



## **Area Plan for Primary Education**

### **Scoil an Droichid**

#### **Pre-Publication Consultation**

**for**

#### **Proposed Establishment of an Autism Specific Class and general Learning Support Class**

**Consultation: 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019 – 17<sup>th</sup> December 2019**

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## BACKGROUND

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- 1.1 The Education Authority (EA) has a responsibility to ensure that children and young people across Northern Ireland who may have special educational needs (SEN) have those needs identified and assessed. The EA also has statutory duty under the Education (NI) Order 1996 to make provision for children and young people in relation to their assessed needs and to make appropriate provision for any child for whom it maintains a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The outworking of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) 2016 Act strengthens the emphasis on improving pupil outcomes and raising standards for all children with a focus on early identification, assessment and intervention at the point of need. A further theme is that of improved consistency in SEN provision with a strong focus on individual outcomes for the SEN child. Furthermore, the EA now has a duty under the SEND 2016 Act to publish a plan on an annual basis.
- 1.2 Currently almost 21,000 of the total pupil population in Northern Ireland has a Statement of Special Educational Need. This figure has been steadily rising and now constitutes 6.04% of the school population.
- 1.3 Of this figure, 5,959 of pupils have their educational needs met through enrolment at one of 40 special schools and approximately 15,000 pupils learn through provision in or attached to a mainstream educational setting. During 2018/19, approximately 14% of these pupils were placed in specialist provisions attached to primary and post-primary schools.
- 1.4 A report on “The Prevalence of Autism (including Asperger’s Syndrome) in School Age Children in Northern Ireland 2019” was published in May 2019 by the Information Analysis Directorate, DHSSPS. The report aims to show prevalence rates of ASD amongst compulsory school age children who are attending grant-aided schools, and are ages 4–15 years old at the start of the school year. To inform the study, the Department of Education provided figures from the annual Northern Ireland School Census from 2008/09 through to 2018/19.
- 1.5 The available data was analysed in a number of ways:
  - By gender
  - By school year and.
  - By Special Educational Needs stage on the Code of Practice.
  - By Health and Social Care Trust
  - By Urban/Rural Location
  - By Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM)
  - By Inequality Gap

- 1.6 In order to establish the prevalence of autism within the compulsory school age population, the number of children who were attending school and had been identified with ASD was divided by the total number of compulsory school age children attending school. This gave the proportion of children within the cohort who were identified with ASD.
- 1.7 The number of children with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder who were of compulsory school age and attending school in each of the last 10 years between 2008/09 and 2018/19 rose by 2.1 percentage points (from 1.2% to 3.3%) equating to an increase of over 175% over the 10 year period.
- 1.8 The main conclusions of the report were:
  - 1.8.1 The figures provided by the Northern Ireland School Census have shown that more males than females have been diagnosed with autism. The 2018/19 figures shows that 5.1% of males were diagnosed compared to 1.5% of females. Males are over three times more likely to be Autistic than females.
  - 1.8.2 Looking at prevalence rates across school years over time, the estimated prevalence of ASD has increased across all school years with the greatest increases in the numbers of children identified with ASD occurring in Year 6 (3.9%). Year 9 had the largest percentage point change between 2008/09 and 2018/19 (2.5%).
  - 1.8.3 The data also shows that the majority (58%) of children with ASD are at Stage 5 of the Special Educational Needs assessment process. The ten year analysis indicates that while numbers continue to grow there is a noticeable decline in the relative percentage of children at Stage 5. However while the relative percentage of stage 5 children has decreased the absolute number has increased.
  - 1.8.4 The figures provided by the school census have also shown that the estimated prevalence of autism has increased across all Health and Social Care Trusts between 2008/09 and 2018/19. The autism prevalence rate in the Belfast has quadrupled between 2008/09 and 2018/19. The Northern, Southern and Belfast Trusts have higher than the Northern Ireland average prevalence of autism. The largest percentage increase in the number of children identified as having autism in the past year occurred in the Southern HSC trust.
  - 1.8.5 The figures also suggest that at a regional level there is a relationship between the estimated prevalence of autism and location, with the urban Northern Ireland population having a statistically significant higher prevalence rate than the rural population.

