Minister’s Brief
Schools issues

Part 1 - Introduction
Part 2 - Overview
Part 3 - Current & Topical Issues
Part 4 - Programme for Government Commitments

June 2020

Note:
This briefing focuses on schools issues which have been the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills. In light of the decision to re-assign certain responsibilities between Ministers, there may be issues which will need to be the subject of engagement in the establishment of new Departmental structures for further education and training and higher education.
1. **Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 4

2. **Context** .......................................................................................................................... 9
   2.1. Overview of the System ............................................................................................... 9
   2.2. Principal Department Locations and Staff Numbers .................................................. 10
   2.3. The Role of the Education System across Government ............................................. 11
   2.4. Demographics ............................................................................................................. 12
   2.5. Budget ......................................................................................................................... 13
   2.6. Legislative Programme ............................................................................................... 16
   2.7. Sectoral Reform / Work Programme Education .......................................................... 17

3. **Strategic, Current & Topical Issues** ............................................................................... 19
   3.1. Covid-19 ..................................................................................................................... 19
   3.2. Reopening Schools ....................................................................................................... 21
   3.3. Leaving Certificate 2020 – Calculated Grades ............................................................... 23
   3.4. Summer Provision (SEN\DEIS) ...................................................................................... 26
   3.5. Climate Action ............................................................................................................. 28
   3.6. Curriculum & Assessment Policy ............................................................................... 34
   3.7. Special Education Provision ....................................................................................... 46
   3.8. Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity Process ............................................................ 52
   3.9. School Transport ......................................................................................................... 53
   3.10. Industrial Relations .................................................................................................... 55
   3.11. Teacher Staffing Schedules and Supply ..................................................................... 60
   3.12. National Development Plan (NDP) 2018 to 2027 ....................................................... 63
   3.13. School Finance ......................................................................................................... 67
   3.14. DEIS ......................................................................................................................... 68
   3.15. Education Welfare and School Completion Functions ........................................... 69
   3.16. Shared Services ........................................................................................................ 70
   3.17. Management of Financial Allocation ....................................................................... 71
   3.18. Redress ...................................................................................................................... 73
   3.19. Irish Medium & Gaeltacht provision ........................................................................ 74
   3.20. Co-construction and collaboration in school evaluation ........................................... 78

4. **Programme for Government 2020 – 2025 Commitments** ......................................... 81
   4.1. NEW STRUCTURES (SPECIFIC TO DES) ............................................................... 81
   4.2. STRATEGIES AND COMMITMENTS (SCHOOLS) ............................................. 81
   4.3. GOVERNMENT CO-ORDINATION AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM .......... 84
1. Introduction

Context
This briefing document is prepared for the information of the Ministerial team and seeks to identify the most current, strategic or topical issues. More detailed briefing can be provided as required.

The briefing focuses on schools issues which were the focus of the Department of Education and Skills prior to the formation of the Government.

Introduction
The Department of Education and Skills is responsible for steering a national education and training system of significant scale and complexity, the performance of which affects a range of outcomes for individuals, wider society and the economy. The full education and training system encompasses over a million learners, over 110,000 public sector employees (one-third of the public sector), and approximately 4,000 schools across the primary and, post-primary sectors. International indicators show that the Irish system performs well and is comparatively equitable.

For individuals, high-quality, inclusive education and training is critical to a range of positive outcomes, including better health and wellbeing, higher social trust, tolerance, civic engagement, environmental awareness and the skills to navigate the changing world of work. Education is also a key driver of societal outcomes, including fairness, equity and economic development. The Citizen’s Assembly on Education, envisaged in the Programme for Government, will a valuable vehicle for exploring key issues within the system and its place within wider society.

Managing the Covid-19 Crisis
The Covid-19 crisis has fundamentally reshaped the operating environment for the education and training system and has necessitated a significant re-orientation of the Department’s focus and resources to lead and co-ordinate crisis responses across the system on a range of issues.
This has necessitated an unprecedented mobilisation of the sector, innovation at all levels and significant ongoing collaborative engagement to support continuity of learning, assessment and inclusion for our learners.

There are a number of major ongoing urgent responses to the Covid-19 crisis which require significant focus and management, including:

- delivering a summer programme;
- re-opening the education and training system (including school transport) and managing the ongoing implications of the crisis for learning, curriculum, and assessment; and,
- delivering the calculated grades system for Leaving Certificate 2020 students.

**Strategic opportunities and challenges**
There are a range of other strategic challenges which, together with the pandemic and its aftermath, will shape the operating environment in which the Programme for Government and the Minister’s priorities will be delivered.

**Resourcing and demographics**

The Department’s budget for 2020 is c. €8.2 billion, the third largest in Government. Given the scale of service pressures, managing the budgetary position in 2020 remains challenging, and ongoing engagement with DPER has been taking place throughout the year, including on issues regarding a potential supplementary estimate. Separately, the Estimates process for 2021 will ramp up later in the summer. In addition to delivering on Government priorities, the Department’s approach will need to have regard to significant service pressures, against a backdrop of increased expenditure pressures across Government.

The capital programme for education and skills (which encompasses schools, digital strategy and tertiary education) will be one of the largest capital programmes in the State over the next decade (€11.9 billion currently allocated). The existing profile of this expenditure is weighted towards the second half of the decade, meaning that the capital budget will remain under considerable pressure in the near to medium term. The key drivers of the programme are demographics, alignment with housing provision and national planning, construction costs, catch-up to address legacy of underinvestment and climate action objectives including deep
energy retrofit. The schools remediation programme is ongoing, with significant works undertaken in 2019 and the bulk of the remaining work to be undertaken on a phased basis over the course of 2020 and 2021. The cost of the schools remediation programme is being met from contingency provision within the capital budget and also from the reduced funding requirement for the multi-annual capital development in TU Dublin Grangegorman following the sale of DIT, Kevin Street, the disposal of which raised €140m. Legal proceedings in relation to the structural deficiencies discovered in the schools built by Western Building Systems are on-going.

The demographic/demand landscape will continue to evolve over the coming decade, and will necessitate a range of policy responses across the system. There will be a decline in national-level primary enrolment, increases in post-primary enrolment until 2024 and significant growth at tertiary level throughout the decade. This will lead to changing geographic and sectoral patterns of demand, raising sensitive and complex issues such as: sustainability challenges for small schools, particularly in rural areas; teacher supply issues and the related challenges workforce planning; school transport delivery; and provision of school buildings in high-growth areas (particularly urban and commuter belt areas).

Curriculum and assessment

Curriculum and assessment reform ensures that our learners acquire the ability to think critically and creatively, to innovate and adapt to change, to work independently and in a team, and to be a reflective learner - all critical skills for life and for the workplace in the 21st century. Over the coming years, this agenda will involve redevelopment of the early years’ curriculum, the primary curriculum, continued implementation of junior cycle reform and the next phase of education for sustainable development. The NCCA will also be bringing forward an advisory report on senior cycle reform for discussion and implementation in the coming years.

Bringing greater coherence across all phases of education, from early years’ provision in pre-schools, through primary and second level education is a priority but also a challenge. What is taught in our schools, and how it is taught and assessed, can be sensitive and sometimes contentious topics both in the public sphere and among stakeholders, and leading change in this area is highly complex.

Quality in the learning experience

Driving an agenda of enhanced quality and performance across all parts of the system is critical. In the early years and school systems, this is supported through using a balanced set
of complementary policies that are informed by international research and best practice. These combine internal self-evaluation by settings and schools; supports provided by advisory services and the Inspectorate; and external evaluation by the Inspectorate and bodies such as the Educational Research Centre. The focus of these policies and actions has been on growing professionalisation in teaching; on effective teacher education and professional development; fostering high quality school leadership; and creating a culture where a focus is maintained on high quality outcomes for learners.

Inclusion

Education is critical for inclusion and social mobility as research shows that educational interventions at an early stage have the greatest impact on opportunities and outcomes in later life. Compared to other OECD members, Ireland shows a relatively low level of difference between schools, showing that the school system is comparatively equitable; with evidence also showing that, while narrowing, a gap still exists between DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

Significant investment has been made in recent years in provision for children with special educational needs, and major reforms have been introduced, including the introduction of a new special education teacher allocation model. Prior to the crisis, the trialling of a new school inclusion model with a broader range of supports was underway and arising from Budget 2020, with a new model of SNA allocation planned for introduction in the system from September 2021 (deferred from 2020 as a result of the pandemic). Reengaging necessary support from the HSE as part of the provision of an in-school therapy service will be challenging, at least in the immediate term, due to reassignment of staff as part of the Covid-19 response. Policy advice will be provided by the National Council for Special Education regarding the educational provision that should be in place for students in special classes and schools and to make recommendations on the provision required to enable them to achieve better outcomes. There have been difficulties in getting schools to open special classes in some areas, and new legislation has been used which empowers the Minister to address shortages of special class and school places.
Industrial relations

The current public service collective industrial relations agreement, known as the Public Service Stability Agreement, is due to run to 31 December 2020.

Redress

In respect of redress for victims of sexual abuse in day schools, the Department, in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General, is currently reviewing the ex gratia scheme established on foot of the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in the Louise O'Keeffe having regard to the determination of the Independent Assessor Mr Justice Iarfhílaith O'Neill.

Major operations and shared services

In addition to operating the school employee payroll, one of the largest and most complex such systems in the country, the Department is driving implementation of a shared services strategy for the education and training sector, including payroll and financial shared services in the ETB and higher education sectors, apprenticeship payments.

North-South engagement, Brexit and international issues

The adoption of New Decade New Approach and the re-establishment of the North-South Ministerial Council allows renewed potential for all-island co-operation on education and training issues. There has been significant North-South engagement during the crisis.
2. Context

2.1. Overview of the System

The Department provides a policy, legislative and funding framework for education and skills development in early childhood settings, primary schools, post primary schools, higher education institutions, further education providers and adult education. There are over 1.4 million learners across the system.

Table 1:
Number of Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Institution (State Funded)</th>
<th>Number of Learners (2019)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Learning and Care (2019 data confirmed by DCYA)</td>
<td>108,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>567,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Primary School</td>
<td>371,455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,047,398</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mission of the Department is to facilitate individuals, through learning to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland’s social, cultural and economic development. The Department’s central vision is that, through adopting a “whole-of-system” approach, the Irish education and training system should lead in innovation and a broad range of endeavours and that we will harness education and training to break down barriers for groups at risk of exclusion and set the benchmark for social inclusion.

Through this approach our ambition is that we will deliver to the highest international standards and prepare learners of all ages to participate and succeed in a changing world. The Department’s approach is guided by objectives which strive to deliver a system which:

- **Acknowledges that a** quality learning experience that supports learners in reaching their potential is the key to giving learners the choices and opportunities to be the best they can be. The learning experience must equip learners so that they can respond to the changing opportunities they will face in the future.

---

1 185,971 young children avail of State funded early learning and care provision and/or school aged child care funded by the DCYA and delivered in preschools, early years settings, creches, etc. Of these 108,204 children avail of the free preschool scheme (ECCE programme) which is available to children in the 2½ years prior to school enrolment.
- Allows all learners have the opportunity to reach their potential and that those with additional needs should receive the right supports at the right time.
- Understands that the quality of teaching and leadership in education settings is a critical success factor for the best possible learner outcomes.
- Fosters the principle that there is huge scope for collaboration and knowledge sharing for mutual enrichment. That communities and industries benefit from the results of the education and training system and in turn, learners benefit from strong links with communities and industries, and the experiences and knowledge this can provide them with.
- Embraces the challenge that we have a responsibility to ensure that the right systems and supports are in place, right across early learning and care, primary, post-primary, further education and training and higher education sectors.

2.2. Principal Department Locations and Staff Numbers

The staffing of the Department of Education and Skills at end 2019 was approximately 1400 full time equivalent (FTE) staff comprising administrative grades, non-administrative grades including staff of the Inspectorate, psychologists in the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and technical staff in the Planning and Building Unit. These staff are based primarily in the Department’s main offices in Dublin 1, Athlone and Tullamore and in a number of regional locations throughout the country. The Department has also established the Education Shared Business Services (ESBS) based in Blanchardstown, Dublin 15, which currently has 67 FTE staff which is due to increase to approximately 300 FTE staff by end-2022.

The current senior management team of the Department of Education and Skills comprises of the Secretary General, Seán Ó Foghlú, and 10 Assistant Secretaries Generals (including the Chief Inspector).
2.3. The Role of the Education System across Government

Education is delivered in a spirit of partnership with other key stakeholders. This is underpinned by statute, including the Education Act 1998. Furthermore, education has an important role in the delivery of cross-Governmental objectives including:

- Supporting children and young people through the national policy framework ‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014 – 2020’;
- Healthy Ireland, including promotion of physical activity, healthy eating, the responsible use of alcohol, combatting abuse of tobacco and other substances, promotion of wellbeing, mental health, anti-bullying strategies and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy;
- Labour Market Activation and the Implementation of the National Skills Strategy 2025;
- Social Inclusion, including of Travellers, migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy; National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and Migrant Integration Strategy; and
- The National Strategy for Women and Girls; the National Disability Inclusion Strategy; the National Drugs Strategy (Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery); the Comprehensive Employment Strategy and the National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy;

The Department will be actively involved in a range of interdepartmental and cross-Government committees as well as broader fora and works with other Government Departments, public bodies, NGOs, civil society and external stakeholders in order to ensure that the Education sector plays a full and active role in the delivery of national policy in these and other areas.

Officials from the Department are centrally involved in developing good working relationships with stakeholders across a range of issues to ensure that policy objectives are achieved and cohere with policy objectives across the wider socio-economic context.

The 2020 gross financial allocation of over €8.2 billion for education represents approximately one-sixth of all Government spending. Our school system operates through 3,242 primary schools and 723 post primary schools employing almost 67,000 teachers at primary and post-primary levels. Our schools also have almost 17,000 SNAs working with learners. There are also ancillary staff who are employed and paid directly by schools in most instances.

The schools system as a whole is the employer of almost 30% of the public sector workforce.
2.4. Demographics

In 2009, the number of births in Ireland peaked at 75,500 births. Since then, births have been falling, with 61,000 babies born in 2018. It is projected that births will continue to fall for the next 10 years, before slowly rising again. However, migratory flows also generate demographic pressures.

Enrolments in mainstream primary school are thought to have peaked in 2018 with 559,548 pupils. Preliminary enrolment numbers for September 2019 were 559,378, a decrease of 170 pupils on September 2018 enrolments. Based on present assumptions about net migration, enrolments are projected to fall over the coming years due to declining birth rates.

Enrolments in post-primary schools are rising. Total enrolments in post-primary schools were 371,455 in September 2019, which was an increase of 8,566 pupils on September 2018 (362,889). Enrolments are projected to continue rising for the next five years out to 2024, as the peak cohort that has just left primary moves through post-primary, with post-primary enrolments expected to fall steadily thereafter.

Full-time enrolments in higher education institutions have grown by almost a third over the past 10 years. Higher education enrolments rose from 138,319 in 2007 to 183,642 in 2017. The most recent data on projected enrolments indicate that total enrolments will rise annually for the next ten years, peaking in 2030, and then falling steadily.

2.4.1. Impact of Demographic Challenges on Expenditure

In the context of demographics, the two main drivers of current school costs are teacher and student numbers as they directly impact teacher payroll and school capitation grants. On the basis of a no policy change scenario in relation to both of these cost drivers it is estimated that increased expenditure will be incurred for post primary schools due to increased enrolments but that this will at least be partly offset by a projected decrease in pupil enrolments in primary schools in the coming years. The Department is currently working with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to develop a forecasting model to estimate the expected additional costs associated with demographics changes expected in school populations.

Any demographic increases also create pressure on school accommodation and consequent pressure for capital investment. While much will depend on the location and distribution of the additional numbers it is expected that increases are likely to occur in cities and commuter belts while more rural areas may experience continuing population decline.
2.5. Budget

2.5.1. Department’s Budget & Public Sector Numbers: 2020

The 2020 gross expenditure allocation for school issues is over €8.2 billion\(^2\) in the Revised Estimates Volume. The Department’s current budget for 2020 is €7.5 billion, which represents around 12% of original Government current expenditure allocations.

The Department’s current budget for schools 2020 is €7.5 billion, which represents around 12% of original Government current expenditure allocations.

Chart 1: Breakdown of the Department’s voted current expenditure (2020)

![Chart 1: Breakdown of the Department’s voted current expenditure (2020)](image)

Just over 80% of the Department’s current Voted budget is allocated to pay and pensions. There are forecasted to be on the order of 88,700 public sector employees funded through the Department’s Voted pay allocation and some 41,800 public service pensioners funded through the Department’s pension allocation in 2020.

