



INTO

# GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTO

**2030 Vision:** Essential Investments for  
Advancing Primary and Special Education



VOTE EDUCATION FIRST

into   
Irish National Teachers' Organisation  
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

# INTRODUCTION

As Ireland stands at a pivotal moment in its educational journey, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) presents our General Election Manifesto, a detailed assessment of 30 critical areas of investment needed from government by 2030. Our goal is clear: to build the best primary and special education system in the world. This ambition is not just a lofty ideal—it is a necessity. A world-class education system is the bedrock of a thriving society, and it is the duty of any incoming Irish government to ensure that our children and young people receive the best possible start in life. According to the OECD, children having access to high-quality learning opportunities, regardless of their background, is the backbone of an equitable education system. In order to achieve this objective, the INTO calls for a 5% increase in the share of total government expenditure for the school sector between 2026 and 2030.

Primary education is the foundation upon which all other facets of society are built. The UN High-Level Panel on the teaching profession noted that the success of education systems is directly tied to the success of the teaching profession, "When we begin with transforming education systems, we can transform conditions of work in schools, transform the practice of teaching, transform learning and transform lives."

The challenges facing primary and special education today are numerous, but so too are the opportunities. By adopting a comprehensive approach that addresses the diverse needs of students, teachers, and schools, we can create a system that not only meets but exceeds international standards. From reducing class sizes and enhancing teacher training to improving school infrastructure and expanding resources for special education, every aspect of this manifesto is designed to raise our educational system to an all-time height.

It is clear that the housing crisis continues to have a profound impact on the recruitment and retention of teachers and must also be tackled by the incoming government.

The INTO pledges to work to ensure government advance an ambitious agenda that prioritises the needs of our students and teachers. Our teachers are at the heart of our education system, and it is essential that they are supported, valued, and empowered to do what they do best—educate and inspire.

We call on the incoming government to match our ambition with action. The time for incremental steps has passed; what is required now is a momentous strategy that addresses the needs of every child, in every classroom, across the country. By committing to this vision, we can ensure that Ireland not only meets the challenges of the future but leads the way in educational excellence.

Together, we can make Ireland a beacon of educational success, where every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential. This is our pledge, and this is our call to action. The future of our nation depends on the choices we make today—let's choose to be ambitious, let's choose to invest, and let's choose to make Ireland's education system the best in the world by 2030.



Carmel Browne,  
**INTO President**



John Boyle,  
**INTO General Secretary**

***“Together, we  
can make Ireland  
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**VOTE EDUCATION FIRST**



# WHAT MUST THE NEXT GOVERNMENT DO?

## Solve Teacher Supply

1. Restructure salary scales making them fairer and more competitive and improve the Single Public Service Pension Scheme to make a career in teaching more attractive.
  2. Provide incentives to retain teachers here and improve the incremental credit scheme to bring teachers home to Ireland.
- 

## Reduce Class Sizes

3. Reduce class sizes in mainstream schools to 19, reduce class sizes in DEIS Band 1 schools to 15 and reduce class sizes in special schools and special classes.
  4. Train additional primary teachers to achieve target class sizes and to ensure all teaching positions can be filled.
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## Support Teaching Workforce

5. Invest in high quality professional development for teachers to support the introduction of the revised curriculum and other important initiatives and increase funding for the teacher fee refund scheme.
  6. Provide enhanced flexible working arrangements, including access to reproductive health leave, surrogacy leave, improved child and family care schemes and support for teacher wellbeing.
  7. Provide substitute cover for all approved teacher absences with particular provision for special schools and special classes.
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## Strengthen School Leadership

8. Expand middle leadership teams in schools.
  9. Provide quality professional development programmes and leadership training for senior and middle leadership roles and for aspiring school leaders.
  10. Increase administrative, technical and maintenance support including direct payment of school caretakers to reduce bureaucratic and management burdens on principals.
  11. Enhance salaries and provide greater incentives for school leaders, including equalising allowances between leaders of primary and post-primary schools, reducing the appointment figures for administrative principals and administrative deputy principals to 150 and 400 pupils respectively and paying school leaders allowances based on all of the staff they manage.
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## Augment Special Education

12. Establish more special schools and maintain the continuum of provision including special classes.
  13. Roll out top-quality training programmes for all who teach children with additional needs including a doubling of the number of places on Special Education Diploma Courses.
  14. Invest in special education resources and facilities and enhance salaries and professional supports for teachers in these settings.
  15. Roll out in-school therapeutic, counselling and psychological supports with front-line disability services being provided locally at school level.
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## Expand School Funding

- 16. Increase primary capitation funding to €400 per pupil by 2030.
- 17. Increase investment in school infrastructure for retrofitting and modernising existing buildings and for new builds/school extensions and substantially increase the minor works grant.
- 18. Make annual grants available for curriculum resources as the redeveloped primary curriculum rolls out and provide for the allocation of ICT resources and digital learning tools beyond 2027.

