

## **“Developing a Teacher Demand and Supply Model for Ireland 2020-2036: A Technical Report”**

### **Feedback to the Department of Education & Skills from the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO)**

INTO has been invited via the Teaching Council to send feedback on the Report – “Developing a Teacher Demand and Supply Model for Ireland 2020-2036: A Technical Report” (undated) – to you.

We welcome the opportunity to provide this feedback. We received the Report late in the afternoon of Friday 29 November 2019. It is clear that the DES briefed certain journalists over that weekend. We noted a headline on Monday 2 December 2019: *“Warning over surplus of 38,000 teachers by 2036, despite current shortages at schools”*. On that same day INTO issued a press release describing such reports as “utter nonsense” because, as we pointed out, we reject the assumptions of no policy change which underlie the Technical Report.

In his Foreword to the Report, the Secretary General makes a number of references to consultation and collaboration. As a union representing over 40,000 primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland, we highlight the lack of collaboration evidenced by the exclusion of teacher representatives from the Teacher Supply Steering Group, and from its Working Groups. Such exclusion does not augur well for any shared understanding of, or approach to meeting, the serious demographic challenges facing our primary schools.

We set out our further response, in summary points, as follows:

- INTO recognises the Report as a neutral, statistical analysis (albeit we have specific reservations as outlined below) but we are concerned on an ongoing basis about political spinning around demographic reports; this concern was raised by INTO at the Forum on Teacher Supply last month.
- We believe that warnings about teacher surpluses of tens of thousands act as a serious disincentive to young people who are considering undertaking a course of initial teacher education. As both Sahlberg Reports (with which the DES will be familiar) have pointed out, Ireland attracts into teaching people of a high academic standard and it is critically important that we continue to do so. It is unconscionable that this State would export large numbers of teachers at a time when investment in our education service is below international norms, as evidenced for example in the OECD’s “Education at a Glance” reports.
- INTO believes that a report of this nature should run scenarios to include a reduction of class size to EU average levels. This would be appropriate in the Report soon after

the existing Table 2. We emphasize that these models should address the question of class size, rather than pupil teacher ratio, because large class size is a key factor for our members, inhibiting their capacity to work for the optimum benefit of pupils on a day to day basis in Irish classrooms.

- Other issues which INTO has highlighted and which affect the quality of primary education also go unmentioned in the “no policy change” context. Many of these have teacher supply implications and they include substitution supply panels (more of which below), establishment of special classes, cover for teachers undertaking CPD and/or involved in the Droichead induction process, the appointment of administrative deputy principals in primary schools on the same basis as at post-primary, and support for pupils with additional needs.
- At Table 4, the Report projects retirements of teachers by age with the highest age set at 65. It is not clear why the percentage predicted to retire at 65 is lower in almost each projected year than it was in 2018, falling to 4% in 2036, or why account is not taken of the change in the compulsory retirement age to 70.
- Table 5 calls for comment on the topic of primary teacher retention. The Report’s statements about data reliability in respect of this Table are noted. Nonetheless, there is cause for the DES to investigate (by exit surveying or otherwise) factors such as the loss of almost 200 primary teachers aged 44 or under in 2014, and the loss of over 500 such teachers in 2017.
- At page 12, the Report states: “To include teachers on career break in the demand and supply model would therefore inflate the overall projected teacher demand and, accordingly, career breaks are excluded.” The figures in Table 6 show that the number of teachers on career break steadily increased each year from 1,340 in 2013 to 1,731 in 2017. On average 1,519 teachers availed of the career break scheme in each of those years. These teachers were replaced by teachers on fixed-term contracts. It is difficult to see how one can say that this does not impact on teacher demand. Similar assumptions are made regarding teachers in job-share arrangements. The report seems to ignore the fact that, while the teachers on career break or job-share may return to the profession, their number will be replaced by other teachers availing of career break and job-share.
- The report takes no account of the potential impact of an increase in the number of teachers availing of job-sharing arrangements. Table 7 clearly shows a significant increase in the number of teacher job-sharing from 639 in 2014 to 1144 in 2017. Quite simply if it takes two job-share teachers to fill one post then it will take 200 job-share teachers to fill 100 posts and 2,000 job-share teachers to fill 1,000 posts. While job-sharing involves no increase in full-time equivalent numbers, it does have implications for teacher numbers overall. DES figures for 2016-’17 indicate that

