

# Building a brighter future for every child

An INTO pre-budget submission





## Reduce class sizes by two pupils



Cost =  
€41 million/year



## Restore 2,400 posts of responsibility



Cost =  
€12 million/year



## Increase school funding by 20%



Cost =  
€21 million/year



## School-based mental-health supports for children



Cost =  
€11 million/year

# 'Ambition is important, but action is imperative – time is running out'

## Budget 2024 must deliver for primary and special education

Time is running out. It's high time we take action to address the shortfalls in our education system. With 237,000 children living in poverty, 68,000 stuck on waiting lists for vital services and over 3,500 homeless, we can no longer turn a blind eye to this damning state of affairs. It's clear that our children deserve better. That's why our focus for Budget 2024 is on their wellbeing and education.

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) is leading the charge, campaigning for a range of budgetary measures to invest in primary education in Ireland. We're calling for class sizes to be reduced by two pupils; the full restoration of 2,400 school posts of responsibility; increased funding for schools and enhanced mental-health supports. These essential steps will guarantee that every child has access to a primary education system that caters to their individual needs.

The positive impact of these measures cannot be overstated. They will transform the lives of our pupils and bolster the entire primary and special education systems. As we strive to recover and rebuild from the pandemic, it's imperative to recognise the central role teachers play in supporting every

single student. However, to deliver a world-class education system, school staff must be backed by Government ambition and increased investment. Budget 2024 must guarantee significant resources for our pupils, teachers and primary schools.

We can no longer tolerate the inequalities and underfunding that plague our education system. It's time to learn from past mistakes and build upon successful practices seen around the world. That's why we are submitting a fully-costed pre-budget proposal. We're calling for a modest, yet proportionate increase in funding for primary and special education.

Now is the moment to act boldly and decisively. Our children's future depends on it. Let us rise to the occasion and prioritise their needs in Budget 2024. Together, we can ensure that ambition turns into tangible action, delivering a brighter future for every child in our care.



**John Boyle**  
INTO General Secretary



**Dorothy McGinley**  
INTO President



# 1

## Reduce class sizes by two pupils



This proposal would cost €13.5 million in Budget 2024 and €41m in a full year.

The INTO is campaigning for a two-point reduction in the average class size in primary schools in Budget 2024.

Notwithstanding the one-point reduction introduced by Government last September, Ireland's average class sizes rose slightly due to the dramatic annual increase in pupil numbers, including those fleeing war and natural disasters.

A reduction of two pupils per class will be required from Budget 2024 to ensure that Irish class sizes are brought into line with our EU counterparts.

Having class sizes of 20 would enable teachers to meet the broad spectrum of needs that children are presenting with. Teachers can use modern teaching methods more effectively and spend more time with each child with smaller class sizes. This is particularly important for children with additional needs and those from disadvantaged communities.

### Costing calculation

*A one-point improvement in the staffing schedule at primary level, including both DEIS and non-DEIS schools, would cost in the region of €6.8 million from September to December 2023 and €20.5m per annum thereafter. Source: Dáil Parliamentary Questions no. 94, 26 April 2023.*

# 2

## Restore 2,400 posts of responsibility in primary schools



This proposal would cost €4 million in Budget 2024 and €12m in a full year.

The INTO is seeking the full restoration of the outstanding 2,400 posts of responsibility in primary and special schools.

These positions are essential for ensuring the smooth running of schools and for providing additional support for pupils. Assistant principals work with principals and deputy principals, sharing responsibility for a range of duties including: learning and teaching; leading school development; pupil support; special education; planning for DEIS and inclusion; the introduction of the new curriculum and coordinating Department of Education strategies (including the *Digital Strategy; Education for Sustainable Development; STEM strategy; the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and the Cineáltas Action Plan on Bullying*).

At INTO Congress 2023, delegates condemned the Government's failure to adequately support school leaders and restore key posts of responsibility which have been unavailable to schools for the last 15 years. Addressing delegates at INTO Congress 2023, Minister for Education Norma Foley TD set out that she was prepared to explore the restoration of posts in a budgetary context. The INTO calls on the minister to deliver on that commitment.

### Costing calculation

*In March 2009, there were 1,605 Assistant Principal 1 (AP1) and 8,593 Assistant Principal 2 (AP2) positions, compared to the current levels of 1,228 Assistant Principal 1 and 6,655 Assistant Principal 2 positions (April 2023). Source: Dáil Parliamentary Question no. 95 and 96, 26 April 2023.*

*The cost of restoring the number of assistant principal posts to pre-recession levels would be €4 million from September to December 2024 and €12m in a full year.*



# 3

## Increase school funding by 20%



This proposal would cost €7 million in Budget 2024 and €21m in a full year.

The INTO is calling for a 20% increase in the school capitation grant to better fund schools and reduce the burden on parents who currently provide additional financial support. Primary schools receive a capitation grant of about €1 per pupil per school day to cover running costs, while second-level schools receive almost double that amount. OECD figures show that Ireland spends on average 12.5% less per student at primary level than other developed countries.