## Control Change Management

- 19. Establish a streamlined and consultative policy development process and enhance professional development structures for implementing new initiatives.
- 20. Pace new initiatives to ensure existing ones are fully integrated.

## Protect Small Schools

- 21. Support small schools through tailored funding and resource allocation for clustering, based on the outcomes of the *Small Schools' Project*.

## Target DEIS Support

- 22. Create a DEIS plus scheme to support 100 schools serving areas of highest deprivation alongside increased funding and resourcing for DEIS schools.
- 23. Make targeted interventions for students at risk of educational disadvantage and augment community and parental engagement initiatives including expansion of the teacher-led home school liaison scheme (HSCL).

## Diversify Education System

- 24. Advance strategies to attract individuals from diverse backgrounds to teaching, ensuring they are supported to join and remain in the profession and develop support systems for teachers with disabilities.
- 25. Bolster efforts to make schools inclusive places to work including developing mentorship programmes for under-represented groups in teaching and providing protections from all forms of violence and harassment.
- 26. Re-energise efforts to ensure diversity of patronage in primary schools.

## Transform the Department's Communications

- 27. Put regular consultation forums and feedback mechanisms in place, to include input from teacher unions.
- 28. Ensure communication of policies and initiatives transparently and in a timely manner.

## Bolster North-South Cooperation

- 29. Establish more focused mechanisms for engagement between education bodies on the island of Ireland including a North-South Education Forum.

## Promote Irish Language

- 30. Provide free courses for teachers striving to achieve the Irish language qualification, deliver annual upskilling for the teaching of Gaeilge to all primary teachers and review the scheme for exemptions from the Irish language at primary level.

# WHAT MUST THE NEXT GOVERNMENT DO?

## Solve Teacher Supply

As the teacher shortage crisis intensifies, the next government must prioritise tackling the recruitment and retention challenges that are crippling many schools in Ireland. With thousands of positions vacant daily, it is clear to the INTO that an extra 300 places will be required in state funded initial primary teacher education programmes each year from 2026 to 2030 to address the substantial shortfall in teacher supply. To make the teaching profession more attractive, a restructuring of salary scales is essential, ensuring that teachers are adequately compensated in line with their qualifications and the demands of their roles. In addition, the current Single Public Service Pension Scheme must be improved to offer greater long-term financial security, which will play a key role in attracting and retaining talented educators within the profession.

Furthermore, the government must introduce targeted incentives to encourage Irish teachers working abroad to return home. Increasing incremental credit for overseas teaching experience would recognise the value of their skills and reduce the financial burden of repatriation. Such measures, combined with initiatives like an enhanced public relations campaign to recruit internationally, will provide the incentives needed to bolster the teaching workforce and ensure that schools are adequately staffed to provide high-quality education for all students. Without immediate and sustained action, this crisis will continue to undermine the future of our education system.

### The Next Government Must:

- Restructure salary scales making them fairer and more competitive and improve the Single Public Service Pension Scheme to make a career in teaching more attractive.
- Provide incentives to retain teachers here and improve the incremental credit scheme to bring teachers home to Ireland.

## Reduce Class Sizes

The next government must take decisive action to tackle Ireland's overcrowded classes, which remain the largest in the European Union. With an average of 22.5 pupils per class, compared to the EU average of 19 our education system is under strain, affecting both teachers and students alike. Reducing class sizes to an average of 19 pupils in mainstream schools would not only bring us to the European average, but also allow teachers to provide the individualised attention that every student needs in today's classrooms where inclusion is key. This is particularly crucial as primary school enrolments are projected to decline, making it an opportune time to implement these changes with minimal additional cost to the exchequer.

In DEIS Band 1 schools, where students face significant socio-economic challenges, the need for smaller class sizes is even more pressing. These schools serve vulnerable children who would benefit most from the focused, supportive environment that smaller classes can offer. By reducing class sizes to 15 in DEIS Band 1 schools, the government can help address the systemic disadvantages these students face, ensuring they have equal opportunities to succeed in education. Addressing class size disparities is essential to levelling the playing field for all of Ireland's primary school children.



