

An Evaluation of the
Department of Education's Engage II Programme
in schools, pre-school settings and
EOTAS centres during 2021-2022

May 2023



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Introduction

Background

In June 2021, the Minister of Education announced the continuation of the Engage Programme into the academic year 2021-2022. This was in acknowledgement of the ongoing impact of COVID-19 related disruption to children and young people's learning across the education system. The Engage II Programme was expanded to include special schools (previously a separate Engage for Special Schools Programme), funded pre-school education settings and Education other Than at School (EOTAS) centres.

The Minister of Education allocated £24.14 million of funding to the Engage II Programme for the academic year 2021-2022. The assigned funding was determined according to assessed levels of disadvantage and number of pupils enrolled in schools and other educational settings; notification of the funding allocations was issued in September 2021.

Throughout the report where text is accompanied by an asterisk this indicates that additional information is available in Appendix D: Notes.

The original conditions of the Engage Programme* did not permit the use of the funding for anything other than the employment of a qualified teacher. The conditions of the Engage II Programme were adapted as a consequence of feedback from representatives of the education sector and the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The adaptations included: flexibility for schools to use a broader range of staff to deliver the programme or to secure the services of third parties to deliver interventions; activities offered outside the normal school/setting day; and, up to circa 20% of the funding to be spent on materials and equipment to support delivery of the programme. Schools and educational settings were required to complete an online planner detailing how the funding was to be used and an evaluation of its overall impact. In 2021, the Department of Education (DE) committed additional funding* to the Education Authority (EA) to provide assistance in the roll out of the programme.

In May 2021 the Minister of Education, in recognition of disruption to learning, took steps to reduce the number of assessments across all Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) qualifications. In the majority of GCSEs where students were in the second year of study (normally year 12), one unit of the course was omitted from the assessment; CCEA specified the unit to be omitted. One of the exceptions to this mitigation was GCSE Mathematics where, due to the unique structure of the course, there were no omissions of any units. DE issued supplementary funding within the Engage II Programme to all post-primary schools, with the exception of junior high schools with no year 12 pupils, as an additional support to year 12 pupils sitting GCSE Mathematics in 2021-2022.

In January 2022, as a preventative approach to offset the severe staffing shortages across all areas of education caused by the ongoing effects of the pandemic, the Minister of Education announced that schools and educational settings could re-deploy staff delivering the Engage II Programme to sustain normal classroom teaching. This flexible approach was to be a short-term measure and to be used only when all other channels for securing a substitute teacher had been exhausted.

The Engage Programme

The aim of the Engage Programme is to limit any long-term adverse impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on educational standards, by supporting pupils in their learning and engagement on their return to school through provision of high-quality one-to-one, small group or team-teaching support in every school in Northern Ireland.

The objectives of the programme are as follows:

- To provide an appropriately differentiated programme of child-centred, one-to-one, small group and/or team-teaching support to pupils of all abilities whom schools identify as those who would benefit from additional support to engage with learning following the COVID-19 period of lockdown.
- To support pupils to increase their confidence, engagement, motivation to learn and to develop the tools and skills they require to become independent learners.
- To develop and enhance pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in the key cross-curricular skills of Using Mathematics, Communication and Using Information and Communication Technology (UICT).
- To support and enhance pupils' development of the whole curriculum thinking skills and personal capabilities.
- To develop pupils' understanding of how they learn (meta-cognition) and their self-knowledge about explicit strategies and behaviours for learning to help build positive mind-sets, coping skills and resilience.
- To complement and enhance the existing work of schools (such as, extended schools, special educational needs and/or nurture provision) to provide support for pupils to engage with learning following the COVID-19 period of lockdown.

During 2021-22, in addition to the stated six objectives of the programme, settings were given the flexibility to contextualise these objectives to reflect the particular needs of their pupils and the circumstances of their settings, in order to accommodate the extension of the programme across the differing nature of the educational settings.