\(^2\) It is important to note that the €8.2 billion and other figures in this section 2.5 are based on full year (2020) figures. Expenditure to date and the projected monthly profile spend over the remainder of the year will have to be taken into account in deciding on the allocation for the remainder of 2020 as part of the reconfiguration of Department structures.
Chart 2: Public sector employees funded from the Education and Skills Vote (2020)(to be updated)

Higher Education
(c. 19,700) 18%

Further Ed & Training
(c. 4,100) 4%

Schools (other)
(c. 2,700) 2%

SNAs (c.17,000) 15%

Civil Service/aegis bodies
(c. 2,500) 2%

School Teachers
(c. 67,000) 59%

The Department’s capital allocation in 2020 is €748 million. This represents around 9% of original gross voted capital expenditure allocated in 2020. The €748 million is a reduction of €16 million on the 2019 capital allocation of €764 million. This reduction formed part of an understanding reached with the Department of Public Expenditure to reallocate resources from capital to current in order to protect front line services.

2.5.2. Budget 2020

The Department’s 2020 gross allocation of €8.2 billion. The main areas funded from the 2020 increase in gross expenditure allocation along with some savings and reallocations from within existing resources were as follows:

- Carryover and existing level of service commitments (€25 million)
- Demographics in schools to provide for teachers and capitation (€35 million)
- Additional €19 million for over 400 extra special education needs teachers.
- Additional €16 million for over 1,000 extra special needs assistants.
- Additional €10 million provided for the State Examinations Commission, which will provide funding for the measures introduced to speed up the processing of Leaving Certificate appeals and for Leaving Certificate candidates who suffer a bereavement around the time of the examinations.
- Schools package, primarily for increased capitation rates and teachers in small schools, supporting school leadership and a pilot school book scheme (€4m).
- Additional school transport provision (€26m).
- Additional shared services and ICT provision to deliver on civil services reforms commitments (€7m)
• Additional provision for Redress Board for final awards and running costs expected to fall due in 2020 (€2 million).
• Additional superannuation provision (€26 million).
• Allocation for the costs of the Public Services Stability Agreement and related pay deals in the education sector (€113 million).

2.5.3. Budgetary Pressures for 2020

Covid-19 Financial Impacts
The Covid-19 crisis has had a significant impact across the school education sector. Significant cost issues are likely to arise in relation to the re-opening of schools in August/September 2020 and possible future public health and social distancing requirements.

The Department is continuing to monitor the financial impacts of Covid-19 on its Vote and is liaising with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in this regard.

The 2020 Estimates for the Vote, as set out in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) are due to be taken by the Dáil before the summer recess and it is likely therefore that the Minister will be required to appear before the Education Select Committee in July to discuss the Department's 2020 Estimates. It is likely that the full financial impacts of Covid-19 will not be identified and costed until later in the year and the related funding requirements for this year will need to be addressed at a later stage as part of the Supplementary Estimates process (usually in October/November).

Other Vote Pressures
In the last three years a number of Spending Reviews have been carried out by, and in cooperation with, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. These Reviews have focused on key expenditure areas and areas where substantial expenditure increases have arisen. This includes Reviews of the areas listed below that continue to exert expenditure pressures on existing allocations and will be subject to further examination and reviews during 2020.

• Pay Expenditure Drivers at Primary and Second Level,
• School Transport Expenditure, and,
• Special Education Needs Provision and Outcomes.

Pension costs is another area that has resulted in particular expenditure pressures over the last number of years. Notwithstanding additional resource being provided in recent years, it is expected that expenditure pressures in these areas will continue to increase for the foreseeable future.
Next Steps
In addition to the approval of the 2020 REV by the Dáil planned for July, there is a need for continuous engagement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on expenditure management throughout the remainder of 2020, and for ongoing consideration of available options to manage any significant expenditure divergences from profile to a degree which increases the risk of an unsanctioned expenditure excess at Vote level.

The monitoring of the Department’s overall budgets throughout 2020 will determine whether any additional actions are necessary to ensure prudent budget management.

2.6. Legislative Programme
A programme of significant legislative reform in recent years has included the enactment of:

- Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018 (delivering major reforms to school admissions processes to reflect diversity, parental choice and SEN provision)
- Education and Training Boards Act, 2013 (delivering the framework to introduce a coherent and streamlined provision at regional level replacing the previous VECs)

2.6.1. Legislation before the Oireachtas on dissolution
There were two Government education Bills before the Oireachtas when the last Dáil was dissolved. The Programme for Government commits to enacting the Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill. The new Government may wish to also reinstate the second Bill to the Oireachtas Order Paper

Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill 2019
The Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2019 was published in September 2019, and had passed all Seanad stages before the Dáil was dissolved. The Bill included provisions that would:

- Require schools to have a Student and Parent Charter;
- Require the Minister to issue guidelines in accordance with which every school’s Student and Parent Charter shall be prepared, published and implemented;
- Provide a power for the Minister to give a direction to a board where the Minister is of the opinion that a board has failed, or is failing, in whole or in part, to comply with its obligation to prepare, publish or implement a charter;
- Amend Section 9 of the Education Act 1998 to include among the functions of a school:
  - a requirement that a school must promote the involvement of students and their parents in the education provided to students and
  - a requirement to ensure the implementation of its charter;
• Amend Section 27 of the Education Act 1998 to change the requirement on a student council from one of promoting the interest of the school to a requirement to promote the interests of the students of the school having regard to the characteristic spirit and polices of the school and the charter.

• Replace the existing section 28 of the Education Act with provisions that provide for the procedures for dealing with grievances of students or their parents relating to the school to be set out in the Minister’s charter guidelines.

Retention of Records Bill 2019
The Retention of Records Bill was published in February 2019 and was initiated in the Dáil. It completed second stage in April 2019. Committee Stage before the Select Committee on Education and Skills was scheduled on a number of occasions in late 2019 but was postponed each time. A number of stakeholders (former residents of institutions, historians and other interested persons) appeared before the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on 26 November 2019 and all spoke against the Bill, mainly in opposition to the proposed sealing of records for 75 years.

The legislation provides for the retention and archiving of records that would, apart from certain records of the Commission to Inquire Into Child Abuse, otherwise fall to be disposed of by way of destruction. The legislation is also necessary to address the issue of the records of the three redress bodies (Commission, Redress Board and Redress Review Committee) as a prelude to the dissolution of the bodies (each of which have almost reached the point where they have completed the performance of their functions).

2.7. Sectoral Reform / Work Programme Education

Overview of approach to system-wide reform
An extensive programme of reform is being implemented across the education and training sector. The previous Department of Education and Skills took a system-wide approach to reform through a series of co-ordinated, targeted and integrated strategies across the continuum of education and training.

The reform programme is designed to provide all learners with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in society and the economy. The Reform Programme aims to facilitate clear and simple pathways for learners within and across the system that support lifelong learning, to improve the quality of the education experience and accountability for educational outcomes, to support diversity and inclusion, and to develop an infrastructure that supports a modern, flexible education and training system.

To coordinate and manage the implementation of the education and training reform programme, the Public Service Reform (PSR) Programme Office was established in the
Department. The role and work of the PSR Programme Office has expanded over time and is now responsible for a broad spectrum of activity across both department and sector.

**Draft Work Programme**

Departmental and sectoral reforms were captured in the previous Department's high-level Work Programme.

This was based on the Department's five high-level goals and provides a strategic overview of the key reform initiatives across the Department, its agencies and the sector as a whole. The Draft Work Programme 2020 sets out time-bound priority activities for that Department and its agencies and aegis bodies for the year.

It outlined how that Department would support the delivery of education and training services, against the background of its main strategies and initiatives.

The Plan was will be used by internal business units for workforce and activity planning purposes, and to ensure that targets are being achieved/ on course to being achieved. It provides a link between the range of reforms already underway and those which are planned in order to further enhance service delivery.

**Our Public Service 2020**

The Department contributes to the broader public service reform agenda, led by DPER. The most recent public service reform plan, "Our Public Service 2020", contains 18 high-level actions under three broad pillars:

- Delivering for our public
- Innovating for our future
- Developing our people and organisations

The Department (PSR Programme Office) leads on Action 14 of OPS 2020 - Continuous and Responsive Professional Development (CRPD) and is responsible for working with a cross-sectoral team to deliver a number of initiatives to support the embedding of CRPD across the public service. In addition, the Department (PSR Programme Office) facilitates overall collaboration between DPER and the wider sector on the wider OPS2020 initiatives and supports their implementation.
3. Strategic, Current & Topical Issues

There are a number of strategically important, current or topical issues facing the Department of Education and Skills which are summarised below and which are highlighted for the Minister’s information. A more complete briefing on each item can be provided where necessary.

3.1. Covid-19

The Taoiseach’s announcement on March 12th of the closure of all schools, colleges, universities and other training and learning facilities was the commencement of a series of challenges across the education and training sector as a result of Covid-19. The challenges continue to be managed in a collaborative manner by the Department of Education and Skills, the education partners and a host of stakeholders. The interests of students and their families as well as the safety of the staff in the sector have been the paramount considerations throughout.

The scale of the challenges can be seen in the fact that there are approximately 4,000 schools with almost a million learners affected as well as upwards of 90,000 staff.

Cross-Government Approach

The Department participates in the central co-ordination structures in relation to Covid-19 to ensure a joined-up approach across Government. This includes the Senior Officials Group (SOG) on Covid-19, which was established in February as the threat of the pandemic emerged. This SOG includes representatives of all Government Departments, the HSE, the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána and allows for a central coordination of the cross-Government response to the pandemic. The SOG had originally fed into a new Cabinet Committee on Covid-19. However, as the scale of the emergency grew, the reports and papers went directly to the regular Government meetings on the issue.

A number of subgroups to the SOG have also been established. The Department is represented on the following subgroups:

- Economic Recovery;
- Needs of Vulnerable Groups;
- Community and Voluntary Pillar; and
- Childcare for essential healthcare workers.

Participation in the work of these groups ensures that the specific concerns of the education and skills sector are reflected in the various responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, including the Government Road Map on reopening society and business.
The education and training system’s response is aligned to our core national priority of saving lives, while being focused on ensuring continuity of education for learners, including a particular focus on more vulnerable students.

**Department Approach**

The previous Minister for Education and Skills was in the Dáil on six occasions between April 23rd and June 24th and had also facilitated briefings with Opposition spokespersons in that period. In the period from May 13th when Parliamentary Questions (PQs) resumed until June 23rd (the last response date), there have been approximately 1,300 PQs asked of the Minister (this is approximately 250% of the expected volumes in a 7 week period). Officials of the Department appeared before the Oireachtas Special committee on Covid-19 last Thursday (June 25th) and a further official level appearance in likely is the week of June 29th or July 6th. This is an increased level of Oireachtas engagement when compared to pre-Covid-19 commitments.

The Department put in place a range of steering and engagement structures to support the education and training system in navigating the new challenges:

- the Department’s Management Board met daily in the period from mid-March until late May and continues to meet at least three times weekly to ensure there is a timely and senior level consideration and co-ordination of developments across and within the sector.

- In the schools sector, stakeholder engagement groups have been set up to engage with school management bodies, school administration and continuity of teaching and learning.

- In the tertiary sector (higher and further education), a steering group on tertiary education was established involving the relevant stakeholders in the tertiary education sector, to ensure a coherent approach to the challenges presented for Ireland and for the sector by the Covid19 pandemic. A number of working groups were established to focus on the different issues emerging from the steering group.

The Department participates daily in the Government’s Crisis Communications Group. This ensures consistency of approach and clear messaging across sectors. Significant communications work has happened with sectoral stakeholders and is ongoing with all audiences, both to ensure wide dissemination of important public health messaging, and also to address sectoral-specific issues. In addition, work to enhance existing communications materials to ensure their accessibility to a wide range of audience, e.g. advice from NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service) was made available as a podcast and animation work was undertaken to create further user-friendly material for children.
The immediate priorities of the Department in regard to responding to Covid-19 challenges are:

1) Plan for the re-opening of the sector (section 3.2);
2) Complete the Leaving Certificate Calculated Grades process (section 3.3);
3) Implement a Summer Programme for SEN learners and those at risk of disadvantage (section 3.4);

Costs arising due to the response to Covid-19 will be a feature of the Estimates 2021 process which will shortly commence.

3.2. Reopening Schools

Preparation for the re-opening of schools in the new school year (2020/2021) is underway in the Department. The ambition is to develop a sustainable plan to reopen schools, the overriding objective of which is to protect the health of staff and students while promoting the educational and development needs of the children. The Department considers that if possible to do in a safe way, fully reopening schools for children is the clear objective for late August into September. The Department is continuing to engage with the health authorities on the advice required to support the re-opening of schools and this advice will continue to be updated as we move through the summer.

The re-opening of schools is also a return to work for upwards of 90,000 staff and the Department is working closely with the school management bodies and unions on the supports necessary for a safe re-opening of the workplace, in line with the requirements of the Return to Work Safely protocol. This will involve providing guidance to schools on issues which need to be managed in a school context including how to manage suspected cases, cleaning requirements as well as the provision of training and inductions for staff, pupils, parents and visitors. It is intended to issue guidance in the week beginning June 29th which builds on the supporting documentation issued for the summer programme for children with special educational needs and those experiencing educational disadvantage. This guidance will be updated by the Department during the summer in line with the health advice. The Department will continue to engage closely with education partners and other key stakeholders on the plan for re-opening of schools for the 2020/21 school year with the aim of reducing the burden on schools at a local level by providing central guidance and supports to the greatest extent possible.

Returning to school in line with the health advice will give rise to extra costs for the system including for additional cleaning, provision of supplies to support good health hygiene such as sanitizer, additional staffing to provide cover for suspected cases or, in the event of a case arising in a school, the ability to deliver blended learning. School transport has also been identified as a significant cost. While many of the costs will be static such as cleaning and
sanitising, others will be dependent on the health advice and its impact on the particular measures necessary in schools.

It is recognised that schools continue to be best placed to make decisions about how to support and educate all their learners during this period. Consideration of the types of experiences that schools will be able to offer in the new school year and how remote/online learning can support/compliment the teaching and learning that takes part in the classroom will be required. In addition, where students cannot attend school, continued support either through online methods or through the provision of self-directed learning materials will be required.

Initial return to school
Due to the prolonged period of time out of school, the initial priority will see schools focusing on the wellbeing and socialisation of the children in addition to health and safety issues. Analysis of the gaps in learning for all their learners and how these gaps will be addressed will also be required in the initial stages. In most cases it is expected that teaching and learning for the initial weeks of the new school year will be in 'catch up' mode.

The Department will be working to develop guidance to schools to assist them in their planning so as to ensure that curricular priorities are delivered and that teaching and learning is optimal in these circumstances. The following issues are being considered:

- How the well-being of students may be supported in the initial return to schooling
- How the curriculum can be prioritised for delivery by schools during the coming school year. At primary level, this might involve a focus on literacy and numeracy and elements of other curricular areas.
- How the curriculum can be delivered in both primary and post-primary schools taking account of the blended approach to learning that may be required in the new school year. Considerations include:
  - what core areas of the curriculum or subjects (or parts of subjects) would best be covered in class and what can be done at home? For example at primary level children may be able to further develop creative and imaginative skills at home whereas at post-primary level practical work such as graphics may need to be done in school.
  - The potential staggering of the re-opening of schools for class groups with priority given, for example, to infant classes, sixth classes and SEN pupils in primary schools and to first years, third years and sixth years in post-primary schools
- How in particular, given the nature of the programmes, the curriculum can be delivered for Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme at post-primary level.
- Consideration of the assessment arrangements for post-primary students taking the certificate examinations in the 2020/21 school year and the extent to which it may be
necessary for these arrangements to take account of the disrupted learning experienced by students during the 2019/20 school year.

3.3. Leaving Certificate 2020 – Calculated Grades

The decision to postpone the Leaving Certificate 2020 examinations was taken following an assessment of public health advice, advice from NEPS and other information including the State Examinations Commission’s (SEC) considerations of the implications for holding the examinations.

In order to comply with public health recommendations the format of the examinations had they proceeded would have been considerably different to previous years. In addition, some students had been disadvantaged by the lack of in-school time and it was considered preferable to have two weeks of return to school in July for Leaving Certificate students to assist in the preparation of exams. However, given the phasing outlined in the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business at the time that the decisions regarding the Leaving Certificate needed to be made, the re-opening of schools for this purpose was not possible.

It was then decided that all students would be offered the option of receiving Calculated Grades for the subjects they are studying and the alternative of sitting the 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations at a date in the future when it is considered safe to hold the examinations. Given that the SEC’s legal powers do not extend to operating the calculated grades system, an executive office within the Department has been established for this purpose which is staffed by temporarily seconded SEC staff.

The calculated grades process combines a student’s expected performance in a subject and level, with information about how students in the school have fared in this subject/level in recent years in line with national performance standards over time. The performance of this year’s group of students against their overall performance at Junior Cycle will also be reviewed. Schools were asked to provide data in respect of each student to form the basis of the Calculated Grades. After the percentage marks and rankings based on the teacher and school’s judgements are received from all schools, the Department will analyse them and carry out a process of national standardisation;

Through this process, the school-sourced data will be combined with historical examination data available to the Department in order to generate the calculated grade for the students in the subject. This national standardisation process will bring the two data sets into alignment with each other and will be used to ensure the calculated grades reflect standards that are properly aligned across schools and with a common national standard.

