



CONTROLLED SCHOOLS' SUPPORT COUNCIL (CSSC)

Fifth Annual General Meeting

The fifth Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC), was held remotely via Zoom webinar on Thursday, 18 November 2021 at 4pm.

1. Introduction, welcome and apologies.

Dr Andrew Brown (Vice-Chairperson) introduced himself as host and facilitator to begin proceedings.

2. Michele McIlveen MLA, Minister of Education, followed by short Q&A, facilitated by Dr Andrew Brown, CSSC Vice-chairperson

The Minister addressed the meeting.

Thank you Mark for your warm words of welcome and for inviting me to address your first AGM. It is a pleasure to be here.

May I firstly offer my congratulations on your appointment Mark, and thank Barry Mulholland for his leadership in establishing the organisation.

I know I have just a few minutes to address you. But it is important that I take the opportunity to first of all commend the on-going hard work, dedication and commitment of principals, boards of governors and staff in schools during the pandemic.

I especially note the work of CSSC COVID-19 school link officers ably supported by Link Officers from EA, CCMS, ETI and other education support bodies. I particularly value the role of CSSC as an advocate for the sector overall. I want to thank you for everything that you are doing under very difficult circumstances.

Performance of the NI Education System (Raising Standards) and School Improvement

Like you, my top priority is keeping children in school. We all know the damage that non-attendance will do, not just to their education but also to their mental health and well-being. With the support of teachers and other staff, school provides a safe and reassuring environment for our pupils. So a huge thank you again for all that you are doing. Education professionals have worked tirelessly to reduce the pandemic's impact on children's education. Vulnerable children, including pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs, were able to attend school throughout the lockdown earlier this year. This provided much needed assistance for families.

The efforts of our schools to deliver remote learning have been truly outstanding. We are very fortunate in Northern Ireland that schools have access to a centrally provided IT system - C2K. This supported online access to school services from the beginning of the COVID-19 school closures. My Department invested almost £7 million of funding to enhance remote learning. Almost 25,000 new digital devices and over 9,000 free Wi-Fi and mobile vouchers were provided to learners.

Resilience, Collaboration and Innovation

Above all, when I reflect on the past 18 months, three things stand out: resilience, collaboration and innovation. Firstly, resilience. The way that teachers, parents and pupils adapted to the situation, and with little notice moved to a wholly different way of teaching and learning, has been a case study of resilience.

Secondly, collaboration. Our teaching profession has learned from each other; sharing ideas and practice as never before. We have also seen enhanced partnerships between our schools and health professionals, parents and communities.

Thirdly, innovation. The pace at which our schools have adapted and embraced new technologies has been impressive. The pandemic has changed teaching - creating new possibilities to do things differently and with greater flexibility. As a result of the excellent, innovative opportunities created by our schools, many thousands of children engaged positively with remote learning.

Support provided over past 18 months.

In the last academic year, over £17 million was invested in the Engage Programme which provided one-to-one or small group teaching support to thousands of pupils across every primary and post-primary school in Northern Ireland. This year, the Engage II Programme is continuing this important work, with an increased budget of over £16m for the period until March. The Engage Programmes have been supplemented by a wide range of complementary interventions: £10 million of investment in Summer Schemes serving over 40,000 children; half a million pounds to help Year 12 pupils taking GCSE maths; and a new wellbeing and pastoral support programme for children with special and additional educational needs.

I am also delighted that £1.4 million of additional investment in teacher professional learning will support a new capacity building project delivered by the Education and Training Inspectorate. The Stepping Forward Together Project will provide a range of professional learning opportunities in the key area of self-evaluation leading to improvement.

I have also prioritised more investment in early years' interventions, with around £2 million of additional annual funding in the Sure Start programme and almost £1 million of additional investment this year for the Pathway Fund to improve the development of young children at risk of not reaching their full potential.