Summary of key findings

- All schools and educational settings were positive about the continuation of the funding. The expansion of the programme to include special schools, funded pre-school education settings and EOTAS centres ensured parity of access to the funding for all pupils, allowing for a wider range of support for more children and young people whose learning had been impacted adversely by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The adaptations to the use of the funding were appropriate and enabled schools and educational settings to provide more individual, creative support to their pupils.
- Almost all of the forty lessons observed were effective in meeting the needs of the pupils.
- The Engage II Programme funding allowed for a range of pedagogical approaches and enhanced adult interactions that have improved pupils' confidence, motivation and engagement in their learning. Leaders reported that the periods of remote learning and lockdowns had resulted in increased levels of anxiety, gaps in curriculum knowledge and skills, and difficulties for pupils in returning to routines. The support sessions gave dedicated time, strategies and resources to address these barriers to learning.
- In almost all of the pre-school settings sampled, the funding was used to provide the children with the opportunity to develop mentally, emotionally, physically and academically; this holistic approach impacted positively on the outcomes of the children.
- In almost all of the primary schools sampled, the Engage II funding was used to support the development of aspects of literacy and numeracy; a small number of schools focused support specifically on emotional health and/or physical development.
- Almost all post-primary schools prioritised English and mathematics support programmes for targeted pupils across year 8 to year 12; most provided intervention such as mentoring or mindfulness training to enable pupils to engage more with their overall learning. Almost all schools reported improvement in pupils' motivation, disposition to learning and acquisition of skills.
- The Engage II GCSE Mathematics Programme has been successful in helping pupils to recover aspects of mathematical learning lost as a direct result of the two periods of remote learning and ongoing absences due to COVID-19, and to rebuild the pupils' confidence in mathematics*.

- The Engage II Programme has enabled special schools to: source bespoke interventions and resources relevant to pupils' individual learning needs and each school's context; target the skills affected most by COVID-19 to improve pupil progression and outcomes; and, develop leadership capacity by securing appropriate training to build the capacity of middle leaders in monitoring and evaluating effectively the schools' Engage II Programmes.
- The Engage II Programme has enabled EOTAS centres to focus on helping pupils use strategies and behaviours to improve their reading skills, supported with appropriate resources and Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) aligned to mainstream schools. The centres are now tracking pupil progress more rigorously, which allows for more timely interventions.
- A majority of schools and educational settings completed the online planner and 98,182 pupils were identified for support. The evaluations in the online planner show that the interventions had a high or very high impact on the learning objectives for most of the target areas. Schools and educational settings were required to complete the planner, which DE had reviewed and streamlined in response to feedback from the first year of the programme. Despite a series of reminders from DE and EA in following up with schools that had not completed the planner, a significant minority did not complete the final evaluation and no sanction was imposed for non-completion; reasons for non-completion cited by schools to inspectors included time pressures and staffing shortages.
- Overall, too many schools and other educational settings submitted no information on the online planner, which is the only formal mechanism available to DE to audit and monitor the impact of the £24.4 million programme across all schools and educational settings.
- The EA reports that there was no underspend by the schools and educational settings that availed of the funding. However, due to financial coding limitations, the EA was unable to determine how much of the funding was re-directed to cover for staff shortages.

Key findings

Approaches used to deliver the Engage II Programme

Pre-school settings used a range of approaches when delivering the Engage II Programme, including to the entire class, small group work and one-to-one support. Of the eleven settings visited, a minority employed an additional adult to release permanent staff to provide small group intervention or one-to-one support. In turn, the enhanced adult to child ratio provided extra nurture and engagement with all pupils, both those in receipt of the additional support and those in the remaining group.

A majority of the pre-school settings used external providers to facilitate planned music and movement activities and physical education, and leaders reported that this improved the pupils' listening skills and fine and gross motor skills. The funding was used also to purchase a wider range of resources to assist with the delivery of tailored programmes to support the pupils' physical, social and emotional development.