Each school’s expected distributions will be arrived at from the statistical analysis of all the historic Department datasets. These data sets allow the production of good calculations of the distributions of marks to be expected for each school and nationally. The information about
the students is combined with the information about the school’s previous results and previous groups to allow adjustments to be made to the marks for each subject from each school to ensure that these marks reflect the application of similar standards. This means that all candidates across the country are treated fairly. The statistical process being applied will not impose any predetermined score on any individual in a class or school.

For subjects with a practical component, the overall estimate will include the mark that the teacher thinks would have been achieved if it had been marked in the usual way. There is one exception to this: in the case of Home Economics – Scientific and Social, the journal component has already been marked by the SEC, and this mark will not be adjusted.

The calculated grades model was developed with the advice and expertise of a Technical Working Group comprised of the Department’s staff, including the professional expertise of the Inspectorate, the State Examinations Commission, the Education Research Centre as well as an international psychometric and statistical expert.

An independent Steering Committee chaired by Dr Áine Lawlor, former Director of the Teaching Council, is overseeing the quality and integrity of the outcomes of the calculated grades system. The other members of the Committee are Dr Peter Archer, the former CEO of the Education Research Centre; Ms Majella O’Shea, former Deputy CEO of the NCCA; Mr Joe Hamill, former Secretary General of the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht and Chair of the New Schools Establishments Group; Mr Justin Edwards, CEO of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment, Northern Ireland and Prof. Michael O’Leary, Professor of Assessment at DCU.

In the case of students taking a subject outside school, the detailed guidance for schools published on May 21st provides details of how schools should proceed if school management authorities are confident that there is sufficient evidence of the student’s achievement to make an objective judgement. For students in receipt of home tuition with an association to the school, the guidance provides information for school authorities to engage with the home tutor in arriving at a decision. This includes situations where students are studying subjects outside of school, including the non-curricular languages.

In general, provided an estimated mark and ranking can be generated by the school in a way that is fair to all students, the Department will seek to provide a calculated grade. Students will be able to use this calculated grade in the same way as a Leaving Certificate grade to satisfy minimum entry requirements.

The Calculated Grades Executive Office has been in direct contact with out-of-school learners, those students who are studying a subject or subjects for Leaving Certificate and who are not attending a second-level school or other centre recognised for the purposes of holding Leaving Certificate examinations are not. The application process that out-of-school learners need to
follow to be considered for calculated grades was notified to them directly and published on June 25th.

Every effort will be made to provide a calculated grade for as many students as possible, whether they are out-of-school learners or taking subjects outside of school, provided there is credible and satisfactory evidence, from an appropriate source, on which an estimated percentage mark can be based. Where this is not possible, students will have the opportunity to sit the 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations at a later date when safe to do so.

The provisional results of the calculated grades process are intended to be issued as close to the usual date of issue as possible. The timing of when results will be issued will be determined in mid July when the processes outlined above have advanced.

The holding of the postponed Leaving Certificate examinations in due course, when it is considered safe to do so, is a matter for the SEC as the statutory body concerned. The timeline for these examinations will be determined when the appeals phase following the release of the results of the calculated grades process has been concluded as this will allow the number of candidates for those examinations to be determined with certainty.

3.3.1. Current Position and Next Steps:

Of the 61,029 students who had previously registered with the SEC by February to sit the 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations by June 18th; the number who had yet to register on the calculated grades executive office student portal was 683. This is less than the average number – approximately 800 annually – who in recent years initially register to take the examinations but who do not subsequently do so. Those who have registered on the portal have not yet been asked to opt to receive calculated grades – the portal will re-open to students for that purpose in the coming weeks.

Schools were asked to submit the estimated percentage marks and class rank orders for their students, by Monday June 22rd. Following the completion of the in-school process, the CGEO is receiving reports from schools on the students taking subjects outside of school for whom schools were unable to provide an estimated percentage mark. On receipt of these reports, the CGEO will contact the school to confirm the process undertaken to arrive at a decision that an estimated mark could not be provided.

The completion of the data collection from schools will allow the executive office move to the next steps in the process which includes checking and validating the school data and commencing the national standardisation process.

Following the publication of the out-of-school learners process, applications from out of school learners will be processed over the coming weeks.
In the interests of all students and to give effect to a policy preference to issue a single or composite Leaving Certificate in due course (the final Certificate is usually issued in the Spring following the examinations year), legal advice has been sought on a number of queries concerning how this preference can be best achieved.

Planning will also be advanced in regard to when results of the calculated grades process can issue with the date to be determined in mid-July (taking account of of tertiary admissions processes in Ireland and elsewhere (particularly the UK) where Irish students have made applications).

In due course, following completion of the appeals process, the CGEO will cease to exist with its staff returning to the SEC.

3.4. Summer Provision (SEN\DEIS)

A summer education programme for children with complex special educational needs and children at greatest risk of educational disadvantage will run this summer. In previous years summer programmes ran for children with complex special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage, including programmes such as July Provision, DEIS Summer Literary and Numeracy camps and School Completion Programmes.

3.4.1. Summer programme for children with special educational needs

The Department has published details of a summer programme for children with special educational needs enrolled in special schools, special classes and mainstream classes. The programme incorporates some aspects of the July Provision of previous years.

Summer Provision 2020 – Reconnecting with Education, is a significantly expanded programme for children with complex special educational needs which aims to re-establish the child’s relationships and connection with school and their peers as a basis for learning and participation and to help the child to re-engage in learning and social activities and help them adapt to new routines and changes. The programme aims to ensure, in so far as possible, that the child can reintegrate/transition into their planned education setting for the next school year with their peers. In-school or home-based supports by teachers and SNAs will help to prevent regression among children with special needs.

The eligibility criteria have been widened to include the following categories of children:

1. Pupils with a diagnosis of Autism
2. Pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Any child in a special school or a special class in a primary school
4. Children transitioning into a special class from early year’s settings to primary school
5. Pupils in primary school mainstream classes who present with the following disabilities:

- Children with Down syndrome
- Children who are Deaf or most severe hard of hearing
- Children who are blind or have a most severe visual impairment
- Children who have a moderate general learning disability
- Children with severe emotional behavioural difficulties

3.4.2. HSE programme

This programme will take place in schools, subject to availability. The Department will fund the employment of SNAs to work on the programme. The programme will involve a number of three hour sessions per week for children and young people with complex needs.

Children’s disability service managers will engage with families to identify those in most need of these supports and agree the number of sessions per week that can be provided. Staff in children’s disability services will provide direction and support for SNAs to deliver activity based “summer camps”. The clinicians will ensure that activities are tailored to the needs of the children. The programme aims to -

- Provide short respite breaks for families
- Facilitate children with complex needs to begin the transition from their homes to re-engaging with their communities and schools
- Provide safe opportunities for children with complex needs to engage with their peers

The programme provides a flexible continuum of both education and care supports for some of the vulnerable children with complex needs. These children together with their families have experienced considerably disruption in their lives and endured much stress with the onset of the Covid health crisis including the closure of school buildings and the withdrawal of health support services. This programme will serve as stepping stone for the reopening of schools and the resumption of normal living.

3.4.3. Summer Programme – Students at risk of educational disadvantage

In the 2019/20 school year there are 890 schools in the DEIS Programme serving over 180,000 pupils. This represents approximately 20% of the overall school population (total of 3,962 schools and 930,671 pupils).

The impact of school closures or continued diminished access to education are very significant for a number of socio-economically disadvantaged students.

There are a number of summer programmes which currently run in schools during the summer period:
- School Completion Programme
- Summer Literacy and Numeracy Programme for DEIS Band 1 primary schools
- Summer programme in High Support units
- Summer camps run directly or outsourced by Boards of Management

**School Completion Programme (SCP)**
The School Completion Programme is a targeted programme funded by DCYA and operationalised by Tusla Education Support Services (TESS). On average each SCP runs 4 weeks of summer activity with approximately 20 students across participating each week 122 projects.

**DEIS Primary Schools**
The aim of the Summer Literacy and Numeracy Programme for DEIS Band 1 primary schools is to provide rich educational experiences for pupils attending these schools, which foster a sense of belonging and creativity and confidence in their learning. The programme is funded to support pupils at risk of educational and social disadvantage. It seeks to assist pupils who are experiencing social or academic difficulties in language and numeracy and who would benefit from a week-long Summer Camp with a very small teacher-pupil ratio.

The camps are already approved for this summer in just over 70 schools at an overall cost of €300,000 and each school caters for 30 students on average. Given the likely greater impact of school closures on students at risk of educational disadvantage, it is highly desirable for these camps to run if possible. As well as focusing on literacy and numeracy, a module on Wellbeing is being developed to be included in the course content of summer camps for 2020.

The design and delivery of all Summer Camps, is guided by the four domains of the programme and underpinned by four overarching principles:

- Learner Outcomes
- Playful learning experiences
- Varied learning environments
- Camp management

A school may choose to deliver the programme thorough English or Irish.

### 3.5. Climate Action

The topic of Climate Action is a shared responsibility across the Department and Education Sector including curriculum, capital expenditure (in terms of new buildings and retrofitting the existing stock), skills development in the wider economy and as well as in corporate areas (involving the management of energy usage, waste management and procurement).
There are also a range of Actions in the National Action Plan where the Department or the education sector are the lead body responsible for their implementation or a key partner in their delivery. These actions include:

- **Action 67:** Set a trajectory for commencing and implementing the Department of Education and Skills deep energy retrofit programme
- **Action 125:** A greater focus on research into land diversification in agricultural colleges, the EPA and Teagasc, to help educate farmers on the benefits of diversification
- **Action 151:** Implement an enhanced approach to energy performance and renewable energy capability in school buildings
- **Action 170:** Support, through the education system, the required initiatives in the Just Transition through existing and new strategies being developed, and through ongoing collaboration with relevant Government Departments and Agencies
- **Action 171:** Enhance the career advice service provided through the Public Employment Service to include offering support for those impacted by technological and other changes
- **Action 172:** Assist local enterprises, through the Regional Skills Forum, to identify their skills' needs through a variety of audit tools to ensure that the Region has effective skills capacity to support the Just Transition
- **Action 180:** Ensure that the school curriculum is reviewed against climate action on an ongoing basis

### 3.5.1. Curriculum: National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development

The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2014 – 2020 was published in July 2014 with the aim of ensuring that “education contributes to sustainable development by equipping learners with the relevant knowledge (the ‘what’), the key dispositions and skills (the ‘how’) and the values (the ‘why’) that will motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become informed active citizens who take action for a more sustainable future”.

A mid-term review of the ESD Strategy was conducted in 2018 and a report was published in December 2018. This set out the key achievements to date under the strategy and actions still to be progressed to 2020.

The current ESD Strategy runs to end this year. Consideration is being given to the development of a new Strategy for the period 2021 – 2030 which will be aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan post 2020.

The Department will commence a public consultation on a 2nd National Strategy on ESD in Q2 2020.
3.5.2. “Green Schools” (Green Flags)

Green Schools is an international environmental education programme with 15 million students in 67 countries across the world. In Ireland, Green Schools is operated and coordinated by An Taisce and is delivered in 93% of Irish schools (primary and post-primary) with 3,381 schools currently holding a Green Flag. The programme is long-term and whole school based and encourages young people to engage in their environment by allowing them the opportunity to actively protect it. It starts in the classroom, it expands to the school and eventually fosters change in the community at large. The programme also extends to 3rd level under the Green Campus programme which currently has 28 institutions registered and 9 Flags awarded. Green Schools also run a Climate Ambassador Programme and a Smarter Travel Programme.

Green Schools has been working with students and teachers all over Ireland for over 22 years, helping teachers to take practical steps by enrolling in their various online and face-to-face teacher training courses and information seminars. They provide resources on a range of themes including Litter and Waste, Global Citizenship, Climate Action and Energy. The run a range of initiatives including national Walk to School Week, National Bike Week and National Scoot to School Week and the #andshecycles campaign.

The Green Schools programme supports the Departments National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development 2014 – 2020 by “equipping learners with the relevant knowledge (the ‘what’), the key dispositions and skills (the ‘how’) and the values (the ‘why’) that will motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become informed active citizens who take action for a more sustainable future”. It also supports the implementation of the National Implementation Plan for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and specifically SDG 4.7 – Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Green Schools are represented on the Department’s ESD Advisory Group.

The Department of Education and Skills does not allocate any funding to Green Schools or to any other ESD related programme providers. A small amount of funding was given to Green Schools in 2019 (€5,000) when it became available towards the end of the year.

3.5.3. Capital Programme Climate Action dimensions

An important aspect of the Department’s rollout of Project Ireland 2040 is the focus on the Climate Action agenda and providing energy efficient buildings. The Department had a significant engagement with the Dept. of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) on the development of the Climate Action Plan.

Significant work has been completed since 1997 by the Department via its energy research programme (currently 48 research strands) on reducing energy in schools and the application
of renewables. The approach respects the principle of reduce before you generate, as the most cost effective energy, is energy not used.

All new technologies and approaches are tested to ensure compatibility with school design and operational requirements. Successful and repeatable results are then incorporated into all school designs and refurbishments.

Renewable sustainable solutions in schools must match the sustainable resource with the end users' needs, provide benefit and not become a management, operational or financial burden on the school.

To promote and reduce energy consumption and operating costs, all new schools have:

- An A rated Building Energy Rating and 20% more energy savings than building regulations.
- A minimum of 10% of total school energy is renewable energy provided by the school's photovoltaic solar panels.
- Individual digital heating controls in all teaching spaces.
- 100% LED lighting and absence detection lighting controls.
- Rainwater Recovery system supplying all toilets / energy efficient water systems.
- Co2 monitors in each classroom for air quality information.
- Super air tightness to minimise heat loss.
- Automatic shudown of non-essential electrical systems when school is closed and alarmed.
- Great daylight, maximising natural daylight into teaching spaces, reducing lighting needs.
- Infrastructure provision for electric vehicle charging.
- Future proofing to enable Energy Supply Companies (ESCO's) to offer heat contracts to schools using biomass boilers which the ESCO operates / maintains and sells heat to the school.

Future proofing to take advantage of developing technologies as they become viable, thus enabling a just transition for school management, teachers, pupils and parents.

The Department specifies high efficiency gas boilers for new schools and replacement of existing boilers.

- The lifespan of these boilers is about 15 years. This provides opportunities at that stage to take advantage of new technologies that might be more appropriate for the needs of the school sector.
- It also enables schools to avail of improvements in the supply of renewable gas as planned by the various gas suppliers in Ireland. To indicate the development potential in this area, Denmark estimate that 100 % of their expected gas consumption will be green gas by 2035.
- The Department continues to review its design policies through research and is presently in the middle of a comprehensive assessment for one of the schools in the 2019 energy retrofit pilot with the undertaking an oil heating to hybrid gas boiler / air source heat pump conversion as part of the pilot.

**Schools requirement to report energy consumption annually**
All public buildings are being measured against a 33% reduction in demand. The Public Sector including schools is at 27% of the 33% 2020 overall Public Sector Target.

- Schools are treated as individual public bodies for monitoring and reporting.
- SEAI 2019 Report on the 2018 Public Sector Energy Efficiency Performance, notes the following:
  - 2678 schools (73%) reported their energy consumption in 2018.
  - Increase of 11% from 2017 noted in report as a significant improvement.
  - The 2678 schools are noted as achieving a 7% reduction against the 33% target.
  - A further number of schools submitted incomplete reports and are not included in figures.
  - Total energy spend of 2678 schools = €40M, = 5% of total public sector energy consumption.
- 53% of reported schools indicated an improvement in energy performance

**National Retrofit Programme for Schools**
The National Development Plan 2018-2027 includes: "the commencement and progression of a deep energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008, with a view to optimum energy use & conservation in school buildings.

- Schools built prior to 2008 will be eligible under a national retrofit programme commencing from 2023 under the NDP to have a retrofit which will increase comfort levels, reduce energy, CO2 emissions and school running costs and assist in meeting the national 2030 energy targets.
- These schools were built at a times when energy conservation / fuel costs were not viewed as critical and construction techniques, materials and building science practices were not as advanced as today.
- Schools built after 2008 would have performed better than the requirements of the 2008 Building Regulations and achieved an A3 Building Energy Rating (BER) when designed and built in accordance with the DES's 2008 technical guidance documents.
- Approximately 93% Primary and 91% Post Primary Schools are of pre 2008 construction.

