



**Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools  
Operational Plan 1: 2022-24**

**Overview Document:  
Proposal to seek approval of  
Specialist Provision in Mainstream Classes  
(to be read in conjunction with the school specific consultation document on  
Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools - SPiMS)**

### Operational Plan 1 (2022–2024)

Consistent with the *Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools* and the *Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Special Education Provision* and, through the associated *Operational Plan 1: 2022-24*, a number of short and medium term workstreams for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools were identified. It is expected that the Operational Plans and workstream actions will dovetail with the Education Authority's *Annual Plan of Arrangements* when it comes fully into effect as part of the implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2016) and Code of Practice. The *Annual Plan of Arrangements* can be accessed on: [EA Annual Plan of Arrangements](#).

The priorities within *Operational Plan 1: 2022-24* are to ensure that there is sufficient capacity as well as seeking to address geographical, sectoral and linguistic inconsistencies, however, there still exists Special Educational Needs pressures and demand for places continues to grow on an annual basis. Therefore, the Area Planning Team will continue to work with the Special Educational Needs Placements Team to ensure that the Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools classes are considered as part of a robust consultation process under the new agile and flexible arrangements for establishing, changing and/or closing Specialist Provision classes in Mainstream Schools.

Area Planning will continue to consider these priorities in ensuring that there are a sufficient number of Specialist Provision in Mainstream School places across the region. This will be achieved through working with all stakeholders and Area Planning will continue to take forward consultations for establishing, changing and/or closing SPiMS as and when required, consistent with the *Framework, Strategy and Operational Plan 1*.

Approval for to establish, change and/or close a SPiMS will be taken to the Education Authority's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee following consideration of responses received through a consultation process. The Education Authority will provide a *Statement of Assurance* to the Department of Education to confirm that consultation has taken place.

Section A below provides a background and context for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools.

### Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools

#### Section A

##### 1 Introduction

The Education Authority has experienced a significant increase in demand for specialist provision places in mainstream schools across the region in recent years. This has placed a high demand on the limited number of places available, not least in the areas where there are significant geographical and sectoral inconsistencies in relation to the accessibility of provision for some pupils. In areas where formally approved provision is not available, and to meet the assessed needs of pupils in a timely fashion, the Education Authority has funded teachers and classroom assistants to support pupils recommended for such provision. This is a temporary measure, referred to as “resource provisions”. Therefore, the Education Authority is proposing to consult upon the following:

- Specialist Provisions to be made permanent;
- Specialist Provision is established where Key Stage pathways have been identified (ie Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 or Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4) to meet the needs of an area; and
- Specialist Provision for Early Years and Foundation (SP EYF) classes on a fixed term basis until 30 June 2025. Specialist Provision (SP EYF) classes are for pupils presenting with a profile of Severe Learning Difficulties, operating in partnership with a Special School and/or Education Authority Services.

In October 2021 the Minister of Education endorsed the *Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools*. Alongside this endorsement, the Minister also endorsed the associated Specialist Provision in Mainstream Pilot. This allows for a new process for a more flexible and agile approach that will facilitate the establishment, closure or change of Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools without the need for the publication of a statutory Development Proposal, but retaining a robust consultation process.

The *Framework* sets out the Education Authority’s vision, rationale and delivery plans for Special Educational Needs for those pupils who have been recommended a small group setting as part of a specialist provision class in a mainstream school across Northern Ireland and aims to improve the outcomes of children with Special Educational Needs by providing a greater level of consistent and equitable provision across the region.

##### 1.1 Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Special Education Provision

*The Special Education Strategic Plan 2022-27: Planning for Special Education Provision* is the first regional plan to focus on creating special education provision that ensures all pupils in special schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. It sets the strategic direction of Special Education Area Planning for the next five academic years 2022-27 and was informed by the *Special Schools Area Planning Framework* and the *Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools*.

The Plan states that to meet the needs of children and young people with a Statement of Special Educational Need and for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools, Area Planning will seek to provide:

- availability at their nearest suitable mainstream school with specialist provision;
- pupils with equitable access to excellent provision that meets the individual needs of the child or young person;
- pathways in specialist provision for all ages and stages of development;
- for changing educational, physical and medical needs; and
- inclusivity, providing opportunities for education alongside mainstream peers.

## Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (SPiMS) – Operational Plan 1: 2022-24

In meeting the aim and objectives of Area Planning, four Key Themes and associated actions have been developed in order to drive forward the changes required to realise the vision and mission:

Increase parity of access for all to appropriate pathways

Promote cooperation, collaboration and sharing between all Special Schools and Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools across all Sectors (as appropriate)

Maximise resources and capacity

Inform strategic infrastructure planning and investment

### 2 Operational Plan 1: 2022 - 2024

The *Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Special Education Provision*, Operational Plan 1: 2022-24, published on 1 September 2022, translates the vision of the strategy into practical area planning actions through short and medium term work streams.

The Operational Plans will enable the Education Authority to bring forward proposals to establish, close or change specialist provision, to dovetail with the Special Educational Needs *Annual Plan of Arrangements*, when it is agreed and fully implemented. The Operational Plans will seek to bring forward proposals for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools to meet capacity needs as well as to address geographical, sectoral and linguistic inconsistencies.

#### 2.1 Objectives for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools

The objectives for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools are to:

- Ensure consistency with the *Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools* and confirm continued need. This includes consistency of language used, replacing the former terms, 'Learning Support,' and 'Autism,' with the new terms, Specialist Provision (Learning) and Specialist Provision (Social Communication);
- Ensure consistency with the *Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022-27*, and to dovetail with area planning for special schools, in order to assess impact on places in special schools in providing for children and young people to attend their nearest suitable school;
- Ensure that the new process provides opportunity for interested parties (including affected schools) to have their views considered before final decisions are taken; and
- Develop recommendations for the Education Authority's Strategic Planning and Policy Committee to consider based on a report on the outcomes.

#### 2.2 Consultation

The Education Authority wishes to engage with the governors, staff, pupils and parents of the identified schools to consult on the formal approval of resource provisions already established, and/or in providing pathways consistent with meeting the needs of an area. Given the number of schools across the region, the Education Authority will inform **all** schools and seek their views as part of consultation. Area Planning will provide a link to the *Annual Plan of Arrangements* web page, in order that members of the public may respond to the consultation.

### 3 Rationale

The Education Authority is seeking to provide pupils and parents a greater level of equity in the availability of Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools across the region. This will provide greater access to inclusive educational opportunities for pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

## Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (SPiMS) – Operational Plan 1: 2022-24

### 4 Specialist Provision

The specialist provision provides a modified learning environment with an enhanced Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) suited to the children's learning profiles. The children, where appropriate, will also benefit from experiencing a level of inclusion, commensurate with their level of need, within mainstream classes. This will provide the opportunity to experience social interaction and curricular activities alongside their peers.

The *Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools* will be used to inform decision making in relation to establishing, changing or closing provision to address the future needs of statemented pupils whose needs are best met in a small group setting within a mainstream school.

**Consistency of Language** - to ensure consistency of language used and to reflect the needs of pupils, the former terms:

- Learning Support to be known as Specialist Provision (Learning); and
- Autism Classes to be known as Specialist Provision (Social Communication).

**Pupil Numbers** - Specialist provision classes will have fewer pupil numbers than a mainstream class, with a higher level of adult support. Class sizes will be determined based on a number of factors but primarily the level of need within the class. Currently, the Specialist Provision (Learning) will provide places for approximately 12 primary or 14 post-primary pupils per class and the Specialist Provision (SP EYF) and Specialist Provision (Social Communication) for approximately 8 pupils per class.

New pathways of Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools will require accommodation to be provided as part of implementation, with such costs highlighted in Table B. Some of these proposals include some additional pathways to meet the needs of an area, consistent with the *Frameworks* in ensuring provision across key stages and in response to the need for places in September 2022. Based on the *Special Education Strategic Area Plan 2022-27: Planning for Special Education Provision* and accompanying Operational Plans 1 and 2, further pathways of provision will be considered based on further Local Government District (LGD) analysis from January 2023 onwards.