All of the pre-school settings visited used digital applications to share a pupil's progress with their parents/carers and to gather feedback and photographic records of the child engaging in similar activities at home. Pre-school settings reported to inspectors that data from questionnaires and verbal comments indicated that parents welcomed the feedback; it provided them with an insight into their child's learning and how they could build on the experiences at home. In pre-school settings where there was a good level of parental engagement, the parents used the suggested strategies and the resources at home to support further their child and, in some cases, siblings. Parents reported that their child's inclusion in the programme had developed a greater understanding of the importance of speech and language and early reading skills; in the Irish medium pre-school setting, parents reported that it had increased their enthusiasm for and confidence in using spoken Irish.

Where external providers were employed, the pre-school settings' staff monitored and evaluated the programme to ensure it was age and stage appropriate. In the most effective practice, the setting's own staff were directly involved in the delivery of external programmes which, staff reported, provided valuable professional development and has ensured the sustainability of the programme. An innovative and effective approach adopted by a nursery school, included employing a post-primary teacher to deliver a bespoke World Around Us (WAU) programme. The nursery principal and post-primary teacher co-designed the programme to ensure it was age and stage appropriate and supported the aims of the [pre-school curriculum](#). During a visit by an inspector, the pupils were observed using scientific language confidently and independently during their incidental play and activities.

In all the pre-school settings visited, the Engage II Programme provided the pupils with the opportunity to develop mentally, emotionally, physically, and academically. In one playgroup the funding was used to source speech and language therapy and/or behaviour support for pupils who had not yet been assessed formally and who could not access support through the usual channels. Almost all the sessions observed in the pre-school phase were effective in progressing the pupils' speech and language and developing further their confidence and social interaction with peers and adults.

Almost all of the **primary schools** visited focused on additional support for the development of aspects of the pupils' literacy and numeracy. The remaining primary schools visited focused specifically on the pupils' emotional health and/or physical development. All of the sessions observed were effective in meeting the needs of the pupils. The regularity and time the Engage teacher devoted to the support sessions was dependent on the financial package and the number of pupils being supported. In three of the schools visited, the planned programme encompassed a whole-school

approach which linked directly to the identified school priorities and to TPL. These whole-school approaches, such as music therapy, ensured a greater number of pupils benefitted from the support. In all primary schools visited, the programme was monitored and progress tracked with any necessary amendments or changes being made to the original planned intervention to ensure the desired impact was realised.

Teachers used a range of methods to evaluate the impact of the planned intervention. The overall evaluation of progress was informed by weekly teacher observations of the pupils' learning, which charted their progress and/or particular difficulties. Staff used standardised tests to track the pupils' progress and almost all of the pupils improved their scores in these assessments.

In a significant minority of the primary schools visited, teachers had opportunities for additional TPL. In one school, teachers drew on work on active learning and teaching strategies to review and implement the approaches across all classes. Schools purchased practical resources, subscriptions to online applications and the services of external providers to supplement the work of the school and deliver bespoke interventions, mindful of the legacy of the programme.

All of the **post-primary** schools that contributed to the evaluation employed at least one additional teacher; small group and/or one-to-one sessions by the Engage teacher or the class teacher helped to support pupils emotionally, socially and academically. As a consequence of the greater flexibility in the conditions around the spend of the money, more schools used the Engage II funding to support both the academic and pastoral needs of the pupils. In the first year of the programme the focus was more on preparation for assessment and curriculum recovery to mitigate against the extended periods of remote learning. A greater number of post-primary schools extended the support to include more than just pupils from examination year groups and in a wider number of areas of learning. Most schools supplemented the Engage II funding with other income sources to provide a greater variety of support to as many pupils as possible. For example, in one school, the Engage II funding was used in combination with Public Health Agency funding to support all year 12 pupils with GCSE English and/or Mathematics, not just those identified as being at risk of not achieving at least a grade C.

