



Listening to controlled schools

June 2017

This report was written by John Reid and John Wilkinson, who, along with Paddy Mackey facilitated a series of events which enabled CSSC to listen to controlled schools from all sectors and from all areas of Northern Ireland.

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CSSC contact:

Sara McCracken, Head of Marketing, Research and Communications

Email: Sara.mccracken@csscni.org.uk Tel: 028 9531 3030

Second Floor, Main Building, Stranmillis University College, Belfast, BT9 5DY

www.csscni.org.uk | [@CSSC NI](https://www.instagram.com/CSSC_NI)

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Foreword

Since its inception on 1 September 2016, I have been delighted at the overwhelming support that the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) has received from controlled schools right across Northern Ireland.

This response has come from all sectors – nursery, special schools, primary and post-primary, with 90% of schools having chosen to register with CSSC.

It reflects on the tireless efforts of the working group, led by Uel McCrea, and a number of associates, led by Gordon Topping. These dedicated educationalists engaged with Ministers, civil servants, representatives of controlled schools, the Transferor Representatives' Council, the Education Authority and other sectoral bodies to develop the vision of setting up an effective support organisation for controlled schools.

CSSC staff have been busy in these early months of the organisation's existence, seeking opportunities to promote controlled schools to policy makers and the public alike, and providing support to schools when required.

However, as a membership organisation, it is essential that CSSC represents your views. We therefore decided to host a series of events to listen to and engage with principals and governors. These well-attended events provided a fora for lively discussion around both positive and challenging aspects of our education system. I am grateful to all those who attended, and to the facilitators Paddy Mackey, John Wilkinson and John Reid.

The outcomes from the events are contained within this report. I assure you that both the Board of Directors of CSSC and staff will use the findings to inform our programme of work.

The Controlled Schools' Support Council vision is one that supports controlled schools in providing high quality education for children and young people to enable them to learn, develop and grow together within the values of a non-denominational Christian environment.

By working together, I am confident that we will be able to achieve this vision and ensure that Northern Ireland has an education system that delivers for all its pupils.



Barry Mulholland
Chief Executive

Executive summary

A series of events to enable the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) to listen to and engage with principals and governors of controlled schools was held in February and March 2017 in venues across Northern Ireland. These were termed 'listening events'.

As a result of this engagement, participants recognised and endorsed CSSC as the representative and advocacy body of controlled schools. Controlled school governors and school principals are committed to fully supporting CSSC in its work.

Governors and principals affirmed the centrality of pupil centred provision and decision making by school leaders to secure the highest possible educational outcomes and achievements for all pupils.

However, this desired outcome is hampered by the shortage of finances, diminishing resources and a deepening gap in the provision of advice and support for governors and teaching staff alike.

Governors highlighted that they require to be more effectively supported and developed in the valuable voluntary contribution they make to the life and success of controlled schools.

The need for a better definition of ethos in controlled schools became evident in the discussion. Previous work to define ethos in the controlled schools needs to be further developed in order to consistently shape the behaviours and actions in schools.

Effective, timely and relevant communication between CSSC and controlled schools was identified as a priority, and needs to be based upon 'listen to us, work with us and communicate effectively with us'.

It was noted that governors and school principals, working in partnership with CSSC, would value the following:

- being able to influence educational policy and direction on behalf of the interests of controlled schools
- maximising the engagement of school-based practitioners in the co-design and co-construction of CSSC strategies and business developments
- a reduction in isolation, which schools felt was a characteristic of the controlled schools sector
- development of effective networks within the controlled schools sector leading to continuous school improvements informed by the sharing of good practice
- improvement in the achievement and attainment profiles of pupils
- a significant reduction in the number of schools presenting as underperforming in ETI inspections
- positive media and community views of controlled schools.

Education in Northern Ireland

Education in Northern Ireland is multifaceted and complex. The overall responsibility is assigned to the Department of Education (DE), which is one of the nine departments accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

DE's primary statutory duty¹ is to promote the education of the people of Northern Ireland and to ensure the effective implementation of education policy. DE's main statutory areas of responsibility are:

- provision of education for children up to age four
- primary, post-primary and special education
- the youth service.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), independent of but included within DE, inspects educational provision for all grant aided schools in Northern Ireland.

DE is accountable through its Minister to the Assembly for the delivery of its statutory functions and for the effective use of the public funds for which it is responsible. It is supported in delivering its functions by a range of arm's length bodies, each of which is accountable to DE. These include:

- Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the statutory function of which includes the provision of advice and support to DE on curriculum and assessment²
- General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI), which has a statutory duty to determine who should be a member of the teaching profession in Northern Ireland³
- Education Authority (EA), which is responsible for ensuring that efficient and effective primary and secondary education services are available to meet the needs of children and young people, and support for the provision of efficient and effective youth services⁴. EA manages the controlled schools' estate
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) which promotes the management and planning of Catholic maintained schools and provides advice to DE⁵. In addition, CCMS employs all teachers for Catholic maintained schools and is the managing authority for the CCMS schools estate
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), which coordinates efforts to develop integrated education and support parents in the opening of new schools⁶
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CNaG), which promotes, facilitates and encourages Irish medium education⁷.

