



## *MEDIA RELEASE*

11 April 2019

### **Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the Education Authority 2017-18 Accounts**

Kieran Donnelly, the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) for Northern Ireland and head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), has reported on the results of his audit of the 2017-18 accounts of the Education Authority (EA).

Over the 2017-18 year, the EA overspent by £16.6 million, in comparison with its total budget of £1.88 billion, allocated by its two sponsoring departments - the Department of Education (DE) and the Department for the Economy (DfE). This was mainly due to overspends in Special Education Needs (£12.7 million), School Meals (£2.4 million) and the unfunded Apprenticeship Levy (£5.3 million), offset by net underspends in other areas.

The C&AG had previously reported on overspend by the EA of £19.1 million in 2016-17. He has recently published reports on 'Special Education Needs' in 2017 and 'The Financial Health of Schools' in 2018, with both reports recommending a review of school funding arrangements.

The issues which led to an overspend in education services in 2016-17 were still prevalent in 2017-18. EA noted that, as budget allocations have essentially remained cash flat, it has been unable to absorb increased demand and inflationary pressures.

Commenting on the report, Mr Kieran Donnelly stated: "I am concerned that once again the EA has overspent on its budget and that DE and EA were unable to agree the 2017-18 budget until January 2018. In my report on the financial health of schools, published in October 2018, I highlighted an environment where there is pressure on school budgets, increasing pupil numbers, and schools with sustainability issues. I welcome the EA and DE's recognition of the need to reform the education sector, which I consider urgent. I will continue to keep this area under review."

ENDS

#### **Notes for Editors**

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. He certifies the

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accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.

2. This report is available from the Audit Office website at [www.niauditoffice.gov.uk](http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk). The report is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on Thursday 11 April 2019.
3. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Francis Casey (028 9025 1087).