The schools used a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data to identify the pupils who would benefit from the programme. In the most effective practice, the design of the Engage II provision was informed by the schools' self-evaluation processes, including parent and pupil views of the previous Engage Programme.

The programme is most effective where there are good links and communication between the academic and the pastoral systems in post-primary schools, which was the case in almost all the sample schools. The form teacher and class teacher are invaluable conduits for monitoring the holistic progress of the pupils. In discussions with inspectors, senior leaders and Engage staff reported that the success of the intervention is that it was able to encompass the needs of the whole child, which in

their view differs from the usual form of support funded by DE initiatives. In those schools, where the approach was to withdraw groups of pupils for support in improving their attitudes and dispositions to learning, the senior leaders reported that as a result there was an improvement in classroom behaviours and subsequent attainment in a range of subjects. The Engage sessions offered an alternative to traditional means of support and in some cases addressed more comprehensively the root causes of disengagement with learning, which was welcomed by pupils and parents. This was achieved with, for example, more access to counselling services, more nurture* provision and more outdoor learning opportunities.

In a minority of the post-primary schools visited, there was no monitoring or evaluation of the impact of the programme on the pupils' outcomes and/or transferrable skills. A minority of the post-primary schools visited had not considered the continuation of the programme or its potential legacy of successful strategies for when the funding ends. Inspectors discussed with those schools the significant implications of not monitoring the effectiveness of the programme to determine the impact on the pupils' learning experiences and, suggested a range of strategies to take forward.

In almost all of the post-primary schools sampled, the funding for GCSE Mathematics was used for additional mathematics support delivered by a mathematics specialist teacher. Most schools supplemented the funding out of their own budget to provide additional specialist teaching hours for at least one day a week. The delivery models included after school sessions, withdrawal groups and providing backfill for the classroom teacher. The most common and most effective approach was the use of substitute teachers employed to release the school's mathematics specialist to deliver the support in withdrawal groups.

A small number of the post-primary schools used their total GCSE Engage II Mathematics funding to purchase mathematical resources such as revision guides, physical resources, online applications and some digital devices for use by the pupils.

The most effective approach, observed in most of the post-primary schools visited, was when the Engage II GCSE Mathematics Programme was led by senior and middle leaders. The schools used a range of qualitative and quantitative information to monitor and evaluate the impact of the support programmes, including pupil voice, internal assessment, teacher judgement and GCSE modular results. In most of the schools, there was direct contact with the parents of the identified pupils to outline the programme of mathematics support, and the parents were happy for their children to receive the support in school. A key strength of the mathematics support programmes was the flexibility within the approach taken in most of the schools. This included enabling the pupils to enter and exit the support when the teacher decided they had made sufficient progress and, the provision of individualised support to meet the needs of the pupils and address specific learning gaps.

Another effective approach was where a school used its TPL opportunities to disseminate a range of teaching strategies to develop pupils' wider numeracy skills across a range of subjects, as well as to support and engage pupils with their GCSE Mathematics.

Pupils attending **EOTAS** centres have complex social, emotional and behavioural difficulties which impact on their learning. Consequently, provision is based on pupil-centred one-to-one, small group or team-teaching support. Given the effects of the pandemic, the variations in pupils' literacy skills were a further barrier to their learning. An audit by the EA identified the need for a more consistent approach to literacy across the EOTAS service, to improve the outcomes of the pupils with a particular emphasis on reading. As a result, the Engage II Programme focused on developing literacy skills alongside therapeutic interventions* to meet better the pupils' complex needs. It was delivered by two teachers working across primary and post-primary EOTAS centres.

