school aged children at key stage two and three and “Healthy Relationships” - a preventative programme for post primary schools which enables young people to explore the differences between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships. It encourages young people to gain a greater understanding of rights within a relationship and to fully comprehend the issues of equality and respect.

4.6. Marital Status
There is little research within this area. The majority of research concentrates on higher and further education.

There is limited evidence on any issues arising within this Section 75 category for children and young people.

4.7. Ethnicity
Traveller and Roma children and young people

Traveller children comprise 0.3% and Roma children 0.08% of the pupil population in Northern Ireland schools. 56

In 2015/16 there were 1,002 enrolments of Travellers pupils and 283 enrolments of Roma pupils in pre, primary, special and post primary schools in Northern Ireland. Of the 1,002 Traveller pupils, 80% were in receipt of free school meals compared to 30% of the general population.

From 2003/4 to 2009/10 only 11 Traveller children achieved 5 GCSE’s A*-C, none went on to higher education. Of the 283 Roma children, in Northern Ireland schools, 74% are entitled to free school meals compared to 30% of the general population57. According to the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People position paper; Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper, July 2017

- A disproportionate number of children from both communities are entitled to free school meals (80% of Travellers and 74% of Roma children compared to just over 30% of all children) and attendance levels are also low (70% for Traveller children and 74% attendance levels for Roma children compared to 95% attendance for all children)58.

- Statistics on attainment levels are not published due to the small numbers, however information that is available shows Traveller pupils continue to have exceptionally poor educational outcomes with only 10 out of 105 school leavers over the five year period

56 Pupil enrolment Statistics 2016/17, Department of Education Northern Ireland  (Revised March 2017)
57 Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, July 2017
58 Ibid
2003/04 to 2008/09 achieving at least 5 (A*-C) GCSEs and none of these went onto higher education\textsuperscript{59}.

The Equality Commission for NI outline that there is a continued relationship between low educational attainment and other types of social exclusion and marginalisation experienced by children from the Traveller community and also Roma children.

Research suggested that the level of underachievement was greater within these categories. According to the Report, the Equality Commission have identified “Children from the Traveller community and Roma children have some of the lowest levels of attainment of all equality groups” as a key inequality\textsuperscript{60}.

Over the period 2007/08 until 2014/15, anywhere between 50% to 80% of Irish Traveller children left school with no GCSEs. This is in contrast to the proportions of all school leavers with no GCSEs which have reduced from 3.5% in 2007/08 to 0.5% in 2014/15\textsuperscript{61}.

Department of Education Statistics on Pupil attendance 2015/16 state that Irish Traveller children attending primary school have a markedly higher absence rate than any other ethnic group. They missed 26\% of total half days, compared with a rate of 26.4\% in 2014/15. The absence rate for children from a minority ethnic background fell from 5.7\% to 5.5\% while the rate for white children remained unchanged in 2015/16.

At 32.5\% of total half days, the overall absence rate in post primary schools continues to be higher for Irish Traveller children than for any other ethnic group. This compares with 6.5\% for white children and 5.8\% for children from a minority ethnic background. Unauthorised absences among Traveller children in 2015/6 stood at 20.9\% of total half days. At post-primary school level, the figures indicate that there are particular attendance issues involving Irish Traveller children – 67.1\% of all such pupils enrolled in post-primary schools are absent for at least 15\% of total half days\textsuperscript{62}.

\textit{Children and young people from BME backgrounds}

Concerns of racist bullying have been raised for minority ethnic pupils with over two fifths of minority ethnic students having been the victims of racist bullying and harassment\textsuperscript{63}.

\textsuperscript{59} Report of the Taskforce on Traveller Education to the Department of Education, (August 2011).
\textsuperscript{60} Statement of Key Inequalities in Education, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2017
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid
\textsuperscript{62} Department of Education Statistics Pupil attendance rates 2015/16
\textsuperscript{63} NCB, NI and ARK YLT (2010) Attitudes to Differences: Young People’s attitudes to, and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland. P55 Table 16-42\% of 16 year olds from minority ethnic groups stated that they had been victims of racist bullying and harassment in school
Newcomer children and young people

The term 'newcomer' is used to refer a pupil who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher\textsuperscript{64}.

In 2001/02 there were 1,336 newcomer children in NI’s schools – 0.5% of the total school population. In 2016/17 there were approximately 14,000 newcomer pupils in schools accounting for 4.1% of the school population. This has risen by more than 5,200 pupils from five years prior.\textsuperscript{65}

There is a rise year on year in the number of pupils whose first language is not English. In 2016/17, there are more than 80 languages spoken by pupils, with Polish and Lithuanian being the most common behind English.

Research has found that some schools found themselves facing challenges that are relatively new and relate to the limited formal educational experiences of some groups of newcomer pupils. These pupils have been identified mainly from the Somali and Roma communities, whose relative numbers have risen in recent years\textsuperscript{66}.

Challenges related to the effects of a limited experience of formal education, in particular literacy and numeracy levels, attainment in other academic subjects, understanding of school norms and in some instances rise to concerns around behaviour and attendance.

Equality Commission research highlights a lack of recognition of diversity in the needs of Newcomer children, a lack of understanding of the Northern Ireland education system by Newcomer parents and unrecognised multiple inequalities such as SEN, which may present barriers to educational equality\textsuperscript{67}.

According to the report Attitudes to Difference - Young people’s attitudes to and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland, young people in Northern Ireland are three times more likely to make contact with members of minority ethnic groups in school than through social events or through work. Schools therefore have an important role to play in shaping attitudes and encouraging positive relationships between pupils from minority ethnic groups and migrants and those from Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{64} Department of Education Northern Ireland Website
\textsuperscript{65} Pupil enrolment Statistics 2016/17, Department of Education Northern Ireland  (Revised March 2017)
\textsuperscript{66} The integration of newcomer children with interrupted education in Northern Ireland schools (A Belfast based case study) Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership, September 2014
\textsuperscript{67} Statement of Key Inequalities in Education, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2017
\textsuperscript{68} Attitudes to Difference - Young people’s attitudes to and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland, NCB NI and ARK YLT, March 2010
4.8. Religion

Statistics and research on educational achievement have identified concerns about under-achievement among Protestants. The ECNI statement on Inequalities in Education highlights that “Protestants continue to have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE and A Level. Fewer Protestant school leavers enter higher education that do Catholics”69.

Despite overall increases in the attainment levels of all students, there is a persistent and overarching trend of higher proportions of Catholics achieving the education targets in all three areas (5+ GCSEs (A*-C), 5 +GCSEs (A*-C) including Maths and English and 2+A Levels (A*-E) than both Protestants and ‘Others’70. This is a persistent inequality.

When looking across the gender and religious categories, and measures of social disadvantage, Protestant male pupils entitled to free school meals (a measure of social disadvantage) have the lowest rates of attainment in respect to GCSE and A Level results71.

Statistics on educational underachievement have identified concerns about under achievement among working class boys and in particular Protestant working class boys.

The Department of Education, managed by EA, have implemented two programmes to specifically address the link between under-achievement and social deprivation, namely the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry – Bright Futures programmes. These are long term sustained interventions and operate across both controlled and maintained schools.

4.9. Political Opinion

The Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 created additional duties for the Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education. Within the Authority, Shared Education activity falls into three main categories:

(3) Shared Education Campus Projects

The Shared Education Campuses Programme aims to provide capital assistance to schools to facilitate and deliver shared educational facilities, enhanced educational facilities and shared educational campuses.

(2) DSC Shared Education Signature Project

Schools involved in the Signature Project were well established schools in ongoing joint classroom learning.

(3) Peace IV

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69 Statement of Key Inequalities in Education, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2017
70 Other refers to those who do not identity as Protestant or Catholic and therefore could include those of other/unknown religions and those of no religion.
71 Statement of Key Inequalities in Education, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2017
The Education Authority in partnership with Leargas led this project on shared education. The aim was to target schools that had not previously participated in shared education.

The Equality Commission Report 2017, recommends a move to a system of shared education across the education system. They believe this could better provide learners with shared awareness, understanding and experience of the value and range of diverse cultures, identities and background in Northern Ireland; whilst also enabling learners from different cultures/communities to experience a shared society\textsuperscript{72}.

With reference to the 2015 Northern Ireland Young life and Times Survey, nearly half of respondents (47\%) were in favour of government plans for greater sharing in education, 24\% were unfavourable and 29\% were neither favourable/ unfavourable.

When deciding on potential changes in education, most respondents felt government should prioritise widening subject choice irrespective of school (84\%), while least important should be saving money (22\%). Just over half of young people (51\%) had joined with other schools to share facilities or mix classes.\textsuperscript{73}

According to the Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education, Department of Education, Sept 2015; building on our existing educational structures, Shared Education offers the opportunity to create a more integrated education system in which children and young people from different community backgrounds can be educated together. Shared Education provides an overarching approach in which schools of all management types, including Integrated Schools, are encouraged and facilitated to provide further opportunities for the education together of our children and young people\textsuperscript{74}.

