



Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

INTO Submission

to the Department of Education
National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development

29 June 2021

Summary

The INTO supports the inclusion of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in our primary schools. The INTO acknowledges primary teachers' contribution to ESD through the curriculum and through many initiatives engaged in by teachers. The INTO supports ESD directly through the Global Citizenship School project. The INTO notes the opportunities to strengthen ESD in primary schools and to promote active citizenship through the redevelopment of the primary curriculum, however, the INTO cautions against adding additional content to an already overloaded curriculum. To support ESD in schools, and pedagogical approaches associated with ESD, the INTO recommends smaller class sizes, CPD for teachers, the restoration of middle leadership posts, and provision of resources. In addition, the INTO calls for the retrofitting of all older school buildings, sustainable design in all new school buildings, outdoor learning environments and a reduction in the use of school transport that relies on fossil fuels.

Introduction

Our twenty-first century world faces major and unprecedented social and environmental problems at the global level. Although no country can escape the profound consequences of global change, inequalities exist between countries in the face of this change. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 is a universal plan of action for people, planet, prosperity, and peace. The agenda incorporates seventeen integrated Sustainable Development Goals balancing three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environment - to be achieved by the year 2030.

Education plays a key role in the transition to societal and environmental sustainability. The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals target 4.7 calls for countries to *“ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development”* while the EU Council conclusions on education for sustainable development (ESD) states *“in a continuously changing world, all European citizens should be equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to understand and deal with the challenges and complexities of modern-day life whilst taking due account of the environmental, social, cultural and economic implications as well as to assume their global responsibilities.”*

INTO – through Global Citizenship Schools - has been to the fore in promoting Global Citizenship Education in the Primary School Curriculum and in supporting teachers and schools to take a rights-based approach to education in primary schools, including local, national, and global justice, equality, and sustainability issues. The vision of Global Citizenship School is that all Irish primary school teachers and children will learn about global citizenship and that schools will take regular and consistent action appropriate for primary schools to help make the world a better place for all. INTO Global Citizenship School strives to have Global Citizenship embedded in Irish primary schools to support ESD in the curriculum. Global Citizenship School also act as a go-to support for anyone involved in primary school Global Citizenship Education.

Sustaining a secure, global future and combatting the urgent issue of climate change requires education systems to nurture students' sustainable behaviours and sense of responsibility. Education serves as an important tool for effecting change and as such has an essential role to play by instilling the competencies needed to find solutions, change consumption models, and transform society towards a more sustainable way of living. Acknowledging the importance of fostering knowledge and understanding of sustainability at an early age, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in its Draft Primary Curriculum Framework states,

“Challenges such as climate change, sustainability, human migration, and geopolitical shifts illustrates the importance of dispositions and skills such as resilience, creativity, innovation and critical thinking in the young and future generations” (NCCA, 2020, p.3).



The Primary School Curriculum

A fundamental principle of the geography curriculum (as part of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education/SESE) is that children should develop an understanding of the world through direct experience and activity. The curriculum aims to foster important aspects of the child’s social and attitudinal development and cultivate an understanding and appreciation of their local, regional, national identity as well as promoting a sense of their European and global citizenship. ‘*Environmental awareness and care*’ is one of the strands of the geography curriculum, endeavouring to awaken in the pupil an appreciation of the environments which he/she encounters and a sensitivity to the impact of change and human actions on the character of these environments (p. 8). An enhanced perception of environments and environmental change should lead to the development of a sense of personal and community responsibility for environments and should foster the notion of people as custodians of the Earth for future generations. The ‘*Environmental awareness and care*’ strand provides opportunities for the child to develop and apply knowledge and skills to contribute in a meaningful way to the discussion and resolution of environmental issues, ranging from matters of local concern to global environmental problems.

The primary school sector is in a time of great change. Society has transformed dramatically since the publication of the current primary curriculum in 1999 and a revised framework must reflect the needs of our modern world. Wellbeing and resilience in an ever-changing world, and the skills needed by students to deal with this, is another issue that has and will continue to influence schools in Ireland. The NCCA draft primary curriculum framework seeks to address these issues.

With this change in curriculum, opportunities can be found for an increased emphasis and inclusion of Education for Sustainable Development/Global Citizenship Education in primary schools. Although firmly rooted in the geography and science/SESE curriculum under the ‘*environmental awareness and care*’ strand, education for sustainable development permeates other areas often involving value judgements, interpretation of evidence and higher-order questioning. Thus, sustainable development teaching will be richest when pupils experience the core elements – concepts, evidence, and values – in an integrated, non-fragmented way.

