



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Country Background Report Ireland

OECD Review of resourcing
schools to address educational
disadvantage

Department of Education, Ireland 2024

Contents

Preface	4
1. Introduction: The National Context	6
1.1. The Economic and Social Context	6
1.2. Demographic Developments	6
1.3. Political Context	9
2. Organisation and Governance of the Education System - Early Years to Post-Primary	10
2.1. Organisation of the Education System	10
2.1.1. The Management of Primary and Post-Primary Schools	11
2.1.2. Role of Patron/Trustee	11
2.1.3. Role of Board of Management	12
2.1.4. Role of Education and Training Board (ETB)	14
2.1.5. Role of Principal	14
2.1.6. Number of Schools and Students	15
2.1.7. Early Years Education	17
2.1.8. Primary Education	21
2.1.9. Post-Primary Education	25
2.1.10. Exams During COVID-19 pandemic	30
2.1.11. Education Outside of the Mainstream School Setting	31
2.1.12. Church Patronage/Ethos	34
2.1.13. School Enrolment Policies	35
2.1.14. Teacher Training and Accreditation	36
2.2. Equity and Inclusion in Educational Goals	38
2.3. Regulatory Framework for Diversity and Inclusion in Education	39
2.4. Stakeholder Consultation	42
3. Student Support and Monitoring	46
3.1. Promoting School-Level Interventions to Support Equity and the Inclusion of All Students	46
3.1.1. Matching Resources Within Schools to Respond to the Learning Needs of All Students	46
3.1.2. Class Size	50
3.1.3. Accommodating the Needs of Different Student Groups in Schools	50
3.1.4. School Day	62
3.1.5. Extracurricular Activities and Homework	62
3.1.6. In-School Initiatives to Support Inclusion	62
3.1.7. Learning Strategies to Address Diverse Needs	65
3.1.8. Assessment in Primary Schools	65

3.1.9. Assessment in Post-Primary Schools	66
3.1.10. Individualised Learning	71
3.1.11. Teaching Strategies to Support All Students	74
3.1.12. Teaching Strategies for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs	76
3.2. Education Provision to Account for Diversity in Education	80
3.2.1 Supports for Students from an Ethnic Minority or from a Migrant Background	81
3.3. Non-Instructional Support and Services	91
3.3.1. Counselling and Wellbeing	91
3.3.2. School Transport	98
3.4. Out of school review	100
3.5. Engagement with Parents and Communities	102
3.6. Monitoring and Evaluating Equity and the Inclusion of Diverse Students in Education	103
3.6.1. Data Collection on Diversity	103
3.6.2. Monitoring and Evaluation of Outcomes at the System Levels	105
3.6.3 Evaluating Processes at the Local and School Level	110
4. General Resourcing	111
4.1. Department Of Education Budget 2024	111
4.2. Levels of Resources and Sources of Revenue	112
4.3. Current Challenges for Resourcing Education	115
4.4. Funding for the School System	117
4.5. School Facilities and Materials	120
4.6. School Support Staff	123
4.7. Summer Programme	127
4.8. The Dormant Accounts Fund	128
5. The DEIS Programme	130
5.1. The History of DEIS	130
5.2. Structure of the DEIS Programme	135
5.3. Provision of Resources Under the DEIS Programme	145
5.4. Evaluation of the DEIS Programme	153
List of Acronyms	159

Preface

Action 4 of the *DEIS Plan 2017*¹ recommended the development of a more tailored and graded model for the allocation of resources to schools in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. Considering the changing demographics of schools, this was extended to encompass the allocation of resources to all schools to address educational disadvantage.

To inform the implementation of this action the Minister for Education Norma Foley TD invited the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Strength Through Diversity: Education for Inclusive Societies* project to review Ireland's current policy approach for the allocation of resources to support children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage. This review will provide an independent expert opinion on the current resource allocation model for the DEIS programme and, drawing on international examples, inform a policy approach for an equitable distribution of supplementary resources to support children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage attending all schools, both DEIS and non-DEIS. The resulting policy will include actions aimed at further evaluation of the impact of the DEIS programme in order to inform the department on the continued development of the programme to meet the needs of children and young people.

The OECD project aims to provide analysis and policy advice to foster more equitable and inclusive education systems, contributing to a more inclusive society. Recognising that countries differ significantly in their diversity dimensions and equity and inclusion objectives the OECD sought to provide a comprehensive review of current policies and practices in Ireland.

With these objectives in mind, the OECD required information on Ireland's approach to equity and inclusion in the education sector. In OECD country reviews, this is done through the preparation of a Country Background Report (CBR) to enable the country to set its approaches in context. The CBR also provides comprehensive insights into Ireland's broader national educational landscape and policy environment from early years to post-primary, ensuring that it serves as a reliable reference that can be accurately cited by the OECD.

The information contained in the CBR reflects data and developments up to the end of June 2024. It is important to note that the CBR provides a snapshot of Ireland's educational policies, practices, and demographic data as they stood at this specific point in time. Any developments or changes that have occurred after June 2024 are not included in this report.

This CBR begins with a brief outline of Ireland's economic, social and political context, including demographic developments. It describes the organisation and governance of the education system from early years to post-primary level. This is followed by information regarding the supports and monitoring which the education system in Ireland provides to its children and young people. The report also discusses the general resourcing of education in Ireland including reference to the current challenges facing

¹ [DEIS Plan 2017](#)

the education system and the solutions with which these challenges are being addressed.

The CBR concludes with a description of the DEIS programme which is a key policy initiative of the Department of Education to address concentrated educational disadvantage at school level. This includes the history and structure of the programme together with a section on programme evaluation.

1. Introduction: The National Context

1.1. The Economic and Social Context

Although it was among the nations hardest hit by the 2007/2008 economic crisis, Ireland's economy recovered well. However, since 2020, Ireland's economy and society has experienced a sequence of three significant shocks, in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Over that time the policy-system has demonstrated flexibility, responsiveness, and effectiveness. Brexit also presents significant political, economic and social challenges for Ireland. Given the extent of the inter-connectedness of our economies and people, the impact of Brexit has been of particular significance for Ireland as we share the island with Northern Ireland which is part of the United Kingdom (UK) and is now outside of the European Union (EU). Ongoing efforts to mitigate these challenges include legislative measures such as the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill² and the more recent Windsor Framework³. Maintaining and enhancing close cooperation in education across North-South and East-West dimensions remains a priority for the Department of Education.

The Education Sectoral Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Minister of Education and the UK Minister in 2021, under the Common Travel Area Agreement between Ireland and the UK, provides a comprehensive framework on which to continue to deliver on bilateral commitments to access to education for citizens in both jurisdictions in each other's systems. It also ensures a platform to ensure ongoing cooperation and collaboration on a North-South and East-West basis that is monitored and reviewed. This is supported by cooperation under the PEACEPLUS⁴ EU Programme for Northern Ireland and Shared Island Fund⁵, with funding and joint collaboration under both being provided by the Irish Government. This collaborative approach is essential for addressing the shared challenges and opportunities that arise from our interconnected educational systems.

1.2. Demographic Developments

Ireland had a population of 4.75 million in the 2016 Census with 1.9 million (approximately 40% of the total population) living in the greater Dublin area (Dublin city and county, Wicklow, Kildare and Meath). The results from the 2022 Census⁶ show a population of 5.15 million which represents a growth of 8% since 2016. This is the first time in 171 years that Ireland's population exceeded the 5 million threshold. The growth in population in the greater Dublin area is the main pressure point in terms of ensuring there are sufficient schools, teachers and school places available to meet demand.

In the first decade of this century, Ireland experienced a rapid increase in immigration. Over this time, Ireland has been transformed into an increasingly heterogeneous country in terms of nationality, language, ethnicity and religious affiliation. The 2022 Census indicates that the number of non-Irish citizens has continued to increase, accounting for

² [Northern Ireland Protocol Bill - GOV.UK \(www.go3v.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

³ [The Windsor Framework: A New Way Forward \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

⁴ [PEACEPLUS | SEUPB](https://www.peaceplus.eu)

⁵ [gov - Shared Island \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie)

⁶ [Census 2022 Key Findings - CSO - Central Statistics Office](https://www.cso.ie)

12% of the population. The biggest non-Irish groups were Polish and UK citizens followed by Indian, Romanian, Lithuanian, Brazilian, Italian, Latvian and Spanish citizens⁷.

The *Census of Population 2016 – Profile 7 Migration and Diversity*⁸ shows that there were 293,830 non-Irish nationals at work in Ireland in April 2016 accounting for 14.9% of the workforce. Polish and UK nationals dominated the non-Irish workers and accounted for 42.1% (123,599) of the total. The remaining 170,231 workers made up of 185 different nationalities. Lithuania with (21,674) persons, followed by Romania (17,134) persons, were the third and fourth largest groups at work in 2016. Latvians, Italians, Spanish and French are the next largest group. Five nationalities had between 5,000 and 8,000 workers, while a further 19 had between 1,000 and 5,000 workers. While equivalent data from the 2022 Census has not yet been published the preliminary data shows that Indian, Romanian and Brazilian citizens were the groups which increased by the biggest numbers since 2016. However, the number of Polish people declined by 24% compared with the previous census, and the number of people with UK and Lithuanian citizenship also decreased.

The Central Statistics Office Ireland (CSO) *Population and Migration Estimates for April 2022*⁹ showed that the number of immigrants to Ireland was the highest since 2007 and consisted of 28,900 returning Irish nationals, 24,300 other EU nationals, 4,500 United Kingdom (UK) nationals, and 63,000 other nationals including Ukrainians and indicates that population growth is forecast to continue. This growth forecast is also reflected in the 2018 *Project Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework (NPF)*¹⁰ which forecasts that by 2040 there will be roughly an extra one million people living in Ireland.

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC)¹¹ has reported on some Census 2022 figures. In its *Council Report No. 160 - Understanding the Irish Economy in a Time of Turbulence*¹² it notes that between 2016 and 2022, there was an average annual net inflow of 31,722 persons per year compared with an average outflow of 4,934 persons per year in the period 2011–2016.

The *Census of Population 2016 Profile 10 - Education, Skills and the Irish Language*¹³ shows that 42.0% (1,216,945) of the population aged 15 and over had a third level qualification in 2016. *Census of Population 2022 Profile 8 - The Irish Language and Education*¹⁴ shows that this figure increased to 45% in 2022. Census 2016 also shows us that, in general, women were better educated than men, with 43.2% of females aged 15 and over having a third level qualification compared with 40.7% of males. By 2022,

⁷ [Migration and Diversity - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

⁸ [Socio-economic aspects - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

⁹ [Population and Migration Estimates, April 2022 - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

¹⁰ [Project-Ireland-2040-NPF.pdf](#)

¹¹ [Home | The National Economic and Social Council - Ireland \(nesc.ie\)](#)

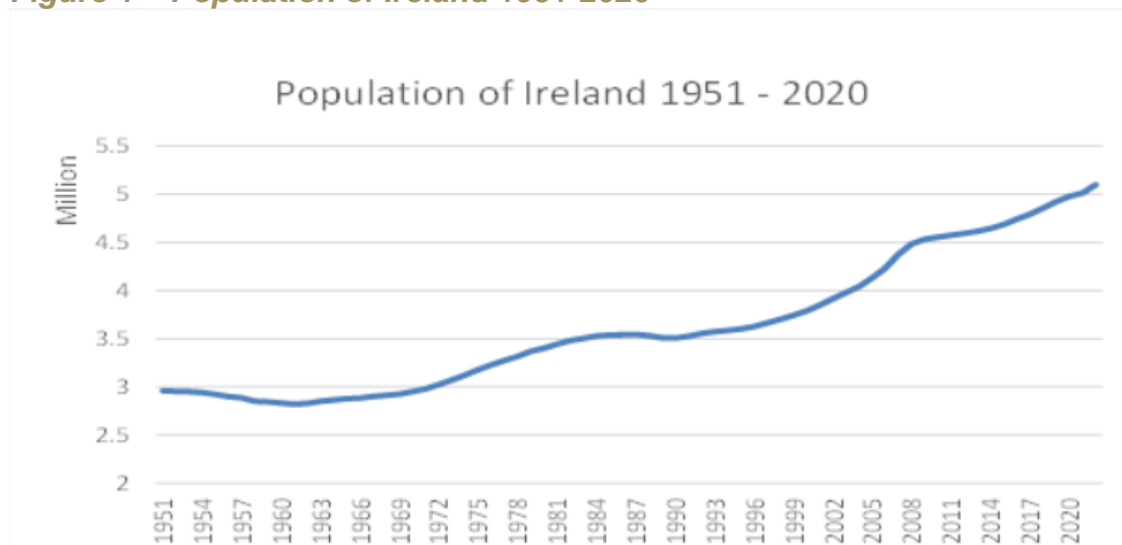
¹² [Understanding the Irish Economy in a Time of Turbulence \(nesc.ie\)](#)

¹³ [Census 2016 Profile 10 – Education, Skills and the Irish Language - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

¹⁴ [/www.cso.ie Census of Population 2022 Profile 8 - The Irish Language and Education](#)

50% of females were educated to third level compared with 46% of males¹⁵. It also noted that the likelihood of being in education was higher among those from the higher socio-economic groups.

Figure 1 – Population of Ireland 1951-2020



Created using data from Central Statistics Office CSO¹⁶

The CSOs *Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2022*¹⁷ states that 53% of 25-64 year olds in 2022 have a third level education and that females in the same age bracket had higher levels of third level attainment than males. However, the report found that approximately 3% of people aged 25-64 had received only a primary school education or no formal education. The report also notes that in 2021 Ireland was above the EU-27 average for third level attainment across all age groupings. The CSO *Population and Migration Estimates for April 2022*¹⁸ notes that in the year to April 2022, 70,300 (58.2%) of immigrants had a third level qualification while 30,700 (51.5%) of emigrants had a third level qualification.

The CSO *Population and Migration Estimates, April 2022*¹⁹ shows that there were 768,900 persons living in Ireland aged 65 and over in April 2022. This was an increase from 13.3% in 2016 to 15.1% of the total in 2022, a volume increase of 139,100 persons. There was a similar increase in persons aged 45-65 from 23.8% to 25.1% over the same period, a volume increase of 151,000 persons. However, in the 0-14 and 25-44 years age groups the proportional share has decreased from 29.6% to 27.5% in the 25-44 years group and from 21.2% to 19.6% in those aged 0-14 years.

¹⁵ <https://www.cso.ie> Census of Population 2022 Profile 8 - The Irish Language and Education

¹⁶ [Key Findings - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

¹⁷ [Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2022 - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

¹⁸ [Population and Migration Estimates, April 2022 - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

¹⁹ [Key Findings - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

*Census 2022 Profile 5 - Diversity, Migration, Ethnicity, Irish Travellers and Religion*²⁰ was published on 23 October 2023. The report indicates that the number of Irish Travellers living in the State, and counted in Census 2022, was 32,949, an increase of 6% from 30,987 in the 2016 Census. Irish Travellers make up less than 1% of the population.

The Irish government is committed to delivering a humanitarian response to welcome people fleeing the war in Ukraine and seeking protection in Ireland. Schools have welcomed over 18,000 children and young people from Ukraine that have arrived under the EU Emergency Protection Directive²¹. There has been a swift and constructive response and a warm welcome from the Department of Education and school communities in this evolving situation.

1.3. Political Context

Ireland has a democratically elected government, with elections held at least every five years. Education policy is driven through central government. Local authorities are also elected every five years, but education policy is not under the remit of local authority officials.

Education is regarded as a central plank in the economic, social and cultural development of Irish society. Governments and the social partners view it as strategically interlinked with national planning. The Programme for Government 2020 - *Programme for Government - Our Shared Future*²² sets out the main political priorities concerning the Irish education system, including a commitment to supporting children and young people with special educational needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It commits to the implementation of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme.

It is widely recognised and accepted that education is a critical driver of economic success and social progress in Irish society. There is a growing recognition, particularly in the European Union, that the provision of quality education and training is central to the creation of a high-skills, knowledge and innovation-based economy that will underpin ongoing and sustainable prosperity. Education and training are also crucial to achieving the objective of an inclusive society where all citizens have the opportunity and the incentive to participate fully in the social and economic life of the country.

²⁰ [Irish Travellers - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

²¹ www.gov.ie - Temporary Protection (www.gov.ie)

²² [Programme for Government 2020](#)

2. Organisation and Governance of the Education System - Early Years to Post-Primary

2.1. Organisation of the Education System

Ireland has a centralised system of education with the Department of Education responsible for the formulation and review of educational policies, the allocation of resources in terms of funding and teachers posts to schools, as well as the administration and the assurance of quality in education.

The Department of Education was established under the *Ministers and Secretaries Act 1924*²³. The aim of the department is to ensure the provision of a comprehensive, cost-effective and accessible education system of the highest quality as measured by international standards. The Minister for Education, who is a member of the government and responsible to Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament), has specific responsibility for education policy issues. The Minister is assisted by a Minister of State at the Department of Education with special responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion, and by a Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and the Department of Education with special responsibility for Sport and Physical Education.

At the head of the Department of Education is the secretary general, who acts as chief executive officer. They have overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring policy and delivering outputs, and for providing policy advice to the Minister and government. In managing the department, the secretary general is assisted by the management board representing the most senior officials in the department.

The *Education Act 1998*²⁴, ensures formal provision for the education “of every person in the State, including any person with a disability or who has other special educational needs”. Under the *Education Act 1998*, all schools are managed by their board of management, except for Education and Training Board (ETB) schools, which are managed by the local ETB. The majority of schools in Ireland are privately owned but receive state funding and are managed by boards of management. The *Education Act 1998* provides a statutory framework for the Irish education system at primary and post-primary level. The Act sets out the broad objectives and principles underpinning the education system and provides for the rights of children and others to education. It sets out the functions and responsibilities of all key partners in the education system, seeks the establishment of boards of management for all recognised schools, and lays down accountability procedures. The Act also clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Minister, school patrons, boards of management, principals and teachers. The principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school and, in general, the responsibility for the recruitment and appointment of teachers to positions lies with each respective school authority, subject to agreed procedures.

All recognised schools operate under provisions of the *Education Act 1998*, other relevant legislation, circulars of the Department of Education, the *Governance Manual for Primary Schools*²⁵ currently applicable in the case of primary schools, and in the case of post-primary schools, the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*²⁶ currently

²³ [Ministers and Secretaries Act, 1924 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

²⁴ [Education Act, 1998 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

²⁵ [Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2023-2027](#)

²⁶ [Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools](#)

applicable along with Articles of Management, relevant Deeds of Trust and the *Governance Manual for Community and Comprehensive Schools*²⁷ as applicable.

In addition to the *Education Act 1998*²⁸, ETB schools also operate under the provisions of Section 44 of the *Education and Training Boards Act 2013*²⁹ and the *Code of Practice for the Governance of Education and Training Boards*³⁰.

2.1.1. The Management of Primary and Post-Primary Schools

While the department sets out the rules of procedure for recognised schools it is not directly involved in the management of schools. The governance structure of schools is such that, in accordance with the *Education Act 1998*, all schools have a patron which sets the ethos for the school. Schools have a board of management appointed by the patron to manage the school. The patron of a school does not have a direct role in the governance of the school which in most schools is a matter for the board of management. The functions of a board of management are set out in the *Education Act 1998*.

In general, all schools have the same management structure. That is they have a patron, board of management and a principal teacher. While the Minister for Education sets the policy direction for schools, responsibility for the school is vested in the school patron or trustee. The patron delegates responsibility for the running of the school to the board of management. The school's board of management communicate with parents and guardians, and teachers to ensure the smooth running of the school for the benefit of the children in the school.

2.1.2. Role of Patron/Trustee

The patron is the body that establishes and operates the school and is responsible for the school's characteristic spirit and ethos. The patron of a school is defined by reference to section 8 of the *Education Act 1998*. Section 14 of the *Education Act 1998* places a duty on the patron of a recognised school, for the purposes of ensuring that such a school is managed in a spirit of partnership, to appoint, where practicable, a board of management.

The school patron is the person/body recognised as such by the Minister for Education in accordance with section 8 of the *Education Act 1998*. For the purposes of section 8 a trustee or Trust can also be a patron. An example of such a structure is the Le Chéile Schools Trust³¹, which is patron of the schools of fifteen religious congregations. The Trust conducts the legal and financial role that was previously performed by the individual congregations. Another example is the Edmund Rice Schools Trust³², which is the trustee and patron of 96 schools, both primary and post-primary.

²⁷ [Governance-Manual-for-CC-Schools.pdf \(fssu.ie\)](#)

²⁸ [Education Act, 1998 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](#)

²⁹ [Education and Training Boards Act 2013 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](#)

³⁰ [Code of Practice for the Governance of Education and Training Boards](#)

³¹ [Home - Le Chéile Schools Trust \(lecheiletrust.ie\)](#)

³² [Who We Are - Edmund Rice Schools \(erst.ie\)](#)

A school patron appoints the board of management to manage the operation of a school under its patronage. The patron determines the ethos and characteristic spirit of the school. Religious education or instruction may be provided at the school in line with its ethos. Patron responsibilities are set out in law under the *Education Act 1998*.

Trusteeship can also relate to the ownership of the school property as opposed to the running of the school operating from the property. Most diocesan school properties are either owned on behalf of the dioceses, in the name of the diocese's bishop or archbishop or are in the ownership of a diocesan trust controlled by trustees appointed by the catholic patron, including the local bishop.

In general, the trustees are the persons who are parties to the lease of the school premises and are normally nominated by the patron as trustees of the school. The trustees undertake that the buildings shall continue to be used as a school for the term of the lease and guarantee that the premises and contents are insured against fire and tempest. In the case of Catholic schools, in most dioceses the school property and enterprise are held by the diocesan trust. In a congregation owned school the trustees are those legally named as such by the religious congregation. In the case of convent, monastery schools and schools owned by a trust, while the bishop is patron, ownership may rest with the diocese, congregation trust or a catholic trust body. In some schools there may not be any trustees (for example, in cases where the school premises is in the direct ownership of the school patron).

Almost 90% of schools in Ireland are under religious patronage, predominantly Roman Catholic.

The ETB is the patron of the schools they manage for the purposes of the *Education Act 1998*. This Act outlines the role of the patron as the body that establishes the school. The patron also appoints the board of management of the school and determines the ethos or characteristic spirit of the school. The ETB is the corporate entity and the employer of school staff. The ETB has ultimate responsibility for employment and financial matters. Each year, the ETB allocates a budget to the school and the board of management has a responsibility for how this budget allocation is spent and accounted for. It is up to the board of management to ensure the effective implementation of policies and legislation as appropriate. There is ongoing support, advice, oversight and governance from the ETB through the Director of Schools, the Director of Organisation Support and Development, the board, and the audit, risk and finance committees in the ETB.

2.1.3. Role of Board of Management

Schools are managed locally by independent voluntary boards of management that have been established by the founding patron and are representative of teacher, parent or guardian, community and patron interests. Each school has its own board of management. Boards of management are typically comprised of members nominated by the patron of the school, parents or guardians of children attending the school, the principal and a member of the teaching staff, and community representatives.

While the department sanctions teaching posts and pays teacher salaries, the board of management is the employer of teachers in a school. The board's role as an employer includes responsibility for the recruitment and dismissal of teachers and other staff

within the school, subject to relevant department circulars, employment legislation and sectoral agreements. The board of management manages the school on behalf of the patron and is accountable to the patron and the Minister. The board must uphold the characteristic spirit (ethos) of the school and is accountable to the patron for so doing. Under Section 24 of the *Education Act 1998* (as amended by *the Education (Amendment) Act 2012*)³³ the board of management is the employer of teachers and other staff of the school. In the case of schools established or maintained by a regional ETB, the relevant ETB is the employer in accordance with section 6 of the *Education (Amendment) Act 2012*.

The board of management must have regard to the efficient use of resources and accountability to children and young people, their parents and guardians, the patron, staff and the community served by the school. Proper accounts and records of all monies received and expended must be kept and the board must ensure each year that the accounts are properly audited or certified. In addition, the board must make arrangements for the preparation of the school plan and ensure that it is regularly reviewed and updated.

Boards of management are supported through guidance documentation, advice, training and funding provided by the relevant management bodies and the department and also through the work of the school principal, who typically acts as secretary to the board at primary level.

The curriculum is determined by the Minister for Education who is advised by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)³⁴. The NCCA was established under Section 38 of the *Education Act 1998*. The curriculum sets out, not only what is to be taught, but how learning in the particular subject area is to be assessed. It is the board of management, in consultation with the principal and staff, of each individual school that decides the range of subjects to be offered in the school each year. Provision of subjects and programmes in a given year may be limited by factors such as available teaching personnel, range of subjects to be offered, and overall demand for the subject or programme.

The agreed composition and procedures for the appointment of boards of primary schools are set out in the *Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2023-2027*³⁵. This is published by the department and reviewed every four years, following consultation with the education partners, representing school management, parents and guardians, and teachers, in advance of the appointment of new boards.

The *Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2023-2027* indicates the composition of the board of management for schools having a recognised staff of more than one teacher as:

1. Two direct nominees of the patron.

³³ [Education \(Amendment\) Act 2012 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/12/section/24)

³⁴ [Home - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment \(ncca.ie\)](https://www.ncca.ie/)

³⁵ [Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2023-2027](https://www.ncca.ie/governance-manual-for-primary-schools-2023-2027)

2. Two parents or guardians elected from parents of children who are enrolled and have commenced attendance at the school (one being a mother, the other a father, elected by the general body of parents of children who are enrolled and have commenced attendance at the school).
3. The principal (or acting principal) of the school.
4. One other serving teacher on the staff of the school, elected by vote of the teaching staff which includes the principal.
5. Two extra members proposed by those nominees, described at 1 to 4 above.

There are three sectors at post-primary level and there are some differences in the composition of boards of management between the three sectors:

1. The boards of management of voluntary secondary schools are constituted and operate in accordance with the Articles of Management of such schools.
2. Boards of management of ETB schools are sub-committees of the ETB in accordance with the *Education and Training Boards Act 2013*³⁶.
3. Community and comprehensive schools are managed and operated by boards of management of differing compositions appointed in accordance with the relevant deed of trust for such schools.

The members of the board must be appointed by the patron (except where the articles of management in the school provide otherwise). The board is accountable to the patron and must consult with the patron and keep them informed of board decisions.

2.1.4. Role of Education and Training Board (ETB)

On 1 July 2013 the 33 vocational education committees (VECs) were dissolved and replaced by 16 education and training Boards (ETBs). ETBs are established under, and governed according to, the *Education and Training Boards Act 2013*. Each ETB is a statutory body with its own corporate status.

ETBs are statutory education authorities with responsibility for education and training, youth work and a range of other statutory functions. ETBs manage and operate community national schools, post-primary schools, further education (FE) colleges, and a range of adult and further education centres delivering education and training programmes.

2.1.5. Role of Principal

The principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, including providing guidance and direction to the teachers and other staff of the school and is accountable for that management. The principal provides leadership to the teachers, other staff, and the children and young people of the school. The principal is also responsible for the creation, together with the school community, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the children and young people, and which promotes the professional development of the teachers.

For the purpose of carrying out their function under the *Education Act 1998*, the principal shall have all such powers as are necessary or expedient in that regard and shall carry

³⁶ [Education and Training Boards Act 2013 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

out their functions in accordance with such policies as may be determined by the board and regulations made in accordance with section 33 of the Act.

Principals, deputy principals and teachers are recruited through open competition under the procedures set out in *Circular 0044/2019 Recruitment/Promotion and Leadership for Registered Teachers in Recognised Primary Schools*,³⁷ which are designed to provide fair and impartial procedures for the appointment to posts in recognised primary schools funded by monies provided by the Oireachtas³⁸. A board of management is bound to apply these procedures to ensure openness and transparency in the process of appointment to posts in schools.

2.1.6. Number of Schools and Students

The education system in Ireland is made up of early years education, primary and post-primary education. State-funded education is available at all levels, unless a parent or guardian chooses to send their child to a private institution or educate their child at home. The compulsory age to begin education in Ireland is six years. All forms of pre-primary education are optional. Nonetheless the majority of children complete two years of free preschool education provided by the early childhood care and education (ECCE) programme³⁹. Education is compulsory for children in Ireland from the ages of six to sixteen or until students have completed three years of post-primary education. While compulsory school starts at age six, most children begin school at age five following early years education. The range of ages for which at least 90% of the population are enrolled is longer than the period of compulsory education and goes from the age of three to the age of eighteen. The average age of graduation from general upper secondary programmes is 18 years in Ireland.

Children normally attend their local school. Parents/guardians can send their child to the school of their choice, provided there is a place for them. While most schools can enrol all the children who apply, there is no guarantee of a place in the local school. Section 29 of the *Education Act 1998* provides for an appeal where a board of management, or a person acting on behalf of the board of management (normally the school principal) refuses to admit a child or young person to a school, where the decision to refuse admission is due to the school being oversubscribed. The appeals procedure is outlined on the department's website⁴⁰.

³⁷ [Recruitment/Promotion and Leadership for Registered Teachers In Recognised Primary Schools](#)

³⁸ [Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

³⁹ [Education at a Glance 2023 \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](#)

⁴⁰ [gov.ie - Appeals in relation to refusal to admit a student due to a school being oversubscribed \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

Figure 2 – Enrolments and Schools 2023-2024

Preliminary Enrolments	2023/2024
Number of pupils in primary school	546,787
<i>of which in DEIS schools</i>	153,607
<i>of which in non-DEIS schools</i>	393,180
Number of students in post-primary school	416,631
<i>of which in DEIS schools</i>	107,232
<i>of which in non-DEIS schools</i>	309,399

Number of Primary Schools	3,089
<i>of which DEIS schools</i>	963
<i>of which non-DEIS schools</i>	2,126
Number of Post-primary Schools	722
<i>of which DEIS schools</i>	232
<i>of which non-DEIS schools</i>	490

Source: Department of Education Statistics Unit POD/PPOD⁴¹

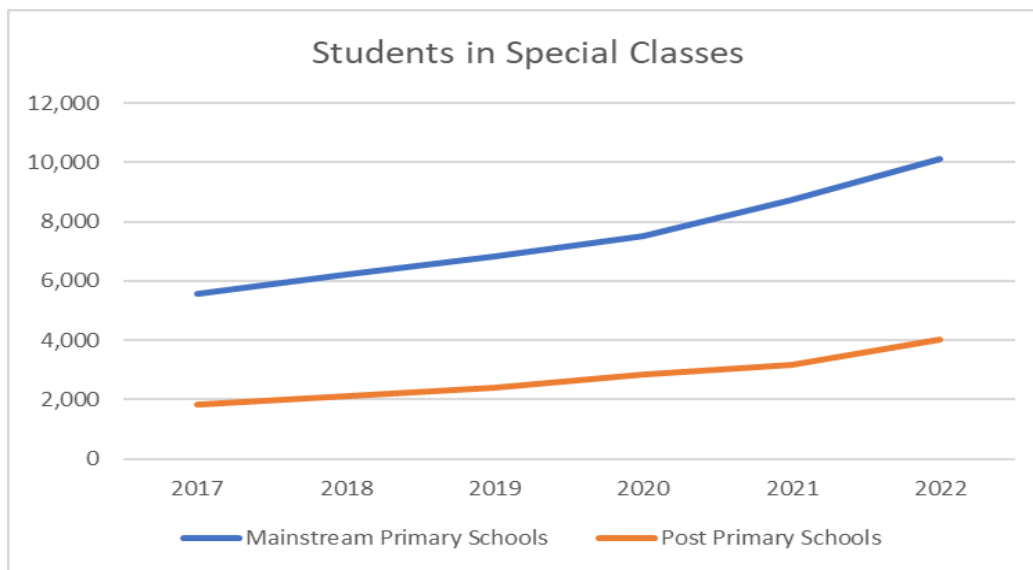
Figure 3 – Number of Special Schools (NCSE supported only)

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of special schools (NCSE supported only)	114	114	114	116	116

Source: Department of Education Statistics Unit

⁴¹ gov.ie - Data on Individual Schools (www.gov.ie)

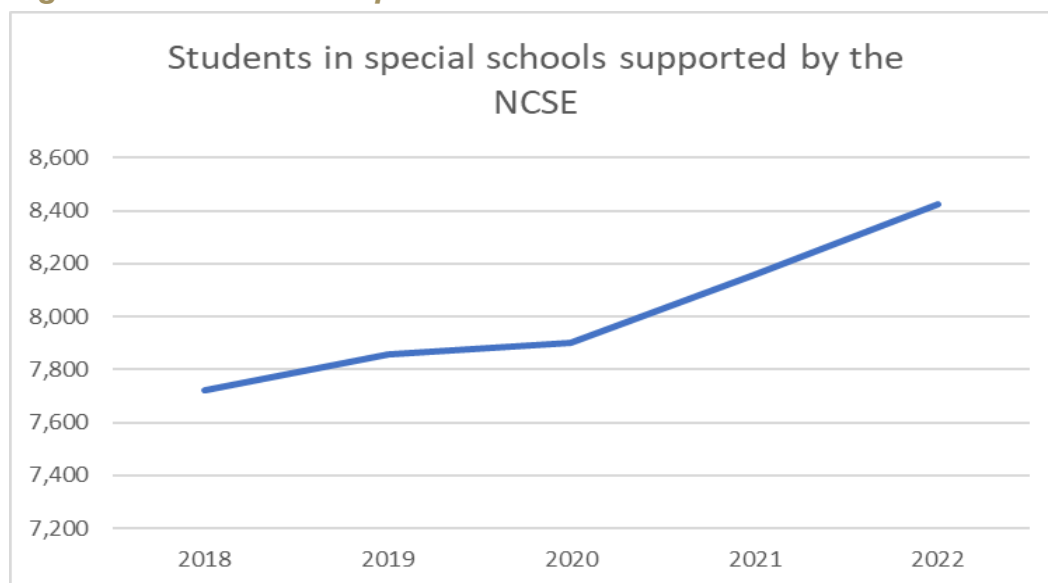
Figure 4 – Students in Special Classes



Source:

Department of Education

Figure 5 – Students in Special Schools



Source: Department of Education

2.1.7. Early Years Education

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) has overall policy responsibility for Early learning and care (ELC). The DCEDIY is responsible, in the main, for pre-primary education and care while the Department of

Education provides limited specialist pre-school provision related to socio-economic disadvantage including the Early Start Programme⁴² and the Rutland Street Project⁴³.

The Irish system has a policy framework to guide the development of the ELC sector entitled *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families*⁴⁴. This is a ten-year plan, covering the period 2019-2028, to help make sure all children have positive early experiences and get a good start in life. It commits to major initiatives on family leave, children's health services, parenting supports, child-friendly communities, and ELC services among a broad range of actions.

The Early Childhood care and education (ECCE) programme⁴⁵ provides children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school. It is a universal two-year pre-school programme available to all children within the eligible age range, free of charge. The programme is provided for three hours per day, five days per week over 38 weeks per year and the programme runs from September to June each year. There is one point of entry at the beginning of the programme year. The programme is available to all children who are at least two years and eight months old by 31 August and who will not be older than five years and five months on 30 June of the programme year.

The ECCE programme is a two-year pre-school programme for children before starting primary school (though not all children participate for both years). In 2023/24, there are 106,108 children taking part in the programme overall. Of these, 7,116 have been approved for additional financial support under the Access and Inclusion model (AIM)⁴⁶, which supports access and participation for children with disabilities. AIM is based on need, not on diagnosis. In addition to the 7,116, other children in the ECCE programme benefit from other targeted and universal supports under AIM, including targeted advice and guidance from early years specialists.

AIM is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the ECCE programme. Its goal is to empower ELC providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that every eligible child can meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early learning and care. AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of support, moving from the universal to the targeted, based on the needs of the child and the pre-school service. It offers tailored, practical supports based on need and does not require a formal diagnosis of disability.

Childcare services taking part in the ECCE programme must provide an appropriate pre-school educational programme which adheres to the principles of Síolta⁴⁷, the National

⁴² [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Early Start Pre-School Programme (www.gov.ie)

⁴³ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Rutland Street Pre-School Project (www.gov.ie)

⁴⁴ [First 5 | A Government Strategy for Babies and Young Children](#)

⁴⁵ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) (www.gov.ie)

⁴⁶ [The Access and Inclusion Model Homepage - Access and Inclusion Model \(\[aim.gov.ie\]\(http://aim.gov.ie\)\)](#)

⁴⁷ [Síolta > Home \(\[siolta.ie\]\(http://siolta.ie\)\)](http://siolta.ie)

Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Aistear⁴⁸, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

The ECCE programme provides important development opportunities to all young children, including children with disabilities. There is no charge to parents or guardians for the playschool or daycare hours provided under the ECCE scheme. However, if a child attends for extra hours, these will have to be paid for. The programme has a 95% uptake rate, with almost 40% of low-income families having said they would not have been able to enrol their child in pre-school had it not been for this programme. The ECCE programme is delivered outside of the formal education system, by a range of private, community and voluntary interests, which can be described as crèches, nurseries, pre-schools, naíonraí (Irish language pre-schools), playgroups and day-care services. This sector operates under *S.I. No. 221/2016 - Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016*⁴⁹.

Inclusion in ELC and school-age childcare up to the age of 15 is also supported through the National Childcare Scheme (NCS)⁵⁰, which provides higher levels of subsidy for families with lower incomes, and which also provides free places for families with high levels of need. The NCS is a financial support for parents, guardians and carers towards the cost of their childcare in a Tusla registered childcare service. It establishes a system of universal and income-related subsidies for children up to the age of 15. It also provides an online application system to access those subsidies.

On 20 May 2024, Equal Start⁵¹ was launched by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman. Equal Start is a funding model and a set of universal and targeted measures to support access and full participation in ELC and school-age childcare for children and their families who experience disadvantage. Equal Start adopts a tiered approach which incorporates universal supports, child-targeted supports and setting-targeted supports.

The Department of Education funds early intervention classes for children from age three who have a diagnosis of autism. These are staffed by one teacher and two special needs assistants (SNAs) with a maximum of six children.

To support the educational transition of children and young people from the ELC sector to primary school, the NCCA⁵² has developed templates entitled *Mo Scéal: Moving from Preschool to Primary*⁵³. Mo Scéal means “my story” and the templates help to tell the story of the child’s early learning and development.

⁴⁸ [Aistear They Early Childhood Curriculum Framework \(ncca.ie\)](https://www.ncca.ie)

⁴⁹ [S.I. No. 221/2016 - Child Care Act 1991 \(Early Years Services\) Regulations 2016. \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](https://www.irishstatutebook.ie)

⁵⁰ [gov.ie - National Childcare Scheme \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie)

⁵¹ [gov - Equal Start \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie)

⁵² [Home - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment \(ncca.ie\)](https://www.ncca.ie)

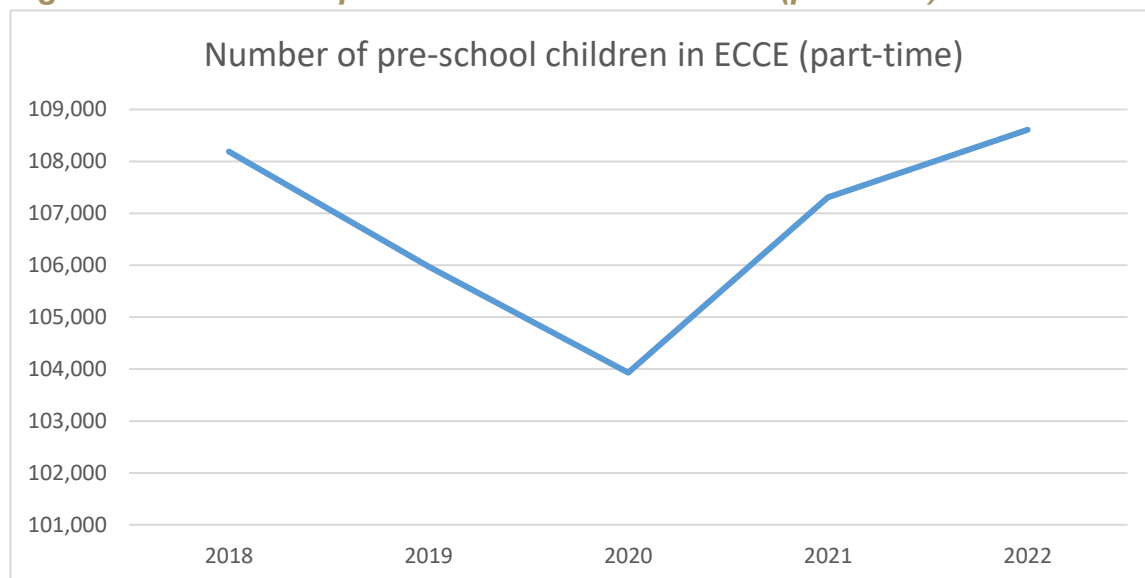
⁵³ [Mo Scéal | NCCA](https://www.ncca.ie)

DCEDIY commissioned a *Review of Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Operating Model in Ireland*⁵⁴ which was published in 2022. While the report acknowledged that the current operating model has many strengths it expressed concern that it is characterised by a fragmented system with multiple intermediary bodies. The report also recommended that the operating model be modified to involve greater interactions and engagement with parents and guardians, families and other stakeholders. The report recognises that over the last two decades, State support for ELC and SAC has widened the provision of subsidies for parents and guardians, and access to ELC and SAC for children, and that there has also been an increasing focus on programmes to support quality, with a particular focus on workforce development and regulatory reform.

The OECD’s *Early Learning and Care in Ireland*⁵⁵ report published in 2020 points to the central challenge of achieving a graduate led ELC workforce. This is central to *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families*⁵⁶. which aims for at least 50% of staff working directly with children in centre-based settings to hold an appropriate degree-level qualification by 2028.

It also notes that the planned transition to a fully regulated childminding sector involves challenges in introducing qualifications requirements for childminders.