Work and planning for this national retrofit programme commenced in 2017 with the Energy Pilot Retrofit Programme (2017 – 2022) established between the DES and the DCCAEO with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). Of note is:
• It is focusing for 4/5 years on retrofit measures to improve school energy efficiency and comfort levels.
• The energy efficiency upgrade measures undertaken are considered medium to deep, and include fabric, electrical and mechanical upgrades.
• Schools represent a variety of challenges with different building ages, archetypes, and requirements.
• First 3 phases delivered retrofit measures to thirty five schools, providing knowledge and learning to help develop the next phases of the schools energy pilot retrofit programme. The pilot continues the evaluation work on the potential application on a national scale of modern heat pumps in schools.
• The pilot continues up to 2022 covering different building ages, archetypes, retrofit requirements, market capacity and procurement routes, to help create an accurate scalable model for national roll out.

The second strand of the programme will take place over 2020 & 2021 to establish a National Energy Profile of School Accommodation, with the third strand of the programme will encompass the establishment of the Energy Retrofit delivery team to scale up the pilot to the delivery of the national programme. This third strand will ramp up in 2022 for commencement of delivery in 2023.

3.5.4. Energy Management in the Department

The Department is obliged to reduce energy consumption by 33% by 2020 under Energy Efficiency Directive 2012 (2012/27/EU) and Statutory instrument 426 of 2014.

The Department has an energy management structure in place and has taken a number of initiatives to reduce energy consumption through awareness campaigns, the identification of poor energy use and the use of efficient energy technology as well as investment in structural changes. The 2019 figures show a cumulative reduction on target of 28% over our 2009 baseline.

Lighting improvements, insulation projects, technology upgrades and behavioural changes are expected to contribute to reaching the target. Energy consumption will be closely monitored to focus on achieving the 2020 target of 33%. That target will be increased to 50% as a 2030 target.

3.5.5. Resource Efficiency in the Department

A Government Decision of 3rd January, 2019 on actions to be taken by departments and agencies on single use plastics, prevention of waste and green public procurement required all government departments to publish their resource efficiency action plans (REAPs). Our
REAP is available on the department’s website and focuses on waste, water and other resources such as paper.

The Department has implemented actions on single use plastics. The establishment of green teams on our main campuses in Dublin, Athlone and Tullamore is underway. There has been a positive reaction to the climate change and sustainability agenda, with a number of ideas submitted to the department’s ideas bank. The environment and sustainability is one of the key themes addressed by the Innovation initiative within the department.

The green teams will prioritise waste as a theme and focus on behavioural change.

3.5.6. Climate Action - School Transport Scheme

In October 2019, the Minister announced a review of the school transport scheme with a view to ensuring funds are being spent in the most effective way and to also examine potential scope for a more co-ordinated approach involving other Government Departments.

It is intended that the review will encompass the Primary, Post-Primary and Special Educational Needs Transport Schemes, in terms of how each element of the schemes currently operate, to include costs, cost drivers, eligibility criteria and overall effectiveness in meeting the objectives of the schemes.

The review’s Steering Group will comprise representatives from the National Transport Authority, the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

The review will include an examination of available synergies with similar publicly funded transport schemes (such as those funded by the HSE, DTTAS\NTA, etc) as well as building on parallel work on route efficiency and vehicle suitability.

3.6. Curriculum & Assessment Policy

3.6.1. Students to sit Leaving Certificate 2021

Following the school closure in March 2020, the Department published a range of guidance to assist schools and teachers in ensuring continuity of teaching and learning for students as well as supporting their wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic. This guidance was informed by surveys conducted by the Inspectorate which showed that schools had differing levels of success in engaging with learners. Telephone interviews conducted by inspectors with over half of all primary school principals and almost all post-primary principals revealed that many schools made excellent efforts to sustain students’ learning while in others, there was little sustained engagement with learners for a variety of reasons.
This information was used to draft guidance for schools aimed to ensure regular engagement of students in lessons, tasks and learning experiences across the range of curriculum subjects, provision of regular assignments and regular, practical, supportive and customised feedback on work submitted.

Schools adopted various ways to engage with their students in accordance with the technology and broadband resources available in school and at home, including by post, e-mails, communication apps, the school website, use of other digital communicative platforms, including live meetings.

Schools were asked to be conscious of pupils who may not have access to online facilities and to adapt approaches so that these pupils continued to have the opportunity to participate in learning.

The aim of these distant learning approaches, the guidance which issued to all schools and the regular engagement with students, was to ensure that students stayed connected with and progressed their learning.

These actions will have helped to minimise the impact of school closure to some extent.

In the context of planning for a return to school which is underway, the Department is considering the curriculum. That is, what needs to be put in place to support ongoing progression for learners and addressing any shortfall that may result from school closures.

Those going into sixth year in post primary schools are a group that will receive a particular focus in the context of preparations for the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2021. Consideration is also being given to the assessment arrangements for post-primary students taking the certificate examinations in the 2020/21 school year and the extent to which it may be necessary for these arrangements to take account of the disrupted learning experienced by students during the 2019/20 school year.

3.6.2. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) supports the personal development, health and well-being of young people and helps them create and maintain supportive relationships. RSE forms a key part of this. RSE has been a compulsory part of the primary and post-primary curriculum since the late 1990s. In December 2019, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published a report which included an examination of the experience and reality of RSE as delivered in schools and how it is planned and taught.

Schools must provide the prescribed curriculum including an RSE programme for all students. It is recognised that this will be delivered within the characteristic spirit (ethos) of the school. It remains a requirement, however, that all aspects of the RSE curriculum, including those in relation to sexual orientation, contraception and sexually transmitted
infections should be covered. Elements of the programme cannot be omitted on the grounds of school ethos.

The report makes a number of recommendations in response to its key findings including an updating of the overall RSE curriculum. The Minister was, and the Department is, considering these recommendations carefully. A number of recommendations are subject to interagency collaboration and the development of the necessary technological supports and infrastructure. In addition, the schedule for curriculum development in this area is subject to wider curriculum processes such as the Primary Review and Redevelopment and Senior Cycle Review. This process will involve extensive consultation including with members of the public.

In the short term, however, the Minister had agreed that the NCCA will commence a number of actions which include:

- Pending commencement later in 2020 of a comprehensive update of the curriculum, the NCCA has begun work on interim guidelines to support the teaching of SPHE/RSE in schools;
- Work on a single online access point for RSE resources;
- Development by the NCCA of an overall framework to inform the development of future SPHE/RSE resources;
- The NCCA are examining opportunities for SPHE/RSE within the new Junior Cycle Wellbeing area of learning.

Other recommendations in the report in relation to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) regarding SPHE and RSE will be reviewed by the Department with a view to putting enhanced supports in place.

Action on this issue has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, where urgent remedial measures required priority attention.

3.6.3. History as a Core Junior Cycle Subject

The new Junior Cycle was developed and implemented over several years, with the final phase of new subject specifications being introduced to schools in September 2019. The new Framework for Junior Cycle gives students the opportunity to develop a wider range of knowledge and skills – to equip them for further learning, for work, for responsible and active citizenship, and for healthy living.

Prior to the introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle, History was a core subject in voluntary secondary schools only (52% of schools) but available in most post-primary schools. The new specification for Junior Cycle History was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). This involved extensive consultation with key
stakeholders and the public. The new specification was implemented in all schools in September 2018.

In July 2019, the Department received a report from the NCCA examining the optional nature of History under the new Framework for the Junior Cycle. In October 2019, the previous Minister for Education and Skills announced his decision that History should have special core status within the new Junior Cycle Framework.

In February 2020, the Minister announced that from September 2020, all schools will be required to offer History as a Junior Cycle subject and all students entering first year at that time will be required to study History as part of the curriculum. Students will follow the existing Junior Cycle History specification, which is of a minimum of 200 hours’ duration and will be assessed at a common level.

The NCCA is also being asked to develop a short course in History for certain students with general learning difficulties/needs. Students in this category will not be required to study the subject ahead of the new short course being made available in September 2021.

Schools are being advised by Departmental circular letter of the practical arrangements for the implementation of the Minister’s decision to accord History special core status.

The rollout of the subject to schools not currently offering it will now have to take account of the impact on schools of the Covid-19 pandemic.
3.6.5. Primary Curriculum Reform

The NCCA is reviewing and redeveloping the primary school curriculum – the current curriculum dates to 1999. There have also been calls for the primary curriculum to do more. In particular, there have been requests to include new areas of learning such as: Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, coding and computational thinking, and modern foreign languages. There are also requests for greater attention to existing areas such as wellbeing (including Social, Personal and Health Education, and Physical Education). In addition, Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People (2011) set out a curriculum reform agenda which led to the development of the new Primary Language Curriculum/Curachaí Teanga Bunscoile and to work on a new mathematics curriculum. Department Strategies and policies such as the STEM Education Policy Statement 2017, Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, Languages Connect – Ireland’s Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026 and Creative Ireland agenda and PFG commitments can be considered in the context of the current review.

Three significant themes have been presented to support the need to change the structure of the Primary Curriculum:

- Alignment and continuity of the learners’ educational experiences; from entry to primary school from early years’ education and on exit from primary school to post-primary education.
- Provision of an appropriate thematic early years’ educational experience in the infant classes of primary school to align with the Aistear curriculum framework.
- Provision of an appropriate subject-centred education in the later years of primary education to prepare the learner for transition to post-primary education and the new Junior Cycle experience.

The NCCA is engaging widely with stakeholders in education and other interested individuals and groups including working directly with schools on their priorities and needs for a redeveloped primary curriculum drawing on an extensive body of research published in a series of short papers on www.ncca.ie. Building on this and informed by the 2017 consultation on curriculum structure and time, the NCCA will publish a draft overview of a redeveloped primary curriculum in February 2020 for consultation.

The issues that are likely to attract most debate are as follows:

- Proposed new aspects of learning i.e. introduction of modern foreign languages.
- The draft framework proposes that learning about ERB and Ethics would be integrated as part of Social and Environmental Education, and as part of Social, Personal and Values Education. Reflecting the high level of publicity and engagement in the consultation in 2016, this proposal too is likely to generate debate.
• Time allocations – the proposals represent reduced allocations across the curriculum with the exception of Wellbeing such as:
  o the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) and the resultant increased time for maths and language - given the first statistically significant increase in attainment levels seen in 30 years in the national assessments at primary, this will generate public commentary;
  o the proposed reduction in time for the patron’s programme. There will be many perspectives on this for example focus on the role of the state in ensuring that every child’s religious/spiritual/ethical development is nurtured during their primary education and the contribution of patrons’ programmes to this; and,
• Alignment of the curriculum with the Aistear curriculum framework for the early years sector

The NCCA engagement with the school patrons has highlighted patrons’ concern regarding the ‘location’ of their programmes within the proposals set out for the redeveloped curriculum and the extent to which the programmes are perceived as contributing to children’s holistic development during the eight years of primary education. Cognisant of the ongoing work on divestment and admissions, discussions have highlighted a more fundamental question regarding the state’s role in ensuring provision for every child’s religious and ethical education and the role of patrons’ programmes within this. Steps have been taken by the NCCA to address the location issue within the Framework.

The public consultation period for the draft Framework was due to finish by end October 2020, with the final framework due to be approved by the Minister by end Q1 2021. In view of the Covid-19, the consultation period will be extended to end December 2020. This will allow additional strands of consultation to take place in the Autumn.

It is expected that the analysis of the consultation and subsequent finalisation of the Primary Curriculum framework will completed by end Q1 2021 with consideration and approval of the Council and the Minister thereafter. Work will then begin on developing the individual specifications. The aim had been to have these completed by end Q2 2024. The timeline for completion of the specifications will likely be pushed out a year in view of the extension of the consultation period on the draft Framework. Consideration is currently being given as to timing and how best to build capacity to support implementation of the new Curriculum.

The final Primary Curriculum framework is due for approval by the Minister in Q1, 2021. Work will then begin on developing the individual specifications and the aim is to have these completed by end Q2, 2024. Consideration is currently being given as to timing and how best to build capacity to support implementation of the new Curriculum.
3.6.6. Senior Cycle Reform

In late 2016, the NCCA commenced an extensive review of senior cycle programmes and vocational pathways, to include Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Established. The review will be informed in part by lessons emerging from implementation of the new Framework for Junior Cycle. As part of the first phase of the review the NCCA conducted international research on senior cycle in a number of other jurisdictions.

Over the school year 2018/2019, a representative sample of 41 schools were directly involved in the initial consultation cycles of the review. The latest phase of the NCCA’s work was a public consultation which invited individuals and organisations to provide feedback on the areas for development emerging from the review to date.

The Interim Report on the review brings together the discussions held during the review in schools, at the national seminars and the national and international research on senior cycle, while the Senior Cycle Consultation document outlines the emerging areas for further consideration in senior cycle. The latest phase of consultation concluded in November 2019.

The timing for the approval and publication of the Advisory Report is currently under review in light of the impact which the emergence of Covid-19 and the measures aimed at addressing the spread of the virus have had on schools and the education system more generally. Developments during this period have highlighted aspects of senior cycle education that may warrant further consideration and additional attention within the Advisory Report. However, it should be noted that the circumstances pertaining this year, and the arrangements in place for the provision of Calculated Grades to students, are exceptional and it is understood that they will not be regarded as a precedent or as agreement by teachers, principals or schools to carry out such tasks in future years.

In this overall context, it is currently envisaged that the report will be finalised by the NCCA in Q4, 2020. This report is likely to include three chapters dealing with Pathways and Flexibility, Curriculum, and Assessment, and will form the basis of further significant discussion and ultimately decision making on senior cycle over the coming years.

In addition to the ongoing review of senior cycle, new (i.e. new subjects) and revised specifications (curricula) are being developed at Leaving Certificate. The position in relation to the timing of rollout to schools of these new and revised subjects will require to be reviewed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of schools from 12 March.

Leaving Certificate Computer Science

The new specification for Leaving Certificate Computer Science (LCCS) was introduced to 40 schools as part of the phase 1 introduction from September 2018.
The first examination of the LCCS was scheduled to take place on 27th May 2020, prior to the postponement of the Leaving Certificate 2020 examinations as a result of Covid-19. The exam for LCCS in 2021 will contain both written and computer based elements.

All schools were informed last October that the national rollout of the subject would commence in 2020. Schools were invited to submit an expression of interest in introducing LCCS from September 2020. The Department is currently engaging with those schools who have expressed an interest in offering the subject from September 2020, to enable the Department and its Support Services to plan for this national rollout of LCCS, and in particular to inform the development of the suite of continuing professional development events that will be provided to support the subject’s rollout.

**Physical Education at Senior Cycle**
There are two recent developments in relation to Physical Education at Senior Cycle: a new specification for examinable Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) subject and a new non-examinable Framework for Senior Cycle Physical Education (SCPE). Both were introduced on a phased basis from September 2018.

- The examinable LCPE specification is currently being delivered in 64 schools and prior to the postponement of the Leaving Certificate, was scheduled to be examined for the first time in June 2020.
- 40 schools are participating in Phase 1 rollout of the SCPE Framework. The SCPE Framework is available now to all schools for their consideration in planning for Senior Cycle Physical Education.

All schools were informed last October that that the national rollout of LCPE and the SCPE Framework would commence in 2020. Schools were requested to submit an expression of interest in order to advise the Department and the support services of their interest in introducing this new examinable subject.

From September 2020, the new SCPE Framework will replace the existing guidelines set out in the Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools, which currently form the basis for Physical Education at Senior Cycle.

**Leaving Certificate Politics and Society**
A new specification for Leaving Certificate Politics and Society was introduced in September 2016 to a selected Phase 1 cohort of 41 schools. The subject was made available nationally from September 2018. There are now over 100 schools providing the subject.

**Leaving Certificate Foreign Languages**
Languages Connect, Ireland’s Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026, contains a commitment to develop Leaving Certificate specifications in Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese, with a view to implementation from September 2020 and first examination in June 2022.
The specifications were approved in June 2020 by the previous Minister for Education and Skills.

The Department has established a steering group with key stakeholders to oversee the implementation of these new languages.

**Leaving Certificate Irish**

The NCCA has commenced the development of L1 and L2 (Language 1 and Language 2, or Teanga 1 and Teanga 2) specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish. This new model of curricular provision for Irish builds on the model of Irish language curricular provision in Junior Cycle and is designed to address the differential learning needs of students who study Irish as a second language (for whom Teanga 2 is designed) and those whose home language is Irish or those who attend Irish-medium schools (for whom Teanga 1 is designed).

The draft specifications are due to go to public consultation in the coming months. There has been strong criticism that the present syllabus for Leaving Certificate Irish is unchallenging for those whose home language is Irish and those who attend Irish medium education, and the provision of differentiated curricula was a key action in the Government’s *Gaeltacht Education Policy*. There is significant interest among the Irish language community and wider groups in this work and on curriculum matters regarding Irish in general. Strictly speaking, the treatment of student achievement arising from the study of Teanga 1 and Teanga 2 vis-à-vis entry requirements for higher and further education is not a matter for curriculum developers. However, it is likely that this will emerge as an issue in the public consultation on the draft specifications.