The challenge for schools is how to reconcile the espoused benefits of interdisciplinary ESD in a curriculum that comprises separate subjects. The draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) proposes the grouping of subjects in broad ‘curricular areas’ to enable teaching and learning in more integrated and engaging ways. The categorising of complementary subjects under five areas supports connections across pupils’ learning while acknowledging their capacity for more abstract thinking and learning through age-appropriate treatment of concepts, skills and knowledge within subject-based inquiry and investigation which is an effective pedagogical approach in teaching education for sustainable development.

Competencies for achieving Sustainable Development Goals include systems thinking, critical thinking, integrated problem-solving, collaboration and self-awareness. These skills are encapsulated in the proposed draft Primary Curriculum Framework which identifies '*Being an active citizen*' as one of seven key competencies. This competency will seek to foster within children the knowledge, concepts, attitudes, values, and dispositions that motivate and empower them as citizens to take positive actions to live justly, sustainably and with regard for the rights of others. It is envisaged the children will be encouraged to question, critique, and understand what is happening in the world they live in within a framework of human rights, equality, and social justice. Democratic practices are at the nucleus of the learning process and this competency will aim to develop pupils' capacity and motivation for active and meaningful participation in society at local, national, and global levels, fostering their ability to "*contribute positively and compassionately towards the creation of a more sustainable and just world.*" (NCCA, 2020, p.8)

As part of the ongoing primary school curriculum review the NCCA is exploring how teaching and learning related to Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics can be integrated into a redeveloped curriculum. This work will scope out how ethical learning, questions of rights, justice, and equality, and learning about the diversities in our communities will be incorporated in the revised curriculum. Within the draft Primary Curriculum Framework one of the eight principles is '*Inclusive education and diversity*' which provides for "equity of opportunity and participation in children's learning", celebrating diversity and responding to the uniqueness of every child. In their consultation with schools as part of the review of religion/ERB the NCCA identified the desire for ERB and Ethics to contribute to learning that fostered skills and dispositions which enable children to engage positively with the world in which we live. Although specific content knowledge was acknowledged as important, a greater emphasis on development of skills and dispositions was evident. This can be seen as linked to social and emotional learning, incorporating the curricular area of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), with a focus on nurturing positive relationships. Pupils in our primary school classrooms experience diversity in their worlds and as children forge relationships with the people they encounter from different backgrounds and culture the type of learning proposed in ERB and Ethics is necessary.

Questions relating to religious diversity arise organically in all schools (both denominational and multi-denominational). Sacramental preparation is one instance when conversations about different practices and belief traditions are initiated. This provides an opportunity for teachers to facilitate classroom discussions and these conversations are important to ensure that all children feel a sense of belonging and inclusion within the school community. ERB and ethics is closely aligned to SPHE which is an important curriculum area that supports pupils' social and emotional development. However, at present, the time and space allocated to SPHE in an already overcrowded curriculum is inadequate, with just thirty minutes assigned per week. The time allocated to SPHE in a redeveloped curriculum would need to be increased to reflect the broad range of topics and issues to be explored in this area. In teaching ERB and ethics - which is bound up with people's values and practices that contribute greatly to their shared sense of identity and belonging – specific skills are required on the part of the teacher. The sensitive nature of the subject matter may be challenging for teachers to facilitate successfully in a safe environment therefore continuing professional development will be necessary to implement an ERB and ethics curriculum effectively and confidently.

Developing civic knowledge and skills among future citizens can be done at the school by teaching pupils about their rights and responsibilities and discussing political events in an age-appropriate manner. It can also be woven into school life by facilitating student councils which allow children to participate in the schools' decision-making processes and reach out to the wider community through volunteering activities. Pupil participation in these activities contributes to developing civic skills and is a strong predictor of civic involvement in later life (Kahne and Sporte, 2008).

Citizens require access to accurate information from multiple sources so they can assess and contrast approaches and viewpoints. Access to an infinite number of sources via online media makes it much easier for individuals to limit themselves to information that only confirms their prior beliefs. Teachers can encourage pupils to critically, but respectfully, engage in informed discussions while building their digital confidence, motivation, and skills. Schools can emphasise the production and sharing of digital content, discussing digital behaviour and its ethical implications. Teachers and schools play a critical role in equipping children with the necessary digital literacy skills, attitudes, and values to understand and engage in public deliberation. 'Being a digital learner' is one of the seven key competencies in the draft Primary Curriculum Framework and the importance of digital literacy has been illuminated in the context of remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Promoting Equality in a Global Context and Empowering Pupils

As mentioned, the primary school curriculum seeks to foster within children the knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values, and dispositions that motivate and empower them as citizens to take positive actions to live justly, sustainably and with regard for the rights of others. This is reinforced in the NCCA's Draft Primary Curriculum Framework which envisages that children will be encouraged to question, critique, and understand what is happening in the world they live in within a framework of human rights, equality, and social justice.

Ireland consistently ranks among the highest OECD countries in terms of the proportion of our official development assistance (ODA) expenditure that targets gender equality. In 2019, more than three quarters of Ireland's bilateral allocable aid targeted gender equality. *A Better World* outlines several areas to be targeted specifically in advancing the rights of women and girls through our multilateral, civil society, and bilateral country partnerships. Recognising the critical role of education as a pathway to gender equality, Ireland is prioritizing education for girls in our development assistance work. Education for Sustainable Development can raise awareness among children about injustices in our world and demonstrate how our efforts at national level to provide humanitarian assistance with Irish NGOs is reaching some of the most disadvantaged people in conflict and crisis situations. This awareness will support the curriculum's vision to enable learners to engage critically with issues of fairness, equality, citizenship, and sustainability and will empower children to act justly and take positive action to change.

Class Size

Large classes at primary level are a barrier to the successful implementation of any curriculum subject. Education for sustainable development (ESD) demands certain types of pedagogies such as discovery-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and constructivist approaches to learning which value

philosophical inquiry with children. A reduced pupil–teacher ratio is a prerequisite to such active pedagogies and the INTO has long advocated smaller class sizes to align with the European average. Smaller numbers of pupils would help to facilitate a more active and, in junior classes, a more play-based approach to teaching and learning which enhance the development of pupils’ capacity to be ‘effective contributors’ within the learning experience.

ESD pedagogy advocates active learning, critical evaluation of opinions and cultural sensitivity. It challenges teachers to create learning environments and provide opportunities for pupils which encompass knowledge, values, and skills. Teachers recognise the value of promoting the use of higher order skills: synthesis of ideas and information; speculating about meanings and intentions and weighing up options before making decisions.

INTO welcomes the reduction to class sizes in DEIS Band 1 schools in 2021 but reiterates that this is merely an initial step and further progress is required to improve the learning experiences and outcomes for pupils in DEIS schools as captured in SDG 4.5 which seeks to “*ensure equal access to all levels of education for the vulnerable including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations*”. The retention and development of Early Start in DEIS Band One schools, and of the Holy Child Pre-school in Rutland Street, as a high-quality, intensive early intervention education programme for the most disadvantaged children should be a priority of the Department of Education, in line with SDG 4.2.

Cross-curricular Initiatives

The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (2014) aimed to ensure that education contributes to sustainable development by equipping learners with the relevant knowledge (the *what*), the key dispositions and skills (the *how*) and the values (the *why*) that will motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become informed active citizens who act for a more sustainable future.

ESD is an agent for positive change. It is education for sustainable development rather than education about sustainable development (Coriddi, 2008, p.1; Hargreaves, 2008, p. 69). Progress in this area is not contingent on lessons in the school setting alone, but rather relies on participation in the wider community. Establishing and maintaining links with local organisations allows pupils to observe strategies and good practice in a real-life context. Various initiatives designed for schools seek to encourage collaboration between schools and members of their local area by providing opportunities to engage in project work to enrich knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that empower individuals to transform themselves and transform societies. The key tenet of ‘partnerships’ is identified by NCCA as one of eight principles in the draft Primary Curriculum Framework which states that “*partnerships and collaboration between schools, families and communities enrich and extend children’s learning by acknowledging and supporting their lives in and out of school*” (NCCA, 2020, p.6).