Figure 6 – Number of pre-school children in ECCE (part-time)



Source: Department of Education

⁵⁴ [Review of Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Operating Model in Ireland \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

⁵⁵

⁵⁶

2.1.8. Primary Education

Although children are not statutorily obliged to begin education until the age of six, most children begin primary education at the ages of five. Primary education consists of an eight-year cycle: junior infants, senior infants, and first to sixth classes. In Ireland all children are entitled to free primary education. The primary curriculum⁵⁷ aims to provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish, supporting them in realising their full potential as individuals and as members of their communities and society during childhood, as they progress through primary and special education and into post-primary education. Building on their previous experiences, the curriculum views children as unique, competent, and caring individuals, and it views teachers as committed, skilful, and agentic professionals. It supports high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment that is inclusive and evidence-based, recognising the right of all children to make progress in all areas of their learning and development.

Standardised tests are used to measure children's reading and mathematical achievement, and to determine children's progress in those areas. Information from the tests is important given the vital role of literacy and numeracy in enabling children to access the full curriculum. All primary schools are required by the Department of Education to administer standardised tests during the period May/June for all pupils in second, fourth and sixth classes. Standardised assessments are administered to all pupils in second, fourth, and sixth classes in both English medium and Irish medium schools. While these assessments are required at the specified class levels, many schools also conduct standardised tests in first, third, and fifth classes as part of their own assessment processes. The standardised assessments evaluate pupils' progress and achievement in English reading and mathematics. In Irish medium schools, Irish reading is also assessed. The tests are normed for the Irish population.

Standardised testing is to help measure each pupil's progress and achievement across the subjects and levels tested. The results help schools to evaluate their progress. They can also help identify gaps of improvement to which additional support can be applied to help those who are struggling to progress and improve their learning.

Section 6.4 of *Circular 0056/2011*⁵⁸ advises that '*Students may be excluded from standardised testing if, in the view of the school principal, they have a learning or physical disability which would prevent them from attempting the tests or, in the case of migrant students, where the level of English required in the test would make attempting the test inappropriate.*' This recognises that it may not be in the best interests of certain pupils to undertake standardised testing. Based on their knowledge of pupils' needs and abilities, principal teachers are in a position to take the decision not to administer standardised tests to individual pupils (that is, to exempt those pupils from standardised testing). The discretion to exempt a child from standardised testing based on educational grounds lies with the school principal. Exemptions should be considered on a case-by-case basis and be warranted only in exceptional cases. Exemptions should not be used for the blanket exclusion of any group of pupils, for example, Traveller or migrant pupils. Pupils who are deemed not to be in a position to undertake standardised

⁵⁷ [The Primary Curriculum Framework \(curriculumonline.ie\)](http://curriculumonline.ie)

⁵⁸ gov.ie [Initial Steps in the Implementation of The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy](#)

testing should be included in the return of the standardised assessment data to the Department of Education as “exempt”.

There is provision of a whole-school policy that provides for school-based testing in order to identify and monitor the progress of pupils with special educational needs. Some pupils with a learning or physical disability may well be in a position to complete standardised testing. While the mode of implementation is clearly set out in test instructions, some reasonable accommodations may be made at school level to facilitate individual pupils in completing a test, if it is deemed by the principal that this is in the best interest of the child. These may include:

- Providing reading assistance in the case of a standardised test of mathematics.
- Undertaking the test in a quiet environment outside the classroom.
- Using a stopwatch or a timer on a mobile phone to give movement breaks during the test.

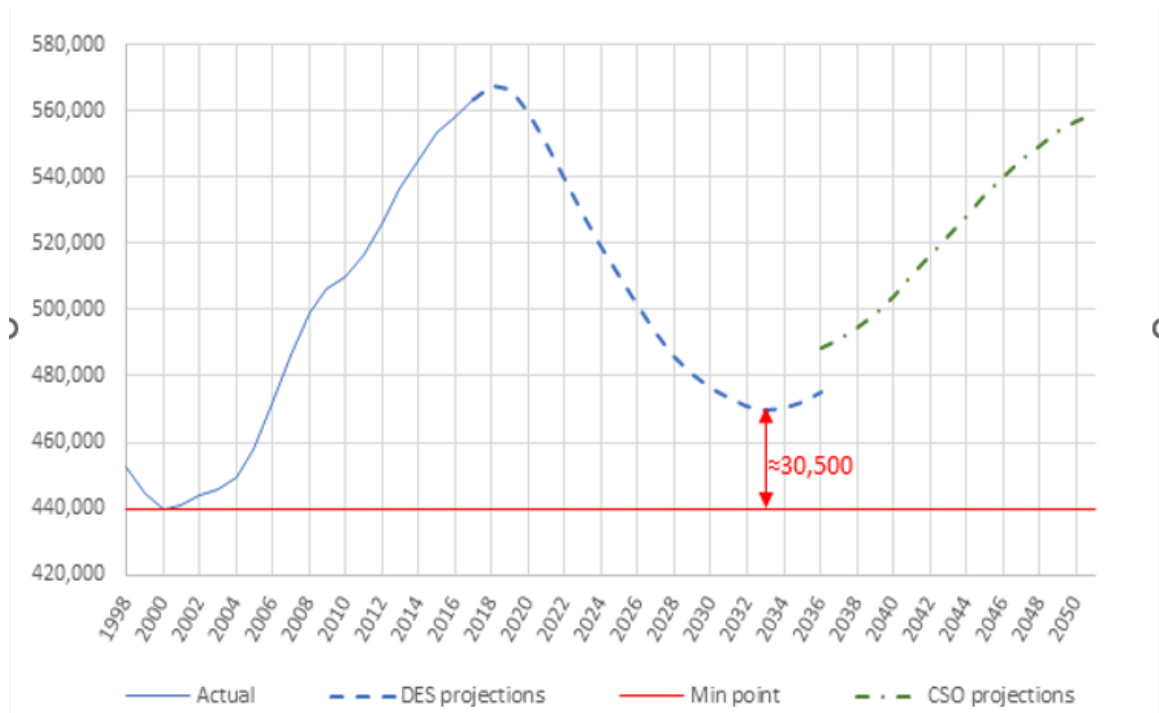
For the country as a whole, primary enrolments had risen substantially in recent years until they peaked in 2018, when total enrolments stood at 567,772. This high point came at the end of a sustained period of growth in primary school enrolments, rising from 439,560 in 2000 and increasing every year since. The enrolments in 2019 stood at 567,716 and fell to 561,411 in 2020.

The Irish education system is characterised by a very large number of primary schools relative to post-primary schools. There are over four times the number of primary schools as post-primary schools due to the predominance of small schools at that level. Over 40% of the primary schools have fewer than 100 pupils.

The Department of Education *Projections of full-time enrolment Primary and Second Level 2021 - 2040*⁵⁹ predicts that enrolments are projected to fall by 120,860 pupils over the coming years, reaching a low point of 440,551 by 2033. The sharpest falls are predicted to be in the early period and will average 12,000 pupils per year between 2022 and 2028 with enrolments expected to rise again post 2033. It should be noted that estimates were conducted in advance of the war in Ukraine which has seen over 18,000 additional Ukrainian children and young people enrolled in Irish schools.

⁵⁹ Projections of full-time enrolment Primary and Second Level 2021 - 2040 Projections of full-time enrolment Primary and Second Level 2021 - 2040

Figure 7 – Enrolments in DEIS Primary Schools - Actual and Projected



Source: Department of Education⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Projections of full-time enrolment 2021 - 2040

Figure 8 – Numbers of Primary Schools and Classes 1998/1999 to 2022/2023

Year	Number of Primary Schools	Number of Primary School Classes
1998-1999	3,303	17,042
1999-2000	3,293	17,252
2000-2001	3,286	17,280
2001-2002	3,282	17,576
2002-2003	3,283	17,807
2003-2004	3,278	18,011
2004-2005	3,284	18,133
2005-2006	3,284	18,367
2006-2007	3,284	18,909
2007-2008	3,282	19,665
2008-2009	3,303	20,291
2009-2010	3,295	20,317
2010-2011	3,305	20,604
2011-2012	3,300	20,716
2012-2013	3,293	20,877
2013-2014	3,286	21,147
2014-2015	3,277	21,419
2015-2016	3,262	21,724
2016-2017	3,250	22,152
2017-2018	3,246	22,430
2018-2019	3,240	22,747
2019-2020	3,240	22,970
2020-2021	3,241	23,460
2021-2022	3,239	23,572
2022-2023	3,231	23,596

2.1.9. Post-Primary Education

Children from about 12 to 18 years attend a post-primary school. The child and their parents or guardians select the post-primary school. Under the *Education (Welfare) Act 2000*, the minimum school leaving age is 16 or after three years of post-primary education, whichever is later. The school patron is the body that establishes and operates the school. The patron appoints the board of management of the school and is responsible for the school's characteristic spirit and ethos.

The post-primary school models available are:

- Community colleges are established by the local ETB which is also the sole patron of the school.
- Community and comprehensive schools are established either by one or more private or religious patrons coming together with an ETB patron or as the result of the amalgamation of voluntary secondary and ETB schools.
- Voluntary secondary schools are privately owned and managed post-primary schools, usually under the patronage of an individual body such as a religious community, a charitable trust or a private charitable company.

Community colleges, community schools and voluntary secondary schools are funded by the Department of Education and deliver the post-primary curriculum determined by the Minister for Education, supported by syllabuses, guidelines for teachers, circulars to schools and prescribed material for the examinations. Post-primary education consists of a three year Junior Cycle, followed by a two or three year Senior Cycle, depending on whether the optional transition year is taken.

The Junior Cycle⁶¹ caters for students in the twelve to fifteen age group. *The Framework for Junior Cycle 2015*⁶², provides the basis for post-primary schools to plan quality, inclusive and relevant education programmes with improved learning experiences for all students, including those with special educational needs. The Junior Cycle examination is held at the end of the Junior Cycle in post-primary schools. Students normally sit for the examinations after three years of post-primary education.

The Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate exams are standardised and are operated by the State Examinations Commission (SEC), which was established by *S.I. No. 373/2003 – State Examinations Commission (Establishment) Order 2003*⁶³. Examination papers and draft marking schemes are developed through a rigorous development process to meet the requirements of the relevant syllabi and standards of assessment. The examination paper development process involves a multi-stage process of drafting, setting, translating, and various layers of oversight and scrutiny. Those involved are experts in the subject who are also experienced teachers. As part of the normal exam paper development process, papers are reviewed by subject experts before they are finalised in order to assess their suitability, the appropriateness of how they assess various learning outcomes as set out in the specification, the clarity of language in them

⁶¹ [Junior Cycle \(curriculumonline.ie\)](http://curriculumonline.ie)

⁶² [gov.ie - Framework for Junior Cycle \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

⁶³ [https://www.irishstatutebook.ie S.I. No. 373/2003 - State Examinations Commission \(Establishment\) Order 2003.](https://www.irishstatutebook.ie)

and the demand they present. Leaving Certificate examination papers are also subject to review by university representatives who view the draft examination papers and marking schemes. The role of the representatives is to verify to the university authorities that the examinations are satisfactory for matriculation purposes. Details of the process are set out in the SEC document, *Manual for Drafters, Setters and Assistant Setters*⁶⁴.

The term "standardised test" has different meanings in different contexts. The Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate examinations are standardised in the sense that the same examination is taken by all candidates under the same conditions and at the same time, except where appropriate accommodations have been provided. They are curriculum-based examinations with a variety of different components, including written examinations, oral examinations, practical examinations, and coursework projects. All of these components are externally set and marked. The marking of the written examinations and of most coursework is fully anonymous, and examiners have no information about the candidates whose work they are marking or the schools they are from. The marking of oral examinations and some practical work is carried out by visiting examiners and therefore cannot have the same level of anonymity, but it is still all external.

Accommodations are provided in line with test accommodation principles that are similar to those in many other jurisdictions as outlined in *Reasonable Accommodations at the 2023 Certificate Examinations – Guide for Students*⁶⁵ together with a more detailed set of instructions for schools in *Reasonable Accommodations at the 2023 Certificate Examinations – Instructions for Schools*⁶⁶.

The examinations are not norm-referenced. The standard-setting principles and practices that are used are set out in the document *Setting and Maintaining Standards in the State Examinations*⁶⁷.

The Senior Cycle⁶⁸ caters for students who are typically in the fifteen to eighteen age group. Senior Cycle is currently being redeveloped following a comprehensive review process. This important work will seek to enhance the educational experience and ensure meaningful learning and achievement in Senior Cycle for all learners. At the heart of the redevelopment is a set of key competencies, an umbrella term that refers to the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions students develop during the programme. Senior Cycle includes an optional transition year⁶⁹ (TY) which follows immediately after the Junior Cycle. TY provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, over the course of a year that is free from state examinations. TY is a valuable programme for students that offers opportunities for life skills, personal, social and academic development, and experience of adult and

⁶⁴ [SEC Setting Manual rev8 \(examinations.ie\)](#)

⁶⁵ [Reasonable Accommodations at the 2023 Certificate Examinations - Guide for Students](#)

⁶⁶ [Reasonable Accommodations at the 2023 Certificate Examinations - Instructions for Schools](#)

⁶⁷ [Microsoft Word - Setting and Maintaining Standards in the State Examinations](#)

⁶⁸ [Curriculum \(curriculumonline.ie\)](#)

⁶⁹ [Transition Year \(curriculumonline.ie\)](#)

working life. TY programmes are designed at school level and based on a multi-layered approach.

The most recent published data shows that the total number of TY students in 2022/2023 was 54,928, corresponding to 79.2% of the number of students enrolled in the final year of Junior Cycle in the previous school year (2021/2022). Preliminary data from the Department of Education for 2023/2024 indicates figures at 58,701 students enrolled, corresponding to 80% of the 22/23 Junior Cycle Year 3 cohort entering the programme. Participation rates (as a percentage of those finishing third year in the previous school year) in TY have grown strongly in very recent years and are currently at an all-time high.

A new Transition Year Programme Statement has been developed for introduction in schools. Each school designs its own TY programme, within set guidelines, to suit the needs and interests of its students. In developing a programme, schools are advised to take into consideration students' needs, parents' or guardians' views, employers and the wider interests of the local community. The draft programme statement was developed by the NCCA's TY Programme Statement Development Group which included representatives of relevant stakeholders, and the development process included significant targeted and public consultation. Following this public consultation, the Programme Statement has been accepted by the NCCA council and submitted to the Minister and the department for consideration and final approval. This work is ongoing.

The Minister for Education has also committed to making TY universally available, so that every student in every school who wishes to participate in the programme can do so. The department is currently working on how schools can be supported in the provision of the programme to all students wishing to take part, and this work includes examination of the costs to families of participation in TY and other potential barriers to participation.

The TY programme, which typically involves high-quality work placements in the community for participating students, is a comparatively low-cost initiative that enables schools to allow their students benefit from opportunities and the capacity of actors around them.

During the final two years of Senior Cycle students take one of three programmes, each leading to a state examination:

*Leaving Certificate*⁷⁰

The Leaving Certificate Established is a two-year programme that aims to provide learners with a broad, balanced education while also offering some specialisation in line with the student's interests and needs with regard to their options for further study and working life. Assessment methods vary by subject, typically including a written examination paper. For many subjects it also incorporates additional assessment methods such as oral and aural examinations, practical examinations and assessment of practical coursework towards the end of the two-year programme of study. While the

⁷⁰ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Leaving Certificate 2023 (www.gov.ie)

purpose of Leaving Certificate assessment is to certify attainment at the end of the two-year programme, in practice performance in the examinations is also used for the purposes of selection into further and higher education, and into employment.

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme⁷¹

This two-year programme combines the academic strengths of the Leaving Certificate with a dynamic focus on self-directed learning, enterprise, work and the community. The programme is designed to encourage students to develop skills and competencies fundamental to both academic and vocational success. The vocational focus of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is achieved through the provision of two additional courses of study in work preparation and enterprise, known as the link modules, which are taken by LCVP students in addition to a number of Leaving Certificate Established subjects.

Leaving Certificate Applied Programme⁷²

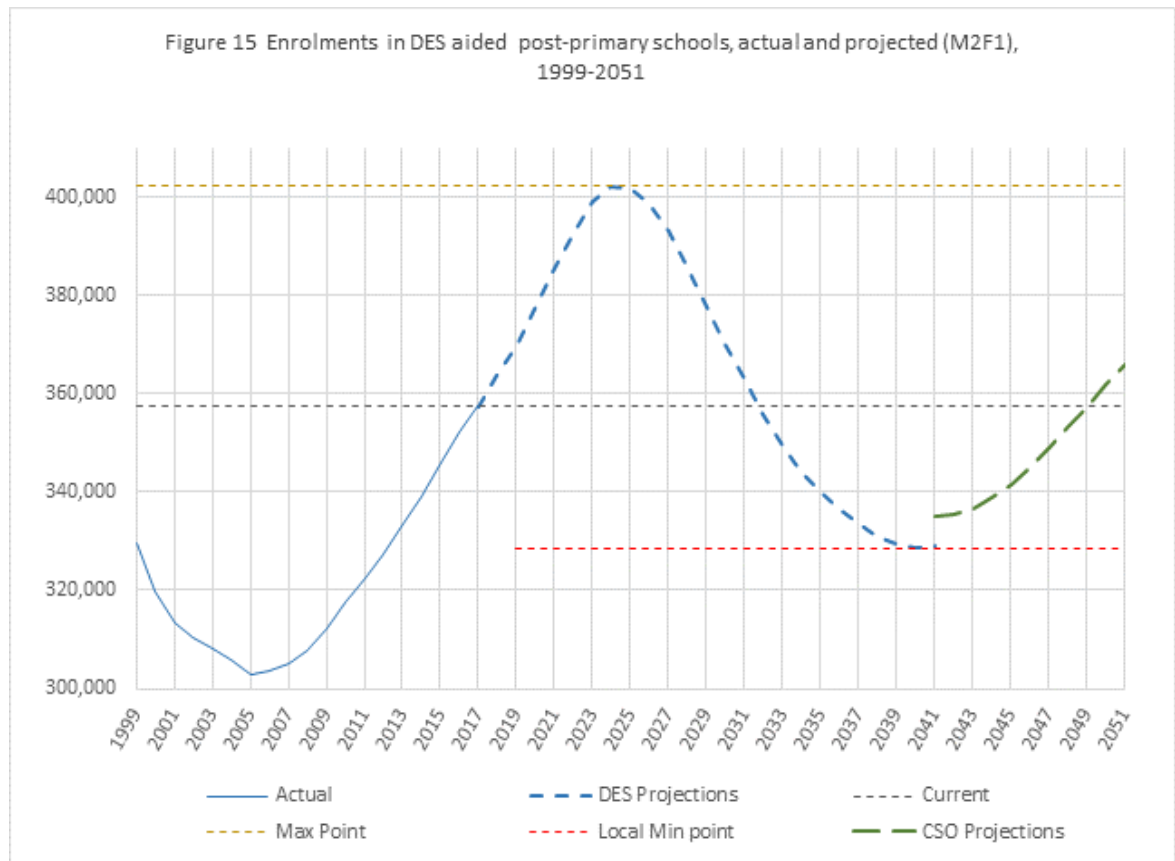
The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is a two-year Leaving Certificate, available to students who wish to follow a practical or vocationally-orientated programme. The Leaving Certificate Applied is made up of a range of courses that are structured around three elements: Vocational Preparation, Vocational Education and General Education.

There are many paths of progression after completion of the LCA programme. LCA students can progress onto further education and training (FET) courses, Apprenticeships and Traineeships, the Gardaí (Irish Police) and the Defence Forces. The LCA is not accepted by higher education institutions for the purpose of direct access to higher education courses. Typically, LCA students wishing to take such courses must first complete either a FET course or a pre-university access course.

⁷¹ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - [Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme \(LCVP\) \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

⁷² [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - [Leaving Certificate Applied \(LCA\) \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

Figure 9 – Enrolments in DEIS Aided Post-Primary Schools



actual/projected

Source: Dept of Education⁷³

⁷³ Projections of full-time enrolment 2023 - 2042

In general, the number of post-primary schools dropped between 1998 to 2013 but started to grow again from 2014 to date as per the table below;

Figure 10 – Number of Post-Primary Schools 1998-2023

Year	Number of Post-Primary Schools
1998-1999	759
1999-2000	740
2000-2001	739
2001-2002	737
2002-2003	731
2003-2004	727
2004-2005	722
2005-2006	715
2006-2007	714
2007-2008	709
2008-2009	710
2009-2010	708
2010-2011	707
2011-2012	701
2012-2013	699
2013-2014	700
2014-2015	708
2015-2016	709
2016-2017	711
2017-2018	715
2018-2019	722
2019-2020	723
2020-2021	730
2021-2022	728
2022-2023	727

Source: Dept of Education

2.1.10. Exams During COVID-19 pandemic

The State Examinations Commission (SEC)⁷⁴ is responsible for the development, assessment, accreditation and certification of the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate examinations. During the COVID-19 pandemic state exams could not be held in the usual format and a system of calculated grades was adopted. Notwithstanding the SEC's statutory role in administering, assessing and certifying state examinations, the SEC was not responsible for the governance or operation of the system of Calculated Grades in Leaving Certificate 2020.

As the calculated grades did not meet the definition of an exam under existing primary legislation and time constraints, responsibility for the governance of the Calculated

⁷⁴ [SEC Home - State Examination Commission \(examinations.ie\)](https://www.examinations.ie)

Grades system fell to the Department of Education which established a non-statutory office, the Calculated Grades Executive Office, to run the process. The SEC retained responsibility for the Leaving Certificate examinations which ultimately took place in Q4 2020 and were taken by a very much reduced number of candidates.

In advance of the system of Accredited Grades used in 2021, the *Education (Leaving Certificate 2021) (Accredited Grades) Act 2021*⁷⁵ was enacted. This Act conferred certain specified functions on the SEC in relation to the system of Accredited Grades. The 2021 Act relates only to the operation of the Accredited Grades system in 2021 and does not have perpetual effect. The system of Accredited Grades, announced by the government in February 2021, operated on an administrative basis under the stewardship of the department until the Minister's determination in June 2021.

2.1.11. Education Outside of the Mainstream School Setting

Most children attend state-funded schools although some are educated at home or in schools outside of the recognised mainstream education system, including private schools. The *Education (Welfare) Act 2000*⁷⁶ provided for the first time for the identification of children who are being educated outside the recognised mainstream education system and for a structure to ensure that the education which is being provided to them meets their constitutional rights.

Section 14 of the Act requires that all children who are educated in a place other than a recognised school are registered with Tusla. To be eligible for Section 14 registration, the Tusla Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS)⁷⁷ requires receipt of a valid application. The service will complete an assessment of the educational provision to determine that the child is in receipt of a certain minimum level of education. The child will then be placed on the statutory register of children educated outside of the recognised mainstream education system.

⁷⁵ [Education \(Leaving Certificate 2021\) \(Accredited Grades\) Act 2021 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](#)

⁷⁶ [Education \(Welfare\) Act, 2000 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](#)

⁷⁷ [Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service Tusla - Child and Family Agency](#)

Figure 11 – Number of Children and Young People on the Section 14 Register for Home Education Split by Primary and Post-Primary Age, 2013 - 2022.

Year	Number of children on s.14 Register for Home Education (calendar year end)	Number of children split by:	
		Primary aged (6 – 12 years old)	Post-primary aged (13-18 years old)
2022	1,931	895	1,036
2021	1,808	849	959
2020	1,648	836	812
2019	1,495	806	689
2018	1,410	786	624
2017	1,377	771	606
2016	1,322	753	569
2015	1,090	595	495
2014	969	527	442
2013	897	446	451

Figure 12 – Number of Children Enrolled in Schools Outside of the Recognised Mainstream Education System Split by Primary, Post-Primary and Those Offering Both, 2014 To 2022.

(For non-recognised schools, the breakdown only is only captured since 2021.)

Year	Number of children enrolled in an independent school	Number enrolled split by:		
		Primary Schools	Post-primary Schools	Primary and Post-primary Schools
2022	6,217	5,003	657	557
2021	5,947	4,933	621	393
2020	6,629	-		
2019	6,688			
2018	5,292			
2017	4,904			
2016	4,804			
2015	4,650			
2014	4,581			

Source: Children’s Services Regulation, Quality and Regulation Directorate - TUSLA.

While the Department of Education primarily supports mainstream schools, it does provide funding for a small number of schools/centres of education, that provide education for the small number of young people who become disengaged from mainstream education before the age of 16. These out-of-school services are typically a provision of education, outside of the mainstream school setting, that provides an alternative option when all other supports have not proved successful in maintaining the student's engagement with mainstream education. These settings vary in structure and design but provide an important service for a small cohort of students who have had difficulty continuing their education in the mainstream system.

Since the establishment of the Youth Encounter Project⁷⁸ in the 1970s there has been an education sector which operates outside of the traditional mainstream school system. This has expanded over time, often as a response to a local or specific need. Settings have been established in Dublin, Limerick, Cork and other, mainly urban, areas. Out-of-school education settings also include the alternative learning programmes developed by ETBs, Cork Life Centre⁷⁹, Carline⁸⁰ and City Motor Sports centres in Dublin, amongst others.

A review of out-of-school education provision was undertaken recently to inform future policy in this area. The Report on the Review of Out-of-School Education Provision⁸¹ was published in May 2022. The report sets out an implementation plan to progress the recommendations of the review. A working group, consisting of a representative cross-section of expertise from relevant government departments and agencies, has been established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations.

Additional support is provided by Youthreach⁸² which is an education, training, and work programme for early school leavers aged fifteen-twenty years of age, which operates under the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. It offers support to young people to help them identify what they would like to do in adult life and allows them to gain a certificate. Youthreach operates on a full-time basis and there are one hundred and ten centres in Ireland. This initiative aims to provide education, training and work experience to young people with no formal education or training qualifications (that is, those who have left school with less than five Grade Ds' at Junior Cycle.)

Youthreach programmes are provided in settings outside of the mainstream school system. The curriculum provided features integrated personal development, literacy, numeracy, ICT and communications and a range of vocational options and work experience. Trainees are paid a training allowance. Guidance and counselling, and childcare services are available for participants. Certification is provided through Quality

⁷⁸ www.gov.ie - High Support Special Schools, Youth Encounter Projects (YEP) and Children Detention Schools (www.gov.ie)

⁷⁹ [Cork Life Centre | Children's Rights Alliance \(childrensrights.ie\)](http://www.corklifecentre.ie)

⁸⁰ [Learning Centres - Peter McVerry Trust \(pmvtrust.ie\)](http://www.pmvtrust.ie)

⁸¹ [Review of Out-of-School Education Provision Social Inclusion Unit Department of Education \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

⁸² www.gov.ie - Youthreach (www.gov.ie)

and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)⁸³, through the Leaving Certificate Applied, and through subjects in the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate.

2.1.12. Church Patronage/Ethos

The 1991 Census showed approximately 190,000 people in a total population of 3,500,000 approximately or 6% of the total; expressing no religion, not expressing a religion or expressing a religion which did not have the patronage of any primary schools. The 2016 Census showed a total population of over 4,760,000 with 10.1% of that number (481,000) recorded as expressing 'no religion'. In the 2022 Census⁸⁴ the figure for people with no religion stood at 736,210 or 14.2% of the population.

When the percentage of those expressing to be Roman Catholic is compared between the 1991 and 2022 Census' that number has fallen from 91.6% to 69% of the population. However, 89% of the primary school stock remains under Roman Catholic patronage.

As of 31/10/2019, 30% of the chairpersons of boards of managements of primary schools were members of the clergy (including nuns) while as of 25/06/2021, that figure had reduced to 26% therefore a 4% decrease since 2019.

Figure 13 – Ethos of Mainstream Primary Schools 2023/2024 School Year

Ethos	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils
Catholic	2,731	484,577
Church Of Ireland	168	16,032
Inter Denominational	16	3,471
Jewish	1	101
Methodist	1	93
Multi Denominational	152	40,783
Muslim	2	822
Presbyterian	17	793
Quaker	1	115
Grand Total	3,089	546,787

⁸³ [Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(qqi.ie\)](http://www.qqi.ie)

⁸⁴ [Migration and Diversity - CSO - Central Statistics Office](https://www.cso.ie/en/migration-and-diversity/)

Figure – 14 Ethos of Post-Primary Schools 2023/2024 School Year

Ethos	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils
Catholic	337	199,292
Church Of Ireland	21	12,416
Inter Denominational	147	94,247
Jewish	1	172
Methodist	1	936
Multi Denominational	211	106,855
Other/Unknown	1	761
Presbyterian	1	1,017
Quaker	2	935
Grand Total	722	416,631

Source: Department of Education

2.1.13. School Enrolment Policies

In relation to school admissions, it is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an admissions policy in accordance with the *Education Act 1998* and the *Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018*. Under the provisions of the *Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018*, school admission policies are approved by the patron, following consultation with staff and parents and guardians, of children who are attending the school. The Department of Education’s main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all children and young people seeking school places in the area. Parents can choose which school to apply to and where the school has places available the child or young person should be admitted. However, in schools where there are more applicants than places available a selection process may be necessary. The selection process must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. However, this may result in some children and young people not obtaining a place in the school of their first choice.

Schools must clearly set out their selection criteria in their admission policies. Schools have discretion in relation to their admission criteria under the *Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018*. The selection criteria applied by schools, and the order of priority, are a matter for the schools themselves. The department does not seek to intervene in the selection criterion applied by schools.

Some examples of criteria used by schools include giving priority to:

1. Pupils that attended certain primary schools.
2. Pupils living in a particular catchment area.

3. Siblings who are currently enrolled in the school or previously attended.

Under Section 29 of the *Education Act 1998*, the parent or guardian of the child or young person, or in the case of a student who has reached the age of eighteen years, the student, may appeal a decision of a school to refuse admission⁸⁵. An appeal may be made under Section 29 (1)(c)(i) of the *Education Act 1998* where the refusal to admit was due to the school being oversubscribed. The Section 29 appeals process checks to ensure that the criteria, and the enrolment policy on which it is based, is applied fairly in respect of all applicants.

2.1.14. Teacher Training and Accreditation

The Teaching Council of Ireland⁸⁶ accredits programmes of teacher education in Ireland and all are required to be in line with the revised standards for programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) outlined in *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education (2020)*⁸⁷.

Programmes prepare student teachers for teaching, learning, reflective practices and assessment in their schools. They are prepared for entry to their professional role in the context of a collaborative, inclusive, dynamic teaching profession, helping them to engage with colleagues, co-professionals, children and young people, and parents or guardians, and to understand their respective roles. Programmes foster a mind-set in student teachers to be open to professional growth and learning over the course of their careers, to reflect on their own professional learning and that of their pupils and to support their pupils in achieving their full potential.

As part of the review and accreditation process, all programmes of ITE must provide evidence of how the core elements are explored and examined with student teachers during the course of their ITE programme.

Inclusive education is a mandatory area of study in programmes of ITE. The term inclusive education refers to any aspect of teachers' learning aimed at improving their capacity to address and respond to the diversity of learners' needs, to enable their participation in learning, and remove barriers to education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from their attendance at school.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)⁸⁸ programmes provided by Department of Education funded support services, include provision for teaching and learning in the inclusive classroom through differentiated teaching methodologies. The department funded support services have a wide range of CPD offerings, including bespoke school support and online resources available to support the implementation of a whole school wellbeing promotion process based on the concept of inclusive education. The areas of

⁸⁵ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Appeals in relation to refusal to admit a student due to a school being oversubscribed (www.gov.ie)

⁸⁶ [Home - Teaching Council](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie)

⁸⁷ [Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education - Teaching Council](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie)

⁸⁸ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers (www.gov.ie)

anti-racism, identity-based bullying and cultural awareness are addressed through a suite of supports provided by the support services to teachers at primary and post-primary level. The support services have an ongoing internal commitment to keeping all its staff up to date in best practice regarding an inclusive education.

The Inspectorate also shares good practices about DEIS through numerous presentations given to Trustee bodies, ETB/DEIS seminars and working with Education Centres.

Principals and teachers receive priority access to Forbairt, a developmental programme for school leadership teams. Aspiring principals from DEIS schools also receive priority access for the Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership⁸⁹.

Teachers are responsible for selecting the professional learning opportunities that they want to pursue and are provided with guidance on the Department of Education's priorities.

Oide⁹⁰ is a new support service for teachers and school leaders, funded by the Department of Education, formed from the integration of four existing support services and launched on 1 September 2023. The creation of Oide is a significant improvement bringing together separate professional support and leadership services for the education sector. Oide promises to be a very significant agent in the education sphere, bringing coherence and a strategic approach to the management and delivery of support services that impact on the professional competencies of teachers.

If teachers' participation is approved, their attendance in workshops during the school day can be covered by paid substitution. Substitution for Oide seminars is only approved if teachers' participation during school hours is considered necessary, such as in the case of professional development related to new curriculum specifications or changes to education policy. There is no fee for Oide Professional Learning courses. However, for elective summer courses, there may sometimes be a nominal booking fee.

During the 2022/23 school year, 47% of all post-primary bespoke in-school support provided by the support service was for DEIS schools and 39% of all primary bespoke in-school support provided was for DEIS schools.

In addition, teachers can follow courses by private providers, many of which are offered online and at varying cost to the teacher.

Misneach is an eighteen month professional learning programme that provides access to trained mentors for newly appointed principals, developed by Oide (formerly the Professional Development Service for Teachers – PDST).

⁸⁹ [School Leadership - Postgraduate Diploma | University of Limerick \(ul.ie\)](#)

⁹⁰ [Home - Oide](#)

2.2. Equity and Inclusion in Educational Goals

A core value of the national curriculum, across all levels of schooling in Ireland, is inclusivity and diversity. The curriculum at primary and post-primary is for all learners, from all backgrounds regardless of gender, socio-economic background, race or creed. It aims to foster inclusivity where equality and diversity are promoted.

The Department of Education is committed to delivering on its commitments under the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and in particular on SDG 4 – Quality Education⁹¹. The target under SDG 4.5 is to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations by 2030.

Under the *SDG National Implementation Plan*⁹², a range of department strategies deliver on SDG 4.5 including the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy*⁹³, *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Plan* (DEIS)⁹⁴ and the *National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development* (ESD)⁹⁵.

The *EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child*⁹⁶ and the *European Child Guarantee*⁹⁷ are major policy initiatives put forward by the European Commission to better protect all children, to help them fulfil their rights and to place them at the centre of EU policy making. This provides Ireland with an opportunity to re-focus and, where necessary, re-evaluate its approach in tackling child poverty and promoting children's well-being as outlined in *The EU Child Guarantee – Ireland's National Action Plan*⁹⁸. The objective of the Guarantee is to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing access for children who are in need of a range of key services and, as such, forms a subset to the wider issues revolving around child poverty.

In January 2023, Roderic O'Gorman, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, led a delegation of officials from relevant government departments for the hearing before the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva. The experts of the Committee expressed admiration for how Ireland had received children fleeing Ukraine. In the Concluding Observations, the Committee recognised the positive steps taken by the State since Ireland's last review in 2016. In particular, it welcomed the progress made with the commencement of the *Children First*

⁹¹ [Goal 4: Quality education - The Global Goals](#)

⁹² [Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment - National Implementation Plan - Annex II \(assets.gov.ie\)](#)

⁹³ [gov.ie - National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021 \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

⁹⁴ [gov.ie - DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

⁹⁵ [gov.ie - 2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development - ESD to 2030 \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

⁹⁶ [The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁹⁷ [European Child Guarantee: how the EU protects children - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁹⁸ [The EU Child Guarantee - Ireland's National Action Plan](#)

Act⁹⁹, *Children and Family Relationships Act*¹⁰⁰, the *Irish Sign Language Act*¹⁰¹ and the adoption of a number of other strategies.

Section H of the Concluding Observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland¹⁰² refers to the Irish education system. The Committee welcomed the measures to guarantee the right to education for children, including the free education scheme and increased funding under the 2023 budget. However, the Committee recommended that Ireland strengthen measures for ensuring the equal access of children in disadvantaged groups, including Roma and Traveller children, asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children, children with disabilities and socioeconomically disadvantaged children, to quality education. The main concerns raised by the committee were in relation to:

- The persistent barriers faced by children in disadvantaged situations to accessing quality education.
- The discriminatory effect of the Leaving Certificate and alternative methods of certification on children in disadvantaged situations.
- The lack of education-related data, disaggregated by ethnic origin, socioeconomic background and residence status, to assess the impact of educational policies on such children.
- The establishment of special classes for children with disabilities.
- Racist and negative stereotyping of migrant and ethnic minority communities in curricula that perpetuate discrimination against such groups of children.

The Committee went on to make a number of recommendations to address these issues.

2.3. Regulatory Framework for Diversity and Inclusion in Education

The *Education Act 1998*¹⁰³ sets out the responsibility of the Minister for Education to ensure *‘that there is made available to each person resident in the State, including a person with a disability or who has other special educational needs, support services and a level and quality of education appropriate to meeting the needs and abilities of that person’*.

Section 32 (9) of the *Education Act 1998* defines educational disadvantage as *‘the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools.’*

The provisions of the *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004*¹⁰⁴ further underpins the rights of students with disabilities. The purpose of the

⁹⁹ [Children First Act 2015 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

¹⁰⁰ [Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

¹⁰¹ [Irish Sign Language Act 2017 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

¹⁰² [Committee on the Rights of the Child - Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland](#)

¹⁰³ [Education Act, 1998 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

¹⁰⁴ [Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

Act is to make detailed provision for the education of children with educational disabilities. The main provisions of the Act include the following:

- Parents of children with disabilities to have a central role in all important decisions concerning the education of their children.
- Integrated, inclusive education to be the general approach to the education of children with special educational needs.
- The policies and operations of the various agencies engaged in delivering education-related services to be coordinated and consistent.
- The establishment of a National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

In 2018 Ireland ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*¹⁰⁵ which envisages the development of an inclusive education system.

Department of Education Statement of Strategy, 2023-2025

The Department of Education Statement of Strategy, 2023-2025¹⁰⁶ identifies the following strategic goals:

Goal 1

Enable the provision of high-quality education and improve the learning experience to meet the needs of all children and young people, in schools and early learning and care settings. Providing every child and young person with a learning experience that enables them to realise their potential and to develop the knowledge and skills they need to navigate in today's complex world.

Goal 2

Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all children and young people are supported to fulfil their potential. Developing an education system that welcomes every child and young person and meets their educational needs irrespective of background or ability.

Goal 3

Together with our partners, provide strategic leadership and support for the delivery of the right systems and infrastructure for the sector. Working with our agencies, the department will provide strategic leadership to the education sector, strengthen existing partnerships and work collaboratively with sectoral stakeholders, the Irish civil and public service, the EU and international fora. Through this collaboration, we deliver high quality education to all children and young people whilst supporting the delivery of a wide range of cross-governmental strategies.

Goal 4

Organisational Excellence and Innovation. Working to serve the public and their elected representatives effectively, we remain committed to innovating in collaboration with aegis bodies and stakeholders to help children and young people to realise their potential.

¹⁰⁵ [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/development/desa/enable/rights/Convention.asp)

¹⁰⁶ [Department of Education Statement of Strategy, 2023-2025](#)

The Statement of Strategy lists a number of strategic actions directed at the achievement of Goal 2 above including:

- Support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people through implementation of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*¹⁰⁷ and *Cineáltas: Action Plan for Bullying*¹⁰⁸ ensuring, among other needs, that wellbeing supports recognise the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people.
- Support the participation and progression of children and young people with special educational needs, in particular the Department of Education working together with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the HSE, collaborating in the planning, design and delivery of an integrated suite of education supports for schools and their children and young people.
- Continue to provide for a continuum of education covering the full range of needs panning mainstream classes, through to more specialist placements in a special class or a special school.
- Help children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage to access appropriate education resources which reflect their diverse needs, including supports provided by the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) and a responsive inspection programme.
- Ensure policy in the area of special education is fully up to date following the review of the EPSEN Act.
- Through the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme and supporting children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage across primary and post-primary schools, reduce the retention and achievement gap between schools in the DEIS programme and non-DEIS schools.
- Continue to provide access to high quality and inclusive education for children and young people arriving into Ireland, including those arriving from Ukraine and through international protection processes.
- Continue the process to reconfigure schools to increase diversity and strengthen the relationship between schools and their local communities.
- Strengthen the participation and engagement of children and young people in decision-making, inspection and evaluation regarding the education system through the further development of communication and participation strategies and practices.
- Support families, and particularly those at risk of child poverty, with cost of living initiatives such as the new scheme to deliver free schoolbooks for children in recognised primary schools and special schools and the plans for the roll-out of the Hot School Meals Programme to every primary school in Ireland.

¹⁰⁷ [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice](#)

¹⁰⁸ [Cinealtas-action-plan-on-bullying](#)

Review of Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004

In December 2021, a review of *the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004*¹⁰⁹ was announced, which provides for the education of children aged under 18 years with special educational needs (SEN).

The purpose of the review is to ensure that legislation on education for children and young people with special educational needs is up-to-date, fully operational, and reflective of the lived experiences of students and families. This includes those sections of the Act relating to individual education plans (IEPs). Open collaboration and consultation are at the heart of the review and all stakeholders are being invited to engage with the process.

A number of steps have been taken by the department in relation to this important review of legislation. Establishment of a Steering Group, Working Group and Advisory Group have been completed and all the groups have had multiple engagements.

A full stakeholder engagement took place in June 2022 to discuss concerns and proposals in relation to this review, which was very positive. An online public consultation phase was completed on 24 March 2023. The next phase involved focus groups exploring key themes that have arisen as a result of the survey analysis.

The review involves an academic assessment and considers legal cases and international comparators. The review is due to be finalised in Q3 2024. Originally this was expected by end of 2023, however the volume of responses, particularly open submissions, received as part of this review and the need for careful consideration of all of these before the next steps has meant the review has continued into 2024.

Education (Provision in Respect of Children with Special Educational Needs) Act 2022

The new *Education (Provision in Respect of Children with Special Educational Needs) Act*¹¹⁰ was signed into law by the President on 19 July 2022. Section 67 of the *Education Act 1998* provides for the NCSE to designate a school place. This measure should be of particular benefit by increasing the level of support to parents and guardians seeking a school place for a child with special educational needs. The provisions allowing for a school to appeal a decision to designate to an appeals committee and the provision allowing a parent or guardian to appeal a decision not to designate to an appeals committee have been removed.

