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## **Education – Important Lessons Learned from the Pandemic**

Northern Ireland's education system can learn many lessons from the pandemic and family and community engagement, some of them perhaps surprisingly positive, a new publication from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland says.

For 'Learning from the Pandemic', the Commission asked 13 educationalists, charities and community and voluntary sector organisations for their thoughts on how learning from the last year can help to reduce educational inequalities.

Geraldine McGahey, the Commission's Chief Commissioner, said: "This collection is essential reading for education policy and decision makers and those committed to equality in education. We know that education is key to our future successes. We also know that a lack of family engagement is linked to poorer educational outcomes. Our contributors told us that recognising the importance of improved communication between schools, education bodies and families, and the technology to enable it, are things we should hold on to.

"As you read 'Learning from the Pandemic', you will learn of the serious challenges some parents faced while trying to support their children's education at home. Despite their best efforts at home schooling many parents lacked confidence, skills, space, technology, time, or faced language barriers. You will also gain an understanding of how our contributors worked to address these difficulties to support children and their families.

"Perhaps what is most surprising is that there are real positives to come out of the experience. It would be a pity not to build on the willingness of people to help and pull together on engaging and supporting families, on recognising how community and voluntary organisations have found new, creative ways to support children, young people and families and on the many positive opportunities for working together. But these things won't work without acknowledging their importance and by resourcing them properly."

- Download the Equality Commission's pdf publication "[Family and Community Engagement in Education - Learning from the Pandemic](#)"

## **Notes to Editors**

Common themes that emerge throughout the publication include:

- Schools have built and deepened relationships of trust with parents and families. Parents know more about what their children are learning. However, this is against a background of widening educational inequalities and experiences are not uniformly positive.
- Mental health of children and young people, their families and school staff will need careful and continuing attention. Parents have been seeking help with mental health issues for themselves and for their children.
- Communications, both to families about services and in the technical sense of devices and data, has been crucial. Networking and a willingness to help each other have characterised the responses to the pandemic.
- Many children from the most disadvantaged groups have fallen further behind with school and will need help to catch up, especially children with disabilities, children with special educational needs, newcomer, Traveller and Roma children.
- Agile responses have proved that statutory bodies can be quick and helpful, particularly in working with community and voluntary bodies who can help get solutions to the children and families in most need of them.
- Policy decisions have had to be taken at speed, but the requirements of Section 75 to ensure equality impacts are considered in developing and implementing policies still apply. Policies should be based on adequate data and an understanding of societal needs. Policy makers are in a position where they can really help by not making existing inequalities worse or creating new ones.