# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

**1. What is your name?**

The Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC)

**2. Please provide an email address**

Info@csscni.org.uk

**3. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?**

Organisation - Go to question 4. If an individual go to Q5.

**4. Please provide the name of your organisation and outline briefly its context/ aims and scope?**

**context/aims of your organisation**

The Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) was set up in September 2016 to represent and support the interests of the controlled sector in Northern Ireland. To date 95% of controlled schools have opted-in to register with CSSC.

The controlled sector is:

* Large – it accounts for 49% of all schools and caters for over 144,700 children, making it the largest education sector in Northern Ireland.
* Diverse – providing education across all school types, i.e. nursery, primary, secondary, grammar and special schools. Within this, controlled integrated and controlled Irish Medium schools are included.
* Inclusive – providing education for children of all faiths and none (62% of pupils define as Protestant, 10% Catholic and 28% ‘other’) and over 40% of newcomer pupils in Northern Ireland.

CSSC has five key functions:

* Advocacy - on behalf of the individual controlled schools and the sector as a whole
* Ethos - developing and maintaining the collective ethos of the sectors.
* Governance - identifying, encouraging and nominating Governors to controlled schools and ensuring ethos is part of employment considerations
* Raising standards - working with The Education Authority (EA) to raise educational standards
* Schools’ estate - assessing controlled provision, participating in area planning and engaging in strategic planning processes.

CSSC’s vision statement is:

“The Controlled Schools’ Support Council supports controlled schools, which are open to all faiths and none, in providing high quality education for children and young people to enable them to learn, develop and grow together, within the ethos of non-denominational Christian values and principles.”

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

**5. N/A**

**6. What would you say are the main causes of educational underachievement?**

A considerable body of literature exists which explores educational underachievement in Northern Ireland. The persistent links between socio-economic background and underachievement has been evidenced in numerous studies. CSSC welcomes the Expert Panel’s commitment to draw on these previous studies and we agree that the Panel should take cognisance of the extensive work which exists in this area.

Educational underachievement is multifaceted and while socio-economic disadvantage is strongly linked to it, there are many contributing factors that must be considered when exploring its causes.

We welcome the statement in the Terms of Reference which states “it is generally recognised that underachievement is due to its inextricable link with poverty in society, which is a much wider issue than education alone.” (DENI, 2020:1). While schools are educational centres, many of the causes of underachievement originate well before a pupil enters the school gates. Schools can address some barriers to learning and develop pathways to achievement, however we must be careful not to look to schools to solve the underlying societal issues linked to underachievement.

CSSC’s practical experiences of working with controlled schools reinforces the existing research in this area, in particular the ILiAD study (2017) which comprehensively explored links in achievement and deprivation at a local level in Northern Ireland, the factors influencing underachievement can be broadly grouped under three headings: Individual, School and Structural.

**Individual**

Barriers to learning from an individual perspective focus on a pupil’s resilience, wellbeing, self-esteem, aspirations and attendance at school. A pupil’s family background also adds contributory factors, such as socioeconomic background, family circumstances, parental experience and perception of education and cultural background. Parental involvement in education is also critical. The ILiAD study demonstrated that where pupils had parental support, good community links and individual resilience their educational attainment was enhanced.

**School**

At CSSC our central focus is on supporting controlled schools, one of our key functions is to work with EA to raise standards. The ILiAD study outlined four school-level inhibitors of attainment in areas of deprivation:

* Low expectations on the part of some schools.
* Perception among some parents of schools and teachers as ‘middle class’ and ‘detached’ (making it more difficult for parents to play a role in their child’s education).
* High rates of absenteeism and exclusion in some schools (higher rates of absenteeism equalled lower rates of attainment).
* Insufficient support for SEN.

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

Every school will have its own unique circumstances, for example the number of pupils entitled to free school meals, pupils with special educational needs and newcomer pupils. Underachievement in schools is inextricably linked to these factors. Schools can take actions to address inhibitors of attainment, such as those mentioned in the ILiAD study. There are many controlled schools which have taken innovative and strategic approaches to address underachievement. However, this can often require additional resource.

**System/structural/policy**

As the Terms of Reference acknowledge, numerous policy interventions and significant financial investments by the Department of Education and others have taken place. In discussion with principals they identified the most significant policy and/structural inhibitors of attainment are; the current economic climate; legacies of the recent conflict; the spatial detachment of schools and the communities they serve; the health and wellbeing of pupils; and insufficient SEN support.