Shared Education has the potential to impact on raising educational standards and reduce underachievement, and deliver societal and economic benefits. As a consequence of schools collaborating, pupils benefit from enhanced curricular delivery.

\subsection*{4.10. EA Workforce}

In the Equality Commission draft statement, November 2017 Key Inequalities in Employment in Northern Ireland, the Commission identified twelve key inequalities for both participation in employment and the sustainability of employment.

In terms of participation, they highlighted the persistent employment gap between people with and without disabilities, inequalities with women with dependants, lone parents, carers, Irish Travellers and also those aged 18-24 have higher unemployment rates than those aged 25 year and older.

In terms of sustainability of employment, the report references issues for women, lone parents with dependants, carers and migrant workers. In addition, they highlight the prejudicial attitudes both within and outside the workplace experienced by people with disabilities, Trans people, lesbian,

\textsuperscript{72} Statement of Key Inequalities in Education, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2017
\textsuperscript{73} Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey 2015
\textsuperscript{74} Sharing Works; A Policy for Shard Education, Department of Education, September 2015
gay and bisexual people, people from minority ethnic groups, migrant workers and those of different religious beliefs.\(^{75}\)

As the Education Authority is Northern Ireland’s largest employer with over 39,000 staff including teachers, school-based support staff and office based and other non-school-based staff it has a wide ranging make up of staff from across the Section 75 groups.

As the employing authority for teachers in controlled schools, EA is responsible for the management of the teaching appointments processes for teachers and principals and provision of learning and development opportunities for teachers.

EA is responsible in some way, for the development of all our young people, beyond the schools we manage into the wider education system and EA recognises that we rely on our people to deliver our services.

As the Education Authority continues its transformation into a regional organisation, the development of regional structures and services is ongoing. The legacy Education and Library Boards, as autonomous agencies in their own right, captured and maintained their own data on their own legacy systems. While significant work is ongoing to develop a single regional and standardised system, we recognise the data limitations we currently have in accurately reporting the 9 categories required. We are keen to migrate the data we have to our new systems while having the functionality to capture the necessary data we require as an employer and service provider, in the interim.

In our Strategic Plan 2017-2027 we have identified five Strategic Priorities that we believe will enable us to provide a high quality education to every child. Two of these strategic priorities are about:

- Developing all our people to carry out their jobs successfully; and
- Nurturing leadership across the EA to give clear direction in a dynamic and complex environment.\(^{76}\)

EA values the need for staff to be empowered and given the right tools to do their job. Moreover one of EAs core values is equality; we will promote equality of opportunity through our employment practices, service delivery and engagement activities.\(^{77}\) We are therefore keen to ensure that through our action plan, we have a fuller picture of the makeup of our workforce, and that we ensure all our staff, regardless of their background, will enjoy working for EA and be able to positively contribute to our vision.

Through our Strategic Plan we have committed to achieving a range of outcomes, including:

- Having a workforce that is highly capable, engaged and empowered;
- Having an organisation where people want to work;

\(^{75}\) Equality Commission NI Key Inequalities in Employment in Northern Ireland Draft Statement November 2017
\(^{76}\) Interim Strategic Plan 2017-2027, Education Authority
\(^{77}\) Ibid
• Developing people who work across boundaries as part of a multi-disciplinary team; and
• Ensuring we have highly capable leaders and managers who develop engaged and performing teams.\(^7\)

Our aim is to make the Education Authority an employer of choice for all our communities in Northern Ireland. This will also be reflected in our action plan.

As this Audit is a living document, it may be updated following the completion of EA’s first Article 55 review, which is due in 2018-19.

5.0. Key themes

Inequalities exist across the education system which extend in many respects beyond the remit of the Education Authority alone, and therefore would require a wider approach.

Through this audit we carried out a whole system analysis of inequalities and identified **common themes** across education that relate to all or most of the section 75 groups. These themes were consistently reinforced through our extensive engagement.

The broad themes that the Authority considers targeted actions to address key inequalities and advance equality of opportunity and good relations are:

5.1. Bullying (including cyber bullying)

Bullying is an issue that transcends many of the section 75 groups, with some pupils from particular backgrounds more susceptible to bullying. Children and young people should feel safe and welcome in their schools. There are higher instances of bullying, or likelihood of bullying for our minority ethnic pupils, lesbian, gay or bisexual pupils, pupils with SEN and or a disability and transgender young people.

