



**Irish National Teachers' Organisation**  
***Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann***

Joint Committee on Education and Skills

Challenges facing our Island Schools  
**16<sup>th</sup> June 2017**

**INTO Submission**

## **Background**

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) represents over 40,000 teachers across the island of Ireland. In the Republic, it represents 33,600 teachers and principals in primary schools. INTO maintains a strong organising base at local level, with 160 branches throughout the 26 counties. The INTO, and primary teachers generally have strong links with their local communities. INTO has a proud tradition of not only representing teachers in relation to their terms and conditions, but also seeking to support and develop the schools in which they work, through improved staffing and funding.

Ireland's coastal islands form a rich part of the country's cultural heritage. There are approximately 30 inhabited islands off the coast of Ireland. There are currently 12 island primary schools located on 10 offshore islands off the coasts of Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Cork serving 203 pupils. (See Appendix A) A thirteenth island school, on Sherkin Island, closed in July 2016. All of the islands discussed are geographically isolated, face Atlantic waters and have ferry access to the mainland.

Primary schools on islands, as in many rural areas, have a key role in sustaining vibrant and viable local communities. The INTO has strongly argued the need to provide adequate support and resources to rural schools and to consider small schools not only on financial terms, but on the value they provide to areas where other facilities may be scarce. The INTO firmly believes that island populations deserve high quality, fully-resourced primary education available within their communities.

## **Teaching Allocation**

All of the island schools currently have a teaching staff of two or less. In Budget 2012, the Government announced an increase in the staffing schedule that targeted 2, 3 and 4 teacher schools. The appointment figure for a second teacher was to increase over 3 school years from 12 to 20, for the third teacher from 49 to 56 and the fourth teacher from 81 to 86. A resolution passed at INTO Congress 2012 condemned "the pressure that is being exerted on rural schools by the revised staffing schedule which will have the effect of making it very difficult for these schools to develop or even survive." The INTO demanded that the staffing schedule be immediately revised with particular reference to the protection of small schools. Following extensive INTO campaigning on the issue, there was a small reduction in appointment figures (to 19, 55 and 85 respectively) in Budget 2015. INTO calls for the immediate restoration of the 2011 staffing schedule for 2, 3, and 4 teacher schools of 12, 49 and 81 respectively for both appointment and retention of staff.

The INTO acknowledges the provision in Budget 2017 for one-teacher island schools. As of September 2017, where a school is the only primary school on an island, it can appoint a second teacher, regardless of pupil numbers. This is a welcome concession. The INTO has previously raised concerns that one-teacher schools can leave teachers professionally and socially isolated. Having one teacher as the sole adult in a school also raises health and safety and child welfare concerns. We understand that this arrangement will lead to an additional teacher for the primary schools on Tory Island and Inishturk.

Budget 2017 also included a provision for three-teacher island schools. In the event that a reduction in numbers meant that a school would lose its third teacher, Budget 2017 allowed the third teacher to be retained subject to the total number of students in the school being at least 45 and the school being the only one on the island. The largest island school currently has two teachers and an enrolment of 42 (as of September 2016) so this provision will not alter the teaching allocation of any of the schools.

## **Accessing and Retaining Teaching Staff**

In 1964, the Government introduced an island allowance as an incentive to teachers to take up teaching positions on islands. This allowance was abolished for all new appointees from 1 February 2012.

Eight of the island primary schools are also Gaeltacht schools. The additional allowance available to teachers in Gaeltacht schools was also abolished for new appointees from 2012. The INTO condemned these cuts and called for the immediate restoration of these allowances.

These allowances were an important incentive in recruiting teachers to island and Gaeltacht schools. Taking up a teaching post on an island involves either a significant upheaval in moving to the island or incurring a huge burden in travel time and cost in going to school.

Teachers deployed in shared posts on island schools have long travel times and increased costs which are not recognised in the time allocations for such posts.

Teachers in island schools, particularly where a school is the only one on an island, are at risk of becoming professionally isolated. Professional development is rarely, if ever, available on island itself and teachers must typically travel to the mainland to engage in training and upskilling. The INTO recommends that continuing professional development should be available to teachers on the islands or that funding be provided to facilitate the additional transport costs for island teachers attending training on the mainland.

The Boards of Managements of island schools also face unique and complex challenges. The INTO recommends that specific and targeted training should be provided to these Boards. Island schools could be brought together, where feasible, to avail of training specific to the management of island schools.

Special consideration should also be given to redeployment of teachers to or from island schools. Teachers being redeployed from the main panel must accept a formal offer of a job within 45km of their original school. The redeployment process, however, makes no distinction between distance travelled by road and that travelled by sea. Tory Island, for example, is 11km from the mainland but the ferry journey to the island takes approximately an hour and varies with changes in weather conditions. A teacher redeployed up to 45km to or from the island would have a considerably longer commute than a teacher travelling up to 45km by road only.