Qualifications

Turning to qualifications. My Department and CCEA humbly learned the lessons from the unique and unprecedented cancellation of exams in 2020, which created difficulties for governments right across the UK. The summer 2021 awards saw the lowest number of appeals on record here. Thousands of young people were enabled to complete their qualifications and progress to the next stage of education, employment or training despite the impact of the pandemic. Again, I cannot praise enough our school leaders and teachers, who stepped forward to provide Centre Determined Grades with fairness and consistency.

My Department has also introduced a comprehensive package of reductions in assessment across all CCEA qualifications for 2022. We were the first jurisdiction in the United Kingdom to announce such measures.

Since assuming this post, I have endeavoured to make it my business to visit as many schools as I possibly can. I want to meet with and listen to principals and to have the opportunity to set out my priorities for the remainder of this mandate.

This afternoon I wish to focus on a number of my other priorities.

Area Planning

Area Planning is a complex, and often contentious, workspace. What works for one area may not work for another and it is important to recognise this challenge when scoping options. But the common denominator, and in my view only acceptable starting point for all of us, is recognition that whatever we do has to be built around the needs and interests of our children and young people, not individual schools or sectors and we must strive to secure their education in educationally and financially viable and sustainable schools.

The SBR published by my Department creates that focus, setting out the journey we have been on since 2010/11, recognising successes and achievements and showing why we still have more to do.

I commend CSSC for its contribution to this work and call on it, the planning authorities and the other sectoral body representatives, to redouble efforts in

The next Area Plan to bring forward collaborative area solutions which meet the needs of all children in an area.

Expert Panel Fair Start Report

You will recall that 'A Fair Start' Report and Action Plan was published on 1 June, following endorsement from the Northern Ireland Executive. The Expert Panel identified eight key areas and 47 actions for change. The Key Areas span Early Years, emotional health and wellbeing, curriculum and assessment, a whole community approach to education, maximising boys' potential, teachers' and school leaders'

professional development and ensuring inter-departmental collaboration and delivery.

I am delighted to be able to report that 22 of the 47 actions (covering a six year plus period) have been initiated since 1 June and 8 new actions to ensure that the £4m budget which I set aside this year has maximum impact.

Amongst the eight Key Areas identified within the report, I would wish to highlight “Maximising Boys Potential” as perhaps one of the most critical, given the emphasis within “New Decade New Approach” to “examine and address links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background, including the long-standing issues facing working-class, Protestant boys”.

We have an education system with significant strengths, which performs well internationally and has many of the features of top performing systems. This includes a highly qualified teaching workforce; a culture of self-evaluation creating ownership of improvement; and a flexible curriculum which allows space for creativity and innovation.

In order for our system to be truly “fair”, we must provide equality of opportunity to everyone. Therefore we need to do more for those children and families who are impacted by social disadvantage and undeniably how we support “boys” in their learning has to be part of the solution.

I am committed to ensuring that progress is made this year and in the years that follow.

Independent Review of Education

I was pleased to recently appoint the Panel to undertake the Independent Review of Education and understand that work on the Review is at a very early stage. I am aware that the CSSC leadership has already met with the Panel and am sure you will continue to engage positively during the Review.

Budget and Spending Review

Whilst Education has succeeded in securing significant additional in-year funding, particularly in respect of responding to COVID-19, there remains a concerning level of funding pressures.

Without significant additional funding, the budget position for the Department of Education is likely to continue to be extremely challenging.

I will continue to work with Executive Colleagues to ensure that Education is adequately funded.

In coming to a conclusion, I will say that I do not underestimate the challenges that lie ahead through all my priorities. There may and probably will be bumps in the road ahead, but we will be as responsive as we can. The challenges are best met together working in partnership.

Thank you again Mark for the invitation. May I reiterate my thanks to all of your schools across all phases for your hard work, day and daily, and your commitment to all our children and young people.

Questions:

Question 1: Ministerial Challenges

You have been in post since June, during potentially the most turbulent time many of us will live through. What would you say are the key challenges you are facing as Education Minister?"

