# Strule Shared Education Campus sod-cutting ceremony reignites decade-old delays and funding concerns



A recent sod-cutting ceremony at the site of the Strule Shared Education Campus in Omagh has reignited questions regarding the longstanding delays and shifting timelines associated with the development. A decade of stagnation has overshadowed this significant project aimed at fostering shared education among a diverse student population.

Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly, alongside Education Minister Paul Givan and First Minister Michelle O’Neill, marked this occasion with renewed optimism. The event, however, drew attention for presenting an illusion of progress in a project first initiated in 2013 that has undergone multiple setbacks. Notably, this is the second such ceremony in ten years, prompting critique from local educators regarding the motives behind what they perceive as a PR strategy rather than genuine progress.

Omagh High School Principal Christos Gaitatzis was among those who chose to boycott the event, expressing concerns about the adequacy and suitability of the proposed facilities. He articulated that the actions of the Department of Education seem misaligned with the needs of the schools, stating that significant opportunities to address concerns raised over the last six years had been overlooked. “These are problems that we highlighted more than six years ago, and there was ample time to address them,” he noted, highlighting a lingering sense of frustration among stakeholders.

The delays at Strule have been compounded by various factors, including procurement challenges and sharp inflation in project costs. Initially budgeted at £100 million, the current estimated expenditure has ballooned to approximately £374 million, stoking fears that construction could be unaffordable. An independent review conducted earlier this year labelled the project as ‘unaffordable,’ suggesting the need to reassess funding strategies to secure a viable pathway forward. Yet, the Department of Education remains steadfast in its commitment to the campus, asserting its intent to explore various funding strategies to support the ambitious educational initiative.

Despite stalled progress on the wider campus, one significant milestone has been achieved: the opening of the Arvalee Special School and Resource Centre, a £8.2 million investment that caters to students with moderate to severe learning difficulties. This facility is the first completed building on the campus, designed to offer specialised resources such as sensory therapy rooms and dedicated teaching areas. It represents an important step toward fulfilling the vision of the Strule project, which aims to accommodate over 4,000 pupils from six different educational establishments.

Local education officials and politicians have expressed a mix of disappointment and determination. Councillors have called for expeditious action to mitigate the community's frustrations over the lengthy delays, stressing the necessity of providing our young people with adequate educational resources. Beyond its immediate educational implications, local leaders believe the campus has the potential to stimulate economic growth and create substantial employment opportunities—estimated at about 1,500 jobs during the construction phase alone.

Looking ahead, the timeline for the wider Strule Shared Education Campus remains uncertain, with estimates pointing towards a potential completion date in 2028. As construction efforts unfold, educators and community leaders will be watching closely, hoping for a shift from the recurring cycles of delay to a new era of actionable development that truly reflects their aspirations for shared education. The evolving narrative of the Strule project encapsulates broader themes of commitment, community engagement, and the critical need for responsive governance in the realm of education.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
2. Paragraph 3
3. Paragraph 3
4. Paragraph 6
5. Paragraph 6
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraph 4

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/questions-asked-over-second-sod-cutting-event-in-a-decade-at-long-awaited-schools-campus-YRBE2NGFRRA4VHJ6PCNWSOWX5Q/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-67730736> - An independent review of the Strule Shared Education Campus in Omagh, Northern Ireland, has deemed the project 'unaffordable,' with costs escalating to £341 million. Despite this, the Department of Education remains committed to the campus, emphasizing its potential benefits for over 4,000 pupils across six schools. The department is exploring various funding options to support the initiative, acknowledging the significant capital investment required for post-primary education in Omagh.
* <https://www.tyronecon.co.uk/news/2023/02/02/gallery/blow-for-strule-campus-as-sole-contractor-s-tender-exceeds-budget-39060/> - The Strule Shared Education Campus project in Omagh faces further delays as the sole contractor's tender exceeds the budget by a significant margin. The Department of Education is engaged in negotiations to refine the tender, but construction is unlikely to commence before Spring 2024, pushing the completion date to 2027. Local councillors express disappointment over the prolonged timeline and rising costs, urging the department to expedite the process to benefit the community.
* <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/new-ps82million-arvalee-school-and-resource-centre-opens> - The new Arvalee School and Resource Centre, a £8.2 million investment, has opened as the first school on Northern Ireland's first shared school campus. The facility caters to over 200 pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties, offering specialized facilities such as sensory therapy rooms and dedicated teaching areas. This development marks a significant milestone in the Strule Shared Education Campus project, aiming to provide state-of-the-art education for children and young people in the Omagh district.
* <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/news/foster-and-mcguinness-attend-opening-ps82million-arvalee-school-and-resource-centre> - Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness and Education Minister Peter Weir attended the opening of the £8.2 million Arvalee School and Resource Centre, the first school on the Strule Shared Education Campus. The facility is designed to enhance the educational experience of pupils in the Omagh area, promoting inclusion and mutual respect among students from different backgrounds. The campus aims to unite the community and provide a model for shared education in Northern Ireland.
* <https://wearetyrone.com/news/scathing-review-of-omaghs-340-million-shared-education-campus/> - An independent review has criticized the Strule Shared Education Campus in Omagh as 'unaffordable,' recommending the immediate cessation of the £340 million project. The review suggests reallocating the £170 million allocated for the campus to other capital schemes. Local school principals and politicians have expressed shock and disappointment over the findings, emphasizing the project's potential benefits for the community and the need for continued investment in shared education.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj62686rppyo> - The construction phase of the Strule Shared Education Campus in Omagh, Northern Ireland, is set to create 1,500 jobs. The £375 million project, the largest education initiative in Northern Ireland, is expected to be completed by September 2028. The campus will accommodate over 4,000 pupils from six schools, including Arvalee Special School, and will feature shared facilities such as performance spaces and sports amenities. The project aims to provide a state-of-the-art learning environment for the community.