The principals in all of the island schools are teaching principals. The INTO recognises the multifarious duties of a teaching principal and have long demanded an increase in principal release days to one per week. The INTO also demands the payment of the benchmarking award, recommended over ten years ago, to end inequality between primary and post-primary principals. The payment of this allowance would enhance recruitment to such posts.

## **Budgetary Matters**

A capitation grant is provided to each school to cover day-to-day running costs. In mainstream schools, the capitation grant is currently €170 per pupil per year. This payment of less than one euro per child per day is insufficient and unacceptable for any primary school. A resolution passed at the INTO Annual Congress in 2016 demanded that the “primary school capitation grant be increased in line with capitation grants at second level.”

We acknowledge that the minimum capitation grant to small schools is based on 60 pupils, but there are basic running costs such as heating and cleaning that exist regardless of school enrolment and many small schools

struggle to meet these costs. This difficulty is exacerbated on islands where costs are higher. The limited capitation grant means many primary schools throughout the country are forced to hold fundraisers to meet operational costs, but fundraising possibilities are limited for island schools by lower populations in the communities they serve.

For island schools there are additional costs to be factored into meeting pupils' educational needs. For example, the Aquatics strand, an obligatory part of the PE curriculum, is not grant-funded. In order to fully deliver the curriculum, schools must pay for ferry transport, in addition to the buses hired by most schools, to access swimming pools on the mainland. Ferry costs must also be factored into any educational outings, school tours or attendance at inter-school activities such as sports tournaments or debating competitions. The INTO calls for an increase in the capitation grant which would ensure that island schools, and their pupils, are not disadvantaged or forced to continuously fundraise to meet the costs of delivering high-quality education.

Island schools, given their location, are particularly exposed to elements and, subsequently, to accelerated building wear and tear. The cost of doing repairs on islands is increased as building materials and labour, when not available on the island, must be sourced on the mainland and transported via ferry to the school. The Minor Works Grant available to schools for the completion of minor repairs and the purchase of furniture and educational equipment is set at a standard rate of €5,500 basic grant plus €18.50 per mainstream pupil and €74 per special needs pupil. This set-rate grant does not consider that any furniture, photocopiers, computers or PE equipment purchased for island schools incur the additional costs associated with getting them to the island. The INTO, therefore, recommends an increase in the Minor Works Grant to allow for the higher cost of equipment and increased frequency of repairs on island schools.

## **Enrolment**

Figures from the Central Statistics Office indicate that in the five years between 2011 and 2016 the overall population of Ireland's islands dropped by 3%. (These figures include some islands that are attached to the mainland by road or causeway.)

The population change has varied across different age ranges. There was a general increase in the number of island inhabitants over 55 years old and a decrease in population numbers across every age range below that. The population of children less than 14 years old decreased by nearly 10% in the five-year period.

The enrolment numbers in island primary schools have fluctuated in the same period as can be seen in Appendix A.

Seven of the island schools had an increase in enrolments, three saw enrolment numbers drop and two schools had the same enrolment in 2016 as it had in 2011.

Given the natural fluctuations in population and the contribution that primary schools make to the vitality of an island community, it is important that a long-term view is taken when deciding the viability of an island school. Enrolment in a given year is not necessarily indicative of the future enrolment potential of that school and consideration must be given to the broader picture and the community's needs.

## **Gaeltacht Schools**

As previously stated, eight of the island schools are also Gaeltacht schools. The INTO believes that special consideration, and favourable retention figures, should be given to schools serving Gaeltacht communities.

Tá ceist na teanga sa Ghaeltacht leochaileach go leor agus tá sé an-tábhachtach go dtabharfaí gach tacaíocht do na scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht plé leis an gcomhthéacs casta teanga ina bhfuil siad ag feidhmiú. Tá taighde déanta, tuarascálacha scríofa agus moltaí curtha chun cinn cheana maidir le cúrsaí oideachais i limistéir Ghaeltachta, agus tá sé in am gníomh anois. Tá cúram ar an Roinn Oideachais a chinntiú go bhfeidhmíonn an córas oideachais ar mhaithe leis an nGaeilge agus le pobal na Gaeltachta seachas a mhalairt. Tá práinn leis an obair seo ó tharla go bhfuil daonra na gcainteoirí dúchais ag titim agus go bhfuil próifíl teangeolaíoch sna ceantair Ghaeltachta éagsúla ag síor athrú. Tá cúram ar leith ar na scoileanna atá lonnaithe sa Ghaeltacht de réir An Achta Oideachais 1998 cuidiú chun an Ghaeilge a choinneáil mar phríomhtheanga an phobail. Aithníonn Acht na Gaeltachta 2012 gurb iad na scoileanna atá mar chroí chuid den tacaíocht atá de dhíth chun cur le húsáid na Gaeilge i measc an phobail Ghaeltachta. Ní mór gach tacaíocht a chur ar fáil do na scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht chun a chur ar a gcumas ard chaighdeán oideachais a sholáthar don phobal.