It is important to acknowledge that many schools across the island of Ireland are engaged in programmes and initiatives which promote environmental awareness and sustainability, with numerous competitions and award schemes in place to recognise their efforts in this area. For example, 1,176 primary schools are involved in The Green Schools Programme which is coordinated by An Taisce. Our World Irish Aid Awards (which is in its 16th year) receives approximately 100 entries from primary schools on an annual basis. The Irish Aid programme also supports international non-government organisation partners to provide learning materials, project work and competitions to primary schools such as GOAL’s Changemakers programme, Trócaire’s Gamechangers programme and Plan International’s Development Education learning materials.

Many teachers recognise the importance of engaging in ESD and related activities however time pressure is a major challenge and a key factor in impeding schools' participation in initiatives. The additional paperwork and time associated with some initiatives deters teachers from getting involved as they are already grappling with significant workload.

Professional Development for teachers is essential to enhance ESD in schools. CPD is important to demonstrate how implementing an ESD focussed initiative can link with other curricular areas. Where ESD content is incorporated into teachers' planning, to extend and develop a curricular area, it can enhance teaching and learning. Literacy and Numeracy is prioritised in the primary school context (Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2011) however, project work associated with ESD initiatives can enable teaching in these areas and result in practical and meaningful pupil learning. As children explore geographical, scientific and environment topics they will draw upon a wide range of materials and record their findings in various formats. Many of these materials (such as maps, charts, books, signs in the environment, PowerPoint presentations etc.) will encourage the development of skills in reading and writing. In an increasingly digitalised world, Education for Sustainable Development provides many opportunities for the development and application of skills around digital learning/information and communication technology (ICT). Arts education lends itself to connection with ESD themes through visual arts, drama, and role play. The latter can be a useful technique to provoke significant levels of thinking, prompting discussion and debate between pupils and their teachers. Investigations in ESD also foster co-operative and group working skills.



Resources

UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.A commits to “*build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.*”

The Department of Education must provide the appropriate school facilities including teaching materials and physical space to allow pupils engage in effective, active learning. Many classrooms at present are not conducive to hands-on activity-based approaches, with some classrooms over-crowded and ill-equipped to provide the practical resources. Investment in support material for teachers and adequate resources for schools is imperative to ensure that teachers can meet curriculum objectives and effectively teach education for sustainable development.

Resources used in primary schools must also reflect the diversity within our classrooms. Mirroring society, primary school classrooms are more dynamic and busier places in which teachers support and respond to a greater diversity of learners with a rich variety of competencies, cultures, ethnicities, family structures and backgrounds, home languages, religions, sexual identities, and worldviews. Enabling children to feel respected, valued and engaged in learning through appropriately tailored experiences and through positive interactions within the school community is important in the development of a more inclusive society in Ireland empowering primary school pupils to take positive actions to live justly, sustainably and with regard for the rights of others.

As our society changes, it is important that the ESD curriculum is audited and updated with supports provided to schools and education settings to promote ESD. The Scoilnet website promotes existing ESD resources for schools and INTO would welcome regular review of this online material with the inclusion of exemplars for teachers at various class levels, ensuring that it continues to offer up-to-date, meaningful content. Gathering samples of teachers' practice, pupils' work and project-based learning and presenting these in a manner which is accessible to teachers would be valuable to primary school teachers.

Initial Teacher Education

The key role of teacher education in Education for Sustainable Development is recognised in the UNESCO implementation strategy and the publication of a teacher education programme to support Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2002). However, considerable challenges persist for schools and teacher education in responding to calls for prioritising and implementing ESD.

The Teaching Council document *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education, published in October 2020*, sets out the requirements which all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes must meet in order to gain accreditation. Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is included in this document as one of seven "core elements", which must underpin all aspects of ITE programmes. The document states that GCE should include Education for Sustainable Development, Wellbeing, Social Justice and Interculturalism. With this inclusion, it is hoped that student teachers will practice GCE throughout their career and share it with colleagues who perhaps did not have this opportunity when they attended ITE. However, the re-accreditation process for Initial Teacher Education courses is only beginning. It is important that there are opportunities to build on the engagement and learning that student teachers acquire in college, so that this work and learning is not lost but built upon as teachers enter the profession.

Within ESD there is scope for innovation and increased collaborative practice. It is important that Education for Sustainable Development is taught in a manner that ensures cultures and identities are represented fairly, respectfully and in an empowering way, and that negative stereotypes are not unintentionally reinforced. This is important for all schools, whether they have a culturally diverse population or not, as they reflect the changing needs of society.