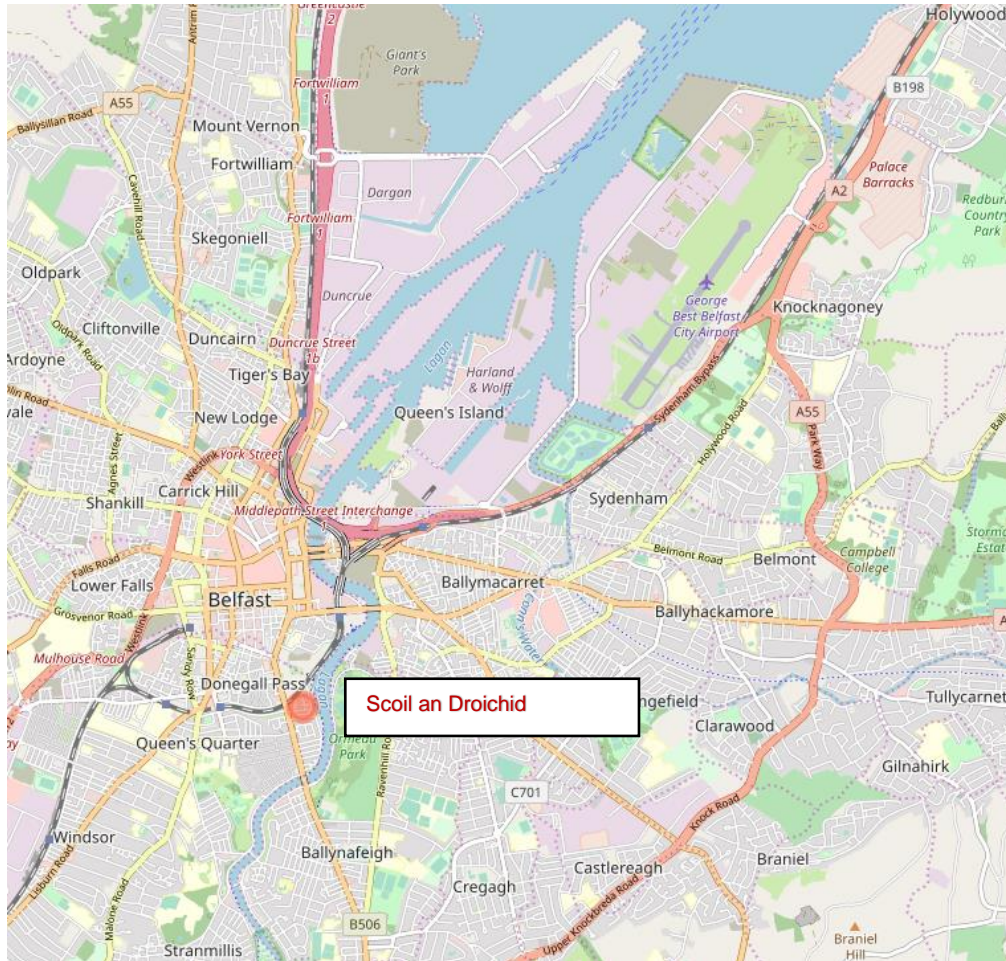
- 1.8.6 Finally, the figures indicated that 14% of children identified with autism were living in the most deprived MDM decile of Northern Ireland and that the rate of autism in the most deprived decile was 58% higher than the Northern Ireland average.
- 1.9 The Education Authority recognises that some of the pupils diagnosed with autism in mainstream primary and post primary schools require more intensive support than that available from EA services and so provision has been made for the establishment of a number of Autistic Spectrum Disorder Classes exclusively for those children and young people requiring specialist provision in respect of their autism to promote progress.
- 1.10 To promote progress and improve outcomes some children are assessed through the statutory assessment process as requiring a more specialist form of educational delivery better suited to their needs. The Education Authority is proposing a model that provides a continuum of support to meet identified special educational needs throughout a child's school life. In primary the model will be the provision of an Autism Specialist Class at Key Stage 1 and a General Learning Support Class at Key Stage 2 while in post primary the model will be the provision of an Autism Specialist Class at Key Stage 3 and a General Learning Support Class at Key Stage 4. The proposal reflects an extension of this model of support across the EA.
- 1.11 The regional increase of over 175% in the number of school age children identified with Autism and Asperger's in 2018/19 compared to 2008/09 has been broken down by Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) areas, with the Northern area having a consistently higher autism prevalence rate than the Northern Ireland average in each of the last five years.
- 1.12 The increase in the number of children with Autism or Asperger's in compulsory grant-aided education within the Northern HSCT area is significant. In 2008/09, 509 children with a diagnosis were enrolled in schools. This number has now increased by almost 446% to 2,779 children and young people in 2018/19.
- 1.13 Autism is a spectrum condition. Therefore, while all children and young people with autism will have some similar problems in school, overall, their condition will impact on them in different ways. With this, some pupils should be able to manage in mainstream school without the need for additional resources, while others will require specialist support, perhaps throughout their lives.
- 1.14 While a diagnosis of autism should not automatically result in the expectation that additional resources are required, some children with more complex autism find a mainstream classroom environment very difficult.