2.4. Stakeholder Consultation

The findings from a national consultation with young children on a whole-of-government strategy for babies, young children and their families was published in recent years. The *First 5 Report on the National Consultation with Young Children*¹¹¹ identified a number of issues raised by young children including the importance of family relationships, play,

¹⁰⁹ [Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/act/27/enacted/12/2004-act-27.pdf)

¹¹⁰ [Education \(Provision in Respect of Children with Special Needs\) Act 2022 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/act/1/enacted/07/2022-act-1.pdf)

¹¹¹ [First 5 Report on the National Consultation with Young Children](https://www.ncse.ie/first-5-report)

food and eating. Regarding education, a positive take from the discussions with children is that they expressed an interest and enthusiasm for preschool and school.

As part of its ongoing work in developing policy to address educational disadvantage the Department of Education consult with a broad section of education stakeholders including principals, teachers, parents and guardians, children and young people, home school community liaison (HSCL) coordinators and school completion programme (SCP) coordinators.

The education partners are the main groups with whom the Department of Education would consult regarding policy changes or issues of equity and inclusion in primary or post-primary education.

Figure 15 - The Education Partners with whom The Department of Education Consult Includes:

Body	Acronym	Description
Irish National Teachers' Organisation https://www.into.ie	INTO	Represents 43,000 teachers at primary level in the Republic of Ireland and 7,000 teachers at primary and post-primary level in Northern Ireland.
Irish Primary Principals' Network https://www.ippn.ie/	IPPN	Professional body for the leaders of Irish primary schools. It is an independent, not-for-profit voluntary association with a local, regional and national presence.
Muslim Primary Education Board https://mpeb.ie/	MPEB	The Muslim Primary Education Board (MPEB) acts on behalf of the patron, as the management body for the existing Muslim national schools, established under the Department of Education.
National Parents Council https://www.npc.ie/	NPC	Primary and post-primary parents' representative group.
Catholic Primary Schools Management Association https://www.cpsma.ie/	CPSMA	Provides advice and support for chairpersons and principals of boards of management in over 2,800 schools. It collaborates with other management bodies and negotiates on behalf of these schools with the Department of Education and other education partners.
Joint Managerial Body https://www.jmb.ie/	JMB	Offers professional development, support and advice to all voluntary secondary schools.
Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools https://www.accs.ie/	ACCS	The mission of the ACCS is to promote and represent community and comprehensive schools and in particular to assist the boards of management of schools in carrying out their duties.
Irish Second Level Student's Union https://www.issu.ie/home	ISSU	The national representative body for post-primary school students in Ireland.

<p>Education and Training Boards Ireland</p> <p>https://www.etbi.ie/</p>	ETBI	National representative body established to collectively represent the sixteen ETBs and promote their interests.
<p>Board of Education - Church of Ireland</p> <p>tps://www.ireland.anglican.org/about/general-synod-its-committees/board-of-education</p>		Represents the Church of Ireland (Protestant Church) and other educational bodies, and provides advice to school patrons and boards of management on the management of schools.
<p>National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education</p> <p>https://nabmse.ie/</p>	NABMSE	Provides a countrywide representation of boards of management of special schools and mainstream schools that provide education for children and young people with low and high incidence special educational needs.
<p>Educate Together</p> <p>https://www.educatetogether.ie/</p>		Educate Together operates a national network of 96 primary schools and 21 post-primary schools in Ireland, catering to over 37,000 children and young people. These schools purport to offer equality of access and esteem to children irrespective of their social, cultural or religious background, are learner centred in their approach to education and are run as participatory democracies, with respectful partnership between parents, pupils and staff.
<p>An Foras Pátrúnachta</p> <p>https://www.foras.ie/en/</p>		An Foras Pátrúnachta is a national patron of Irish-medium schools at both primary and post-primary level.
<p>National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals</p> <p>https://www.napd.ie/</p>	NAPD	Provides a united voice for principals and deputy principals on issues of common concern.
<p>Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland</p> <p>https://www.asti.ie/home/</p>	ASTI	The ASTI represents 18,800 teachers in community schools, community colleges, comprehensive schools and voluntary secondary schools.
<p>Teachers' Union of Ireland</p>	TUI	The Teachers' Union of Ireland represents over 20,500 members in the education service.
<p>Fórsa</p> <p>https://www.forsa.ie/about-forsa/divisions/education/</p>		Fórsa represents members in the public service, as well as the commercial sector, state agencies, some private companies and in the community and voluntary sector. Representation includes SNAs, school ancillary staff, staff in SCP and ETB administrative Staff.

Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants tps://www.ahcps.ie/	AHCPS	AHCPS represents senior civil servants and managers in the State sector, including administrative staff in ETBs
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3. Student Support and Monitoring

3.1. Promoting School-Level Interventions to Support Equity and the Inclusion of All Students

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle of Ireland's education and training system. The education system welcomes and meaningfully engages all learners, including those with special educational needs and learners impacted by disadvantage. Considering its core role in the development, cohesion and wellbeing of an inclusive society, the system places the children and young people at the centre of education strategy and policy development and values learning as a public good. All learners should have the opportunity to reach their potential.

3.1.1. Matching Resources Within Schools to Respond to the Learning Needs of All Students

In Irish primary and post-primary schools, children and young people are grouped according to age. Children typically start their primary education at the age of five. At post-primary typically young people at Junior Cycle range in age from 12 to 16 years and at Senior Cycle from 16 to 18 or 19.

In primary schools, children and young people are organised into mixed ability class groups in almost all instances. In smaller primary schools, multi-grade classrooms exist. The children and young people's ages therefore vary in accordance with the range of class grades within individual classrooms.

Post-primary schools in Ireland group children and young people for learning in a variety of ways. At one end of the spectrum, full streaming throughout the Junior Cycle is still in practice. At the other end of the spectrum, several schools have adopted full mixed-ability classes throughout Junior Cycle. In between, there are countless variations of these practices, including setting for certain subjects, banding class groups on the timetable and creating segregated class groups for low attaining students or students following the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)¹¹².

The education system and national curricular changes have encouraged post-primary schools to a move away from streaming according to assessed or perceived ability. As a result, in many schools a combination of mixed-ability teaching with setting in core subjects is common practice. At Senior Cycle level young people can be broadly grouped according to the programme they choose to follow, with LCA students typically maintaining a distinct grouping. Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) are not typically separated by programme except in the case of timetabling for the LCVP Link Modules and students of both programmes may share the same class groups based on their subject choices. The class groupings at an individual school level are determined by a number of factors, including the need to group students of similar levels of ability in each subject together,

¹¹² [About the Junior Certificate School Programme - JCSP](#)

and the level of interest from students in particular subjects in conjunction with the school's ability to accommodate these.

All Irish primary and post-primary schools are provided with additional teaching resources to support children and young people's special educational needs. Schools can use these resources flexibly to provide small group or one-to-one interventions based on the principle that children and young people with greater levels of need receive greater levels of support.

In a growing number of schools, the Department of Education has allocated additional resources to provide special classes to support children and young people with complex special educational needs. The children and young people within these special classes can range in age as the allocation is based on specific identified needs.

Special educational needs can arise from a physical, sensory (blindness/visual impairment, deafness/hard of hearing), mental health or learning disability. Children and young people with special educational needs are children first and have many different strengths, talents and abilities. The *Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004*¹¹³ (EPSEN) gives children and young people with special educational needs the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as their peers who do not have such needs.

Special educational needs are defined in the EPSEN Act as *"a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition and cognate words shall be construed accordingly."*

The different designations of special educational needs classes provided in Ireland are:

- visual impairment
- hearing
- mild general learning disability
- moderate General Learning Disability
- severe/profound learning disability
- emotional/behavioural disturbance
- severe emotional/behavioural disturbance
- autism
- physical disability
- multiple disabilities
- specific learning disability
- specific speech and language disorder

The Department of Education policy, which is set out in EPSEN is that children and young people with special educational needs should be educated in mainstream placements with additional supports provided as appropriate. Significant additional

¹¹³ [Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie)

special education teaching and special need assistant supports have been allocated to schools to support children and young people with special educational needs to remain in mainstream placements. A child or a young person with special educational needs does not require a diagnosis or professional report to access additional teaching and special needs assistant (SNA) supports in mainstream classes. The vast majority of children with special educational needs attend mainstream settings while those children and young people with more complex needs attend special classes and special schools.

Where children and young people require more specialised educational settings, such as special classes or special schools, the department and National Council for Special Education (NCSE) ensures that the necessary resources and supports for such placements are provided in line with the needs of the child or young person.

The *NCSE Inclusive Education Framework*¹¹⁴ provides guidance to schools on what constitutes good practice for including children and young people with special educational needs and is designed to provide clear signposts to schools on their journey towards inclusion. The framework consists of ten structured themes relating to inclusion, with a number of criteria under each. It has been designed for use in all educational settings including mainstream schools, special classes and special schools. The NCSE supports this commitment to its use across educational settings, which is in keeping with the functions outlined for the NCSE within the *EPSEN Act*. (2004).

Children and young people with a variety of complex special needs also attend special schools. These schools are organised based on the needs of the children and young people and ages range from four to eighteen depending on the school's category of special educational need. Although all special schools in the state are designated primary schools, this is for organisational purposes, and some special schools are organised based on primary and post-primary age categories.

In order to access a special class or a special school a child or young person must have a report from a relevant professional or team of professionals (for example, psychologist, speech and language therapist, psychiatrist) stating that the student has a disability (in line with the designation of the special class in question) and that they have complex or severe learning needs that require the support of a special class setting, and the reasons why this is the case. The professional report must meet Department of Education requirements for the disability in question.

The number of children and young people in a special class does not always equate with the number of children and young people with special educational needs in a school. The published class tables from Primary Online Database (POD) are by standard and it is possible for a school to select a standard other than special for a child or young person with special educational needs. There are 534 non-DEIS schools with a special pupil enrolment which equals 25.1% of non-DEIS schools. The figure for DEIS schools is 355 with a special pupil enrolment which equals 36.7% of DEIS schools.

¹¹⁴ [Inclusive Education Framework – National Council for Special Education – Working to deliver a better special education service \(ncse.ie\)](#)

Published data reflects enrolments and standards as per the POD Census data of 30 September 2022.

At the moment, POD does not record children and young people with special educational needs in mainstream education. For POD purposes children and young people have either a special or mainstream enrolment. Questions with regard to special educational needs were asked in the School Data Collection survey¹¹⁵ but the answers are self-reported by schools and are not validated.

It should be noted that the majority of children and young people with special educational need are in a mainstream class.

Parents make the final decision to enrol the child or young person in a special class or special school in conjunction with the child or young person, school and other relevant professionals. Parents require objective and comprehensive information about the options available and should actively consult with relevant professionals (for example, school, psychologist, special educational needs organiser (SENO), health professionals) to arrive at an informed decision. Schools must obtain parent or guardian's written consent before enrolling a child or young person in a special class. This can be a difficult decision for some parents or guardians who can feel under pressure to keep their child in mainstream education. In some cases, the decision may be relatively straightforward where the child or young person's needs are very complex. In other cases, the decision is made following a period of assessment, intervention and review, conducted by teachers, in conjunction, as appropriate, with psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPs) and other external professionals. Children and young people with their parents or guardians should be actively involved in this enrolment process.

Many studies of the placement and class organisation of children and young people involve comparison of classes containing a full range of ability with those in which children and young people are more similar in ability. However, these studies are not always comparable because of a wide range of factors. The relative outcomes of children and young people in schools and classrooms (even in homogeneous, ability-based classrooms) are affected by many variables and results of research will always be determined by the choice of variables considered by the study. These may include:

- school context, ethos, catchment area
- age, gender, socio-economic status, perceptions and expectations of children and young people
- teacher perceptions, attitudes, experience, qualifications, competence and expectations
- teaching methods and materials, curriculum content and the degree of differentiation
- class size, range of ability within a class
- quality of teaching and learning
- parental attitudes
- cultural differences, the organisation of local and national education systems

¹¹⁵ [School Data Collection 2023/24 pdf](#)

3.1.2. Class Size

The numbers of teachers, pupil to teacher ratio (PTR) and class size are headline measures in the education system¹¹⁶.

- **Pupil/Teacher Ratio:** The pupil teacher ratio (PTR) accounts for all teachers, including mainstream and all other teachers which are allocated to schools. Other teachers include special education teachers, English language support teachers, administrative principals, and Home School Community Liaison (HCSL) teachers, as well as any other full-time teaching staff.
- **Class Size:** The average class size is determined by the number of mainstream classroom teachers allocated for the total enrolment of pupils.

Changes in Pupil/Teacher Ratios and Class Sizes

The pupil/teacher ratio at the primary level has decreased from 15:2 in 2018 to 13:4 in 2022. At the post-primary level, it has fallen from 12:7 to 12:5¹¹⁷.

By the end of 2023, approximately 986 new teaching posts were created, including 686 additional teachers for special education and 300 mainstream teachers. Of these, 370 posts were established to fulfil commitments in the Programme for Government.

The funding for these posts has contributed to a reduction in class sizes by lowering the school staffing schedule by one point for all primary schools starting in September 2023. The new staffing schedule is now 23:1 in mainstream primary schools, with even lower ratios in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools. This adjustment represents a further reduction from already historically low levels and marks the first instance of consecutive reductions in three Budgets. For the 2022-2023 school year there were designated staffing schedules for DEIS Urban Band 1 schools giving a class size of 18:1 in junior schools, 20:1 in vertical schools (schools with junior and senior classes) and 22:1 in senior schools.

Demographic changes also impact the number of teachers in schools. Decreasing pupil enrolments in primary schools and increasing enrolments in post-primary schools result in a net reduction of approximately 70 mainstream teaching posts. However, the additional mainstream primary teachers, due to changes in the staffing schedule, resulted in a net increase of 350 to 400 mainstream teachers.

3.1.3. Accommodating the Needs of Different Student Groups in Schools

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD)¹¹⁸ outlines the obligations on signatory countries to establish an inclusive education system which envisions all children, including those with disabilities, being educated in inclusive

¹¹⁶ www.gov.ie Education Indicators for Ireland March 2024

¹¹⁷ www.gov.ie Education Indicators for Ireland

¹¹⁸ [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(un.org\)](http://www.un.org)

settings. The *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004)*¹¹⁹ asserts that children with special educational needs should be educated, wherever possible, in an inclusive environment together with children who do not have such needs.

The *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004*¹²⁰ states that 'a child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with:

(a) the best interests of the child as determined in accordance with any assessment carried out under this act, or

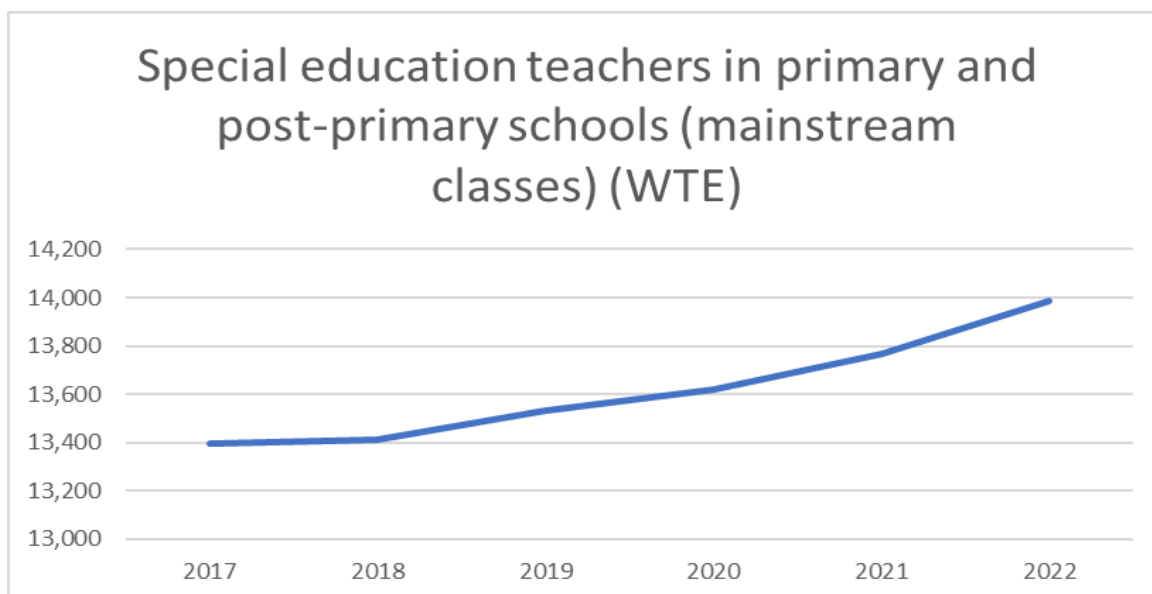
(b) the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated'.

Where possible in Ireland children and young people with special educational needs are educated alongside their peers in a mainstream class. This is supported through the provision of additional supports to schools such as special education teachers, special needs assistants and assistive technologies to support the learning of the individual child or young person. Parents make the final decision to enrol the child or young person in a special class or special school in conjunction with the child or young person, school, and other relevant professionals.

¹¹⁹ [Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

¹²⁰ [Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004, Section 2 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

Figure 16 – Special Education Teachers in Primary and Post-Primary Mainstream Schools



Source: Department of Education

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE)¹²¹

The NCSE has responsibility for the delivery of education services to children and young people with special educational needs. In fulfilling this responsibility, the NCSE supports primary and post-primary schools in establishing special classes for children and young people with special educational needs, typically autism.

The NCSE has also established approximately 150 early intervention classes for children with autism aged three to five years. These classes are intended to provide appropriate interventions for children and young people with autism before they start school. They are established by the NCSE and are part of the school. The school's board of management has overall responsibility for the management of the class. Special schools are designed to support children and young people aged between four and eighteen with more severe and/or complex special educational needs in cases where a full-time mainstream placement would not be in the best interest of the child or young person. They are designated as primary schools and operate according to the primary school calendar and school day. Although all special schools in the state are classified as primary schools for organisational purposes, some special schools cater to both primary and post-primary age groups.

Funding

The department announced unprecedented funding for special education in the 2024 budget. This budget allocated over €2.7 billion for special education, marking a 5% increase from the previous year.

¹²¹ National Council for Special Education – Working to deliver a better special education service NCSE.ie

Key highlights from the 2024 budget include:

1. **Funding for Additional Staff:** An additional €82 million will be used to recruit 1,216 (SNAs) and 744 special educational needs teachers (SET's). This initiative is expected to create up to 2,700 new places for children and young people with special educational needs
2. **Support for Special Schools:** €11 million is allocated to benefit special schools, removing the threshold for the appointment of an administrative deputy principal and providing for an additional 100 teaching posts. This will support in the region of 9,000 children and young people in these schools
3. **Enhanced Summer Programme:** An additional €20 million will be available for the Enhanced Summer Programme, which is particularly beneficial for children and young people with special educational needs. This funding aims to encourage more schools to participate and offer this program
4. **School Transport Scheme:** €92 million is allocated to the School Transport Scheme to increase the number of places for children and young people with special educational needs, covering increased bus contractor costs and continuing the reduction in school transport fees

Posts

In 2024, the number of teaching and SNA posts in schools will increase with an additional 744 teachers and 1,216 SNAs added to deliver up to 2,700 new places for children with special educational needs. This will mean we will have over 41,500 qualified and committed people in our schools who are focused wholly and exclusively on supporting these children and young people.

The new posts include:

- 205 SET posts to support children and young people in mainstream classes.
- 477 special class teachers.
- 62 teachers in special schools.
- An additional 1,216 SNA's will also be created.
260 SNAs in mainstream schools to provide additional resources allocated based on exceptional needs reviews and appeals.
- 150 SNAs to support special schools.

Special Classes

Special classes are part of a continuum of educational provision that enables children and young people with more complex special educational needs to be educated, in smaller class groups, within their local mainstream schools.

During the 2022/23 school year 386 new special classes were opened across primary and post-primary schools. A further 390 new special classes were opened in the 2023/24 school year. For the 2024/25 school year, the NCSE has already sanctioned a

further 375 new special classes to open, taking the total number of special classes to almost 3,300 in 2024¹²².

The numbers of children and young people attending mainstream schools in special classes has grown at primary and post-primary level by an increase of 145% since 2014. In line with the experience in other EU countries, Ireland has experienced an increase in the number of children and young people being diagnosed with a special educational need and requiring a special class or special school placement. The biggest driver of this increase is an increase in the prevalence rates of autism.

Figure 17 – Number of Children and Young People in Special Classes by Year 2018 – 2023

Pupils in Special Classes	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Pupils in special classes in mainstream primary schools	6,229	6,822	7,510	8,740	10,123	11,722
Pupils in special classes in mainstream post-primary schools	2,136	2,406	2,856	3,178	4,028	4,786
Total No. Pupils in Special Classes	8,365	9,228	10,366	11,918	14,151	16,508
Overall Student Population	930,671	939,166	940,595	946,486	964,535	963,418

¹²² Special Classes – National Council for Special Education – Working to deliver a better special education service (ncse.ie)

Figure 18 – Special School Enrolments by Year

Pupils in Special Schools	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
NCSE supported Special schools	7722	7856	7900	8158	8424	8827
Hospital Schools	233	201	220	227	218	240
Schools linked to CAMHS units	43	59	65	70	75	70
Total No. Pupils in Special Schools under remit of Special Education Section	7,998	8,116	8,185	8,455	8,717	9,137
Other Special Schools <i>(for example, under remit of Social Inclusion)</i>	226	235	223	227	227	230
Total No. Pupils in Special Schools (POD)	8,224	8,351	8,408	8,682	8,944	9,367

Figure 19 – Proportion of Overall Pupil Population in Special Classes and Special Schools by Year 2018 to 2023

Pupils in Special Schools and Special Classes	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Proportion of overall pupil population enrolled in all special schools	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	1.0%
Proportion of overall pupil population enrolled in special classes	0.9%	1.0%	1.1%	1.3%	1.5%	1.7%
Proportion of overall pupil population enrolled in special placement setting	1.7%	1.8%	2.0%	2.2%	2.4%	2.7%

Source: Department of Education

Figure 20 – Students in Special Schools Supported by the NCSE

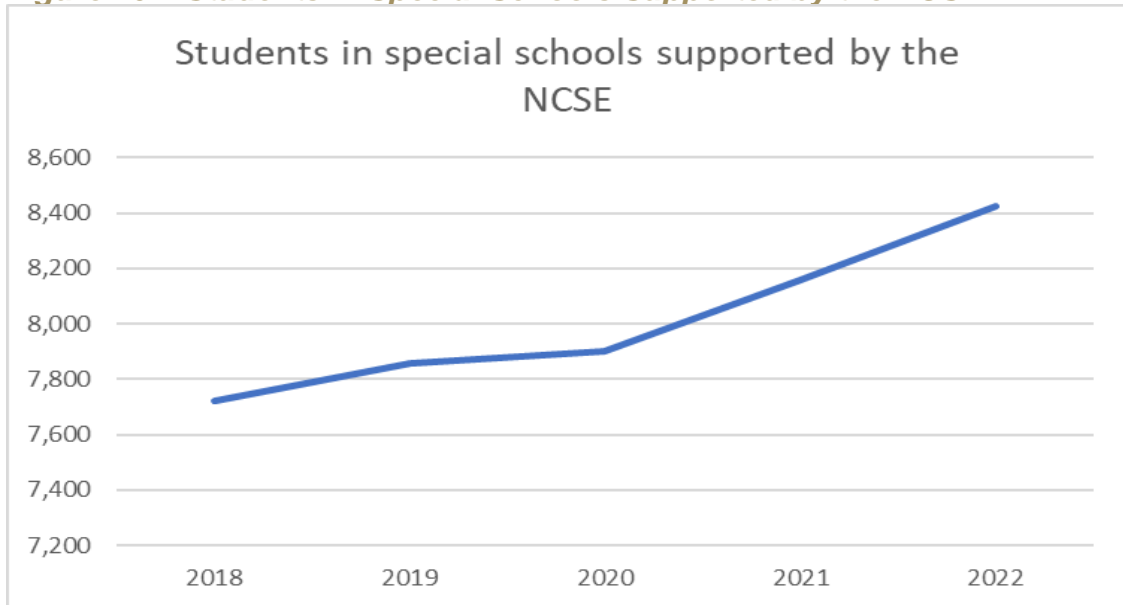
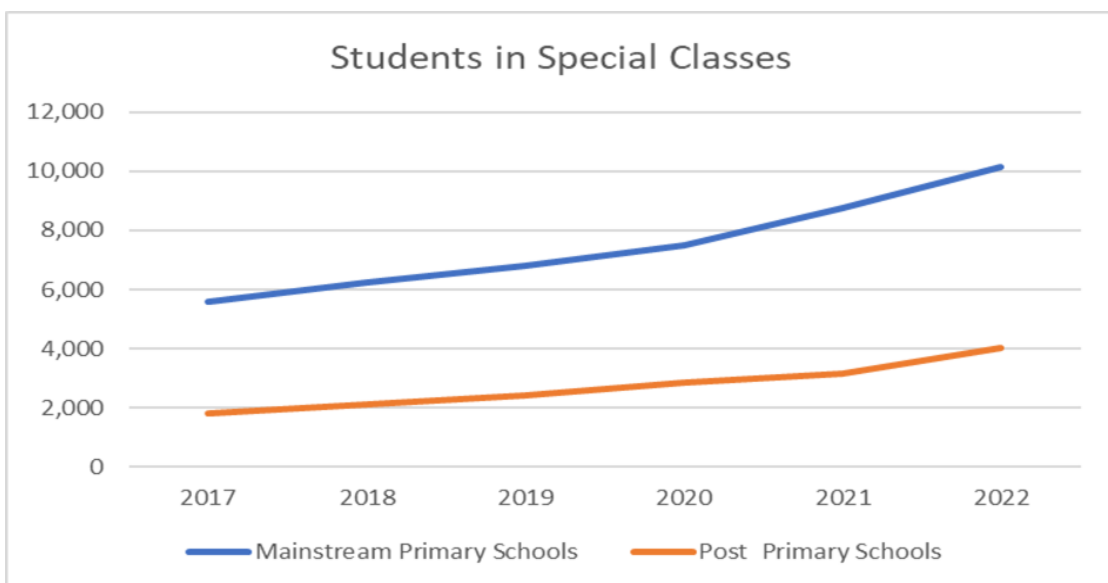


Figure 21 – Students in Special Classes



Source: Department of Education

The NCSE has advised that 90% of special educational needs classes in mainstream primary and post-primary schools in Ireland cater specifically for autism. In 2018, the Department of Health published its report '*Estimating Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in the Irish Population: A review of data sources and epidemiological studies*'¹²³. It states that although there have been many studies on the epidemiology of

¹²³ [Estimating Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders \(ASD\) in the Irish Population pdf \(assets.gov.ie\)](https://assets.gov.ie)

ASDs internationally, uncertainty remains about the true prevalence of ASD globally. This is largely attributed to differences in measurement techniques which makes direct comparisons difficult. In the last 20 years, the reported prevalence of ASDs has increased. In 2018 the US Centre for Disease Control¹²⁴ (CDC) reported the prevalence of ASDs in the US as 1.68% in the surveillance year 2014 but ASDs have been reported to be as high as 2.6% in South Korea and as low as 0.39% in China. Variations and changes in ASD prevalence rates reported may have several explanations including changes or broadening of the diagnostic criteria, differences in the methods used to study prevalence (sampling procedures, application of statistical methods), as well as an increased awareness among parents and guardians, professionals, and the general public.

As there is no specific autism register in Ireland, a number of administrative databases were explored to determine if there was any useful data to inform incidence/prevalence rates. In addition, a literature search was conducted to identify any research or epidemiological studies relating to autism prevalence that have been undertaken over the past 20 years in Ireland. Prevalence rates of autism in other countries were sourced and analysed for comparison purposes. These included analyses of data from registries and epidemiological studies. Notwithstanding the absence of a single source of data to estimate ASD prevalence in Ireland, data compiled using a combination of methods suggests that there is a robust case for adopting an estimated prevalence rate of 4-5% for the purpose of planning policy and services.

Autism charity Aslam¹²⁵ routinely refers to an autism prevalence rate of 1/27 or 3.7%. Small scale studies suggest higher autism prevalence rates. One, for example, suggests a prevalence rate of 3.4% for children and young people in Cork. In Northern Ireland, the Autism Northern Ireland School Census¹²⁶ published by the Department of Health, states that 4.7% of school aged children in the school year 2021/22 had a diagnosis of autism (6.9% boys and 2.4% girls). Department of Education officials recently met their counterparts from Northern Ireland during which the significant challenge in providing for this level of prevalence was discussed. Officials in the Department of Education's Special Education Section recently convened a meeting of other government departments and agencies with a view to examining how best to ensure the department can provide and prepare for increased autism prevalence rates. The group is exploring how best to capture and detail the prevalence rates of children and young people that require specialist supports including special school and special class placements.

A short report on an approximate estimation of the prevalence of autism in Cork City and County by Maria Gleeson-Cary, senior speech and language therapist, Cope Foundation¹²⁷ Cork noted that:

- Other studies have reported figures as high as 4.7% in Northern Ireland (Department of Health, 2022), 2.6% in South Korea (Kim et. al 2011) and as low as

¹²⁴ [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/)

¹²⁵ [As I Am | Ireland's Autism Charity](https://www.aslam.ie/)

¹²⁶ [The Prevalence of Autism \(including Asperger Syndrome\) in School Age Children in Northern Ireland Annual Report 2023 \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/)

¹²⁷ [Cope Foundation | Supports for People with Intellectual Disabilities \(cope-foundation.ie\)](https://www.cope-foundation.ie/)

0.39% in China (Wang et.al, 2018). The difference in prevalence figures is attributed to differences in the methods used, including differences in sampling procedures or application of statistical methods.

- The approximate prevalence on autism in children and young people under the age of 19 years in Cork County on 1 May 2021 is estimated as being 3.38%.

Figure 22 - Primary School Special Classes by Type - Number of Special Classes by Year

Class Type	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023
Autism Early Intervention	21	71	135	133	151	157
Autism	214	482	1,000	1,217	1,463	1,698
Emotional/behavioural disorders	1	4	7	6	5	5
Deaf, Hard of Hearing	7	9	13	14	17	16
HI Early Intervention	0	1	1	1	1	1
Mild General Learning Disability	28	35	39	39	37	37
Moderate General Learning Disability	7	11	23	25	24	28
Multiple Disabilities	8	13	19	23	24	20
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	5	7	9	9	8	8
Specific Learning Needs	13	13	13	13	13	14
Developmental Language Disorder	52	59	63	64	64	64
Totals	356	705	1,322	1,544	1,807	2,048

Figure 23 - Post-Primary Special Classes by Type - Number of Special Classes by Year

Class Type	2010	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023
Autism	65	189	435	524	653	780
Emotional/behavioural disorders	2	2	3	3	3	3
Deaf, Hard of Hearing	2	5	5	5	7	8
Mild General Learning Disability	9	11	14	14	14	14
Moderate General Learning Disability	11	25	45	46	49	51
Multiple Disabilities	3	5	12	13	13	14
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	0	0	1	1	1	1
Blind/Vision Impaired	0	0	2	2	2	1
Totals	92	237	517	608	742	872

Figure 24 - Total Primary and Post-Primary Special Classes by Type and Year

Primary and Post-Primary							
Class Type	2010	2013	2015	2020	2021	2022	2023
ASD Early Intervention	21	59	71	135	133	151	157
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	279	580	671	1,435	1,741	2,116	2,478
Emotional Disturbance	3	5	6	10	9	8	8
Hearing Impairment	9	12	14	18	19	24	24
HI Early Intervention	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Mild General Learning Disability	37	46	46	53	53	51	51
Moderate General Learning Disability	18	30	36	68	71	73	79
Multiple Disabilities	11	12	18	31	36	37	34
Other - pilot	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	5	6	7	10	10	9	9
Specific Learning Disability	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	52	58	59	63	64	64	64
Visual Impairment	0	0	0	2	2	2	1
Total	449	823	943	1,840	2,153	2,550	2,921

Source: Department of Education

In the same period, the number of children and young people in special schools increased by 19%. However overall, based on percentage of the school going population, the percentage of children and young people in special schools and classes remains stable. Most children and young people with special educational needs continue to be educated in mainstream settings with significant supports.

Figure 25 - Numbers of Children and Young People Supported in Special Class and Special School Placements

School Year	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Students in Special Classes	4,353	4,706	5,472	6,393	7,390	8,410	9,259	10,436	12,289
Students in Special Schools	7,127	7,170	7,350	7,426	7,519	7,722	7,856	7,899	8,183

Source: National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Annual Report 2022¹²⁸

In Ireland parents and guardians have freedom of choice as to where they wish to enrol their children in school. There is no restriction with regard to catchment area or regional area. Schools are not required to enrol a quota of children and young people from certain backgrounds. However, under the provisions of the *Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018*¹²⁹, all schools must publish an annual admissions notice on the school's website prior to the commencement of the admissions process for the following September. Schools must include an admission statement in its admission policy stating that the school will not discriminate in its admission on any of nine specified grounds, including race and religion. In Ireland all migrant children, and young people including children of international protection applicants, migrant workers, and unaccompanied minors, can access pre-school, first and second-level education in a manner like Irish nationals, until they have reached the age of 18 years.

Concluding observations on Ireland from the recent report of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child¹³⁰ highlight the need to strengthen measures for ensuring the equal access of children and young people in disadvantaged groups, LGBTQI+ children and young people, asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children, children with disabilities and socioeconomically disadvantaged children, to quality education.

In its report, *Plan for Places Forward Planning for the Provision of Schools Places for Children with Special Educational Needs: A Children's Rights Issue*,¹³¹ the Irish Ombudsman for Children Office¹³² (OCO) made a number of recommendations regarding children and young people with disabilities. The Ombudsman notes that the Department of Education has increased funding for many aspects of education provision for children with special educational needs and has undertaken significant work to improve data collection and cross unit working in recent years. The report states that

¹²⁸ [NCSE-Annual-Report-2022-ENG.pdf](#)

¹²⁹ [Education \(Admission to Schools\) Act 2018 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](#)

¹³⁰ [gov.ie - United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child publishes its Concluding Observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

¹³¹ [Plan-For-Places-Full-Report.pdf \(oco.ie\)](#)

¹³² [Protecting the rights of children in Ireland | Ombudsman for Children \(oco.ie\)](#)

this is to be welcomed and has led to more school places becoming available for this cohort of children and young people. However, it also states that '*there still appears to be a 'mismatch' between the forecast need and the actual provision of school places for children with SEN.*

The Ombudsman's report acknowledges, as a positive development, the involvement of the Department of the Taoiseach, which is now coordinating between the Departments of Education, Health (including the HSE), and Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). This coordination is to ensure the provision of coherent structures to enable children and young people to access the therapeutic assessments and supports required to maximise their potential within education.

Transitioning Through Education

To support children and young people with special educational needs, and their parents or guardians, in navigating the various transition stages in and from education, the (NCSE) has published transition guidelines¹³³ between all stages of education that are designed to assist parents and guardians to support their children to make successful transitions.

Under the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities*¹³⁴, the Department of Education is leading on the implementation of a number of actions supporting transitions and progression in education from early childhood through to further education and training, and higher education.

A Transitions Programme Steering Group, chaired by the Department of Education and including representation from NCSE, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) and Solas, established under the Strategy is working to oversee development of a Transition Programme that aims to provide access, for all school leavers requiring specialist supports, to an appropriate transition programme.

Specifically in relation to the transition of students with special educational needs post school, the department has two transitions pilot programmes. One is as part of the department's commitment to implementing actions under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES programme) for persons with disabilities; the second is funded under Dormant Accounts Funding (DAF programme)¹³⁵.

The CES programme is targeted at students in Senior Cycle with the most complex needs and the overarching objective is to ensure that these students make optimal transitions to either further education or training/work/adult disability services. The schools are being supported to develop their own approaches based on their students and context.

The DAF programme is operated by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) and is a manualised programme delivered in a number of special schools. The children and

¹³³ [NCSE 2016 - Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs to make Successful Transitions - Guidelines for Schools](#)

¹³⁴ www.gov.ie - Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities

¹³⁵ [Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan 2023](#)

young people are supported by employment facilitators to explore the full range of transition options open to them.

3.1.4. School Day

The school system consists of primary schools, special schools and post-primary schools. A primary school day lasts 5 hours and 40 minutes. This includes regular instruction time, assembly, roll call and breaks. The school day is shortened by one hour for infant classes. A post-primary school day typically lasts six hours with a total of 28 hours of lessons a week. Typically, schools open from Monday to Friday and primary schools must operate a minimum of 182 days, post-primary schools must operate for a minimum of 166 days. The school day applies to all children and young people.

3.1.5. Extracurricular Activities and Homework

Most primary and post-primary schools provide some form of extracurricular activity, such as sports, drama or music. Many schools in the DEIS scheme use their DEIS Grant, and the Schools Meals Scheme, to assist in the operation of homework clubs after school, other afterschool activities, and breakfast clubs aimed at groups of children and young people deemed to be at most risk of educational disadvantage.

Each school designs its own extracurricular activities considering the availability of space such as classrooms, sports halls and outdoor space. Activities that are organised by external personnel require that school management are vigilant in terms of ensuring that the necessary Garda (Police) vetting, insurance and child protection procedures are in place. Certain property, including temporary accommodation, may be leased to the patron and in such cases school authorities are required to operate within the terms of the relevant lease.

In some cases, a school may enter partnership arrangements with a local sports club or organisation to avail of grant funding such as is available under the Sports Capital Programme¹³⁶, which benefits both the school and local community. Department *Guidelines on the use of School Buildings outside of School Hours*¹³⁷ must also be considered.

Policy on homework is a matter for each individual school. However most, if not all, primary and post-primary schools assign some form of homework to children and young people. Homework typically consists of revision of materials covered in class and project work related to topics being covered in class.

3.1.6. In-School Initiatives to Support Inclusion

Student Support Teams

All post-primary schools are expected to establish Student Support Teams (SST)¹³⁸. SSTs are part of the support system in a post-primary school. It is the overarching team concerned with providing for the welfare and wellbeing of all children and young people.

¹³⁶ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Sports Capital Programme (www.gov.ie)

¹³⁷ [Guidelines on the use of School Buildings outside of School Hours \(assets.gov.ie\)](http://assets.gov.ie)

¹³⁸ [Guidance for Post-Primary Schools & Student Support Teams](#) [Guidance for Post-Primary Schools & Student Support Teams](#)

SSTs provide whole-school and targeted support to identified children and young people in response to their needs. It is also the mechanism through which many of the existing supports are coordinated and planned. All post-primary schools are also allocated a guidance counsellor to provide additional tiered support. Guidance counsellors work closely with the schools' support team (SST).

The core membership of SSTs includes senior management representative(s) (principal/deputy), year heads, the guidance counsellor, and the special educational needs coordinator. Where such posts exist, membership could also include the home school community liaison (HSCCL) coordinator, School Completion Programme (SCP) project staff, a representative from the school's pastoral support (for example, chaplain) or other support teaching staff. Work is underway under Cineáltas to develop pupil support teams in larger primary schools and to support the input of parents and guardians, and children and young people into the work of SST's.

The School Inclusion Model

The School Inclusion Model¹³⁹ (SIM) is a pilot project which is designed to promote inclusive school environments and to build the capacity of school communities to meet the needs of children and young people. Currently there are 75 schools in the project consisting of 54 primary, 15 post-primary and 6 special schools. As part of the SIM, speech and language therapists (SLTs) and occupational therapists (OTs) work in partnership with teachers and school leaders, delivering a mixture of teacher professional learning, in-school coaching and modelling. Teachers and SIM therapists also collaborate in the design and delivery of educationally relevant therapeutic interventions and strategies to promote learning and participation. Additionally, the National Educational Psychological Service¹⁴⁰ (NEPS) allows for an additional 30% of psychologists' time to be allocated to the 75 schools in the SIM. NEPS psychologists use this additional time to provide an enhanced preventative and responsive psychological service to the schools which aims to build inclusive practice to support the needs of children and young people.

City Connects

In July 2016, the government launched a major initiative for Dublin's North-East Inner City (NEIC) to oversee the long term, social and economic regeneration of the area. City Connects¹⁴¹ is a system originally developed by Boston College that organises support for children and young people and leverages existing school and community-based resources to improve the academic and social/emotional outcomes for children and young people.

The North East Inner City (NEIC) Multi-Disciplinary Team

The Department of Education and the Health Service Executive (HSE) established an in school Executive Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) in ten primary schools in the NEIC. The NEIC MDT provides a direct service to children and young people, school staff and families. The NEIC MDT has three clusters, with one NEPS Psychologist, one speech

¹³⁹ www.gov.ie - School Inclusion Model Group (www.gov.ie)

¹⁴⁰ www.gov.ie - National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) (www.gov.ie)

¹⁴¹ www.gov.ie - City Connects Programme | NEIC | North East Inner City of Dublin

and language therapist and one occupational therapist on each team and the schools are divided into three corresponding cluster groups. The HSE psychologist works across the three clusters/ten schools.

This project involves school leaders and teachers, working closely and across job descriptor boundaries, with psychologists, education specialists and inspectors, to jointly plan interventions that will lead to better outcomes for children and young people and their families.

The NEIC Multi-disciplinary Team project won first prize in the European Public Sector Award (EPSA) 2023-24¹⁴²

Summer Programmes

Since 2021, the Department of Education has extended to all mainstream primary and post-primary schools and all special schools the opportunity to offer a Summer Programme¹⁴³. The programme is designed to address the needs of those children and young people who were disproportionately impacted by the periods of remote teaching and learning during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. It is specifically aimed to support the ongoing engagement with education during the summer period of children and young people with special educational needs and those at risk of educational disadvantage. The Special Education Section of the Department of Education funds the programme and the individual schools manage it. 42,000 children and young people benefited from both school based and home-based programmes in 2022. As announced in Budget 2024, €40 million will be invested in the 2024 Summer Programme, allowing it to continue to run in line with how it has been delivered over the past three years.