3.6.7. National Strategies for STEM, Modern Foreign Languages, Digital Learning and Creativity

National strategies for enhancing teaching and learning in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Modern Foreign Languages and Digital Learning have been initiated in recent years. Each of these strategies sets out a number of curricular changes and a range of actions to enhance teachers’ skills in these areas and to improve monitoring of student learning. As part of each of the strategies, the Inspectorate has published baseline evaluations describing the strengths and areas for development in STEM, Modern Foreign Languages and Digital Learning. These reports are intended to provide baseline information about these areas, promote improvement, and inform further evaluations as the strategies are implemented.

The Department is also a key partner in the delivery of Creative Youth, the plan for Pillar 1 of the Creative Ireland Programme. The plan has a range of actions which engages the formal and non-formal youth and education sectors to promote creativity among children and young people.
3.6.8. Review of Career Guidance Tools and Information

The objective of the review of career guidance tools and information carried out in 2019 was to examine aspects of career guidance in the Irish education and training system in order to improve the existing career guidance tools and information and to enhance engagement with enterprise. The review looked at the quality of information available to students and adults in relation to career guidance, the sources of this information and how the system is organised to support students and adults in this area.

Overall, findings suggest Ireland has a number of features of effective careers support systems. However, there are areas which require urgent attention. These include the need to improve career information and advice, including on labour market opportunities and on apprenticeship options. There is also a need to enhance employer engagement and to extend supports for special education schools. Changes to organisational structures are also required. In addition, there is a need to intensify the potential role of career guidance in reducing economic and social disadvantage.

Following the publication of the report an internal taskforce comprised of senior officials from units within the Department responsible for elements of career guidance was established. The taskforce will examine each of the recommendations contained in the report and how best to implement them.

The task force has met six times to date, most recently on 25th June, and is progressing with the work assigned. The group is currently considering detailed proposals for the establishment of the support organisation recommended by Indecon and for a prioritised implementation plan. Once the task force has completed this phase of the work, it will engage with relevant stakeholder groups and work through the implementation of the other recommendations contained in the report.

3.7. Special Education Provision

3.7.1. Availability of Special Education School Places

Government policy provides that children with complex special needs should be placed in mainstream classes with their peers unless this is deemed not to be in their best interest or to be inconsistent with the effective provision of education for other students. Children with more complex needs are placed in either special classes in mainstream schools or in special schools where lower pupil:teacher ratios apply and there are other supports available.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory function to plan and coordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs. This includes the establishment of special class and special school placements in
areas with identified need. The NCSE works with families and schools to ensure that advance planning is in place so that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children who have been identified as needing special class placements.

Historically, schools have willingly opened special classes for children in their areas. In most cases this remains the case. For example, in September 190 new special classes are expected to open. However, the NCSE which is responsible for planning and coordinating local provision has experienced difficulty recently in getting schools in in a small number of areas to open special classes. By way of response, the Government introduced legislation in 2018 providing the Minister for Education & Skills with a legal power under 37A (2) of the Education Act 1998 to direct schools to make new places available, where all reasonable efforts have failed.

The initial step in the section 37A process is for the NCSE to inform the Minister that there is a shortage of places in a particular area. The NCSE will only activate the legislation after it has taken all reasonable efforts to get schools and their Patrons to voluntarily agree to provide additional special class or school places.

Last year, the NCSE indicated that parents in Dublin 15, South Dublin, Kildare and Cork were experiencing difficulty securing school places for their children.

In Dublin 15, a total of 86 children were identified being without a placement and Section 37A was initiated for the first time to address the reported shortage of places in Dublin 15. Significant progress was made in a relatively short period in Dublin 15 with the establishment of Danu Special School which will eventually have an enrolment of 40 students as well as seven schools offering to open special classes. The new places will help these families and ensure that the children concerned have access to education.

The establishment of new special schools and special classes has been supported by a programme of professional development and in school support for the teachers and school management.

More recently in October 2019, the process has been initiated in respect of South Dublin where 82 children have been identified as needing placement. As required under the Education (Admissions to School) Act 2018 the NCSE has recently consulted with the schools and their patrons in South Dublin in advance of preparing a report on the matter as set out in the legislation. This Report was received on 21 April. The NCSE has formed the opinion that there is a shortfall of both special school and special classes in the South Dublin area. The NCSE identified that the following additional provision was required-

- 8 ASD primary school special classes to cater for 43 children of school going age who will be without placements for September 2020
- Special school places for 36 children with ASD and complex needs, and 2 children with Severe EBD, for September 2020


Since September 2019, the NCSE has engaged intensively with schools, boards of management and patron bodies with a view to addressing this issue.

Since submitting the report in April, the NCSE and Department have engaged on this matter, with the NCSE providing clarifications on aspects of the report and the level of consultation undertaken taken by the NCSE in reaching its opinion.

Minister McHugh formed the opinion that the 39 schools referred to in the Report should be requested to make additional provision for children with special educational needs as required under S 37A of the Act.

Legal notices have been issued to schools and their patron bodies. The Act provides for a very transparent process of engagement and at each step schools may make representations. Notices issued and representations received must be published.

At the end of January 2020, the High Court heard cases in relation a lack of school places for students with special education needs in the South Dublin area. The cases were adjourned to allow the NCSE and schools in the area to identify possible options.

The recent experience of the shortage of suitable school places for children with special needs has highlighted the need for more pro-active planning and coordination at a central level to ensure the timely delivery of special class and school places in future. Protocols have been put in place to facilitate the exchange of data and information in a timely way to enable more effective pro-active planning in the short, medium and longer term throughout the country.

Next Steps
Receipt and consideration of representations by the 39 schools to whom legal notices have been issued.

3.7.2. School Inclusion Model (incorporating a "Front Loaded" SNA allocation model and the therapy demonstration project)

The School Inclusion Model was recommended by the NCSE in policy advice published in May 2018 entitled the "Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme – a new School Inclusion Model to Deliver the Right Supports at the Right Time to Students with Additional Care Needs".

The Review found that the SNA scheme worked well in meeting the needs of younger children and students for whom it was originally designed, including those with care needs such as toileting, mobility and feeding. However, it identified some shortcomings and concluded that a more broadly based model of support incorporating both education and health therapeutic supports was now required. Access to SNA support on its own cannot address the wide range, diversity and complexity of student needs that present in schools. The Review made a number of significant recommendations in this regard. A core recommendation was the frontloaded
allocation model which will provide greater autonomy to schools to meet the needs of their pupils and ensure SNA support is available at the beginning of the school year.

At the time of publication in May 2018, Government noted the contents of the NCSE’s Review and the Minister for Education and Skill undertook to develop proposals for the implementation of the recommendations in the Review (Government Decision S180/20/10/0394A).

In Budget 2019, Government allocated €4.75 million for the implementation of the recommendations of the Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme, including the implementation of a new service pilot to begin the roll out of the new model.

In 2019 following consultations with the Departments of Public Expenditure and Reform, Health, and Children and Youth Affairs, the Minister for Education and Skills brought forward proposals for the development and piloting during the 2019/20 school year of a new service model (School Inclusion Model) for schools together with proposals for the implementation of a number of other priority recommendations outlined in the Comprehensive Review. These proposals were approved by Government on 12 February 2019.

Budget 2020 provided for an additional 1,064 additional SNAs for allocation to schools, bringing the total numbers to over 17,000 in 2020.

**Pilot of the School Inclusion Model 2019/20**

In February 2019, Government approved the trialling of a new School Inclusion Model (SfM) for the 2019/20 school year which comprised:

- the establishment of a pilot of a new service model for children with special educational and additional care needs which involves 75 participating schools in the Community Healthcare Organisation area (CHO 7) for the 2019/20 school year. The new service model has the following elements:
  - a new frontloaded allocation model of SNAs allocated in line with profiled need having regard to the approach taken by the New Allocation Model for Special Education Teachers which was introduced in September 2017,
  - expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to support pilot schools, and
  - continuation of the pre-school and in-school demonstration project in the pilot area to ensure a wrap-around service for the pilot schools;
- the establishment, on a pilot basis, of an NCSE Regional Support Team in the Community Healthcare Organisation area (CHO 7) where the pilot is taking place, to include specialists in relevant disciplines (Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Behaviour Practitioners), in order to inform teacher Continuing Professional Development and best practice in schools in that area;
- the development of a National Training Programme for SNAs and a pilot roll-out;
the provision of a nursing service for children with complex medical needs in schools to complement existing HSE-supported nursing provision; and

- the trialling in the NCSE of a new functional operating model in order to better reflect the establishment of the NCSE Support Service and regional teams, and to more fully integrate supports for the piloting of the new model.

Budget 2019, provided €4.75 million for the implementation of the recommendations of the Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme, including the implementation of a new service pilot. A comprehensive independent evaluation of the Model will be undertaken to test its effectiveness and to support decision making in terms of further implementation.

Significant progress has been made in all aspects of the SIM pilot and regular updates are provided for Government.

Deferral of the Rollout of the new allocation model for SNAs from September 2020
On 17 December 2019 Government approved the phased implementation of the SIM nationally with the implementation, in the first instance, of the frontloading of SNA allocations to all mainstream schools and classes for the 2020/21 school year.

In light of the ongoing Covid-19 crisis the new Frontloaded Allocation Model for Special Needs Assistants, for students in mainstream classes in primary and post-primary schools has been deferred until the beginning of the 2021/22 school year.

Schools have been notified of the arrangements for the allocation of SNA support in respect of students in mainstream classes for 2020/21. The arrangements include the following provisions:

- 2019/20 mainstream class SNA allocations will be frozen, from the date of issue of Circular 0030/2020, and will automatically rollover into the 2020/21 school year. This means that no school will receive an allocation less than that which they have on the date of issue of this Circular and existing SNAs currently in standard SNA posts can continue in these posts for the next school year in the normal way.
- Schools may apply to the NCSE for additionality where they can demonstrate that the current allocation does not meet additional care needs within the mainstream classes in the school. Applications for additionality arising from significant new or emerging additional care needs, which cannot be catered within existing allocations, will be dealt with by way of an exceptional review process.
- A diagnosis of a disability, or a psychological or other professional report, will not be necessary for this process. The role of the SNA to support the care needs of students in mainstream classes, as set out in Circular 0030/2014, remains unchanged.
It is expected that schools will review and reprioritise the deployment of SNAs within mainstream settings and allocate resources to ensure those with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support. Providing access to SNA support continues to be based on primary care needs as outlined in DES Circular 0030/2014. SNA allocations for special classes and special schools are not affected by this arrangement.

The new circular will also outline the next steps for the full implementation of the Frontloading Model from September 2021.

Budget 2020 provided for an additional 1,064 additional SNAs for allocation to schools, bringing the total numbers to 17,014 by December 2020. This allocation of SNAs is for allocation to schools which will enable the establishment of new special classes, creation of new places in special schools and support children in mainstream classes.

The School Inclusion Model incorporates the pre-school and in-school therapy demonstration project. This is a project co-funded by the Departments of Children and Youth Affairs, and Education and Skills. It is managed by the NCSE and therapists are supplied by the HSE who also ensure the necessary clinical governance arrangements. Due to the Covid-19 crisis, these therapists like others in the HSE were reassigned to other duties, including contact tracing and testing. Indications from the Department of Health are that re-engaging necessary support from the HSE as part of the provision of an in-school therapy service will be challenging, at least in the immediate term, due to reassignment of staff as part of the Covid-19 response. Other approaches are being considered to support the model for the 2020/21 school year.

Next steps:
Preparation for the introduction of the new allocation model nationally had commenced but some aspects had to be suspended due to Covid-19 restrictions. It is anticipated that, as soon as practicable in the next school year, training and information sessions will commence to prepare the sector for the introduction of the new allocation model for the 2021/22 school year.

Work will also continue on progressing all elements of the wider School Inclusion Model more generally and on its evaluation. This will include potential alternative models for provision of therapy supports.

3.7.3. National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes and the UNCRPD

The NCSE is developing policy advice on the educational provision that should be in place so that children with special needs can achieve better outcomes. In November 2019, the NCSE published a progress report on work to date outlining that the Council had yet to find any substantial evidence that students with additional needs have better outcomes in special schools or classes. The Department’s Inspectorate has also published an evaluation report
on the operation of special classes for children on the autism spectrum in primary and post-primary schools which shows weaknesses in the implementation of these classes, particularly at post-primary level.

The NCSE is engaging in a consultation to get the public perspective on whether Ireland should move in the direction of a fully inclusive school provision. Following this public consultation and further deliberations the NCSE will finalise the policy advice for submission in December 2020.

From the initial findings and conclusions of the progress report, any decision about whether to move towards the inclusion of all students in mainstream schools requires very careful consideration and if this policy advice recommends a move towards greater inclusion, this could potentially bring about significant changes in the education of students with the most complex needs. The implications of any such potential changes, and their likely resource impacts, need to be fully explored and articulated as part of the final policy advice to be submitted later this year.

Ireland has significant new obligations following the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which requires that children with disabilities can access inclusive, quality and free primary and secondary education. The NCSE is examining, as part of the Policy Advice, the significant implications following ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2018. Article 24(2) of this Convention obliges States, inter alia, to ensure that children can access an inclusive, quality and free education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. The UN Committee reviewing the Convention’s implementation is interpreting inclusive education as educating all children together within their local school and that having a continuum of provision, i.e. mainstream schools, special classes and special schools, is not compatible with Article 24. Ireland is due to submit its first State report on the Convention to the UN in July 2020.

3.8. Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity Process

The Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process was developed in order to provide more multi-/non-denominational schools across the country, in line with the choices of families and school communities. This process involves the transfer of live schools as opposed to the amalgamation and/or closure model of the earlier patronage divesting process. Currently (2019/2020 school year), there are 150 multi-/non-denominational primary schools.

The Department estimates that further provision will arise with the opening of new schools to cater for areas of demographic growth by 2030. It is envisaged that further growth particularly in areas of stable population will be achieved by way of transfers of patronage of existing
schools from denominational to multi-denominational patrons under the Schools Reconfiguration process.

The process was envisaged to comprise of 2 phases – the Identification Phase and the Implementation Phase. The initial identification phase of the process involved each Education and Training Board (ETB) identifying an area where there may be unmet oncoming demand for a multi-/non-denominational school, and surveying parents of pre-school children to assess the level of this oncoming demand in that area.

The Department has had engagement with representatives of the Irish Episcopal Conference (representing Catholic Bishops) with a view to developing an agreed approach to the next phase of the Reconfiguration process. The publication of the Identification Phase Reports has been deferred to allow those discussions evolve towards an agreed approach to the next Phase of the process.

In addition, the “Early Movers” provision of the Reconfiguration process enables school communities which have already decided to seek a transfer of patronage (independent of the central Reconfiguration process) to engage with their school patron on the matter. A number of patronage transfers have already taken place in this way.

The Programme for Government commitments in this area (to achieve the target of at least 400 multidenominational primary schools by 2030, to expand and prioritise the transfer of viable schools to Community National Schools and work with communities to ensure the provision of clear, non-partisan information on the preparation for, and the consequences of, the divestment process and to respond to queries raised) is aligned

3.9. School Transport

School transport is a significant daily operation. In the current school year over 120,000 children, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, are transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost to DES of over €219m in 2019. The total cost to the State in 2019 at €219.2 million was a rise of €46m or 26% in the 5 years from 2015 to 2019.

School Transport provision has evolved considerably since the school transport scheme was established in 1967. However, the purpose of the Scheme has remained the same which is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote (i.e. 3.2 kilometres (primary) and 4.8 kilometres (post primary) or more) from their nearest school / education centre.
In particular, transport provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) has expanded significantly and whilst in the region of 12% of children availing of transport are on the SEN scheme, the scheme now accounts for over 50% of all school transport scheme expenditure, increasing from just over €60m in 2011 to over €106m in 2018.

A growing number of children are availing of school transport on a concessionary basis (children who are not eligible but can avail of spare seats on transport routes), resulting in a shortage of places. This has given rise to significant disquiet on the part of parents and public representatives in various locations.

In October 2019, the then Minister announced a review of the school transport scheme with a view to ensuring funds are being spent in the most effective way and to also examine potential scope for a more co-ordinated approach involving other Government Departments. Terms of reference and the scope of the review have been drafted and a Steering Group has been established.

In the first instance, there has been intensive analysis of the short-term options available to the Department in terms of the scheme and its implementation in September 2020 with a view to preparing an initial report by the second quarter of 2020. This is to be followed by a deeper examination of the current model of services and its component strands with a view to putting forward options for the future operation of an integrated and sustainable scheme.

Given the current evolving situation with Covid-19 and the continued restrictions the work of the Steering Group has experienced some delay. The Department has been engaged in scenario planning for schools to re-open in September 2020 and our priority in recent weeks has been contingency planning. The Department has now received clear advice from the public health authorities providing interim recommendations for the reopening of school and educational facilities. This includes recommendations to get children safely to school. These recommendations will allow us to work towards a full service for children in relation to the SEN and the general transport scheme and we are engaging with Bus Éireann in this respect.