In the last academic year (2016/17) there were 95 Nursery Schools (5,864 pupils), 39 Special Schools (5,407 pupils), 821 Primary Schools (181,302 pupils) and 201 post primary schools

¹ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/about-department-education#toc-2> (accessed 08/06/17)

² <http://ccea.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/our-remit> (accessed 08/06/2017)

³ <http://www.gtcni.org.uk/index.cfm/area/information/page/DisciplinaryFunc> (accessed 08/06/2017)

⁴ <http://www.eani.org.uk/about-us/> (accessed 08/06/2017)

⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1989/2406/part/IX> (accessed 08/06/2017)

⁶ <http://www.nicie.org/about-us/role-of-nicie/a-co-ordinating-body/> (accessed 08/06/2017)

⁷ <http://www.comhairle.org/english/> (accessed 08/06/2017)

(140,413 pupils) in Northern Ireland. The number and type of schools within the controlled sector is outlined in Table 1.

The controlled education sector

The origins of the controlled sector were in the early 20th century, when schools, managed mainly by the Protestant Churches, were transferred to the state. Together, with schools provided directly by the state, they formed a non-denominational Church-related sector, delivering free education for all children irrespective of background. From these beginnings of a historic faith context and a commitment to free public education, today's controlled schools provide for a more pluralist society through a diversity of schools with individual characteristics, but with core values and principles.

Controlled schools have been owned and managed by Education and Library Boards (ELBs) since 1973. ELBs had a unique dual role. They were closely associated with the controlled sector through ownership of premises and management, but had a duty to all sectors in making educational provision and support. The tensions between these roles meant that ELBs were unable to act as advocates for the controlled sector solely or to represent that sector exclusively.

In many ways controlled schools are unique. The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986⁸ defines a controlled school as 'a grant aided school under the management of a board' and the Education (Northern Ireland) Act 2014⁹ maintains this definition under EA.

Schedule 4 of the 1986 Order sets out that controlled schools have particular forms of governing bodies recognising their origins, history and the communities they serve. In addition, Article 21¹⁰ of the 1986 Order defines that in terms of religious education, a controlled school, other than a controlled integrated school, is required to deliver 'undenominational religious education' and collective worship. This forms a distinctive element of a controlled school's ethos.

In terms of a controlled integrated school, Article 21 states that the religious education and collective worship required shall be under the control of the Board of Governors.

⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1986/594/contents> (accessed 12/06/2017)

⁹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/cy/ni/2014/12> (accessed 08/06/2017)

¹⁰ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1986/594/article/21#commentary-c17006481> (accessed 12/06/17)

Diversity in the controlled sector

The modern controlled education sector is a large, diverse and distinctive system which is:

- church related
- diverse in provision and governance
- inclusive in making provision for children and young people from all backgrounds
- aspirational in seeking to provide the best possible education.

As show in Table 1, in 2016/17 there were 560 controlled schools in Northern Ireland, accounting for 48% of all nursery, primary, special and post-primary schools. A total of 140,632 pupils attended these controlled schools, representing 42% of all school enrolments in Northern Ireland.

These figures demonstrate the scale and nature of the controlled sector and illustrate that it has the largest number and range of schools in Northern Ireland, with a large number of governors and a wide range of pupils.

Table 1: Pupil numbers in controlled schools 2016/17

School sector	Number of schools	Number of pupils	Percentage of schools that are members of CSSC
Nursery	64	4,141	87.5%
Primary	389	87,198	89.7%
Secondary	54	29,929	100%
Grammar	16	14,267	100%
Special	37	5,097	78.4%
Totals	560 (48% of all schools)	140,632 (42% of all pupils)	90%

The Controlled Schools' Support Council

In 2014, the Minister for Education and Northern Ireland Executive agreed to establish and fund a support body for schools in the controlled sector as there had been no specific support for this sector over the previous 30 years. Legacy issues which needed to be addressed included ethos, representation and advocacy¹¹.

The Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 provided for the Department to pay grants to any body representing the interests of controlled schools, or of any other grant aided schools¹². The supporting body for controlled schools is The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC), which received Ministerial affirmation to enhance the quality of educational provision DE.

To achieve this, CSSC would pay particular attention to the following on behalf of the controlled sector:

- advocacy
- ethos
- governance
- raising standards
- area planning
- external relationships
- business management.

In fulfilling these functions, CSSC would act as a constructive and positive critical friend to controlled schools, encouraging them to provide excellence for their pupils and communities.

The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is currently classed as a Third-Party Organisation. It is a company limited by guarantee and is seeking charitable status.

The CSSC was formally established on the 1st September 2016 and the Minister for Education had allocated funding of up to around £1m annually¹³.

¹¹ Official Report (Hansard) Tuesday 14 October 2014 Volume 98, No4

¹² Northern Ireland Assembly RAISE Briefing paper – Education System in Northern Ireland Paper 44/16 NIAR 208-16 8 August 2016

¹³ Northern Ireland Assembly RAISE Briefing paper – Education System in Northern Ireland Paper 44/16 NIAR 208-16 8 August 2016

Engagement with controlled schools

The need for CSSC has been made abundantly clear in the short time it has been in existence, with 90% of controlled schools opting-in to register with the Council.