The cultural perception of education in different communities is also linked to underachievement. Studies reveal that in general there is a higher value placed upon education and attainment within the Catholic community in contrast to those in Protestant working class areas (QUB, 2016: 55). This is reflected in attainment levels at GCSE and A Level grades and in numbers moving on to further and higher education or employment. Historical factors, such as the opportunities traditionally open to some school leavers in certain industries, such as the ship building industry in Belfast, which no longer exist, also impact upon the cultural perception and value placed on education at a generational level.

The benchmark for success at post-primary level, as measured by DE and other government departments, and referenced in the Terms of Reference, is the attainment of five or more GCSEs A\*-C including GCSE English and Maths. For pupils in Northern Ireland the parameters of success are narrowly defined by this benchmark. Basic measures such as GCSE results do not reflect the added value that schools provide to enable pupils to achieve their potential which calls into question the definition of underachievement. It may be useful for the Panel to clarify what it defines as a school underachieving.

**Measures of attainment**

When the statistics are considered, the complexity of factors impacting on pupil attainment become apparent. It is widely noted that girls achieve higher at GCSE level than boys and that Catholic pupils achieve higher than their Protestant counterparts – particularly referenced is the attainment of Protestant boys from disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, it must also be noted that more Catholic pupils are entitled to free school meals than Protestant pupils. In the 2018/19 school leaver data, which refers to final year and year 12 pupils, there were 1,658 Catholic boys entitled to free school meals, compared to 874 Protestant boys. 46.7% of the Catholic cohort attained the GCSE benchmark, compared to 37.9% of the Protestant cohort. This 8.8 percentage point difference equates to a difference of 77 boys, if the same proportion of Protestant FSME boys as Catholic FSME boys were to attain the set standard. Over a seven-year period the difference in numbers of actual boys ranges from a low of 50 to a high of 105. Similar trends are noted when comparing Catholic FSME girls’ attainment and Protestant FSME girls’

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

attainment. For many years the focus on research in this area has been on FSME boys, while girls’ underachievement has largely flown under the radar. However, underachievement is also evident in FSME girls, particularly from the Protestant community. This is an area which requires further exploration.

As mentioned above schools cannot redress societal issues which impact on underachievement, but they can address barriers to learning, given the necessary resources to do so. Wider societal change must also be tackled. Schools with higher proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals or special educational needs can put in place practices and interventions to facilitate and encourage learning. For example, the underachievement of boys in comparison to other groups must be addressed using interventions which are proven and tested.

In summary, we are pleased that the Panel will draw on existing research into the causes of underachievement. The three-level approach to understanding the causes, as evidenced in the ILiAD study, and other key pieces of research, highlight that when tackling underachievement this must also be done at all three levels: pupil, school and structural. From a school perspective there are many examples of schools which have taken actions to address underachievement by focusing on barriers to learning for groups of pupils who are at risk of underachievement. The focus should now be to explore these methods and approaches.

To help explore this further CSSC is keen to facilitate an opportunity for the Panel to engage directly with a group of Principals from controlled schools to inform the panel about their experiences in successfully tackling underachievement.

**7. In your view, what is the main impact of educational underachievement?**

For the purposes of this answer we will again consider potential impact of educational underachievement under three headings.

**Individual**

There is a strong evidence base from research that an adverse home situation with poor and inadequate levels of parental support feeds into a cycle of under-achievement for the pupil, impacting upon their home experience in relation to education. A disinterest and lack of engagement from parents with school and the education of their child reinforces a lack of value in the learning process and fosters a negativity about all things related to school. As a consequence attendance for the pupil may be low or at best sporadic; homeworks may be of a poor standard or not completed; attendance at parental meetings or school events unlikely and the encouragement to achieve and strive for success is not a priority within the family and as a result for the pupil.

There is the potential for this educational outlook to be reinforced by peer pressure and a group mentality towards school and attainment. Anecdotally referred to as ‘the wrong crowd’ the pupil may seek solace in a group with similar experiences and outlook on their schooling experience which in turn reinforces the lack of engagement and motivation for educational attainment.

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

The impact for the individual is likely to be a high degree of low esteem based around their learning experience and a feeling of being ‘left behind’ or ‘left out’ of a system which celebrates achievement and success. For the pupil they may seek other avenues to reinforce their self-worth, acceptance and value as an individual. It may be too simple to reinforce the stereotype that the pupil will resort to anti-social behaviour or become the child who is always in detention or part of the more ‘difficult’ class although there is ample evidence that these pupils do exist. However, there are those children who are equally impacted by such circumstances but maintain a lower profile. They are classified as low achievers and the expectation is a low outcome in terms of academic achievement. The impact on the pupil may likely be the same in terms of low esteem and low expectations of themselves, they simply don’t kick against the system but try to manage their way through it with the least fuss and effort.

Educational underachievement for the individual at its more extreme will leave the pupil with a negative experience of their learning and a low regard of what they can achieve in terms of recognised qualifications. At a pragmatic level it is likely to result in low grades at GCSE level and little potential to pursue further academic study. The capacity to secure higher salaried jobs will be limited and there is an increased likelihood that the individual will require benefits from the welfare system at some stage during their adult life.

**School**

Research studies have identified key factors within the school system which can raise the level of attainment. Strong visionary leadership, high expectations, a strong sense of community are just some of the things which can affect the learning outcomes positively within a school. What is true in a positive sense can also be true in a negative sense and go towards impacting negatively on a school, contributing to underachievement. These can be:

* Low expectations
* School leaders/teachers disconnected from pupils
* Poor Pastoral care and behaviour support
* SEN support is not structured and/or is inadequate
* Poor community links
* No vision and/or vision not shared and owned
* Curriculum not matched with pupil needs and aspirations

There is ample evidence within research studies which expand upon the impacts of these factors and others but it is useful to highlight the following points in relation to the impact of educational underachievement at a school level.

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

**Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

There is clear evidence of the growing demand and resultant pressure being placed upon schools by the increase in both numbers of pupils with Special Educational Needs and increasing complexity of need. Whilst this does not necessarily correlate in all instances with underachievement there are nevertheless strong links and evidence to demonstrate that pupils who are supported through SEN have challenges around their attainment levels.

It is important to stress that the impact upon the school is not necessarily at the policies, procedures or practice level but more at the point of delivery. The capacity for a school to deliver what it feels to be best practice and to implement measures which would address underachievement is frustrated by the budget constraints and as a result lack of access to resources and/or timely interventions. This may also include access to external resources in terms of support services such as Educational Psychologists and Literacy or Numeracy pupils support services etc. In many instances the volume of pupils requiring assistance are making it difficult for the schools to effectively meet pupil needs.

**Behaviour**

This aspect is not mutually exclusive of the above point and is quite frequently linked with the increasing demand on supporting pupils with SEN. Teachers and schools are being faced with an increasing number of pupils designated with a particular condition. The resultant behaviour associated with many of these conditions can present huge classroom management issues and impact upon the learning of the individual and quite often the class as a whole. The time required to deal effectively with the pupil and the consequences of their behaviour likewise impacts adversely on the teacher’s time and also on that of senior management as they quite frequently assist with interventions.

**Mental Health and Well-Being**

This is reflected both at a pupil level and also at a staff level. There has been some early positive work undertaken with Trauma Informed Practice around awareness of issues for pupils and the reasons behind behaviours but there is still considerable ground to cover in terms of a universal understanding across schools. The impact upon staff can be considerable and resultant stress of having to manage and deal with behavioural issues on a constant basis leads to a decline in teacher performance and potential absence for medical reasons. The cyclical effect on the teaching and learning of pupils is thus further exacerbated.

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

**Structural/societal**

Again some of these outcomes are well rehearsed across research papers and serve to highlight key impacts at a societal level and at a system level. Elements such as;

* Economic climate
* Unemployment
* Conflict legacy
* Lack of educational investment
* Cultural values on education

are only some of the areas highlighted in studies such as the Iliad.

It is arguable that the system has contributed to the impact of underachievement by failing to address it in any sustained and meaningful manner. A string of research studies has identified the issues and focused on key contributory factors. It is our hope and expectation that this report will result in specific actions to be taken forward in addressing the issue.

It is important to note that the ‘impact’ upon the system and society is closely aligned with the contributory factors identified towards underachievement. A lack of financial investment in the educational system does in turn influence the ability of schools to suitably deploy appropriate resources to address underachievement issues. The cutting back of educational services, at a time when demand is increasing, compounds the problem. The reduction in educational support services restricts access to help which would assist schools in targeting pupils who would benefit from additional support. Lack of personnel then places extra pressure upon existing support services and demand far outstrips supply with services, and ultimately people, being stretched to provide the necessary and relevant support to schools and pupils.

Initiatives, such as Nurture Units, are welcomed and provide an invaluable service to schools and pupils and have been evidenced as making a difference. However, these are limited and whilst there is acknowledgement of the benefits financial restrictions mean the system is unable to provide such a program universally across schools where it could make a significant difference. Other previous initiatives, such as the Signature Project which provided additional teachers for schools to target literacy and numeracy outcomes are welcomed by schools and have demonstrated significant impact, but again they have been limited in duration. The Signature Project ended after two years.

This short-term intervention, or limited access to existing services, impacts directly upon schools being able to strategically plan to address issues of underachievement in a sustained and meaningful manner and ultimately impacts upon children who would have benefitted from receiving such support. It also leaves schools with a sense of dissatisfaction in the system adequately meeting their needs or feeling that support may be dependent on their location and Free School Meals quota.

The higher value that is placed on education by the Catholic community compared to the Protestant community, particularly in working class areas is well referenced. That impact at a system and societal level still remains, largely, unaddressed and the ethos and culture remains largely unbroken.

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

The issues are complex and will not be addressed with education interventions in isolation.  A multi-disciplinary longer term strategic approach is required and it is hoped the outcomes of this initiative will result in this being realised.

**8. From the list below please select five (only) interventions that you consider have an impact on raising educational achievement and rank in order with 1 being the most effective. Please add any additional interventions in the comment box below**

* **Effective school leadership1**
* **Effective classroom teaching2**
* **Greater family engagement5**
* **Greater focus on children and young people's mental health, well-being and resilience3**
* **Addressing income poverty**
* **Raising aspirations**
* **Greater focus on early years development including language development 4**
* **Improving local employment opportunities**
* **Stronger links between school and community**
* **Greater investment in schools - capital/ buildings**
* **Effective intervention for Special Educational Needs**
* **A relevant and engaging curriculum**
* **Provision of educational opportunities or life long learning skills for parents**
* **Other**

Although ranked, no one intervention necessarily supersedes the others. All interventions play a significant part in addressing underachievement and should not be viewed in isolation as potential solutions

**9. In your experience what has worked to address educational underachievement?**

**Any links to supporting evidence will not work through Citizen Space so links/ copies of external documents should be emailed to** [**expertpanel@education-ni.gov.uk**](mailto:expertpanel@education-ni.gov.uk)

As the advocacy body for controlled schools, CSSC has provided advice and support to controlled schools and a representational voice for the controlled sector. CSSC, on behalf of controlled schools, has sought to influence policy, developments and reforms to education provision to ensure high quality education outcomes for all children and young people. CSSC has responded with support to arising needs within controlled schools and where appropriate, signposted to other bodies. After listening to controlled schools, CSSC has responded to public consultations that would impact on controlled schools. CSSC also represents the interests of controlled schools through attendance at various fora, including: Educational Technology Services Project – Strategic and Advisory Group (STAG), PRSD Regional Steering Group, MAPMaths, MAST, DE Engagement Reference Group (Suspensions and Expulsions Review) and through engagement in relevant workstreams of the Education Transformation Programme, e.g. Home to School Transport Review.

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

Since 2016, CSSC has worked constructively with The Department of Education (DE), EA, other key stakeholders and controlled schools to address underachievement and to raise educational standards, thereby making a meaningful contribution to DE’s corporate goal of raising standards for all. Based on our own work and experiences with controlled schools we have many insights into how schools can address some of the barriers to learning. The following points focus on CSSC’s key areas of work:

1. **The importance of school ethos**

A key priority for CSSC is to develop and maintain the collective ethos of the controlled sector. This ethos is based on:

* a belief that all our children and young people should have opportunities to gain the knowledge, skills and attitudes to prepare them for adult and working life and allow them to make a constructive contribution to society
* the conviction that an education service of the highest quality should be inclusive and demonstrate respect for diversity
* the values which underpin the Christian faith, including the belief in the dignity of every human being, the responsibilities of living in society and respect for self and others
* support for the teaching of religious education and developing in children and young people the moral values associated with Christian faith and the encouragement of their spiritual development.

