

North South Ministerial Council
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta
Thuaidh Theas
An Chomhrúnaíocht

NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

EDUCATION MEETING

MIDDLETOWN CENTRE FOR AUTISM, ARMAGH

2 APRIL 2025

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty-seventh North South Ministerial Council Education meeting was held in the Middletown Centre for Autism on 2 April 2025. The meeting was attended by Paul Givan MLA, Minister of Education, Helen McEntee TD, Minister for Education, John O'Dowd MLA, Minister of Finance. Minister Givan chaired the meeting.
2. The NSMC noted that today is World Autism Awareness Day and thanked Middletown Centre for Autism for hosting the meeting. Ministers welcomed the opportunity to visit the Centre and see firsthand the important specialist educational services being provided to children and young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

3. Ministers welcomed the continued work of both departments and the Middletown Centre for Autism (Middletown) to develop, extend and enhance its services and to scope the potential for expansion of the services to meet the needs, including emergent needs, across the jurisdictions.
4. The Council noted further opportunities for joint co-operation by both departments in relation to Special Educational Needs (SEN) and inclusion to develop, extend and enhance the transformation of services to support children and young people with SEN across the island.

5. The NSMC welcomed the appointment of five new members to the board of the Middletown Centre for Autism who were appointed during 2024 and thanked the exiting members for their contribution to the governance of Middletown.

ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

6. The Council received an update on the implementation of the RAISE programme and noted the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Departments of Education in both jurisdictions, supporting the pilot cooperation programme to address Educational Disadvantage which includes the RAISE programme.
7. Ministers noted the announcement of the RAISE programme on 16 October 2024 supported by an allocation of up to €24 million from the Government of Ireland's Shared Island Fund and agreed that updates on the overall delivery of this pilot programme will be provided at future meetings.
8. The NSMC noted the funding allocation also includes up to €4 million for Northern Ireland to extend the Teachers' Research Exchange (T-REX) Platform and provide a new Creative Connections arts education pilot programme and that these programmes are currently under development.
9. Ministers noted the progress made in implementing projects being supported under the PEACEPLUS Shared Learning Together programme and welcomed the official launches of related projects which have been held to date or are planned to take place shortly.
10. The Council agreed that officials will explore potential for further cooperation in the area of addressing educational disadvantage and will provide an update at the next NSMC Education meeting.

DIGITAL LITERACY

11. Ministers welcomed the proposed project to provide teacher professional learning resources on how to inform students on disinformation/misinformation including the impact of AI and noted the intention to further explore potential options for collaboration in this area.

SCHOOL, YOUTH AND TEACHER EXCHANGES

12. The Council noted the activity on pupil, youth, student and teacher exchanges on a North-South basis and the valuable experience this has provided to those involved. Ministers requested a progress report on these activities be provided on an annual basis to NSMC Education Sectoral meetings.
13. Ministers noted progress to implementation stage of successful applicants to the PEACEPLUS Programme under the Shared Learning Together investment area, including specific North South School Civic Exchanges and Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing area programmes.

14. The Council welcomed progress made by the two Education Departments and the Mary Immaculate College Limerick to extend development and delivery of the Teacher Research Exchange (T-REX) across both jurisdictions.
15. The NSMC noted the on-going review of the North South Education & Training Standards Committee (NSETS) which endorses undergraduate and postgraduate youth work programmes and noted the on-going work of the North South Youth Work Sector Practice Development Hub in strengthening and developing sustainable North-South youth work sector relationships and enhancing the quality of the learning experience of young people participating in youth services across the island.
16. Ministers noted the continued cooperation across inspectorates.

PROMOTING WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS

17. The Council welcomed the presentation on behalf of the Our Generation partnership, funded under PEACEPLUS Theme 3 *'Empowering and Investing in Our Young People'* and Investment Area 3.3 *'Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing'* and commended the joint working in this area across the jurisdictions.
18. Ministers noted the policy and delivery framework position in both jurisdictions on Emotional Health and Wellbeing Framework and noted that officials will explore potential options for collaboration and provide an update at the next meeting.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

19. The Council agreed to hold its next Education meeting in autumn 2025.

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2 April 2025

Website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org