The Minister advised she was honoured to take up the role and acknowledged that teaching has changed completely due to the pandemic. The Minister is committed to making a difference to the lives of children and young people and to dealing with the challenges of the pandemic and the legacy of this. The Minister acknowledged the serious mental health challenges affecting young people and referenced the health and wellbeing funding available. Tackling disadvantage and educational underachievement is a key priority for the Department through the Fair Start action plan. The Minister referenced the Independent Review of Education.

The Minister's vision for education in Northern Ireland is a world leading education system with sustainable schools.

Question 2: Special Educational Needs

"The Fair Start Report and the Panel's focus on the importance of early intervention has been widely welcomed. The costs associated to deliver on the findings are significant in comparison to the £4 million committed to date.

How committed are you to providing the funding for its delivery? What actions are you taking to address Special Educational Needs support and intervention in nursery schools and primary schools?"

The Minister acknowledged that the cost of delivering on the findings of The Fair Start Report are significant. The Minister advised of the importance of evidence of the £4 million pounds that has been set aside having an impact. The Minister advised she will be in post to the next election but recognised the importance of having the foundations in place so that it becomes a viable programme. The Minister referenced the requirement for engagement from other departments including The Department of Health and The Department for Communities.

The Minister commented that Special Educational Needs support and intervention is a priority for the Department and the Education Authority (EA). The Public Accounts Committee report on Impact Review of Special Educational Needs provides recommendations for Special Educational Needs in Northern Ireland. Support around individual children, teachers being fully equipped to support children and adequate SEN places are priorities. The Consultation on Deferring the School Starting Age may address some SEN issues.

There is a requirement to look at a menu of support and early intervention.

Question 3: Controlled schools' estate

“Minister, you’ve spent a lot of time visiting and supporting controlled schools and have witnessed first-hand the estate issues faced by controlled schools.

Can I ask you to update us on the major and minor works programme priorities moving forward?”

The Minister recognises the disparity in provision but acknowledged that all children and young people need to be in buildings that are fit for purpose. The Minister commented on the legacy of underinvestment particularly in controlled schools. The Minister advised that she is committed to making a call for major capital works before the end of the financial year. The Minister recognised that minor capital works are constrained by budget. The Minister commented that more capital resource is needed.

The Vice-Chairperson thanked the Minister for her time and for addressing the meeting.

3. CSSC Award for Excellence in Educational Research

Ms S Carew was the recipient of the CSSC Award for Excellence in Educational Research 2021.

4. ‘CSSC – The next chapter’ Mark Baker, Chief Executive, Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC)

The Vice-Chairperson recognised the outstanding leadership of Mr Mullholland and wished him every success in his new role as Chairperson of the Education Authority (EA).

The Vice-Chairperson introduced Mark Baker, Chief Executive, Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) commenting that he had joined the organisation in June 2021 and was previously a member of the senior leadership team in the Education Authority (EA).

The Vice-Chairperson invited Mr Baker, Chief Executive to address the meeting.

Mr Baker thanked the Minister and welcomed representatives from member schools, colleagues from the Department, the Education Authority (EA) and the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC). Mr Baker specifically mentioned Ms M Corkey, Director of Education (EA) and Ms R Rainey, Chairperson of the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC). Mr Baker extended thanks to Mr S McCurdy, who acted as interim Chief Executive in the period from January to June 2021.

Mr Baker thanked Mr Mulholland, Chair of the Education Authority (EA) for attending the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and formally noted his leadership of the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSCS). It is through the work of Mr Mulholland and the team that the sector has a voice and a strong advocate.

Mr Baker affirmed that one of the key purposes of the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is to address the historical deficit of support for controlled schools, their leaders and staff and the communities and children and young people they serve.

The Controlled Schools' Support Council's (CSSC) strategy moving into the next period of Council, which coincides with an important period politically and the ongoing Independent Review of Education is to challenge and support the Education Authority (EA), as the managing authority of controlled schools, to be the best managing authority it can be. The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) understands the challenges faced by the Education Authority (EA) as both the managing authority for controlled schools and the wider service provider to all schools. This must be overcome to ensure that there is equality of support across all sectors.