Primary classrooms have seen significant change on many levels in the last two decades. One aspect of this change relates to increasingly religious diversity in society. Ireland has transformed from a predominantly Christian population to embrace a variety of religious and secular perspectives. The 2011 census lists over 80 countries as places of birth for Irish residents at the time of its completion (CSO, 2011a). Greater diversity of religions and belief systems are now visible in Ireland. In addition to religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity, the integration of children with special educational needs into our mainstream classrooms has increased the range of abilities teachers now teach. An important role in Initial Teacher Education is to adequately prepare teachers and develop their professional capabilities to support all children in their learning and to enable them to develop their full potential in changing classrooms which provide a richness to our educational landscape but can also provide challenges for schools and for teachers in their provision of education.

The Development Education Strategy states that Education for Sustainable Development:

empowers people to analyse, reflect on and challenge at a local and global level, the root causes and consequences of global hunger, poverty, injustice, inequality and climate change; presenting multiple perspectives on global justice issues.'

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

As previously mentioned, ongoing professional development for primary school teachers in our ever-evolving world is an important facet of a strategy on sustainability. CPD should be designed to ensure deep change in teachers' behaviours and practices regarding ESD. Despite the fact that CPD carries some obligation in most countries, it was found that it is not having the change impact it should, and it is not sufficiently effective to install a deep change in the practice of teaching behaviours' (European Commission 2013, 39),

Understanding the complexity of sustainable development and appreciating the interplay of environmental, economic, cultural and social factors, is important that Initial Teacher Education courses provide student teachers with strong foundations upon which to build their subject knowledge through lifelong learning and opportunities for CPD. Student teachers (as referenced in the section above) should receive guidance on how to effectively integrate geographical, scientific and literacy skills to deepen their understanding of a sustainable development issue and how to effectively teach this in the classroom setting.

As new themes unfold, and teachers engage with emerging strategies, professional development in ESD is crucial to consolidate their understanding, raise awareness of new issues, and enhance their pedagogical skills. Teachers must be supported throughout their career to feel competent and confident that they are equipped to teach in a manner consistent with sustainable development and global citizenship as they evolve over time.

Recent movements such as the Climate Action marches, the 'Me Too' movement and *Black Lives Matter* protests show that young people are exposed to and/or engaging with these issues. Teachers would welcome age-appropriate resources to enable them to teach about these topics in the primary school classroom. Children's exposure to recent international tragedies highlights the need for space to be made for nuanced conversations around religions and beliefs. Without adequate space to address these emotionally charged, sensitive topics as they arise, simplistic narratives risk going unchallenged. Some discussions may seem challenging or advanced for children at primary level, but it is important that a reviewed curriculum fosters the skills and dispositions that children need to navigate the complexities of contemporary life.

In spring 2021, INTO responded to members' demands and an online course for teachers was developed in spring 2021 to tackle the issue of racism. The '*Understanding and Preventing Racism*' course comprised three modules seeking to allow participants to gain a deep understanding of the concept of race and racism. The course explored racial diversity within an education/school context and provided guidance on how to prevent racism and racial bullying/harassment in schools. Owing to the success of the course it is being offered to teachers as part of the organisation's summer programme in addition to a Global Citizenship course which is popular among members each year.

Whilst teachers' enthusiasm to further their education and acquire the information and skills to effectively teach these important topics is evident, the number of members who can engage with these courses is limited. It is, therefore, essential that materials and CPD are available for all teachers, and as previously recommended, resources should allow for integration with other curricular areas to avoid exacerbating the pressure that teachers report in meeting the demands of an already overloaded curriculum.

Any new curriculum that is introduced must be accompanied by thorough guidance and professional development programmes for all teachers and principals at system level. In addition to this broad CPD to ensure continuity and consistency on a national level, school focused CPD should also be designed to respond to local needs. Smyth (1994) asserts that CPD for whole school environmental education must be school-focused, but this process has to connect with the wider environment. For change to be sustainable in stimulating and maintaining environmental education at school level, it requires collaboration and interaction with external bodies and support networks to assist schools in navigating their way through waves of change.

The NCCA's draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020) recognises teachers as 'agentic' professionals who use their professional expertise and their knowledge of the strengths, needs, interests and individuality of the children with whom they work to make informed decisions about what to teach, when to teach it and how to sequence and pace learning. Developing self-reflective capacity can help to adapt educational practice to a continuously developing world and is a good starting point for every teacher engaging with education for sustainable development. At school level, working collaboratively with colleagues to reflect on plans, achievements and challenges is a strength of effective education for sustainable development. The school self-evaluation process can promote staff discussion around sustainability issues and raise awareness of the concept of ESD and how to effectively embed sustainability-related themes within teaching.

Change is one of the key elements of sustainable development as the planet, the environment, society, and humanity can only continue to exist through change by developing the competence to respond sustainably to emergent situations.

Outdoor Learning

Outdoor learning provides children with an opportunity to experience the interdisciplinary nature of the real world through interactions with each other and the planet. Geographical enquiry involves exploring the outdoors in an investigative capacity, although sustainability is applicable to all curricular areas.

Among the '*skills and concepts*' within the current curriculum, is '*a sense of place and space*'. The child's sense of *place* refers to his/her understanding of, and feeling for, the essential character of different places; an understanding of how landscapes have been formed and shaped by the interaction of natural processes and human activity, and an appreciation of the distinctive contribution made by the motivations, beliefs, values, and attitudes of people.

A sense of *space* refers to a pupil's understanding of where places are and how they are interconnected. The curriculum provides for the exploration of natural features in the local environment and the processes by which they are formed by physical forces and processes (for example heating, cooling, erosion, deposition) and how flora and fauna interact with them. The Skills and concepts development section in the curriculum (1999) states that geographical skills "will be fostered most effectively by activity in, and experience of, a range of environments (p. 9)."

The value of exploration of the natural world and pupils' environment is reiterated in the NCCA draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020). Children's learning is shaped and nurtured by the physical environment, both indoors and outdoors. These diverse environments encourage children's independence and stimulate and support their learning across the curriculum (NCCA, 2020). Concerns about children's current and future relationships with the environment have been highlighted with Louv (2010) warning of 'nature-deficit disorder' describing the human cost of alienation from nature, including physical and emotional illness, reduced use of the senses and attention difficulties. According to Louv (2010, p.36)

'long-standing studies show a relationship between the absence, or inaccessibility of parks and open space with high crime rates, depression and other urban maladies.'

The Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) curriculum, which includes Geography, could include extensive outdoor learning initiatives using local sites such as the school grounds and the local area. In the interests of promoting education for sustainability, a redeveloped curriculum should establish a conscious synthesis which blends the dimensions of place, environment, and sustainability with accompanying support for schools.

The outdoor environment is a substantial resource for schools, however, many factors work in complex ways in teachers' locally situated contexts to influence when, if and how teachers conduct work outside the classroom. Financial constraints, time, teacher–pupil ratios, perceptions about safety, weather, transport, and disruption to classes all have an impact (Higgins, Nicol, & Ross, 2006; Mannion, Fenwick, & Lynch, 2012). Parental concerns about children's safety can reduce opportunities for children to explore their local area independently and as a result children's play is increasingly moving indoors and onto electronic screens (Sobel, 2001). Depending on a school's location, access to space may not be available and it is important that alternative areas are accessible for fieldwork and outdoor exploratory learning activities (for example through partnerships with local groups and agencies).



School Buildings

The Department of Education have stated that it is committed to playing its part in ensuring energy efficiency in our schools, to support the Climate Action Plan. The INTO welcome the recent launch of the energy retrofit Pathfinder programme to target energy use and CO₂ emission reduction, testing deep retrofit and low carbon heating solutions. The Pathfinder programme is a great example of how working together on pilot energy efficiency and decarbonisation projects, can establish approaches to ensure compatibility with school design and operational requirements on a scalable basis.

The public service must reduce emissions by at least 50% by 2030 and to net-zero by 2050. This project is an example of leadership, which is producing sustainable solutions that can be scaled up around the country. Schools are at the centre of our communities and are where our children learn skills for their future. By ensuring that older schools are financially supported to undertake energy upgrades to become low-energy buildings, a good example can be given to the community while at the same time reducing running costs, emissions, and improving the comfort levels and learning environment in these vital buildings.

Since the 1st of January 2011, school principals (along with all public sector bodies) are required to report annually to SEAI on their energy usage, and their actions taken to reduce consumption. The data collated by the SEAI provide an opportunity to monitor the energy efficiency of the education sector. The INTO highlights the potential for this data to be used to complement the efforts of the Department of Education to strengthen the sustainability of educational infrastructure. INTO demands that all new school buildings reflect sustainability policies based on up-to-date evidence regarding design and technologies.