Given this high level of membership, it was agreed to invite governors and principals to a series of events. The key objectives of the events were to:

1. outline the role and work to date of CSSC
2. listen to schools' views on how CSSC can best support them

Eleven of these 'listening events' took place in February and March 2017 across Northern Ireland, attended by governors and principals from controlled schools. Further information on the structure of the listening events is contained in Appendix 1.

CSSC Chief Executive Barry Mulholland provided an overview of the history and recent developments in the establishment of CSSC and its key objectives. He gave a commitment to work in partnership with controlled schools. This would ensure that the interests and future developments of controlled schools were strategically framed and that CSSC would support the needs and aspirations of both individual schools and the sector as a whole.

The listening events enabled governors and principals to raise and discuss their significant issues and concerns as a result of the current educational climate. They discussed potential strategic responses and actions to address such concerns.

Participants discussed how they could work in collaboration with CSSC to raise the profile of the controlled sector and create a more equitable and equal standing with other sectoral interest groups. The need to re-define public and community perception of controlled school and to celebrate success and improvement was highlighted.

The following findings, conclusions and recommendations were informed by the participants at each of the events, who were consulted afterwards to ensure that summary reports had accurately reflected their views. This report also takes cognisance of other communications between individual schools which has contacted CSSC regarding particular issues and concerns.

The themes arising from the listening events have been encapsulated under the following headings:

- ethos
- raising achievement
- governors and governance
- advocacy and representation
- communications and research.

Ethos

Ethos was a term referenced at every event.

Whilst previous work had set about to acknowledge and define the ethos of controlled schools, few of the attendees could articulate what being a 'controlled school' meant. Thus, during the events, there was no single definition and/or interpretation of what the controlled sector stood for.

At a number of events the term 'inclusive' was proposed as a defining characteristic of all controlled schools. A comment from an attendee summed up the general view "where every child and parent/carer is valued and that the values underpinning controlled schools work for every child".

A dominating perspective was that the controlled education sector epitomises and is a reflection of all society; it is inclusive and open to all.

However, with this comes the challenge of CSSC being a voice for all, considering the diverse nature of the sector which includes special, nursery, primary and post-primary education.

At some events, controlled schools were considered to have legacy issues dating back to the 1948 legislation when they were established. Other sectoral bodies have since emerged, including CCMS, NICIE and CNaG. It was felt that ethos was a significant feature in the development of these sectors since their inception.

There was a sense that ethos as a concept had drifted over time and that this should be a key feature of the work of CSSC.

There was a strong feeling throughout the listening events that controlled schools, because of their legal status, are effectively integrated since they are non-denominational. It was felt that this had become blurred with the sector perceived as 'protestant'. A baseline analysis by CSSC has shown that the religious breakdown of pupils in the controlled sector is 66% Protestant, 10% Catholic, 18% no religion and 6% other¹⁴.

During the events, governors and school principals expressed a firm commitment to creating and developing a more encompassing and more clearly defined interpretation of what ethos in the controlled sector is and what it means for their schools. They voiced their willingness to engage with CSSC to shape the ethos, vision and values of controlled schools.

Ethos conclusions

Ethos is an important aspect of school culture and assists in defining the vision, values and principles that inform and determine decision-making and actions in every school setting. It should pervade governors' planning and actions in the governance arrangements for schools. Ethos should also dominate the leadership and professional teaching practices within schools, particularly the school development planning processes.

¹⁴ An analysis of the controlled schools' sector. CSSC May 2017

While much of this is consistent with DE guidelines for governors¹⁵ and school planning and development¹⁶, ethos is much more deeply rooted in the evolution of each school and has, over time, shaped the values and vision of each school separately.

Ethos, as a concept to convey the nature of the controlled school sector, is problematic to articulate.

Controlled schools are by statute and legislation non-denominational. Given that controlled schools are therefore integrated by their nature, participants in the listening events expressed the view that this should be more vocally articulated.

The general view of attendees was that schools in the controlled sector are misrepresented as 'protestant schools'. As referenced above, this does not reflect the findings of the CSSC baseline assessment.

Previous work during the setting up of CSSC had described controlled education as a 'non-denominational church related sector delivering free education for all irrespective of background'. Building on this work, attendees felt that further development was required to develop a clearer narrative and working definition of ethos. This would then enable an interpretation of ethos to be applied to school policy and practice.

Ethos recommendations

Based on feedback from the listening events, it is recommended that CSSC undertakes to:

- define the values, behaviours and actions of those subscribing to controlled schools' ethos
- clarify and describe the principles and values of the controlled education sector
- build on the wish of governors and principals to be actively involved in capturing the 'ethos dividend' that will more accurately define the culture, climate and values of controlled schools and its impact on pupil development and achievement.
 - This may best be achieved by establishing a working group representative of the broad interests of controlled schools. This group, informed through a research-based perspective on ethos, culture, climate and impact upon improving school effectiveness, could establish:
 - a series of statements on ethos, culture, climate and values for controlled schools
 - a number of underpinning principles that secure an understanding of the behaviours and actions that consistently represent ethos in controlled schools

¹⁵ ESAGS, Guide for School Governors

¹⁶ ESAGS – School Improvement

- a framework document / self-evaluation tool to enable each controlled school to assess its ethos and how its ethos contributes to overall educational outcomes, raising achievement and school improvement.

