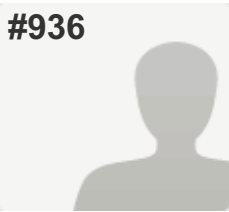


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Collector: Web Link 1 (Web Link)

Started: Wednesday, June 08, 2016 8:57:58 AM

Last Modified: Wednesday, June 08, 2016 1:19:42 PM

Time Spent: 04:21:43

IP Address: 86.45.18.150

PAGE 1: Please complete this consultation paper in respect of your area of interest and/or expertise

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Q4: 1(a) What improvements can be made within existing resources

1. An integrated public policy approach, involving the range of government departments
2. A strategy of equality proofing all budgetary policies and initiatives.
3. Address social class inequalities – these are closely linked to educational inequalities.
4. Address barriers to school completion for pupils with disabilities/SEN, such as bullying and/or disengagement from school. (Please note that bullying is still a major problem for LGBTI pupils and the anti-bullying policy of the DES is a very welcome resource).
5. Publish and implement the NCSE evidence-based advisory document on autism submitted to the DES in September 2015.
6. Require and support schools to incorporate ethnic diversity issues, anti-racism and inter-culturalism in all school plans.
7. Support schools to implement equitable access to schools for pupils of all religions and none.
8. Increase the proportion of multi-denominational and non-denominational schools.
9. In order to provide evidence- and research-based advice to the Minister, re-establish the Educational Disadvantage Committee, established by statute in the 1998 Education Act and left dormant since 2005. Ensure the Committee is comprised of representatives of the relevant government departments (e.g. Education & Skills, Health, Children, Social Protection, Justice), the Human Rights and Equality Commission, people with expertise in the field of equality and education, educational researchers, education partner representatives (e.g. teacher unions, management bodies) and other relevant personnel.

Q5: 1(b) What improvements can be made through new provision

1. Radically reduce child poverty – the proportion of children living in consistent poverty in Ireland almost doubled between 2008 and 2014 from 6.3% - 11.2%. This will require a cross-Governmental multi-faceted approach, as pledged in Better Outcomes, Better Futures.
 2. Further develop and increase investment in high quality and quality assured early childhood education for children, especially for disadvantaged children and those with disabilities/special educational needs. Such increased investment should aim to ensure improved employment for staff and a minimum Level 6 qualification for all staff and a Level 8 qualification for early childhood education centre leaders.
 3. Increase therapeutic supports for children with disabilities/SEN (especially speech and language and occupational therapies and psychological services).
 4. Broaden the school curriculum at Junior Cycle to include the introduction of a Level 2 award to enhance the experience of pupils with SEN for whom the traditional Junior Certificate is unsuitable.
 5. Restore support systems for Traveller and Roma pupils (including the Visiting Teacher service). Although just 13% of Traveller children complete secondary education in comparison with 92% of the general population, in the period 2008-2013 Traveller specific educational supports were cut by almost 87%.
 6. Provide additional support supports for pupils in direct provision and for other categories of immigrant children, especially for those who do not have English as a first language.
 7. Provide CPD on inter-culturalism, anti-racism and teaching English as an additional language for teachers
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Q6: 2. Comment on work currently being undertaken by the Department in your area of interest and/or expertise. (What are we doing well, what could we do better)?

In spite of severe cutbacks over the past years the Department, in collaboration with the NCSE, has protected, researched and developed the area of education for children with disabilities/SEN. In the 2013-2014 school year the DES/NCSE enabled over 45,700 students with special educational needs to receive additional teaching in mainstream schools. In addition, there were 737 special classes in mainstream schools with 4,997 places and an additional 7,500 pupils enrolled in special schools. By 2015/16 there are 11,820 special needs assistants, compared to less than 300 in the late 1990s, and some 6,832 resource teachers, many of whom work alongside the mainstream teacher. This represents substantial progress. Nevertheless, there are still outstanding problems to be addressed, as recent research has illustrated. Many of these problems arise from difficulties in the provision of therapeutic support services such as speech and language therapy and occupational therapy (funded by the HSE). Other problems arise from difficulties regarding assessment and diagnosis. These, it is hoped, will be addressed when the new resource allocation model is rolled out to all schools. However, a substantial expansion of the NEPS service is necessary for school supports in a fully inclusive service for pupils with disabilities/SEN.