School Transport

Safe, efficient, low carbon, and affordable mobility for all is essential to sustainable human development and must be enabled in all sustainable development policies. Transport is central to powering lives and livelihoods. It is the engine of the global economy and helps spur human development. Every day, people all over the world depend on a variety of transport modes to make a living, go to school, access essential goods and services, and ultimately, enhance equal opportunities for participation in society. With growing transport demand and impacts, the sustainability of the transport sector must improve to meet sustainable development and climate action targets.

The transport sector in Ireland is a significant contributor to unsustainable practices through emissions of greenhouse gases and air pollutants and increasing congestion on roads. The national policy on sustainable travel is set out in *Smarter Travel - a Sustainable Transport Future*, the *National Cycle Policy Framework* and the *Road Safety Strategy* - aimed at reversing current unsustainable transport and travel patterns. The Department of Education has a critical role to play in supporting national policy in this area through the operation of the School Transport Scheme. This scheme provides transport for more than 120,000 students every school day and while the primary aim of the scheme is to provide transport to and from school for pupils living at a distance from their nearest school, it also contributes to a reduction in private car journeys during the 'school run' hours and thereby reduces carbon emissions by parents transporting their children to school (DES, 2011).

Efforts are being made to make school transport even more sustainable. Bus Éireann, which operates the scheme on behalf of the Department of Education, has partnered with the SEAI to introduce eco-driving and other energy efficiency methods in order to benefit the environment and make energy savings. Bus Éireann has also become a member of SEAI's Energy Exemplar Partnership Programme, which will see it introduce a number of energy management initiatives as part of the public sector target of a 33% improvement in energy efficiency by 2020. Parallel to this development, An Taisce supports the 'Green-Schools Travel Theme', funded through the National Transport Authority (NTA). To support the initiative the NTA produced a "Toolkit for School Travel". As part of this initiative, schools set their own travel targets with the aim of increasing the number of students who are not driven to school. Since its introduction in 2008, over 1400 schools have participated in the programme. These schools have reported an average 22% reduction in car journeys to school, and an average 32% increase in walking and cycling rates. The INTO acknowledge this progress and would welcome additional support for schools in engaging with this initiative. The INTO also demands that alternatives to the use of fossil fuels to run the school transport system be developed in the immediate future.

Conclusion

We need to prepare our young people for our changing world. Societal and Environmental education must strive to empower students to solve the global sustainability crisis and develop the skills, optimism and resolve to lead the societal and environmental movement of tomorrow. Teachers are committed to providing the best possible outcomes for their pupils, both now and in the future. In order to cultivate a sustainable environment in a just world, teachers need relevant curricula and tools for their students to reflect and acquire knowledge on how they can make a difference for the future, with appropriate resources and funding. The INTO calls for increased investment by government to ensure that all teachers in our primary schools are provided with appropriate professional development and supports to realise Ireland's ambition for sustainable development. Central to the achievement of a sustainable future are two key aspects – the provision of infrastructure and support for schools and education for all members of the school community on energy efficiency and sustainable development.

In conclusion, to support the development and progression of Education for Sustainable Development in primary schools the INTO recommends that a revised National Strategy addresses the following:

- a primary curriculum that embeds ESD into its learning outcomes at all stages (aligned with early years/Aistear, Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle) with continuous professional development for teachers,
- the development of content (both in English and as Gaeilge) by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to support the revised primary curriculum and meet the diverse needs of pupils in Irish primary schools,
- the adequate resourcing of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) to provide adequate upskilling opportunities for teachers in ESD, facilitating the inclusion of all pupils,
- emphasis on ESD in Initial Teacher Education courses provide student teachers with strong foundations upon which to build their subject knowledge through lifelong learning and opportunities for CPD
- Increased investment in resources for schools to ensure that all schools are equipped with the necessary infrastructure to facilitate outdoor learning,
- Provision of support for schools in maintaining energy-efficient, sustainable learning environments,
- reduced class sizes to create environments conducive to effective Education for Sustainable Development,
- the re-establishment of middle-management posts in primary schools to enable a whole-school coordinated approach to ESD.
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Abbreviations

CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DE	Development Education
ERB	Education about Religious Beliefs
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
EU	European Union
GCE	Global Citizenship Education
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NTA	National Transport Authority
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SESE	Social, Environmental and Scientific Education
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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