The department also makes a Home-Based Summer Programme¹⁴⁴ available for children and young people with complex special educational needs who cannot access the school-based programme. The Home-Based Programme makes a grant funding available so that parents and guardians can engage the services of a teacher to provide tuition or a SNA to provide care support as appropriate to the needs of their child. In recognition of the fact that some children and young people who are eligible for the Home-Based Programme will benefit from peer and social interactions, the department allows the Home-Based Programme to be provided in a small-group arrangement up to a maximum of three children.

The department also funds Numeracy and Literacy summer programmes for schools in the DEIS scheme. Approximately 200 primary schools and eighty post-primary DEIS schools offer these camps which cater for approximately 7,000 and 3,000 children and young people respectively.

The Special School Pilot Programme¹⁴⁵ has now been developed for special schools where a child's special school is not running a school-based programme. This will allow

¹⁴² [EPSA 2023-2024 - EIPA](#)

¹⁴³ [gov.ie - Summer Programme 2023 \(www.gov.ie\) gov.ie - Summer Programme 2024 \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

¹⁴⁴ [gov.ie - Summer Programme 2023: home-based programme \(www.gov.ie\) gov.ie - Summer Programme 2024: home-based programme \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

¹⁴⁵ [Special School Pilot Programme](#)

parents and guardians to register their child's details so that if a place is available in another location, their participation in a programme may be organised.

3.1.7. Learning Strategies to Address Diverse Needs

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)¹⁴⁶ is a statutory body responsible for advising the Minister for Education on curriculum and assessment matters relating to early childhood education and primary and post-primary schools.

In primary, post-primary and special schools, teachers use a range of assessment types both formal and informal to inform teaching and learning. All primary, post-primary and special schools are required under legislation to have an assessment policy. The school's assessment policy typically outlines the school's approach to assessment and identifies the range of diagnostic and screening tests used in the school. Among the most common strategies used in primary, post-primary and special schools to identify children and young people in need of additional support are:

- intake screening
- collection of information from pre-school or primary schools
- teacher observation
- teacher designed assessment
- learning environment checklist
- SST involvement
- standardised tests of literacy and numeracy
- consultation with children and young people
- parental consultation
- diagnostic testing

3.1.8. Assessment in Primary Schools

The NCCA has published a comprehensive *Assessment in the Primary Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools*¹⁴⁷. These guidelines define assessment as building a picture over time of a child's progress and/or achievement in learning across the primary school curriculum. The guidelines focus on two principal approaches to assessment:

- Assessment for Learning (AFL)
- Assessment of Learning (AOL)

These are viewed as interrelated and complementary approaches which emphasise two aspects of assessment that are central to the teacher's work, the teacher using evidence on an ongoing basis to inform teaching and learning, and the teacher periodically recording the children and young people's progress and achievement for the purpose of reporting to parents and guardians, teachers and other relevant persons.

Typically, all children and young people in English medium primary schools, from first to sixth class, are tested annually in English reading, and mathematics using a recognised standardised test. In Irish medium primary schools, children and young people, from first to sixth class, are tested in Irish and English reading and mathematics. Schools are required to submit the results for children and young people in second, fourth and sixth class to the Department of Education. Some children and young people with special

¹⁴⁶ [Home - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment \(ncca.ie\)](http://www.ncca.ie)

¹⁴⁷ [assessment-guidelines.pdf \(ncca.ie\)](http://www.ncca.ie/assessment-guidelines.pdf)

educational needs can be exempted from these tests if, in the view of the school principal, they have a learning or physical disability which would prevent them from attempting the tests or, in the case of migrant pupils, where the level of English required in the test would make attempting the test inappropriate. Further detail on standardised testing in the Republic of Ireland is contained in *Department of Education Circular 0056/2011*¹⁴⁸

For children in infant classes, primary school teachers typically use a range of teacher observation and early screening assessments of literacy, numeracy and social skills. For children and young people for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL) there is a specific assessment kit to assess proficiency in English language called the Primary School Assessment Kit¹⁴⁹.

Under the *Education Act 1998* the school must provide reports for each child and young person and the school must allow parents and guardians to have access to their child's school record. Primary schools are required to provide reports on pupil progress as outlined in *Department of Education Circular 0018/2022*¹⁵⁰. In addition, the NCCA has developed an information leaflet that explains standardised test results to parents¹⁵¹. This leaflet is available in several languages and must be enclosed with the school report.

To support transitions between primary and post-primary schools, the NCCA has developed an Education Passport¹⁵² which can be shared between primary and post-primary schools. The education passport includes the primary-school report card and a profile of the child or young person which is completed by parents and guardians.

3.1.9. Assessment in Post-Primary Schools

Many post-primary schools test children and young people on entry into first year through general cognitive ability testing to help identify those children and young people with additional needs. Post-primary schools can also carry out additional diagnostic testing to explore the child or young person's additional needs through an array of diagnostic tools outlined in *Circular 0001/2023*¹⁵³. However, in the Irish system, it is not permitted to use general cognitive ability or diagnostic testing for selection purposes.

Post-primary school children and young people are also assessed for curriculum attainment and achievement through summative assessment structures set out by the State Examinations Commission (SEC)¹⁵⁴. The SEC is responsible for developing, assessing, accrediting and certifying the Irish State's second-level examinations, the

¹⁴⁸ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Initial Steps In The Implementation Of The National Literacy And Numeracy Strategy (www.gov.ie)

¹⁴⁹ [PRIMARY SCHOOL ASSESSMENT KIT | NCCAEAL Primary School Assessment Kit | NCCA](#)

¹⁵⁰ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Information in relation to Standardised Testing and Other Matters – Academic Year 2021/22 and Subsequent Years (www.gov.ie)

¹⁵¹ [Your child and standardised testing NCCA](#)

¹⁵² [Education Passport | NCCA](#)

¹⁵³ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Advice on the use of assessment instruments/tests for Guidance or for additional and special educational needs (SEN) in post-primary schools (www.gov.ie)

¹⁵⁴ [SEC Home - State Examination Commission \(examinations.ie\)](http://www.examinations.ie)

Junior Cycle and the Leaving Certificate. The SEC is a non-departmental public body under the aegis of the Department of Education.

Assessment at Junior Cycle

Junior Cycle caters for children and young people in the first three years of their post-primary education. The Junior Cycle was introduced on a phased basis between September 2014 and September 2021. It features revised subjects and short courses, a focus on key skills, and new approaches to assessment and reporting. Schools have more freedom to design Junior Cycle programmes that meet the learning needs of all children and young people. For children and young people, the Junior Cycle curriculum available in their schools is a mix of subjects and short courses as well as other learning experiences. Core elements of the curriculum include, English, Irish, mathematics, history and wellbeing.

Assessment at Junior Cycle involves classroom-based assessments designed and assessed at school level, and Junior Certificate¹⁵⁵ state examinations at the end of the three-year Junior cycle. Children and young people who complete the Junior Cycle receive a Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement¹⁵⁶ issued by the school which reports on attainment in the classroom-based assessments, the state examinations, and other areas of learning and, since 2022, includes reporting on wellbeing. The wellbeing element includes areas such as physical education, civil social and political education, social personal and health education (including relationships and sexuality education) and guidance counselling.

During second and third year, children and young people undertake a number of Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs), facilitated by their teacher. As per the Framework for Junior Cycle¹⁵⁷, there are two CBAs to be completed per subject, one in second year and one in third year, and one CBA to be completed per short course in third year. CBAs take place during normal class time during a designated CBA window. The assessments associated with the CBA are linked to the skills and knowledge of the subject or short course being studied. For example, a science CBA could be linked to an experiment while a history CBA could be creating a presentation on a major historical figure.

A range of revised assessment arrangements have been in place for the last number of years due to the impact of school closures, as a result of COVID-19, on students' learning. These temporary arrangements include reducing the required CBAs to one per subject rather than the usual two and removing the Assessment Task element. Assessment Adjustments are in place for students completing their Junior Cycle in 2024/25 and 2025/26. These adjustments are the same as those that were implemented for 2022/23 and 2023/24. This means that students in these cohorts are only required to undertake one CBA, and no Assessment Tasks will be examined for these years.

¹⁵⁵ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Junior Cycle Examinations 2023 (www.gov.ie)

¹⁵⁶ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) (www.gov.ie)

¹⁵⁷ [gov](http://www.gov.ie) - Framework for Junior Cycle (www.gov.ie)

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has also developed Level One and Level Two programmes and qualifications which are designed for children and young people with special educational needs. These learning programmes are targeted at a very specific group of learners with general learning disabilities who would not be able to access the Level 3 Junior Cycle. Level 1 and Level 2 learning programmes involve Priority Learning Units (PLUs). The PLUs identify and develop the key areas of learning needed to prepare the children and young people for their future lives. Examples of PLUs include communication, language and literacy, numeracy, and personal care and wellbeing.

Assessment at Senior Cycle

Formal assessment in Senior Cycle, the Leaving Certificate¹⁵⁸, is used to test and certify a student's attainment in Senior Cycle across the three programmes available. The summative assessment involved is managed and administered through the State Examinations Commission (SEC). A broad range of assessment methods is used across the range of Leaving Certificate subjects and modules, including written examinations, oral and aural examinations, coursework and practical examinations.

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)¹⁵⁹ is a Senior Cycle programme with a focus on enterprise and preparation for working life. It combines the academic focus of the Leaving Certificate with a focus on self-directed learning, enterprise, work and the community. Young people who study the LCVP take two additional courses, called Link Modules, in the areas of Preparation for the World of Work, and Enterprise Education. The modules are assessed by way of a terminal written examination worth 40% of the total marks, and which includes an audiovisual element. Students also create a portfolio over the two -year period which is worth 60% of available marks and is assessed at the end of the two years.

In March 2022, the Minister for Education announced an ambitious programme of work for a reimagined Senior Cycle which will involve significant changes to assessment at Senior Cycle. This programme of work builds on work completed by the NCCA between 2016 and 2020 when they undertook an extensive review of Senior Cycle programmes and vocational pathways. This review involved a very extensive range of research, consultations and communications with a wide range of stakeholders on all aspects of review and redevelopment over a number of phases. The NCCA also commissioned external expertise to support the process, including the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the OECD. The NCCA's document *Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report*¹⁶⁰ presents the findings on that review. The ongoing Senior Cycle Redevelopment programme, announced by the Minister in March 2022, is informed by this report, as well as the experience of Leaving Certificate students over the period of the pandemic, international experience and perspectives, and the growing consensus and demand for change that is reflective of a more active student voice.

¹⁵⁸ [gov.ie - Leaving Certificate 2023 \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

¹⁵⁹ [Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme \(LCVP\) \(curriculumonline.ie\)](http://curriculumonline.ie)

¹⁶⁰ [Senior Cycle Review Advisory Report | NCCA](#)

Under the programme for Senior Cycle Redevelopment, all Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) subject specifications will include additional assessment components (AACs) worth at least 40% of the overall marks. The introduction of AACs for all LCE subjects as they are revised is intended to ensure a meaningful spread of assessment load that will aid student wellbeing and allow students to demonstrate their learning through a wider array of formats. Such formats could include practical assessments, portfolio work, performances, or the creation of an artefact, for example. This approach builds on established practices in the many LCE subjects which already have components beyond written examinations, with many of these components set at, or above, 40% (for example in the language subjects, art, music, PE and computer science). AACs will be externally assessed by the SEC.

The second level JCSP ¹⁶¹ focuses specifically on learners deemed to be at risk of early school leaving. The LCA Programme recognises the diversity of needs of students at the post-compulsory stage of education and provides a programme aimed at preparing participants for the transition from the world of the school/centre to that of adult and working life. In this way, LCA can ameliorate early school leaving for those students whose needs may not be met by the LCE. The LCA Programme emphasises cross-curricular work, tasks and projects, along with personal and social development. A minimum level of attendance is required for the programme; this is intended to encourage young people following the LCA programme to attend regularly.

The LCA Programme consists of four half-year blocks called sessions. Achievement is credited in each session. Students can accumulate a maximum of 200 credits over the programme for the satisfactory completion of modules, student tasks, and final examinations in specific areas. Students who successfully complete the programme are awarded a Leaving Certificate by the SEC. The Certificate is awarded at three levels: Pass, Merit, and Distinction.

¹⁶¹ About the Junior Certificate School Programme - JCSP

Figure 26 – Percentage of Students Taking Leaving Cert Programmes 2015-2022

Indicator Description	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
% students taking Leaving Certificate Established programme	66.9 %	67.8 %	68.3 %	69.2 %	70.0 %	70.8 %	71.1 %	66.5 %
% students taking Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme	28.2 %	27.3 %	26.8 %	25.9 %	25.0 %	23.9 %	23.0 %	26.9 %
% students taking Leaving Certificate Applied	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	5.1%	5.3%	5.8%	6.4%
Students doing Transition Year as % of previous Third Year	67.5 %	70.4 %	71.9 %	72.3 %	74.0 %	72.9 %	73.8 %	79.2 %

Source: Education Indicators for Ireland 2023¹⁶²

Examination candidates with permanent or long-term conditions, including visual and hearing difficulties or specific learning difficulties, may be able to avail of accommodations to facilitate them in taking both Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate state examinations.

The scheme of SEC’s Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations¹⁶³ (RACE) facilitates access to the certificate examinations by candidates who would have difficulty in accessing the examination or communicating what they know to an examiner because of a physical, visual, hearing and/or learning difficulty. The scheme assists candidates who have special educational needs to demonstrate what they know and can do in certificate examinations, without compromising the integrity of the assessment. The focus of the scheme is on removing barriers to access, while retaining the need to assess the same underlying skills and competencies as are assessed for all other candidates, and to apply the same standards of achievement as apply to all other candidates. Schools submit applications for accommodations on behalf of students.

For children and young people with special educational needs, including those with complex special educational needs or, where a school observation or informal and formal assessment identifies a child as having significant learning difficulties, psycho-educational testing can be carried out before coming to school. Schools have access to the services of an educational psychologist employed by NEPS¹⁶⁴. NEPS provides a consultative model of service to schools and focuses on empowering teachers to

¹⁶² www.gov.ie/Education-Indicators-for-Ireland

¹⁶³ [RACE 2024.pdf \(guidanceoffice.info\)](https://www.guidanceoffice.info/RACE-2024.pdf)

¹⁶⁴ www.gov.ie - National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) (www.gov.ie)

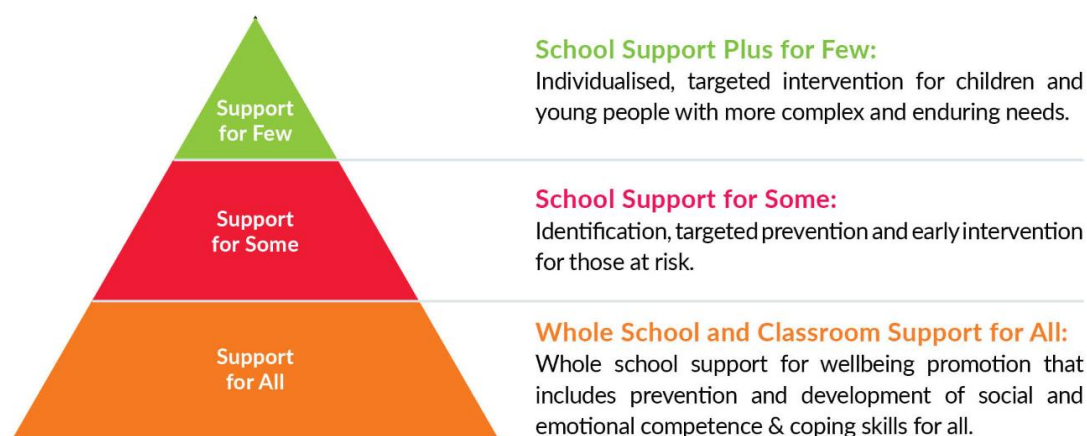
intervene effectively with children and young people whose needs range from mild to severe and transient to enduring. As part of this service a school can request a psycho-educational assessment of the needs of a child or young person

3.1.10. Individualised Learning

The extent to which individualised learning is provided to children and young people in mainstream classes is determined by the level of support the child or young person is in receipt of from the Continuum of Support. The Continuum of Support¹⁶⁵ is the official Department of Education approach to dealing with special educational needs in primary and post-primary schools. It is underpinned by *Circular 0013/17*¹⁶⁶.

Special educational needs can arise from a physical, sensory (blindness/visual impairment, deafness/hard of hearing), mental health or learning disability. A learning disability can be general or specific in nature. Important differences between general and specific learning disabilities are explained in more detail in NCSE *Information Booklet for Parents of Children and Young People with SEN*¹⁶⁷.

Figure 27 – Continuum of Support



The Continuum of Support is a problem-solving model of assessment and intervention which enables schools to gather and analyse data as well as plan and review the progress of all children and young people and respond to their needs. This framework recognises that special educational needs occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to severe and from transient to long term. Consequently, children and young people require different levels of support depending on their identified educational needs.

This framework provides a means through which teachers can ensure that interventions are incremental; moving from mainstream, class-based interventions for children and

¹⁶⁵ [Special Educational Needs - A Continuum of Support \(Guidelines for Teachers\) \(assets.gov.ie\)](#)

¹⁶⁶ [Circular No 0013/2017 \(cpsma.ie\)](#)

¹⁶⁷ [NCSE Information Booklet for Parents of Children and Young People with SEN](#)

young people with mild or transient educational needs and delivered by the mainstream class teacher, to more intensive and individualised supports at school support and school support plus levels. School support plus level generally responds to those children and young people with the most significant level of need. The Continuum of Support emphasises that interventions at all levels should be informed by the careful monitoring of progress and the development of targeted intervention plans as part of a student support file.

Under current advice from the department, the NCSE and NEPS, the classroom teacher has primary responsibility for the progress and care of all children and young people in their classroom. Mainstream class teachers may be supported by SETs who will work closely with the class teacher to provide additional teaching support for the children and young people.

Both NEPS and the NCSE provide a comprehensive suite of resources for schools on their websites to support implementation of the Continuum of Support and to further enhance the capacity of teachers to deliver evidence-based interventions to meet the needs of children and young people who experience difficulties with literacy, numeracy, and social and behavioural difficulties.

Since 2017, the use of the Continuum of Support by teachers in planning for groups and individuals has become increasingly embedded in practice. In all schools teachers use a range of models of support, including withdrawal of children and young people individually or in small groups and in-class team-teaching support. Most schools operate a mixture of the above approaches based on the identified needs of the child or young person.

Children and young people attending special schools and special classes within mainstream schools typically have a pupil/teacher ratio of between 6/7:1 with two or three SNAs per class. Special schools and classes are resourced by NCSE based on an annual review of their enrolment and the profile of the children and young people enrolled in them. Teaching resources are allocated in line with the recommendations of the Special Education Review Committee 1993¹⁶⁸. NCSE *Guidelines for Setting Up and Organising Special Classes*¹⁶⁹ set out the allocation of teacher and SNA supports for special classes. In relation to staffing resources, in general primary schools are allocated an additional teacher and 2 additional SNAs for each special class. This increases to 1.5 teachers at post-primary. Pupil Teacher Ratios and Class SNA Ratios for each category of special class are set out in the following table:

¹⁶⁸ [Report of the Special Education Review Committee, 1993 \(sess.ie\)](#)

¹⁶⁹ [Guidelines for Setting Up and Organising Special Classes \(ncse.ie\)](#)

Figure 28 - Pupil Teacher Ratios and Class SNA Ratios

Category	Pupil Teacher Ratio Primary	Pupil Teacher Ratio Post-primary	Class SNA Ratio
Visual Impairment	8:1	8:1.5	4:1
Hearing	7:1	7:1.5	4:1
Mild General Learning Disability	11:1	11:1.5	4:1
Moderate General Learning Disability	8:1	8:1.5	2:1
Severe/Profound Learning Disability	6:1	6:1.5	2:1
Emotional/Behavioural Disturbance	8:1	8:1.5	4:1
Severe Emotional/Behavioural Disturbance	6:1	6:1.5	1:1
Autism	6:1	6:1.5	1:2
Physical Disability	10:1	N/A	1:1
Multiple Disabilities	6:1	6:1.5	1:1
Specific Learning Disability	9:1	N/A	N/A
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	7:1	N/A	3:1

Whole-School Support-All involves a whole-school approach to responding to the needs of all children and young people in primary and post-primary schools, including those with special educational needs, using universal, preventative and proactive approaches.

Classroom Support-All is the first response, led by the class teacher, when concerns emerge in relation to a child or young person's learning, wellbeing and/or social-emotional development. The provision of Classroom Support-All is the responsibility of the class teacher.

School Support-Some involves the provision of additional targeted teaching and learning supports in response to the special educational needs of small groups and/or individual children and young people.

School Support Plus-Few involves the provision of highly individualised, intensive, targeted and specialised additional teaching and learning supports for children and young people, whose special educational needs are enduring, and significantly impact on their learning and participation in the school environment.

Special education teachers are involved in the provision of support at the levels of School Support-Some and School Support-Few.

Where concerns arise in relation to a child or young person, a four step cyclical problem-solving process is the approach used by schools to identify needs, plan, monitor and review response to intervention. The problem-solving process is applied across the Continuum of Support to ensure that interventions and supports are aligned to the identified needs of the child or young person and are reviewed regularly. A collaborative approach is adopted, involving the whole school community, including children and young people, teachers, and parents or guardians working together proactively. External agencies, including NEPS, NCSE, and allied health professionals, may also be involved, where appropriate, in this collaborative process.

3.1.11. Teaching Strategies to Support All Students

The principle underpinning the approach to teaching and learning in the Irish system is that all children and young people should be taught a curriculum that is appropriate to their developmental level. In matching programmes to identified needs, teachers and school leaders are encouraged to examine the range of curriculum options available including adaptations to the Primary Curriculum, Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), Junior Certificate, Level 1 or 2 Learning Programmes, Leaving Certificate Established (LCE), and Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA).

Overall, teachers in Ireland are expected to plan their lessons carefully to address the diverse needs, and abilities within the classroom. The expectation is that all teachers will adapt their teaching approaches for some children and young people to take account of their application, motivation, communication, behaviour or interaction with peers. This may require targeted interventions to develop relevant adaptive skills and wellbeing supports that relate to their needs.

Primary

At primary level in the infant classes there is an emphasis on learning through play and Aistear,¹⁷⁰ the curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland, is implemented in many primary schools. The primary school curriculum¹⁷¹ outlines appropriate approaches and methodologies for each of the subjects. For example, the methodologies for physical education are direct teaching approach, guided discovery approach and the integrated Approach. The methodologies for science are whole-class work, small groups, individual work, investigative approach, closed activities, open investigations and teacher directed approach.

Post-Primary

Teaching strategies at Junior Cycle are informed by key principles¹⁷². The key principles are learning to learn, choice and flexibility, quality, creativity and innovation, engagement and participation, continuity and development, inclusion and wellbeing. The Junior Cycle also contains twenty-four statements of learning. In planning for teaching and learning schools ensure that all statements of learning, along with the key skills, feature in the programmes of all Junior Cycle young people. Finally, when planning for methodologies and approaches teachers consider the needs of learners and how to plan

¹⁷⁰ [Aistear-Principles-and-Themes_EN.pdf \(curriculumonline.ie\)](#)

¹⁷¹ [Curriculum Areas \(curriculumonline.ie\)](#)

¹⁷² [Framework for Junior Cycle | NCCA](#)

to meet those needs and develop key skills of being literate, managing myself, staying well, managing information and thinking, being numerate, being creative, working with others and communicating.

At Senior Cycle young people following the LCE programme typically study Irish, English and mathematics and four other subjects from a larger range of optional subjects. Teaching and learning strategies for the LCE programme, and across Senior Cycle, aim to develop the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions of students as they progress in competency and expand on their subject interests. The draft Key Competencies for Senior Cycle¹⁷³ framework has been drawn up by the NCCA and will inform the ongoing redevelopment of subjects for the LCE.

In addition to developing student competencies in relation to learning outcomes, teaching and learning strategies at LCE can take account of the different assessment types which take place across subject options.

Teaching strategies in the languages develop competencies in relation to the oral, aural and written components of the course and also include elements of literary comprehension and analysis. The sciences include teaching in laboratory settings with a focus on practical experience through experiments. There is also a strong emphasis on teaching approaches for the development of practical skills in subjects such as construction studies, engineering and home Economics. In some subjects, such as history, geography, and politics and society, teaching and learning approaches are informed by project work components which support the development of competencies in independent research.

Students following the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme option also study Irish, English and mathematics but at a more functional level. Students following the LCA programme also study a range of practical subjects and subjects aimed at supporting progression to further education and work. There is an emphasis on real life, practical, contextualised teaching in the LCA, which includes a work-experience element.

The Transition Year (TY) programme in the Senior Cycle is designed to enable young people to develop a wider range of skills. Students continue their study of mathematics, English and Irish, and explore a wide range of other modules and learning experiences. There are opportunities for young people to engage in activities to promote active citizenship, self-development, creativity and entrepreneurship which could be considered as more experiential learning approaches. The teaching approaches in TY are varied and can include a wide range of practical and flexible learning activities in the classroom. TY students maintain a portfolio and there is an emphasis, in the teaching and classroom activities, on encouraging young people to develop their independence as learners and responsibility for their own learning.

As part of the programme for Senior Cycle Redevelopment, follow-on modules at Senior Cycle for those students with special educational needs taking Level 1 (L1LPs) and

¹⁷³ [Key competencies in Senior Cycle report en 2023.pdf \(ncca.ie\)](#)

Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) at Junior Cycle will be made available from 2024. The L1LPs and L2LPs at Senior Cycle are designed to prepare students for life beyond school, enabling them to be lifelong learners and to live more independently. The L1LPs and L2LPs at Senior Cycle are personalised programmes that are tailored to the individual learning needs of the student. This is seen as necessary to achieve the best possible outcomes for the student. The NCCA has published a draft programme statement and a first set of modules have undergone public consultation.

Overall, at both Junior and Senior Cycles, teaching approaches can vary both within and between schools. In some classrooms, learner-centred methodologies, such as research, practical learning, or group work are the norm. It is also common to see differentiated teaching approaches which facilitate children and young people to engage in learning at a pace and level suited to their ability. In other classes, whole-class teaching, which is more teacher directed, is practiced.

3.1.12. Teaching Strategies for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs

All teachers are expected to implement teaching approaches and methodologies that facilitate the meaningful inclusion of all, including children and young people from migrant backgrounds, Traveller children and young people, those with special educational needs and for those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

The methodologies include:

- co-operative teaching and learning within mainstream classrooms
- collaborative problem-solving activities
- heterogeneous group work
- differentiation
- interventions to promote social and emotional competence
- embedding of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching, learning and assessment

Children and young peoples' levels of interest, attention, concentration and persistence are gradually developed, extended and consolidated, using appropriate teaching strategies. To cater for the range of learning needs in any class, teachers regularly need to differentiate their lessons by:

- varying the level, structure, mode of instruction and pace of lessons to meet individual needs
- adapting lessons for children and young peoples' interests
- matching tasks and processes to children and young people's abilities and needs
- adapting and utilising resources, including use of technology
- aspiring towards suitably challenging learning outcomes and assessing accordingly

Special education teachers are expected to be familiar with a wide range of teaching approaches, methodologies and resources to cater for particular learning preferences and to meet a variety of needs. Teaching approaches in special education settings include a combination of team-teaching initiatives, cooperative teaching, early intervention, small group or individual support.

Some children and young people with more complex and enduring needs may require specific methodologies, teaching approaches and/or learning activities. Such interventions are based on careful identification of strengths and needs, including multi-

disciplinary assessment, when necessary. Special education teachers, in consultation with classroom and subject teachers, should plan their interventions carefully to address priority learning needs and to achieve the targets identified in the relevant Student Support Plan. Short-term planning should reflect the support plan targets and should break down the development of skills and content into small incremental steps to address each child and young person's specific needs. Outcomes for children and young people are routinely assessed, recorded and used to review progress. These outcomes should also be used to inform the targets for the next phase of intervention.

The ¹⁷⁴ SET allocation model was introduced in Ireland in 2017. For the first time, schools were resourced to provide support to children and young people in their school, based on their identified need as opposed to a diagnosis of disability undertaken by psychological/psychiatric or other medical services. In essence, the Department of Education, in introducing the model, was confirming that the school was best placed to identify the educational needs of its children and young people and to respond to those needs flexibly. The model of provision in place prior to the SET model was deemed to be inequitable as it conferred an unfair advantage on children and young people whose parents or guardians had the means to access diagnostic services. Every primary and post-primary school has an allocation of SET provision.

The model allows schools to allocate supports according to the level of education need as it arises in the school across the Continuum of Support. This process is informed by regular reviews of progress (in consultation with parents and guardians, and children and young people). It follows the principle that children and young people with the greatest level of need have access to the greatest level of support and allows the school to adjust the support provided to an individual, based on their response to intervention and level/nature of ongoing education need.

While the exact numbers of children and young people supported by SETs and SNAs in mainstream classes are not available, most students with special educational needs are in mainstream classes.

The 2024 allocation model¹⁷⁵ has been designed to allocate more special education teaching hours for children and young people with complex needs. This new system uses high quality and verifiable educational data supplied directly from all schools. As with the 2017 allocation model, it remains the case that children and young people in need of SET support do not need to wait for a medical diagnosis to receive this support in school. In addition, children and young people do not need to wait to be assessed by the HSE before their needs will be reflected in the SET hours allocated to their school.

Under the new system, the scores children and young people get in educational tests will determine around two thirds (68.5%) of the SET hours allocated to their school. Under the new system, 37% of schools will see an increase in their allocation of SET

¹⁷⁴ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Special Education Teaching Allocation 2022/23 (primary) (www.gov.ie)

¹⁷⁵ [gov](http://www.gov.ie) - Special Education Teacher Allocation 2024/2025 explained (www.gov.ie)

hours, 30% of schools will retain the same allocation of SET hours and 33% of schools will see a reduction in their SET hours.

Under the consultation process for the new SET allocation model the Department of Education undertook an intensive review and stakeholder engagement process. The NCSE also carried out around 40 reviews with individual schools to get their feedback on the updated model. The new model is designed to address the concerns raised by schools in relation to inequities and lack of responsiveness within the previous allocation model.

The Department of Education is cognisant that the model needs to continue to evolve so that the SET allocations process considers new or improved data sources and other changes within the school system. The department intends to undertake further detailed consultations with education partners in the development of future enhancements to the model. As part of this it will examine an ongoing continuous improvement process that can give schools more input into identifying the need in their school in the most efficient way possible.

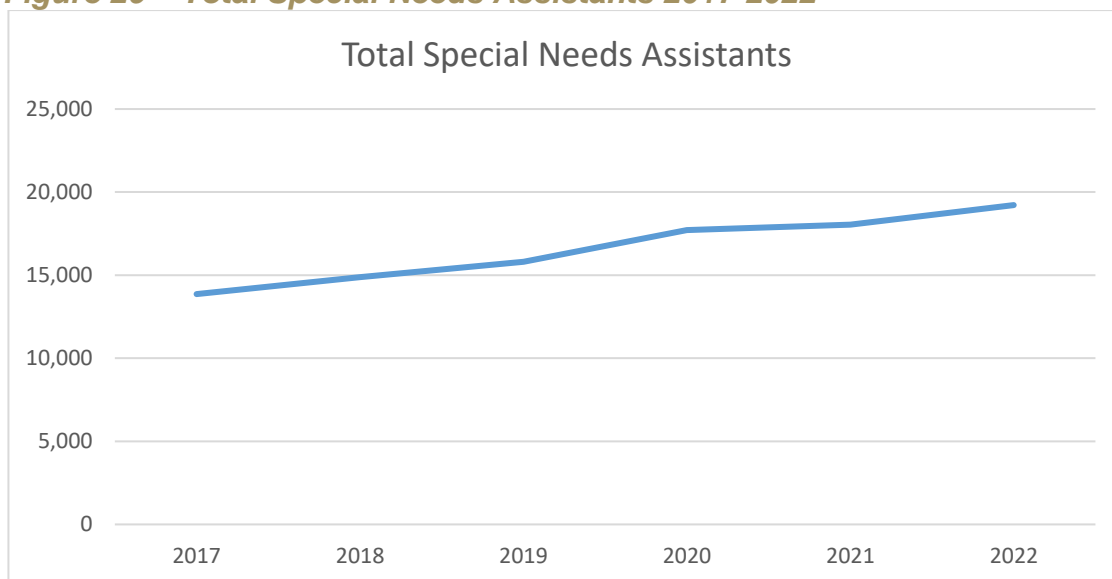
Guidelines issued by the Department of Education to support schools in the implementation of the 2017 SET Model state that effective provision for children and young people with special educational needs is situated within an inclusive, whole-school Continuum of Support framework to assist schools in identifying and responding to children and young people's needs.

Special Needs Assistants (SNA)

Children and young people with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs may be granted special needs assistant (SNA) support. Such support is provided to facilitate the attendance of those children and young people at school and to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the children and young people concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills. The *Special Needs Assistant Scheme*¹⁷⁶ has been a key factor in ensuring the successful inclusion of children with special educational needs into mainstream education, and with providing care support to children and young people who are enrolled in special schools and special classes.

¹⁷⁶ The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme to support teachers in meeting the care needs of some children with special educational needs, arising from a disability (circulars.gov.ie)

Figure 29 – Total Special Needs Assistants 2017-2022



Source: Education Indicators for Ireland 2024¹⁷⁷

Reasonable Accommodations in State Examinations

Examination candidates with permanent or long-term conditions, including visual and hearing difficulties or specific learning difficulties, which they believe will significantly impair their performance in examinations, can apply to the SEC for reasonable accommodation(s) to facilitate them in taking state examinations¹⁷⁸.

National Nursing Programme Pilot for Children with Complex Healthcare Needs

The National Nursing Programme Pilot for Children with Complex Healthcare Needs¹⁷⁹ is a nationwide pilot scheme run in partnership between HSE and NCSE. The pilot is to be evaluated and the outcome will inform the provision of nursing support for children and young people with complex healthcare needs into the future.

The pilot nursing scheme extends, for eligible children and young people, the Paediatric Home Care Package (PHCP) from their home into the school setting. This allows an agency nurse attend school with the child or young person for an agreed number of hours per week, and travel to and from school with them, if necessary. A transition and ongoing review process facilitates the child or young person's transition into school and monitors their progress.

Assessment of Need

The HSE operate an Assessment of Need¹⁸⁰ (AON) process designed to identify children and young people who may have a disability. An Assessment of Need is a separate legal process that is set out in the *Disability Act 2005*. An AON is not

¹⁷⁷ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Education statistics (www.gov.ie)

¹⁷⁸ [Candidates - State Examination Commission \(examinations.ie\)](http://examinations.ie)

¹⁷⁹ [National Nursing Programme Pilot for Children with Complex Healthcare Needs](http://www.nursing.ie)

¹⁸⁰ [Disability Assessment - HSE.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

necessary to access health services. The NCSE provides a link between the HSE and the school who have the information about a child or young person's educational needs. The NCSE require schools to complete a Report of Education Needs for all children and young people who are involved in the AON process. In completing a Report of Education Needs, teachers can use all information available to them in relation to the individual child or young person. Some of this may be recorded in the Student Support File.

3.2. Education Provision to Account for Diversity in Education

Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018

The *Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018*¹⁸¹ was introduced to implement a fairer system of school admissions. The Act applies to admissions to both primary and post-primary education. This Act focuses on admissions to primary schools, although the admissions procedure is the same at both levels. Under the terms of the Act, schools must not prioritise one child or young person over another on any of the following grounds:

- gender
- civil status
- family status
- sexual orientation
- religion
- disability
- race
- membership of the Traveller community
- special educational needs

The selection process must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. The Act also requires all schools to have an admissions policy in place.

Exemption from the study of Irish

The study of Irish is one of the core subjects in the school curriculum in Ireland. Children and young people who meet specific criteria may be granted an exemption from the study of Irish. These criteria include:

- Moving from a different country without previous experience of learning the Irish language.
- Experiencing significant literacy difficulties which are an obstacle to learning across the curriculum.
- Experiencing a high level of multiple and persistent needs that are a significant barrier to participation and engagement in learning and school life.

Children and young people enrolled in a special class or special school have an automatic entitlement to an Irish exemption. Full details regarding exemptions from Irish

¹⁸¹ [Education \(Admission to Schools\) Act 2018 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

are outlined in *Circular 54/2022*¹⁸² for primary schools and *Circular 55/2022*¹⁸³ for post-primary schools.

3.2.1 Supports for Students from an Ethnic Minority or from a Migrant Background

The Department of Education is committed to delivering an education system that is of the highest quality, and where every child and young person feels valued and is actively supported and nurtured to reach their full potential.

In Ireland, all migrant children and young people, including children and young people of international protection applicants, children and young people of migrant workers and unaccompanied minors, can access primary and post-primary education in a manner like Irish nationals, until they have reached 18 years of age.

Schools across Ireland welcome children of all backgrounds and nationalities. It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the *Education Act 1998* and the *Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018*.

In Ireland, a school must admit all children and young people applying where it is not oversubscribed, and places are available. Schools must also include an admission statement in its admission policy stating that the school will not discriminate in its admission on any of nine specified grounds, including race and religion.

Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2021

This strategy focuses on promoting integration as crucial for Ireland's renewal and a core principle of society. It outlines actions to facilitate migrants' full participation in Irish life, aiming to integrate them and address integration barriers.

A central goal is for migrants and their children to fully benefit from the education system, with measures including the *Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016* and ongoing review of language support in schools.

The Department of Education is actively advancing strategy-related actions and collaborating with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY), the strategy's lead department.

DCEDIY has initiated the development of a new strategy, with the Department of Education committed to continued engagement with all relevant stakeholders for its development and execution.

¹⁸² [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Exemptions from the study of Irish – primary (www.gov.ie)

¹⁸³ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Exemptions from the study of Irish – post-primary (www.gov.ie)

Regional Education and Language Teams (REALT)

The primary role of the Regional Education and Language Teams (REALT) is to assist in allocating children and young people to school places and to support schools in meeting the needs of children and young people as they arise.

Ukrainian and international protection applicant families may enrol their children in schools as per usual practice although the REALT are available to assist these families where difficulties arise such as a lack of capacity.

Since November 2022 the role of these teams has now been extended to assist with the enrolment and transition of non-Ukrainian children and young people residing in accommodation provided by International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) and children and young people arriving under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP), where required. These teams ensure that clear, accessible information flows are in place between schools, local education support services and national support structures to assist migrant families access the necessary supports.

While the REALT coordinator provides operational support, Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) continues to work with all local providers on an ongoing basis to ensure that, as far as possible, children and young people are enrolled in school in a timely manner and within 12 weeks of seeking international protection in Ireland, in line with the provisions of the EU Directive

English as an Additional Language

The department has prioritised enhancing English as an Additional Language (EAL) support, recognising the critical role of language proficiency in successful integration and academic achievement.

The Special Education Teaching (SET) allocation provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile and encompasses the EAL allocation that schools were allocated in previous years.

All schools are advised in the first instance to review whether the needs of newly enrolled children and young people can be met from within existing allocations.

The department has adapted to the dynamic landscape of student enrolment particularly with the influx of newly arrived children and young people into the country who require English as an additional language. The department's policies enable flexible resource allocation, including additional EAL hours and positions, to meet these varying needs.

Schools may also apply for further language support through the staffing appeals process.

Supporting Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs.

The department provides a system to support all children and young people with special educational needs irrespective of their country of origin. These supports include extra teaching hours and the provision of additional temporary special needs assistants (SNAs), ensuring a smooth transition and inclusive educational environment for these children and young people.

These resources are integral to the Irish educational system's commitment to providing a supportive and inclusive environment for all children and young people, particularly those from Ukraine, international protection applicants, and children and young people with recognised status, facilitating their full participation and success in their educational endeavours.

In 2022, additional temporary special education supports were put in place on a sliding scale to support schools with large enrolments from Ukraine and other countries.

The department has developed and implemented many strategies and resources in schools in recent years to support migrant children and young people enrolling in school in Ireland for the first time and to support emerging needs.

These supports include:

- primary and post -primary school mainstream staffing allocation
- special educational needs allocations
- resources to support cultural and linguistic diversity in schools
- wellbeing and psychological supports
- mental health support
- guidance counsellors

Support for Children and Young People from the Traveller and Roma Community

The government has a National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS)¹⁸⁴. This provides a framework for action on Traveller and Roma issues. It represents a whole of government approach and brings government departments and agencies together with representatives of Traveller and Roma communities to focus on key issues in a structured way.

In 2019, under the NTRIS, the department established a pilot programme, the Supporting Traveller and Roma (STAR) pilot project, to target attendance, participation and retention, and school completion in specific Traveller and Roma communities. The four STAR pilot projects were rolled out incrementally across Ireland in Cork, Galway (Tuam), Wexford and North Dublin and 55 schools are involved in the pilot. The pilot is co-funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) at a cost of approximately €1.1million per year. The project involves the provision by the Department of Education of additional home school community liaison (HSCL) coordinators and the support of education welfare officers (EWOs) in each pilot area. It also includes the provision by DCEDIY of two community education workers at each pilot site. Other key stakeholders in the project include Tusla Education Support Service (TESS), and Traveller and Roma representative organisations.

¹⁸⁴ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021 (www.gov.ie)

An independent evaluation of the STAR pilot project is currently nearing completion. This will fulfil the commitment in the Programme for Government to evaluate the project, and it will provide detailed and timely information that will feed into the development of the National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES)¹⁸⁵. The evaluation, which commenced in May 2023 and is being carried out by the Centre for Effective Services¹⁸⁶ has involved engaging with a wide range of stakeholders and collecting a diverse set of data, including from over 30 focus groups with children and young people and their parents or guardians, interviews and workshops with those involved in the project, and school questionnaires.

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides additional supports to schools in the STAR pilot project and undertook successful action research projects across the four sites that aimed to improve the literacy standards and learning experience of children and young people from the Traveller and Roma communities. The aims of the literacy action research project were to:

- substantially close the gap in literacy achievements between children and young people whose schools were participating in this project and the literacy achievements of children and young people in non-DEIS schools, over a two-three year period.
- build teacher and school capacity in the selection, implementation and evaluation of evidence based approaches to literacy development based on detailed assessment of current student performance and school practice.
- build communities of practice across school settings to share learning and encourage deep reflective practice and professional growth mindsets.
- strengthen the evidence base regarding what works in closing the literacy gap in the Irish educational context, particularly for those at risk of marginalisation, including Traveller and Roma children and young people.

