EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026

S.R. 2006 No. 106

1. Introduction

1.1. This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Department of Education (DE) to accompany the Statutory Rule (details above) which is laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

1.2. The Statutory Rule is made under The Department of Education in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 13(3) of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, as it relates to school development plans in grant-aided schools, and is subject to the negative resolution procedure.

2. Purpose

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

3. Background

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

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

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

3.4. As a result, the Department has revoked and replaced the regulations on this matter (The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010).

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

3.6. Upon commencement of the new Statutory Rule, every SDP shall be prepared in line with Department of Education guidance and should include a brief overview of the following: a.the school's vision and ethos; b. the school's context; c. the evaluation and evidence that informed the SDP; d. the school's key areas of focus across the next three years as informed by (c); e.a set of actions to be delivered in the forthcoming academic year only.

3.7. In addition to the above, the new Statutory Rule confirms that: i. The period of the SDP will be for three years. ii. The school must monitor and review the progress made during each school year against the plan and revise it as necessary. iii. The school should revise the plan annually, in respect of (e), the set of actions for the forthcoming year; every three years, in respect of a - d; and no later than six months following the publication of an inspection report. iv. The plan must be published on the school's website and a copy provided to EA on request.

4. Consultation

4.1. A public consultation was not undertaken on the proposals as this was considered unncessary in terms of a wider public interest. However, the proposals were developed through extensive engagement with a range of school leaders across all sectors and phases and with key delivery bodies including the EA, CCMS, sectoral support bodies and the Education and Training Inspectorate.

5. Equality Impact

5.1. Consideration has been given to compliance with section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Department considers that this matter will not have a differential impact on any of the section 75 categories and, on this basis, the measure was screened out.

6. Regulatory Impact

6.1. A regulatory impact assessment was not considered necessary.

7. Financial Implications

7.1. There is no cost to making the Regulations.

8. Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

8.1. The proposed legislation is considered compatible with section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

9. EU Implications

9.1. Not applicable.

10. Parity or Replicatory Measure

10.1. This measure does not replicate, nor is there a requirement to maintain parity with, legislation in other administrations.

11. Additional Information

11.1. Not applicable.