



OUR 5 POINT PLAN FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

**KEEP OUR
SCHOOLS
WORLD-CLASS**

APRIL 2022

Introduction

Rt Hon Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP

At this election I am campaigning on the basis of our 5 point plan for Northern Ireland. A key element of my plan is keeping our schools world class. I want to see this plan implemented after the election and with your support we can do just that.

As part of the plan to keep our schools world class we support: -

- ✓ A fair funding model for all schools.
- ✓ Building more new schools in the next 5 years.
- ✓ Modernising the curriculum for the 21st century workplace
- ✓ Widening access to breakfast and homework clubs.
- ✓ A cap on school uniform costs
- ✓ Restructuring special educational needs services.
- ✓ Supporting Well-being and COVID recovery for our children.
- ✓ Improving educational outcomes for our most disadvantaged students.

- ✓ A focus on Early Years.
- ✓ Coding in Primary Schools.
- ✓ Reducing bureaucracy and administration for schools.
- ✓ Support for more Outdoor Play.
- ✓ Universal Free School Lunches for all children.
- ✓ Reviewing of home to school transport.
- ✓ School Street Schemes.

The DUP supports shared education in Northern Ireland. It enables schools from different sectors to come together, work in partnership and collaborate. We wish to see the creation of a single education system in Northern Ireland. By looking towards the education of our children and young people, we can help to shape the best future possible for all. It is our responsibility to ensure that our young people can reach their full educational attainment.

Jeffrey Donaldson



Fair funding model for all schools

We support shared education in Northern Ireland, but we do not believe that one sector deserves more funding than another.

No child's education should suffer because of this. We will ensure that pressure is kept on the UK Government to uphold their *New Decade New Approach* commitment 'to financial flexibility to re-profile funding provided as part of the Fresh Start Agreement for shared and integrated education'. Community engagement is central to developing a bottom-up approach to shared and integrated education. Without community buy-in, the transition to shared and integrated education is not feasible.

Build more new schools in the next 5 years

Environment has an important part to play in education and our schools and places of learning must be fit for purpose, now and in the future.

The DUP Education Minister has already announced a **£794 million** investment for **28 new schools** benefitting some **25,000 pupils**.

We are committed to building more new schools across Northern Ireland in the next 5 years, with a focus on better utilising technology within the classroom.

Modernise curriculum for the 21st century workplace

As society changes, so too do our places of work. We support the increased promotion of vocational and digital based subjects in both secondary and grammar schools and combining traditional education with day-release schemes to learn vocational trades first-hand, whilst also ensuring that young people leave education with basic Maths, English and IT requirements. As our workforce becomes increasingly digital, our education system needs increased support to ensure that children from Key Stage 1 and up receive the best coding training possible.

Widen access to breakfast and homework clubs

Breakfast and homework clubs are invaluable to both tackling educational underachievement and supporting working parents. We support the continuation of the Extended Schools Scheme with enough funding to ensure that there are places for all pupils who wish to avail of this. There is a greater role for community based after schools' clubs as an additional way to widen access to these clubs and a place to develop our library network to encompass new approaches to tackling educational underachievement and building up digital capability.

A cap on school uniform costs

The cost of school uniforms can be extortionate, a problem that is increased depending on the number of children in a household. This can cause both financial difficulties and unnecessary concern to many families across Northern Ireland. We support a cap on the cost of school uniforms.

Restructure special educational needs services

Children in Northern Ireland deserve the opportunity to reach their full potential. For some, this may require additional support.

We support measures to improve early intervention and diagnosis for those with Special Educational Needs to ensure each child has the necessary support. We will commit to introducing mandatory training on Special Educational Needs during all teaching degrees, with updated training to be provided to all current teachers. We also need to modernise and expand the Special School estate with more school builds to support those need them.



Support Well-being and COVID recovery for our children

Our DUP Education Ministers have invested heavily in programmes such as Engage, extending School Counselling (Health Happy Minds) and Well-being funding for schools but we need to recognise that some children are still coping with issues related to their experiences during lockdown. We will continue to prioritise these programmes that have been so effective in supporting our children through the pandemic and beyond.

Improve educational outcomes for our most disadvantaged students

Over the last assembly term the numbers of students achieving 5 GCSEs (A* - C including English and Maths) has increased 7%. In 2016/17 it was 69.6% increasing and to 76.2% in 2020-21 with alternative awarding. This represents good progress but more needs to be done to support students who are struggling.

We have continued to focus on this priority whilst other political parties have used it as a sound bite. We will commit to supporting these students through the sound recommendations made by the Expert Panel in Educational Underachievement in their 'Fair Start' report.

Focus on the Early Years

There has been significant and sound research to suggest that the Early Years are key in a child’s educational journey. Parents need supported to understand that early language development and play are very important. Early intervention is key and funding needs to support this ambition. We will commit to a new-targeted programme of support for children under two years old and we will work with the Department of Health to achieve this. This will be themed around the Sure Start Development Programme.

Coding in Primary Schools

We know that the workplace is changing and therefore our children need to be prepared to for that changed environment. More jobs will rely on digital skills and underpinning many of these will be the ability to code. We will establish Coding pilots for Primary Schools alongside partners in industry. These will be evaluated to test the best method for teaching our children how to code in a fun and informative way.