Short term benefits (1-3 years)

- Ethos becomes a prominent theme in the promotion of controlled schools as a strong, vibrant sector and informs the strategic and corporate performance of all schools.
- Governors, school leaders, teachers, ancillary and auxiliary staff, parents and pupils are more acutely aware of the ethos factor in controlled schools.

Long-term benefits (2-5 years)

- The educational system and wider society have a stronger understanding of what controlled schools stand for.
- Ethos, through a series of guiding principles, is embedded in controlled schools and constantly drives school improvement and pupil development.

Advocacy and representation

There was a unanimous perspective at all of the events that CSSC's establishment was particularly important at a time when DE policy, funding concerns, administration overhaul and reduction in support arrangements were creating significant challenge for the governance, leadership and management of schools.

Participants strongly confirmed CSSC's stated roles in facilitating and representing the needs of individual schools as well as the views of the controlled sector as a whole.

The majority of attendees felt that controlled schools have not been equally represented as a sector. There was a widely-held view that the interests of controlled schools were under-represented, particularly when compared with other educational sector interest groups.

Principals and governors from all education settings expressed major concerns about society, community and media perceptions of the controlled school sector as under-achieving and performing less well in comparison to other sectors.

It was felt that local media reporting tended to portray a negative image of the controlled education sector and that this was disproportionate to other sectors.

There was a strong voice from amongst the attendees that this perceived misrepresentation needs to be addressed urgently, and that CSSC is well placed to re-define the image of controlled schools with a focus on improving school performance and raising achievements for all.

Shared education was noted during a number of events and was particular to those schools presently involved in new initiatives linked to specific DE funding proposals.

There was a unanimous commitment by attendees throughout the events to engage positively with CSSC, to be ambassadors in working with other school sectors, with other schools in their geographic area and to other governors and staff within their own school. This would progress advocacy and representation of the controlled sector at all levels.

Advocacy and representation conclusions

The advocacy and representational role of CSSC as set out in its Articles of Association was endorsed unanimously by governors and school principals who attended the events. This role affects individual schools, groups of schools and the sector as a whole.

CSSC advocacy and representational role affirms the controlled sector at a system level, regional level and particularly at an individual school level.

Shared education has strategic importance for CSSC. This DE priority-funded area will have continuing and significant consequences for controlled schools and CSSC is strategically placed to provide guidance, advice and support to governors and school principals.

There was a strong consensus that CSSC can advocate on behalf of all controlled schools to secure active involvement in educational policy development. Participants affirmed that

CSSC could act as an authoritative and professional voice on educational matters at a level that makes a difference, for example at a Northern Ireland-wide, local or individual school level.

However, the caveat was that this advocacy needed to show results quickly to secure long term confidence in CSSC by governors and school principals.

Attendees were willing to be active in advocacy processes, and encouraged CSSC to engage with DE and other educational interest groups to effect a change in policies and practice in the interests of controlled schools, staff, pupils, parents and the wider community.

Advocacy and representational recommendations may best be achieved by CSSC clearly setting out advocacy and representation as key strategic priorities, and how they will be advanced. There must be an established timeline for building these to ensure equality and equity with other sectoral interest groups.

Concurrently, CSSC should seek to define and establish its advocacy and representational role with the media.

Advocacy recommendations

Based on feedback from the listening events, it is recommended that CSSC undertakes to:

- regularly consult and engage with governors and school principals regarding advocacy work to ensure that they have a voice in decisions that concern school governance and leadership
- clearly define its advocacy role and ensure it is understood by controlled schools and other educational stakeholders, with an advocacy policy established to ensure clarity in application and focus. In doing so CSSC should articulate how advocacy will be applied and understood at an individual school, regional/groups of school and system levels
- ensure advocacy policy is consistent with CSSC's Articles of Association and ensure that memorandums of understanding with other educational bodies do not usurp existing frameworks that define the statutory and legal responsibilities of such educational bodies, including EA
- robustly advance the interests of the controlled education sector and positively influence educational and wider social policy
- establish itself as the significant voice for controlled education, acting to secure equity and equality in the interests of the sector as a whole and individual schools
- define a strategic approach to shared education as it affects controlled schools and ensure it becomes a strategic priority for CSSC, working in partnership with DE, EA and other sectoral interest bodies
- ensure that CSSC's annual survey considers the impact of CSSC's advocacy work.

Short term benefits (1-3 years)

- Governors and principals are aware of the advocacy role of CSSC, the gains that its advocacy policy will bring to the sector and also the limitations of protocols to resolving some issues.
- Governors have a growing confidence that there is an advocacy body that can be proactive with regard to advice, bringing issues to the attention of decision makers and acting, where appropriate, on behalf of controlled schools.

Long-term benefits (2-5 years)

- Governors and principals have a high confidence in the advocacy role of CSSC across a range of education and school priorities.
- The controlled schools' voice is prominent in policy development and controlled schools are acknowledged as being a significant interest group in Northern Ireland's education system.
- Complex individual school issues are being dealt with appropriately and that the system stakeholders now accept the advocacy authority of CSSC.
- Governors and school principals are empowered to influence the policy frameworks that ultimately impact upon their own schools.

