

ISSUE

WHAT'S IN THE DRAFT PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT?

REDUCE CLASS SIZES	<p>Aim to reduce the general pupil teacher ratio at primary level to 19:1 over the term of government and introduce targeted measures in schools with very large classes</p>
SUPPORT TEACHING WORKFORCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Introduce paid surrogacy leave ✎ Examine the extension of parents leave and benefit and additional flexibilities. ✎ Drive the early establishment of the Assisted Human Reproduction Regulatory Authority, commit to commencing the <i>Health (Assisted Human Reproduction) Act 2024</i> and promptly enact supplementary legislation. ✎ Develop a code of practice to support the hiring of workers with a disability
AUGMENT SPECIAL EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Continue to increase the number of special schools and special classes across the country to ensure that children can go to school within their local community. ✎ Hire additional special education teachers and special needs assistants to provide greater support to students and schools ✎ Expand early intervention classes where appropriate and ensure that children have access to supports at the earliest possible stage. ✎ Double college places for therapy-related courses. ✎ Make special education modules and placements in special schools or classes a universal part of initial teacher training, which will be subject to assessment. ✎ Expand access for teachers to undertake professional development in special education provisions, particularly when opening new special classes, and in using therapies. ✎ Streamline the delivery of modular accommodation for special classes and special schools so that it is in place in advance of the school year. ✎ Promote the potential for special schools and clusters of mainstream schools to work together innovatively to offer high-quality inclusive and integrated education and support the co-location of special schools with mainstream schools. ✎ Ensure children and their families who need early intervention and therapy input can access that support in a timely way by increasing staffing, training more therapists, and prioritising children's disability teams to deliver supports and services. ✎ Create a dedicated National Therapy Service in Education, beginning with special schools. ✎ Establish targeted supports for children with autism experiencing mental health challenges. ✎ Establish an annual Children's Therapies Grant Fund to provide evidence-based therapies. ✎ Increase staffing, train more therapists and prioritise children's disability teams to deliver supports and services. ✎ Increase the number of Regional Assessment Hubs. ✎ Support families who are waiting too long for an Assessment of Needs to procure assessments privately. ✎ Complete the review of the <i>EPSEN Act</i> and make sure that it meets the needs of children with special educational needs. ✎ Support students with a disability in transitioning through all educational settings and levels. ✎ Introduce a new common application system for children applying to special schools and classes to make it a more straightforward experience for parents. Continue to expand the free-of-charge Summer Programme for students with special educational needs, particularly the in-school provision of the programme. ✎ Review the mental health and wellbeing pilots that are ongoing in primary and post-primary schools and expand them. ✎ Consider measures to attract and retain staff in CAMHS; develop a new workforce plan to address immediate staffing shortages and longer-term needs.
EXPAND SCHOOL FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Increase capitation funding to schools of all types to ensure that schools can meet the elevated day-to-day running costs and reduce the financial burden on families. ✎ Increase the Minor Works Scheme payment and ensure it is paid on an annual basis. ✎ Ensure that the Summer Works Scheme operates every year to ensure good maintenance of school buildings. ✎ Invest in ICT and the development of appropriate digital skills in our schools, embedding coding and ensuring digital safety. ✎ Develop a programme to improve the energy efficiency of public buildings. ✎ Install solar panels, renewable energy sources, or connect to district heating where feasible in suitable public buildings, including to schools and third level institutions across Ireland. ✎ Work to provide all schools with high-speed internet broadband, so as to prepare students for a digital future with seamless access to technology resources and adaptive learning methods.
PROMOTE THE IRISH LANGUAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✎ Continue assistance through the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. ✎ Increase the dedicated Irish-medium teacher training programmes. ✎ Support naionraí and creches to ensure early education access in Gaeltacht communities and beyond. ✎ Establish Gaelscoileanna and Gaelchloistí where there is demand and support parents choosing Irish-medium education for their children. ✎ Consider ways to enhance supports to Gaelscoileanna and Gaelchloistí, particularly in Gaeltacht areas, which have a high proportion of students whose first language is neither Irish nor English. ✎ Work towards aligning Irish language curriculums with the CEFR to enhance spoken Irish at primary, post-primary and third levels ✎ Continue to fund and enhance Gaeltacht scholarships, ensuring cost is not a barrier for students wishing to attend summer courses.