To achieve these target class sizes and to ensure that every child has the fully qualified teachers they are entitled to every day, it is critical that the government invests in teacher training and recruitment. Increasing the supply of qualified teachers will ensure that schools can meet the staffing demands required to maintain smaller classes. This long-term investment in both teachers and students will enhance the quality of education across the country, ensuring that every child, regardless of background or location, has access to a supportive and effective learning environment.

#### **The next Government must:**

- Reduce class sizes in mainstream schools to 19, reduce class sizes in DEIS Band 1 schools to 15 and reduce class sizes in special schools and special classes.
- Train additional primary teachers to achieve target class sizes and to ensure all teaching positions can be filled.

## **Support Teaching Workforce**

Comprehensive and ongoing professional development is critical, especially during the roll-out of the new curriculum. A phased, well-supported introduction will help avoid overwhelming teachers. In September 2025, the new Primary Curriculum will be introduced in Irish schools, marking the first major reform in over 25 years. It's vital that teachers receive quality CPD and professional learning opportunities to help them understand and implement the curriculum.

The NCCA's 2022 document, *Supporting System wide Primary Curriculum Change*, highlights the need for a shared vision, careful timing, and clear communication among all stakeholders. It also stresses the importance of policy alignment to avoid overloading schools with other initiatives during this transition. Crucially, sufficient resources, including funding for classroom materials, professional learning for teachers, and adequate facilities, must be provided.

The union calls for quality in-person CPD for all teachers during the school day, allowing them to engage with the curriculum alongside colleagues and experts. Schools need funding for necessary equipment and timely access to comprehensive online resources and tool kits.

Teacher wellbeing is essential for effective teaching and positive pupil outcomes, and it encompasses emotional, social, physical, and cognitive aspects. Prioritising teacher wellbeing leads to higher job satisfaction, reduced burnout, and better retention rates.

The next Government must reduce unnecessary administrative burdens that detract from teaching and contribute to burnout. Aligning Department of Education initiatives sustainably will enhance their impact on pupil outcomes. Additionally, delivering on promises of sabbaticals for teachers in DEIS schools is key to tackling educational inequality and supporting teacher wellbeing, as it improves teacher retention in schools struggling to attract and retain staff.

Regarding reproductive health leave, the INTO welcomes the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth's *PLACES* Report, which recommends statutory paid leave for early pregnancy loss. There is also a critical need for paid leave for those undergoing infertility treatment, as teachers face challenges with leave management following changes to the public service sick leave scheme in 2013.

The *PLACES* report underscores the unique challenges teachers face with fertility treatments and pregnancy loss. Providing reproductive health leave supports teachers through significant life events, enhancing their wellbeing and preventing burnout. Surrogacy leave, highlighted by an INTO Congress motion, must also be legislated for reflecting Ireland's evolving family structures.

Flexible work arrangements will further improve job satisfaction, retention, and wellbeing in school communities. The Department of Education should review the parental leave scheme to allow teachers to take leave on individual days rather than the current minimum of seven consecutive days.

Ensuring substitute cover for all absences is a core INTO policy. During the Covid pandemic, all teacher absences were covered by substitutes. The INTO urges the Department of Education to reinstate this measure to ensure every child has access to a qualified teacher each day.

#### **The next government must:**

- Invest in high quality professional development for teachers to support the introduction of the revised curriculum and other important initiatives and increase funding for the teacher fee refund scheme.
- Provide enhanced flexible working arrangements, including access to reproductive health leave, surrogacy leave, improved child and family care schemes and support for teacher wellbeing.
- Provide substitute cover for all approved teacher absences with particular provision for special schools and special classes.



## **Strengthen School Leadership**

There is consistent evidence that the quality of school leadership has a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The structure of the primary education system, which aims to devolve responsibility to schools, combined with the voluntary nature of school management, places a significant burden on school leaders, especially principal teachers. All schools and principals are subject to the same administrative and compliance requirements set by the Department of Education. The focus on compliance in areas such as GDPR, Child Protection, Health and Safety, and employment law has resulted in a substantial administrative load for principals, who manage the daily operations of their schools. Most primary schools have minimal support with finance, human resource management and IT.

#### **The next government must:**

- Expand middle leadership teams in schools.
- Provide quality professional development programmes and leadership training for senior and middle leadership roles and for aspiring school leaders.
- Increase administrative, technical and maintenance support including direct payment of school caretakers to reduce bureaucratic and management burdens on principals.
- Enhance salaries and provide greater incentives for school leaders, including equalising allowances between leaders of primary and post-primary schools, reducing the appointment figures for administrative principals and administrative deputy principals to 150 and 400 pupils respectively and paying school leaders allowances based on all of the staff they manage.