In primary EOTAS centres this method of delivery has ensured a consistent approach to baselining the pupils' literacy skills and more robust mechanisms for monitoring their progress in areas such as letter recognition and reading skills. Therapeutic interventions have had a positive impact in progressing the pupils' learning and self-regulation to enable them to re-integrate successfully into mainstream schools. In the small number of sessions observed, the pupils were highly motivated and engaged and showed curiosity to learning. Moreover, the pupils' progress in reading has impacted positively on their self-esteem and confidence. In addition, effective TPL has resulted in the identification of a designated literacy 'champion' in each centre who is trained in intervention strategies and pupil profile tracking. Staff were also provided with ongoing support through online resources.

In post-primary EOTAS centres there is now effective regional action planning to improve pupil outcomes in literacy, aligned to developments in mainstream schools and identifying priorities from an evaluation of pupils' needs emerging from the pandemic. A more consistent approach has been developed to track pupil progress using pupils' written work and there is now electronic tracking of progression in literacy levels and in learning dispositions. In the centres visited, leaders identified the positive impact of TPL in: raising expectations of standards in literacy through improved analysis and internal standardisation of pupils' work; diagnostic testing in line with mainstream schools and a clearer understanding of progression across key stages (KS) 3 and 4. Staff valued greater access to effective learning strategies in literacy and relevant texts to prepare pupils better for re-integration.

Special schools used the Engage II funding creatively and effectively to provide a wide range of resources to meet the very specific learning needs of their pupils. Examples of resources included: Light Emitting Diode (LED)* boards for pupils in Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) and nurture classes; authentic resources for the development of life skills such as vacuum cleaners, portable cookers and bicycle-maintenance kits; and, outdoor play and learning resources to enrich cross-curricular learning experiences and support pupils experiencing challenges with their emotional health and well-being.

In addition, a small number of the special schools visited, as part of an established regional cluster, used Engage II funding to support existing foci on developing leadership capacity, particularly for co-ordinators and middle managers. They created bespoke TPL programmes enabling the review and adaptation of key curricular areas, taking into account the impact of the pandemic on pupils and focusing further on increasing their confidence, engagement and motivation to learn. This appropriate long-term strategic approach addresses the legacy of the programme when the funding is no longer available.

In almost all of the special schools visited, the younger children were identified for additional interventions to support their emotional health and well-being. The range of interventions included increased access to and improved planning for: outdoor play; World Around Us; and, therapeutic programmes such as music therapy.

In post-primary departments, audits undertaken by the teachers highlighted lost learning and skill deficits in ICT, social and practical skills, which were impacting negatively on a number of subject areas and outcomes achieved. Appropriate interventions included: developing further the five 'E's* in ICT to enable better progression; re-establishing work-experience skills; using LED boards with nurture and PMLD classes to increase further pupil engagement; and, increased access to art and music therapy to develop communication.

In the more effective practice, interventions were supported by TPL sessions which included the dissemination of effective practice and/or training to develop further staff expertise. For example, a majority of the schools employed external providers, such as music therapists and fitness instructors to deliver elements of their programmes. In all cases, schools linked effectively the external provider with the school's music or physical education specialist, enabling further dissemination of effective practice to relevant school staff. Similarly, within a small number of schools, subject specialists for example in drama, led staff in disseminating effective practice in developing pupils' confidence, self-esteem and communication skills.

The facility to purchase subject-specific resources such as outdoor learning equipment, ICT software and Learning for Life and Work resources and use them effectively for learning and teaching is a particular strength of the Engage II Programme. This contributed significantly to pupils re-engaging successfully in many aspects of their learning.

Teacher evaluations of the Engage II Programme in special schools identified increased levels of pupil engagement, collaboration, motivation, enjoyment and self-esteem which are impacting positively on their emotional health and well-being. Pupils, where appropriate, are completing more activities independently and are making progress against the skill-based targets in their individual education plans. Pupils with additional barriers to their learning, such as complex behavioural needs, have improved their self-management and concentration skills through having access to a range of effective interventions including music therapy and their teachers' effective use of assistive technology.

