

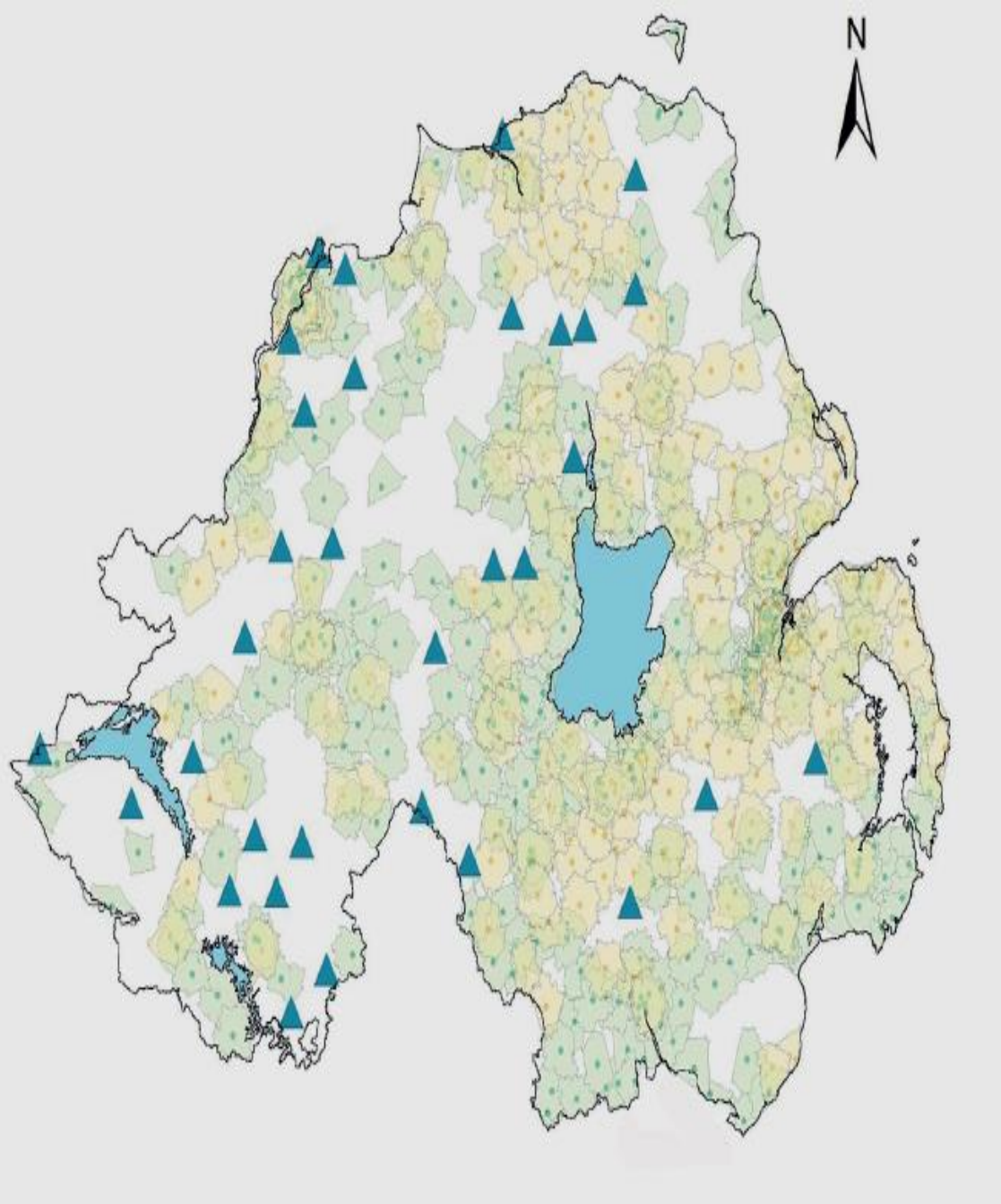
What is the Future Schools Project and its associated toolkit?

- *The Future Schools Project has been undertaken by researchers from the School of Education, Ulster University in a project partnership with the Integrated Education Fund.*
- *The core aim of the Programme is: “To support initiatives that put people at the centre of decision making (regarding the provision of education) in Northern Ireland.”*

Why was the Future Schools Project developed?

The education system has a diversity of school types, each with its own distinctive ethos and values. However, it is not sustainable. (New Decade, New Approach, 2020)

- The Future Schools project has been designed to support schools and communities who wish to explore whether there might be a more sustainable approach to primary school provision in their local area.
- Well documented historical factors have led to the development of a system of education in Northern Ireland that, on the whole, reflects the enduring community division. This situation means that many local areas may be served by two (or more) primary schools.
- The duplication of schools in many communities has led to the prevalence of too many small schools across Northern Ireland.
- According to The Sustainable School's Policy, there were 220 rural primary schools (33%) below the minimum thresholds in 2020/21. 21 primary schools had fewer than 30 pupils.
- The Department of Education is currently involved in an Area Planning process to create a network of sustainable schools. This has led to a number of recent school closures.
- The Department of Education has been engaged with the Future Schools Project as it aligns well with their direction of travel for Area Planning.



- A study by Ulster University in 2019 examined the duplication of primary school provision in Northern Ireland.
- This duplication typically occurs when a Controlled school and Maintained school are located close to one another, often in small settlements.
- They identified 32 isolated pairs of primary schools which were of different management types and located less than one mile apart and more than 3 miles from a another school of the same management type.
- In 26 of these pairs, at least one school was not sustainable.
- The study concluded that were the schools to find arrangements to remove duplication and become more sustainable, they would be more likely to avoid closures which would benefit local communities of all backgrounds.

