PRESS RELEASE

Challenging Inequalities in Education

“It is important that our education system delivers genuine equality of opportunity for all our children,” said Dr Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland today.

Dr Wardlow was giving the opening address at a Policy Forum Seminar dealing with policy priorities for education in Northern Ireland. The seminar focused on how to improve educational attainment and reduce inequalities.

“Education is a key factor in determining every person’s life chances - it plays a major part in every person’s access to employment and to their advancement within it,” Dr. Wardlow said. “Lack of educational attainment can isolate and exclude individuals – and whole communities– from achieving their full potential in the workforce and in wider society.”

The Commission has highlighted the enduring inequalities that need to be addressed including

- Boys, who have persistently lower levels of attainment than girls
- Protestants, who persistently have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE and A Level
- Poorer children as measured by entitlement to free school meals, particularly Protestant boys
- Traveller and Roma children, who have some of the lowest levels of attainment of all equality groups
- Children with SEN or a disability, who have lower attainment levels than students without any SEN or disability.

We also need to challenge bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, as minority ethnic children, newcomers, and young people with same-sex attraction are more likely to be bullied in school.

“Whilst welcoming the proactive steps already taken by a range of education bodies to achieve greater equality in education and the progress made in advancing educational
outcomes, if we are to realise the desired outcome in the draft Programme for Government to reduce educational inequality, it is important to take stock and consider how we can work together to address the enduring inequalities in our educational system,” Dr Wardlow said.

“We must look at all aspects of our education system and proactively take steps to address the challenges that remain to ensure that every young person in Northern Ireland has an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential,” Dr Wardlow concluded.

Further information about inequalities in education is available on our website: www.equalityni.org/KeyInequalities-Education