In reviewing services, policies and procedures the Education Authority (EA) must ask what more it should be specifically doing for controlled schools. Without this controlled schools' proofing, there will remain the risk that this equality of support to all schools is not provided. The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is confident that with the positive relationship that exists with the Education Authority (EA) this core focus can be progressed.

Collaboration is more than a Memorandum of Understanding and Protocols. It is more than working side by side. Collaboration is working with a common purpose. The Education Authority (EA) and the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) must work together to ensure that equality of support for controlled schools is delivered.

The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is a voluntary body without a statutory remit. The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is not a designated body, there is no duty on other bodies or organisations to consult with CSSC on behalf of controlled schools.

It is vital that all bodies recognise that the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) has a core function as the representative voice for controlled schools. There is progress to be made with the Department to ensure all levels and functions and officials are aware of the need for CSSC to be present in strategic discussions, consultations and processes where controlled schools need representation.

Another important area moving forward is working with members to celebrate the diverse and inclusive nature of controlled schools and the children and young people they serve. There is a need to continue to work collaboratively with other sectors through shared education partnerships, area planning and other collaborative groupings. Controlled schools need to continue to be connected to their local communities but must also consider how they are seen by these communities.

It is important to highlight the highly effective work already carried out by the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) in developing the Ethos self-evaluation toolkit and supporting schools to use it to explore Ethos within their individual settings.

It is vital that all phases represented in the sector are celebrated: nursery, special, primary and post-primary and also all types, controlled, controlled integrated and controlled Irish medium.

Mr Baker thanked the Chair, Mr M Orr and outgoing Council members and welcomed the new incoming members. Council members, in a similar way to school Governors, are volunteers. It is vital that this voluntary service to the controlled sector is celebrated and recognised.

Mr Baker affirmed that the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is here to support and represent the best interests of controlled schools.

Mr Baker advised members he was content to take questions or comments. Mr G Hamilton, Principal, Moyle Primary School thanked Mr Baker for his comments and welcomed him to his new role.

Dr Brown commented that Mr Baker's passion, enthusiasm and determination to represent the sector is commendable.

5. Dunclug Nursery School performance

Attendees were invited to watch a performance by Dunclug Nursery school.

The Vice-Chairperson introduced Mr M Orr, CSSC Chairperson to lead on the CSSC AGM business.

6. AGM business

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the Fifth Annual General Meeting advising that AGM business would conclude with the ratification of the new Council members.

i. Apologies

Apologies were noted and a full list is included at Appendix 1.

ii. Minutes

The Chairperson referred to the minutes of the AGM in 2020, which had been shared electronically with members seeking views on accuracy. No issues were raised.

Decision: On the proposal of Ms R Maxwell, seconded by Ms J Lendrum, the minutes of the AGM in 2020 were approved.

iii. 2020/21 Annual Report and accounts presented by Mark Baker, Chief Executive, CSSC and Shane McCurdy, Head of Corporate Services, CSSC

The Chairperson invited Mr M Baker, Chief Executive to address the meeting.

Mr Baker advised that during the reporting period 2020/21 the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) changed status to that of a registered charity. The organisation's reporting is in line with this. The Annual Report for 2020/21 includes the detail of the OBA framework for 2019/20 which has been required by the Department. The Annual Report 2020/21 gives assurance that the activities undertaken by Council and officers is in line with CSSC's key functions and that funding has been used appropriately.

It was noted that the annual report had been shared with members electronically seeking views on the same. No issues were raised.

iv. CSSC accounts 2020/21

Mr S McCurdy, Head of Corporate Services was invited to summarise the business in relation to the accounts for 2020/21.

Mr McCurdy confirmed that the external auditors had indicated that the accounts provided a true and fair view of the financial affairs of CSSC and there were no qualifications or points of concern to report.