- 1.15 Currently provision within the Belfast area is mainly in a special school, in two controlled primary school specialist centres or in a mainstream school with classroom assistance. There is currently no approved provision at present for parents whose preference is for Irish Medium education in the Belfast area or indeed in any area of the EA.
- 1.16 In order to extend parental choice across the wider Belfast area and meet the needs of children with SEN in mainstream settings the Authority is extending the model of specialist provision through the establishment of Autism Specialist Classes and Learning Support Classes.
- 1.17 There are growing numbers of children with statements of SEN in the area, particularly younger people with ASD who require an enhanced pupil teacher ratio (PTR) and a modified learning environment in order to access optimal learning opportunities and to alleviate the stress and sensory overload that can happen in a mainstream classroom.
- 1.18 This proposal will allow children with SEN the opportunity to access their education in a mainstream setting in their local area. The Autism Specialist Class at Key Stage 1 and the Learning Support Class at Key Stage 2 will provide a modified learning environment with an enhanced PTR suited to the children's learning profiles. The children, where appropriate, will also benefit from experiencing some inclusion within mainstream classes, and the opportunity to experience social interaction and leisure activities alongside their peers.
- 1.19 The Annual Review process which involves the principal, parents, the Education Authority and other relevant professionals where appropriate will determine placements into the proposed SEN provision.

### **Brief Description of the School**

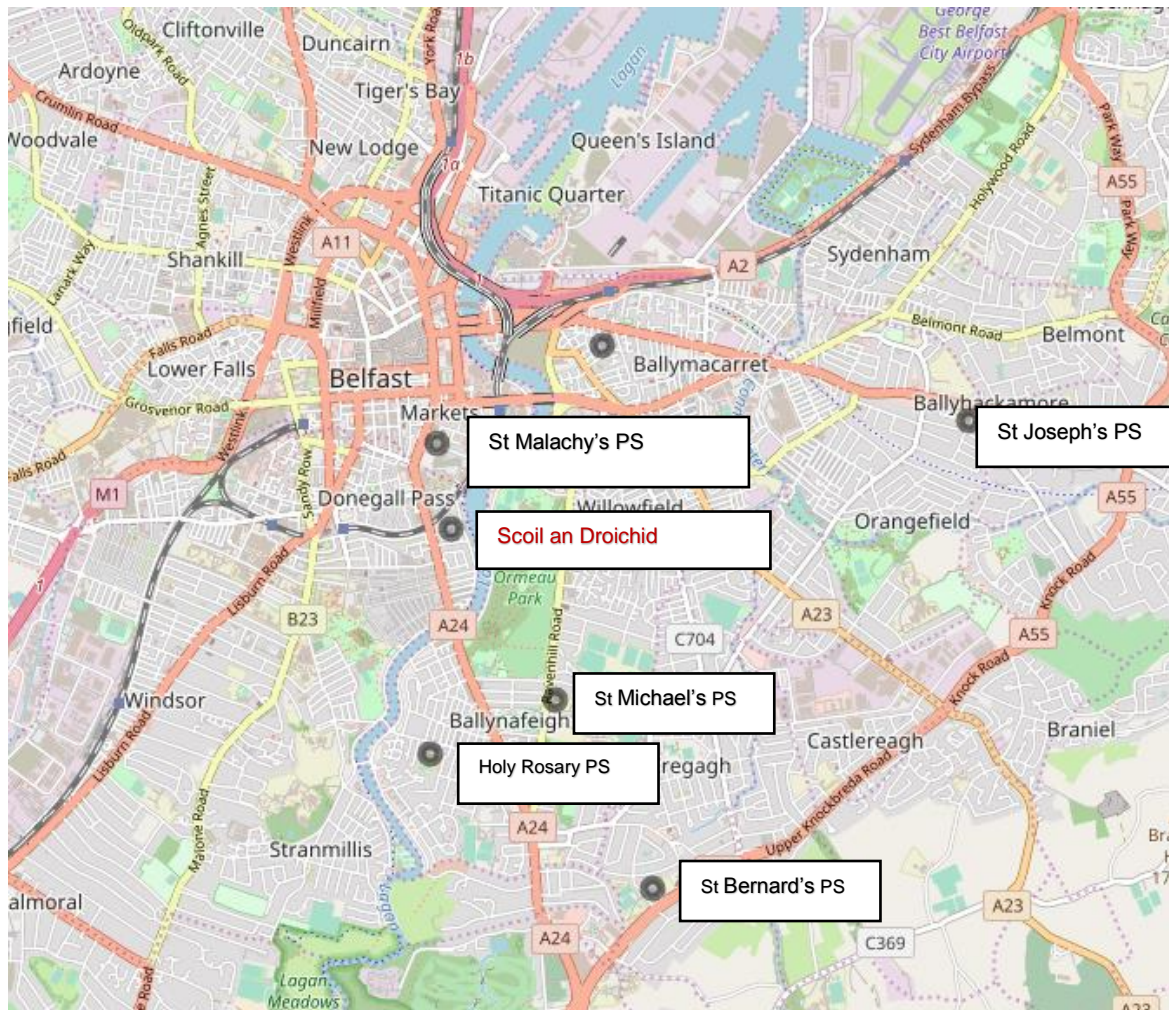
- 1.20 Scoil an Droichid is situated off the Ormeau Road in Belfast and is an Irish Medium Primary School. It was started in 1997 by the An Droichead community group as a new Irish Medium school. The school purchased its site from the An Droichead community group at this time and continue to share the site with them. In its early years, the school benefited from European monies to fund costs and in 2001 gained recurrent funding from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland. Enrolment at Scoil an Droichid has continued to grow and the school now has seven primary classes and a nursery class.
- 1.21 Scoil an Droichid is an Irish-medium school and the school's main aim is to provide an Irish-medium education for primary school children in the age range 3-11 years. The school aims to promote tolerance and mutual understanding in the areas of religion, politics, culture and language.