The expansion of the early years education service and the introduction of inspection/quality assurance is very welcome indeed and excellent groundwork is under way. The international evidence of the importance of early years education for typically developing children and for those with SEN is absolutely compelling, as it is for children who are disadvantaged for any reason - e.g. by reason of social class, ethnicity, linguistic background, membership of the Traveller/Roma communities, immigrant status or any other reason. Thus, as indicated in my previous comment, substantial investment in early years will yield impressive and important dividends for Irish society.

New developments in teacher education at initial, induction and in-career levels are extremely welcome and place Ireland very favourably in international terms, regarding the quality of new entrants to the profession. However, the early years of the teaching career are urgently in need of reform. Already we are losing highly trained and competent teachers to other jurisdictions, representing a substantial loss to Irish society and Irish tax-payers. The pay differential between new and longer established teachers introduced as an emergency measure is both unjust and unsustainable and must be removed. The qualification allowances should be restored as these directly relate to professional practice. The extension of initial teacher education (which I fully and whole-heartedly support) demands that there be financial support for students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds in order to increase diversity in the profession.

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Q7: 3. Are there opportunities (e.g. new areas of work) which the Department should consider when developing the 2016 - 2018 strategy which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the continuum of education and skills?

As suggested in my response to Question 1, there needs to be equality proofing of all initiatives, with an urgent need for a focus and substantially increased resourcing for the support of pupils who are seriously marginalised such as children living in poverty, or who are homeless, who are Traveller or Roma, who are in direct provision, or are immigrant.

The goals and initiatives in the Department's strategy paper are admirable. While accepting that resources are always restricted, it is worth reminding ourselves that, as Ireland emerges from the shadow of the recent recession the need for social, cultural and economic development is very clear. Education is central to this. Evidence from across the world shows that more equal societies provide better outcomes for their citizens. Education is a core mechanism for the advancement of equality (or its opposite). Equality is also closely linked to quality in modern educational systems. It is therefore essential, if the Government is to deliver on its eight areas of priority, that equality in education becomes a central focus. For the Department's 2016-18 Strategy to be delivered the resources must be provided. The social and cultural returns will be significant but so too will be the economic returns. There is, in this way, a historic opportunity to make a radical difference to Irish society.

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Q8: 4. How should success on achieving our strategies be measured.

There are a range of measures. These include participation and completion rates for different groups, measures of literacy and numeracy, measures of health and well-being, measures of employment and innovation, measures of social cohesion, indicators of creativity, and many more.

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Q9: 5. Comment on any issues relating to the continuum of education and skills, in addition to your particular area of interest and/or expertise

Life-long learning is a desirable and essential goal. It is essential that this goal embraces ambitions for all groups and incorporates adult and community education for disadvantaged people and communities and is inclusive of people with intellectual and other disabilities.

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Q10: 6. Any other observations that you would suggest the Department should consider in the formulation of our strategy for education and skills 2016 - 2018

Respondent skipped this question

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Q11: 1(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

I have already commented on early years education. I repeat, the sector needs serious investment and reform in order to bring us into line with international best practice (as, for example, in the Nordic countries). Current employment conditions are unsustainable. Enhanced qualifications and support for existing practitioners to achieve them must form part of the mix. The quality assurance already under way should be further developed as quickly as feasible.

I am aware that such increased investment in early years and other areas of education will involve substantial additional allocations to education, which can only be achieved through increased taxation (progressive, not regressive). This issue cannot be dodged and the public need to be prepared for this in a careful and measured way. In the end, it is about the kind of society we want for ourselves and our children.

Q12: 1(b) How should progress on Prioritising Early Years be measured?

It can be measured in terms of participation rates, learning outcomes, improvements in literacy and numeracy, completion rates further up the system, social indicators such as employment rates, reduced problems in adolescence, - international research will validate this. In addition, the proportion of education budgets allocated to it is a measure.