Representation recommendations

Based on feedback from the listening events, it is recommended that CSSC undertakes to:

- represent the thinking, values and beliefs of controlled schools
- be knowledgeable and understand the principles of child-centred education that make controlled schools what they are, to pupils, parents and the wider community
- act as the voice of controlled schools to secure the best system outcomes for all, while acknowledging the tensions and interests of individual schools
- clearly define and assert its representational role in order to promote the controlled schools as a specific education sector
- strategically frame its work to secure equitable recognition, status and inclusion in significant educational policy developments, brought about primarily by DE, EA, CCEA and ETI, and in partnership with other interest groups such as CCMS, NICIE, CNaG and GBA
- be proactive, strategic and tactical in representing the controlled schools' sector

- anticipate emergent educational policy developments and issues that will impact upon the capability and capacity of governors and principals to govern, lead and manage schools effectively
- represent the collective views of controlled schools and not to be detracted or paralysed by system tensions given the present educational policy environment.

Short term benefits (1-3 years)

- Building confidence for governors and school principals that their corporate and strategic responsibilities are being prioritised, particularly in forums where previously they perceived that they were being excluded, underrepresented or misrepresented.
- The views, wishes and aspirations of controlled schools are genuinely considered when policy decisions and significant educational initiatives and developments are being planned and implemented.

Long-term benefits (2-5 years)

- Governors and principals have a high confidence in policy developments and other educationally focused initiatives.
- CSSC is perceived to be recognised and treated equitably compared to other sectoral interest groups.

Governors and governance

At all of CSSC's listening events, governors and principals mentioned changes to the Northern Ireland education landscape, including:

- austerity
- restructuring of the administration to a regional EA
- assessment
- curriculum
- school inspections.

These are having a significant impact on governors and governance arrangements in controlled schools.

Governance was given a high prominence throughout all of the events. Principals throughout the workshops emphasised the contributions of school governors. It was noted that too often the value of governors in controlled schools was not fully recognised and often taken for granted by the system.

During the events it was noted that there is difficulty in recruiting the full complement of governors required. The range of skills to cover the corporate and strategic roles and responsibilities, as set out in the ESAGS Guidelines for Governors, was not always being met.

It was recognised that governors are committed to the work of the school and give freely of their time. Many of the events noted the increasing workload issues, such as range, intensity and accountability that governors now have to deal with.

A key concern was the level of accountability now being placed on both the board of governors and individual governors in specific areas of responsibility, including finance, child protection and discipline. It was felt by a significant number of governors that their knowledge and skills was limiting their effectiveness in terms of accountability requirements.

Participants stated that current governor support arrangements are not adequate to meet the increasing corporate and strategic demands that governors are charged with in order to meet fully their statutory role. While there was recognition that governor training was being offered at a Northern Ireland level, it was felt that this was specifically targeted at the statutory and legal responsibilities of governors.

Challenges facing governors can be summarised as follows:

- maintaining an up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the changes happening in schools, including policy developments, school development planning processes, area planning, legal and statutory responsibilities and the inspection process for schools
- managing governor workloads
- accessing timely and relevant advice
- recruiting new governors with required skills to contribute to the workings of the Board of Governors

- being a critical friend to the school principal and senior leadership team
- governor self-evaluation.

Governors and governance conclusions

Governors, whilst aware of significant DE and EA policies that inform their role and responsibilities, have concerns that the circulars and advice issued are too complex to be interpreted without a substantial knowledge of educational issues.

The work of school governance in controlled schools is overloaded. Too many demands are being placed upon boards of governors. The level of responsibility is beyond the capacity, and sometimes capability, to work optimally in the best interests of the schools, pupils and parents.

Additional policy and administrative demands as set out in the DE guidelines for governors¹⁷, as well as greater accountability requirements for school educational performance now considered within the inspection processes, is making the work of school governance in controlled schools more complex, challenging and demanding.

Participants felt that the work of governors in controlled schools is taken for granted by DE and EA, with a degree of occasional tokenism. It was recognised that there have been more formal and established supportive frameworks in place for other education sectors, namely CCMS, NICIE, GBA and CNaG.

The recruitment and retention of governors in controlled schools was highlighted as a challenging issue. Not all schools have a full quota of governors, putting additional stresses on sub-committee structures and governor availability. This is particularly evident in small school settings, schools in rural areas and in the nursery sector.

This was viewed as an area for immediate improvement and a priority for CSSC.

The 'critical friend' element of governance is an area for improvement. It was felt by governors attending the events that their knowledge and skills on educational and school improvement issues were not always adequate to provide appropriate levels of challenge and scrutiny.

Enabling governors to provide effective support to the school principal and school leadership is an area that requires development.