- 1.22 Scoil an Droichid is situated in the Lower Ormeau area of South Belfast and serves the Lower Ormeau, Short Strand and Greater Belfast areas. There are a further five primary schools in the area and the map below indicates the location of the schools:



Map 1: Location of Scoil an Droichid





Map 2: location local primary schools in the area

### Statistical Information – Scoil an Droichid

- 1.27 The approved enrolment and admissions numbers of the school are 145 and 21 pupils respectively. Recent years have seen a steady demand for places in the school with the number of pupils in 2018/19 being 179
- 1.28 Within the school in 2018/19 there were 66 pupils with identified Special Educational Needs (SEN) and of that number 8 pupils had a SEN stage 5 statement.
- 1.29 The table below shows the enrolment pattern over the past 7 years at Scoil an Droichid. It is evident that the school's enrolment has remained strong over the past 7 years.

	Nursery	Primary 1	Primary 2	Primary 3	Primary 4	Primary 5	Primary 6	Primary 7	Total
2012/13	26	22	19	18	16	14	21	10	146
2013/14	25	24	21	19	18	14	14	21	156
2014/15	29	23	23	20	17	17	13	12	154
2015/16	29	22	22	22	17	16	17	12	157
2016/17	28	23	22	21	21	17	16	17	165
2017/18	30	28	24	21	22	20	17	15	177
2018/19	29	25	28	22	18	22	17	18	179

TABLE 3: Seven Year Enrolment Trend for Scoil an Droichid

- 1.30 Approximately 49% of the pupils attending Scoil an Droichid in the 2018/19 school year were entitled to Free School Meals.
- 1.31 Scoil an Droichid has developed a wealth of experience in making provision for children and young people with special education needs. Over the past five years approximately 40% of the pupils enrolled were on the SEN register with regularly around 8 of those pupils holding a statement.

	2014 / 2015	2015 / 2016	2016 / 2017	2017 / 2018	2018 / 2019
% (No.) Pupils on SEN Register	39% (60)	39% (62)	42% (70)	40% (70)	37% (66)
No. Pupils with a Statement	4	7	8	8	8

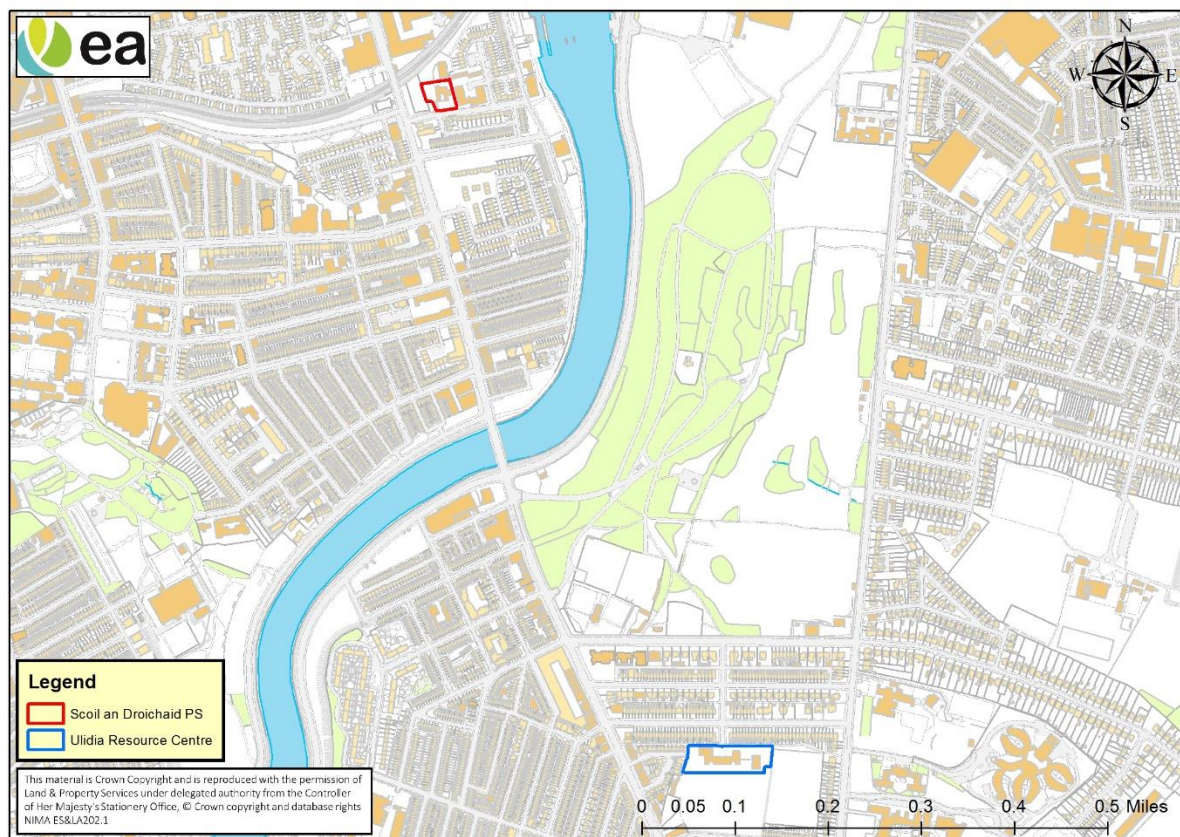
TABLE 4: Five Year Analysis of SEN Enrolment at Scoil an Droichid



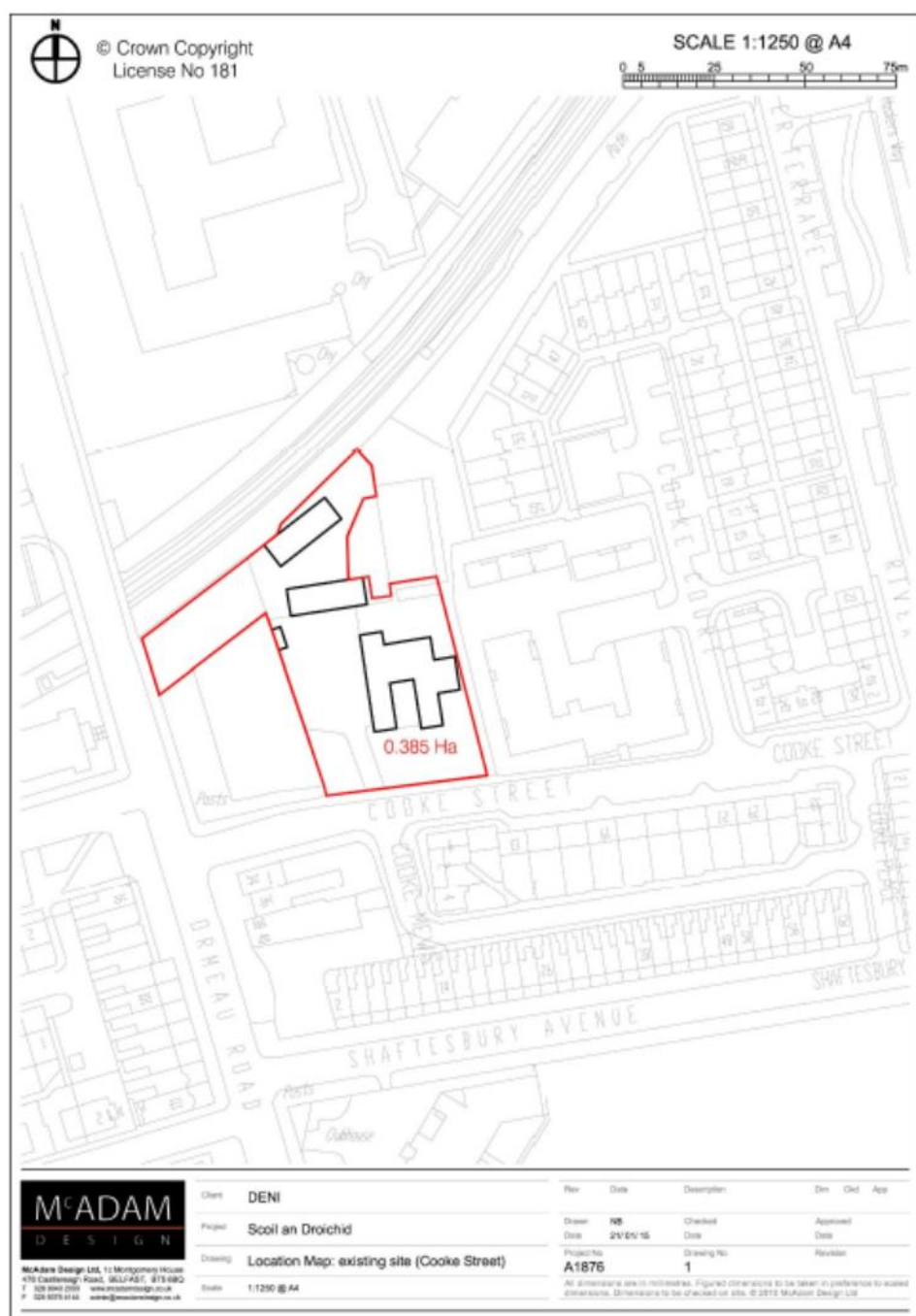
- 1.32 The last Education and Training Inspectorate report of October 2018 stated that the previous inspection in June 2015 evaluated the overall effectiveness of Scoil an Droichid as good.