Challenges in delivering the Engage II Programme

In all of the **pre-school** settings visited and consulted, the main challenge reported was that the sector's funding allocations was issued by DE in early September 2021, which made it difficult to secure the additional service providers or staff. The voluntary and private pre-school providers are not funded through the same centralised system as schools so had to undergo a process to accept the money. Financial responsibilities lie with a management committee and not individual playgroup leaders, on occasion resulting in a lack of awareness about when the funding was available, which led to more delays in commencing the planned interventions. The non-statutory pre-school settings reported this made it difficult to spend the full allocation within the timescale of the 2021-2022 financial year.

In almost all of the pre-school settings visited, COVID-19 related absences impacted on the delivery of the planned programme and settings had to divert the use of funding to employ additional staff to adhere to recommended adult to child ratio as outlined in DE's [A Framework for Early Years Education and Training](#). Pre-school settings endeavoured to continue to deliver the intervention, however some support sessions were missed due to staff illness or COVID-19 self-isolation.

Most pre-school practitioners reported that the completion of the online planner was a major challenge. Voluntary/private settings are not supported by an information and communications network in the same way as schools, and leaders have no non-contact time to complete the online planner. Staff in funded pre-school settings reported the time taken to complete the online planner impacted negatively on what they view as limited administration time.

Primary schools faced a range of challenges in the delivery and consistent provision of the planned interventions. DE wrote to schools on 17 June 2021 to confirm that the programme would continue for a second academic year from September 2021. To allow settings to plan for their implementation of the programme, schools were advised that they would not receive less than in year one of the programme. A small number of the schools visited were able to employ the Engage teacher from the previous year to deliver the Engage II Programme. However, the formal allocation of funding for the second tranche of the programme was not issued until after the programme was launched by the new Minister on 6 September 2021, which was after the beginning of the academic year, and schools reported they had to make consequent adjustments to the interventions planned.

The majority of the primary schools visited experienced a moderate level of disruption on their ability to provide a continuous programme. The increased number of positive COVID-19 cases and self-isolation of both children and staff, particularly in term one of the 2021/22 academic year, had a negative impact on the continued delivery of the intervention. High levels of positive COVID-19 cases amongst teachers placed pressure on the already limited availability of substitute teachers. Leaders

endeavoured to protect the delivery of the programme through, on occasions, short periods of remote learning for particular year groups or where possible, providing cover within the existing staff, including the redeployment of the Engage teacher to teach classes of absent colleagues.

Schools reported the challenge of providing consistent support for newcomer children as a small number of families chose to return to their home country for periods during the pandemic, and/or experienced being isolated from their communities. A lack of available space in primary schools required creative thinking, flexibility and adaptations to the school day, in order that the withdrawal sessions for pupils were delivered in a suitable venue with limited disruption. In a very small number of cases the school needed to reassure a parent that their child would benefit from one-to-one withdrawal support despite their initial reluctance for the child to participate.

Almost all **post-primary** schools reported that the greatest challenge of the Engage II Programme was related to staffing. There remained a shortage of specialist English and/or mathematics teachers and the scope and scale of the programme this year meant that there were fewer substitute teachers available. As with primary schools, DE wrote to all post-primary schools in mid-June 2021 to confirm that the programme would continue for a second academic year and ask schools to plan for implementation on the basis that they would not receive less than they had in the first year. The funding allocation was issued after the first term had begun and timetables had been arranged, which resulted in some schools having difficulty sourcing a qualified teacher to deliver the programme. The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workforce and pupil attendance was another challenge for post-primary schools. Out of the sample visited, almost all reported that the Engage teachers were re-deployed to cover for absent colleagues to a moderate extent (25%-75% of the time).

Views of the pupils

All of the pupils who engaged in focus groups with inspectors spoke positively of their participation in the programme. In primary schools, the pupils all reported that they enjoyed the support and input. Individual pupils commented on their increase in confidence when reading aloud in a whole class situation and in using the range of mathematical strategies they had revisited. The pupils welcomed the input from external providers, which they reported helped them with their schoolwork and relaxation. In post-primary schools, the pupils valued in particular the relationship with the Engage staff and the opportunities they had to improve confidence and reduce anxiety levels in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing them to re-engage with learning.