TARGET DEIS SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Establish a new DEIS Plus Scheme to support schools with the highest level of educational disadvantage to improve educational outcomes, particularly in literacy and numeracy. ✘ Expand the Home School Liaison Coordinator Scheme with new posts for schools demonstrating high need ✘ Provide more community link workers to schools to support Traveller and Roma students and their progression in education. ✘ Review and enhance educational supports for Traveller and Roma students. ✘ Implement a range of recommendations from the recent Report on the Review of Out-of-School Education Provision to support school completion. ✘ Pilot wellness initiatives in high-need areas to develop new models of best practice. ✘ Retain the Child Poverty and Well-being Programme Office in the Department of An Taoiseach to break down silos between departments and drive delivery of measures aimed at reducing child poverty. ✘ Examine the Back-to-School Clothing and Footwear Allowance eligibility criteria to allow flexibility for foster carers. ✘ Continue to support the Dublin Northeast Inner-City Programme to strengthen community safety, boost educational and employment opportunities, improve wellbeing, and enhance the area's physical landscape.
PROTECT SMALL SCHOOLS	<p>Introduce a new national Small Schools Project for all 1,300 small primary schools to protect these school communities and develop new administrative supports.</p>
DIVERSIFY EDUCATION SYSTEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Increase funding supports for student teachers, working to increase diversity within the profession and with a view to increasing supply ✘ Seek to increase choice for parents by ensuring that families can access both non-denominational and faith-based education ✘ Expand opportunities for students to attend Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí. ✘ Work to promote a diverse and equal workforce for all sections of society, including from minority or disadvantaged communities. ✘ Invest in integration programmes that support language learning, as well as broader social, cultural and sporting exchange, and access to essential public services such as education and healthcare, facilitating smoother transitions for migrants. ✘ Continue to invest in English language classes for people seeking international protection. ✘ Continue to support initiatives that foster inclusion of our neurodiverse community. ✘ Task the LEEF, with developing recommendations to enhance the diversity of our workforce, especially in the civil and public service sectors. ✘ Continue to implement training programmes within our education system to address racism and unconscious bias, fostering a more inclusive environment for all students and reducing susceptibility to extremist views.
SOLVE TEACHER SUPPLY	<p>Develop a workforce plan for the education sector to ensure that we continue to attract, retain and return people into the sector and that the appropriate conditions and supports exist to ensure that they meet the needs of children and young people, society and the economy over the coming decades.</p>
STRENGTHEN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Trial new administrative supports and arrangements for principals and boards of management to reduce the non-educational aspect of their workloads. ✘ Conduct a review of leadership and continuous professional development supports to ensure that school management structures are adequately equipped to manage changes to the education system
BOLSTER NORTH-SOUTH COOPERATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Strengthen all-island collaborations and continue to support the North-South Research Programme through the <i>Shared Island Fund</i>. ✘ Commission a North-South statistical series and publication to provide comparable data on economic activity, public expenditure and wider social and economic measures, including education, housing and health outcomes. ✘ Reaffirm its commitment to the <i>Shared Island Fund</i> and commit to increasing the resources available to the fund by a further €1 billion up to 2035 to foster reconciliation, mutual respect and growth. ✘ Increase staffing levels in the Shared Island Unit within the Department of the Taoiseach and introduce specific targets for each government department to come forward with new and relevant projects.
MISCELLANEOUS	<p>Hot School Meals <i>The Hot School Meals Programme</i> ensures no child goes hungry. There is no stigma attached to the Programme with all children in a school treated equally and sitting down to have their meal together. This Government will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Complete the roll-out of hot school meals to all primary schools in 2025. ✘ Ensure that suppliers adhere to robust guidelines on the nutritional value of meals, the dietary requirements of students, reduce food waste and utilise recyclable packaging. ✘ Commence the rollout of hot school meals to all secondary schools over the lifetime of the next government. ✘ Implement the Summer 2025 Holiday Meals pilot project and evaluate this initiative aimed at closing the nutritional gap during school closures. <p>Early Childhood Education Work with schools to host before and after-school care, and examine start-up supports for groups involved in after-school activities.</p> <p>STEM and Girls Advance education, training and maintenance of new digital skills and capacities, and particularly STEM subjects, with a special focus on girls (universal access to coding, maths and ICT classes), through training and life-long learning, and to prioritise diversity and inclusion in STEM.</p> <p>Creative Schools Increase financial support for the Creative Schools and Music Generation projects.</p> <p>Sport and Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Prioritise the development of physical education halls and sporting facilities (including yards and play areas) for schools in conjunction with the <i>Sports Capital Fund</i> to deliver for both schools and communities. ✘ Expand the <i>Active School Flag Initiative</i> and equip schools with resources to better promote physical activity and health. ✘ Mandate the Local Sports Partnerships to collaborate with schools to promote inter-school competitions, sports festivals, and collaboration with parents, local sports clubs, and national sporting organisations to create a dynamic, inclusive approach to physical activity. <p>International Develop and promote projects which build links and understanding with other EU capitals and regions in the fields of culture, education, research and innovation.</p>