In practical terms, CSSC believes this means that controlled schools can:

* be inspirational within their communities so that children and young people aspire to high levels of attainment and self-confidence in life and work
* foster the spiritual and moral development of children and young people within the context of Christian faith and values whilst respecting other faith and non-faith philosophies
* keep the child at the centre of all education practice. A strong ethos recognises the importance of each child’s mental health and wellbeing.

In response to CSSC’s listening events held with Principals and governors during March 2017, CSSC established a working group with representatives from the Transferors’ Representative Council and Stranmillis University College. The working group recommended that further consultation regarding current practice in respect of ethos, values and collective worship should take place with schools.

Extensive consultation was carried out during the 2017/18 academic year across Northern Ireland and with all types of schools within the controlled sector. Analysis of the consultations led to the development of the CSSC ethos toolkit, which aims to assist schools to develop a statement of ethos. It provides evaluation materials that will assist schools seeking to strengthen their ethos and critically evaluate how it contributes to pupil achievement and well-being. The ethos toolkit has been greatly welcomed by controlled schools along with support for the development of ethos, vision, mission and values. CSSC believes that a school with a strong child-centred ethos can have a substantial and enduring benefit for the pupils it serves.

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

1. **Strong leadership and effective governance**

Strong and effective governance is a vital element in the leadership of a successful school that seeks to continuously improve and deliver the best possible education and educational opportunities for all children and young people. In controlled schools this involves, “setting the strategic direction for the school and taking corporate decisions in relation to the statutory functions of the Board of Governors” (DENI 2018) [Department of Education publication](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guide-governor-roles-and-responsibilities)

CSSC has provided support to enhance the effectiveness of governance in controlled schools. This has included the delivery of training to ensure governors have a greater understanding and appreciation of ethos in the controlled sector and of their role in developing and contributing to the ethos in their individual schools. Mindful of the importance of ethos for ensuring high quality outcomes for all children and young people, CSSC has worked in partnership with EA and TRC, to identify, encourage and nominate governors to vacancies that present on the Boards of Governors of controlled schools. CSSC is currently developing a process, in conjunction with the EA, whereby ethos is included in staff recruitment and selection processes in controlled schools.

1. **Raising standards in schools**

CSSC has been tasked by the Northern Ireland Executive to working with the Education Authority to raise educational standards in controlled schools. In seeking to fulfil this function, CSSC has listened to schools and carried out research to identify priority areas in which to support controlled schools to effect change. An analysis of recent inspection reports of controlled schools identified a recurring theme of the need for more rigorous and robust self-evaluation processes leading to improvement. The analysis also identified those schools that were deemed to be less than very good or those that did not demonstrate capacity to sustain improvement. A further analysis considered GCSE and A level results, aligned to free school meal bands. This analysis identified schools where results demonstrated a downward trend or erratic trend. These schools were prioritised for support and offered a place on a sustained programme of school improvement.

All programmes offered by CSSC are evidence-based, and research forms the foundation from which we work. Research indicates that within schools, the quality of teachers is the single most important factor in the education system and that teacher quality is highly variable. Further research concluded that the most effective teacher professional learning is collaborative, focused on learning and teaching, includes practice-based research, sustained throughout the year and includes the opportunity for coaching and mentoring. Mindful of this research, CSSC developed a programme for building the capacity of senior leaders in controlled schools to embed evidence-based practice, conduct rigorous self-evaluation and lead improvement in learning and teaching. This programme has included an international mobility for senior leaders to learn from effective practice in high performing education systems in other European countries. Feedback from schools has demonstrated a very positive impact on practice, thereby improving the quality of education outcomes for all children and young people.

CSSC has also worked with controlled schools to identify, validate and disseminate effective practice from Northern Ireland. Each year CSSC has delivered phase-specific professional learning

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

programmes and provided support as required for principals and Governors in controlled schools. A further programme that CSSC has developed and delivered is Engaging with Sign, a Language for You and Me. All these activities have sought to improve the quality of practice within controlled schools and thereby raise standards.

CSSC would reiterate its capacity to facilitate access to a group of Principals from controlled schools to inform the panel’s work.

CSSC welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with other key stakeholders in raising standards and addressing underachievement. To this end, CSSC has made strategic contributions to the partnership with Stranmillis University College on a research project examining the impact of male teachers on underachievement among boys; the partnership with the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment and other stakeholders within the education system via a Consultative Group to provide an online "Support for KS3 Curriculum Implementation Package" for school leaders and teachers in Northern Ireland; the THRiVE strategic partnership that involves partners from statutory and non-statutory bodies including community and voluntary organisations, all seeking to raise standards in the Rathcoole/Monkstown area; and, the partnership with the University of Ulster to include the “Taking Boys Seriously” research programme.

We are pleased that one of the studies listed in the Panel’s Terms of Reference is the ‘Taking Boys Seriously: Best Practice Report’ from the first joint conference of the Controlled Schools’ Support Council and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools which was hosted by Ulster University. The report draws together the insights gained from more than 100 educators and youth participants on ‘what works’ in supporting increasing attitudes and attainment of boys in their education and youth development. It also shares practical suggestions from experienced educators on how to engage boys in education and focus on attainment.

With the current pressure on school budgets, CSSC has supported controlled schools to access additional resources to enhance learning and teaching. These have included accessing funding for STEM partnerships, resources for STEM learning and waterproofs and wellies for outdoor learning. Additional funding enables controlled schools to engage children and young people in learning opportunities that may not otherwise be possible.

1. **Strategic estate planning**

The Department of Education’s Sustainable Schools Policy has as its vision, “an estate of educationally sustainable schools planned on an area basis, with focus on sharing and collaboration. It provides a framework for early consideration of emerging problems and possible remedial action to address questions of viability. The primary objective of the policy is to ensure that all children get a first class education in fit for purpose facilities, regardless of background or where they live”. [Department of Education article](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/sustainable-schools)

Recognising the impact of the learning environment on the quality of the educational experience, CSSC represents the interests, ethos, needs and perspectives of the controlled sector within the planning process ensuring representation in all area planning meetings. CSSC also provides information, analysis and advice on proposals impacting on controlled schools in the area plans and

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

annual action plans and responds to all consultations for development proposals which have an impact on controlled schools. Furthermore, CSSC advocates effectively for and on behalf of controlled schools and the sector as a whole in respect of maintenance, minor works and capital investment opportunities thereby ensuring that all children have access to the best facilities and learning environment taking cognisance of the current budgetary constraints.

1. **Effective collaborations and partnerships**

CSSC recognises the importance of building cooperation and engaging with other sectors on matters of mutual interest, including the promotion of tolerance and understanding to deliver a positive impact for the controlled sector. CSSC has supported controlled schools in initiating relationships with schools from other sectors and in applying for T:BUC funding to develop these relationships further. CSSC has also actively encouraged and facilitated shared education practices and contributed to the planning of shared education campuses. CSSC acknowledges the constraints of funding due to the current economic situation and the need for efficiencies within the education system. In seeking to address underachievement in the controlled sector, we recognise the benefits of strong collaborations and the opportunities this presents for learning from the effective practices in other sectors and further afield.

**Case studies from controlled schools illustrating journeys to improvement**

The case studies below represent a small sample of the excellent progress many controlled schools are making in addressing underachievement and supporting the holistic development of our children and young people. They illustrate how the different aspects outlined above, along with the passion and commitment of schools, may improve the quality of education provision. Each school, depending on their specific context, has identified their priority areas for development using a self-evaluative process and developed action plans to lead the improvement.

* [Windsor Hill Primary School - development of an inclusive and supportive ethos and culture of support](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Windsor%20Hill%20Primary%20School.pdf)
* [Lisneal College - strengthening ethos to improve attainment](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Lisneal%20College.pdf)
* [Ballyholme Primary School - developing ethos and pastoral provision](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Ballyholme%20Primary%20School.pdf)
* [Carrickfergus Grammar School - developing the wellbeing and personal resilience of its pupils](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Carrickfergus%20Grammar%20School.pdf)
* [Gibson Primary School - developing a culture of inclusion](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Gibson%20Primary%20School.pdf)
* [Knockavoe School – developing a nurture provision](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Knockavoe%20School.pdf)
* [Longstone School - How a Rights Respecting School award enriches pastoral care](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Longstone%20School.pdf)
* [Limavady Nurserry School - developing a nurturing and stimulating learning environment with a particular emphasis on the development of speech and language](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Limavady%20Nursery%20School.pdf)