Q13: 1(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Already indicated

Q14: 2(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The strategies are admirable as set out. Educational disadvantage may arise for many reasons - social class, disability, ethnic minority or immigrant status and so on. I have already commented but I repeat:

1. An integrated public policy approach, involving the range of government departments
2. A strategy of equality proofing all budgetary policies and initiatives.
3. Radically reduce child poverty – the proportion of children living in consistent poverty in Ireland almost doubled between 2008 and 2014 from 6.3% - 11.2%. This will require a cross-Governmental multi-faceted approach, as pledged in Better Outcomes, Better Futures.
4. Address social class inequalities – these are closely linked to educational inequalities, bearing in mind that certain areas have high levels of social class disadvantage and require intensive resourcing, but that disadvantaged children may be found in many non designated schools.
5. Restore support systems for Traveller and Roma pupils (including the Visiting Teacher service). Although just 13% of Traveller children complete secondary education in comparison with 92% of the general population, in the period 2008-2013 Traveller specific educational supports were cut by almost 87%.
6. Provide additional support supports for pupils in direct provision and for other categories of immigrant children, especially for those who do not have English as a first language.
7. Provide CPD on inter-culturalism, anti-racism and teaching English as an additional language for teachers.
8. Support schools to incorporate ethnic diversity issues, anti-racism and inter-culturalism in all school plans.
9. Continue to develop and increase investment in high quality and quality assured early childhood education for children, especially for disadvantaged children and those with disabilities/special educational needs. Such increased investment should aim to ensure improved employment for staff and a minimum Level 6 qualification for all staff and a Level 8 qualification for early childhood education centre leaders.
10. Increase therapeutic supports for children with disabilities/SEN (especially speech and language and occupational therapies and psychological services).
11. Address barriers to school completion for pupils with disabilities/SEN, such as bullying and/or disengagement from school. (Please note that bullying is still a major problem for LGBTI pupils and the anti-bullying policy of the DES is a very welcome resource).
12. In order to provide evidence- and research-based advice to the Minister, re-establish the Educational Disadvantage Committee, established by statute in the 1998 Education Act and left dormant since 2005. Ensure the Committee is comprised of representatives of the relevant government departments (e.g. Education & Skills, Health, Children, Social Protection, Justice), the Human Rights and Equality Commission, people with expertise in the field of equality and education, educational researchers, education partner representatives (e.g. teacher unions, management bodies) and other relevant bodies.

Q15: 2(b) How should progress on Tackling Disadvantaged be measured?

Through participation and completion rates for different groups, through Inspectors' reports and through research.

Q16: 2(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

They are indicated in 2a

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Q17: 3(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

There have been very rapid changes in Irish society regarding religious affiliation, with a substantial increase in religious diversity and also in the proportion with no religious affiliation. The U.N. Human Rights Committee, as part of the periodic reporting mechanism, has been very critical of Ireland's response to these changes in the area of education on four occasions. This Committee has recommended that Irish schooling should be re-structured in order to protect freedom of religion and non-discrimination and that more non-denominational schools should exist throughout the country. Progress has been extremely slow in this regard. In the light of this, the ambition to have 400 multi-denominational and non-denominational schools by 2030 seems extremely modest.

Q18: 3(b) How should progress on Diversity and Choice for Parents be measured?

Respondent skipped this question

Q19: 3(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

The churches as well as the DES have a real responsibility here. Creative and generous approaches are essential. Further discussion and initiatives will be required. In the difficult resource framework, divestment is the obvious option, although new schools will also need to be built. More ambitious targets will be required.

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Q20: 4(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

My main comment on this section relates to teachers. The ambition to invest in continuing professional development for teachers is very appropriate and is in line with best international practice. In my view, CPD for teachers should be a mandatory element for registration with the Council, as is the case for other professions. Together with developments in initial teacher education it is one of the most important ways to achieve school improvement. Furthermore, a preparation course for new principals should be mandatory. However, leadership CPD should be both extensive and directed to school principals but also to all teachers, so that leadership for learning becomes a key element of distributed leadership in schools. While many forms of CPD will be relevant, including CPD within schools, the contribution of the universities to CPD through accredited programmes will continue to be a very important element.