Mr McCurdy advised that quarterly reporting to the Department during the 2020/21 year and the Department's verification of the period July to September 2020 detail had identified no issues of concern.

The triannual review carried out by the Department in 2018 demonstrated that there were robust financial systems and controls in place. It is anticipated that there will be a triannual review in the 2021/22 year and it is expected the assessment will remain robust.

Mr McCurdy advised that with CSSC now being recognised as a Charity there are additional responsibilities on those charged with governance and additional accounting disclosures required that are set out in the detail of the accounts (restricted and unrestricted funds).

The Letter of Offer for 2020/21 again affirmed a budget of £983,000 for the year. This was the fourth year that the budget had been held at this amount. Covid factors meant that the delivery of the programme of work for the 2020/21 year did not proceed as had been planned in terms of mechanics of delivery. As a consequence, £59,000, or 6% of the allocation had been surrendered back to the Department during the year.

In looking ahead there are real concerns about the ability of CSSC to meet its contractual obligations and the Chief Executive is engaging with the Department in respect of the grant allocation for the next three years, being the DE business planning period.

Mr McCurdy highlighted that although the accounts show the organisation operating at a loss of £683,000 this is due to the impact of having to report the pension liability within CSSC's accounts. He explained that as CSSC is an employer member of NILGOSC, a fund which is in deficit, that deficit is required to be reflected in the accounts of all its employer members. From an accounting perspective this is an indicative position which would only be realised if the fund itself was wound up or if CSSC withdrew from the fund. At which stage CSSC would be required to make good the shortfall identified. CSSC's membership of the NILGOSC scheme however is underwritten by DE and therefore, in such a circumstance, the financial consequences would be a matter for the Department.

Mr McCurdy extended his thanks to Ms Duncan, CSSC Finance Officer, for ensuring the integrity of the financial systems and their operation.

Mr McCurdy concluded that the draft accounts were presented to Council in June 2021.

No questions were recorded or issues raised with regard to the 2020/21 accounts.

Decision: On the proposal of Ms R Harkness, seconded by Dr M Rainey, the Annual Report and accounts 2020/21 were adopted.

v. Election results presentation and ratification of new Council members

Mr Baker advised that CSSC has completed the process for nominations of Directors from member schools for the next Council. Mr Baker confirmed that the process was in line with the organisation's Articles of Association.

There was one election process undertaken for the position of Director for the controlled nursery sector, 54% of nursery schools voted.

Mr Baker confirmed the six nominations for Directors representing controlled schools,

- Ms Emma Corry has been nominated by those members representing the nursery sector
- Ms Roz McFeeters has been nominated by those members representing special schools
- Mr Trevor Robinson has been nominated by those members representing the controlled grammar sector
- Mr Darren Mornin has been nominated by those members representing the post-primary sector
- Ms G Dunlop and Ms H Murray have been nominated by those members representing the primary sector.

Mr Baker advised there are three representatives from the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC) who are returning to serve as Directors,

- Dr Andrew Brown
- Dr Peter Hamill
- Mr Kenneth Twyble

Mr Baker advised that in line with the Articles of Association four publicly appointed Directors are nominated,

- Mr John Anderson
- Ms Catherine Chambers
- Ms Paula Leitch
- Mr Mark Orr QC

Decision: On the proposal of Mr G Hamilton, seconded by Mr R McLoughlin, the 13 nominated Directors were ratified.

7. Closing remarks

The Chairperson concluded by thanking participants, speakers, the CSSC board of directors, senior management team and officers. He thanked delegates for their attendance.



Members were invited to watch a performance from Banbridge High school to close the AGM.

The meeting ended at 5pm

Chairperson_____

Date_____

APPENDIX 1

List of apologies AGM meeting 18 November 2021

School	Sector	Position	Title	First Name	Surname
Cookstown HS	Post Primary	Principal	Ms	Gwyneth	Evans