

THE SEN CAPITAL PROGRAMME



Department of
Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk

“Today, I am announcing the biggest step change to capital planning in education for a generation, with an ambitious and far-reaching programme of investment in facilities for children with SEN, which will transform the education and lives of our most vulnerable children and their families”.

Paul Givan MLA
Minister of Education
30 April 2024



Background

In April 2024, the Minister of Education announced a wide-ranging programme of significant and sustained capital investment for the development of school facilities to support the increasing numbers of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) across Northern Ireland.

He outlined a four-point capital investment masterplan, which will be delivered over the next decade. This leaflet sets out the key elements of the programme and progress to date.

In the short-term, due to the Minister’s new strategic approach to SEN investment, over 1,450 new places in both special and mainstream schools were created by the Education Authority (EA) for September 2024, with building works delivered to establish 112 new Specialist Provision in Mainstream (SPiM) classes in 105 primary and post-primary schools and an additional 67 classrooms created in special schools across Northern Ireland. Over £51 million of capital funding has been invested through the SEN capital programme this year.

Over the coming months and years, we will continue to build on this excellent progress and work collectively to ensure that we meet the needs of our most vulnerable children. This will mean a re-imagining of the school estate to create modern, supportive, inclusive learning environments for our children and young people. A long-term capital strategy for the development of the special school estate across Northern Ireland is being developed and will be consulted on with key stakeholders. The SEN Capital Programme will benefit from more integrated planning with the wider education capital programme.



A new momentum has been created in recent months and capital projects to create new SPiM provision, extend special schools and plans to deliver new builds schools are now moving at pace. Around £1 billion pounds of investment will be required to support the SEN Capital Programme over the next decade.



The Programme

Annual Maintenance and Equipment Programme for Special Schools and SPiM classes.

There is now an annual maintenance and equipment programme for special schools and SPiM classes. Since April, almost £3m in furniture and equipment grants has been provided to special schools and schools with new SPiM classes. This funding which includes £20,000 for new resources for each new SPiM class has ensured that schools have the right resources to support their pupils.

A programme of maintenance is also being delivered across the special school estate, including an ambitious £2m programme of works to facilitate and improve access to the outdoors including landscaping and new pathways, play and sensory areas.

New Specialist Provisions

Significant funding is required to refurbish existing classrooms or provide new classrooms for SPiM provision. The creation of 112 new SPiMs for September 2024 has provided over 900 new places to enable pupils with a statement of SEN to learn and participate in mainstream schools alongside their peers.

The Department and EA are currently engaging with over 250 schools regarding the establishment of SPiM provision for September 2025 and beyond.

Given the unprecedented increase in the number of children with SEN the creation of additional specialist provision is a critical priority. Information for mainstream schools who are interested in establishing specialist provisions is available on the EA website or you can contact the Department of Education directly at SENCIPT@education-ni.gov.uk



Extension and Refurbishment of Special Schools

Due to the growing number of children requiring specialist placements, a significant amount of specialist accommodation within our special schools has been repurposed and work by EA shows overpopulation of existing school accommodation across Northern Ireland.

A key aspect of the Programme will, therefore, be to expand capacity in our special schools to provide additional high-quality accommodation.

There are currently ten special school extension and refurbishment projects within the Department's School Enhancement Programme. These projects have been prioritised and expedited for delivery. In the last six months the business case has been approved for the extension to Thornfield House. Three other business cases are now with the Department for approval and are well advanced in the approvals process. In addition, the construction tender will issue imminently for a £5m extension to Kilronan School.

The Department is also working closely with EA to bring forward large scale extension and refurbishment projects at other special schools where additional places are needed.



New Special Schools

The final element of the SEN Programme is a new build special school programme both for a number of existing special schools and up to eight entirely new schools.

The technical feasibility report for the approved new special school in Belfast has recently been completed.

The planning for new build schools at Sperrinview Special School, Knockevin Special School, a second campus for Ardnashee School and College and a further Belfast Special School has also commenced, with the appointment of technical teams progressing in procurement.

**CREATING MODERN, INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN**