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Special Education and Inclusion Review Team
Department of Education
Rathgael House
43 Balloo road
Rathgill
Bangor
BT19 7PR

21st January 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

Comments from the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) on the Rural Needs Impact Assessment completed as part of the Consultation on Draft SEN Regulations

The UFU is the largest farming organisation in Northern Ireland (NI) representing approximately 11,500 farming families. The UFU represents farmers from all areas of Northern Ireland, across all sectors and has a vision of a productive, profitable and progressive farming sector.

Rural schools form a key part of rural communities. Over half (55%) of NI's primary schools are situated in rural areas, together with 20% of post-primary schools. Not only do they provide a safe learning space for young people, but employment and a social venue for other clubs such as community classes, youth clubs etc.

Members of the UFU Rural Affairs Committee who work in rural schools have found it concerning that the Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) completed as part of this consultation process found the new SEN Framework to impact urban and rural children equally, *The new SEN Framework will impact positively on children and young people whether in rural areas or otherwise*, however provides no evidence to confirm or deny this.

Often rural schools find themselves with fewer resources compared to urban schools. Such as, in many rural schools the Learning Support Coordinator will also be the Principal or another senior teacher, the changes to the Code of Practice will add hugely to their workload. In addition there is an increasing demand for provision of SEN support, yet it is dictated by school numbers. As rural schools are normally much smaller it restricts the number of children that can avail of SEN support – a smaller school does not necessarily mean fewer pupils with SEN.

Our focus is on supporting the needs of the rural community and we cannot comment on the key changes to the new draft SEN Regulations. However request that consideration is given to the additional challenges caused by implementing the changes to SEN regulations in rural schools.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to get in contact.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" and last name "Brown" clearly distinguishable.

David Brown
UFU Deputy President