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

* [Priory Integrated College - connecting pastoral support, digital learning and academic progress](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Priory%20Integrated%20College.pdf)
* [Regent House School - improving educational outcomes through staff development and evaluation strategies](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Regent%20House%20School.pdf)
* [Bocombra Primary School - improvement with an emphasis on self-evaluation, literacy and numeracy](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Bocombra%20Primary%20School.pdf)
* [Gorran Primary School - engagement with parents and their development of an outdoor play area](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Gorran%20Primary%20School.pdf)
* [Barbour Nursery School Developing children’s language skills](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Barbour%20Nursery%20School.pdf)
* [Laurelhill Community College - A broader curriculum and focused performance dashboard links to improved outcomes](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Laurelhill%20Community.pdf)
* [Markethill High School - How self-evaluation and planning impacts on improved educational outcomes](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Markethill%20High%20School.pdf)
* [Donaghadee Primary School - Collaboration through the school development plan to ensure school improvement](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Donaghadee%20Primary%20School.pdf)
* [Drumachose Primary School - Building the capacity of middle leadership](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Drumachose%20Primary%20School.pdf)
* [Ashgrove Nursery School - Use of self-evaluation to make improvement](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Ashgrove%20Nursery%20School.pdf)
* [Dromore Nursery School - Development of an outdoor learning environment](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Dromore%20Nursery%20School.pdf)
* [Sandleford School - A focus on effective communication and transparency](https://www.csscni.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-12/Sandelford%20School.pdf)

**10. How has the Covid-19 lockdown impacted on educational underachievement?**

CSSC is currently seeking the views of controlled schools on this issue. The four quotes below are from principals:

“Underachievement is now wider spread than previously due to lack of focused support and interventions. Pupils engaged extremely well upon return to school but there is evidence now of uncovered work, lack of understanding and gaps in learning when areas are being revisited. Lack of peer interaction and opportunities for different learning styles, scaffolding learning etc are now very evident in lower than usual standards of work throughout the school. Lack of suitable reading books has had quite a large impact on literacy attainment.” (Primary School, 30% FSME)

# CSSC response to the Expert Panel on Educational Underachievement

“Children have undoubtedly suffered educationally through lockdown and we have seen huge gaps in learning, children are not ready to learn and we have to spend a significant amount of time working on these skills first.” (Primary School, 30% FSME)

“Baseline tests indicate Year 2 and 3 have lost a huge amount of teacher input into the building blocks of literacy and numeracy that influence future reading and writing and counting skills.” (Primary school, 38% FSME)

“Current Year 12 and 14 pupils have missed many months of last year and are now many pupils are unable to attend due to self-isolation. Teaching staff numbers are depleted and year groups have been sent home due to a lack of staff cover. This cohort of pupils are at risk of much greater educational disadvantage than last year's cohort.” (Post primary school, 43% FSME).

**11. Please add any other comments that you would like the panel to consider.**

* There needs to be a fresh long-term strategic plan for education, with the necessary investment and clearly articulated outcomes, if we are to be a world class education system. In order to do this underachievement in the system must be addressed.
* It must be noted that the education system in Northern Ireland is underfunded, as identified in the recent Northern Ireland Affairs Committee’s inquiry into education funding. Any examination of underachievement within the education system therefore must consider the current context of underfunding.
* In dealing with educational underachievement it is important that a cross-departmental, multi-agency approach is adopted so that all available funding sources are targeted to the point of need.
* We are pleased that the Panel will draw upon the existing research studies on underachievement in Northern Ireland. It is positive that the main focus of the Panel is to draw together the development of solutions. We are interested to see the outcome of the Panel’s work and hope that government commit to resourcing the solutions identified.
* Consideration must be given to the definition and measurement of underachievement. Basic measures such as GCSE results do not reflect the added value that schools provide to enable pupils to achieve their potential.
* Finally, if the Panel wish to meet with the group of principals referred to earlier in this paper please do not hesitate to contact CSSC to avail of this offer.