The projects have now been completed and results indicate statistically significant gains in literacy attainments between pre- and post-intervention, across the four pilot sites. Qualitative data also highlights the positive impact of project participation on children and young people, and their teachers. Overall, the project demonstrated the positive impact of building teacher capacity regarding the selection, implementation and evaluation of evidence-based literacy intervention, using a response-to-intervention model, for this cohort of children and young people and their teachers.

Another targeted initiative that supports the educational needs of Traveller and Roma children and young people was established using Dormant Accounts Funding (DAF). Using this fund, the Department of Education funded 10 new HSCL coordinator posts in 14 non-DEIS post-primary schools with a high concentration of Traveller and Roma children and young people. Their role is to work primarily with Traveller and Roma families and children and young people to improve school attendance, participation, retention, progression and outcomes.

¹⁸⁵ [gov - Traveller and Roma Education Strategy \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

¹⁸⁶ [Helping to Implement Better Public Services - CES \(effectiveservices.org\)](http://effectiveservices.org)

Figure 30 - Traveller Pupils in Primary Schools (2022/23)

	Number of pupils	Percent of pupils	Number of Traveller pupils	Percent of Traveller pupils
Non-DEIS	404,434	72.5%	2,158	26.0%
DEIS	153,709	27.5%	6,151	74.0%
Total	558,143	100.0%	8,309	100.0%

Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES)

The Department of Education is working in close collaboration with the Traveller and Roma communities, DCEDIY, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and other education stakeholders on the development of TRES 187.

A TRES Advisory Group was established in 2023 to guide, oversee and contribute to the design, development and drafting of the strategy, including consultation.

Membership of the Advisory Group includes a range of education, and Traveller and Roma stakeholders. The group also subsumes the work of the former NTRIS) sub-committee on education, and the Department is working with colleagues in DCEDIY and DFHERIS on inputting to the development of the next iteration of NTRIS.

The public consultation phase commenced in July 2023 with the Minister for Education announcing the launch of a public consultation. The survey was designed in conjunction with the TRES Advisory Group and the Traveller and Roma Consultation Group, with a significant amount of feedback considered from the group on the questions themselves and the language used in the survey in making sure the questions were clear and easy to understand for all.

The survey provided the opportunity for respondents to share demographic details and provide responses to four substantive questions:

1. What current actions, policies or processes are working well? What is having a positive impact on Traveller and Roma education or care?
2. What are the challenges or barriers that the Traveller and Roma communities currently experience in primary, post-primary and early learning and care/school age childcare?
3. What actions do we need to take to address the challenges or barriers you identified in question 2?
4. What is your vision for Traveller and Roma education in Ireland?

The targeted consultation process is also complete and involved the three main strands of Traveller and Roma families and communities, children and young people, and the education system.

187 gov.ie - Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (www.gov.ie)

Significant efforts were made from the outset to ensure that all relevant stakeholders were aware of the development of the strategy and consultations to ensure maximum participation and awareness. The department also endeavoured to make communications and consultations as inclusive and accessible as possible.

The Traveller and Roma Education Strategy was published by the government on 16 July 2024¹⁸⁸.

Supports for Progressing to Third level

There are two specific schemes available to maximise opportunities for all children and young people to access third level education. The Higher Education Access Route¹⁸⁹ (HEAR) and the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)¹⁹⁰. HEAR is an admissions scheme for children and young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The scheme aims to improve access to college for school-leavers from socio-economic backgrounds that are under-represented in third-level education. DARE is a third level alternative admissions scheme for school-leavers whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second level education. DARE offers reduced points places to school leavers who, because of having a disability, have experienced additional educational challenges in second level education.

Data from Census 2022¹⁹¹ indicates the number of people who finished full-time education when they were 25 years or older was up 48% on the 2016 figures to nearly 375,000. The proportion of the population who finished their full-time education after completing an ordinary degree or higher was up from 25% in 2011 to 34% in 2022. Between 2016 and 2022, there were large increases in the numbers of people with third level qualifications. An honours degree or equivalent was the highest level completed by over 450,000 people who had finished their full-time education, up 36% since 2016.

Cineáltas Action Plan on Bullying

*Cineáltas Action Plan on Bullying*¹⁹² was launched by the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD in December 2022. *Cineáltas* contains 61 actions to prevent and address bullying, cyber bullying, racism, gender identity bullying or sexual harassment, among other areas, in schools. The action plan provides a collective vision and a clear roadmap for how the whole education community and society can work together to prevent and address bullying in schools.

Cineáltas Action Plan on Bullying has drawn on the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2019*¹⁹³, UNESCO's *Whole Education Approach*¹⁹⁴, as well as national and international research and best practice to develop a robust strategy that

¹⁸⁸ [gov](http://www.gov.ie) - Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (www.gov.ie)

¹⁸⁹ [HEAR - Access College](#)

¹⁹⁰ [DARE - Access College](#)

¹⁹¹ [Education and Irish Language - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

¹⁹² [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* (www.gov.ie)

¹⁹³ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - *Wellbeing in education* (www.gov.ie)

¹⁹⁴ [General Education System Quality Analysis/Diagnosis Framework \(GEQAF\) | International Bureau of Education \(unesco.org\)](#)

places children and young people at the centre of their school community and at the centre of national education strategy and policy development.

Cineáltas builds on the achievements and ambition of the previous *Action Plan on Bullying*¹⁹⁵ published in 2013, taking into account the work undertaken in recent years to ensure that our schools are safe and happy places for all our children and young people.

Some of the key actions from the plan include:

- Development of a national database to enable the publication of an annual national report on bullying in schools.
- Ensuring that student teachers and all school staff have the knowledge and skills to effectively prevent and address bullying.
- Development of a recognition process, such as a Cineáltas flag, for schools engaging in measures to prevent and address bullying.
- Piloting a programme of counselling supports for primary schools
- Developing guidance for the establishment of a Student Support Team model in larger primary schools.
- Establishing a dedicated unit in the Department of Education to promote the voice of children and young people and to ensure that they have meaningful input into the development of department policy.
- The progression of the Charter Bill and the development of Charter Guidelines that will strengthen the voice and participation of children and young people, and their parents and guardians in the development and implementation of school policies.

The *Cineáltas Implementation Plan 2023-2027*¹⁹⁶ launched by Minister Foley on 10 April 2023, commits to implementing each of the 61 actions contained in Cineáltas within a five-year period.

Implementation of Cineáltas commenced in Q1 2023, and a number of actions have been progressed.

An Implementation and Evaluation Group has been established to oversee implementation. Annual implementation and evaluation reports informed by feedback from children and young people, parents and guardians, school staff, education partners, key stakeholders and relevant agencies will be published.

A dedicated Student Participation Unit was established in the Department of Education in April 2023. This unit will promote the voice of children and young people and help ensure that they have meaningful input into the development of department policy. An Expert Group has been formed to advise the department in relation to the work of the new unit. Professor Laura Lundy, Professor of Education Law and Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast, who developed the Lundy Model of children's participation, has been appointed Chair of the Expert Group. This group commenced its work in May 2023.

¹⁹⁵ [It Stops Here \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

¹⁹⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f3fbe-cinealtas-implementation-plan-2023-2027/>

On 19 June 2024 the Minister for Education launched the Bí Cineálta procedures to prevent and address bullying behaviour for primary, post-primary and special schools. These 'Bí Cineálta' ('Be Kind') procedures were developed in collaboration with the education partners and are heavily informed by the views of children and young people, parents and guardians, school staff, board of management members and the wider education community.

The 'Bí Cineálta'¹⁹⁷ procedures are centred on a child rights-based approach and support a partnership approach where all members of the school community work together to prevent and address bullying behaviour. The procedures have been updated to take account of gender identity bullying, cyberbullying, racist bullying, sexist bullying, and sexual harassment. They support schools to develop clear strategies to prevent and address these bullying behaviours. The new procedures result from a review of the 2013 *Anti-bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools*¹⁹⁸. This is a flagship item in the 'Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying.'

The new procedures include:

- Getting the entire school community – children and young people, parents and guardians, teachers, secretaries, special needs assistants, caretakers, cleaners, board of management– to work together to maintain a school culture where bullying behaviour is unacceptable.
- Tackling hidden spaces in hallways, around staircases and in the schoolyard where there is a greater risk for bullying behaviour to occur. The options that could be considered include installing mirrors for greater visibility and planting shrubs to avoid students congregating in certain areas.
- The importance of visible and vigilant supervision in schools, particularly for students who are more at risk of experiencing bullying behaviour.
- Supporting a 'telling' environment by producing and displaying publicly a student-friendly version of the school's 'Bí Cineálta' policy in the school reception, classrooms, or in student journals. This will allow students to easily see what they need to do if they think they are being bullied, and what actions the school will take to help them.
- Checking back with children and young people who have been bullied and their parents and guardians after 20 school days to see if the bullying behaviour has ceased.
- Getting feedback and input from children and young people, parents and guardians, and the whole school community for the annual review of their school's 'Bí Cineálta' policy.
- Working with parents and guardians as a key partner to prevent and address bullying behaviour.
- A verbal bullying behaviour update report by the school principal at every Board of Management meeting, including the number of incidents of bullying behaviour

¹⁹⁷ [gov](http://www.gov.ie) - [Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

¹⁹⁸ [gov](http://www.gov.ie) - [Anti-bullying procedures for primary and post-primary schools \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

and the measures taken to prevent and address bullying behaviour. No personal details of students are provided to the board.

- Recording each incident of bullying behaviour, which it is intended will form part of a national database on bullying behaviour and an annual national report. This information will not identify individual schools or students.

In Ireland, almost three-quarters (74%) of children and young people in the *Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021*¹⁹⁹ indicated that they were almost never bullied. One-fifth (20%) reported that they were bullied about monthly, while 6% reported that they were bullied about weekly. The study found that the mean reading achievement of children and young people who were bullied most often was substantially and significantly lower (by 59 points) than those who were almost never bullied.

Retention and Attainment of Children and Young People from Diverse Backgrounds

Evidence suggests that there are high levels of retention of all children and young people, including children from the Traveller and Roma Communities, in the school system. Since 2012 all schools, DEIS and non-DEIS, are required to engage in School Self Evaluation (SSE). All schools in Ireland are obliged to have specific targets and actions aimed at promoting attendance, retention and progression for their targeted groups of children and young people deemed most at risk. Circular 0056/2022 ‘*School Self-Evaluation: Next Steps September 2022 – June 2026*’²⁰⁰ outlines the requirements for all schools in this regard.

The Department of Education has a range of initiatives in place to support the retention of all children and young people in the education system. These include:

- *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*²⁰¹
- *The Migrant Integration Strategy*²⁰²
- *Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018*²⁰³
- *Schoolbook Grant and Free Schoolbooks Scheme*²⁰⁴
- *Early Childhood Education and Care*²⁰⁵
- *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS)*²⁰⁶

Ireland’s retention rate to the Leaving Certificate²⁰⁷, which is the final state examination that students take on completion of Senior Cycle is very high.

In 2016, there were 64,879 enrolments in the first year of the Junior Cycle programme in second-level schools. The retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of 91.7% for this

¹⁹⁹ [PIRLS-2021_Reading-Results-for-Ireland.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁰⁰ [School Self Evaluation Next Steps.pdf](#)

²⁰¹ [wellbeing-policy-statement-and-framework-for-practice-2018–2023.pdf \(pdst.ie\)](#)

²⁰² [gov.ie - Migrant Integration Strategy \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

²⁰³ [Education \(Admission to Schools\) Act 2018 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](#)

²⁰⁴ [gov.ie - Minister Foley announces details of a new scheme to eliminate the cost of schoolbooks in primary schools and special schools \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

²⁰⁵ [gov.ie - Early Childhood Care and Education Programme \(ECCE\) \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

²⁰⁶ [gov.ie - National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021](#)

cohort represented a decrease of 0.4 percentage points on the 2015 cohort when it stood at 92.1%. Retention rates decreased generally overall compared to the period of calculated grades. The retention rate for schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme decreased to 85.0%, a 1.1 percentage points decrease from the previous year when it stood at 86.1%. The gap in retention between DEIS and non-DEIS schools was 8.4 percentage points, an increase on the 2015 cohort when it stood at 7.6 percentage points. In summary, the 2016 cohort has seen a slight decrease overall in retention rates from the previous year, driven by decreased participation by males in both DEIS schools, and community and comprehensive schools. Data from Eurostat²⁰⁸ indicates that in 2022 3.7 % of Ireland's population aged 18 to 24 were early leavers from education and training which was the second lowest in Europe.

Data from Census 2022²⁰⁹ indicates that the age at which people ceased their full-time education has increased over recent censuses. In April 2022, there were 150,000 people who had ceased their full-time education before they were 15 years old, this was down 18% since the previous Census in 2016. The proportion of the population who had finished their full-time education and whose highest level completed was lower secondary or below fell from 32% in 2011 to 23% in 2022.

The School Completion Programme (SCP)²¹⁰ has a responsibility to provide intervention for children and young people who are not regularly attending school or who have significantly disengaged from school. iScoil²¹¹ is a proven intervention with an explicit aim of returning young people to mainstream education. Where this is not possible, and for this group of very disengaged young people this is a complex issue, the young person may move to other progression routes in education including Youthreach²¹².

iScoil provides a safe learning environment where young people can re-engage with education, achieve recognised Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)²¹³ certification and access further education, training and employment opportunities. iScoil provide a personalised learning programme based on a student's unique needs, interests and abilities. The iScoil approach combines instructional content with individual mentoring and tutoring support to guide each student along their journey, building up an assessable portfolio of work, leading to their QQI accreditation. iScoil is flexible and adaptable, allowing students to work at their own pace, from home or from a local blended learning centre.

²⁰⁸ [Early leavers from education and training - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁰⁹ [Education and Irish Language - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

²¹⁰ [SCP - School Completion Programme Tusla - Child and Family Agency](#)

²¹¹ [iScoil - Continue to Learn](#)

²¹² [gov.ie - Youthreach \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

²¹³ [Quality and Qualifications Ireland \(qqi.ie\)](#)

3.3. Non-Instructional Support and Services

3.3.1. Counselling and Wellbeing

The Department of Education's approach to supporting wellbeing and mental health is set out in its *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*²¹⁴. The approach proposed is a whole school and preventative approach which has multiple components that include providing children and young people with opportunities to:

- build core social and emotional skills and competencies
- experience supportive relationships within the school setting
- be part of a school environment and culture that feels both physically and psychologically safe, in which they feel a sense of belonging and connectedness

The policy sets out the ambition and vision of the Department of Education that the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school in Ireland and that all schools will provide evidence-informed approaches and support, appropriate to need, to promote the wellbeing of their students.

Aligned with this policy, a number of supports are currently being offered to schools to support wellbeing and mental health including:

School Self Evaluation

Schools are encouraged to use a reflective, school self-evaluation approach to identify and prioritise the needs of its own school community in relation to the promotion of wellbeing and mental health, and to respond to meeting those needs. To support schools in this work Oide (formerly Professional Development Service for Teachers²¹⁵) is currently providing training to schools to ensure that the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school. As part of the implementation of the actions contained in Cineáltas, the Department of Education will support schools to engage in a school self-evaluation approach to wellbeing promotion, which includes preventing and addressing bullying, in line with the department's *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice*.

An initiative in 2022-23, under the Irish Presidency of the European Schools, involved Irish higher education institutions providing teachers in the European Schools network with reflective practice trigger papers, tools, collaborative techniques, approaches to assist professional engagement among teachers, and supports for collaborative school improvement.

Guidance Counselling

At post-primary level, counselling is a key part of the role of the guidance counsellor, offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental learning process, at moments of personal crisis but also at key transition points. Cineáltas contains a

²¹⁴ [wellbeing-policy-statement-and-framework-for-practice-2018–2023.pdf \(pdst.ie\)](#)

²¹⁵ [PDST | Professional Development Service for Teachers](#)

commitment for the Department of Education to pilot a programme of counselling supports for primary schools.

Wellbeing related curriculum

Wellbeing is mandatory in all primary schools as part of the Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. At post-primary, all students commencing Junior Cycle undertake the area of learning Wellbeing. The wellbeing element includes areas such as physical education, civil social and political education, social personal and health education (including relationship and sexuality education) and guidance counselling.

Student Support Teams

Student Support Teams are the structure through which key wellbeing and wellbeing-related policies are implemented in post-primary schools. *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* contains an action to develop guidance for the establishment of a Student Support Team model in larger primary schools.

Trauma Informed Approaches

The Stress Factor - Getting the Balance Right, is the first in a series of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) learning programmes on the promotion of wellbeing and resilience in schools. This programme is designed to support school staff in getting the balance right by creating environments that minimise stress and by teaching children and young people the skills needed to recognise and manage emotions, thoughts and actions in school. This learning programme is designed for all school staff so that all adults in the school community can work together to support and promote the wellbeing and resilience of the children and young people in their care.

Anxiety Prevention and Resilience Building Programmes

NEPS offers training to teachers in anxiety prevention and resilience building programmes. FRIENDS²¹⁶ is a cognitive-behavioural based programme designed to reduce anxiety, increase coping skills and promote resilience.

The FRIENDS programmes are a set of evidence-based anxiety reduction and resilience building programmes which teach children and young people coping strategies to manage anxiety and cope with challenges and stresses in their daily lives. The programmes are based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which is the recommended first line approach for the treatment and prevention of anxiety and the promotion of resilience and wellbeing. The author, Dr Paula Barrett, has developed a unique set of programmes that incorporate the principles of CBT in a format that is accessible for children and young people, which can be delivered by clinicians and also by appropriately trained and supported non-clinicians such as teachers in schools.

The FRIENDS programmes can provide access to CBT skills to address children's anxiety and promote resilience in their own classroom and these skills can be practiced at home. Therefore, access to the FRIENDS programmes in schools provides a first line

²¹⁶ [NEPS FRIENDS Programme \(assets.gov.ie\)](https://assets.gov.ie)

response for a significant number of children and young people who would not otherwise be able to access such group or individual CBT support.

NEPS has provided training to teachers in these evidence-based programmes since 2014. The programme was selected in response to increased concerns reported by schools regarding anxiety in children and young people.

In advance of a systematic roll-out of the programme, NEPS conducted a randomised control trial (RCT). Teachers trained in the programme by NEPS delivered the programme universally to over 700 primary pupils in 2013/14. Significant improvements in coping skills, school connectedness and self-concept, along with a significant reduction in anxiety were found for children and young people whose teachers delivered the program. The research demonstrated the programme's effectiveness in both promoting resilience and wellbeing while also reducing anxiety.

Classroom Management Strategies

NEPS offers training to teachers in the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme²¹⁷ (IYTCM). This programme is an evidence-based programme for teachers that focuses on strengthening teacher classroom management strategies, improving classroom climate and fostering collaborative home-school relationships. This leads to an increase in children and young people's social, emotional and academic competence and reduces classroom aggression and disruptive behaviour.

Critical Incident Learning

NEPS has developed an eLearning course, Responding to Critical Incidents in Schools²¹⁸. Webinars on understanding bereavement and loss and supporting children and young people have also been made available by NEPS.

National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in schools

The programmes and initiatives set out above are in addition to the educational psychological support that the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provide to all primary and post-primary schools. This includes direct support in the event of a critical incident. NEPS works closely with the Health Service Executive (HSE) and its agencies to ensure those who may require the provision of therapy or counselling are referred on to the appropriate clinical services for intervention and support.

NEPS is a division of the Department of Education that provides an educational psychological service to all primary and post-primary schools and special schools to support the wellbeing, academic, social and emotional development of all learners. The NEPS Model of Service is a consultative, capacity-building model, in which there is a balance between casework and work of a more preventative or developmental nature, which is referred to as Support and Development work, and includes general consultation for teachers. The service provides access for all schools to:

- Psychological support in the event of a Critical Incident

²¹⁷ [Incredible Years Programme \(assets.gov.ie\)](https://assets.gov.ie)

²¹⁸ [Responding to Critical Incidents Guidelines for Schools \(CYPSC.ie\)](https://www.cypsc.ie)

- A Casework Service for individual children where there is a need for intensive consultation and assessment via a NEPS psychologist or through the Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments²¹⁹ (SCPA)
- A school staff Support and Development Service, to build school capability to provide a comprehensive continuum of support in schools
- Ongoing access to advice and support for schools

NEPS psychologists are assigned schools based on a weighting process which takes into account school size, DEIS status, gender mix and geographical spread, equating roughly to a 4,500:1 pupil to psychologist ratio. Depending on demographics, the number of schools an individual psychologist may be allocated to can be within a range of 10 to 35. DEIS schools receive priority access to the support of the NEPS

Each of the 227 psychologists that are employed by NEPS is assigned to a group of schools. The NEPS model of service involves the application of a consultative problem-solving approach to supporting individual children and young people through a casework service, while also providing a support and development service to build capacity in schools to respond to the wellbeing, academic, social and emotional needs of all children and young people. The purpose of this model is to support schools to identify and respond to the needs of all children and young people, including those with special educational needs, while also building school capacity to provide evidence-informed prevention and early intervention support as part of the Continuum of Support framework. The NEPS casework service involves the provision of a psychological service for a child or young person, with the psychologist working through a consultative problem-solving process with them and/or with their teachers or teachers and parents/guardians, to facilitate a common understanding of the issues and agreement on a plan to support the student. The focus of NEPS support and development work is on building capacity and enhancing systems, policies and practices, to maximise a whole-school approach to creating environments which are inclusive, flexible and responsive to the needs of all children and young people. This includes universal approaches to promote academic, social and emotional competencies and skills, as well as targeted interventions in response to identified need.

NEPS provides access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support children and young people, access a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, and access individual pupil casework where there is need via a NEPS psychologist. The NEPS Support and Development service, reaching an estimated 25,000 teachers annually, is an applied psychological service for school staff to help build their capability to respond to the wellbeing, academic, social and emotional needs of all students, and particularly those who are experiencing barriers to their wellbeing, learning, inclusion and participation.

Where a school contacts NEPS seeking guidance relating to gender identity issues, NEPS will signpost the school to the appropriate services and resources. If a school has concerns for the mental health of a child or young person, they may consult with their

²¹⁹ Scheme for the Commissioning of Psychological Assessments Guidelines for Schools – 2022-2023

NEPS psychologist who will provide support and guidance to the school and/or refer the child or young person to the appropriate mental health services.

Currently there are challenges for both the healthcare and the education system in recruiting qualified psychologists as Ireland faces a shortage of personnel in the area of mental health professionals. While the system proposes a holistic model to respond to children and young people's needs and foster their wellbeing, long waiting times for accessing health and therapeutic services negatively impacts on the ability of the education system to achieve its holistic aim. This has a particularly negative impact for those children and young people whose needs intersect education disadvantage and special educational needs.

Counselling in Primary Schools Pilot 2023-2025

The Counselling in Primary Schools Pilot 2023-25²²⁰ project is an initiative aimed at piloting the provision of counselling and wellbeing supports to a number of primary school children and young people, within a selected group of Irish counties. This programme has been designed to complement existing services in the area, and to meet current urgent needs for support for primary school pupil's mental health and well-being. Schools work in consultation with a NEPS psychologist and are guided by the Continuum of Support. There are two strands to the pilot:

- Strand 1 is the provision of one to one counselling provision to support small numbers of children in all primary schools in seven selected counties (Cavan, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Monaghan and Tipperary). The counselling service does not replace the services provided by the HSE Primary Care Psychology service or the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)²²¹, and children and young people attending these services should continue to do so.
- Strand 2 involves the establishment of Education Wellbeing/Mental Health Teams to support schools in four cluster areas, and the introduction of Education Wellbeing Practitioners into schools, under the direction and supervision of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone

Sharing the Vision²²² (STV) is Ireland's national mental health policy to enhance the provision of mental health services and supports across a broad continuum from mental health promotion to specialist mental health service delivery during the period 2020-2030.

Recommendation 10 in the policy states that *“A protocol should be developed between the Department of Education and Skills and the HSE on the liaison process that should be in place between primary/post-primary schools, mental health services and supports such as NEPS, GPs, primary care services and specialist mental health services. This is*

²²⁰ gov - Counselling in Primary Schools-Pilot (CPS-P) 2023-2025 (www.gov.ie)

²²¹ CAMHS, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services - HSE.ie

²²² gov - Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone (www.gov.ie)

needed to facilitate referral pathways to local services and signposting to such services, as necessary.”

A Working Group was established to progress recommendation 10 and improve liaison processes and information sharing between schools and mental health services. The Terms of Reference are as follows:

- Share information on support services for school communities in the area of mental health and wellbeing, including clarification of roles and responsibilities.
- Consider the services best placed to provide support to children and young people with moderate to severe mental health difficulties.
- Identify gaps in service provision and make proposals to the National Implementation Monitoring Committee where appropriate (NIMC).
- Provide a channel through which challenges and obstacles can be addressed.
- Develop protocols for services and schools in relation to referral pathways.
- Develop a plan on how to communicate referral pathways to all stakeholders.
- The Department of Health to report progress to the NIMC.

The School Meals Scheme

The School Meals Scheme²²³ is under the remit of the Department of Social Protection and provides funding towards the provision of food services to some 1,600 schools and organisations benefitting 260,000 children. The objective of the programme is to provide regular, nutritious food to children and young people to support them in taking full advantage of the education provided to them. The programme is an important component of policies to encourage school attendance and extra educational achievement.

The Programme provides funding towards food services for disadvantaged school children and young people through two schemes: The Urban School Meals Scheme and the School Meals (local projects) Scheme. The Urban School Meals Scheme is for primary schools only. It is operated and administered by local authorities and is part-financed by the Department of Social Protection.

The School Meals (local projects) Scheme was set up in 2003, to provide regular, nutritious meals to children and young people who were unable to take full advantage of their educational opportunities. Priority for funding under the scheme is given to schools which are part of the DEIS framework that was put into place in 2005. Schools and organisations that are not in the DEIS programme but were in the School Meals Programme prior to the establishment of DEIS in 2005, have continued to remain in the scheme at a capped rate. Funding under the school meals (local projects) scheme can be provided for breakfast, snack, lunch, dinner, hot meals and afterschool clubs and is based on a maximum rate per child per day, depending on the type of meal being provided.

As part of Budget 2019, funding was provided for a pilot scheme from September 2019, providing hot school meals in primary schools at a cost of €1m for 2019 and €2.5m in

²²³ gov.ie - School Meals Scheme (www.gov.ie)

2020. The pilot involved 37 schools benefitting 6,744 pupils for the 2019/2020 academic year and was aimed primarily at schools with no onsite cooking facilities.

In Budget 2021 an additional €5.5m was provided to extend the provision of hot school meals to an additional 35,000 primary school children and young people, who were receiving the cold lunch option. The 35,000 places were allocated to each local authority area based on the number of children applied for by local authority as a percentage of the total number. A minimum of one school for each Local Authority area was selected. Thereafter, a process of random selection was used for each area.

Budget 2022 provided for the hot school meals to be extended from January 2022 to the 81 DEIS schools that submitted an expression of interest but were not selected in the extension to 35,000 children already referred to.

Following a review of the school meals programme, it has been recommended that the Department of Social Protection continue to expand the school meals programme and build further on the significant extension of the programme that has taken place in recent years. Budget 2023 provided €94.4 million for the programme.

In February 2023 the government approved an additional €14.5m to allow access to the Hot School Meals scheme for all remaining DEIS schools and special schools from September 2023. The full year cost for 2024 of this measure is €38m.

As part of significant plans to extend the hot school meals to all children and young people in the coming years, all remaining primary schools were contacted and requested to submit an expression of interest form if their school was interested in commencing the provision of hot school meals. Expressions of interests were received from over 900 primary schools in respect of 150,000 children and in late 2023 these schools were invited to participate in the Hot School Meals Programme from 8, April 2024. There will be an opportunity for the other primary schools, who had subsequently expressed an interest, to do so formally later in 2024.

Participation in the scheme is entirely voluntary. Schools and organisations must reapply for funding in advance of each school year and are required to submit detailed records at the end of the school year. Applications are accepted from individual schools and organisations who apply for multiple schools.

There are numerous suppliers of school meals nationwide with no one person or body holding the contract to provide meals for the programme. The Department of Social Protection provides the funding directly to the schools, who are then required to procure the provision of the food in compliance with government procurement rules and with relevant Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme (HEALP)²²⁴, Food Safety regulations and the Nutritional Standards for School Meals²²⁵. The Nutritional Standards for School Meals were developed by a working group led by the Health and Wellbeing

²²⁴ [HACCP Principles and Application Guidelines | FDA](#)

²²⁵ [Safefood - Nutritional Standards for School Meals](#)

Programme in the Department of Health, in consultation with Safefood²²⁶ and the Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme²²⁷ in the Health Service Executive (HSE).

Generally, school meals are provided free of charge to the children and young people. Some post-primary schools with canteen facilities may ask parents and guardians to provide a contribution to the school meals rate to enable a dinner to be provided.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 report found that just over one in 10 pupils in Ireland (11%) felt hungry every day on arrival at school, and a further 11% experienced this almost every day. This represents a slight increase in the prevalence of hunger since 2016.

3.3.2. School Transport

The purpose of the School Transport Scheme²²⁸ is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children and young people who reside remotely from their nearest school.

The School Transport Scheme is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department of Education. In the current school year over 161,600 children and young people, including over 135,000 travelling on primary and post-primary services, 19,800 with special educational needs, and 6,800 who have arrived in Ireland from Ukraine are transported on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country. The total cost of the scheme in 2023 was €382.02m.

The *School Transport Scheme 2030 - Review of the School Transport Scheme - Phase 3 Report*²²⁹ has now been published, which marks the largest review of the School Transport Scheme since it was established in 1967. This review was conducted with a view to examining the current scheme, its broader effectiveness, and sustainability and to ensure it services children and young people, and their families adequately. The government is committed to working to achieve the report's recommendation of expanding access to the scheme so that an additional 100,000 children and young people can be carried by 2030.

Children and young people are eligible for transport at primary level where they reside not less than 3.2 kilometres from, and are attending, their nearest primary school. At post-primary level students are eligible where they reside not less than 4.8 kilometres from, and are attending, their nearest post-primary school/education centre as determined by the department/Bus Éireann, having regard to ethos and language for both cohorts.

The NCSE acts in an advisory role to the Department of Education on the suitability of placements for children and young people with special educational needs. Under the terms of the *School Transport Scheme for Children with Special Educational Needs*²³⁰

²²⁶ [Food safety and healthy eating on the Island of Ireland | safefood](#)

²²⁷ [Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme - HSE.ie](#)

²²⁸ [gov.ie - School transport \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

²²⁹ [www.gov.ie/School Transport 2030](#)

²³⁰ [School Transport Scheme for Children With Special Needs \(assets.gov.ie\)](#)

school transport is provided to children and young people with special educational needs who are attending the nearest school to their place of residence that is or can be resourced to meet their educational, as identified by the Special Educational Needs Organiser²³¹ (SENO).

In general, the scheme provides that, in order to be eligible for school transport, children and young people must be attending the nearest recognised school that is or can be resourced to meet their educational needs. Children and young people who are not eligible for school transport, but who completed the application process on time, are considered for spare seats that may exist after eligible children and young people have been facilitated, such seats are referred to as concessionary seats.

Bus Éireann continue to provide transport under the school transport scheme for children and young people arriving from Ukraine and children and young people residing in IPAS accommodation. Every effort is being made to ensure school transport services are available as they are required.

As a cost of living measure, for the 2022/23 school year school transport fees were waived for all families. For the 2023/2024 school year, reduced charges apply, with a cap per family of €125. This reduction in fees is at a cost of €49m. Eligible children and young people holding valid medical cards and eligible children and young people with special educational needs remain exempt from paying the annual charge. However, since 2020 (when examination fees were waived in response to changes with State examinations due to the COVID-19 pandemic), information on student possession of a medical card has not been available in State examination databases. Children and young people arriving from Ukraine and children and young people living in International Protection Accommodation also remain exempt from fees.

²³¹ Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) – National Council for Special Education

Figure 31 - School Transport Expenditure and Parental Contributions 2012 – 2022

Year	Total Expenditure	Parental Contributions	% Parental Contributions
2012	€168,464m	€12,600m	7.5%
2013	€170,750m	€12,806m	7.5%
2014	€172,081m	€13,078m	7.6%
2015	€172,961m	€13,707m	7.9%
2016	€182,187m	€14,575m	8.0%
2017	€188,534m	€15,216m	8.1%
2018	€200,275m	€15,939m	8.0%
2019	€219,200m	€16,944m	7.7%
2020	€224,791m	€12,337m	5.5%
2021	€289,496m	€11,500m*	4%
2022	€338,9m	€0 *	0% *
2023	€382,02m	€1,311m *	0.34%*

* The reason for the reduction in parental contributions for 2022 and 2023 is because the Government announced a total fee waiver in 2022 and a reduced fee for tickets in 2023 as part of a wider cost of living package to assist with back to school costs. Eligible children holding valid medical cards and eligible children with special educational needs remain exempt from paying the annual charge.

3.4. Out of school review

The Department of Education published a report in May 2022 on the Review of Out-of-School Education Provision²³², focusing on learners under 16 who struggle in mainstream education.

The review aims to inform future policy with sustainable options for these learners, acknowledging the essential role of out-of-school settings in providing holistic educational services. The review was conducted with input from various stakeholders, including young people and practitioners from out-of-school settings. It responds to Action 88 of the *DEIS Plan 2017*, aiming to enhance future policy through a thorough understanding of current out-of-school education provision. An Implementation Group was established in October 2022 to progress the review's recommendations, with a

²³² www.gov.ie Review of Out -of -School Education Provision

diverse membership from relevant departments and organisations. The possibility of offering Leaving Certificate options in alternative education centres is under consideration, alongside progression pathways for individuals up to 18 years old. The group's work is nearing completion, with expectations to finalise its report and action plan for the future of alternative education provision in the 2024.

The out-of-school education sector relates to a small number of schools and education centres which operate outside of mainstream education provision. This review focused on the education provision in the State for learners under 16 years of age who have encountered difficulties staying in mainstream education. The review also makes recommendations to inform future policy to provide a sustainable option within the education system to further serve this group of learners.

The recommendations, based on the findings of the report, are as follows:

- That a framework of support for students at risk of disengaging from education is developed which gives consideration to the position of short term and longer term out-of-school education provision in relation to the current three tier DE Continuum of Support model. to recognise the need for a framework of supports for students who are at risk of becoming disengaged from education.
- Standardised structure is required for the governance of out-of-school education provision. This review finds positively on the work which is carried out in out-of-school settings, and it is important to provide stability to this provision. It recommends that all settings be supported by state funding to ensure its stability. However, in order to receive funding, out-of-school settings should be required to meet set criteria in relation to the level of education provision, level of teaching, referrals process and overall governance.
- A referral framework is developed to provide clear structure, guidelines and accountability for the referral process through the continuum of support for the retention of students in education and training.
- Improvement in the current level of the data recording and transfer on the needs, supports, outcomes and attendance of students throughout the education continuum.
- Consideration be given to the location and accessibility of short term and longer term out-of-school supports, to prevent the early leaving of students from education and training.
- The completion of a mapping of all support services available to schools to support the educational and personal development of their students to include all cross departmental, agency and community services.

This review involved consultation with a range of stakeholders and other interested parties including young people and practitioners from out-of-school education provision settings.

While Ireland has one of the highest completion rates for second-level education in the EU, there are learners who, having experienced difficulty staying in mainstream education seek an alternative. Out-of-school education settings provide these learners with a holistic educational service, using innovative and flexible approaches for students. The recommendations in this report aim to draw on these approaches and ensure out of

school education provision can be sustained into the future and continue to play its vital role.

3.5. Engagement with Parents and Communities

Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2019

The *Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2019*²³³ has passed all stages in the Seanad and completed second stage in the Dáil on 8 July 2021 and awaits progress to Committee Stage.

The bill provides for all schools to have a Charter and for the Minister to issue guidelines, following consultation, in accordance with which every school's Charter shall be prepared, published and implemented. The bill sets out the key matters that the Minister must have regard to when preparing the charter guidelines.

The overall aim of the *Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2019* is to improve the level of engagement in the school community by inviting feedback, comment and observation from the school community and by further developing a listening culture in schools.

One of the key concepts of the bill is the need for a school to consult with children and young people and their parents or guardians on individual school plans, policies and activities. This approach will help ensure that the various views of children and young people, and parents or guardians, will be heard and responded to by schools on issues and policies.

The legislation will help ensure that the school community continues to work in partnership effectively together and will provide greater clarity for students, and their parents or guardians, on what they can expect from schools.

The bill sets out the key matters that the Minister must have regard to when preparing the charter guidelines and the types of matters that can be addressed in those guidelines. The bill also provides for the Minister to give a direction to a board of management where he or she is of the opinion that a board of management has failed, or is failing, to comply with its obligation to prepare, publish and implement a charter.

In relation to grievances, the bill is replacing the existing Section 28 of the *Education Act 1998*²³⁴ with a new Section 28 which, working with other provisions of the Bill, will ensure that all schools will be required to have and to implement standardised grievance procedures. The Charter Guidelines, which will be developed in consultation with education stakeholders, will set out the details of the grievance procedures and these will focus on dealing with complaints efficiently, effectively and, as far as possible, informally. The Charter Guidelines may require schools to provide information to children and young people, and parents or guardians, on the number and types of

²³³ www.gov.ie - Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill, 2019 - Summary of Bill (www.gov.ie)

²³⁴ irishstatutebook.ie - Education Act, 1998, Section 28

complaints that it receives and information on their outcomes. These measures aim to improve the fairness and transparency of the school grievance process.

The overall approach in the bill is to move away from reacting to problems in schools after they arise, to an early intervention approach which aims to improve the day-to-day experience children and young people, and their parents and guardians can expect from schools.

Citizen's Assembly

The *Programme for Government*²³⁵ includes a commitment to the establishment of a Citizen's Assembly on the future of education to ensure that the voices of young people and those being educated are central to future policy development in education. The department has begun examining what such a body will look like and the broader questions to be addressed.

3.6. Monitoring and Evaluating Equity and the Inclusion of Diverse Students in Education

3.6.1. Data Collection on Diversity

The Department of Education's electronic databases, POD (Primary Online Database) and PPOD (Post-primary Online Database), hold data on all primary and post-primary school students, including their name, address, PPSN, gender, date of birth and nationality. On a voluntary/optional basis and requiring written consent from a parent or guardian, or the student (if over 18), the following data is also collected:

- POD - data on the child's religion
- PPOD - data on the students' mother tongue ('yes/no' on whether mother tongue is Irish/English)
- both databases - information on ethnic/cultural background

Questions about ethnic/cultural background were developed in consultation with the CSO (Central Statistics Office) and are based on the ethnic/cultural categories which have been included in the Census of Population since 2011. Specifically, POD and PPOD ethnic/cultural background data is collected using the following categories:

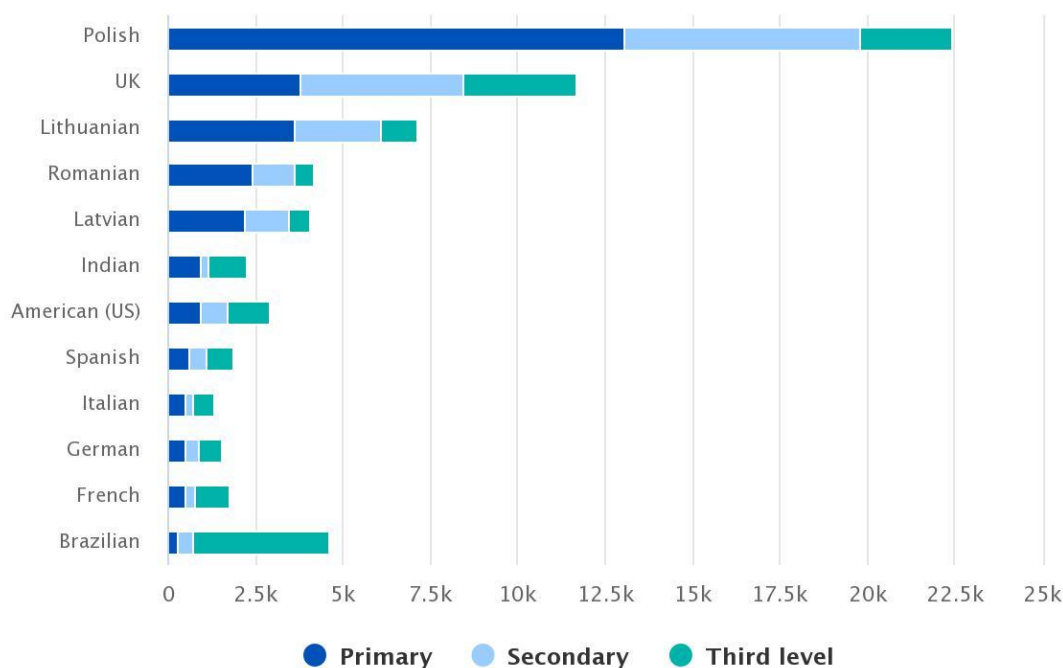
- White Irish
- Irish Traveller
- Roma
- Any other White Background
- Black or Black Irish - African
- Black or Black Irish - any other Black background
- Asian or Asian Irish - Chinese
- Asian or Asian Irish - any other Asian background
- Other (inc. mixed background)

²³⁵ [Programme for Government - Our Shared Future \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

While this data is not publicly available, the Central Statistics Office CSO published some relevant data regarding non-Irish students from the 2016 Census from which the table below is taken.²³⁶ Relevant data from the 2022 Census is not yet available.

Figure 32 – Non-Irish Primary, Secondary and Third Level Students 2016

Figure 4.1 Non-Irish primary, secondary and third level students, 2016



Source: CSO Ireland
Highcharts.com

The most recent report published on Traveller education statistics covered the period from 2011 to 2015. The databases do not record immigrant status, including whether a children or young person is a refugee, asylum seeker or beneficiary of the EU Temporary Protection Directive. However, given the significant number of people arriving in Ireland from Ukraine since the Russian invasion, the Department of Education prepares statistics on the number of Ukrainian children and young people who are enrolled in our schools, based upon the nationality data recorded in the databases. This information is published on an ongoing basis on the gov.ie website²³⁷.