## Augment Special Education

In January 2024, the NCSE published a policy advice paper titled *Special Schools and Classes: An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society*. The document acknowledges that, while ideally all children, regardless of need and ability, should be educated together, a continuum of provision must be maintained in Ireland. Special classes are an important part of this continuum and should be established in every school where the need for such a class exists. Training should be provided to teachers and other relevant school staff in a timely manner, ideally before they take up their roles in the special class and regularly thereafter. Schools should be properly funded and resourced to accommodate children with SEN in mainstream classrooms where appropriate.

All teachers should receive comprehensive training on the teaching of pupils with SEN across the continuum of teacher education. This training should be available to beginning teachers at initial teacher education and induction levels, and to more experienced teachers as needed throughout their careers. The training should be provided in a timely manner, as required, and through a flexible suite of delivery methods to suit the needs of teachers.

Grants and funding for the establishment of special classrooms, appropriate quiet and sensory spaces, and adapted outdoor play areas must be provided to all schools before special classes are opened. Accommodation must be fit for purpose, and new builds must be sanctioned wherever necessary. Schools must be supported to adapt mainstream classrooms as needed to accommodate pupils with additional needs.

INTO welcomes the appointment of 39 Speech and Language and Occupational Therapists by the Department of Education. However, we note that this service will need to expand to approximately 400 personnel to provide an adequate service to every primary school in the country. We recognise the initial successes of the Counselling Pilot programme and call for its extension to all schools on a phased basis, with immediate roll-out in all DEIS schools.

### The next government must:

- Establish more special classes and maintain the continuum of provision including special schools.
- Roll out top-quality training programmes for all who teach children with additional needs, including a doubling of the number of places on Special Education Diploma courses.
- Invest in special education resources and facilities and enhance salaries and professional supports for teachers in these settings.
- Roll out in-school therapeutic, counselling and psychological supports with front line disability services being provided locally at school level.





## Expand School Funding

The next government must urgently address the funding deficits facing primary schools by increasing direct school funding. Currently, primary schools receive €200 per pupil towards operational costs for utilities, insurance, and resources. Today's capitation grant which is the same as it was in 2012 is not nearly enough to enable primary schools to make ends meet, causing them to rely on parents and other members of the local school community for hand-outs. The funding shortfall places undue financial pressure on primary schools and highlights the need for a dramatic increase in the capitation grant to help schools manage rising inflationary costs. A substantial increase is essential to ensure that every child in primary school receives a fair and well-resourced education. To address the serious funding crisis in primary schools the INTO calls on the incoming government to increase the primary capitation grant to €400 per pupil.

Investment in school infrastructure must also be a priority, with a focus on retrofitting and modernising existing buildings, as well as expanding capacity through new builds and school extensions. Many primary school buildings are outdated and in need of urgent repairs, but the current minor works grant is insufficient to meet even basic maintenance needs. We call on government to substantially increase the minor works grant for primary and special schools. Increased investment in infrastructure will provide a safe and conducive

learning environment for students, supporting their educational development. Moreover, these upgrades will ensure that schools can operate sustainably, with improved energy efficiency and modern facilities to meet the demands of a 21st-century curriculum.

As the redeveloped primary curriculum is rolled out, annual grants for curriculum resources must be made available to support teachers in delivering a modern and comprehensive education. Additionally, funding for ICT resources and digital learning tools must be extended beyond 2027 to ensure that all schools have the technology needed to prepare students for a rapidly evolving digital world. Without these crucial investments in infrastructure, resources, and technology, schools will struggle to provide the high-quality education that every child deserves.

### The next government must:

- Increase primary capitation funding to €400 per pupil by 2030.
- Heighten spending on school infrastructure for retrofitting and modernising existing buildings and for new builds /school extensions and substantially increase the minor works grant.
- Make annual grants available for curriculum resources as redeveloped primary curriculum rolls out and provide for the allocation for ICT resources and digital learning tools beyond 2027.

## Control Change Management

Change, whether legislative, curricular or administrative must be moderated and paced in such a way that it does not become a barrier to improvement and development, or a deterrent to effective teaching and learning. Calls from many quarters for schools to respond to societal changes and become the remedy to matters such as bullying, obesity, excessive smart-phone use and environmental damage have left teachers and principals feeling that they are being asked to take on additional workload through a plethora of initiatives and programmes.