The Department will now commence the necessary analysis set out as part of the review of the scheme previously and prepare a background paper for consideration of the Steering Group to inform further progress of the review of the scheme.

Next Steps:
The Department will commence the necessary analysis set out as part of the review of the scheme previously and prepare a background paper for consideration of the Steering Group. Once this background paper is complete, a meeting of the Steering Group will be arranged (remotely if required) to discuss this paper and proposed next steps.

The Review will build on the proposals in the Draft Programme for Government, which sets out the following objectives:
Accelerate sustainable transport plans for schools. We will complete the review of the School Transport Scheme to seek better outcomes and reduce car journeys. The School Transport Scheme should work in liaison with the Safe Routes to Schools Programme.

We will conduct a comprehensive review of the School Transport Scheme, identifying recommendations for the scheme to provide better value and a better service for students, including those with special educational needs, and examining issues such as the nearest or next-nearest school.

3.10. Industrial Relations

3.10.1. Successor to the Public Sector Stability Agreement (PSSA) 2018-2020

The current public service pay agreement, Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) 2018–2020, is scheduled to expire at the end of 2020.

Current Position:

Next Steps:
Talks are anticipated to take place in 2020.

3.10.2. Secretaries and Caretakers

Schemes were initiated in 1978 and 1979 for the employment of clerical officers and caretakers in schools. The schemes were withdrawn completely in 2008. These schemes have been superseded by the more extensive capititation grant schemes. The majority of primary and voluntary secondary schools now receive assistance to provide for secretarial, caretaking and cleaning services under these grant schemes.

It is a matter for each individual school to decide how best to apply the grant funding to suit its particular needs. Where a school uses the grant funding for caretaking or secretarial purposes, any staff taken on to support those functions are employees of individual schools. The terms and conditions provided to these staff are a matter for each individual employer and every school has different needs in terms of the amount of secretarial and clerical support that is required.

On foot of a Chairman’s Note to the Lansdowne Road Agreement, the Department engaged with the Unions representing school secretaries and caretakers, including through an
independent arbitration process in 2015. The Arbitrator recommended a cumulative pay increase of 10% between 2016 and 2019 for staff and that a minimum hourly pay rate of €13 be phased in over that period. For those on the then minimum wage, the arbitration agreement resulted in a 50% increase in salary. This arbitration agreement covered the period up to 31 December 2019.

In May 2019 officials from the Department had discussions with FÓRSA trade union representatives as part of a planned meeting. FÓRSA took the opportunity to formally table a claim seeking access to a public service pay scale, pension, year-round working and improved terms and conditions of employment. This was tabled as a follow-on claim from 2015 Arbitration Agreement.

School secretaries and caretakers are not public servants but are employees of individual schools with salaries funded through the grants provided to such schools. It is estimated that there are approximately 8,000 such Secretaries and Caretakers employed in schools.

Following a FÓRSA ballot in August 2019, which was 94% in favour of industrial action, grant-funded secretaries undertook a short work stoppage which took place on Friday 20th of September followed by a work-to-rule. Following discussions in the WRC, FÓRSA suspended their action on 22nd October 2019.

**Current position:**

In order to address the various issues within the claim and to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution a number of confidential conciliations have taken place in the WRC.
Next Steps:
A date for the next WRC engagement is to be agreed between the parties.

3.10.3. Two Tier Pay

As a consequence of the financial crisis, salaries and allowances payable to all new entrants to public service recruitment grades (including teachers) were reduced by 10% with effect from 1 January 2011. Subsequently in 2012, following the public service-wide review of allowances, the Government withdrew qualification allowances for new teachers. However, the Government partially compensated for this by deciding that new entrant teachers would henceforth commence on a new salary scale which had a starting point higher than the starting point of the old scale.

New entrant pay has been gradually restored over the years, the latest of these measures being the September 2018 agreement. Both INTO and ASTI rejected the September 2018 new entrant pay agreement, while TUI members accepted it.

The teaching unions have a number of outstanding elements of the September 2018 agreements that they dispute. In April 2019, the Government stated that these outstanding matters will be given full consideration.

Notwithstanding their acceptance of the 2018 agreement and the Government's commitment in April 2019, TUI members held a one day strike on 4 February 2020 in relation to new entrant pay. ASTI recently announced their intention to ballot members for industrial action on the issue of new entrant pay, to be taken in conjunction with another teacher union. INTO have not announced plans to ballot.
3.10.5. Temporary Assignment of SNAs

The Minister announced on 1st April a contingency plan for all Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to be available for a new temporary assignment scheme as part of the Government’s response to Covid-19. In the normal course of events, the majority of children with disabilities access multidisciplinary therapy services through the HSE. Many of these services have been scaled down during the Covid-19 emergency situation as staff are redeployed. The reduction in these services, combined with school closures are putting substantial demands on children with disabilities and their families. It is intended that the temporary assignment of SNAs to support children’s disability services during this public health emergency will help to alleviate the stress being experienced by these vulnerable families.

The Department’s ‘Guidance on Continuity of Schooling: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs’ document provides a framework for SEN teachers and SNAs to maintain contact with SEN students and to provide appropriate learning support. Many SNAs have been engaged in such work through their schools since the closure period began. It has been confirmed to school management that, in the interim period pending the assignment of an individual SNA to the HSE, that SNA is available to support their allocated students through their school. The HSE has started assigning SNAs to families and children identified in their services.
There was close cooperation between the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Health and the HSE in establishing and managing the scheme. The Departments and the HSE held weekly meetings with the Education Division of Fórsa (the trade union representing SNAs) to resolve any issues of concern.

Under the scheme SNAs are being asked to provide support to those students in receipt of HSE Disability services by way of either remote working through the use of telephones, smartphones or laptops or centre-based work. They will work under the guidance and direction of the child’s ‘key point of contact’ who will be a clinician such as a speech and language therapist, psychologist or occupational therapist who is familiar with the student and will explain what support each student and family might require. The key point of contact will provide strategies for working with the child / family and will signpost the SNA towards any resources required. Communication channels between the school and the SNA will be facilitated where appropriate to ensure that SNAs can receive guidance where educational issues arise during the course of the suite of supports being provided by the HSE teams during this period.

SNAs are being matched with students, and wherever possible this will be their own allocated student(s). If this is not possible, SNAs may then be matched to support children with whom they are not familiar. Students and families requiring the greatest level of support will be prioritised.

To ensure that SNAs receive appropriate support and have regular opportunities to engage with the HSE’s multidisciplinary teams, SNAs will be able to access resources at the relevant HSE or disability service premises and will be provided with a letter identifying them as an essential worker to facilitate travel to these centres.

The work of the SNAs will be underpinned by dedicated ICT supports. Therefore, where the SNA prefers to work remotely or has an underlying health condition or particular circumstances that impact on their ability to leave their home and has access to the appropriate technology this can be facilitated with the agreement of the Service Manager and key point of contact.

The HSE are providing an induction for all SNAs who are asked to participate in the new service. Where possible they will ask SNAs to attend one of their offices to do this but where SNAs are self-isolating, have underlying health conditions or have childcare or other caring responsibilities, the induction can be done remotely.

The HSE are providing a dedicated IT platform which will allow the HSE to match SNAs to children / families. This platform will also allow the SNA to log their interactions with the family and to report on same. SNAs can use their own phone, tablet or laptop to carry out this work, and access to appropriate resources and technology will also be available at the HSE / disability premises.
At all times the HSE will take account of the public health restrictions in place and the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business published by Government on 1 May.

To date (24th June 2020) over 900 children have been identified and over 230 SNAs matched by the HSE.

The SNA temporary assignment scheme runs until the normal school closure period i.e. 30th June. The Department and the HSE recently reached agreement with the Fórsa Trade Union for continuation of this scheme into the summer with SNAs taking on this additional work on a voluntary paid basis (see section 3.4 for further information). The HSE summer scheme is targeting between 1100-1500 children with complex care needs.

3.11. Teacher Staffing Schedules and Supply

3.11.1. Primary school Staffing Schedules

State funded primary schools are allocated teachers on a staffing schedule that operates on a general average of 26 pupils to every 1 teacher (26:1). This ratio is the overall classroom teacher allocation ratio for the school and is not a reference to individual class size or average class size. The schedule is organised by limits, whereby if a school reaches a given number of pupils they receive an additional teacher.

DEIS Band 1 primary schools operate on a general average of 22 pupils to every 1 teacher (22:1) in fully vertical schools, 24 pupils to every 1 teacher (24:1) in senior schools and 20 pupils to every 1 teacher (20:1) in junior schools.

Primary schools in the 2018/19 academic year has an average class size of 24.3:1, compared to OECD class size average at primary level of 21:1.

Budget 2020 introduced a one-point reduction in the staffing schedule in schools with up to four teachers, meaning that one less pupil is now required in these schools in order to retain or recruit a teacher.

Changes to the staffing schedule result in additional current expenditure in respect of teacher salaries and additional capital expenditure in respect of provision of classroom accommodation.

3.11.2. Teacher Supply Working Group

Management bodies and schools have, in recent years, reported difficulties in recruiting teachers. At primary level this relates mainly to the recruitment of substitute teachers and at post-primary to the recruitment of teachers of particular subjects (e.g. STEM, modern foreign languages, Irish, Home Economics) as well as substitute teachers.
The Steering Group on Teacher Supply was established in March 2018. The Steering Group is leading on the identification of the issues, the development of a programme of actions on teacher supply and the oversight of its implementation. An Implementation Group reports to the Steering Group. Its role is to identify issues that impact on teacher demand and supply and develop a programme of actions to address the issues identified. In turn, a number of working groups report to the Implementation Group in specific policy areas:

- Data Working Group: oversees the identification and analysis of data to support teacher workforce planning.
- Higher Education Working Group: considers higher education policy issues relevant to teacher demand and supply.
- Communications Working Group: focus is to promote the teaching profession and the development of an online teacher recruitment portal.
- Policies and Procedures Working Group: considers school and Department arrangements which that effects the demand for and supply of teachers.

**Teacher Supply Action Plan**
The Teacher Supply Action Plan was published in November 2018. The Plan contains a range of actions in four policy areas identified through the work of the Steering Group and engagement with stakeholders.

**Current position:**
A number of actions have been implemented in the various policy areas, including:

- In November 2019, the Department published a technical report Developing a Teacher Demand and Supply Model for Ireland 2020-2036, which provides demographic projections of teacher demand and supply to 2036. The intention is to establish a robust data based model for the effective projection of future teacher demand and supply across the school system.
- The “Teaching Transforms” campaign has been ongoing since late 2018 to promote the teaching profession using digital, radio and video media. It is supported by a dedicated webpage. The 2020 campaign is currently being rolled out in line with key dates in the educational calendar.
- Sub Seeker: A new central portal for short term substitute vacancies went live in December 2019. The new service is a central resource for schools and matches available teachers with short term substitute vacancies in both primary and post primary schools.
- In June 2019 the post primary school management bodies launched Turasabhalle.com, a portal designed to match teachers working abroad with vacancies in Irish schools.
- New initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in a number of priority subject areas were put in place by higher education institutions (HEIs) for September 2019.
Programmes included mathematics, modern foreign languages and Irish. More new undergraduate ITE programmes are also planned to commence in September 2020.

- Call for upskilling programmes: A HEA call to HEIs for programmes to upskill existing teachers in three targeted post primary subjects (mathematics, physics and Spanish) issued in December 2019. The intention is that the programmes will commence in 2020/21.

- Student Assistance Fund: Additional funding of €1m has been made available for Professional Master of Education students under the Student Assistance Fund.

- Substitute teacher supply panels for primary schools have been created on a pilot basis for the 2019/20 school year, in six locations based on these areas having the greatest challenge in terms of sourcing substitute teachers (two panels in Dublin and one each in Kildare, Meath, Cork and Galway).

- The Department published a Circular which provides for a new teacher sharing scheme for post-primary schools effective from September 2019. This scheme is intended to enhance curricular choices in schools and support teachers in obtaining full time employment.

- Teacher registration: The Teaching Council is developing more streamlined processes for the registration of teachers qualified in jurisdictions outside the State.

- Career break arrangements: For the 2018/19 and 2019/20 school years, restrictions on the number of days that teachers, on career break, may be employed were suspended.

Next steps:

These include:

- Publish an updated Action Plan to address ongoing challenges associated with demand for and supply of teachers.

- Conduct further data analysis, following from consultations with stakeholders, and publish an updated report on national projections of teacher demand and supply.

- Work with the HEA to ensure that upskilling programmes in targeted post-primary subjects are in place for 2020/21 and promote awareness of these programmes amongst teachers.

- Explore the provision of additional supports for postgraduate ITE students.

- Explore the development of an online recruitment portal for long term teaching vacancies.

- Consider removing the current restrictions on job-sharing teachers undertaking substitute work.

- Review arrangements for continuous professional development and State examination related employment in order to reduce their impact on class contact time.

- Review the operation of the pilot primary substitute teacher supply panel scheme to determine if it should continue in 2020/21.
3.12. National Development Plan (NDP) 2018 to 2027

3.12.1. School Capital Programme

The NDP 10 year capital plan amounts in total to €11.9 billion (€8.8 billion for the schools sector, including €420 million for the Digital Strategy for Schools, and €2.2 billion for higher education infrastructure). The key drivers of capital investment in the schools sector are as follows:

- Demographics - Primary level has peaked but regional variations (East/West divide) continues to drive requirement for additional provision; and the bulge in enrolments continues at post-primary with regional variations driving requirement for additional provision well into the future even after peak enrolment at national level;
- Number of teachers has increased by 11,576 over the last 8 years (Demographics will add to this, as will changes to the PTR. A 1 point change to the PTR is estimated to create 250-300 posts, which in turn triggers a need for extra classrooms at an estimated at a cost of €225,000 per classroom);
- The ramping up of housing provision which triggers a need for additional school provision;
- Cost of sites for new schools in city and urban areas;
- Catch-up on legacy of underinvestment;
- Cost pressures on Capital Budget reflecting increased construction costs including as a result of increased standards as part of the Climate Change Agenda and increased site costs in urban areas. These are challenges across all Departments who are responsible for delivering Infrastructure projects.

The Department has a large pipeline of projects for delivery under the school building programme currently involving 373 large-scale projects and circa. 800 projects for delivery under the Department’s Additional Accommodation Scheme. This pipeline will continue to be monitored to ensure it is aligned with Spending Code requirements and the objectives of Project Ireland 2040.

While good progress continues to be made with the rollout of projects, the enhanced funding levels envisaged under the National Development Plan period 2018 to 2027 will be key to ensuring the successful delivery of the remaining elements of the pipeline of projects during the NDP period.

The current status of projects being delivered is listed on a county by county basis on the Department’s website at www.education.ie and updated on a monthly basis to reflect their progress through the various stages of capital appraisal, site acquisition, design, tender and construction.
Since 2018 there has been in excess of €1.2bn invested in Capital Infrastructure under the School Building Programme. A further €620m is allocated for investment in 2020.

**Covid-19 – Projects in construction activity**

There were circa 200 projects on site in early 2020. In line with National Public Health announcements by Government, all construction sites in relation to the education sector ceased in March 2020 including in respect of the schools remediation programme. Since Monday 18th May, the construction sector has been re-opening on a gradual and phased basis. Contact has been made to all contractors by the Design Team and Contractors have to re-commence work.

It will take time to remobilise and see the impact of the new Covid-19 working arrangements. It is too early to quantify exactly the impacts on projects due to the pandemic and as a result of these new working arrangements. A clearer picture will emerge over the next few months as projects become fully re-mobilised and we gain an increased understanding of the operational impacts of implementing Public Health guidelines, in particular in relation to the social distancing rules. We will keep this under regular review. While the construction sites were closed, the pipeline of projects in design continued to be progressed in an online and remote working environment. The progression of this pipeline helped smooth the impact of Covid-19 on the overall rollout of Project Ireland 2040 within the education sector.

Planning and Building Unit is working closely with school authorities and patron bodies to ensure that contingencies arrangements are in place where necessary if a school building project is not completed in time for the start of new school year as a result of delays caused by Covid-19. This work is on-going and it is envisaged that all issues will be addressed prior to the start of the new school year.

**3.12.2. Remediation Programme**

The Department of Education and Skills initiated fire safety assessments across 58 school buildings in 2017. During the implementation of fire remediation works in Q4 of 2018, structural issues were identified in schools built by Western Building Systems (WBS).

Emergency structural assessment of 42 schools built by WBS were carried out and the subsequent implementation of temporary precautionary measures in 22 of these schools, with one school (Ardgillan CC, Phase 1) being partly closed.

Significant progress was made in 2019 and 2020 to date on the Schools Remediation Programme in respect of schools built by WBS and this facilitated work on precautionary measures being removed from 18 of the first 22 schools. Works continue to be carried out during 2020 on the remainder of these 22 schools and by the end of 2020 it is expected that planned structural remediation works will have been carried out in all of these schools. In
addition, the priority phase 1 fire remediation works will have been carried out across all 40 schools.