### Current Accommodation

- 1.33 The school is situated on a site of 0.5 hectares compared to the DE recommended site area for a seven class-base school of 1 hectare (1.1 hectares when the Naiscoil is added). In 2014 a feasibility study indicated that there is currently 110m<sup>2</sup> of hard play area, which is below the DE recommended area of 800m<sup>2</sup>, as well as 300m<sup>2</sup> of grass play area, which is significantly below the DE recommended amount of 5000m<sup>2</sup>.



**MAP 1: Location of Scoil an Droichid Primary School's current and proposed locations**



Drawing 1: A drawing showing the school's existing layout on its current site emphasising again the constrained nature of the site:

- 1.34 The school is currently accommodated in temporary mobile classrooms, the majority of which have reached the end of their useful life. Some of the rooms are unusable, with water ingress and collapsed ceilings. External cladding has also deteriorated and in general the mobiles are in poor condition. The rooms are difficult to teach and learn in, particularly in periods of poor or hot weather, with the school sometimes having to send children home early because of the conditions.
- 1.35 Scoil an Droichid has significant deficiencies when compared with the provision that is recommended by DE for one of its size. In total, the amount of space

available to the school is some 57% below the DE recommended amount, which provides some indication of just how seriously deficient the current accommodation is. These deficiencies include:

- No multi-purpose hall or ancillary accommodation;
- Classrooms which are too small;
- Lack of resource space;
- An undersized library;
- No usable multi-purpose rooms;
- No group room; and
- No purpose-built staff room.

1.36 The absence of these spaces has a detrimental influence on the ability to deliver the curriculum effectively and therefore is having a negative effect on the potential educational outcomes for pupils. The lack of space can be seen in corridors being used to store resources and pupils and staff getting in each other's way as they move around despite their best efforts. While school staff work very hard the prolonged impact of working in unsuitable accommodation can be seen in a lowering of morale, as reported by the Principal.

1.37 In June 2014 the then Minister announced that Scoil an Droichid was to be taken forward in planning on a single site as a part of the capital programme. Following consideration of the current deficiencies and future educational needs of the area, the Business Case recommended a new build school on a new site as the most cost effective solution. Currently the scheme is at design stage with an estimated completion date of **July 2021**. As evidenced within the approved Business Case for the capital build the existing accommodation has many deficiencies in terms of condition and suitability however the school make best use of the current facilities.

## **SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT**

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- 2.1 In seeking to establish specialist SEN provision the Education Authority considers that the host school must be considered as sustainable as defined by the 'Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools' document. Scoil an Droichid is sustainable and is considered by the Education Authority to be a core school in the pattern of education provision in the Belfast area. This can be evidenced as follows:

### **Quality of Education**

- 2.2 The inspection report of the school by the Education and Training Inspectorate was conducted in 2015, and indicated that the overall performance level was graded good.

### **Stable Enrolment Trends**

- 2.3 The school enrolment has remained steady over the past seven years (see Table 3 above).
- 2.4 Enrolments are consistently above the sustainability threshold.
- 2.5 The approved enrolment number for the school is 145 and the school has consistently been over their enrolment number for the past seven years.
- 2.6 The school has one classroom for each class including the nursery and exceeds the Bain threshold of 140 for a primary school in an urban setting. As can be seen from the table there is a steadily increasing enrolment across the school. There are more pupils entering the school than those leaving. The percentage increase across the whole school for these 7 years is 23%.

