

# Media Release



## **Governance, Accountability and Oversight Arrangements relating to the Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated Sectors**

There are weaknesses and inconsistencies in arrangements for safeguarding how Northern Ireland's school system spends the significant amount of public funds it receives. That is the conclusion of a report published today (Wednesday 08 July) by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Dorinnia Carville's report examines governance and accountability arrangements in Northern Ireland's education system. It focusses on Voluntary Grammar (VG) and Grant-Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools, and includes consideration of the respective roles of the Department of Education (the Department) and the Education Authority (EA).

The report observes the complex and historically fragmented nature of the education system here, which comprises more than 1,000 schools across several school types / sectors. Over time, this has resulted in differing arrangements between the VG / GMI sectors and other schools for ensuring good governance in the way public money is spent. These inconsistencies are partly attributable to a lack of clarity in the legislative framework, which was previously identified in the 2023 Independent Review of Education.

Today's report identifies weaknesses in the way that the use of public funds by VG and GMI schools is monitored. Currently, reliance is placed on information submitted by schools and on the work of auditors and Boards of Governors. However, not all schools are submitting information to the EA, and there is limited scrutiny of this information by the EA to identify emerging risks and give assurance that public money is being spent properly. Given the scale of public funding - with approximately £392 million given to VG and GMI schools in 2024-25 - this is a significant concern.

The report further identifies uncertainty regarding the respective roles and powers of the Department and the EA for oversight and intervention where risks are identified. A range of statutory powers exists, but there is a lack of clarity in how these are understood and applied in practice. In particular, the report notes contradictory views between the Department

and the EA on the extent of intervention powers in VG and GMI schools should a problem arise.

Commenting on the findings, Dorinnia Carville said:

*"It is important that effective arrangements operate over the use of significant public funds by schools. This report highlights various inconsistencies and areas of uncertainty, which could potentially result in serious risks or concerns failing to be properly identified and adequately addressed."*

*"We recognise the challenges presented by the current legislative framework. Addressing these challenges will take time. However, there is a need in the shorter-term for proactive action by the Department and EA to provide assurance to pupils, parents and taxpayers. This includes clarifying and ensuring understanding of oversight and intervention powers, strengthening scrutiny of schools' financial and governance information, and putting in place consistent processes for escalating and managing risks."*

ENDS

### **Notes for Editors**

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). She and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. The C&AG certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. She has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. Her reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. The report will be available on the Audit Office website at [www.niauditoffice.go.uk](http://www.niauditoffice.go.uk) and is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on Wednesday 08 July 2026.
3. The C&AG is **not** the appointed auditor for any school in Northern Ireland.