Schools used focus groups and surveys to include pupils' views and in the most effective practice, pupils were involved in the co-design of the programme.

Learner feedback includes the following:

"I'm getting better at my spelling."

"I'm starting to know which strategies I can use to help me with tricky words."

"You are never stuck."

"Fun activities."

"Never anything boring."

"...I feel better prepared for going to my other classes."

"My confidence has been boosted."

"I can answer out in class now."

"Repeating things over and over again in small classes is really helpful for me."

"It is fun in the class."

"Teacher explains things clearly and slowly – I need that."

"Takes pressure off me."

"I get advice on how to deal with situations...helps me to deal with friendship fallouts."

"Better ways to cope with life."

Conclusion

Schools, pre-school settings and EOTAS centres are unanimous in their appreciation of the Engage II Programme to date. The cumulative effects of periods of lockdown have exacerbated any pre-existing gaps in opportunities and attainment and had a negative impact on the emotional health and well-being of children and young people. The disruption to normal classroom learning and awarding and assessment arrangements, coupled with societal changes such as patterns of work and changes in community structures and networks, has resulted in increased levels of anxiety and loss of confidence among children and young people. The full impact may not be known for many years to come. The flexibility given to schools and educational settings to design their own programmes with a budget for external providers and resources has enabled them to target the particular needs of pupils in a unique way. Almost all schools and educational settings visited had a good range of qualitative and quantitative data to show that the funding has had a positive impact on the educational experiences of pupils. However, with a significant minority of schools not completing an online planner, it is impossible to know if all organisations have a similar range of data and therefore impossible for DE to know the precise impact of the funding across sectors and in relation to the level of impact of the range of strategies used to support children and young people.

A significant minority of schools and educational settings did not track and monitor pupil progress robustly, including monitoring the quality of the work of external providers, and as a result did not plan approaches to address any residual issues from the COVID-19 pandemic when the education budget no longer sustains additional funding. District inspectors will continue to discuss and monitor settings' approach to monitoring and evaluating provision. In addition, this report has identified issues in relation to, for example, how the funding is accessed and the administrative time required for some sectors in relation to tracking the funding for the programme.

The above issues need to be set in the context of the strengths of the programme as outlined in the report, which allowed for everyone involved across all levels of the programme to work at a faster pace and with increased autonomy in responding to the needs of the children and young people who were in most danger of becoming overwhelmed by the effects of the pandemic. DE, support services, managing authorities and schools retained a firm and unified focus on the needs of children, not least in the work of the combined Strategic Oversight Group which responded constructively to feedback from schools, the teaching unions and other arms' length bodies and from inspectors on changes or modifications which needed to be made at the various stages of the programme. DE has established new ways of working with stakeholders which have been, for the most part, highly successful. DE can continue to draw on and develop further the innovative approaches outlined in the report in working with schools, support services, other educational settings and the teaching unions to continue to improve provision and raise standards for children and young people.

Appendix A: Background information

The Engage Programme was introduced within the broader context of the Standards and Learning Project of the Department of Education's (DE) Restart Programme. This aimed to maintain (or to redress) educational standards, acknowledging the period of time pupils experienced outside of the classroom environment, and to provide continuity of learning going forward.

Appendix B: Methodology and evidence base

The Department of Education commissioned the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to evaluate the effectiveness of the Engage Programme during the 2021-2022 academic year and in particular its impact on children and young people's learning.

The ETI conducted the evaluation through:

- an evaluation of a sample of the online planners completed by 1198 settings in total;
- ongoing and focused district inspector communication with schools; and
- focus groups with leaders from primary, post primary and special schools and pre-school and EOTAS settings; visits to 11 pre-school settings, 11 primary schools, 19 post-primary schools, six special schools and seven EOTAS Centres.