As part of consultation for the EA Youth Service Area Plan for Cookstown, young people were consulted to ascertain what they see as the main issues impacting children and young people in society. The results of the findings were that bullying was ranked first. The Youth Council within that area carried out research with 2 post primary schools to explore the issues further and gain an insight into students’ safety, bullying issues and support received from schools.

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\(^7\) Ibid
5.2. Attainment/Achievement

There is clear evidence that there are inequalities regarding achievement, for specific groups of children and young people. Groups considered under this theme include - looked after children, children from minority ethnic backgrounds, including Traveller and Roma children, children with a disability and children entitled to free school meals (a measure of social disadvantage79).

This theme will also explore what achievement means for our children and young people and how we can measure success.

5.3. Access to education

Access to Education encompasses many issues that impact many of our section 75 groups. The areas of focus for this theme include special educational needs and access and achievement levels for Travellers, newcomers and school aged mothers.

5.4. Data and monitoring

Data gaps have been highlighted as a significant issue in terms of both enabling and measuring equality of opportunity. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Commissioner for Children and Young People have both raised the issue of data gaps and the need to disaggregate data as key issues for education. The Education Authority accepts the need for up to date and reliable data to ensure we can tackle inequalities and measure progress.

Improving data will be a key priority for the Authority.

5.5. Mental health/emotional wellbeing

Mental health and emotional wellbeing remains a significant issue for our children and young people, and how our schools respond to issues around anxiety, stress and depression can have a hugely positive or negative impact on the young person’s recovery and / or development.

The issue of mental health and wellbeing transcends many of the Section 75 groups, and some issues can be related back to young people’s experiences in school as a member of a particular community.

For the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, the well-being of children and young people in schools is therefore a serious issue80. It was also an issue raised by young people in our engagement through the Youth Service and with schools pupil councils.

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79 Entitlement to Free School Meals is calculated based on parental receipt of income support or Jobseekers Allowance, an annual taxable income of £16190 or less, or receipt of several other allowances or tax credits.

80 Educational Inequalities and Inclusion Position Paper, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, July 2017
5.6. EA Workforce

EA values the need for staff to be empowered and given the right tools to do their job. One of EAs core values is equality; we are keen to ensure that through our action plan, we have a fuller picture of the makeup of our workforce. We will ensure all our staff, regardless of their background, will enjoy working for EA and be able to positively contribute to the realisation of EA’s vision.

We have committed to achieving a range of outcomes, including:

- Having a workforce that is highly capable, engaged and empowered;
- Having an organisation where people want to work; and
- Developing people who work across boundaries as part of a multi-disciplinary team
- Ensuring we have highly capable leaders and managers who develop engaged and performing teams.81

Our aim is to make the Education Authority an employer of choice for all our communities in Northern Ireland. This will also be reflected in our action plan.

6.0. Equality Action Plan

The Equality Action Plan sets out the Education Authority’s (EA) response to this Audit of Inequalities. The Equality Action Plan is aligned to the EA Strategic Plan 2017-2027. We will therefore produce two plans. The first plan will cover a four year period (2018-2022) followed by a new plan, covering a further five year period (2022-2027). Progress will be measured annually with opportunities to amend the plan should this be necessary during each monitoring cycle. In its development, consideration was given to a review of existing priorities and consideration of new priorities.

The plan is a ‘live’ document and as such will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

The actions in the plan are reflective of actions and commitments included in the Education Authority’s Strategic Plan. A number of the actions relate specifically to the transformation of services and will be reviewed as part of the on-going programme of change.

The Equality Action Plan can be accessed on our website: www.eani.org.uk

7.0. Conclusion

The Audit of Inequalities is used to identify the range of key inequalities which EA’s functions are intended to, or are likely to, address. The Equality Action Plan details the action measures and timeframes which have been put in place to address identified inequalities.

81 Interim Strategic Plan 2017-2027, Education Authority
The Equality Commission, in its guide, ‘Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 - A Guide for Public Authorities’ defines an Audit of Inequalities as a systematic review and analysis of inequalities which exist for service users and those affected by a public authority’s polices.

The Guide for Public Authorities recommends that:

‘In order to effectively demonstrate that a public authority has paid due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations through the implementation of its equality scheme, a public authority should develop action measures/action plans to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.’

The Audit of Inequalities and associated Equality Action Plan will be kept under review and updated as appropriate to reflect new and emerging issues or changes in experiences for section 75 groups.
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