A procurement process is currently underway to appoint a contractor for the remaining 18 schools, including Ardgillan Community College. The first phase of the programme to remediate these schools is due to commence in Q1 2021 following the completion of that procurement process.

The cost of the schools remediation programme is being met from contingency provision within the capital budget and also from the Department's reduced funding requirement for the multi-annual capital development in TU Dublin Grangegorman following the sale of DIT, Kevin Street, the disposal of which raised €140m

Legal proceedings in relation to the structural deficiencies discovered in the schools built by Western Building Systems are on-going.

3.12.3. Retrofitting

The second half of the National Development Plan (from 2023 onwards) will see an increased focus on upgrade and refurbishment of the existing school stock. One of the strands of this upgrade and refurbishment programme will be the commencement and progression of a deep energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008. Briefing on this strand is at National Retrofit Programme for Schools in the earlier Climate Action chapter.

3.12.4. Ensuring sufficient school places are provided

In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, the Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, including Child Benefit Data from the Department of Social Protection and the Department’s own school enrolment databases, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, the Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

Information on school enrolments and Child Benefit data allows the Department to map where children are living or attending school and this information provides a degree of certainty in projecting demand in an area in future years. The Department’s analysis of overall requirements takes account of capacity and projections for individual school planning areas and adjoining school planning areas.

Major new residential developments in a school planning area have the potential to significantly alter demand (and timing of demand) in an area. In that regard, as part of the demographic exercises leading to the April 2018 New Schools Announcement, the
Department engaged with each of the local authorities to obtain up-to-date information on significant new residential development of 100 units or more. This process also factored in updates from local authorities in relation to where the combined impact of a number of smaller residential developments of under 100 units would in aggregate represent significant residential development. This approach was necessary to ensure that schools infrastructure planning aligned with the demographic changes in an area.

An updated national demographic analysis will be completed in Summer 2020. A number of measures have been taken to strengthen the quality of information feeding into the process.

Three initiatives are being introduced to strengthen the demographic analysis process since the April 2018 New Schools Announcement:

(i) enhancing our engagement with local authorities in relation to the information on residential development incorporated in the analysis process. As part of the current process, local authorities have been requested to provide more detailed information than heretofore, including a breakdown of residential units completed since 2018, construction underway, planning permissions granted and developments in pre-planning stage.

(ii) the Department having additional engagement with patron bodies in relation to their local knowledge on school place requirements. Education and Training Boards, Diocesan offices and national patron bodies such as Educate Together, An Foras Patrúnachta etc. can be an important source of local knowledge. This will add to information also provided to the Department by local authorities or individual schools.

(iii) the Department has put a structure and system in place for a national inventory of school capacity to be completed by individual schools. When schools are providing their annual 30 September enrolment returns to the Department in the Primary Online Database (POD) in respect of primary schools and Post-Primary Online Database (PPOD) in respect of post-primary schools they are now also requested to provide information in respect of overall demand for school places and available capacity within their schools.

The compilation and analysis of this information at local, regional and national level through the Department’s Geographic Information System (GIS) will be an important additional feature of the school planning process. This is the first year of this initiative and the approach taken will provide a cost effective and efficient method to the provision and analysis of up to date data in relation to demand and capacity across over 3,000 primary schools and over 750 post-primary schools.

As school authorities finalise their enrolments each year, issues can arise where primary school pupils are experiencing difficulties in a number of areas in securing a post-primary school place for the start of the new school year (September 2020). Where capacity is an issue the key points to be considered are:
• Duplication of applications – pupils have applied for a place to a number of schools in the area
• School of choice – pupils can’t get a place in their preferred school while there are places in other schools in the town/area
• Some towns/areas have single sex schools and while places are available in the school these are not available to all pupils
• External draw – pupils coming from outside the local area.

Where these issues exists, Department officials from the Planning and Building Unit engage with all relevant parties to resolve them. This process is currently ongoing at the moment with a view to ensuring every pupil has a school place for September 2020.

3.13. School Finance

3.13.1. Capitation Grants

The process of restoring capitation commenced at the start of the 2019/20 school year with a 5% increase applying at a cost of circa €4m in 2019 and €10m in 2020.

Restoring capitation funding to pre-2011 levels will cost an estimated €21 million, with additional cost in the ETB sector.

The Department published a Circular in 2017 with measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the cost of uniforms and other costs. It included principles of cost-effective practices to be adopted, including generic rather than branded items, use of sew-on or iron-on crests, and all elements of a uniform being available from various stores.

The Department provides a book grant to all recognised primary and post-primary schools within the Free Education Scheme in order to provide assistance for books including Book Rental Schemes.

3.13.2. Voluntary Contributions

Voluntary contributions can be sought from parents provided it is made clear that there is no compulsion to pay and that a child’s place in the school or continued enrolment is not dependent on a willingness to make a contribution.

Section 64 of the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018 explicitly prohibits the charging of fees for admission to or for continued enrolment in a school, with some exceptions such as boarding or fee-charging schools. Consequently, there is now a statutory provision that prohibits the charging of admission and enrolment fees.
The Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2018, states that schools will be required to provide information on how voluntary contributions are spent by the school.

3.14. DEIS

3.14.1. DEIS Review

With the exception of 79 schools added to the DEIS programme in 2017, schools were accorded DEIS status in 2006 based on largely subjective means at primary level including questionnaires completed by school principals on the socio-economic status of their school’s pupil cohort. The DEIS review process which was finalized in 2017 undertook a comprehensive examination of the options available to allow for the development of an improved methodology for the assessment of schools’ levels of disadvantage. The availability of the HP (Haase Pralischke) Deprivation Index provided a basis for developing a new and objective methodology for identifying schools for inclusion in DEIS.

Ireland is divided into approximately 18,600 small areas by the CSO, each including typically 120 dwellings and each area is assigned a HP deprivation index which serves as an indicator of relative affluence or deprivation. The HP index is based on the combination of three components of demographic profile, social class composition and labour market situation. DES’ enrolment databases (POD for primary and PPOD for post-primary) contain the address data of all pupils enrolled in schools. Using a combined approach of mapping Eircodes and/or manually geo-coding small area data, the DES can map a HP indicator to each individual pupil enrolled in primary and post-primary schools, based on school enrolment data. This results in a socio-economic profile of each school based on their student cohort and enables the relative level of concentrated disadvantage present in the pupil cohort of individual schools to be assessed.

An extensive process of data analysis and verification has been conducted based on the 2018 enrolment data, resulting in the refinement of the DEIS ID model. The first phase of consultation included a briefing with stakeholders on the technical aspects of the refined DEIS ID model. This was led by the Educational Research Centre and took place on 12 March 2020.
3.15. Education Welfare and School Completion Functions

The Taoiseach’s remarks in the Dail on June 27th included a reference to those functions relating to the educational welfare service and school completion programme transferring from the former Department of Children and Youth Affairs to the Department of Education. Previously, DCYA had policy responsibility for the implementation of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 which is operationalised by the Education Support Service of Tusla (TESS). It will need to be determined if the TESS will transfer fully to the Department.

_Tusla Education Support Service (TESS)_

TESS has three component programmes: The Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL), the Educational Welfare Services (EWS Statutory School Attendance Service) and the School Completion Programme (SCP). Together these three TESS strands work collaboratively with schools, families and other relevant services to achieve the best educational outcomes for children and young people. Tusla also has responsibility for the registration and assessment of home-schooling and non-recognised schools. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs had developed a Policy Blueprint which offers a platform for development of these areas over the period 2020-2023. It had been intended that the Blueprint would be launched in the coming months.

TESS has statutory responsibility under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 for ensuring that all children attend school regularly. Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) work with families and children to overcome barriers to their school attendance, participation and retention.

In DEIS schools where HSCLs are actively working to have parents involved directly in the school, consideration will need to be given to how parent activities can be managed safely within guidelines.
**TESS Specific Actions Planned to Support Educational Transitions and Return to School**

TESS is targeting cohorts particularly affected by Covid-19 to ensure that all support possible is provided for children and young people to engage and reengage with education. This includes those living in Direct Provision, children in DSGVB refuges, Travellers and Roma children.

### 3.16. Shared Services

In 2019 and in to 2020, the Department continued to support the implementation of priority projects developed under the Education and Training Sector Shared Services Plan 2017-2020. This includes a number of large scale projects service different parts of the sector.

#### 3.16.1. Shared Service payroll for ETB’s

A major undertaking is the planned consolidation of the individual payroll functions of all 16 ETBs to one shared pay centre, responsible for paying 27,000 ETB employees. This centre has been established at the Department’s Education Shared Business Services (ESBS) Centre in Blanchardstown, Dublin and is staffed by Departmental staff and ETB employees seconded to the project.

The business case for the establishment of the ESBS Centre and the introduction of ESBS ETB Payroll Shared Services estimated that the total cost of processing payroll was approximately €6.6 million per annum in ETBs, including staff costs, overheads and technology costs. The cost for implementing the shared payroll model is estimated at €16.5 million. When fully operational, it is envisaged that savings compared to existing annual costs
will be in the region of €1.8 million per annum and payback on the investment is expected in eight years from the full commencement.

In 2019, as part of a wave migration strategy, the ESBS operationalised payroll shared services for three ETBs: Dublin-Dún Laoghaire; Cavan-Monaghan; and Laois-Offaly ETBs. As of June 2020 an additional two ETBs, Louth-Meath, and Galway-Roscommon, have also migrated successfully to the shared service. Longford Westmeath and Tipperary are scheduled for later in the year. Processing of travel and subsistence is also being rolled out. By the end of 2020 7 ETB Payrolls (out of 16) and T&S functions for 6 ETBs will have been completed. The remaining 9 ETBs will be migrated in follow-on waves in 2021 and 2022.

3.16.2. Shared Service finance for ETB’s

A Financial Management Shared Service for the 16 ETBs is also being developed including a market strategy to procure and implement a new system to underpin this service.

3.16.3. School employees payroll shared service

Work continues on a project to acquire a preferred solution to upgrade the Department’s payroll function to shared service standards, and provide a secure modern system for over 120,000 payees. It is planned to issue a Request for Tender (RFT) market in Q1, 2021 for a replacement payroll and claims processing solution.

3.16.4. Procurement

In line with Government policy on centralised public procurement a business case setting out options for new procurement shared service arrangements for the education sector is being finalised with a view to implementation from late 2020.


The 2020 gross expenditure allocation for the Department of Education and Skills is over €11.1 billion. The current budget for 2020 is €10.3 billion, which represents around 16.5% of original Government current expenditure allocations. In addition to Voted expenditure, the Department’s current budget includes the non-Voted National Training Fund (€623 in 2020). The Department’s capital allocation in 2020 is €922 million. This represents around 11% of original gross voted capital expenditure allocations in 2020, the third largest allocation (after Housing and Transport). The Department is also forecast to receive around €435 million in Appropriation-in-Aid receipts which are offset against expenditure (these include superannuation contributions and EU funding, notably the European Social Fund).
The Covid-19 crisis has had a significant impact across the education and skills sector. Significant cost issues are likely to arise in relation to the re-opening of schools and colleges in August/September 2020 and possible future public health and social distancing requirements.

The Department is continuing to monitor the financial impacts of Covid-19 on its Vote and is liaising with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in this regard. The Covid-19 will also have a significant impact on the self-financing income for the third level sector, mainly due to a projected reduction in international students for the coming academic year.

The 2020 Estimates for the Vote, as set out in the Revised Estimates Volume (REV) are due to be taken by the Dáil before the summer recess and it is likely therefore that the Minister will be required to appear before the Education Select Committee in July to discuss the Department’s 2020 Estimates. It is likely that the full financial impacts of Covid-19 will not be identified and costed until later in the year and the related funding requirements for this year will need to be addressed at a later stage as part of the Supplementary Estimates process (usually in October/November).

In the last three years a number of DES Spending Reviews have been carried out by, and in co-operation with, the DPER focusing on key expenditure areas and areas where substantial expenditure increases have arisen. This includes Reviews of the areas listed below that continue to exert expenditure pressures on existing allocations and will be subject to further examination and reviews during 2020.

- Pay Expenditure Drivers at Primary and Second Level,
- Understanding the Funding Needs of the Third Level Sector,
- School Transport Expenditure, and,
- Special Education Needs Provision and Outcomes.

Pension expenditure is another area that has resulted in particular pressures over the last number of years. Notwithstanding additional resources being provided in recent years, it is expected that expenditure pressures in this area will continue to increase for the foreseeable future.

**Next Steps**

In additional to the approval of the 2020 REV by the Dáil planned for July, there is a need for continuous engagement with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on expenditure management throughout the remainder of 2020, and for ongoing consideration of available options to manage any significant expenditure divergences from profile to a degree which increases the risk of an unsanctioned expenditure excess at Vote level.

The monitoring of the Department's overall budgets throughout 2020 will determine whether any additional actions are necessary to ensure prudent budget management.
3.18. Redress

3.18.1. Day School Sexual Abuse (Louise O'Keeffe Type Cases)

Louise O'Keeffe was sexually abused by her school principal when attending primary school in the early 1970s. The domestic Courts up to and including the Supreme Court found that the state had no liability for day school abuse as it was not the owner or manager of the schools and, while it paid school teachers, it did not employ them. Ms O'Keeffe brought proceedings against Ireland before the European Court of Human Rights claiming violations of various Articles.

In its 2014 Judgment, the Grand Chamber determined that there had been a violation of Articles 3 and 13 of the Convention. On foot of the judgement, the Department put in place (in 2015 on an administrative basis) an ex gratia scheme managed by the State Claims Agency. The criteria for admission was:

- They had instituted legal proceedings against the Minister for Education in respect of school child sexual abuse and that those proceedings were not barred under the Statute of Limitations prior to their being discontinued; and
- They were sexually abused while at school by a primary or post-primary school employee in respect of whom there was a prior complaint of sexual abuse to the school authority (or a school authority in which the employee had previously worked) prior to the issue of the Department of Education child protection guidelines to primary and post-primary schools in 1991/92.

The State subsequently appointed an Independent Assessor, Mr Justice l Sarah O'Neill, who would assess cases where people who applied for the ex gratia scheme were declined by the State Claims Agency. Of the 19 cases referred to him for an assessment, Mr Justice O'Neill concluded that 13 were entitled to a payment from the ex gratia scheme. The applications were originally declined because they failed to furnish evidence of a prior complaint. Mr Justice O'Neill, in his determination, considered that the prior complaint condition was not compatible with a correct implementation of the judgement of the ECtHR. Following the determination of the Assessor 16 offers of payment have been made and, to date, 8 have been accepted.

Survivors of Day School Abuse are pursuing cases through the civil Courts and are regularly receiving settlements, either through the Courts or on an out of court basis. To an extent, the judgments have been secured against the actual abuser and/or the school management/patron. In the latter case these have generally been religious congregations. Efforts are regularly made to join the State in these cases.
3.19. Irish Medium & Gaeltacht provision

3.19.1. Gaeltacht Provision

The overarching goal of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 is to support the use of Irish as the main language of Gaeltacht communities through the provision of high quality Irish-medium education in schools located in Gaeltacht areas. Under the policy a range of additional supports have been provided to schools that have opted to participate in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme.

An Chomhaidé um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoileachta (COGG), a Department agency, whose remit includes facilitation of research and provision of teaching resources and support services for Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools, has been assigned a central role in supporting the implementation of the Policy.

Schools in Gaeltacht areas must apply for recognition under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme and must demonstrate that they are participating in the language-planning processes provided for under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012 and are implementing specific language-based criteria. Schools cannot achieve this recognition on the basis of geographical location alone.

All (100%) Gaeltacht post-primary schools and 79% of Gaeltacht primary schools are participating in the Scheme. Schools admitted to the scheme qualify for additional supports such as grants for the purchase of Irish-medium teaching resources, additional support teaching hours and Continuing Professional Development.

3.19.2. Increasing the supply of teachers who can deliver high quality Irish medium education.

A key aim of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 is to increase the supply of teachers who can deliver high quality Irish-medium education in primary and post-primary schools. The Department awarded contracts to Marino Institute of Education and Mary Immaculate College in 2018 for the design and delivery of two new Irish-medium teacher education programmes to provide up to 60 new places funded annually for the duration of the contracts.

Two additional teaching posts have also been provided to the Máistir Gaímiúil san Oldeachas (MG/P/M Professional Masters of Education) at NUI, Galway, which is a recognised full-time two-year Irish-medium initial teacher education qualification to become a post-primary teacher.
Gaeltacht Placement: Restoration of Grant
The Gaeltacht Placement is a compulsory part of all Primary ITE Programmes. All students are required to attend two residential placements in the Gaeltacht of two weeks (4 weeks in total).

A grant which had been available for all students in State funded institutions, to cover the costs of the Gaeltacht Placement, ceased for new entrants from the 2012/2013 academic year. Budget 2020 restored this Gaeltacht grant for all students (undergraduate and postgraduate) in State-funded primary ITE programmes with effect from the academic year 2020/2021.

