



## Key Point Briefing: COVID-19 and Education: Equality Considerations

23 June 2020

The Commission welcomes and acknowledges the range of steps that have been taken across the education system to mitigate the risks of any loss of learning in the response to COVID-19.

In tackling the virus, there must be a focus on avoiding the emergence or widening of inequality. Clearly no-one should be unfairly disadvantaged because of who they are; and protected equality grounds or characteristics should not be a predictor of outcomes.

While data from Northern Ireland regarding the equality impacts of COVID-19 is currently limited, information from elsewhere and on pre-existing inequalities in education suggests that there is a risk that the COVID-19 crisis will deepen known educational inequalities<sup>1</sup>, or lead to the emergence of new inequalities, for children and young people now and over their lifecycle.

There may be persistent long-term impacts on equality groups, particularly on those equality groups more likely to experience poverty. There is also a need to avoid and challenge negative stereotypes related to equality grounds, and to challenge and avoid any rise in prejudicial attitudes.

Urgent action by Government, built on the analysis of equality-disaggregated data and on engagement with key stakeholders, families and communities, is essential to better promote equality of opportunity and avoid the emergence or widening of inequalities in the response to COVID-19.

### ***Summary of Recommendations***

Our recommendations<sup>2</sup> for legislation, public policy and/or service provision, which build upon our existing (2018) calls for action<sup>3</sup>, are:

- **Use the equality duties** to inform decision-making.
- **Collect comprehensive equality data** to identify equality impacts and shape targeted actions to advance equality.

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<sup>1</sup> ECNI (2017) [Statement on Key Inequalities in Education in Northern Ireland](#).

<sup>2</sup> Our assessment is based on evidence available at this time and may therefore be subject to change and development.

<sup>3</sup> ECNI (2018) [Equality in Education Policy Recommendations](#)

- **Maximise collaborative approaches** to identify and respond to barriers to education, involving the families and wider communities of key equality groups.
- Mitigate the negative impact on children of the **closure of pre-school** settings caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, including for those with disabilities, from minority ethnic communities and new residents.
- Take action to identify and mitigate potential negative equality impacts arising from **reduced access to formally taught education**.
- Address any negative equality impacts arising from the **shift to home-based learning**.
- Identify and mitigate potential negative equality impacts arising from any **move to 'blended' learning**.
- Consider the equality impacts of decisions regarding **assessment** and any opportunities to better promote equality.
- Ensure that the **benefits of sharing in education** are maintained now, when schools reopen, and as social-distancing is relaxed.
- Deliver strong and visible leadership to maintain and **promote an anti-bullying culture** within education, and combat the potential for racially motivated negative attitudes and behaviours.
- Assist schools in making effective use of **dual language resources to help Newcomer learners** access the curriculum.
- Identify and address any effects of COVID-19 that **poverty or socio-economic status** may have on the emergence or exacerbation of inequalities experienced by a range of equality groups.



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