¹⁷ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/guide-governor-roles-and-responsibilities>

Governors and governance recommendations

Based on feedback from the listening events, it is recommended that CSSC undertakes to:

- provide a summary of DE policies and circulars in the future in a format that includes the key points, implications and relevance to their work as governors
- work with EA and DE to better explain the range of responsibilities of a board of governors with the goal of simplifying workload requirements through clear and unambiguous guidelines
- work with EA in identifying the barriers to recruiting governors and the retention of governors
- promote school governance to the wider community and business interest groups and identify how professional and community expertise can be tapped to encourage involvement in school governance
- work with schools, EA and the Transferor's Representative Council to encourage recruitment of new governors
- raise the profile of governors and governance in controlled schools
- advocate on behalf of governors with DE and EA to recognise the value that governors bring to effective schooling, as well as their commitment and dedication to work positively and supportively on behalf of pupils, parents/carers, teachers, principals, ancillary and auxiliary staff
- work with EA to secure:
 - relevant, timely and high-quality training and development for governors
 - an annual training and development needs analysis and relevant training
 - an annual review of governance training and development to scrutinise the impact that it is having on governor effectiveness.
- where appropriate, work in partnership with EA and/or other organisations to offer regional workshops for governors that provide updates on:
 - policy developments
 - educational issues that impact on governor effectiveness
 - governor inspection processes and self-evaluation
 - school improvement within controlled school settings
 - controlled school ethos development.
- develop a resource for governors of controlled schools that provides access to educational policies, policy summaries, good practice guides and case studies
- produce a regular newsletter for governors which summarises key education developments and case-studies of effective governance
- arrange events similar to the listening events to focus on governor needs

- establish a forum that is representative of nursery, primary, special and post primary schools to listen and consider the views of governors. This group(s) to meet regularly to ensure that interventions are timely, relevant and appropriate to the needs of governors in controlled school settings.

Short term benefits (1-3 years)

- A strategy for improving governance arrangements in controlled schools, leading to an emerging confidence in governors to conduct responsibilities effectively.
- A more robust scrutiny role in the relationship between governors and school principals.
- Governors' knowledge, skills, understanding and effectiveness supported and developed by relevant training and development working in partnership with EA.
- The ethos, values and principles of controlled schools embodied in the actions and decision-making protocols of board of governors.

Long-term benefits (2-5 years)

- Boards of governors have their full complement of governors.
- Greater diversity in the composition of boards of governors, including greater representation from those that traditionally would not have got involved in school governance.
- Business interest groups more significantly involved in linking with boards of governors, either in full-time involvement or on short term projects.
- School inspection reports affirm that governance arrangements in the majority of controlled schools is highly effective, characterised by:
 - setting high expectations and consistently assuring quality of educational outcomes and achievements for all pupils
 - optimising the resources available to the school to raise standards and improve quality in all aspects of the schools corporate and strategic priorities
 - building their own governance capability and capacity with appropriate governor recruitment and retention arrangements.

Raising achievement

The topics and issues with regard to raising achievement were wide-ranging, reflecting the significant challenges that individual schools, in all sectors, are facing.

These included:

- funding constraints and school viability
- curriculum and assessment changes
- increasing accountability and external scrutiny
- raising attainment
- school improvement
- CPD for teachers, school leaders and governors
- DE policy direction leading to confusion and affecting strategic planning and also planning processes in each school
- selection.

Self-evaluation was considered an important facet in every school. This enabled monitoring, evaluating and reviewing of progress, as well as informing and providing insights to a school in order to improve quality and raise achievement for all pupils. Principals noted that self-evaluation was a major element of the work of the leadership teams to drive forward improvement.

It was noted that external monitoring and inspection of schools was necessary. However there was a majority view which valued the previous approaches to inspection which was framed around critical friendship.

It was felt that the framework for inspection had recently shifted and is now perceived by schools as adversarial. Participants felt that the inspection process was contentious.

There was a unanimous view that the current approach to inspection was unhelpful; it contributed significantly to stress for all concerned including principals, senior leaders, professional teaching staff and governors.

It was perceived that since exam performance, based on GCSE profiles, was prominent in the final judgment, controlled schools with a non-selective intake were disadvantaged compared to selective schools. In terms of GCSE results, the CSSC baseline assessment of the controlled education sector has shown that low attainment schools have below average attendance, higher than average absence rates and above average unauthorised absence rates¹⁸.

This external measure of school success was unfair and not representative of the added value happening to the majority of pupils in controlled post-primary schools.

Internal performance measures applied by many schools referencing 'contextual value added' (CVA) demonstrated that the improvement gain by pupils showed significant

¹⁸ An analysis of the controlled schools' sector. CSSC May 2017

progression from entry stage. It was felt that CSSC should explore CVA or a similar measure as a research project.

Professional support in terms of leadership development in schools is an integral part of raising standards. Concern was expressed about the lack of professional school improvement support for governors and school leaders at all levels.

It was noted that leadership development for principals, senior leaders and middle leaders was required to build capacity in schools to meet the demands of DE educational policy, particularly in light of austerity, increased class sizes, a reduction in resources and the requirement to raise the standard of achievement in all schools.

The need to review the support arrangements for school governors in the context of raising standards was noted. It was felt that existing governor training was to satisfy the statutory nature of school governance such as finance, health and safety, child protection, recruitment and selection and risk registers, rather than raising standards. It was also noted that the style of delivery was too didactic and delivered by personnel familiar with the area of focus but with a limited understanding of application to a school governor setting.

Participants described how schools are beginning to establish networks with other local schools to fill gaps previously encompassed by CPD. These were found to be helpful for schools working collaboratively, but these networks limited the range of topics and themes that could be presented. It was felt that the approach of sharing of effective practice should be developed further, particularly at a Northern Ireland level, which would require a more central coordinated approach.

A number of events referred to the need for the education system to take cognisance of the emotional health and well-being of staff. Principals made reference to high stress levels that were contributing to ill-health and absenteeism. This was having a knock-on effect to raising achievement and sustaining educational improvements.