### **Sound Financial Position**

- 2.7 The school is in a deteriorating financial position. The deficit projections are a result of the school's decision to have single year group classes and hence higher staffing costs than pupil numbers alone would justify. If the current trend for increasing pupil numbers continues Scoil an Droichid will be in a better position as the school's PTR (Pupil Teacher Ratio) will be maximised. The figure for the PTR in 2017/19 was 18.44. The budget position will be assisted by maintenance cost reductions following the new build. It is likely that the school will be able to return to a balanced budget in future years barring any unforeseen challenges.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
<b>Surplus/Deficit (£)</b>	<b>£51,732</b>	<b>£20,565</b>	<b>£91,518</b>
<b>Surplus/Deficit (%)</b>	<b>-7.83%</b>	<b>-3.17%</b>	<b>-15.98%</b>

Table 5: Surplus/deficit for Scoil an Droichid as a figure and percentage for financial years 2013/14 to 2015/16

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
<b>Surplus/Deficit (£)</b>	<b>-16,415</b>	<b>-54,224</b>	<b>-34,425</b>
<b>Surplus/Deficit (%)</b>	<b>-18.59</b>	<b>-30.31</b>	<b>-39.54</b>

Table 6: The three-year budget projections for Scoil an Droichid for financial years 2016-17 to 2018-19 are as follows:

### **Strong Leadership and Management**

- 2.8 The school is well led and managed by the Board of Governors and Principal. In the most recent Inspection Report of 2015 the Education and Training Inspectorate noted that, “The senior leadership team is committed to the pastoral and academic needs of all the children and has developed successfully a culture and ethos of collegiality throughout the school.” And “Based on the evidence presented at the time of the inspection, the ETI’s evaluation is that there can be confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The Board of Governors are committed to the school. They have promoted successfully the school within the community and have managed effectively a number of particularly challenging situations over recent years.”
- 2.9 Overall ETI judged Leadership and Management to be satisfactory apparently reflecting the need to improve School Development Planning and arrangements for safeguarding.
- 2.10 The leadership and management of the school spend much time distracted by the day-to-day issues of working in an unsatisfactory building. This is further compounded by the breakdown in relationships with the An Droichead

community group based on adjoining land. There have been difficulties and disputes over land ownership in recent years. There are legal proceedings underway which again distract the school and governors from their core purpose.

- 2.11 Scoil an Droichid has the Leadership and Management in place to move successfully into a new build and meet the Sustainable Schools' criteria.

### **Accessibility**

- 2.12 The school has been very successful at the current site, with numbers growing and this location is clearly reasonably central to the school's catchment. The difficulty with any option which leaves the school where it is, is that this is a highly constrained site. It is bounded by a railway line to one side, a main arterial road route and residential accommodation. The possibility of acquiring an adjacent car park belonging to UTV has been explored more than once. However, this does not look possible, at least not in the short to medium term. In any case, even if this additional land was obtained, the site would still not be big enough to accommodate a school to Building Handbook requirements. This has led the consultants who undertook the feasibility study to comment that constructing a school on this site would require an innovative architectural design. While such a design would raise the profile of the school and act as a flagship within the local community, it clearly adds to the expense and the potential risk around costs. Further, even with the most innovative of designs, the issues around lack of space would not be resolved. In addition, the inhibitions of the site would mean that the school would have to be relocated during construction. The above argument indicates the unsuitability of the current site for any but the smallest of primary schools.
- 2.13 Parents and visitors to the school are faced with great difficulties with entrance and exit to the school buildings and finding anywhere to park, if they travel by car.
- 2.14 The lack of space within the buildings themselves makes movement around the school difficult. The school has to access to limited external facilities for anything but the most basic of exercise in the "playground". For example, the school engages in a "daily mile" for every pupil as a part of its fitness and healthy living programme. In many schools this would involve a lap of the grounds and the opportunity to enjoy trees, plants and the outdoors. At Scoil an Droichid it involves going back and forward across a tarmacked area.

### **Strong Links with the Community**

- 2.10 The involvement of the school with the local community is set out in the table below.



Provider	Description
Local churches	The school makes provision for those children whose parents wish them to be prepared for the sacraments.
LTSS Service	LTSS visit the school regularly to assist in meeting the needs of identified children, with specific literacy difficulties and or severe literacy difficulties.
Charities	Charities visit the school to make presentation to pupils. Cancer Focus, Trócaire , SÓLÁS
BHSCT	Vaccination programmes for pupils Drug Awareness programme, Dental Programme
Cultural and Sporting Celebrations	Co-operation with other Schools via sporting events, Ulster Orchestra , Grand Opera House ,

TABLE 5: External / Community Links

## **AREA PLANNING IMPACT**

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- 3.1 The proposal forms part of the actions set out in the Area Plan Action Plan which highlights the need to extend and enhance specialist provision attached to mainstream schools to ensure equity of access across Northern Ireland. It is likely that there will be no detrimental impact on other schools as the pupils who will enrol in the specialist SEN provision will be supernumerary and as evidenced above there is no other similar provision within the Belfast area.
- 3.2 The proposal fully aligns with the Key Themes of Area Planning as set out in “Providing Pathways-Strategic Area Plan for School provision 2017-2020”.

### **Securing Parity of Access for All to Appropriate Pathways**

- 3.3 This proposal will allow children with SEN the opportunity to access their education in a mainstream setting in their local area. The Autism Specialist Class at Key Stage 1 and the Learning Support Class at Key Stage 2 will provide a modified learning environment with an enhanced PTR suited to the children’s learning profiles.