**Staffing/Management/Funding** - The Board of Governors, supported by the Education Authority, assume governance of the specialist provision with the daily running and management being the responsibility of the school Principal. The staff will be funded by the Education Authority and managed by the school, with recruitment fulfilled in line with the normal school recruitment process. The makeup of the group of children within the provision will determine the level of staffing. However, generally, when operating at full capacity, the Specialist Provision (Learning) will be staffed with one teacher and one classroom assistant and the Specialist Provision (SP EYF) and Specialist Provision (Social Communication) will be staffed with one teacher and two classroom assistants.

#### Specialist Provision (SP EYF) Classes

In response to the pressure for places and lack of places in the special schools, the Education Authority has set up Learning (SP EYF) classes. Specialist Provision for Early Years and Foundation (SP EYF) is for pupils presenting with a profile of Severe Learning Difficulties, operating in partnership with a Special School and/or EA Services.

An *Emergency Framework* is currently being developed to outline guidance, support and resources required for a Specialist Provision (SP EYF). It is anticipated that there will be consideration of different models of provision to include:

## Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (SPiMS) – Operational Plan 1: 2022-24

- Early Years Assessment Models to determine a longer term pathway in identifying a specialist setting as a special school or mainstream school.
- Specialist Provision (SP EYF) model of provision extended beyond Early Years and Foundation to include all key stages as pathways of provision.
- Further dual campuses managed by Special Schools.

Based on consideration of models of Specialist Provision (SP EYF), there will be an opportunity to review and revise the *Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream schools and/or Special Schools Area Planning Framework*.

Based on the proposed number of specialist provision classes to be provided each will incur estimated costs as detailed in Table A:

<b>Table A: Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools – Staffing and Funding</b>		
<b>Staffing/Specialist Provision (per class)</b>	<b>Staffing Complement (per class)</b>	<b>Staff Cost (per class) (funded by the Education Authority)</b>
Learning	1 Teacher and 1 Classroom Assistant	£75,000
Social Communication	1 Teacher and 2 Classroom Assistants (depending upon pupil numbers)	£100,000
Learning (SP EYF)	1 Teacher and 2 Classroom Assistants (depending upon pupil numbers)	£115,000
Set Up Cost		£3,000
Annual Allowance		£3,000

For resource provisions which are already operational, costs have been allocated by the Education Authority on a temporary basis. In seeking formal approval, as part of the consultation, these will become permanent specialist provisions to meet the needs of an area. New pathways of Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools will require staffing costs to be met as part of implementation.

This provision will be funded by the Education Authority in relation to teaching and non-teaching staff. An annual payment of £3,000 per class will also be allocated through the LMS budget. This will provide for sustainable specialist provision classes.

**Accommodation** – In setting up new specialist provision there may be accommodation requirements. Should accommodation be required and, in particular, in providing pathways and meeting the increased demand into the future, as part of the outworking of the *Special Education Strategic Area Plan (2022–2027)*, Table B below provides a guide to the estimated cost requirements for additional classrooms:

<b>Table B: Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools – Accommodation</b>		
<b>Staffing/Specialist Provision</b>	<b>Classroom Requirements</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Learning and SP EYF	1	£450,000 + VAT
Social Communication	1	£450,000 + VAT

**Support** - The school will have access to a range of support services within the Education Authority. A collaborative cross-directorate and cross-organisational approach will be used to ensure that specialist provisions are effectively supported and resourced to provide high quality teaching and learning experiences leading to improved outcomes for children and young people, fully reflective of their abilities and potential.

## Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (SPiMS) – Operational Plan 1: 2022-24

In establishing specialist provision in mainstream schools, the Education Authority has developed specific **criteria** and **indicators**, as detailed in the *Framework for Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools*. These will be used to identify the gaps in the existing specialist provision in mainstream schools and to identify mainstream schools in which to establish suitable provision to meet the needs of an area and for future needs of children and young people with special educational needs.

### 5 Specialist Provision Consultation

A list of the proposals currently being consulted upon can be accessed via the Education Authority website:

<https://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/area-planning/proposed-specialist-provision>.