Raising achievement conclusions

Principals and governors feel that the education system has become very uncertain and that there is a lack of clarity in policy direction from DE and EA. Political uncertainty, lack of policy coherence, austerity and the overhaul and dismantling of the education administration is creating chaos and disarray. This limits school improvement actions in individual schools.

A diverse approach is needed to raise achievement. Taking into account nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools, different DE policy frameworks have different priorities and work to different external performance indicators regarding performance and pupil educational outcomes.

The majority view was that controlled schools were doing a good job in raising achievement and educational outcomes for most pupils. Teachers, school leaders and governors were committed to improving achievement in their school settings, and were setting ambitious targets to improve the educational outcomes for all pupils in their care.

Building professional capability and capacity of teachers, school leaders and governors was viewed as a priority if controlled schools are to continue to raise pupil achievement and improve standards. At present, schools are concerned that there has been a dismantling of CPD structures with no clear strategy for redefining CPD frameworks and infrastructures. Schools are having to create their own CPD networks and share staff development opportunities between schools.

The inspection process and the approaches to the inspection visit are a significantly contentious area. There was a unanimous view that inspection was unhelpful and leads to stress for all schools staff and governors. In post primary schools, the key external measures of attainment and school performance is not providing a real measure of a school's achievement in terms of pupils' personal progress from their entry point baseline score.

GCSE profile, the dominant key performance indicator, misrepresented the CVA dimension. It was felt that the system should review the appropriateness of CVA as a key measure of a school's success.

Raising achievement recommendations

Based on feedback from the listening events, it is recommended that CSSC undertakes to:

- complete an in-depth baseline analysis of performance of the controlled education sector to identify strengths, areas that are showing improvement gains and those areas that are doing less well; this will inform how CSSC can best support controlled schools to improve quality and raise achievement
- encourage EA to undertake an audit of the teaching profession to identify a long-term strategy for teacher recruitment and retention that will address the succession planning requirements within the sector for the next five to 10 years
- raise the profile of success in raising achievement and educational outcomes already evident in controlled schools
- define the characteristics of successful strategies that are securing effective school improvement and share these strategies across the wider controlled school sector
- undertake a research project to explore the key strategic drivers and effective practices that are making a difference to raising attainment and securing sustainable school improvement
- identify recommendations to plan both education system-wide and school-based support in the controlled schools' sector through research outcomes
- encourage and support EA in conducting a needs audit in relation to controlled schools' CPD requirements focussing on:
 - governor development
 - principal development
 - senior/middle leader development

- teacher development.
- encourage and support EA to plan, develop and design an effective framework for securing relevant and appropriate CPD to optimise school improvement throughout the controlled schools sector, raising professional standards in governance, leadership and teaching and raising achievement for all pupils. Strategies to include:
 - regional and local cluster groups
 - sharing good practice workshops
 - sub-sectoral forums to consider specific issues
 - governor support on key strategic issues including area planning, funding and grant applications.

Short term benefits (1-3 years)

- Governors and school principals are engaging with CSSC to improve performance across the whole sector leading to improving results.
- Teachers and school leaders have access to CPD support.

Long-term benefits (2-5 years)

- Results in controlled schools show a marked improvement from the baseline position in 2017.
- Governors are confident in their role in supporting the school principal regarding improving pupil achievement/attainment.
- Inspection reports show a marked improvement with more controlled schools achieving very good/outstanding judgments.

Communications

Attendees appreciated their involvement in the CSSC's listening events. It was felt that this initial level of engagement was appropriate; nevertheless it was deemed important that CSSC needs to keep in contact with member schools. Meetings, at least annually, at which the views of controlled schools could inform future work are needed.

It was important that communication between CSSC and schools should be meaningful, *i.e.* views should be genuinely sought about real matters.

The success of the relationships between CSSC and controlled school governors and principals would be dependent upon the effectiveness of communication arrangements. It was viewed that schools require accurate, relevant and timely information, presented in a manner that enables schools to engage with it.

Attendees were strongly of the view that controlled schools were misrepresented, for example in the media and by other educational bodies; the prevailing external view was that controlled schools were performing less well in comparison to other education sectors.

The headlines of protestant boys as under-achievers seemed to be the tag-line for failures of the Northern Ireland education system. It was felt that such negative perceptions are ingrained in the thinking of DE and EA. Attendees were strongly of the view that the evidence base for these viewpoints and opinions by DE and EA required further investigation.

Communication from CSSC about policy and procedures that impacted on controlled schools would be welcomed, as governors and principals had concerns regarding approaches to communicating and sharing information by DE, EA and ETI. It was felt by many attendees that educational policy development by DE and implementation approaches by EA were applied to schools without an appreciation and understanding of the complex and challenging issues schools were already dealing with.

Concerns were raised regarding the effectiveness of communication between EA and DE with controlled schools, which was largely one-way. Participants indicated that communications were sometimes perceived as intimidating by the recipients. There was no engagement.

Communications conclusions

The overriding expectation for CSSC to be viewed as successful and having an impact on behalf of controlled schools is effective communication. The consistent message from controlled schools was 'listen to us, work with us and communicate effectively with us'. Participants would welcome being kept informed and informed and up-to-date on developments at all levels within the education system".