### **Enhancing Choice**

- 3.4 This proposal will allow children with SEN the opportunity to access their education in a mainstream setting in their local area. The Autism Specialist Class at Key Stage 1 and the Learning Support Class at Key Stage 2 will provide a modified learning environment with an enhanced PTR suited to the children’s learning profiles. The children, where appropriate, will also benefit from experiencing some inclusion within mainstream classes, and the opportunity to experience social interaction and leisure activities alongside their peers.

### **Maximising Resources and Sustainability**

- 3.5 The proposal will further develop the sustainability of Scoil an Droichid as a core Irish Medium school in Belfast. It will meet the increasing demand for specialist SEN provision in the area through an existing and established school thereby maximizing the investment and use of resources in an effective and efficient manner.

**Informing Strategic Infrastructure Planning**

- 3.7 If approved, this proposal will ensure that the approved new school build will encompass the specialist SEN accommodation within its design ensuring the facilities at the school will be used to maximum effect.

## **RATIONALE FOR PROPOSAL**

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- 4.1 It is recognised that there is a continuum of special educational need which requires a continuum of provision across the Education Authority to meet this need. Special schools form part of this continuum of provision for children and young people with SEN. Often the enrolment of a child with SEN in mainstream education is appropriate however the severity or complexity of their needs is the key factor in determining the most appropriate educational setting that will best serve to improve outcomes with cognisance of professional advice and parental views.
  - 4.2 To promote progress through primary education, many children with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder initially require the support available through a placement in an Autism Specific Class at Key Stage 1. Following this initial placement, the children are placed in either a mainstream class or in a Learning Support Class.
  - 4.3 With the Belfast area there is currently six approved Specialist units attached to primary schools, there are 5 learning support classes and 1 approved Autism Specific Classes within the area.
  - 4.4 The proposed Autism Specialist Class and General Learning Support Class in Scoil an Droichid will cater for children and young people of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 year groups for whom the Education Authority maintains a Statement of Special Educational Needs. This will complement the wider model of inclusion through specialist provision across the Education Authority.
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## EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

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- 5.1 A model of inclusion through specialist provision across the Education Authority areas has been operational for over twenty years. This began with the establishment of Learning Support Classes across a number of primary and post-primary settings. In some areas the model was further developed when the need for specialist provision for some pupils with Autism in mainstream settings was identified. The need for some of the pupils diagnosed with Autism in mainstream schools and in Learning Support Classes attached to mainstream schools to have more intensive support than that available from the Autism Advice and Intervention Service at that time was acknowledged and hence, a strategy developed to make provision for the establishment of a number of Autism Specialist Classes exclusively for those children requiring specialist provision in respect of their Autism to promote progress.
- 5.2 The provision of the Autism Specialist Classes and Learning Support Classes within Scoil an Droichid will fulfil the needs of those children and young people who struggle with their identified special needs in the initial years of Primary education and who require a placement in such provision. Following this initial placement in the Autism Specialist Classes, the children and young people can often be successfully placed in a mainstream setting or progress to the Learning Support Class.
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**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (IF THE PROPOSAL IS APPROVED)**

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- 6.1 If approved, implementation of this Development Proposal would take effect as soon as possible thereafter following the approval of the Development Proposal. The preferred option would enable the project to be completed without displacement of pupils during the build.
- 6.2 Approval would allow the Authority to seek approval to an addendum to the approved Business Case for the new build school enabling the design team to be instructed to prepare designs and begin construction once capital funding is confirmed.
- 6.3 Approval would allow the EA and the Board of Governors to start the process of establishing the classes. This would include
- Recruitment and training of additional staff.
  - Training in meeting the needs of children with SEN and autism provided to all school staff.



## RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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### Staffing

- 7.1 The Education Authority (EA) will fund Resource Provision within the two specialist special education classes. The staffing requirements are set out below,

Class Type	Pupil Numbers	Teaching Staff	Support Staff
ASC	8 pupils	1 teacher (MPG + 2 points)	2 classroom assistants SEN
LSC	12 pupils	1 teacher (MPG + 2 points)	1 classroom assistant SEN

TABLE 7: Staffing Complement for Proposed Specialist Special Education Classes.

- 7.2 When both classes are established in year 2 the approximate costs per annum will be £160k-175k depending on the applicants' salary point. These costs will be funded centrally and will have no impact on the school's budget.
- 7.3 The school would also receive an allowance of £3,000 per class per annum from the EA as a contribution towards running costs, resources and maintenance of the facility.

### Accommodation

- 7.4 The current running costs of the buildings are large, due to the poor state of the buildings. A new build will take advantage of the much improved reduction in running costs.

### Transport Costs

- 7.5 Where assessed as necessary, transport will be provided as required and recorded in the pupil's statement of SEN.
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