To moderate change and initiative overload, the INTO submits that a number of measures are required, including the continuation of and support for the Primary Education Forum which provides a clear method of meaningful consultation around the introduction and sequencing of change and initiatives in schools.

In addition, there should be ring-fenced funding for teachers' own Continuous Professional Development needs rather than 'top down' system needs dominating allocated resources.

Finally, there should be professional development for system-driven change delivered within school time and at no cost to teachers. A whole school approach to CPD is essential and should be complemented by sustained support from Oide at school level.

### **The next government must:**

- Establish a streamlined and consultative policy development process and enhance professional development structures for implementing new initiatives.
- Pace new initiatives to ensure existing ones are fully integrated.

## Protect Small Schools

Small schools are the backbone of many rural communities, serving not only as centres of education but also as vital hubs of social and cultural life. Supporting and protecting these schools is crucial for the sustainability of rural Ireland. Without them, many small communities would face difficulties in retaining families and preserving their unique local identity. The next government must ensure that small schools receive the resources and support they need to flourish, recognising their central role in both the education sphere and community life.

The next government must prioritise tailored funding and resource allocation for small schools, particularly by supporting the clustering model developed through the Small Schools Project. This initiative has proven effective in helping small schools collaborate, share resources, and develop innovative solutions to common challenges. Expanding this project nationwide would provide targeted support to small rural schools, ensuring they receive the financial backing and organisational structure necessary to thrive. Tailored funding for clustering, based on the project's outcomes, will enable small schools to continue delivering quality education while overcoming the limitations of their size. The small school cluster project needs to be made permanent and expanded to include more clusters of small schools. In addition, a full time Cluster Administration Officer should be appointed to support each of the clusters.

### **The next government must:**

- Support small schools through tailored funding and resource allocation for clustering, based on the outcomes of the Small Schools' Project.

## Target DEIS Support

The recent OECD Report, *Resourcing Schools to Address Educational Disadvantage in Ireland* (July 2024), is positive about the DEIS programme and acknowledges the benefits it has brought to areas of socio-economic disadvantage. However, the report recommends better targeting of resources towards those in greatest need. The INTO notes the report and calls for increased funding for areas with the most severe needs, such as communities experiencing intergenerational poverty, high levels of crime, homelessness, and addiction. The OECD report should serve as a reference point rather than a template for redistributing the current DEIS budget.

The OECD report repeatedly calls for better coordination of services for children and highlights mental health as a significant concern for DEIS schools. It acknowledges the growing concern about mental health issues among young people, frequently referring to the need for counselling and therapeutic supports for trauma. The INTO calls for an immediate extension of the current counselling pilot to all DEIS schools as a matter of urgency and seeks the expansion of the in-school therapy pilot to all DEIS schools in its next phase.

The success of the HSCL programme is well documented, and this service should be available to all schools to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are present in every school population. This service must be staffed by experienced teachers who have knowledge of the education system and a strong understanding of DEIS.

### **The next government must:**

- Create a DEIS plus scheme to support 100 schools serving areas of highest deprivation alongside increased funding and resourcing for DEIS schools.
- Make targeted interventions for students at risk of educational disadvantage and augment community and parental engagement initiatives including expansion of the teacher-led HSCL scheme.

## Diversify Education System

To make the teaching profession more diverse, it is essential to implement strategies that attract individuals from a variety of backgrounds. This should include developing strong support systems for teachers with disabilities, helping to remove the barriers these educators often face. Creating inclusive workplaces in schools is also crucial and can be achieved through targeted mentorship programmes for under-represented groups in teaching. These programmes would provide guidance and encouragement to new entrants from diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of belonging and supporting their professional growth. By investing in these areas, we can make significant progress towards creating a teaching workforce that reflects the diversity of Ireland's pupil population.

It is also vital to enhance efforts to diversify school patronage in primary schools, acknowledging that the current dominance of the Catholic school ethos may discourage candidates from different religious or non-religious backgrounds. Supporting initiatives that increase participation in initial teacher education, such as scholarships for language acquisition and tailored programmes for migrant teachers, can make teaching a more accessible career choice for those from under-represented communities. By re-evaluating entry requirements and providing the necessary resources, the teaching profession can become a more inclusive and attractive career path, enriching the educational experiences of all pupils and contributing to a more culturally responsive education system.