There is a Programme for Government commitment to ensure robust data collection on the use of reduced timetables. The new *Guidelines for the use of Reduced School Days in Schools*²³⁸ came into effect on 1 January 2022 and these include the requirement for

²³⁶ [Students and Education - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

²³⁷ [Ukrainian Enrolments](#)

²³⁸ [Guidelines for the use of Reduced School Days in Schools](#)

schools to notify Tusla Education Support Service²³⁹ (TESS) of the use of all reduced school day arrangements. The process of notifying TESS involves a notification form, which provides the option to include the student's ethnic background; the question is optional and written consent from the parent or guardian is required to collect the information.

The Department of Education worked with Traveller representative organisations to create a video specifically for parents or guardians of Traveller children and young people to inform them of their rights in respect of reduced school days. The video makes it clear, for example, that parents and guardians do not have to agree to the use of a reduced school day, and that reduced timetables should never be used to manage behavioural issues. Educational Welfare Officers are available to assist parents/guardians throughout the process, and the video for Traveller parents or guardians provides contact details for Traveller parents and guardians to get in touch with Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) welfare officers for help in any decision relating to a reduced school day.

3.6.2. Monitoring and Evaluation of Outcomes at the System Levels

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)²⁴⁰ is a survey of 15-year-old students that assesses the extent to which they have acquired the key knowledge and skills essential for full participation in society.

The PISA 2022 results were published in 2023²⁴¹. The report found that Ireland's performance in PISA 2022 showed some changes when compared to previous cycles, particularly in mathematics and science.

- Irish students are the best performing in reading literacy among the 37 countries in the OECD and the 26 EU countries.
- Irish students are significantly above the OECD average in all three domains – reading literacy, mathematics literacy and science literacy.
- Ireland's placing amongst the 81 countries taking part in the PISA project has improved in all three domains since 2018.
- In reading literacy, we have moved from eighth place to second place among the 81 countries.
- In science literacy, we have moved from twenty-second place to twelfth place.
- In mathematical literacy, we have moved from twenty-first place to eleventh place.

²³⁹ [TESS Tusla - Child and Family Agency](#)

²⁴⁰ [PISA - PISA \(oecd.org\)](#)

²⁴¹ [Education-in-a-Dynamic-World-Report the performance of students in Ireland in PISA 2022 \(ERC.ie\)](#)

- There are considerably fewer low-performing students in Ireland in reading, science and mathematics compared to the average across OECD countries.
- Both male and female students in Ireland significantly outperformed the OECD average in all three domains.

National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER)

In Ireland the National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER)²⁴² are carried out by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) at the request of the Department of Education since 1972. Primary-School pupils in selected second and sixth classes, their parents and guardians, teachers, and school principals take part in NAMER. Pupils complete assessments in mathematics and English reading as well as a pupil questionnaire. Parents, teachers, and school principals also complete questionnaires²⁴³. Amongst the adaptations to NAMER 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic it was decided not to administer questionnaires to parents and guardians of participating pupils, as had been done in previous cycles.

The *National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER) 2021*²⁴⁴ and the *Ireland's 2021 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading: A focus on achievement in Urban DEIS schools*²⁴⁵ reports focus on the performance of pupils in NAMER 2021 and relates their performance to that of pupils who participated in the National Assessments in 2014. A DEIS context report was released in 2023, *Ireland's 2021 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading: Exploring the home backgrounds, classrooms and schools of pupils in Urban DEIS schools*²⁴⁶. A further report, due to be published in late 2024, will examine factors relating to the teaching and learning of mathematics and English reading, using school-level, classroom-level, and pupil-level data, drawn from questionnaires administered in conjunction with NAMER 2021. Factors related to achievement and contextual information gathered from the questionnaires will be examined in this context report.

For the first time the design of NAMER 2021 incorporated an increased sample of pupils in DEIS schools in order to make robust comparisons on the achievements of pupils in non-DEIS and DEIS schools. NAMER 2020 was postponed to 2021 due to COVID - 19. NAMER 2021 took place at a time of recent disruption to schooling in Ireland due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All pupils had been required to engage in remote learning for an extended period prior to the NAMER 2021.

The *National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER) 2021*²⁴⁷ and the *Ireland's 2021 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading: A focus on achievement in Urban DEIS schools*²⁴⁸ reports were published on 16 May 2023. The reports noted that overall, performance on mean scores and proficiency levels appear

²⁴² [NAMER \(National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading\) - Educational Research Centre \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁴³ [Questionnaires - Educational Research Centre \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁴⁴ [NAMER2021_Performance-Report_Digital.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁴⁵ [B23572-NAMER-DEIS-report-Online.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁴⁶ [NAMER-21-DEIS-Context-Report-Final-Online.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁴⁷ [NAMER2021_Performance-Report_Digital.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁴⁸ [B23572-NAMER-DEIS-report-Online.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

quite stable, and pupil attainment remained broadly similar between 2014 and 2021. There was no evidence of a statistically significant narrowing of the gap in average achievement between pupils in Urban Non-DEIS and Urban DEIS schools.

Internationally there is considerable evidence of learning loss in reading and mathematics amongst primary school pupils during the period of the pandemic. Despite this, findings outlined in NAMER 2021 show no evidence of a decline in average reading or mathematics scores between 2014 and 2021 in DEIS Urban Band 1 or DEIS Urban Band 2 schools. These findings are welcome in the context of international evidence of learning loss and the particular impact of COVID-19 on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

NAMER 2021 found that there was a statistically significant gender difference in average English reading, with a gap of about 8 points in favour of girls. This is in contrast to a statistically significant gender difference in average mathematics achievement in favour of boys.

The study included an oversampling of DEIS Urban schools. There were 60 DEIS Urban Band 1 and 30 DEIS Urban Band 2 schools of the 188 schools who participated. While findings from NAMER 2021 do not show significant gains in overall achievement since NAMER 2014, a sustained level of performance has been maintained. As in previous cycles, current findings show a persistent achievement gap between pupils in DEIS schools compared to those in non-DEIS schools. This is particularly pronounced when comparing the average achievement of pupils in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools with that of pupils in DEIS Urban non-DEIS schools. These findings underscore the need for continued provision of additional supports, particularly for DEIS Urban Band 1 schools.

The main findings of *Ireland's 2021 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading: A focus on achievement in Urban DEIS schools*²⁴⁹ included:

- No significant gains or falls in average achievement in Urban DEIS schools between 2014 and 2021.
- No evidence of a widening achievement gap between Urban Non-DEIS and DEIS schools between 2014 and 2021.
- Mean Sixth class mathematics score of pupils in DEIS Urban Band 2 schools not significantly different to mean score in Urban non-DEIS schools.
- Target to increase the percentage of high reading achievers at Second class in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools was met.

However, there were a number of negative findings including:

- Consistently lower average achievement of pupils in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools compared to Urban non-DEIS schools.
- Two-fifths of Second class pupils are low reading achievers in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools.
- Nearly half of Sixth class pupils are low achievers in mathematics in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools.

²⁴⁹ [B23572-NAMER-DEIS-report-Online.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

- Three out of four targets from the *DEIS Plan 2017* were not met.

Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)

The *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021*²⁵⁰ was also published on 16 May 2023. PIRLS is designed to assess the reading achievement of fourth class pupils (or the equivalent grade level internationally). PIRLS was first conducted in 2001 and takes place every five years. PIRLS is a project of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)²⁵¹, a non-profit organisation based in The Hague, Netherlands. In Ireland, the EERC manages the study on behalf of the Department of Education (DoE) and the study is administered by the ERC with the support of the Inspectorate of the department. PIRLS is specifically designed to support the measurement of trends, enabling each country to track their own performance over time, as well as facilitating comparisons with 56 other countries.

The findings of PIRLS 2021 were mostly encouraging in relation to Ireland when compared to other countries and included:

- Ireland retains its place among a subset of high-achieving countries in relation to primary school reading.
- No EU or OECD country achieved a score that was significantly higher than Ireland's score in PIRLS 2021.
- All other participating countries achieved mean scores significantly lower than Ireland's.
- The comparative national trend for Ireland is very positive with Ireland's mean score of 577 on PIRLS 2021 being 11 points higher than the comparable national score in 2016 and 25 points higher than in 2011.
- Most pupils in Ireland were very confident (49%) or somewhat confident (34%) about reading, with 17% not confident (PIRLS Students Confident in Reading Scale).
- Reading achievements amongst pupils in DEIS schools broadly replicate the achievement patterns observed in 2016, with average reading scores in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools 56 points lower than non-DEIS schools and an average 40-point gap between pupils in DEIS Urban Band 2 and their peers in non-DEIS schools.
- In 51 of the 57 PIRLS countries, including Ireland, girls significantly outperformed boys in reading.
- The gender gaps in Ireland were smaller than on average internationally.

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)²⁵² is a project of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and is managed at an international level by the International Study Centre in Boston College. In Ireland, the ERC manages the study. TIMSS assesses the mathematics and science achievement of children and young people in fourth class in primary and second year in

²⁵⁰ [PIRLS-2021_Reading-Results-for-Ireland.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁵¹ [About IEA | IEA.nl](#)

²⁵² [TIMSS Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study \(bc.edu\)](#)

post-primary. First conducted in 1995, TIMSS takes place every four years. A major purpose of TIMSS is to provide background information that can be used to improve teaching and learning. Findings from TIMSS 2023 are scheduled for publication in December 2024.

In relation to Ireland TIMSS 2019²⁵³ found that overall, performance in Ireland was strong and stable, particularly so for mathematics and that even Ireland's lowest-achieving students tend to perform relatively well. Performance among the highest-achieving students was somewhat poorer when compared to their peers in countries with similar overall performance, especially in the case of mathematics. However, TIMSS 2019 results showed that Ireland was the top performing EU country in mathematics in fourth class in primary-school and second year at second level.

Role of the ERC in Evaluating Education Policy

The ERC²⁵⁴ carries out research at all levels of the education system in Ireland, from preschool to adult. The Educational Research Centre is an internationally recognised centre of excellence in research, assessment and evaluation in education. It was established in 1966 in St Patrick's College Drumcondra. In September 2015, it was designated as a Statutory Body in accordance with the *Education Act 1998*. Research is undertaken on behalf of the Department of Education, at the request of other agencies and on the initiative of the ERC itself and its staff. The ERC carries out work for a number of agencies including PIRLS, PISA, TIMSS and NAMER.

Well-being Outcomes between Diverse Student Groups and Their Peers

There have been a number of studies that have measured the wellbeing outcomes for children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage. In particular the Growing Up in Ireland²⁵⁵ study has monitored outcomes for a sample of children and young people from a range of backgrounds over a longitudinal study. In carrying out the PISA, PIRLS and NAMER studies, the ERC also include surveys of families, students and school staff to provide a contextual background and broader picture of the wellbeing of children and young people from different socio-economic backgrounds including:

- *Ireland's 2021 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading: Exploring the home backgrounds, classrooms and schools of pupils in Urban DEIS school.*²⁵⁶
- *Beyond Achievement: Home, school and wellbeing findings from PISA 2018 for students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools.*²⁵⁷
- *PIRLS 2021 Reading Results for Ireland*²⁵⁸ included findings on hunger, tiredness and bullying amongst students, and job satisfaction amongst teachers.

²⁵³ [TIMSS 2019 Encyclopedia: Ireland \(bc.edu\)](#)

²⁵⁴ [Home - Educational Research Centre \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁵⁵ [www.growingup.ie](#)

²⁵⁶ [NAMER-21-DEIS-Context-Report-Final-Online.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁵⁷ [Beyond Achievement: Home School and Wellbeing findings from PISA 2018 for students in DEIS and NON-DEIS Schools](#)

²⁵⁸ [PIRLS-2021_Reading-Results-for-Ireland.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

3.6.3. Evaluating Processes at the Local and School Level

The standards and quality of education provision in the Irish education system are assured by a number of elements, including inspections.

Inspections are carried out to improve the quality of learning and teaching that children and young people experience in Irish schools, centres for education and other settings, and to quality assure and report on quality, standards, educational opportunities and experiences, and issues of educational equity. The Department of Education's Inspectorate does this through providing high quality evaluation, analysis, support and advice in relation to education provision at early years, primary and post-primary levels and in other settings that provide alternative educational pathways to children and young people. The Inspectorate also fulfils its function through its publications, including the publication of individual inspection reports and thematic reports on the quality of specific aspects of education provision within the system. Inspectors also provide advice on a range of education issues to school communities, policy makers in the department and to the wider education system.

Early Years Education Inspections (EYEIs) are carried out in all Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings, including those participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme²⁵⁹ (ECCE). During these inspections, the quality of the nature, range and appropriateness of the early educational experiences for children participating in the ECCE Programme is evaluated. The main activity of an EYEI inspection is the observation, by the inspector, of the processes and practices relating to children's learning in one or more learning rooms or areas in the early years setting. Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) settings are also inspected by the TUSLA Early Years Inspectorate²⁶⁰. The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate is the independent statutory regulator of ELC and SAC services in Ireland. It is responsible for the registration and inspection of all ELC and SAC services including playgroups, day nurseries, crèches, day care, school-age childcare, and similar services catering for children and young people aged 0–14 years.

The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate is committed to ensuring that children and young people attending ELC and SAC services are safe, that they receive appropriate care and have a positive experience where they can develop and learn in a quality service. This is achieved through the registration, inspection and enforcement processes prescribed by law and implemented by the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate.

²⁵⁹ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) (www.gov.ie)

²⁶⁰ [Early Years \(Pre School\) Inspectorate Tusla - Child and Family Agency](http://www.tusla.ie)

4. General Resourcing

4.1. Department Of Education Budget 2024

The total budget for the Department of Education in 2024 is €10.467 billion. Since 2020, funding for school-level education has increased by around €1.8 billion (20%). Budget 2024 provides an increase of €420 million in core funding, an increase of 4.6%, and builds on significant increases in recent budgets. There is also €35 million allocated as temporary funding to facilitate selected COVID-19 measures during 2024 along with €135 million to be allocated for Cost of Living supports.

The key features of Budget 2024 include:

- Some €67 million funding for free schoolbooks and classroom resources for Junior Cycle students. This will bring total investment in free schoolbooks at primary and post-primary school level to some €115 million.
- Over €20 million in additional capitation funding to assist schools now and longer term with increased day-to-day running costs. This will support a permanent restoration of funding for all primary and post-primary schools, bringing the basic rate of capitation to €200 per pupil in primary schools and to €345 in post-primary schools.
- In addition, to particularly support schools this year with inflationary pressures, Minister Foley has secured an additional €60 million in cost of living supports, which will be paid to all primary and post-primary schools in the free scheme.
- €92 million in additional funding for the School Transport Scheme to provide additional places for children and young people with special educational needs, increased bus contractor costs and a continued reduction in school transport fees.
- €82 million for an additional 1,216 special needs assistants and 744 additional special educational needs teachers in classrooms providing for 2,700 new places for children and young people with special educational needs.
- Provision of an additional €11 million for special schools catering for children and young people with special educational needs to remove the threshold for the appointment of an administrative deputy principal and provide for a further 100 teaching posts
- €20 million in funding for the Enhanced Summer Programme totalling €40 million for summer 2024.
- Additional allocation for curricular reforms, which includes funding for the accelerated roll out of the Senior Cycle Redevelopment programme and the delivery of additional physical activity initiatives in schools.
- Additional allocation for social inclusion measures, including enhancing the capacity of the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS) and additional educational welfare officer posts.
- Provision made for the pilot counselling services to continue for another year
- Actions to address teacher supply issues through an incentive scheme to partially refund future Professional Master's in Education (PME) fees and additional upskilling teacher programmes for in demand subjects.
- Additional posts of responsibility allocated to assist the leadership and management in schools.

4.2. Levels of Resources and Sources of Revenue

The Vote 26 Education Appropriation Account 2022²⁶¹ indicates that the Department of Education spent €10.17 billion in 2022 on *Programme A: First, Second and Early Years' Education* which was an increase on the 2021 gross expenditure of €9.26 billion. These are the most recently published figures, the accounts for 2023 were not complete at the time of writing. The table below includes figures for 2023 which are estimates as per Revised Estimates for Public Services 2023²⁶².

²⁶¹ [Vote 26 - Education \(audit.gov.ie\)](https://www.audit.gov.ie)

²⁶² [Master File REV 2023.pdf Revised Estimates for Public Services 2023 \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie)

Figure 33 - Department of Education Expenditure 2021-2023*

Figures for 2023 are estimates as per Revised Estimates for Public Services 2023	2021	2022	Estimates 2023
Programme A: First, Second and Early Years' Education	€000	€000	€000
A.1 Administration – Pay	85,207	100,607	123,352
A.2 Administration – Non-Pay	17,786	19,424	33,440
A.3 Salaries, wages and allowances of primary school teachers	2,781,360	2,981,779	3,059,788
A.4 Salaries, wages and allowances of secondary, comprehensive and community school teachers	1,460,743	1,578,789	1,626,887
A.5 Grants to Education and Training Boards in respect of ETB teachers' salaries	667,343	738,719	747,129
A.6 Salaries, wages and allowances of special needs assistants in primary and post-primary schools	669,113	745,844	790,608
A.7 Salaries, wages and allowances of nonteaching staff in primary and post-primary schools (excluding special needs assistants)	104,999	108,109	116,527
A.8 Superannuation in respect of teaching and non-teaching staff	1,310,197	1,406,032	1,467,911
A.9 School transport services	289,511	338,904	283,150
A.10 Grants (including capitation) payable to primary and post-primary schools, Education and Training Boards and other educational organisations and institutions	626,347	767,212	598,877
A.11 Grants to education bodies working in the primary and post-primary sectors	142,077	175,460	200,688
A.12 Teacher Education	30,748	34,965	39,776
A.13 Payments in respect of residential institutions redress and costs associated with the Child Abuse Commission	1,641	1,210	2,062
A.14 Miscellaneous grants and services	161,354	43,335	82,912
A.15 Primary and post-primary infrastructure	851,086	1,071,735	782,000
A.16 Public private partnership costs	63,496	64,169	70,000
Total	9,263,008	10,176,293	10,025,107

Previous appropriation accounts for Vote 26 Education are published on the website of the Comptroller and Auditor General²⁶³

Special Education

The department has announced an unprecedented level of funding for special education in the 2024 budget, with over €2.7 billion allocated, representing a 5% increase from the previous year.

Key highlights of the 2024 budget include:

- **Funding for Additional Staff:** An extra €82 million will be dedicated to hiring 1,216 special needs assistants (SNAs) and 744 special educational needs teachers. This initiative is anticipated to create up to 2,700 new placements for children and young people requiring special educational support.
- **Support for special schools:** €11 million will be allocated to enhance special schools by removing the threshold for appointing an administrative deputy principal and adding 100 teaching positions. This funding aims to benefit nearly 9,000 children and young people enrolled in these schools.
- **Enhanced Summer Programme:** An additional €20 million will be provided for the enhanced summer programme, which is particularly advantageous for children and young people with special educational needs. This funding is intended to encourage increased participation from schools.
- **School Transport Scheme:** €92 million will be allocated to the school transport scheme to expand the number of available places for children and young people with special educational needs, including covering the costs of increased bus contracts.

School Buildings Programme

The Department of Education is responsible for ensuring that appropriate physical infrastructure is in place so that learners throughout the system can have access to a modern learning environment that is fit for purpose and will meet the needs of the curriculum that is being taught.

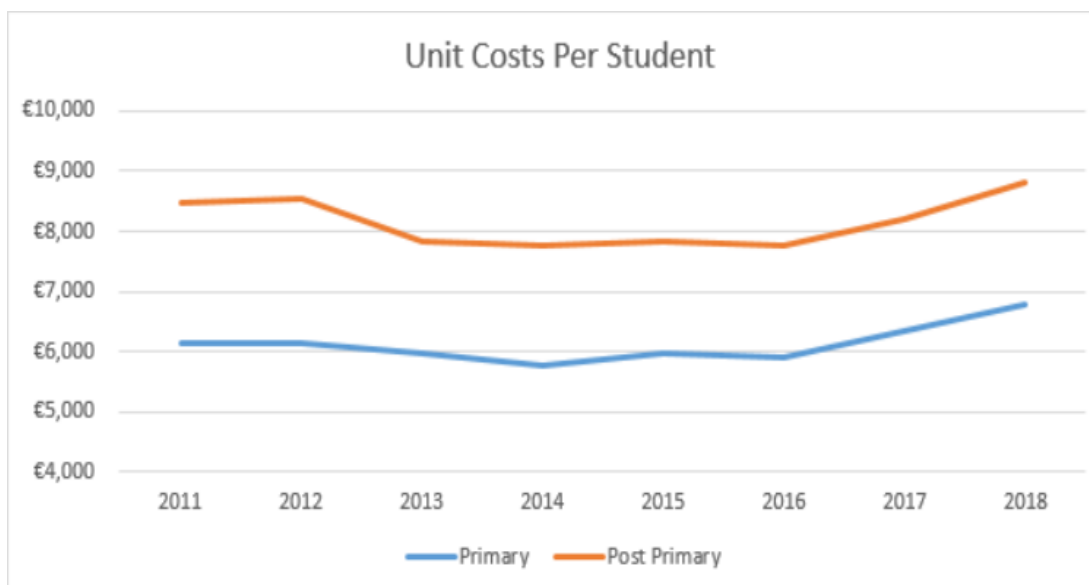
Since 2020, the department has invested around €4.5 billion in schools throughout the country, involving the completion of over 800 school building projects and with construction currently underway on roughly 300 other projects, which include 31 new school buildings. These 300 projects currently under construction involve a total state investment of over €1.2 billion.

It is also planned that close to 90 projects currently at tender stage, including 28 new school buildings, will be authorised to proceed to construction over the course of 2024 and early 2025. In total, around €800 million will be invested in these projects under the department's Large Scale Capital Programme and Additional Accommodation Scheme for essential classroom accommodation.

²⁶³[Appropriation Accounts - Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General](#)

Per student costs

The unit cost per student for Department of Education expenditure is outlined below. This is currently available up to the end of 2018.



Source: Department of Education

4.3. Current Challenges for Resourcing Education

Integration of children and young people fleeing the invasion in Ukraine

Additional hours are being allocated to schools to address the very exceptional and extremely swift increase in enrolments as a direct result of the war in Ukraine. The Special Education Teacher (SET) model is designed to cater for normal changes in enrolments and our existing allocation is sufficient to meet the needs of all children and young people with special educational needs, including those who arrive from other countries. However, the model is not designed to cater for the large influx of children and young people, in such a short time and the Department of Education needed to ensure their needs were supported in those schools impacted. In some schools, enrolments have doubled in a three month timeframe and the existing allocations cannot cater for this.

As a result, the Department of Education has implemented temporary additional hours on a graduated scale (with at least 10 additional Ukrainian enrolments) so that the schools impacted have the resources to cater for those children and young people enrolling with special educational needs and the unprecedented change in their student profile. It is important to note that both SETs and SNAs are whole school resources and are not assigned to an individual child and young person or an individual cohort of students. Therefore, the relevant schools who receive these additional temporary allocations are required to utilise them for all of the students on the basis of greatest special educational needs.

The temporary exceptional response is to cater for an unprecedented situation affecting a portion of schools. In addition, for schools which have experienced International

Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) students' enrolments of a similar scale, the NCSE can review and amend their special educational needs resources if required.

Ukrainian as a Non-Curricular Language will be developed by the State Examinations Commission (SEC). The first examination will be available for students sitting the Leaving Certificate in June 2025. This means that students entering fifth year in September 2023 will be able to study Ukrainian as part of the Irish Senior Cycle curriculum.

On 4 June 2024 there were 18,133 children and young people from Ukraine enrolled in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland.

Cost of Living Increase

All recognised primary and post-primary schools benefitted from a once-off cost of living measure to support increased school running costs. This additional capitation funding in 2022 represented an increase of circa 40% of current standard and enhanced capitation rates. The additional grant was paid in December 2022 at the rate of €75 per pupil at primary level and €113 at post-primary level. Enhanced rates were also paid in respect of pupils with special educational needs.

Covid-19 Capitation funding has been provided in recent years in addition to the normal capitation funding. This has been provided in order to support the implementation of the infection prevention and control measures in order to keep the school community safe during the Pandemic. See further information in this regard under capitation grants in Section 4.3 below.

Teacher Supply

In recent years the Irish education system has been experiencing challenges in recruiting sufficient teachers to fill vacancies in schools. The recruitment and appointment of teachers to fill teaching posts is a matter for individual school authorities, subject to procedures agreed upon under Section 24 of the *Education Act 1998 (as amended by the Education (Amendment) Act 2012)*. The department does not currently collate data on teacher vacancies in schools, including on a regional basis.

The recruitment of teachers is a priority area of action for the department given the importance of ensuring that every child's experience in school is positive and that they have available to them qualified, engaged, and supportive teachers to support them in their learning. The department is undertaking a comprehensive programme to support the supply of teachers. A number of innovative measures have been implemented to support the supply of substitute teachers to alleviate the challenges.

Budget 2024 reflects the government's commitment to ongoing investment in the education system through various measures including:

- Introduction of a professional Master of Education incentive scheme for newly qualified teachers graduating in 2024. Eligible teachers can receive an incentive payment of up to €2,000, to be paid in 2025.
- Expansion of upskilling programmes, free to teachers, aimed at increasing the number of qualified teachers in high-demand subjects and reducing out-of-field teaching. New programs in Irish, French, politics and society, and computer science

will complement existing programmes in mathematics, physics, and Spanish. Trinity College Dublin will deliver a new Irish upskilling programme for post-primary teachers starting in late 2024, available at no cost to eligible teachers.

- Provision of an additional 1,000 posts of responsibility in the school system, including 500 each at primary and post-primary level, for the 2024/25 school year, recognising the vital role of school leaders in enhancing educational outcomes by fostering a positive school environment and empowering educators and learners within their communities.

These new measures are in addition to a range of targeted measures introduced in recent times, including:

- Post-primary teachers can provide up to 35 additional hours of substitute cover per term in the subject they are qualified to teach.
- Ensuring initial teacher education providers created existing flexibilities that enable student teachers to support schools, either while on placement, or in a substitute capacity. In 2022/23, more than 2,700 third and fourth year undergraduate student teachers registered under Route 5 with the Teaching Council and provided valuable support to schools as substitute teachers. Currently there are 3,600 registered under Route 5 on the Teaching Council register, the highest number ever.
- Encouraging retired teachers to provide substitute cover. A communications campaign ran in early 2023 resulting in an increase in the number of teaching days provided by retired teachers of 49%, an increase of over 17,000 days between the 2021/22 school year, and the 2022/23 school year. A new communications campaign began in January 2024 to encourage retired teachers to return to teaching.
- The 50 day pension abatement waiver, for retirees returning to work, has been extended for a further two years to the end of 2025.
- Restrictions on job-sharing teachers and those on a career break from working as substitutes have been reduced.
- The Teaching Transforms²⁶⁴ campaign continues to promote the teaching profession encouraging students to follow a career in teaching. The campaign uses digital, radio and video media.

4.4. Funding for the School System

Education and Training Boards

The Education and Training Boards (ETBs) were established on 1 July 2013 under, and governed according to, the *Education and Training Boards Act 2013*²⁶⁵. Each ETB is a statutory body with its own corporate status. ETBs carry out their duties in relation to the provision of education in accordance with the *Education and Training Boards Act 2013* and under the legislation that established SOLAS²⁶⁶ in relation to further education and training.

ETBs are responsible for the provision of a wide range of education services and, in addition to the full range of second-level courses, they are also the main provider of

²⁶⁴ www.gov.ie/teachingtransforms

²⁶⁵ [Education and Training Boards Act 2013 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://Education and Training Boards Act 2013 (irishstatutebook.ie))

²⁶⁶ Solas | Learning Works

adult education, community education and further education and training courses in Ireland. In 2022 the ETBs received over €1,16 billion in funding from the Department of Education. The total funding of ETBs was circa €2.2 billion with the balance largely related to further education and training. There are approximately 32,000 staff across the 16 ETBs.

Capitation Grants

Schools are funded centrally from the Department of Education through the allocation of a range of grants. These are typically allocated based on the numbers of students enrolled in the school. The main grant allocation to provide for the running of a school is the Capitation Grant²⁶⁷. Capitation grants are paid to all recognised primary schools and post-primary schools in the free education scheme, on the basis of enrolments. These rates depend on the particular level of need involved. The overall capitation grant is paid based on the current school year's September enrolments and is paid in two instalments. The standard rate capitation grant is €183²⁶⁸ per primary school pupil and €316 post-primary²⁶⁹. The grant paid to small schools is based at a rate equivalent to an enrolment minimum of 60 mainstream pupils.

Enhanced capitation rates are payable in respect of children and young people attending special schools and special classes. These classes have a lower pupil teacher ratio and as such the unit cost per pupil attending those classes/schools is higher. An enhanced rate is also allocated in respect of Traveller children and young people attached to mainstream schools.

The purpose of the capitation grant is to cater for day to day running costs such as heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance, general up-keep and other similar expenses. In addition, schools also receive a range of other grants including Ancillary Services/School Services Support Fund (SSSF) to cater for the cost of employing ancillary services staff.

Budget 2020 provided for a 2.5% increase in standard capitation funding for primary and post-primary schools that applied from the start of the 2020/21 school year. This built on the 5% increase in capitation announced in Budget 2019 bringing the total increases to date to 7.5%. All schools have received the benefit of the capitation increases awarded to date. In addition to the increase in standard capitation, the enhanced rates of capitation payable in respect of students with special educational needs increased by 7.5% from the start of the 2020/21 school year. Budget 2022 provided for the continuation of this process by providing funding to cater for the elimination of the School Salary Grant deduction commencing in the 2022/2023 school year. The estimated cost of this measure is €1.4 million in 2022 with a full year cost in 2023 estimated to be €5.7 million. These grants may be regarded as a common grant from which the Board of Management can allocate according to its own priorities.

²⁶⁷ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - [Capitation and Ancillary Services Grants \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

²⁶⁸ [Revision of Capitation Grant Rates for recognised Primary Schools \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

²⁶⁹ [Revision of Capitation Grant Rates Post-Primary \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

As part of the capitation package in Budget 2024, €21 million was secured as a permanent increase in capitation funding to assist schools with increased day-to-day running costs. This will support a permanent restoration of funding for all primary and post-primary schools from September 2024. This will bring the basic rate of capitation grant to the pre-2011 level of €200 per pupil in primary schools. Enhanced rates will also be paid in respect of children and young people with special educational needs. This represents an increase of circa 9.2% of current standard and enhanced capitation rates.

In addition to these grants, €20 million in funding was issued in October 2023, to support all recognised primary and post-primary schools in the free education scheme. This funding was the first tranche of an overall additional €60 million funding announced as part of Budget 2024 measures designed to assist schools with increased day-to-day running costs such as heating and electricity. A further €40 million in funding was delivered in early 2024.

Private run schools do not receive the capitation grant funding from the department for the running of their schools. Teachers in those schools are however paid by the department.

Figure 35 - Fee Charging Post-Primary Schools 2023/2024 School Year

County	Number of Schools	Enrolment
Cork	5	3,265
Dublin	34	18,833
Kildare	2	1,350
Limerick	2	756
Louth	2	1,100
Monaghan	1	255
Sligo	1	490
Tipperary	2	768
Wicklow	1	612
Grand Total	50	27,429

The Department of Education has provided guidelines for schools to reduce the cost of education on parents and guardians. Schools however can request a contribution from parents and guardians towards the running of the school. While schools may request a voluntary contribution from parents or guardians, it must be made expressly clear to parents and guardians that there is no requirement to pay this cost. The way such voluntary contributions are sought and collected is a matter for school management. However, their collection must not create a situation where parents and guardians, or children and young people, could infer the contributions are compulsory in nature. Under

Section 64 of the *Education Act*²⁷⁰ no fee can be charged for instruction in any subject of the school curriculum or for recreation or other activities where all children or young people are expected to take part. Schools may also conduct fundraising initiatives.

The department has also sought to legislate for increased consultation between school communities regarding the planning, policies, and activities in schools. The *Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2019* was published in September 2019 and has been passed by the Seanad (the upper house of the Irish parliament). The bill passed Second Stage in Dáil Éireann (lower house of the Irish parliament) in July 2021 and is awaiting an order for Committee Stage²⁷¹. This bill provides for the Minister to issue guidelines and for all schools to prepare a Charter, following consultation with parents and guardians, and children and young people. The overall aim of the bill is to improve the level of engagement between the school and community by inviting feedback, comments and observations from the community on a range of issues, including voluntary contributions and how they are spent, as well as complaint procedures. There is also a separate Private Member's Bill, the *Education (Voluntary Contributions) Bill 2021*, which was introduced in parliament in 2021²⁷². This bill aims to mandate the Minister for Education to regulate (not abolish) voluntary contributions. This bill would mean schools would be obliged to inform parents and guardians that contributions are not mandatory, and that the enrolment of their children cannot be made dependent on the payment of voluntary contributions.

4.5. School Facilities and Materials

The National Public Procurement Policy Framework²⁷³ (NPPPF) sets out the procurement procedures to be followed by government departments and state bodies under national and EU rules. The NPPPF supports contracting authorities when awarding contracts for works, goods and services. It supports and enables public bodies to adopt procedures to meet their public procurement requirements and facilitates compliance with EU and National Procurement Rules. Procurement transactions and decisions must in all respects be fair, equitable and ensure value for money.

Schoolbooks

The Department of Education already provides a book grant of some €18.2 million to all recognised primary and post-primary schools within the free education scheme in order to provide assistance for books, including book rental schemes and all schools are encouraged to operate book rental schemes to help alleviate costs to parents and guardians.

As part of Budget 2023, Minister Foley launched a programme of over €50 million to provide free books to primary school pupils within the free education scheme from September 2023. This measure eliminates the cost to these families for all schoolbooks at primary school, including workbooks. It delivers on the Programme for Government

²⁷⁰ [Higher Education Authority Act 2022, Section 64 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](https://www.irishstatutebook.ie)

²⁷¹ Houses of the Oireachtas (2019), Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2019, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2019/67/>

²⁷² Houses of the Oireachtas (2022), Education (Voluntary Contributions) Bill 2021, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2021/113>

²⁷³ [National Public Procurement Policy Framework \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie)

commitment to extend the free schoolbook pilot, already in 102 DEIS primary schools, as resources permit. The free primary schoolbooks scheme benefits up to 540,000 pupils in approximately 3,240 recognised primary schools, including over 130 special schools.

In addition to this, as part of Budget 2024, the department announced €68 million to provide free schoolbooks to Junior Cycle students in post-primary schools in the free education scheme from September 2024. The Junior Cycle Schoolbooks Scheme will benefit more than 213,000 young people in approximately 670 post-primary schools and over 65 special schools.

The schoolbook schemes have eliminated the cost to families for all schoolbooks, workbooks and copybooks at primary level, including special schools, and all schoolbooks and core classroom resources in Junior Cycle post-primary level. The guidance to schools²⁷⁴ for the scheme states that *“Parents/Guardians will no longer be required to make any contribution towards the cost of schoolbooks, including the cost of core classroom resources. Where the funding allows, related classroom resources may also be provided by schools under the scheme. Schools will communicate with parents/guardians in relation to the scope of the scheme in their school each year.”*

The Assistive Technology Grant Scheme

The Assistive Technology Grant Scheme is provided by the Department of Education to supplement the overall approach to providing funding to schools for digital technology and equipment to support children and young people for education purposes. All equipment provided under this scheme supports children and young people with more complex disabilities who, in order to access the school curriculum, require essential specialist equipment. An additional €2 million funding was secured in Budget 2023 for this scheme. This represents an increase of almost 60% on funding allocated previously to this essential support. Assistive technology is a critical enabler for those with special educational needs to gain the maximum benefit from a modern technologically focused education system and this increased allocation contributes to ensuring that a full range of resources, not just teachers and SNAs, are available to support those children and young people who most need it.

Where children and young people with more complex disabilities require essential specialist equipment to access the school curriculum, which they do not already have, or which cannot be provided for them through the schools existing provisions, schools may make an application for such equipment to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) under the terms of this scheme. In order to qualify for equipment under the Assistive Technology Scheme, a child or young person must have been diagnosed with a physical or communicative disability and must also have a recommendation in an assessment by a suitably qualified professional, such as an optician, audiologist or other qualified professional, that the equipment is essential in order to allow the child or young person to access the curriculum.

²⁷⁴ www.gov.ie/Schoolbooks Grant Guidance for Primary and Special Schools 2024/25

The type of equipment provided under the Assistive Technology Scheme is varied and includes audiological supports for children and young people with hearing impairment, braille equipment for children and young people with visual impairment, and computer equipment with associated modified software for children and young people with physical or severe communicative disabilities.

The department is currently reviewing this scheme to ensure that it is working for these children and young people and that the resources are allocated appropriately and as efficiently as possible.

School Buildings

Across the country, the department completed over 180 building projects in 2022 within a challenging construction sector environment of high inflation, labour shortages and supply chain issues. In 2023 in excess of 300 school building projects were under construction, including 40 new school buildings and 260 projects at existing schools. Under Project Ireland 2040²⁷⁵ the Department of Education is investing €4.4 billion over the period 2021 to 2025, to add capacity and develop and upgrade school facilities across the country for the almost one million children and young people and over 100,000 staff that learn and work in the school system. High construction inflation remains a continuing challenge for 2024.

Since 2020, the department has invested in the region of €4.5 billion in schools throughout the country, involving the completion of over 800 school building projects and with construction currently underway at approximately 300 other projects, which includes 31 new school buildings. These 300 projects currently at construction involve a total State investment of over €1.2bn.

It is also planned that close to 90 projects currently at tender stage, including 28 new school buildings, will be authorised to proceed to construction over the course of 2024 and early 2025. In total, around €800 million will be invested in these projects under the department's Large Scale Capital Programme and Additional Accommodation Scheme for essential classroom accommodation.

The Summer Works Scheme is designed to devolve funding to individual school authorities to undertake small-scale building works which, ideally, can be carried out during the summer months or at other times that avoid disrupting the operation of the school. The Summer Works Scheme plays an important role in the maintenance and upgrade of the condition of schools. It provides opportunities for enhancing the facilities in a school such as upgrading science laboratories and enhancing the energy efficiency of schools through upgrade works to roofs, windows, heating systems and other similar items. Funding investment of €65 million was provided in primary and post-primary schools in 2022, to facilitate the delivery of 499 projects under the Summer Works Scheme.

²⁷⁵ gov.ie - Project Ireland 2040 (www.gov.ie)

Amongst the COVID-19 operational supports available to primary and post-primary schools to fully and safely reopen in a sustainable way, while minimising risk associated with COVID-19 is the Minor Works Grant²⁷⁶.

4.6. School Support Staff

Special Needs Assistant

Special needs assistants (SNAs) provide schools with additional adult support staff who can assist children and young people with special educational needs who also have additional and significant care needs. Such support is provided to facilitate the attendance of those children and young people at school and also to minimise disruption to class or teaching time for the pupils concerned, or for their peers, and with a view to developing their independent living skills. The support provided by SNAs has been a key factor in ensuring the successful inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs into mainstream education, and with providing care support to children and young people who are enrolled in special schools and special classes.

SNAs are not allocated to an individual child or young person but as a whole school resource and SNAs should be deployed by schools in a manner which best meets the care support requirements of students in mainstream classes. It is a matter for each school to allocate SNA support to meet student need through identifying and monitoring the care needs of all students in the school, thereby allowing schools flexibility in how the available SNA support is utilised.

The role of the SNA continues to be to support the care needs of students, to assist classroom teachers and SETs and to ensure that the student is able to access education, as set out in Section 5 of *Department of Education Circular 30/2014*²⁷⁷. The role of the SNA is not to provide additional tuition, as this is the role of qualified SETs who may assist the subject/class teacher to provide additional teaching to children and young people with special educational needs. SNAs are recruited specifically to assist in the care needs of children and young people with disabilities in an educational context. SNAs therefore do not have a teaching/pedagogical role. It would not be appropriate for children and young people with special needs to be taught by unqualified personnel.

As per Department of Education Circular No 0018/2023²⁷⁸, children and young people with the greatest level of need should receive the greatest level of support. SNA duties are assigned at the discretion of the principal, or another person acting on behalf of the principal, and/or the Board of Management of a school or ETB. The work of SNAs should be focused on supporting the particular care needs of the student and should be monitored on an ongoing basis and modified accordingly.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of local special educational needs organisers (SENOs), for allocating SNAs to schools to support children and young people with special educational needs in accordance with Department of Education criteria. A key feature of the NCSE allocation process is to

²⁷⁶ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Minor Works Grant (www.gov.ie)

²⁷⁷ Circular 0030/2014 The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme

²⁷⁸ SNA Allocations Circular 18 2023 Final EV (www.gov.ie)

provide for an annual allocation of SNA support to eligible schools. Over recent years schools have maintained their SNA allocation quantum for the coming school year with an option to apply to the NCSE for additional SNA resources where a school identifies a significant increase in care. This gives schools certainty as to the resources which will be available to them for the coming school year and allows for school planning to commence as soon as possible.

Examples of the primary care needs which would be considered significant, and which might require SNA support are:

- Assistance with feeding: where a child or young person with special needs requires the assistance of an adult and where the extent of assistance required would overly disrupt normal teaching time.
- Administration of medicine: where a child or young person requires adult assistance to administer medicine and where the extent of assistance required would overly disrupt normal teaching time.
- Assistance with toileting and general hygiene: (including catheterisation) where a child with special needs cannot independently self-toilet, and until such time as they are able to do so.
- Assistance with mobility and orientation: on an ongoing basis including assisting a child or young person to access the school, the classroom, with accessing school transport (where provided, school Bus Escorts should, in the first instance, assist a child to access school transport), or helping a child or young person to avoid hazards in or surrounding the school. (Every effort must be made by the school to provide opportunities for independence. For example, the removal of hazards).
- Assisting teachers to provide supervision in the class, playground and school grounds at recreation, assembly, and dispersal times including assistance with arriving and departing from school for children and young people with special needs where the school has made a robust case that existing teaching resources cannot facilitate such supervision.
- Non-nursing care needs associated with specific medical conditions: such as frequent epileptic seizures or for children and young people who have fragile health.
- Care needs requiring frequent interventions including withdrawal of a child or young person from a classroom when essential: This may be for safety or personal care reasons, or where a child may be required to leave the class for medical reasons or due to distress on a frequent basis.
- Assistance with moving and lifting of children or young people, operation of hoists and equipment.