Reduce bureaucracy and administration for schools

A schools primary focus should be on the education and support of its children but we know the demands on Classroom Assistants, Teachers and Principals has risen steeply over the last two years. We want to devolve more decision making powers to schools, especially with regard to procurement and purchasing.

Support for more Outdoor Play

One of the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the rediscovery of the outdoors for adults and children alike. We have already provided a significant investment of £2 million this year to assist schools to enhance their outdoor learning spaces and provide good quality play equipment.

Outdoor play has proven educational benefits and is also effective at developing other skills such as teamwork and problem solving for children. We want to develop and support schools as they repurpose their outdoor space. We will now establish a fund for schools to support them in creating better outdoor spaces surrounding their school and also work with partners such as Forest Schools to allow those in urban areas with less access or space to realise their ambitions in this area.





School Lunches

We have learnt through COVID-19 the importance of ensuring that children get at least one hot meal a day. We need to ensure that primary school children have access to a free, healthy and nutritious meal. We need to be ambitious in this area and therefore we will work to seek to do more.

Review of home to school Transport

We will examine this important area for many children in Northern Ireland who are limited at the moment in which school they can attend because of the inability to get free transport. This will open up a level of parental preference not realised yet in Northern Ireland because some parents simply cannot afford to take their children to a particular school because of the distance of travel. The party will lobby the Executive for additional funding to support this new scheme.



School Funding

We need to re-examine how schools are funded and provide a greater level of certainty for school leaders within budget cycles. One key aspect of this is a three-year budget from the NI Executive that would allow better planning for services and capital.

But we need to go further and address the gap between the per capita funding of our children in Northern Ireland and the other regions in the United Kingdom. It is no longer sustainable that Education is underfunded by the wider NI Executive and this must change.

School Street Schemes

All parents will know that the 'school drop off' can be a stressful time of the day. It can also be a hazardous time for children and whilst accidents are very rare we must create a new way of getting our children to school. A School Street is effectively a pedestrian and cycling zone. This has a number of benefits such as supporting active travel, cleaner air, reducing vehicle movement and creates a safer and more pleasant start and end to the day for everyone in and around school communities. We will work with the Department of Infrastructure to roll these out across Northern Ireland for those schools who wish to take part in the scheme.

Achievements In Education

The DUP, through its Ministers, has delivered a number of key education objectives. While progress has been made we recognise there is much more to do.

- The DUP has **increased the number of Nurture Units** in Northern Ireland over the last mandate by 100% with the number now standing at 62. These units support some of our most vulnerable pupils.
- We supported schools during COVID-19 with an **additional £149m** of funding
- Our DUP Ministers have increased funding for some of our most vulnerable members of society with **spend on children with Special Educational Needs rising by 77%** during this mandate.
- We have introduced during this assembly term **the most progressive School Starting Age legislation** within the UK. The School Age Bill will provide real choice to the parents of many thousands of children born in April, May and June each year and also to premature children who would have been Young for Year if born at term. No longer will any child in Northern Ireland be required to start school a year earlier due to their premature birth.
- We created the **Engage programme to support children coming back to school** during COVID-19. Our DUP Education Ministers have invested **more than £42m in this scheme.**



- Our Ministers introduced the 1st Northern Ireland wide report into **Educational Underachievement** and have now implemented the majority of the action points from the Fair Start report.
- We **introduced the first Holiday Hunger scheme** in Northern Ireland and also rolled out the “period poverty” pilot for schools.
- We created the Primary School Counselling pilot “Healthy Happy Minds” with a **direct investment of £7m**.
- We have **introduced mandatory CPR training** into the Curriculum for all pupils aged 11-14 with CCEA and the Education Authority working closely with the British Heart Foundation and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to develop guidance, resources and training.
- As part of the **NI100 celebrations** the Department of Education rolled out a specific programme to give students a better shared understanding of the last 100 years of Northern Ireland’s history and also **provided funding directly to schools to allow them to mark the event**.
- As part of our commitment to reforming education we have **delivered an “Independent Review of Education”** which is due to report next year.
- In 2020 and 2021 our Ministers **provided the funding for free summer schemes** across all schools in Northern Ireland.
- The Department is currently rolling out a **programme for the Queens Platinum Jubilee**. This will not only provide resources to mark this historic event but also will provide funding directly to schools to allow them to mark it.
- The **Childcare Sector** - DUP Ministers have supported the sector with **£36 million being paid to childcare providers**, to enable the sector to remain viable and childcare places to be available for families, at a time when the essential role played by early education and childcare to our broader society and economy was demonstrated more clearly than ever.
- We have provided **20,000 digital devices** to all statutory Nursery, Primary School, EOTAS centre, Special School and Post Primary teachers.
- In 2021 we **invested £21m investment in the provision of education in Special Schools**. 17 Special Schools benefited from the funding providing 61 additional classes, the recruitment of approximately 60 additional teachers and 145 additional classroom assistants.
- This year we **have provided £2 million to assist schools in enhancing their outdoor learning spaces** and provide good quality play equipment.





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