Gaeltacht scholarships and professional development programmes for teachers who did not come through the Irish education system should also be considered. The Irish language proficiency requirement disproportionately affects migrant teachers, and the requirement is excluding diverse candidates from entering and remaining in the profession. While maintaining the Irish language requirement is vital for preserving and promoting the language, more accessible pathways and significant supports must be provided for teachers from under-represented backgrounds pursuing the language qualification.

**The next government must:**

- Advance strategies to attract individuals from diverse backgrounds to teaching, ensuring they are supported to join and remain in the profession and develop support systems for teachers with disabilities.
- Bolster efforts to make schools inclusive places to work including developing mentorship programmes for underrepresented groups in teaching and providing protections from all forms of violence and harassment.
- Re-energise efforts to ensure diversity of patronage in primary schools.



## Transform the Department's Communications

To improve communication and engagement with the Department of Education, it is essential to establish regular consultation forums and feedback mechanisms that include input from teacher unions. These forums would provide a structured space for open dialogue, allowing educators to share their insights and concerns directly with policymakers. This collaborative approach ensures that the voices of those on the front lines of education are heard and considered in decision-making processes. Furthermore, it is vital that the communication of policies and initiatives is conducted transparently and in a timely manner. By clearly outlining the rationale behind decisions and providing prompt updates, the Department and its agencies can build trust and foster a more cohesive relationship with the teaching community, ultimately leading to more effective and responsive educational policies.

Enhancing the Primary Education Forum would enable a greater focus on communication and collaboration in this respect.

**The next government must:**

- Put regular consultation forums and feedback mechanisms in place, to include input from teacher unions.
- Ensure communication of policies and initiatives transparently, on a phased basis and in a timely manner.

## Bolster North-South Cooperation

Ireland and Northern Ireland perform well in international comparisons of skill development at both primary and secondary school levels. Both jurisdictions show broadly similar patterns of skill development and similar outcomes based on social background, indicating comparable levels of inequality in skill acquisition.

However, the ESRI recommended in 2022 that increased cooperation across the island would be beneficial in several areas, particularly in addressing educational disadvantage and promoting the inclusion of students with special educational needs. The INTO believes that the incoming government should build on the work started by the Shared Island Unit at Roinn an Taoisigh and do more to improve educational experiences and outcomes for all students attending schools across the island of Ireland.

This view is supported by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the *Good Friday Agreement*, which recommended that the government explore ways to facilitate teacher mobility across the border, allowing teachers to work in both jurisdictions. Both the education systems in the North and South face challenges in addressing educational disadvantage. In Northern Ireland, students from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to leave school early compared to those in the Republic of Ireland. This difference is likely influenced by factors such as academic selection in Northern Ireland and the success of the DEIS programme in the Republic of Ireland in retaining students in education.

Currently, North-South contact and cooperation are often ad hoc and rely on individual relationships or specific projects, making sustained cooperation more difficult. Given that both jurisdictions face similar challenges in combating educational disadvantage and creating an inclusive educational environment for students with special educational needs, there is an opportunity for shared dialogue and learning.

The INTO calls on the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly to establish a North-South Education Forum. This forum should involve education unions across the island and other key stakeholders, focusing on critical issues such as educational disadvantage, special education and teacher mobility.

### The next government must:

- Establish more focused mechanisms for engagement between education bodies on the island of Ireland including a North-South Education Forum.





## Promote Irish Language

Successive reports from the Chief Inspector have raised concerns about the teaching of Irish, noting that “Pupils’ learning outcomes, motivation, and engagement in Irish need to be improved” (2022). Other studies (Harris 1999 and 2006) highlight some teachers’ lack of confidence when teaching the language. The INTO also recognises that the Irish language requirement for teacher registration is viewed as a barrier for many teachers from minority groups seeking to enter the profession.

The INTO calls for a comprehensive range of free Irish language courses for both practising and beginning teachers including those who trained abroad and are striving to achieve the required qualification, enabling them to upskill and maintain professional proficiency in the language. The INTO welcomes the recent collaboration between COGG and the Education Centre network in providing free Irish language courses for teachers and recommends that this initiative be expanded and adequately funded immediately.

The INTO also calls for a full review of Exemptions from the Study of Irish, especially in the context of the introduction of modern foreign languages in the Redeveloped Primary Curriculum. Evidence-based research from Ireland and other bilingual and multilingual jurisdictions should be used to evaluate the educational value of the current system of exemptions.

### The next government must:

- Provide free courses for teachers striving to achieve the Irish language qualification, deliver annual upskilling for the teaching of Gaeilge to all primary teachers and review the scheme for exemptions from the Irish language at primary level.



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