Assistance with severe communication difficulties including enabling curriculum access for children and young people with physical disabilities or sensory needs and those with significant and identified social and emotional difficulties. Under the direction of the teacher, this might include assistance with assistive technology equipment, typing or handwriting, supporting transition, assisting with supervision at recreation, dispersal times and other similar items. The role of the SNA continues to be to support the care needs of students;

to assist classroom teachers and SETs and to ensure that the student is able to access education, as set out in Section 5 of Department of Education *Circular 30/2014*²⁷⁹. The role of the SNA is not to provide additional tuition as this is the role of qualified SETs who may assist the subject/class teacher to provide additional teaching to students with special educational needs. SNAs are recruited specifically to assist in the care needs of children and young people with disabilities in an educational context. SNAs therefore do not have a teaching/pedagogical role. It would not be appropriate for children or young people with special needs to be taught by unqualified personnel.

While SNAs are not required to have specific qualifications or degrees they are encouraged to avail of the opportunity to study the new National Training Programme for SNAs²⁸⁰ which was launched by the Department in 2020. This is the first dedicated national training programme for SNAs. It is being delivered by University College Dublin and funded by the Department of Education. There is no cost for serving SNAs already working in schools to participate on this course.

The recently established SNA Workforce Development Unit (SNAWDU) has commenced work on the first *Special Needs Assistant Workforce Development Plan* with a scheduled completion date of September 2025. This Plan will introduce policy developments which will bring clarity and direction to the SNA service. The Plan will include consideration of how best school leaders and SNAs can work together to ensure that both are supported to provide the most effective service to children and young people with significant care in our schools. It will review the role of the SNA and develop actions on key supports such as learning and development, and quality assurance.

The Plan is being developed in consultation and collaboration with stakeholders including school leaders, management bodies, the unions, parents and guardians, student representative groups, students, advocacy groups and the SNAs themselves. While all stakeholder input and views are under consideration in deciding on the policy direction for the SNA workforce, the best interests of the children and young people for whom they provide support is the benchmark against which decisions will be measured.

Irish Sign Language (ISL) Scheme²⁸¹

A new enhanced scheme of provision to support children and young people whose primary language is Irish Sign Language (ISL) was announced in March of 2022. The scheme provides ISL in-school support for children and young people who are deaf and whose primary means of communication is ISL. Irish sign language is a recognised language under the *Irish Sign Language Act 2017*²⁸².

This first phase of the scheme allows for resources to be targeted towards supporting children and young people, and their families where specific intensive support is required in order to access the curriculum and to allow for learning and improvement of the scheme going forward. As part of the expansion of the NCSE that was announced in

²⁷⁹ [Special Needs Assistant \(SNA\) scheme pdf](#)

²⁸⁰ [national-training-programme-for-special-needs-assistants/](#)

²⁸¹ [gov.ie - Irish Sign Language \(ISL\) Scheme \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

²⁸² [Irish Sign Language Act 2017 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](#)

Budget 2023, 40 dedicated new staff are being allocated for this first phase of the ISL scheme.

Under the scheme, two new posts have been created, an ISL – Specialist Classroom Support (referred to as ISL – SCS) and an Advisor Deaf/Hard of Hearing (ISL) (referred to as ISL Advisor). The role of the ISL – SCS is to consistently convey the spirit and content of the communication occurring in the classroom and enhance active engagement with learning and participation in school life by the child or young person. The focus of the new ISL advisor role is to build capacity in ISL across the school community including teachers, SNAs, other school staff and students. A national recruitment campaign, run by the NCSE, commenced in January 2023 with the initial focus on the recruitment for the ISL- SCS followed by the ISL advisor role. Two ISL-SCS are now in place in schools and two ISL Advisers are in place in the NCSE. A further recruitment campaign is planned for 2024 by NCSE.

Say Yes to Languages

The Say Yes to Languages²⁸³ sampler module introduces primary pupils to a new language, by facilitating schools to introduce either a Modern Foreign Language of their choice or Irish Sign Language (ISL). Say Yes to Languages is delivered to primary school pupils from third to sixth class and runs for eight hours, over a period of eight weeks. Participating schools are eligible for a grant from the Department of Education of €400 per classroom, up to a maximum of €1,600 per school. This programme is used to generate awareness among pupils of the range of languages used by their peers in their schools and communities, including Irish Sign Language, which may help to support greater inclusion and appreciation of diversity in society.

Employee Assistance Service

The department offers an Employee Assistance Service (EAS) for all school staff in recognised primary and post-primary schools. This free service includes a wide range of supports including a confidential 24/7 helpline, short-term counselling, a wellbeing portal and webinars. It also provides advice and support to managers to help them deal with health and wellbeing issues in the workplace.

Support Teacher Pilot

In 1995, the Support Teacher Project was established to assist primary schools with children who were experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. These are standalone posts which were introduced to provide a behaviour support service to primary schools and provide support to combat challenging behaviour, and for the social, emotional and personal development of the targeted children in a holistic manner. There are currently approximately 40 support teacher posts. Given the developments in relation to schools' supports in this area overall, the Inspectorate has conducted evaluations in a number of primary schools in Dublin and Cork which have support teachers. A composite report²⁸⁴ on the quality of work of support teachers was published by the department's Inspectorate in December 2020. This report

²⁸³ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication-say-yes-to-languages-language-sampler-module-2022/23>

²⁸⁴ [Evaluation of the Support Teacher Project pdf \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication-evaluation-of-the-support-teacher-project-pdf/)

recommended the retention of the Support Teacher Project as a discrete resource in schools serving areas of acute disadvantage.

4.7. Summer Programme

The Department of Education provides a Summer Programme²⁸⁵ to support children and young people with complex special educational needs and those at risk of educational disadvantage during the summer months. All primary and post-primary schools can offer a summer programme. The programme aims to support the wellbeing of children and young people through building their confidence and enhancing their sense of connection with their school and their peers. It also supports children and young people at key transition stages in their education to progress to their planned educational placement in each September. The department offers a number of school-based programmes including;

- the Primary School Scheme
- the DEIS Literacy and Numeracy Summer Camps in Primary Schools
- Special School Scheme
- Post-Primary Scheme

The 2023 Primary School Scheme integrated previously separated elements into one inclusive scheme for mainstream primary schools which accommodates pupils in special classes, pupils who have complex educational needs in mainstream classes and pupils who are most at risk of educational disadvantage.

In 2023, a new Special School Programme was introduced to ensure that there is a real focus on supporting special schools. This programme has been designed and developed to ensure supports are targeted to enhance the availability of a school-based programme for children and young people in special schools to ensure there is a real focus on supporting special schools.

All schools will have an opportunity to run a programme for those children and young people that need it the most, so that they can be supported, nurtured and encouraged to continue to engage in a fun and inclusive educational setting. In 2022, the summer programme supported more children and young people and more schools than ever before. Additional funding was secured in Budget 2023 to run the programme to match the investment in 2021 and 2022, bringing the total funding available to €40 million for 2023. €40 million will be invested in the 2024 summer programme²⁸⁶ – allowing it to continue to run in line with how it has been delivered over the previous three years.

There are two in-school schemes at mainstream primary level:

- The Primary School Scheme for pupils in primary mainstream schools, which provides one cohesive scheme combining the Inclusion programme and special classes.

²⁸⁵ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - Summer Programme 2023 (www.gov.ie)

²⁸⁶ [gov](http://www.gov.ie) - Summer Programme 2024 (www.gov.ie)

- The DEIS expanded literacy and numeracy summer camp/campa samhraidh for pupils in DEIS schools. This is available to all schools in the DEIS scheme, including those that received their new DEIS status in September 2022.

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education evaluated the summer programme in 2023 through a series of inspection visits over the summer and through follow-up visits in October and November to schools that offered the summer programme. The evaluation report is published online²⁸⁷ and contains many positive findings on the summer programme. It noted in particular the emphasis on children and young people enjoying their learning, the opportunities for learning through cross-curricular activities, the promotion of social skills development, in particular for children and young people with special educational needs and the promotion of well-being on summer programmes.

The 2024 programme is designed and developed to ensure supports are targeted to better assist children and young people to have access to a school-based programme. For 2024, as in 2023, it is a priority that more children and young people in special schools have access to a school-based programme.

It has become apparent since this expansion of the scheme in 2021 that there is a need to have additional education provision for more children and young people during the summer months. An increase in prevalence rates, particularly of autism and the presenting of more complex needs from children and young people with severe and profound disabilities, and increased behavioural and communicative difficulties, has meant this type of programme is more important than ever. There is recognition of the need to support children and young people with the most need in all schools, not just special schools and classes, and this is an important part of why all schools can run a programme.

A home-based summer programme is also available for children and young people with complex special educational needs where a place on a school-based programme is not available.

4.8. The Dormant Accounts Fund

The *Dormant Accounts Act 2001*, together with the *Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003* and the *Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Acts 2005-2012*, provide a framework for the administration of unclaimed accounts in credit institutions including banks and other financial institutions, and unclaimed life assurance policies in insurance undertakings. The Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF)²⁸⁸ consists of measures approved for funding that are proposed by various government departments for inclusion in the annual DAF Action Plan that address the criteria set out in the DAF legislation to address:

- The personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged.

²⁸⁷ [Summer Programme 2023: Building Confidence and Connections Findings from inspections and follow up visits \(gov.ie\)](#)

²⁸⁸ [2023 DE Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan 2023.pdf \(gov.ie\)](#)

- The educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged.
- Persons with a disability (within the meaning of the *Equal Status Act 2000*²⁸⁹).

Measures must also support one or more of the strategic objectives under the DAF Disbursement scheme.

In 2023/2024 the Dormant Accounts Fund²⁹⁰ is providing additional funding for a number of education related programmes.

²⁸⁹ [Equal Status Act, 2000 \(irishstatutebook.ie\)](http://irishstatutebook.ie)

²⁹⁰ [Dormant Accounts Fund Action Plan 2024](#)

5. The DEIS Programme

5.1. The History of DEIS

DEIS – inception in 2005

Supplementing the universal supports available to all schools, the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Programme is a key policy initiative of the Department of Education to address concentrated educational disadvantage at school level in a targeted and equitable way across the primary and post-primary sector. The DEIS concept was introduced in 2005 by Minister of Education and Science, Mary Hanafin TD, in *DEIS an Action Plan for Social Inclusion*²⁹¹. The DEIS concept recognised that under-achievement in school can have profound consequences for children, young people and adults in later life, including economic uncertainty, wellbeing and health issues, low self-esteem and problems participating in family and community life.

The 2005 *DEIS Plan* recognised the lack of a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage in schools and sought to improve methods for the identification of schools whose were supporting children and young people who were at risk of educational disadvantage, and the targeting of additional supports to such schools under a range of measures. This was examined in the Educational Research Centre (ERC) report, *A Report on the Procedures Used to Identify Post-Primary Schools for Inclusion in The School Support Programme Under DEIS*²⁹². These measures included Early Start²⁹³, Giving Children an Even Break, the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)²⁹⁴, the School Completion Programme (SCP)²⁹⁵, the Early Literacy Initiative and the Schoolbooks Grant Schemes at primary and second level. It also included the provision of additional supports for vulnerable groups, particularly Travellers and children and young people for whom English or Irish was not their first language.

The first schools entered the DEIS programme in September 2006. As per *DEIS An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion*²⁹⁶ it is grounded on the following principles:

- That every child and young person deserves an equal chance to access, participate in, and benefit from education.
- Every person should have the opportunity to reach his or her full educational potential for personal, social and economic reasons.
- Education is a critical factor in promoting social inclusion and economic development.

Research carried out by the ERC²⁹⁷, and the Irish Journal of Education's *An Analysis of the Association Between Socioeconomic Context, Gender, and Achievement*²⁹⁸, found strong evidence that the disadvantage associated with poverty and social exclusion

²⁹¹ [DEIS Action Plan May 2005.pdf \(education.gov.ie\)](#)

²⁹² [Procedures for selecting post-primary schools for DEIS.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁹³ [gov.ie - Early Start Pre-School Programme \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

²⁹⁴ [gov.ie - Home School Community Liaison Scheme \(HSCL\) \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

²⁹⁵ [SCP - School Completion Programme Tulsa - Child and Family Agency](#)

²⁹⁶ [DEIS Action Plan May 2005.pdf \(education.gov.ie\)](#)

²⁹⁷ [DEIS \(Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools\) - Educational Research Centre \(erc.ie\)](#)

²⁹⁸ [Archer.vp:CorelVentura 7.0 \(erc.ie\)](#)

assumes a multiplier effect when large numbers of children and young people in a school are from a similar disadvantaged background (the “social context effect”). The differences between urban and rural disadvantage were also taken into account in targeting supports under the DEIS programme.

DEIS Review Process 2015-16

In May 2014, a joint Department of Education and Educational Research Centre research seminar ‘*Learning from DEIS*’, was held at which researchers from the ERC, and the Department of Education Inspectorate and Statistics Section presented published research to an audience of DEIS schools and other education partners. At the seminar, then Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn TD, announced plans “*to commission one further piece of research in relation to DEIS, to provide recommendations for a renewal of policy in relation to educational disadvantage, including DEIS*”. The overall objective of this project was to produce a consolidated report on the DEIS programme incorporating information in relation to the various inputs, processes and educational outcomes contained in the findings from the DEIS research conducted to date. This evaluation was carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). Published in April 2015, the ESRI Report, entitled *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS*²⁹⁹, identified the following policy implications:

- The continuing concentration of disadvantage in DEIS schools, especially DEIS Urban Band 1 primary schools, highlights the need for continued supports for such schools. Further debate is merited on the appropriate scale of funding, particularly for DEIS Urban Band 1 schools, given the greater complexity of need.
- There is also a case for a degree of tapering of resourcing for schools rather than the current ‘cut-off’.
- Continuing challenges in the area of mathematics, highlighting the need to focus on numeracy skills in future provision.
- Research points to a number of ways of further enhancing practice in DEIS schools through changes in the use of ability grouping and enhancing the quality of teacher-student interaction.³⁰⁰
- The lack of data on the social profile of individual children and young people makes it difficult to measure the achievement gap specifically for disadvantaged children and young people, and to capture the additional effect of the concentration of disadvantage in a school on achievement.

Following the publication of the ESRI Report, a review of the DEIS programme was initiated in 2015. The objective of this review was to develop a new methodology for the identification of schools and a renewed framework of support for schools to address educational disadvantage. This work was carried out in the context of the learning from evaluations of DEIS to date, and relevant policy and other changes since its introduction in 2005. The review examined all aspects of DEIS, including the range and impact of different elements of the supports provided under DEIS, the potential for innovation within and between schools and the scope for increased integration of services provided by other departments and agencies in order to improve the effectiveness of the range of

²⁹⁹ <https://www.esri.ie/publications/learning-from-the-evaluation-of-deis>

³⁰⁰ See P.63 <https://www.esri.ie/publications/learning-from-the-evaluation-of-deis>

interventions deployed. The review process also 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 focus in this process was to ensure an accurate, robust, responsive, and independent assessment framework. The review process was informed by extensive engagement with the education partners and other key stakeholders, including workshops with academics and practitioners, to explore the potential for innovation in future interventions in schools which cater for children and young people at highest risk of educational disadvantage and at risk of not reaching their full potential by virtue of their socio-economic circumstances.

The outcome from the review, documented in the *Report on the Review of DEIS*³⁰¹, was the publication of the *DEIS Plan 2017*.

*DEIS Plan 2017*³⁰²

The *DEIS Plan 2017*, set out the vision for future interventions in the critical area of educational disadvantage policy and built on what had already been achieved by schools who had benefitted from the additional supports available under the initial DEIS programme introduced in 2005.

The *DEIS Plan 2017* set the ambition to become the best in Europe at harnessing education to break down barriers and stem the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage by equipping learners to participate, succeed and contribute effectively to society in a changing world. In order to measure progress, the plan set out a number of targets relating to literacy, numeracy, retention, teacher education, and parental and community engagement. It also set out five key goals:

- The implementation of a more robust and responsive assessment framework for the identification of schools and effective resource allocation.
- To improve learning experiences and outcomes for children and young people in DEIS Schools.
- To improve the capacity of school leaders and teachers to engage, plan and deploy resources to their best advantage.
- To support and foster best practice through inter-agency collaboration.
- To support the work of schools by providing research, information, evaluation and feedback.

The *DEIS Plan 2017* identified more than 108 actions to support the achievement of these goals and targets and provide learners most at risk of disadvantage with improved outcomes.

Those actions included the following:

- School leaders and teachers in DEIS schools will be prioritised for accessing professional leadership training, preparation courses for newly appointed principals, and mentoring and coaching courses.

³⁰¹assets.gov.ie Report on the Review of DEIS

³⁰²[gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie) - DEIS Plan 2017 (www.gov.ie)

- All post-primary schools participating in the School Support Programme will have access to a dedicated career guidance counsellor.
- The connections between pre-schools and primary schools in communities will be strengthened.
- DEIS schools will be asked, in the annual review of their School Plan, to set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time specific targets, including targets for literacy and numeracy, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and leadership, and to evaluate these annually.
- A pilot approach, to identify effective interventions and explore how these and further creativity around teaching and learning, and the delivery of other supports, have made effective use of the resources available to schools to achieve good educational outcomes, will be adopted.
- A new School Excellence Fund will be established, which will be supported by a pilot DEIS Development Unit, to support the implementation of new interventions and help broker the necessary resources from the various support agencies.
- Operation of a Book Rental Scheme will become a mandatory requirement for schools participating in the School Support Programme by September 2017
- Greater prioritisation of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) service to DEIS schools.
- Education and Training Boards (ETBs) will establish formal outreach arrangements with DEIS schools to encourage access through its existing education pathways
- Learning from the Area Based Childhood (ABC)³⁰³ programmes will be incorporated into current teaching, learning and other supports in schools. The ABC programme aims to work in partnership with families, practitioners, communities, and national stakeholders to deliver better outcomes for children and families living in areas where poverty is most deeply entrenched. The ABC programme works from a strengths-based approach, harnessing the talents, abilities and capabilities of the family and community. This is done using prevention and early intervention approaches.

At the time of the *DEIS Plan 2017*, a further 79 schools were included in the DEIS programme through the initial application of the DEIS identification model.

Extension of DEIS to further schools 2022

In March 2022, Minister Norma Foley announced a major expansion of the DEIS programme which meant that, for the first time since 2017, the programme was significantly expanded to an additional 322 schools³⁰⁴.

The programme now includes in the region of 1,200 schools and supports approximately 260,000 children and young people. This means one in four of all students are now supported in the programme. This recent expansion added an additional €32 million to the department's expenditure on the DEIS programme from 2023, bringing the overall Department of Education allocation for the programme to over €180 million.

³⁰³ Area Based Childhood Programme (ABC) Tusla - Child and Family Agency

³⁰⁴ The Refined DEIS Identification Model

Policy level targets

The *DEIS Plan 2017* sets a number of policy level targets with regard to addressing the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools and improving the outcomes for children and young people in DEIS schools. The full table of targets is located at pages 6-8 in the *DEIS Plan 2017*³⁰⁵. Those targets aim to be measurable and are set based on available metrics, but the department aims to continue to refine its capacity to measure programmes with new indicators. For example, the targets on literacy and numeracy are set and measured by the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER)³⁰⁶. The most recent review was published in *Ireland's National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading 2021: A focus on achievement in urban DEIS schools*³⁰⁷.

DEIS Action Plans for Improvement

Schools that receive additional support and resources through participation in DEIS are expected to support the DEIS action plan through a systematic planning and monitoring process at individual school level and at school cluster/community level. Schools are advised to plan by setting targets under the DEIS themes of:

- attendance
- retention
- literacy
- numeracy
- supporting educational transitions
- partnership with parents and guardians, and others
- academic outcomes (post-primary only)

The following three integrated themes were introduced as new DEIS themes in 2017. Leadership, Continuing Professional Development, Wellbeing. While these integrated themes do not require a separate section each like the main DEIS themes, consideration should be given to how they can be integrated into the main themes, with relevant targets and actions set out as appropriate.

The involvement of children and young people, parents and guardians, local communities, and agencies operating at local level is considered an important dimension of the planning process. Within this framework, participating schools are responsible for tailoring their own action planning to meet the specific needs of their children and young people. Progress in the implementation of these action plans should be kept under review and adjusted in light of experience.

A planning template was developed by the support services to facilitate DEIS schools in developing their own individual three-year action plans. By using these templates for action planning for improvement, schools supplement and extend established school development planning practices. Principals, boards of management and in-school management teams, who were already responsible for leading the planning process in their schools, are expected to support the implementation of the DEIS action plans. It is

³⁰⁵ [DEIS Plan 2017 \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie) See pgs 6-8

³⁰⁶ <https://www.erc.ie/studies/namer/>

³⁰⁷ [www.gov.ie/pdf/Ireland's National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading 2021: A focus on achievement in urban DEIS schools 23572-NAMER-DEIS-report-Online.pdf \(erc.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie/pdf/Ireland's%20National%20Assessments%20of%20Mathematics%20and%20English%20Reading%202021%3A%20A%20focus%20on%20achievement%20in%20urban%20DEIS%20schools%2023572-NAMER-DEIS-report-Online.pdf)

intended that the planning template developed by the support services would assist schools to include targets at school level under each of the agreed areas of focus, otherwise referred to as the DEIS themes. The targets are to be agreed at whole-school level, with all staff members then taking them into account as appropriate in their individual planning for teaching and learning.

The Inspectorate evaluates and reports on DEIS schools Action Planning for Improvement. During these inspections, the inspectors evaluate how the school devises, implements and monitors its action plan and how this impacts on learner outcomes. They meet with the school principal, the in-school leadership team, and with groups of parents and guardians, children and young people, and teachers, and observe teaching and learning in classrooms. Parents and guardians, and children and young people also complete questionnaires. Oral feedback is provided at the end of these evaluations and the school receives a written report, which is published on the department's website³⁰⁸.

In 2015 the Department of Education Inspectorate carried out a review *Looking at Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Primary Schools*³⁰⁹. Included in the conclusions of this review was that it was evident that engagement with action planning for improvement in DEIS schools was having a positive impact and that schools had reported improvements in many aspects of the DEIS themes, including attendance, literacy and numeracy. The report noted that collaborative planning had resulted in the adoption of effective whole-school practices, which had assisted in bringing about improvements in the DEIS themes.

In 2022, the Inspectorate published *Looking at DEIS Action Planning for Improvement in Primary and Post-Primary Schools*³¹⁰. This was a composite report of inspections on the leadership of DEIS action planning for school improvement and the quality of teaching, learning and professional development conducted in 2021. The conclusions of this report included that overall, in the schools inspected, there was a strong culture of planning for improvement, school leaders provided strong instructional leadership to their schools and that schools are implementing a significant number of interventions to bolster literacy, numeracy and the wellbeing of their students.

The Inspectorate shares good practices about DEIS through numerous presentations given to trustee bodies, ETB/DEIS seminars, and working with Education Centres.

5.2. Structure of the DEIS Programme

Identification of schools for inclusion in the programme

The identification of schools for inclusion in DEIS is based on the “multiplier effect” of concentrated levels of socio-economic disadvantage on the educational experience. The approach is grounded in international evidence, and it is considered that it is the combination of the various interventions under DEIS that have enabled it to succeed. Recent endorsements for the approach include a 2018 OECD report, *Equity in*

³⁰⁸ www.gov.ie Evaluation of Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Schools Inspection reports

³⁰⁹ assets.gov.ie Looking at Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Primary Schools

³¹⁰ www.gov.ie DEIS Action Planning for Improvement in Primary and Post-Primary Schools

*Education – breaking down barriers to social mobility*³¹¹ which showed that educationally disadvantaged children and young people do much better in schools where they are a minority, thereby demonstrating the importance of focusing support on concentrated numbers of students from areas of significant socio-economic disadvantage.

When the DEIS programme was first established in 2005, schools were identified for inclusion in the programme using different means than currently, and the methods differed at primary and post-primary levels. At primary level a survey of school principals provided data on the percentage of pupils in the school with the following characteristics³¹²: parents and guardians who were unemployed; living in local authority accommodation; from lone parent families; of Traveller ethnicity; from large families (more than 5 children); and eligible for free books. At post-primary level³¹³ centralised information was used to identify schools for inclusion: the percentage of students with medical cards; school level retention rates for several cohorts; and Junior Certificate achievement data over a period of time.

The DEIS review process in 2015 and 2016 included a comprehensive examination of the options to allow for the development of an improved methodology for the measurement of schools' levels of disadvantage. In the consultation process for the review, it was clear that schools did not want to return to a survey-based approach given the additional administrative burden this imposed on schools. It was considered unfair to expect schools to gather sensitive socioeconomic data on their school communities. Also, there was a demand for a more responsive methodology, one that could reflect demographic and other changes in school communities. This latter point was viewed as critical, given that the social context is a key component in the needs analysis for the DEIS programme. The availability of school data sources through the department's student databases, Primary Online Database (POD)³¹⁴ at primary, and Post-Primary Online Database (PPOD) at post-primary³¹⁵, facilitated the department in looking at other options.

The Pobal HP Deprivation Index

The development of the Pobal HP Deprivation Index (HP Index)³¹⁶, which is a theoretically sound and robust method of measuring the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area using data compiled from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) national census, offered significant potential to form a key part of a new methodology.

The HP Index³¹⁷ is Ireland's primary social gradient tool. It is used by numerous State agencies for the identification of disadvantage in order to target resources towards communities most in need. Variables used in the compilation of the HP Index include those related to demographic growth, dependency ratios, education levels, single parent

³¹¹ [Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility | en | OECD](#)

³¹² [The Assessment of Levels of Disadvantage in Primary Schools For Deis \(ERC.ie\)](#)

³¹³ [Procedures for selecting post-primary schools for DEIS.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

³¹⁴ [gov - Primary online database \(POD\) \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

³¹⁵ [www.gov.ie post-primary-online-database-p-pod/](#)

³¹⁶ [http://trutzhaase.eu The-2016-Pobal-HP-Deprivation-Index-Introduction-07.pdf](#)

³¹⁷ [The 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index \(SA\) | Trutz Haase](#)

rate, overcrowding, social class, occupation, and unemployment rates. These variables are the same as those affecting families and individuals that are more likely to be in private rented or social housing and/or live in areas with greater levels of anti-social issues.

The DEIS identification methodology that was developed in 2017 provided an objective approach to the identification of schools for DEIS. The key data sources used in the DEIS identification process were the Department of Education's POD and PPOD, together with CSO data from the national census of population as represented in the HP index at small area level. Individual student address data supplied by schools was anonymised and matched to HP index small areas to accord a relevant deprivation score. From this, a school-level aggregate measure of concentrated disadvantage was derived.

The initial application of the HP index in the DEIS identification model in 2017 was based on the concept of assessing the percentage of children and young people with a HP index of -10 or below, where -10 represents the HP index score that is one standard deviation below the mean and the point at which the label 'disadvantaged' is applied by the authors of the index. When the 2017 DEIS identification model was applied, the criteria used to identify schools for inclusion in the DEIS programme was based on the percentage of children or young people in a school from small areas that had a HP index of -10 or below.

The *DEIS Plan 2017* noted that further analysis of the DEIS identification model was merited to identify refinements which may improve its accuracy and application in terms of resource allocation. In addition, considerable work was carried out to improve the accuracy of data on the POD and PPOD systems and the mapping process required for linking those addresses to the relevant HP index small areas.

A comprehensive and comparative analysis was conducted, including consultation with school management, national parent representative bodies and teacher unions. This extensive analysis, examination and consultation resulted in the addition of a number of refinements to the identification model.

The model now accounts for children and young people who are from areas designated borderline disadvantaged, that is, those with a HP index score of between -7.5 and -10. This improves on the single cut-off point of the 2017 version of the model and allows for the disadvantage of schools with high proportions of children and young people who are from borderline disadvantaged areas to be reflected.

A weighted approach was incorporated into the model. Children and young people from areas with a HP index score of -7.5 and below in each individual school are grouped into three groups based on their level of disadvantage and assigned a weighting to reflect the severity of their relative disadvantage:

- Those with a HP index score of -20 or below are accorded a status of very disadvantaged.
- Those with a HP index score between -10 and -20 are accorded a status of disadvantaged.
- Those between -7.5 and -10 are accorded a status of borderline disadvantaged.

This allows for the relative severity of disadvantage within an individual school to be reflected in the overall model.

The refined DEIS identification model includes a component to reflect the level of educational disadvantage experienced by children and young people who have self-identified as Traveller or Roma. The school enrolment database allows children and young people, or their parents and guardians, to voluntarily self-identify their ethnicity. Where a school has students who have chosen to self-identify on the POD and PPOD systems as Traveller or Roma, these students are assigned a status of disadvantage which ensures that they are considered within the application of the model, independent of the HP index and this is reflected in the school's overall disadvantage score.

The refined DEIS identification model includes a component to reflect the level of educational disadvantage experienced by children and young people who reside in International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) centres or Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROC) and students experiencing homelessness. Where a school has student addresses on the school enrolment database which match the addresses of the State-funded emergency homeless accommodation or IPAS and EROC accommodation, these addresses are assigned a status of disadvantage which ensures that they are considered within the application of the model, independent of the HP index (as it applies at small area level) and this is reflected in the school's overall disadvantage score. While the inclusion of this measure does not account for every student experiencing homelessness, it makes use of the data available on State-funded homeless accommodation.

The government's approach to supporting families and children experiencing homelessness involves a multi-agency approach and several Irish departments and agencies are responsible for the delivery of supports to these families (for example, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY); Tusla, Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Education. Moreover, Housing for All³¹⁸ commits to providing enhanced tenancy sustainment supports for families in long-term homelessness to help them exit emergency accommodation and maintain their tenancies.

In terms of applying the refined DEIS identification model two methods were used. A school's initial disadvantage score was calculated by assigning the weights and summing the proportion of students in each of the three disadvantaged groupings together. Schools' scores were then standardised relative to their respective primary or post-primary score distributions. This provided a standardised disadvantage score for each school.

In addition to the above, the proportion of students with a HP index score at or below -10 in each school was computed. Schools are identified for inclusion in the DEIS programme based on their standardised disadvantage score and/or the proportion of

³¹⁸ [gov - Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

students with a HP index score at or below -10. Schools with the highest levels of disadvantage under either of these measurements are included in the DEIS programme.

It should be noted that the above process is used to identify additional schools for inclusion in the DEIS programme. While the model is applied to all schools, it has not yet been used to identify schools within the programme who no longer meet the criteria for inclusion.

Lorraine Gilleece and Gráinne McHugh of the ERC published a research paper '*Validating School-based Measures of Educational Disadvantage in Ireland*'³¹⁹ which compared school-average HP index scores with the percentages of students eligible for examination fee-waivers and school-average values on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) measure of student economic, social and cultural status. They found that despite some limitations, the HP index represents a reasonable option for use in the DEIS identification process.

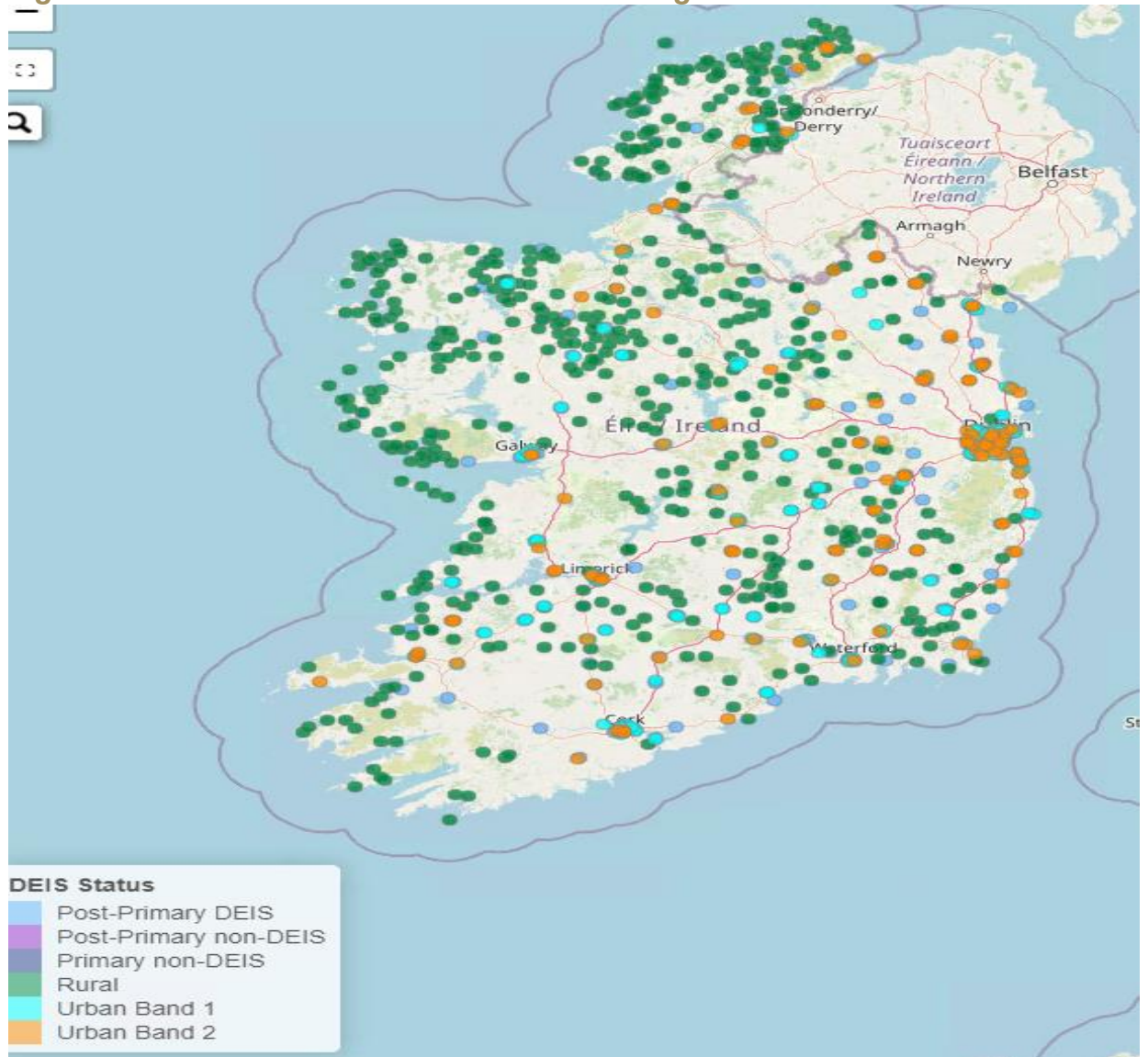
Following the national census conducted in April 2022, an updated HP Deprivation index has now been generated by Pobal and was launched on 2 November 2023. The Department of Education is engaging with Pobal regarding this development, and it will be thoroughly reviewed to inform future resource allocation aimed at tackling educational disadvantage.

Location of schools in the DEIS programme

Schools in the programme are located in almost all areas of the country. The map below shows the geographic spread of schools in the programme. Rural DEIS schools are more prevalent along the western coast of Ireland with high numbers in Donegal and Mayo. While there are a large number of DEIS schools in Donegal for example, many of these are very small rural schools. The majority of DEIS Urban Band 1 and DEIS Urban Band 2 schools are located in Dublin. There are however urban DEIS schools in all the major cities and in regional towns across all counties.

³¹⁹ [View of Validating school-based measures of educational disadvantage in Ireland epaa.asu.edu](https://www.epaa.asu.edu)

Figure 38 – Location of Schools in the DEIS Programme



The below tables provide a breakdown by county of where the numbers and percentages of schools and students in the DEIS programme were located for the 2022/2023 school year.

Figure 37 - Mainstream Primary Schools by County 2022/23

County	Non-DEIS		DEIS		% Schools in DEIS	% Pupils in DEIS
	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils		
Carlow	25	3,701	17	3,767	40.5	50.4
Cavan	58	6,953	17	2,965	22.7	29.9
Clare	81	10,323	28	3,042	25.7	22.8
Cork	285	52,271	54	9,876	15.9	15.9
Donegal	43	7,249	131	11,480	75.3	61.3
Dublin	285	97,350	175	41,557	38.0	29.9
Galway	160	23,034	62	7,102	27.9	23.6
Kerry	95	12,106	37	3,841	28.0	24.1
Kildare	86	25,151	15	4,139	14.9	14.1
Kilkenny	57	9,112	13	1,841	18.6	16.8
Laois	48	8,637	15	2,229	23.8	20.5
Leitrim	21	2,617	16	1,225	43.2	31.9
Limerick	96	16,567	37	5,938	27.8	26.4
Longford	20	1,763	17	3,507	45.9	66.5
Louth	51	11,517	19	5,432	27.1	32.0
Mayo	73	8,438	81	6,112	52.6	42.0
Meath	102	23,135	12	3,290	10.5	12.5
Monaghan	46	5,655	16	2,241	25.8	28.4
Offaly	42	5,097	25	4,399	37.3	46.3
Roscommon	59	5,747	29	2,237	33.0	28.0
Sligo	43	4,979	21	2,366	32.8	32.2
Tipperary	107	12,339	45	5,841	29.6	32.1
Waterford	54	9,244	19	4,675	26.0	33.6
Westmeath	54	7,498	19	3,788	26.0	33.6
Wexford	70	10,833	32	7,324	31.4	40.3
Wicklow	68	14,173	14	3,495	17.1	19.8
Grand Total	2,129	395,489	966	153,709	31.2	28.0

Figure 38 - Post-Primary Schools by County 2022/23

County	Non-DEIS		DEIS		% Schools in DEIS	% Students in DEIS
	Schools	Students	Schools	Students		
Carlow	8	4,972	3	1,504	27.3	23.2
Cavan	9	5,324	2	1,149	18.2	17.8
Clare	14	8,042	4	1,357	22.2	14.4
Cork	63	37,367	22	9,501	25.9	20.3
Donegal	8	5,254	19	8,953	70.4	63.0
Dublin	117	74,620	68	25,723	36.8	25.6
Galway	36	18,381	10	3,881	21.7	17.4
Kerry	21	10,274	5	1,747	19.2	14.5
Kildare	22	16,936	7	4,366	24.1	20.5
Kilkenny	9	6,354	6	2,194	40.0	25.7
Laois	8	5,213	2	1,506	20.0	22.4
Leitrim	7	2,855	0	0	0.0	0.0
Limerick	20	13,229	8	3,943	28.6	23.0
Longford	3	1,873	6	2,545	66.7	57.6
Louth	11	8,550	7	5,708	38.9	40.0
Mayo	15	7,533	11	3,561	42.3	32.1
Meath	20	14,347	4	2,786	16.7	16.3
Monaghan	8	3,750	4	2,199	33.3	37.0
Offaly	7	4,079	4	2,721	36.4	40.0
Roscommon	6	2,988	3	1,578	33.3	34.6
Sligo	10	5,149	3	479	23.1	8.5
Tipperary	20	10,994	10	4,099	33.3	27.2
Waterford	11	7,727	6	2,448	35.3	24.1
Westmeath	10	7,914	3	942	23.1	10.6
Wexford	12	9,522	11	4,495	47.8	32.1
Wicklow	17	9,499	7	3,486	29.2	25.8
Grand Total	492	302,746	235	102,871	32.3	25.3

Source: Department of Education

Since 2017 the DEIS programme has been extended by 50%, adding an additional 401 schools (79 in 2017 and 322 in 2022). In the 2020/21 academic year there were 887 schools in the DEIS Programme serving over 185,000 children and young people, 689 primary and 198 post-primary.

In the 2021/22 academic year there were 884 schools in the DEIS Programme serving over 180,000 children and young people, 687 primary and 197 post-primary.

In the 2022/23 academic year there were 1,201 schools in the DEIS Programme serving over 20,000 children and young people, 966 primary schools and 235 post-primary schools.

Preliminary data indicates that in the 2023/24 academic year there are 1,195 schools in the DEIS Program serving over 260,000 children and young people, 963 primary schools and 232 post-primary schools.