How can the Future Schools Project support communities?

The Project supports school communities who wish to explore whether there might be a more sustainable solution to primary school provision in their geographic area and to provide guidance on how they could move forward with this in practice.



Future Schools has, at its heart, a vision that primary schools, parents and the local community will work together to identify area-based solutions with the potential of ensuring sustainable local school provision. The aim is to engage communities to ensure that everyone who lives in the area can have their views heard regarding education preferences.



The Future Schools Project does not seek to pre-determine pathways for specific schools or communities but rather to empower and support them to determine (in conjunction with the EA, CCMS, CSSC Department of Education and other key stakeholders) what option is most likely to lead to a sustainable future.

Future Schools Toolkit

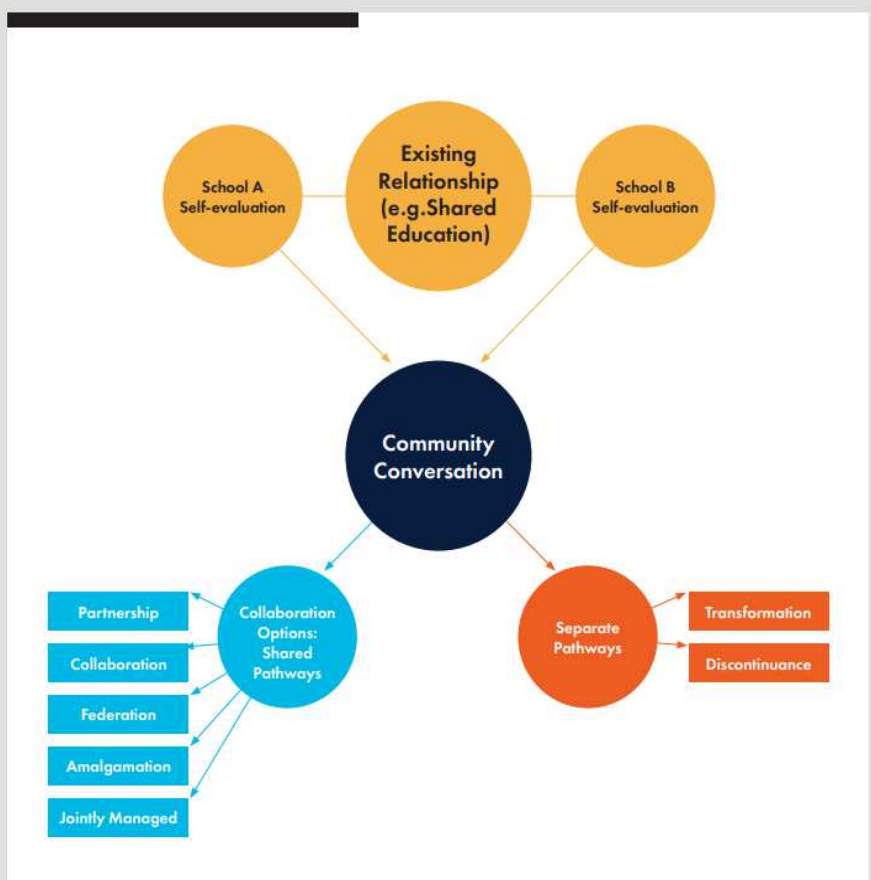
The Future Schools Toolkit

A detailed toolkit has been created as part of the project which highlights three main facets:

1. The first section provides guidance to schools to self-assess and explore their own sustainability by assessing it against the DE Sustainable Schools Policy and other relevant policy documents.
2. The second section provides a mechanism and guidance to support school communities who wish to have a community conversation. This offers communities an opportunity to engage about options for school provision that would provide a sustainable and high-quality education in their local area, particularly where current provision may not meet the sustainable schools' criteria.
3. The final Pathways and Processes section of the Toolkit identifies alternative options that may be available to a community seeking to find a sustainable solution.



Figure 1:
Three-part structure of the
Future Schools Toolkit Process



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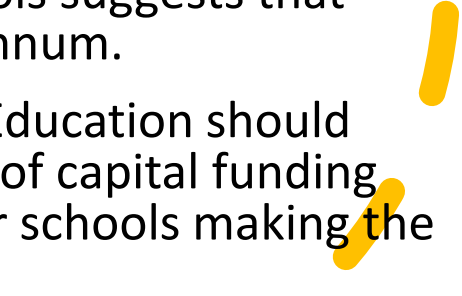
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How does the Future Schools Project link with the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland?

- The Review highlights the concerning number of 'non-viable small schools' and recommends a new approach to area planning.
 - It recommends 'strict adherence' to the minimum enrolment thresholds of 105/140 in rural/ urban primary schools.
 - It recommends the establishment of an Independent Planning Commission which will develop a plan for a new network of schools based on sustainability and jointly managed schools.
 - It suggests increasing the number of integrated schools or jointly managed community schools.
 - The new model suggests the creation of 99 new or reconfigured jointly managed community primary schools and 22 post primary schools.
 - The modelling of this reconfiguration of schools suggests that running costs will reduce by £94 million per annum.
 - The review suggests that The Department of Education should encourage this change by allocating £1 billion of capital funding and £135 million over a period of ten years for schools making the transition.
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For further information on the Future Schools Project, please contact Fiona McGinn, Future Schools Officer at: fiona@ief.org.uk



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