The primary capitation grant was cut from €200 (in 2008) to €176 between 2010 and 2013. The grant was partially restored to €183 in 2020. Increases in the cost of utilities led to schools receiving a 40% increase in funding for the 2022/23 school year, as a one-off payment. The welcome increase to school funding for the last school year must continue beyond 2023 if schools are to meet their costs.

Second-level schools receive capitation funding of €316 per head. This difference between the funding of primary and post-primary schools is not warranted. Whilst many post-primary schools might be larger and have higher operating costs than primary schools, this should not take away from the vital funding needed to keep primary schools functioning efficiently.

Many primary schools also operate computer rooms, general purpose rooms, sensory rooms, libraries and other specialist accommodation for pupils. Funding must reflect the real operating costs of primary schools.

Prior to the pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis, schools were already struggling to meet basic expenditure. Schools must not be expected to fundraise to meet basic expenses and parents must not be relied upon to keep schools afloat. The low level of primary school funding places intolerable burdens on school principals, teachers and parents and further disadvantages pupils in DEIS schools. The INTO believes that every child has the right to attend a school that is comfortable, bright, adequately heated and ventilated with appropriate furniture and technology. A 20% increase in the capitation grant will benefit every child.

### Costing calculation

Based on costings provided by the Department of Education, the estimated full year cost of providing for a 20% increase in the capitation grant for primary and special schools would total €21 million. The estimated cost from September to December 2024 would be €7m.

# 4

## School-based mental-health supports for children



This proposal would cost €3.7 million in Budget 2024 and €11m in a full year.

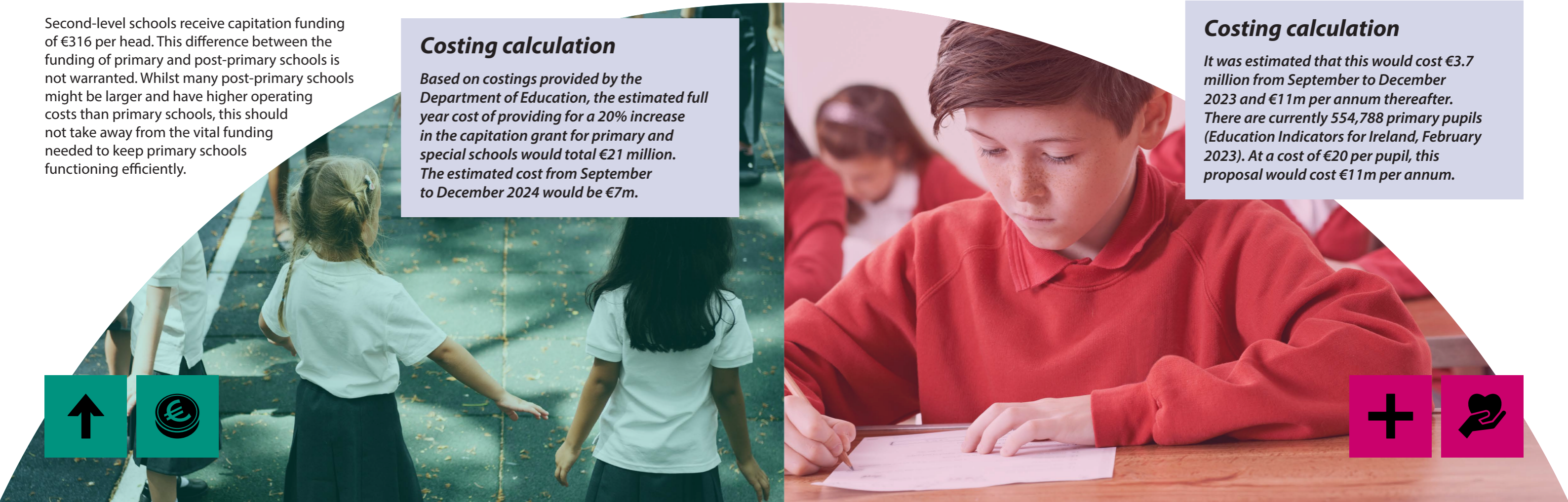
The INTO is calling for age-appropriate mental-health supports to be funded for all children with mental health and emotional issues. The recent *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)* report found that pupil wellbeing, as measured by feeling hungry or tired, or being bullied, had decreased since 2016. Referrals to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and other services rose by 40%.

The INTO believes that the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) should be augmented, that the in-school and *Early Years Therapy Support Demonstration Project* should be reinstated and expanded and funding for the *School Completion Programme* increased.

Building on the on-site counselling pilot scheme proposed in Budget 2023 and announced in June 2023, we must ensure the nationwide rollout of these essential school supports. Additional supports such as nurture rooms are also needed in DEIS schools. The Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science report on *Mental Health Supports in Schools and Tertiary Education*, published in January 2023, called for the establishment of a national mental-health programme for children and young people as a matter of urgency. In particular, the committee argued that this programme should consider the establishment of mental-health supports on-site in schools – a key call by this union. It is vital that a grant of €20 per pupil for school-based mental-health supports, such as on-site counselling services be provided from September 2024.

### Costing calculation

It was estimated that this would cost €3.7 million from September to December 2023 and €11m per annum thereafter. There are currently 554,788 primary pupils (Education Indicators for Ireland, February 2023). At a cost of €20 per pupil, this proposal would cost €11m per annum.



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