1,836 teachers were job-sharing. This creates a need for 918 replacement teachers. The figure of 3,849 in Table 12 is distorted by the exclusion of this factor.

- On the supply side, the Report factors in a supply of 1,750 new primary teachers per annum. We need to clarify the manner in which the supply of teachers through the private provider (Hibernia College), which is not amenable to regulation of supply, is included in this.
- As regards substitute teacher statistics, we believe that the report is inaccurate in a number of aspects. It states, for example, that Principal Teacher release days are covered to the extent of 96% (Table 17). This is based on the stated “Total leave days” of just under 27,000. However, when one factors in all of the release days which are the entitlement of Principals in the three bands of school (which have varying release entitlements) the real total of leave days entitlement is over 44,000, as estimated by INTO. Therefore, the true percentage of days covered is more like 58%. The lack of availability of substitute teachers affects the take-up of substitutable days and distorts the accuracy of figures.
- INTO believes that in other respects also the statistics regarding substitution coverage understate the needs of schools. There is the further consideration that a number of categories of substitutable absence were removed during the recession. These cuts mean that children are without a class teacher in a number of cases – e.g. on the first day of a teacher’s illness leave absence, first day of family illness leave – which is totally unacceptable. A scenario where this and similar supply needs are included in projections would be appropriate. One situation where additional need will arise relates to the introduction of Parent’s Leave in 2019, with a government objective to increase this to nine weeks per parent.
- Table 13 shows that there were 15,471 substitutes available in 2017. However, the Table also shows that 5,070 of these substitutes worked on 9 days or fewer. It is reasonable to assume that these teachers were not really “available” for work and were simply obliging schools who were in difficulty. Indeed, one could argue that the same could be said of the additional 4,958 who worked on 10-49 days. This would give a total of 10,028 substitutes not available on a consistent basis. It is clear that these persons do not wish to sub for longer periods (given the demand for substitute teachers). The assumption (page 22) that all 15,471 subs are available for long-term work, to absorb changes to leave entitlements, is inaccurate. And the Report does not consider how many of the substitutes are retired teachers and whether this cohort can be relied on to continue subbing into the future.
- Overall, it is clear from an examination of the categories of leave covered by substitutes that many of those with low percentage coverage (20% or more days not covered) are short-term and short-notice leaves, such as antenatal visits/classes, professional development and self-certified sick leave. This underlines the need for

Supply Panels to be established on a nationwide basis in order to provide substitute cover for classes at relatively short notice. The Report itself confirms that there is “clearly unmet demand for substitute teachers” (p. 22) and references challenges around finding cover for maternity leave, sick leave and family-related leave. However, the Report does so without drawing the conclusion that the introduction of teacher supply panels is required to facilitate the efficient employment of substitute teachers and an effective system to ensure that children are not left without teachers.

- We would like to have clarified the statistics in Table 16 which indicate a decline in the percentage of long-term substitute teachers at primary level who convert to contract work (38% in 2017, for example, compared with 53% in 2014).
- As the Report acknowledges (p.24), further work is necessary in order to have a more complete picture of regional projections. INTO would welcome such further analysis.

Finally, INTO would welcome an opportunity to meet with the authors of this Report, and we request such a meeting. It is essential that policy decisions are underpinned by accurate and realistic statistics and assumptions, and we seek an opportunity to discuss the above points and these matters.

**INTO**

**20 December 2019**