### **DEIS Status for Island Schools**

Eight of the island primary schools are currently classified as DEIS Rural schools.

The Department of Education & Skills DEIS programme aims to provide support to schools with high levels of disadvantage and, as a result, improve educational outcomes for pupils in these schools. Supports available to DEIS Rural Schools include additional grant aid, enhanced rate of funding under the Schools Book Grant Scheme and priority access to schools meals programmes.

When the programme was first implemented, DEIS Rural schools had access to a rural co-ordinator serving a cluster of schools. Where clustering wasn't an option, DEIS rural schools were granted additional financial supports to aid with school planning, the implementation of measures to improve literacy and numeracy and to facilitate building strong links between home, school and the community. Under the National Recovery Plan 2011-2014, rural co-ordinators were withdrawn from schools effective from 31 August 2011. The INTO Central Executive Committee deplored the removal of these and other resources which were "relied on by schools to enhance the learning of the most vulnerable pupils in our primary schools." INTO called for the "return of the rural coordinator role to schools banded as Rural DEIS," as per a resolution passed at INTO Congress 2016.

### **Conclusion**

The Department of Education and Skills' Value for Money Review of Small Primary Schools, completed in 2013, stated that "The Department of Education and Skills supports a number of small primary schools.., that are mainly located in rural areas, so that children of primary school age are enabled to attend a local school without having to travel excessive distances and are able to benefit from the same quality of education as those pupils attending schools of a larger size... Through benefiting from quality education, pupils in small primary schools are then enabled to develop to their full potential and thereby contribute to the economy and wider society." The INTO fully supports this view and is therefore committed to ensuring that island schools are properly staffed, resourced and funded to ensure that they can continue to contribute to vibrant local communities. We look forward to engaging further with the Joint Committee on this matter.

**Appendix 1**  
From DES Statistical Reports

	School Name	Location	Roll Number	DEIS?	Gaeilge	Number of mainstream teachers 2015/16	Enrolment 2016	Enrolment 2015/16	Enrolment 2014/15	Enrolment 2013/14	Enrolment 2012/13	Enrolment 2011/2012
1	Scoil Mhichil Naofa	Bere Island, Bantry, Co Cork	19525R	Y	N	2	20	18	19	20	22	23
2	Scoil Naisiúnta Cléire	Cape Clear, Skibbereen, Co Cork	14303U	Y	Y	2	14	13	15	12	14	8
3	Scoil Naomh Cholmcille	Tory Island	05164I	Y	Y	1	7	9	10	11	9	6
4	Arainn Mhór I	Arranmore Island, Donegal	15955W	Y	Y	2	18	25	31	36	41	43
5	Arainn Mhór II	Arranmore Island, Donegal	16384K	Y	Y	1	16	15	12	12	10	12
6	Scoil Ronain	Inis Mór, Arainn, Co Galway	17456O	N	Y	2	42	37	34	36	41	42
7	SN Eoin Pól II	Inis Mór, Arainn, Co Galway	20210W	N	Y	2	17	21	20	21	23	16
8	SN Caomhain	Inis Oirthir, Arainn, Co Galway	17289V	Y	Y	2	24	25	18	16	17	17
9	SN Inis Meadhoin	Inis Meain, Arainn, Co Galway	12339I	N	Y	2	8	8	3	5	8	6
10	Inishbofin NS	Inishbofin, Co Galway	13927H	Y	N	2	12	11	12	17	17	15
11	St Columba's NS	Inishturk, Co Galway	13174H	Y	N	1	3	3	2	3	3	3
12	St Patrick's NS	Clare Island, Co Mayo	13311O	N	N	2	22	20	22	19	18	20
13	Sherkin Island NS	Sherkin Island, Co Cork	14065H	Closed 2016			Closed	2	4	12	6	12

**Appendix 2**  
From CSO.ie

**Population of Inhabited Islands Off the Coast 2011 to 2016 (Number) by Sex, Age Group and Census Year**

	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>
Both sexes		
All ages	9,029	8,756
0 - 4 years	449	387
5 - 9 years	518	448
10 - 14 years	568	550
15 - 19 years	584	491
20 - 24 years	463	429
25 - 29 years	442	406
30 - 34 years	496	441
35 - 39 years	543	495
40 - 44 years	573	538
45 - 49 years	640	580
50 - 54 years	682	610
55 - 59 years	671	672
60 - 64 years	648	673
65 - 69 years	568	655
70 - 74 years	404	534
75 - 79 years	355	351
80 - 84 years	231	277
85 years and over	194	219