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Dear Dr Murrison

Thank you for your letters dated 2 and 3 April 2019 which sought additional information to inform your inquiry into education funding in Northern Ireland, and advised us to engage with the Northern Ireland Office to agree a process for responding to your final report.

In respect of your letter dated 3 April 2019, I can confirm that departmental officials have engaged with colleagues from the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Health on the co-ordination of responses to your final reports. I understand that the Northern Ireland Office will write to you separately about this.

With regard to your letter dated 2 April 2019, please see the following responses to the questions you raised.

1. *The reason for the additional £90.8m of resources allocated to the Department in the Spring Supplementary Estimates.*

The £90.8m of additional resources allocated to the Department in the Spring Supplementary Estimates relates to additional budget (resource and capital) cover of c£53.6m and an associated increased cash requirement of c£37.2m. Whilst the c£53.6m of additional budget cover represented increased spending power, the increased cash requirement did not.

2. *How much of the £66m allocated to shared and integrated education projects is money not previously allocated.*

The Chancellor announced £66m of immediate funding for shared and integrated education in Northern Ireland on 23 November 2018. This funding represents an allocation from the £500m for shared and integrated education and housing in Northern Ireland previously announced as part of the Fresh Start and Stormont House Agreements. The £66m has been made available to progress on-going capital projects at 23 shared and integrated schools.

3. Whether any of the £100m of capital funding eligible to be transferred to resource budgets in the 2018-19 budget was allocated to the Department of Education.

The 2018-19 budget position outlined by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in March 2018 included £100m of capital funding which was used to address resource pressures. This funding was not specifically allocated on a Departmental basis, but has enabled key services to be protected and preserved, reducing the level of cuts that may otherwise have been required across all Departments.

4. How many Development Proposals the Department has taken a decision on in 2018-19 and how many of these have been approved.

A total of **19** Development Proposal decisions were made in 2018-19, of which **17** were approved and **2** were not approved. Among these were decisions to close four small primary schools in order to facilitate one newly-established amalgamated school; one standalone primary closure; the opening of two statutory nursery units; eight changes to admission and enrolment numbers; and one school relocation.

5. How many teachers took early retirement through the Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme in 2018-19?

The Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme for 2018-19 offered the opportunity for up to 200 teachers to be released.

Whilst conditional notice was provided to 200 teachers to leave the profession, the Scheme saw 133 teachers exit, 49 at the end of February and 84 at the end of March 2019.

Further details of the scheme can be found on the Department's website – link below.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/investing-in-the-teaching-workforce-circular-201819-scheme-de-circular-201804.pdf>

6. The Department's current estimate of whether the Education Authority will overspend on its block grant in 2018-19 and if so the estimated level of overspend.

The Education Authority (EA) is working through the finalisation of the year end account processes and therefore the final position is not available at this stage.

7. What criteria the Education Authority failed to meet that resulted in it failing its CoPE accreditation and whether the EA has now met those criteria.

The Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) Accreditation Review that was completed in March 2018 made seven recommendations, five of which were designated as 'critical'. These are as follows:

- Operations and Estates Directorate should develop the governance structures, processes and documentation to support the effective management of change (Critical);
- Operations and Estates Directorate should capture the risk of delay in recruiting the Head of Procurement and develop appropriate contingency plans. (Critical);
- The CoPE should record the risk of non-compliance of contract management on goods and services contracts, consider whether any immediate mitigating actions are

needed, and put plans in place to see that the new organisation and supporting processes are implemented (Critical);

- EA would benefit from the development of a training strategy to identify any staff skills gap and ensure personal and professional development needs are met (Recommended);
- The CoPE should issue instructions to those schools not yet using iProcurement, so that all procurement activity can be captured on eTendersNI (Essential);
- The CoPE should develop its risk management identification, escalation and reporting processes (Critical); and
- The CoPE should record in the risk register the internal audit control compliance risk it is currently exposed to and should introduce short term mitigating control actions (Critical).