Figure 41 - DEIS Schools - School Year 2023/24

DEIS Band	No. of Schools
DEIS Urban Band 1	306
DEIS Urban Band 2	150
DEIS Rural	507
Total Primary	963
DEIS Post-Primary	232
Total DEIS Schools	1,195

Source: Department of Education

Figure 40 – Number of DEIS Primary Schools 2014-2022

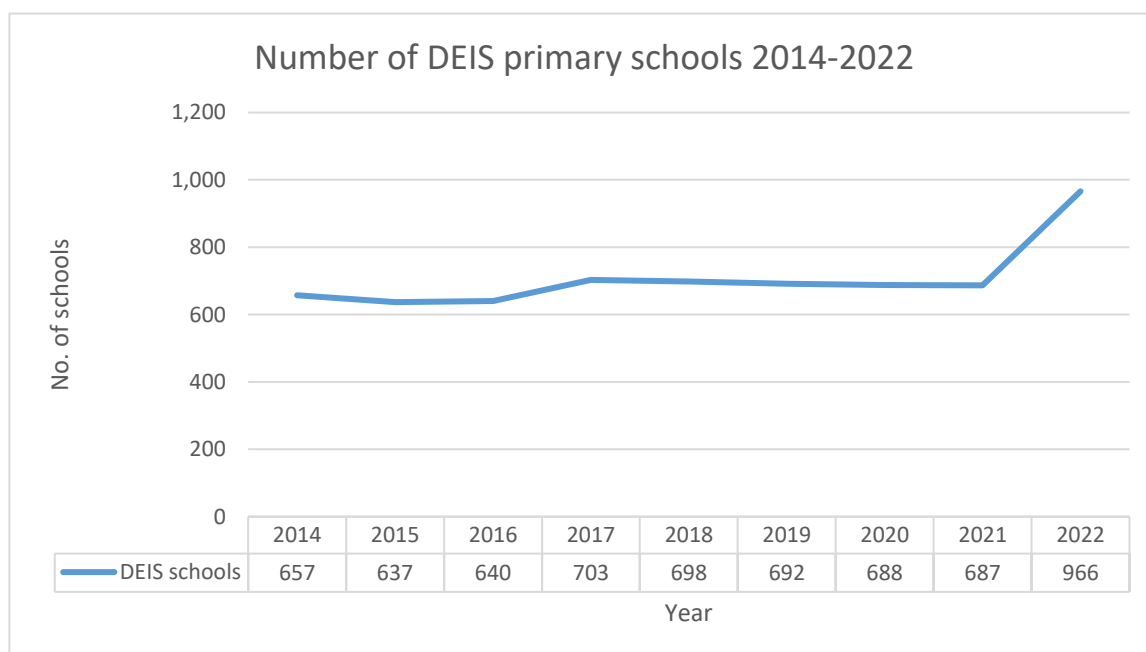


Figure 41 – Number of DEIS Post-Primary Schools 2014-2022

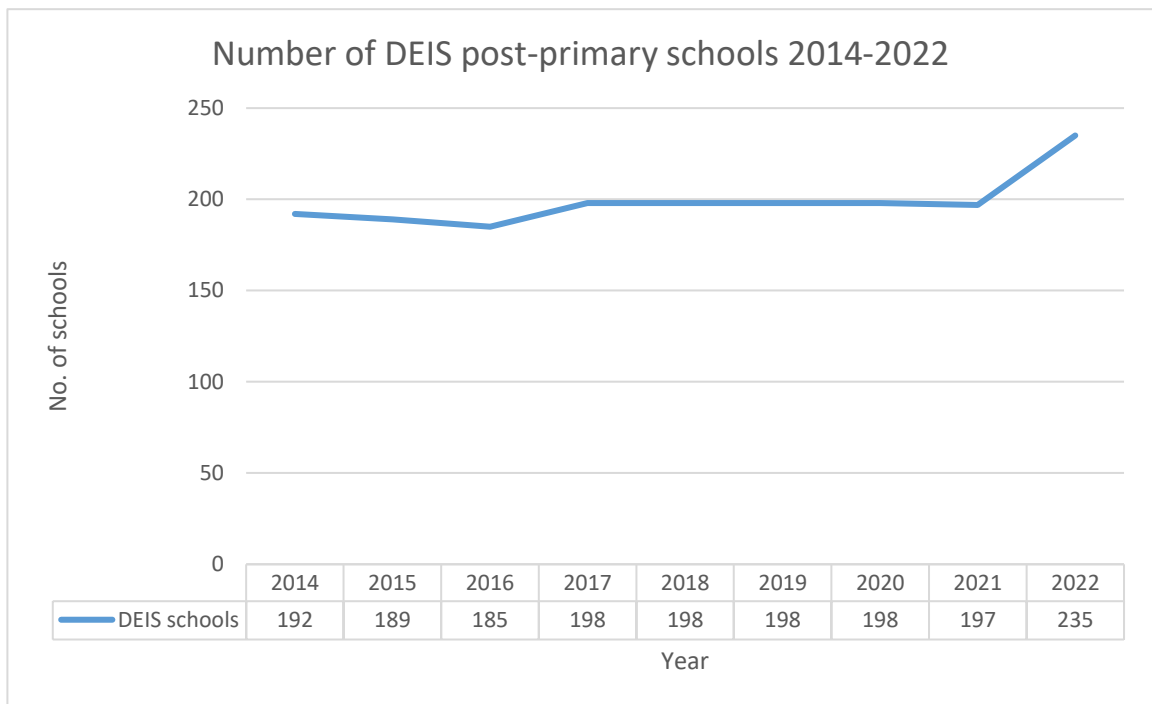


Figure 42 - Number of pupils in DEIS primary schools 2014-2022

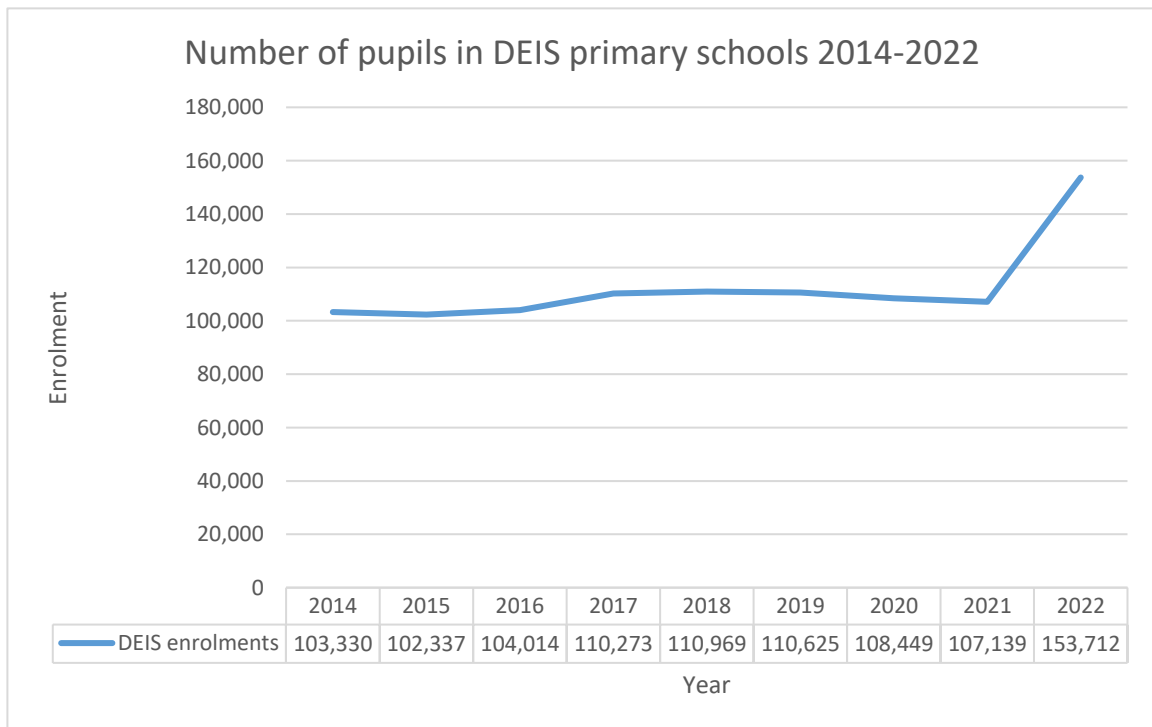
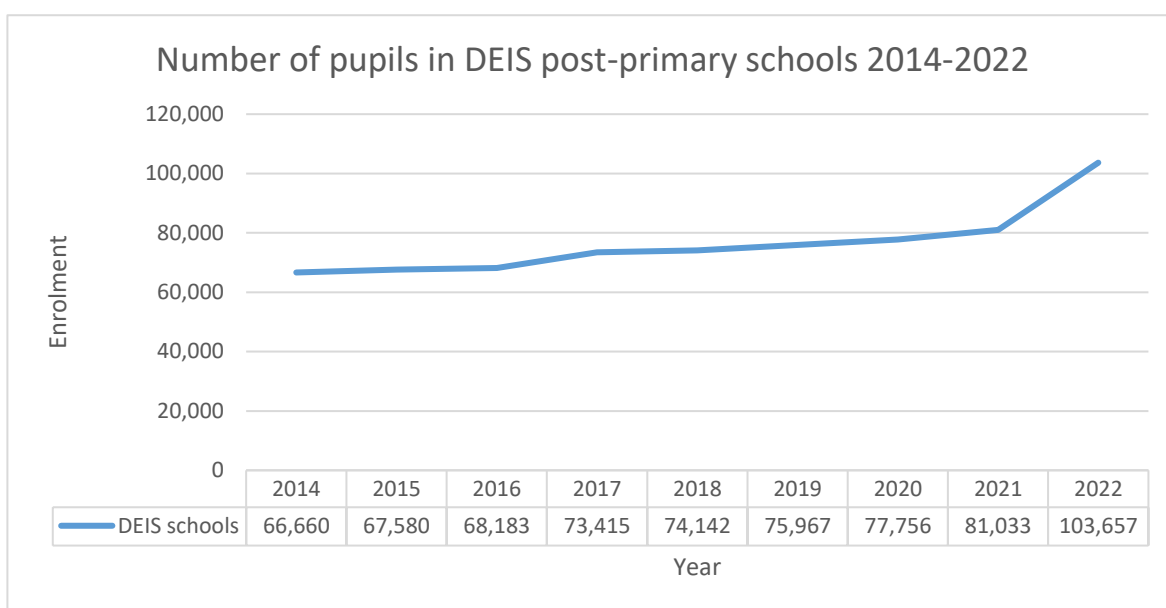


Figure 43 – Number of Students in DEIS Post-Primary Schools 2014-2022



Source: Department of Education

5.3. Provision of Resources Under the DEIS Programme

Funding for the DEIS programme in 2021 was over €150 million. Budget 2022 provided for an allocation of an additional €18 million for 2022 and €32million for 2023 to extend the DEIS programme to further schools with the highest levels of disadvantage. The cost of providing supports to DEIS schools was in the region of €170 million in 2022 and this funding increased to over €180m in 2023. This does not include additional funding by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to provide the School Meals Programme to all DEIS schools.

Primary schools in the DEIS programme are classified as DEIS Urban Band 1, DEIS Urban Band 2 and DEIS Rural. The level of resources that a school receives is based on this classification. This classification is based on:

- 1) A school’s individual level of disadvantage
- 2) The location of an individual school

This classification informs the resource allocation process within the DEIS programme. In order for a school to be classified as being urban the school must satisfy both criteria set by the Central Statistics Office (CSO):

- 1) The school must be within the clustering of dwellings of the settlement boundary layer drawn by the CSO.
- 2) The settlement must have 1,500 inhabitants to be considered a town (“urban”).

The CSO states:

“The term Aggregate Town Area or Urban area refers to settlements with a total population of 1,500 or more.

*The term Aggregate Rural Area refers to the population outside Aggregate Town areas and includes the population of settlements with a population of less than 1,500 persons.*³²⁰

Supports for DEIS Urban Band 1 Primary Schools

The main additional support for the DEIS Urban Band 1 schools is smaller class sizes and additional leadership allocation. The full list of resources for DEIS Urban Band 1 schools is below.

- The primary staffing schedule will operate on the basis of a general average of 1 classroom teacher for every 23 pupils for the 2023/24 school year. However lower thresholds apply for DEIS Urban Band 1 schools. Staffing arrangements in DEIS Urban Band 1 primary schools for the 2023/24 school year are 17:1 for junior schools, 19:1 for vertical schools and 21:1 for senior schools. Detailed information on the allocation of teachers to schools is published each year. For the 2023/24 school year the information is available in *Circular 0006/2023 Staffing arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2023/24 school year.*³²¹
- Administrative principal appointed on an enrolment of 113 pupils.
- DEIS grant paid based on level of disadvantage and enrolment
- Access to Home School Community Liaison Services (HSCL).
- Access to School Meals Programme.
- Access to range of supports under School Completion Programme (SCP).
- Access to literacy/numeracy support such as Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery, First Steps, Ready Set Go Maths.
- Access to planning supports.
- Access to a range of professional development supports for teachers.

Supports for DEIS Urban Band 2 Primary Schools

DEIS Urban Band 2 schools, as urban schools, receive access to the SCP and the HSCL scheme. These are important supports in urban and post-primary schools. A full list of the supports for DEIS Urban Band 2 schools is below:

- Administrative principal appointed on an enrolment of 136 pupils.
- DEIS grant paid based on level of disadvantage and enrolment.
- Access to Home School Community Liaison Services (HSCL).
- Access to School Meals Programme.
- Access to range of supports under School Completion Programme (SCP).
- Access to literacy/numeracy support such as Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery, First Steps, Ready Set Go Maths.
- Access to planning supports.
- Access to a range of professional development supports for teachers.

³²⁰ [Urban and Rural Life in Ireland, 2019 CSO.ie](https://www.cso.ie/en/media/cso/images/publications/urbanandrurallifeinireland2019.pdf)

³²¹ [Staffing arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2023/24 school year \(gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications-and-statements/publication-staffing-arrangements-in-primary-schools-for-the-2023-24-school-year/)

Supports for DEIS Rural Primary Schools

Research in *The Achievements and Characteristics of Pupils Attending Rural Schools Participating in DEIS*³²² has shown that educational outcomes for DEIS Rural pupils is not as poor as those for pupils in DEIS Urban schools. Therefore, the allocation model provides a lower level of resources to DEIS Rural schools, reflecting a perceived lower need.

- DEIS grant paid based on level of disadvantage and enrolment.
- Access to School Meals Programme.
- Access to planning supports.
- Access to a range of professional development supports for teachers.

Supports for DEIS Post-Primary Schools

For post-primary schools there is no banding process. Schools are allocated supports based on their individual level of disadvantage or receive access to supports through being included in the DEIS programme.

- DEIS grant paid based on level of disadvantage and enrolment.
- Access to Home School Community Liaison Services (HSCL).
- Access to School Meals Programme.
- Access to range of supports under School Completion Programme (SCP).
- Access to planning supports.
- Access to a range of professional development supports for teachers.

Examples of DEIS Supports

Below is additional detail on some of the supports that schools in the DEIS programme receive:

DEIS Grant

The DEIS Grant is allocated to schools based on their overall enrolment and their percentage of disadvantage. The grant should be utilised to attain the targets set in the school's DEIS Action Plan across the DEIS themes. In this regard, financial resources should be targeted at the individual children and young people who are considered most at risk, and at addressing educational disadvantage through a focused response.³²³

Schools in the DEIS programme are required to set out a three-year DEIS Action Plan for Improvement. As part of this process, schools are asked to set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time specific targets and to evaluate these annually by monitoring the impact of actions undertaken in the key DEIS themes. The Department of Education provides approximately €20 million annually to primary and post-primary DEIS schools through the DEIS grant.

For DEIS schools included in the HSCL scheme it is a requirement that at least 10% of the annual DEIS grant to each school should be allocated for use on HSCL activities

³²² [The Achievements and Characteristics of Pupils Attending Rural Schools Participating in DEIS \(erc.ie\)](#)

³²³ [assets.gov.ie DEIS Action Planning and Grant Allocation for all DEIS Schools](#)

and made available to the HSCL coordinator³²⁴. Schools who have a HSCL coordinator are reminded of the importance of adhering to the terms of Circular 0016/2019 HSCL Scheme. When expending the DEIS grant schools need to consider if the item/service is relevant to their DEIS action plan and whether there are any existing schemes or support programmes available before considering expenditure of funds under the DEIS grant.

Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme

The HSCL scheme aims to improve educational outcomes for the children and young people most at risk of poor attendance, participation and retention. This is achieved by working with the parents or guardians of students who are experiencing, or are likely to experience, educational disadvantage. The HSCL Scheme is funded through the Department of Education. Operational responsibility for the HSCL scheme is under the remit of Tusla Education Support Service (TESS). In the 2022/2023 school year the cost of the HSCL scheme was approximately €35 million.

The primary role of the HSCL coordinator is to work with the salient adult(s) in the child's life, in order to improve educational outcomes for the child. The focus of the role is to improve the attendance, participation and retention of children in the Irish educational system, by providing both universal and targeted supports. Ensuring positive attendance and full participation and engagement with school is important for all children from the earliest stages. Patterns of positive attendance, participation and engagement are formed from a very early age.

A HSCL coordinator is a teacher from a participatory school/s who is released from teaching duties, for a maximum of five years, in order to work intensively with and support parents and guardians. They engage in full-time liaison work between the home, the school, and the community. The scheme operates in a spirit of partnership and collaboration with parents and guardians, and teachers, while at the same time, being part of an ongoing and wider integrated services approach to children's educational welfare.

In summary, the HSCL Scheme:

- Targets children and young people at risk of not fully attending, participating or being retained within the formal educational system because of many home, school, community and other issues, which adversely affect the attainment of children and young people and their school retention.
- Focuses directly on the significant adults in children and young people's lives and seeks direct benefits for the children themselves.
- Works in an enabling way with parents and guardians to develop their capacity as a key resource in their children's learning.
- Develops the pupil-parent-teacher relationship, so that school becomes a place where all children and young people can reach their potential.

³²⁴ gov - Home School Community Liaison Scheme: Assignment of Home School Community Liaison Coordinators within DEIS schools (www.gov.ie)

- Identifies and provides for the personal, leisure and learning needs of parents and guardians, so as to promote their self-worth and self-confidence, which will have a positive impact on their children's education.
- Becomes familiar with attendance patterns, in order to maximise student attendance, participation and retention.
- Works in a supportive and purposeful way with parents and guardians, and facilitates communication with class teacher, tutor, year-head, and school management, when required.
- Promotes positive teacher and staff attitudes towards partnership-working and adopting a whole school approach to attendance participation and retention.

The HSCL scheme is managed administers by the TESS Integrated Service Management (ISM) team. The ISM team devise, develop and deliver a comprehensive programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for all HSCL coordinators, which aims to:

- impart the core vision and principles of the HSCL scheme.
- equip new coordinators with the skills and confidence to work in a collaborative way with parents and guardians, schools, and communities.
- ensure an integrated approach to working in accordance with the single strategic approach to attendance, participation and retention.
- develop coordinators at a personal and professional level to be agents of change in school/s and in the community.
- utilise appropriate planning and reporting tools that are consistent across all TESS strands.
- utilise evidence-based models and interventions to achieve outcomes.
- support coordinators in targeting, in a consistent way, those most at risk of educational disadvantage.

The current CPD suite available to coordinators spans the lifecycle of their assignment. Before beginning the role all newly appointed coordinators are provided with an orientation programme that is delivered remotely. Lasting half a day, the purpose of this programme is to acquaint coordinators with the vision, mission, principles, and objectives of the scheme; to introduce them to a peer support network and professional learning community (PLC); to instil confidence and allay any doubt, fear or anxiety relating to their new role; and to familiarise new coordinators with relevant members of the TESS ISM team. During the first year in the role coordinators receive two induction modules, each of two days' duration. Content covered builds on the material delivered at orientation.

Also in year one, training in Motivational Interviewing (MI) is delivered lasting two days. The final instalment of training for newly appointed coordinators is a day-long training module in the SCP's Intake Framework. This is an integrated training piece delivered to staff of all three stands of TESS, facilitating the joined-up thinking and working required to best serve the most marginalised children and families in Ireland.

As the coordinator moves through the HSCL lifecycle they receive sustained support from the ISM team. These supports include site visits from the ISM team to schools and to family and local cluster meetings. Supplementary CPD is also delivered to

coordinators throughout their tenure. In years two, three and four a total of two further days training is delivered encompassing contemporary needs arising, and a reorientation and refresher training provided mid-assignment.

While initially all DEIS primary schools, both urban and rural, were included in the HSCL Scheme, after the 2008 financial crisis DEIS Rural schools were excluded from the allocation. The rural posts were withdrawn from schools with effect from August 2011 under the *National Recovery Plan 2011-2014*. The rationale for the decision was on the basis that there was no evidence that additional teaching staff in smaller DEIS Rural schools provided an additional impact. DEIS Rural schools performed on a par with Urban non DEIS schools in testing under the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER).

In the 2022-2023 school year the number of HSCL coordinators increased from 418 in 521 DEIS schools to 530 HSCL coordinators in 688 DEIS schools. The coordinators are allocated based on the number of disadvantaged children or young people in a school. The number of HSCL coordinators per schools is generally capped at one per school. Where a school's numbers of disadvantaged students are smaller, a shared arrangement is put in place. The HSCL allocation to schools in the programme since 2006 has not been changed since their initial allocation. This will be considered by the department in a review of the individual resources allocated to schools in the DEIS programme.

In addition to this, 10 HSCL coordinator posts, funded through the Dormant Accounts Fund, are currently supporting 14 post-primary schools outside of the DEIS programme that have high numbers of Traveller and Roma children and young people. This brought the total number of HSCL coordinators to 540 and schools to 702 for the 2022-2023 academic year.

In 2019, under the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, the department established a pilot programme, the Supporting Traveller and Roma (STAR) pilot project. This project was designed to target attendance, participation and retention, and school completion in specific Traveller and Roma communities. The four STAR pilot projects were rolled out incrementally across Ireland in Cork, Galway (Tuam), Wexford and North Dublin with 55 schools involved in the pilot. The pilot is co-funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) at a cost of approximately €1.1million per year. The project involves the provision by the Department of Education of additional HSCL coordinators and the support of Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) in each pilot area. It also includes the provision by DCEDIY of two community education workers at each pilot site. Other key stakeholders in the project include TESS, and Traveller and Roma representative organisations.

School Completion Programme

The School Completion Programme (SCP) is a central element of the *DEIS Plan 2017*. It was first introduced in 2002 by the Department of Education, and the programme was significantly expanded with the extension of the DEIS programme. The SCP is a targeted programme of support for primary and post-primary children and young people who have been identified as potentially at risk of early school leaving, or who are out of school and have not successfully transferred to an alternative learning site or

employment. Funding for SCP is provided by the Department of Education via TESS, and TESS have responsibility for oversight of the programme. TESS has responsibility for the allocation of annualised funding to the SCP and for the provision of an extensive suite of continuing professional development to support the SCP staff with practice and operations at frontline level.

SCP projects provide a broad range of evidence-based and evidence-informed programmes, practices and supports to children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage, together with individualised responses to educational welfare needs. SCP provides support to children and young people in primary school, post-primary school and to those not in full time education/not in school. SCP provide three distinct types of interventions:

- Targeted interventions to children and young people with significant educational welfare needs.
- Brief interventions to those requiring an immediate short-term support.
- Evidence based and evidence informed interventions at a universal level to whole class or large groups.

There are 121 SCP projects nationally operating in every county in Ireland with approximately 1,100 staff members. The overall funding increased from €24.7m in 2016, to €34m in 2024. Overall, SCP projects provide support to circa 800 primary and post-primary schools and serve over 42,000 children and young people.

The desired impact of SCP is retention of a young person to completion of the Leaving Certificate, equivalent qualification or suitable level of educational attainment which enables them to transition into further education, training or employment. SCP since its introduction in 2002 also works with children “out of school” in alternative forms of education such as the blended learning centres. Part of the mandate for SCP is to re-engage and retain vulnerable children and young people in education settings, such as iScoil, and to encourage participation and engagement in education, with an open pathway back to a mainstream setting.

Referrals can be made in relation to any child or young person enrolled in a school which is included in a SCP project. The majority of schools included in the programme are DEIS schools. Referrals can be made by participating primary and post-primary schools, parents and guardians, self-referrals or other agencies working with children and young people in the project cluster.

SCP delivers a range of local interventions in disadvantaged communities which support the retention of young people in education. The programme enables local communities to develop tailored strategies to maximise participation levels of those at risk of early school leaving in the education process. It entails targeting individual young people of school-going age, both in and out of school, and arranging supports to address inequalities in education access, participation and outcomes.

Another aspect of the department’s work in the NEIC is the establishment of an in-school Department of Education and Health Service Executive Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) in the 10 primary schools in the NEIC. The NEIC MDT provides a direct service to children, school staff and families, in the 10 NEIC schools. The NEIC MDT has three

clusters, with one NEPS psychologist, one speech and language therapist and one occupational therapist on each team and the schools are divided into three corresponding cluster groups. The Health Service Executive (HSE) psychologist works across the three clusters/ten schools.

Figure 44 – Supports provided through the School Completion Programme

In School	After School
Transition programmes Targeted attendance tracking Mentoring Pro Social Skills Decision Making Skills Behaviour Management Restorative Practice Social and Emotional Resilience Communication skills Self-Care (for example, hygiene, sleep hygiene and other similar activities) Organisation Skills Motivational Interviewing Breakfast Clubs Lunch time clubs One to One individualised supports Small group targeted work Universal evidence based/informed preventative programmes	Homework groups Study groups After school clubs (that is, art, sports etc.)
Out of School	Holiday Provision
Individualised supports Motivational Interviewing Restorative Practice Advocacy Social and emotional resilience Suspension intervention Family support Collaborative approaches with community and/or statutory agencies.	Summer programmes Mid Term programmes Easter programmes

5.4. Evaluation of the DEIS Programme

Analysis of the DEIS programme has shown that since the programme began in 2006, it has helped to close the gap in achievement between schools serving the highest levels of educational disadvantage and those serving populations with little or no disadvantage. It has provided children who come to education at a disadvantage with an equitable opportunity to achieve their potential in education. Assessments of literacy and numeracy, such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)³⁴³ and Ireland's National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER)³⁴⁴ find that Ireland has an educational system that is both high performing and comparatively equitable.

Schools participating in the DEIS programme have seen school completion rates improve since the introduction of DEIS. The gap in completion rates between DEIS and non-DEIS schools has narrowed from a gap of 16.8% for the 2001 entry cohort to approx. 8.4% for the 2016 cohort who completed post-primary in 2022.

The *Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools – Entry Cohort 2016*³⁴⁶ report was published in October 2023. In 2016, there were 64,879 enrolments in the first year of the Junior Cycle programme in second-level schools. Of these, 97.6% sat the Junior Certificate examination in 2019 or received a Junior Cycle Certificate of Completion in 2020. Further, 91.7% sat the Leaving Certificate examination or received an accredited grade in 2021 or sat the Leaving Certificate examination in 2022.

The retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of 91.7% represented a decrease of 0.4 percentage points on the 2015 cohort when it stood at 92.1%. Retention rates decreased generally overall compared to the period of calculated grades. The gender gap between males and females has decreased to 3.2 percentage points, down marginally from 3.3 percentage points for the 2015 cohort. Voluntary secondary schools continued to have the highest retention rate, with 93.2% of students sitting the Leaving Certificate. Community and comprehensive schools had a rate of 90.4%, down from the previous year's 91.4%, while education and training board (ETB) schools stood at 89.5%, up from 89.3%.

The retention rate for schools participating in the DEIS programme decreased to 85.0%, a 1.1 percentage points decrease from the previous year when it stood at 86.1%. The gap in retention between DEIS and non-DEIS schools was 8.4 percentage points, an increase on the 2015 cohort when it stood at 7.6 percentage points. In summary, the 2016 cohort has seen a slight decrease overall in retention rates from the previous year, driven by decreased participation by males in both DEIS schools, and community and comprehensive schools.

Data from Census 2022³⁴⁷ shows that the age at which people ceased their full-time education increased over recent censuses. In April 2022, there were 150,000 people who had ceased their full-time education before they were 15 years old, down 18% since 2016. The number of people who finished full-time education when they were 25 years or older was up 48% to nearly 375,000.

The national census also found that the proportion of the population who had finished their full-time education and whose highest level completed was lower secondary or below fell from 32% in 2011 to 23% in 2022. In contrast, the proportion of the population

who finished their full-time education after completing an ordinary degree or higher was up from 25% in 2011 to 34% in 2022. Between 2016 and 2022, there were large increases in the numbers of people with third level qualifications. An honours degree or equivalent was the highest level completed by over 450,000 people who had finished their full-time education, up 36% since 2016.

The *Country Note for Ireland*⁶⁴⁸ under the PISA 2018 shows an educational system in Ireland that is both high performing and comparatively equitable. Students in Ireland scored higher than the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science. Compared to the OECD average, a similar share of students in Ireland performed at the highest levels of proficiency (Level 5 or 6) in at least one subject, while a larger proportion of students achieved a minimum level of proficiency (Level 2 or higher) in at least one subject.

The *OECD Education Policy Outlook Report 2020 - Ireland*⁶⁴⁹ shows that Ireland had one of the lowest shares of low performers among students from disadvantaged backgrounds (21% compared to 35% in the EU) and among students with a migrant background (14% compared to 35% in the EU). The report also notes that only 3.3% of Ireland's population aged 18 to 24 were early leavers from education and training which is amongst the lowest in Europe and compares very favourably with the EU2030 headline target of 9%.

In April 2022 the Department of Education's Inspectorate published a report, *Looking at DEIS Action Planning for Improvement in Primary and Post-Primary Schools*³⁵⁰. Amongst the conclusions of this report the Inspectorate noted that school leaders had established structures within their schools to promote planning for improvement as a shared responsibility among the leadership team and within the staff. Leadership responsibilities were distributed and there was a sense of shared ownership of the DEIS action plan. The report indicated that generally, schools were implementing a significant number of interventions to bolster the literacy, numeracy, and the wellbeing of their students.

The report also found that schools were endeavouring to create inclusive classrooms. Differentiated supports were being provided within the mainstream setting in all primary schools and in some post-primary schools and classrooms, teachers and special education teachers (SET) were working collaboratively to meet the needs of children and young people. However, the report recommended that further supports should be provided to post-primary schools in their work to build inclusive school and classroom environments. Specifically, supports should be provided by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) on how to implement team teaching within mainstream classrooms and the best methods to support differentiation of children and young people in different subject areas.

Figure 45 – Transition Rates from Post-Primary to Higher Education DEIS v non-DEIS

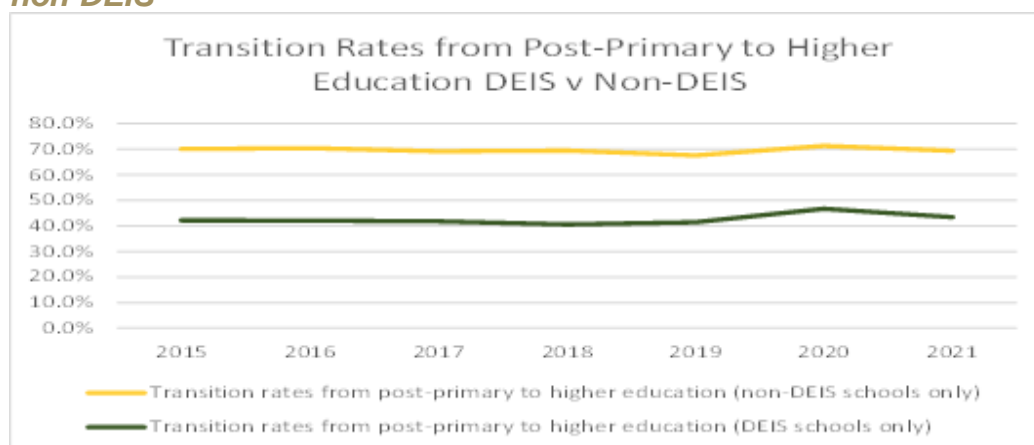
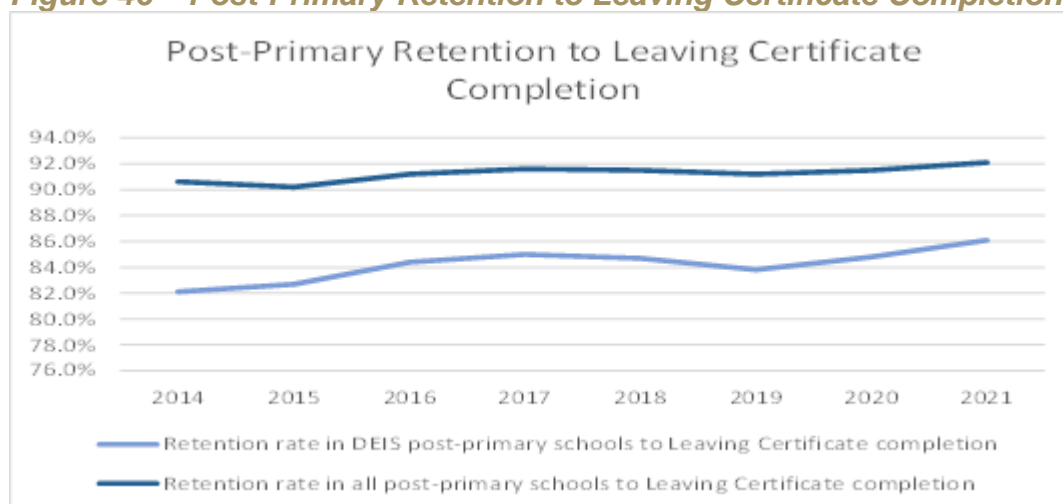


Figure 46 – Post-Primary Retention to Leaving Certificate Completion



Source: Education Indicators for Ireland 2022³⁵¹

Evaluations by the Educational Research Centre

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) is an agency of the Department of Education. It is an internationally recognised centre of excellence in research, assessment and evaluation in education. It was established in 1966 in St Patrick’s College Drumcondra. In September 2015, it was designated as a Statutory Body in accordance with the *Education Act 1998*.

The ERC carries out research at all levels of the education system. Research is undertaken on behalf of the Department of Education, at the request of other agencies and on the initiative of the ERC itself and its staff. The ERC also publishes the *Irish Journal of Education*³⁵².

The ERC carries out annual research and evaluation for the department on the DEIS programme. This includes a range of standardised testing on the educational outcomes for children and young people in Ireland such as the NAMER, PISA and PIRLS testing. The department works with the ERC to develop DEIS specific reports from the findings of this testing which allows it to measure progress. This can involve an oversampling of

DEIS schools to provide a more accurate result. The ERC also carry out subject specific evaluations in relation to DEIS such as assessing the impact of the HSCL scheme³⁵³ and the outcomes for children in Urban DEIS schools³⁵⁴. The ERC has published a range of reports in relation to the DEIS programme on its website³⁵⁵.

National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading (NAMER) is a study that evaluates the reading and mathematics achievement of primary school pupils in Ireland. It involves administering tests to pupils and collecting data through questionnaires from pupils, teachers, and school principals. The assessments track trends in performance over time and provide insights into factors related to pupil achievement, including the impact of school practices and the COVID-19 pandemic

The *National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading 2021*³²⁵ study included an oversampling of DEIS schools (58 DEIS Urban Band 1, 30 DEIS Urban Band 2 as opposed to 13 DEIS Urban Band 1 and 12 DEIS Urban Band 2 in 2014). This means that the study has allowed for more representative assessment of DEIS schools than previously and, while conscious of the context in which the tests were taken, creates an improved set of baseline data to inform future policy in this area.

NAMER testing is used to monitor achievement against targets outlined in *the DEIS Plan 2017*. It is important to note that the targets set in the *DEIS Plan 2017* did not account for the impact of the pandemic.

Internationally there is considerable evidence of learning loss in reading and mathematics amongst primary school pupils during the period of the pandemic. Despite this, findings outlined in the NAMER 2021 report show no evidence of a decline in average reading or mathematics scores between 2014 and 2021 in DEIS Urban Band 1 or DEIS Urban Band 2 schools.

Despite the impact of the Covid19 pandemic, the target to increase the percentage of high achievers in second class reading in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools to 25% was met. This was a 7% increase on the 2014 NAMER results.

For each of the three school groups examined (Urban Non-DEIS, DEIS Urban Band 1 and DEIS Urban Band 2 schools), there were no significant differences between 2014 and 2021 in the mean scores for overall reading, vocabulary or comprehension and the overall mean for mathematics achievement.

Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)

PIRLS is an international assessment conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) that evaluates the reading comprehension skills of fourth grade (or equivalent) pupils. The study measures pupil's ability to read and comprehend both literary and informational texts and assesses their proficiency in retrieving, inferring, interpreting, and evaluating text.

³²⁵ www.gov.ie NAMER 2021 The National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading 2021

The PIRLS 2021³²⁶ results provide critical insights into the evaluation of the DEIS scheme, particularly regarding the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on student achievement. The new individual measure of pupils' SES applied during this cycle reveals a significant and concerning trend: pupils from higher SES backgrounds substantially outperform their middle and lower SES peers. Specifically, the highest SES group achieved a mean score on the Literary subscale that was 85 points higher than that of the lowest SES quartile. This stark difference highlights the persistent educational inequalities that DEIS aims to address.

The PIRLS data also underscores the effectiveness of DEIS interventions. Ireland's overall performance in PIRLS 2021, where it maintained a high international ranking, suggests that the support provided under DEIS is contributing positively to student outcomes. The tailored strategies and resources deployed in DEIS schools are crucial in closing the achievement gap, supporting children and young people in overcoming barriers associated with socioeconomic disadvantage. Thus, while the PIRLS results highlight ongoing disparities, they also affirm the value and impact of the DEIS scheme in striving for educational equity.

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

PISA is an initiative of the OECD. It assesses the skills and knowledge of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics, and science, focusing on their ability to apply what they have learned to real-life challenges. PISA aims to measure how well students are prepared to meet the demands of contemporary society.

The PISA 2022³²⁷ results provide critical insights into the persistent educational disparities related to socioeconomic status, highlighting the areas where the DEIS scheme can have a significant impact. Although DEIS schools continue to show lower average performance outcomes, the data suggest that DEIS interventions have helped to narrow some achievement gaps compared to the broader OECD context.

The PISA 2022 results underscore the ongoing challenges of achieving educational equity in Ireland. The data reveal significant achievement gaps based on SES status, emphasising the need for continued and enhanced interventions under the DEIS scheme.

Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for DEIS

The *DEIS Plan 2017* sets an action to establish a DEIS Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. The Department of Education aims to provide partners and stakeholders with ongoing information in relation to the implementation of the DEIS programme. In particular, it is seeking to identify early indications of progress, or lack thereof, map the various inputs and supports provided for DEIS schools and examine progress towards the achievement of outcomes.

The Department of Education gathers a range of data on various aspects of the DEIS programme including supports and resources provided to DEIS schools, retention rates

³²⁶ [PIRLS-2021_Reading-Results-for-Ireland.pdf \(erc.ie\)](#)

³²⁷ [gov - Performance of students in Ireland in PISA 2022 \(www.gov.ie\)](#)

of students in schools. Individual schools generate a range of data to monitor the progress of their specific school based DEIS action plans.

There are several challenges presented in the management and use of the wide range of data generated at school level and at system level. These include generating the data that link the outcomes to the various inputs and linking school-based data with national, system-wide data. A Monitoring and Evaluation Group was established to reflect the renewed emphasis on monitoring and evaluation in the *DEIS Plan 2017*.

The department will focus on monitoring aspects of the DEIS programme at system level over time. Monitoring at school level will be undertaken by DEIS schools as part of effective action planning for improvement and by the DEIS evaluations conducted by the Inspectorate. Information at a system level will be provided by the Educational Research Centre. Performance indicators will be outlined that will identify the key areas of the *DEIS Plan 2017* that will be monitored.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Group will consider the role of all department funded support services in supporting schools to make effective use of school level data in DEIS Action Planning for Improvement.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Group will liaise with all relevant areas in order to provide a range of focused supports for DEIS schools in:

- Action planning for improvement at school level.
- Setting targets for improvement that are data-informed and based on robust evidence.
- Developing a culture of action planning based on school-based data
- Monitoring and evaluating the success or otherwise of interventions at school level which are part of the DEIS programme.
- Setting school-based targets that reflect the national priorities and targets for DEIS schools.
- The importance of choosing evidence-based programmes to improve student outcomes at school level, particularly for the most at-risk students.
- Measuring student achievement and other relevant outcomes.

The rationale for developing this framework is to provide a strategic, coherent, evidence-based means of describing, monitoring and evaluating what works in the DEIS programme at system and school levels. This in turn will allow the department and other users of the framework to achieve a range of objectives including:

- Identifying elements of the DEIS programme that appear to be particularly successful/unsuccessful.
- Identifying gaps in information to be prioritised for further research.
- Promoting a common, shared approach to, and understanding of, monitoring and evaluation of the DEIS programme at school and system levels.
- Maximising the use of available data and information for monitoring and evaluation purposes. The objective of this is to assess the effectiveness of the programme and determine if value for money is achieved by the DEIS programme.

List of Acronyms

AACs - Additional Assessment Components
ABC - Area Based Childhood
AERS - Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service
AFL - Assessment for Learning
AIM - Access and Inclusion Model
AOL - Assessment of Learning
AON – Assessment of Need
ASD - Autism Spectrum Disorders
CBA - Classroom-Based Assessments
CBT - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CES - Comprehensive Employment Strategy for persons with disabilities
CPD - Continuing Professional Development
CSO - Central Statistics Office
DAF - Dormant Accounts Fund
DCEDIY - Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DEIS - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES – Department of Education and Skills
DHLGH – Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
EAL - English as an Additional Language
ECCE - Early Childhood Care and Education
ELC - Early Learning and Care
EPSEN - Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act
ERC - Educational Research Centre
EROC - Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres
ESD - Education for Sustainable Development
ESRI - Economic and Social Research Institute
ETBI - Education and Training Boards Ireland
EYEI - Early Years Education Inspections
HEAR - Higher Education Access Route
HSE - Health Service Executive
IEP - Individual Education Plan
ISCED - International Standard Classification of Education
ISL – Irish Sign Language
ISM – Integrated Service Manager
ITE - Initial Teacher Education

IPAS - International Protection Accommodation Services
IYTCM - Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme
LCA - Leaving Certificate Applied
LCE - Leaving Certificate Established
LCVP - Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NAMER - National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading
NIMC – National Implementation Monitoring Committee
NCCA - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE - National Council for Special Education
NEIC – (Dublin’s) North East Inner City
NEPS – National Educational Psychological Service
NESC - National Economic and Social Council
NPPF - National Public Procurement Policy Framework
NTRIS - National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy
OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OT - Occupational Therapist
PDST - Professional Development Service for Teachers
PHCP - Paediatric Home Care Package
PIRLS - Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA - Programme for International Student Assessment
PLU - Priority Learning Unit
POD – Primary online Database
PPOD – Post-Primary Online Database
SAC – School Age Childcare
SEN - Special Educational Needs
SENO – Special Education Needs Organiser
SET - Special Education Teacher
SDG – Sustainable Development Goals
SIM - School Inclusion Model
SLT - Speech and Language Therapist
SNA - Special Needs Assistants
SST - Student Support Team
STAR - Supporting Traveller and Roma
TESS - Tusla Education Support Service
TIMMS - Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TRES – Traveller and Roma Education Strategy

TY – Transition Year