Credibility and trust between schools and CSSC will be critical to CSSC's success.

Principals and governors would welcome their views and opinions to be authentically sought, valued and understood in the context within which they are governed and led.

Controlled schools are open to a range of approaches to engage with CSSC including conferences and events, newsletters, focus groups, school visits, email, digital media, one-to-one meetings and the AGM.

Communications recommendations

Based on feedback from the listening events, it is recommended that CSSC undertakes to:

- develop a strategic communications plan for CSSC to deliver effective communication channels and structures that ensures engagement with all controlled schools
- raise public awareness of the controlled education sector
- engage strategically with the media and significant policy shapers to ensure that controlled schools are viewed positively in all forums they are involved in
- provide reliable, relevant, timely and context specific information to controlled school governors, school leaders and teachers
- develop appropriate methods of communication, depending on the audience and issue, such as focus groups, events, newsletters, digital media, emails, one to one meetings and the AGM
- engage proactively with school governors and school leaders to in communication arrangements to optimise impact, in the context that active engagement is a two-way process and everyone has a part to play.

Short term benefits (1-3 years)

- Controlled schools have better information regarding education-related developments and the implications for impact in their practice, ultimately driving up school improvement.
- Governors and school leaders have more confidence in the communication arrangements that are in place and that there is a two-way process of engagement with CSSC working for the benefit of all involved.

Long-term benefits (2-5 years)

- CSSC is responsive to the needs of the controlled education sector.
- CSSC actions are primarily informed by schools, leading to trust and value in CSSC's work.

Research

Based on discussions at the listening events, this report highlights significant areas of educational policy and practice relevant to controlled schools and the workings of governors and school leaders. These areas include:

- raising standards and achievement
- ethos
- governance
- performance data reporting
- shared education.

Research should be seen as an enabler to underpin the work of CSSC and inform its objectives. There is therefore scope for CSSC to carry out and commission specific research projects relating to the controlled sector.

Research conclusions

There is a limited research basis specific to the controlled schools sector with regard to these areas and through taking the lead with research, CSSC could help redefine the successful achievements of controlled schools and assist education policy developments in DE and EA.

Since shared education is a significant policy directive by DE, it is important that CSSC is significantly informed of the implications of this policy direction to ensure that controlled schools are well-placed to maximise the educational potential for pupils.

It is important that CSSC presents informed, accurate, reliable and valid perspectives of the controlled schools and to ensure that the advocacy and representational roles are underpinned by robust and authentic research.

Research recommendations

Based on feedback from the listening events, it is recommended that CSSC undertakes to:

- develop a research strategy for CSSC
- as part of this strategy, commission a number of research projects focussed on:
 - baselining educational progression and attainment – refining the argument for contextual value-added measures as a system wide approach to determining school success
 - raising standards and achievements in controlled schools
 - optimising governance in controlled schools setting
 - defining the characteristics of the controlled school ethos.
- commission a longitudinal research project, possibly in partnership with a university, to study the implementation approaches and the impact of shared education on schools in the controlled sector.

Short term benefits (1-3 years)

- CSSC work is informed by evidence-based research and supported by facts.
- Governors and school leaders have confidence in CSSC's research process which informs policy development.

Long-term benefits (2-5 years)

- Improvements in educational progression attainment of pupils is evident.
- A robust research strategy ensures focus on raising standards, optimising governance and ethos development.

Appendix 1 – details of listening events

Purpose of event:

To engage with principals and chairs of Boards of Governors from controlled schools

Aims:

1. Outline the role / work to date of CSSC within each functional area
2. Listen to schools' views on how CSSC can best support them within each functional area

Process:

1. Barry Mulholland to set the context.
 - a. This is what we are about.
 - b. This is what we are doing.
 - c. Strength of the organisation will be determined by the participation of members, the development of a partnership approach and sectoral collaboration.
 - d. We can advocate on your behalf.
2. Set questions to participants.
 - a. How can CSSC best support the controlled sector strategically at a systems level?
 - b. How can CSSC best support the controlled sector strategically at a regional level?
 - c. How can CSSC best support the controlled sector strategically at school level?
 - d. How can you/your school support the development of the work of CSSC in the interests of the controlled schools' sector?

A feedback / satisfaction survey will be used to gather further comments from participants

Outcomes:

1. Findings from each session will be collated into a report and participants consulted.
2. An overarching report outlining findings and recommendations from all sessions will be compiled.
3. The findings will be used to inform CSSC work going forward.

Venue	Date	Facilitator
Silverbirch Hotel	21/02/2017	Paddy Mackey
Lagan Valley Island Centre	22/02/2017	John Wilkinson
Lodge Hotel	23/02/2017	John Wilkinson
Stormont Hotel	28/02/2017	John Reid
Burrendale Hotel	01/03/2017	John Wilkinson
Seagoe Hotel	21/03/2017	John Wilkinson
Glenavon Hotel	22/03/2017	Paddy Mackey
Armagh City Hotel	23/03/2017	John Wilkinson
Clandeboyle Hotel	28/03/2017	John Reid
Everglades Hotel	29/03/2017	Paddy Mackey
Dunsilly Hotel	30/03/2017	John Wilkinson