Work on updating the scheme to reintroduce the grant is underway and consultation on this will commence in early 2020. The revised scheme will be submitted to the Minister for approval, before the roll-out commences. Restoring this grant will cost an estimated €1.8 million annually.

3.19.3. 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language
The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG) published the 20 year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2020 in December 2010. Its aim is to increase on an incremental basis, the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language and to ensure that as many people as possible are bilingual in both Irish and English. It subsequently published the 5 year Action Plan 2018 – 2022 setting out the actions required to meet its objectives.

Education makes up Chapter 1 of the Strategy and the Action Plan includes 48 actions for DES in the areas of: Education in the Gaeltacht, Partial Immersion, Curriculum, Assessment, Teacher Training, Development and Provision of Resources, School Provision and Supply of Teachers for Irish-Medium Education Out of School usage of Irish, Early Years Education and Higher Education.

Implementation of these actions include:

- Year 1 of a 3 year pilot project on introducing a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach to teaching and learning Irish in English-medium Early Years Settings, Primary and Post-primary schools. This project has been extended by a year owing to the Covid-19 school closures. With implementation of the pilot in Early Years settings and schools beginning in the 20/21 school year.
- Revised circulars on Exemptions from the Study of Irish for recognized primary and post-primary schools were published in September 2019 bringing the circulars up to date with other Department policies and understanding of SEN.
- Revised specifications for Senior Cycle Irish
Further exploration of opportunities to acquire a programme for English-medium schools to support the Primary Languages Curriculum. Acquiring a new programme is essential to support the teaching and learning of Irish.

In addition, a review of the implementation and operation of the circulars on Exemptions from the Study of Irish will be carried out two years after implementation. Work will also continue to find a means of developing/acquiring a new programme to support the teaching and learning of Irish.

3.19.4. Development of an Irish-Medium Education Policy

Plans to develop a new policy for Irish-medium education were announced in December 2019. This new policy will provide a framework for the delivery of high quality Irish-medium education in Irish-medium schools and early-years settings outside the Gaeltacht. The policy will build on the Policy on Gaeltacht Education and will take account of experience in the implementation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme.

The work will be informed by national and international research into good practice in other countries or jurisdictions, such as Wales or Quebec, and will also take account of existing good practice already being implemented across the Irish-medium sector.

Initial investigations have been carried out in relation to the additional resources, including staffing, which will be required to support the development of this new policy. A consultation phase, including the organisation of a stakeholder consultative seminar will be organised in 2020.

3.19.5. Creating opportunities for Irish-medium education (outside the Gaeltacht)

In developing the Irish medium education policy, one of the aspects to be examined is having a clear policy on the establishment of Aonaid in existing schools and also the establishment of new gaelscóileanna, gaelcholáistí and Aonaid as part of the patronage process. The Department has committed to creating opportunities for expanding Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht in the context of the establishment of 45 new schools from 2019 to 2022.

The Online Patronage Process System (OPPS), which provides objective information and allows parents to express their preferences in relation to the patronage and language of instruction, i.e. Irish or English, of these new schools. Parental preferences, as well as other considerations such as the extent of diversity of provision in an area (including Irish-medium provision), are key to the decision-making process and to whether at primary level a school will take the form of an Irish-medium Gaeilseoil or an English-medium school or at post-primary level whether a school would take the form of an Irish-medium Gaeilcoiliste or whether, if English-medium, the school would include an Irish-medium unit or "Aonad".
Developments at primary level

There have been significant developments in relation to Irish-medium provision at primary level. On 3 September last, measures were announced to increase access to Irish-medium education as part of the patronage process, including that five new primary schools being established from 2020-2022 are being designated for Irish-medium education. This step is part of a framework which includes:

- Designating the language of a new primary school as Irish in some circumstances;
- Testing (on a pilot basis) the potential to cater for demand for English and Irish medium provision through, for example, delivering two 8-classroom primary schools (one English-medium and one Irish-medium) in a shared building/campus rather than delivering one 16-classroom primary school, subject to factors such as demand and site conditions;
- Exploring the potential to expand existing Irish-medium primary schools to meet unmet demand in an area;
- Providing opportunities for patrons of existing primary schools to change the language of instruction from English to Irish, such as is envisaged as part of the Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process.


The NCCA has commenced the development of L1 and L2 (Language 1 and Language 2, or Teanga 1 and Teanga 2) specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish. This new model of curricular provision for Irish builds on the model of Irish language curricular provision in Junior Cycle. The draft specifications are due to go to consultation in the coming months. There is significant interest among the Irish language community and wider groups in this work and on curriculum matters regarding Irish in general.

3.19.7. Differences in capitation grant for schools located within Gaeltacht areas

The Department has recently received a number of requests seeking an increase in the capitation rate in Gaeltacht schools. The increase in the capitation rate is being requested in the context of the additional capitation rate which is being received by Irish-medium primary schools located outside of the Gaeltacht.

Currently Gaelscolleanna located outside of the Gaeltacht receive additional capitation at a rate of €23.00 per pupil. This was put in place to provide an extra incentive for Irish-medium schools to promote the use of the Irish language in areas outside of the Gaeltacht. The additional capitation grant being received by primary schools located outside of the Gaeltacht is significantly less than the additional resources being provided to schools in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme (GSRS).
3.20. Co-construction and collaboration in school evaluation

3.20.1. Approach to inspection

The Department’s Inspectorate has adopted a strongly collaborative and co-professional approach to evaluation in early years settings and schools. This approach has eschewed the publication of league tables of schools: while inspection reports have been published, the emphasis has been on encouraging self-evaluation and development in schools and adopting an improvement-focussed approach during inspections. Ireland has contributed to the international thinking about this approach to evaluation and school improvement, and the Inspectorate has been asked to contribute to the professional development of inspectors in a number of countries.

School and setting self-evaluation have been encouraged through the publication of inspection frameworks – Looking at Our School (for primary and post-primary schools) and an Early Years Inspection Framework. These have been supported by the provision of workshops directly by the Inspectorate and in association with the Professional Development Service for Teachers and the Junior Cycle for Teachers support services.

Inspection models and practice have been developed so that a range of inspection approaches – ranging from very short to longer and more intensive inspection models – is available for use. This means that inspection may be focussed where it is most beneficial. A wide range of data is used to inform the evaluation of schools, including student, parent and teacher surveys; interviews and focus groups with parents, students and teachers; documentary evidence; and most importantly of all, extensive classroom observation and engagement with learners.

3.20.2. Forthcoming developments in 2020/21

Focus on advisory work to support settings and schools in the return to schooling and early years education and care

The Inspectorate has decided to adjust its inspection and advisory work in schools in the 2020/21 school year in light of the challenges facing schools and settings as they reopen. Schools and settings have been informed that the normal programme of inspection will not take place in Term 1 of the new school year; that engagement with settings and schools will focus on identifying and disseminating examples of good practice of schools and settings responding to the new challenges facing them and their learners; and that only a small number of urgent inspections will take place in Term 1. It is envisaged that advisory and support work
will continue during Term 2 and Term 3 and that the normal programme of inspection will be built up gradually after 1 January 2021, subject to health advice.

Development Education-focused inspections for the 0-6 years group in ELC settings

At the invitation of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), the Inspectorate carries out Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) in ELC settings availing of state funding. In 2018, DCYA asked the DES Inspectorate to consider extension of the EYEI model of inspection to include state funded early years provision for children aged 0-3 years. This is included as a key action in First Five: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families.

Research and development work is underway to facilitate extension of inspection to provision for children aged 0-6 years. As this is the first time that the Department of Education and Skills will have oversight of state funded provision for learning for children from 0 - 3 years, this is likely to attract significant interest.

3.20.3. Evaluation of Provision at Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROC)

The Department funds schooling provision for children resident at Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs). The Inspectorate and NEPS conducted joint visits to three EROCs in late 2017. Following the visits, a report was prepared and presented to the Department’s Management Board. An MoU has been agreed with the Department of Justice and Equality which will facilitate further inspection work in these centres. This work is expected to commence in 2021.

*Improving engagement with parents and students in inspections*

The Inspectorate has been innovative in the ways it collected and used information on the views of parents and students in evaluations. These processes are currently being reviewed with the assistance of an external consultant in order to improve the ways in which the Inspectorate engages with parents and learners before, during and after inspection. The Inspectorate has trialed new ways of providing students with information about inspection before an inspection takes place and is currently developing its approaches to engaging with learners and parents during inspection. Elements of these will be introduced in the current school year.

3.20.4. Co-constructing school evaluation

The Inspectorate has been extending the ways in which it engages with education stakeholders in the development of inspection practices. Recently, it has moved to adopt a co-constructive approach, where inspectors and school leaders collaborate in the design, trialing and refinement of inspection approaches. This was used most recently in the
development of Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections which were developed in conjunction with schools and supported by an extensive programme of inspector-led workshops for all school leaders.

In March 2020, the Inspectorate was preparing to adopt a similar approach to co-develop and approach to school inspection in which schools would propose aspects of their self-evaluation work for inspection, the evaluation team would involve both inspectors and the school principal or another senior teacher, and the inspection report would be used to inform school improvement work. A number of schools had indicated an interest in becoming involved and it was planned to commence the work in the 2020/21 school year. This work has been delayed but it is envisaged that co-construction work to create Collaborative School Evaluation will form part of the Inspectorate strategy over the coming years. It is hoped that early work will commence in Q2 or Q3 of 2021.

**Promoting and fostering excellence**
In addition to setting standards and promoting their use as outlined above, the Inspectorate continues to develop new ways of working with schools and settings. It works with a number of schools in excellence and improvement visits to challenge and support school leaders and teachers in their efforts to develop innovative approaches and to improve standards. This work supports the implementation of the School Excellence Fund, the revised DEIS Policy and the Policy on Gaeltacht Education. It is intended to commence the review the operation of these schemes in 2020/21.

**Education for sustainable development (ESD)**
The Inspectorate is developing its evaluation models and processes to enhance the way in which it inspects, supports and reports on ESD in settings and schools. It is also looking at how schools can be supported to use school self-evaluation (SSE) to examine their own provision for ESD. The Inspectorate is contributing to the Department's Strategy for ESD 2020 – 2030, which is being developed by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit. The implementation of ESD in schools will be a focus on evaluation work when inspections recommence in Q1 and Q2, 2021.

**Improving the use of data on schools to support both inspections and self-evaluations**
While there is a considerable amount of information available on schools and settings and on the educational outcomes for learners, the Inspectorate aims to make this information more readily available to inspectors and schools so that inspection and self-evaluation can be better informed and more context-sensitive. A key task for the Inspectorate will be to work with other sections of the Department and with the Educational Research Centre to develop better ways to make available this information in meaningful ways to inspectors, schools and settings.

The Programme for Government 2020 – 2025 Our Shared Future contains a range of commitments on which the Department of Education and Skills will lead. Whilst it is expected that the Department of the Taoiseach will set out for Departments the commitments on which they will report the following sets out in a thematic way the principal commitments arising.

4.1. NEW STRUCTURES (SPECIFIC TO DES)

- Establish a Citizens’ Assembly on the Future of Education at primary and second level
- Establish a new Education Research and Policy Section within the Department.
- Cabinet Committee on Education
- Provide greater integration of the advisory service of the Schools’ Inspectorate with supports such as continuous professional development (CPD), leadership development and specialist support services (e.g. NEPS, NCSE).
- Audit and inventory of all school buildings, infrastructure and facilities,
- Review of school forward planning policy,
- Database of all school admissions policies.

4.2. STRATEGIES AND COMMITMENTS (SCHOOLS)

*Curriculum and school level initiatives*

- General: Continue to review and reform primary and post-primary curriculums. Continue to review and reform the teaching and learning of Irish
- Digital: Develop and embed a Digital Education Strategy, use the Digital Education Strategy to engage pupils and students in structuring their learning
- Literacy & Numeracy: New literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategy to support learners and develop.
- RSE/SPHE: Develop inclusive and age appropriate RSE and SPHE curricula for primary and post-primary. Ensure a curriculum of multiple religious beliefs and ethics in all primary schools. Establish a new Primary School Healthy Eating education programme.
- Gaeilge: Increase the emphasis on spoken Irish in the classroom. Provide a comprehensive policy for the Irish language from pre-primary education to teacher education for all schools. Increase supports to COGG. Develop an Irish Cultural Studies JC short course and expand the CLIL PE programme. Create an Irish language education School Excellence Fund.
- Modern languages: Develop a new modern languages in Primary School Initiative
• **Creativity:** Expand Creative Schools, and ensure it continues beyond the life of Creative Ireland.

• **Legislation:** Enact the Student and Parent Charter Bill.

• **Schools excellence and innovation:** Technical Support Service Teams to enable innovation in schools and clusters of schools. Increase funding to the Digital, STEM and Creative and other School Excellence Funds.

• **Gifted students:** support gifted and talented students.

**Inclusion**

• **SEN:** SEN students get the right assistance at the right time. Support continued investment in SNAs, ensure appropriate school places, further progress the move towards a needs-based, responsive set of state supports and expand early intervention teams over the next five years.

• **DEIS:** Complete the new DEIS identification model.

• **Traveller issues:** Develop a National Traveller Education Strategy

• **Other inclusion issues:** Additional supports for students who are homeless, resident in family hubs, or in direct provision, resourcing for EAL students. Independent assessment of the pilot projects aimed at retaining Traveller and Roma children in education

• **Reduced timetables:** only to be used in limited, appropriate and absolutely necessary ways.

**Early years**

• **AIM:** Fully implement the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) that helps children with additional needs access early education and care settings.

**Teachers and Teacher education**

• **ITE/CPD:** review the provision, content and delivery of teacher education and professional development.

• **ITE:** Publish an evidence-based national policy on ITE encouraging further access to teaching from people from minority backgrounds, introduce a positive action programme to overcome barriers and increase the number of teachers from our migrant communities.

• **New graduates:** ensure all graduating teachers maintain high levels of pedagogical and content knowledge.

• **School leadership:** Innovative measures to support school leadership and the quality of teaching.

• **Teacher evaluation:** Teachers to develop their own self-evaluation plan, with CPD to support distance and blended learning.

• **Teacher supply:** a targeted government scholarship scheme to focus on encouraging graduates into subject areas where there is a shortage of post-primary teachers.
Diversity, patronage, communities

- **School choice**: achieve the target of at least 400 multi-denominational primary schools by 2030, expand and prioritise the transfer of viable schools to Community National Schools. Work with communities to ensure the provision of clear, non-partisan information on the preparation for, and the consequences of, the divestment process. Provide Gaelscoileanna and Gaelscoláiste where there is strong demand - aim to double student numbers in Irish medium schools.
- **Small schools**: Recognise the importance of small schools to communities across Ireland.

School costs

- **Schoolbooks**: free schoolbooks pilot in September 2020, emphasise the rental and reuse of books and discourage the use of workbooks.
- **Costs**: Provide clear guidelines to schools on cost effective and sustainable practices to decrease school books, uniforms, IT and sport equipment costs.

Funding

- **Minor Works**: Place the Minor Works Grant on a permanent footing, build and modernise PE and school sport facilities, audit and inventory of all school buildings, infrastructure and facilities.
- **PTR**: Reduce pupil teacher ratios in primary schools.
- **Capitation**: Seek to increase the capitation grant with a view to reducing the reliance on voluntary contributions made to schools.

School re-opening

- Students and parents included in re-opening plans, schools have time to implement required changes, and prepare detailed contingency plans for further potential school closures.
- Enable schools, workplaces and other institutions to stagger opening and closing times.
4.3. GOVERNMENT CO-ORDINATION AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM

- **Departmental structures**: Strategic Policy Unit in each Department (Policy and Research Unit in Education Chapter)
- **Innovation**: Policy innovation office to take a challenge based approach to major issues
- **Social dialogue**: Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach to coordinate social dialogues and create new models of sectoral engagement.
- **Digital public services**: Create a single digital unit in Government to drive more public services online.
- **Government Departments**: Reconfiguration of Government Department to ensure greater policy coherence, programme implementation and a fair division of labour and responsibilities.
- **Budget**: New set of indicators to measure performance and inform policymaking, wellbeing indices and balanced scorecard for each area of public policy measuring outcomes and impacts - focus on housing, education and health - group led by Taoiseach's - will be used to set budgetary priorities, evaluate programmes and report progress. Improve budgeting for demographic-related costs. Each minister will be required to produce service improvement and reform plans in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Systematic programme reviews focused on SMART performance indicators. More open budgetary process focused on policy goals and proven policy performance
- **Home-working**: 20% home and remote working in 2021.
- **Plain language requirements
- **Recruitment and development**: Work with the public service to promote structures for talent development and further encourage the recruitment of talent from outside. Targets to increase the proportion of public and civil servants from ethnic minority backgrounds. Paid internship programme within government departments, targeted at migrant communities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

*Cross-Government*: Prioritise cross-public service collaboration to enhance the whole of government strategic ownership and delivery of public policy priorities.