Q21: 4(b) How should progress on Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools be measured?

Through measures of quality assurance and participation rates, though school self-evaluation and through the work and reports of the Inspectorate.

Q22: 4(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Ensuring every school has good broadband and that all teachers are sufficiently trained to use ICT would be a good start to the digital strategy as well as enabling other aspects of the Promoting Excellence strategy to be delivered.

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Q23: 5(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The emphasis on the Arts is very welcome. The Arts foster creativity and also entrepreneurship and are essential in transmitting and creating cultural values, but are also vital to our economy. Mention is also made of mental health awareness and this is also welcome. The addition of P.E. to the Leaving Certificate is a long awaited development. It is not very clear what is meant by 'enhancing' guidance counselling.

STEM subjects also form part of the Programme and there is by now a general awareness of the importance of the take-up of STEM subjects for our economy. However, there is also a developing awareness of the importance of what are called the 'STEAM' subjects - i.e. the way in which combining the arts with the teaching of science, technology, engineering or mathematics can foster greater creativity and innovation.

What is sometimes forgotten in these discussions is the impact of gender in the take-up of these subjects. Boys are still in the majority in the take-up of honours mathematics and are substantially so in physics and engineering, whereas girls are significantly over-represented in the take-up of art and music at Leaving Certificate. These stereotypical choices have significant labour market implications for students and also have implications for social, cultural and economic development. There is substantial work to be done in schools of all types in how gender is managed.

Q24: 5(b) How should progress on Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students be measured?

Through a range of measures, including Inspectors reports. However, this area would benefit from systematic research as well.

Q25: 5(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Incentivise non-stereotypical take-up of subjects by boys and girls. Too much talent is being wasted by stereotypical choices.

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Q26: 6(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The use of school buildings outside school hours is a good idea and is already well established in community schools. Much better use can be made of these valuable resources in all types of school, although there will be obvious issues to be resolved such as insurance, maintenance, staffing and so on.

Q27: 6(b) How should progress on Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities be measured?

By annual review.

Q28: 6(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Setting out guidelines for good practice and drawing on the experience of schools already engaged in such activities.

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Q29: 7(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

I have already commented earlier on a number of aspects of special needs education. The initiative in relation to children with Down Syndrome is welcome. The evidence-based policy advice on autism developed by the NCSE and already submitted to the DES in September 2015 should be published and acted upon. The incorporation of speech and language within the sphere of the DES is welcome and it is to be hoped that the model will work well. One word of caution - for children with intellectual disability and complex needs in the area of speech and language, especially children with classic autism, intensive, individual speech therapy should be an ingredient in most cases as early as possible in the child's education, ideally in the early years.

The commitment to invest additional resources in NEPS is very welcome.

Q30: 7(b) How should progress on Special Needs Education be measured?

Progress should ideally be measured in outcomes. There is just a limited amount of research in this area at the moment (some of it commissioned by the NCSE) but further research would be very useful.

Q31: 7(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

As indicated above, but it really is important to get the therapeutic support systems in place. They are patchy, to say the least, in many cases.

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Q32: 8(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The funding crisis in Higher Education over the past years has been a national scandal. The impact on staff and on students in the sector has been severe, although great efforts have been made to preserve the quality of programmes. However, it is significant, and very negative, for Ireland that a number of our HEIs have dropped down the rankings of the top universities in the world. While many of us have reservations about the value of such tables they are, nevertheless, used a lot by international students and commentators and our rankings are skewed by deterioration in resource levels. It is now a matter of urgency that the HE funding issues be addressed in the most equitable way possible and reviews and plans should not be the subjects of interminable delays.

Development and support of the Further, Adult and Community Education sector is to be welcomed. Quality assurance should also be an important element of any developments.

Q33: 8(b) How should progress on Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future be measured?

As quickly as possible.

Q34: 8(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Review and planning following the publication of the Expert Group report on the Future Funding of the Higher Education Sector within a tight framework in an expeditious and equitable manner.

An inclusive approach to HEI admissions and also to the Further, Adult and Community Education sector.