The visits included 40 observations of sessions, scrutiny of school documentation and discussions with key staff and pupils.

Appendix C: Schools/educational settings that participated in the evaluation

List of schools, educational settings and centres visited:

Ardglass Pre-school	Lisnagarvey High School
Brambly Hedge Community Playgroup	Markethill High School
Christ the Redeemer Nursery Unit	Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock
Dunclug Nursery School	Priory Integrated College
Galliagh Nursery School	Regent House
Kylemore Nursery School	Saintfield High School
Magherafelt Nursery School	St Colman's High and Sixth Form College
Mallusk Community Playgroup	St Dominic's
Naíscoil Mhic Reachtain	St Joseph's Boys' High School, Newry
Newtownbutler Playgroup	St Mary's College, Derry
Stepping Stones Playgroup	St Patrick's Maghera
	Victoria College
Cedar Integrated Primary School	Ceara Special School
Christ the Redeemer Primary School	Clifton Special School
Dunclug Primary School	Donard Special School
Gaelscoil Aodha Rua	Parkview Special School
Glenann Primary School	Rathore School
Knocknagoney Primary School	St Gerard's School
Larne and Inver Primary School	
Newtownards Model Primary School	Castlereagh EOTAS Centre
Our Lady's and St Mochua's Primary School	Castlereagh Support Unit
St Anne's Primary School	Connections EOTAS Centre
Stranmillis Primary School	Fir Trees EOTAS Centre
	Little Oaks EOTAS Centre
Ashfield Boys' High School	Loughshore EOTAS Centre
Ballymoney High School	Newtownabbey EOTAS Centre
Belfast High School	
City of Armagh High School	
Dean Maguirc Colllege	
Integrated College Dungannon	
Lagan College	

List of schools /settings that participated in focus group discussions:

Playhouse Activity Centre
Galliagh Nursery School
Kylemore Nursery School
Drumnamoe Nursery School
Brookeborough and District Community Playgroup

Ballymacward Primary School
Braidside Integrated Primary School
Bunscoil Cholmcille and Naiscoil Dhoire
Camphill Primary School
Donacloney Primary School
Downpatrick Primary School
Fane Street Primary School
Loughview Integrated Primary
Millstrand Integrated Primary school
Richmond Primary School
St. Joseph's Primary School, Crumlin
St. Joseph's Primary School, Bessbrook
St Nicholas' Primary School, Ardglass
Tannaghmore Primary School

St Paul's High School, Bessbrook
St Mary's High School, Newry
Ballymoney High school
St Joseph's Boys' High School, Derry
Nendrum College,
St Patrick's College, Dungannon
Ballycastle High School

Loughshore EOTAS
Knockavoe Special School

Appendix D: Notes

- Page 2** **Engage Programme*** - Page 10, points 28, 29 Engage Programme Guidance for Schools September 2020.
- Page 3** **additional funding*** - This funding was to support a full time and a part time member of staff whose roles included monitoring of the information supplied on the planners and monitoring the overall spend.
- Page 6** **mathematics*** - Schools visited as part of the evaluation provided a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence to inspectors.
- Page 10** **nurture*** - Nurture provision focuses on a culture of well-being for all, whilst providing short term intervention for pupils experiencing social, behavioural, emotional and well-being difficulties, most often in small class settings for part of the school day.
- Page 12** **therapeutic interventions*** - The therapeutic curriculum is a key component of the EOTAS provision in helping pupils to self-regulate.
- Light Emitting Diode (LED)*** - LED boards have interactive touchscreen displays and enhance the opportunities for pupil participation and collaboration.
- Page 13** **Five 'E's*** - The curriculum requirements for using ICT are set out under the 5 'E's: Explore, Express, Exchange, Evaluate and Exhibit.

Appendix E: Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

Quantitative terms

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

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