The EA has advised that six of the seven recommendations (five 'critical' and one 'essential') have been addressed, and that work is ongoing to address the one remaining recommendation which was 'recommended' by the Review Team. A further CoPE accreditation review will be required in due course.

8. *When does the Department expect to publish its Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2019?*

Subject to the certification by the Comptroller and Audit General the Department expects to lay the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2019 in the NI Assembly week commencing 1 July 2019 and to publish shortly afterwards.

9. *Update on implementing the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Audit Office's June 2017 report on Special Educational Needs.*

A Programme Board was established in August 2017, with representation from the Department of Education, the Education and Training Inspectorate and the EA, to provide governance for the implementation of NIAO Special Educational Needs (SEN) Report recommendations. Project and Action Plan teams were established, linking with key stakeholders as necessary.

This work is ongoing. Out of the 10 recommendations, three have been substantially achieved, one is on track for achievement and six are likely to be achieved with some delay, with progress being monitored by the Programme Board.

The NI Audit Office has indicated that it will be undertaking a follow up review in June 2019.

10. *Update on implementing the recommendations of the NIAO's October 2018 Financial Health of Schools report.*

The Department, in conjunction with the EA, established a Financial Health of Schools Project Team in January 2019, the aim of which is to ensure that arrangements are in place to address the recommendations contained in the NIAO report by 30 June 2019.

11. Update on the Department's review of school capacity and surplus school places.

The Department has information from over 75% of primary schools on how their accommodation correlates with both their approved and actual enrolments. This information is currently being reviewed and analysed and it is anticipated that a report summarising the findings on capacity in primary schools will be finalised by 31 May 2019.

Post-primary schools are considerably more complex due to the specialist accommodation required and timetabling arrangements. Given this complexity, and as the majority of surplus places are in primary schools, the Department does not intend to review capacity in post-primary schools.

Currently, a statutory Development Proposal (DP) is required to effect any significant change to a school's size or character. However, DE commissioned the EA and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), working closely with the other school sectors, to explore, develop and test a new process which could permanently reduce a school's approved numbers (to the established norm) without the need for a DP. The "*Resetting School Approved Admissions and Enrolment Numbers Pilot*" exercise is being progressed under DE's overarching Transformation Programme Delivering Schools for the Future Project. The pilot is due to conclude in June 2019 and, if content with its findings, it is DE's intention to approve the revised numbers for each pilot school and integrate the new process into the Area Planning cycle.

The out-workings of this pilot aim to introduce a more efficient process to 'right size' schools not only to better reflect their characteristics but also the availability of places, and consequently the perceived number of surplus places, in an area.

12. Update on the work of the Surpluses and Deficits Working Group.

The EA established a Surpluses and Deficits working group in 2015-16. Significant progress has been made with 35 of the 41 EA actions complete or deemed substantially complete as at October 2018. The EA is reconvening the working group early in 2019-20.

13. Update on the work of the Tackling Educational Disadvantage Team.

The Tackling Educational Disadvantage (TED) Team was established in May 2017 and is responsible for a number of policies and programmes aimed at tackling educational disadvantage. These include:

- Extended Schools programme
- Full Service programmes in North and West Belfast
- West Belfast Community Project
- West Belfast Sharing the Learning Programme
- North Belfast Primary Principals Support Programme
- Oversight of Neighbourhood Renewal Programmes (funded by DfC)
- Pupil Attendance Strategy
- Parental Engagement Campaign

The Department has been aware for some time of the link between poverty and poor educational outcomes and consequently has prioritised not only raising attainment but simultaneously closing the gap. This is a significant challenge for any society but particularly challenging in areas where there are large pockets of deprivation.

For that reason, the Department is continuing to prioritise interventions to support children facing the greatest challenges, working closely with arm's-length bodies, schools, early years and childcare providers, the youth service and other education stakeholders to identify and disseminate the most effective strategies to meet the needs of children and young people.

I trust you will find this information useful, and if you require anything further please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to receiving the Committee's final report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D A Baker". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

DEREK BAKER