



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Review of Class Size in DEIS Urban Band 1 Primary Schools

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Glossary of Terms

CHO – Community Healthcare Organisation

CPSMA – Catholic Primary School Management Association

CSL – Centre for School Leadership

DEIS - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DoE - Department of Education

EAL – English as an Additional Language Support

ERC – Educational Research Centre

HSCL – Home School Community Liaison

HSE – Health Service Executive

INTO – Irish National Teachers Organisation

IPPN – Irish Primary Principals’ Network

NCSE - National Council for Special Education

NEPS – National Educational Psychological Service

PATH – Programme for Access to Higher Education

POD – Primary Online Database

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SENO – Special Educational Needs Organiser

SET – Special Education Teacher

SSP – School Support Programme

Executive Summary

Following on from the review of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme, and the publication of the *Report on the Review of DEIS*, there was a recommendation in DEIS Plan 2017 to evaluate the level of teaching resources for schools participating in the programme to inform future policy in this area. A Working Group on Class Size was established with representatives from various education partners, the Educational Research Centre and relevant Units from within the Department of Education (DoE) to consider this issue.

The analysis for this report was carried out before the onset of the Covid19 pandemic and its subsequent effect on how education has been delivered. Therefore there are no references to the utilisation of remote learning during school closures or the additional supports provided to schools in September 2020 to facilitate their reopening.

Based on the discussions of the working group and further internal research and consideration, the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department has prepared this report.

The report sets out the available research and evidence on the effect of class size reduction as a method for tackling educational disadvantage. Overall, evidence points to a modest increase in academic achievement with reduced class size, with the benefits being felt to a greater degree in junior classes. However, pupils from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds have been shown to benefit from smaller classes more than other groups.

Class size cannot be looked at in isolation and it is evident that the importance of leadership in the school, expectations for students, parental engagement and the training, skills and teaching approaches of teachers should not be underestimated. The overall package of supports provided to DEIS schools also needs to be taken into consideration which includes a DEIS grant, enhanced book grant and access to the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, the School Completion Programme and the School Meals Programme.¹ The report also sets out the developments in the education sector in supporting those students with special needs with the introduction of the Special Education Teaching allocation model since 2017 which underpins the allocation of over 13,500 special education teachers in mainstream settings. Other issues which have to be factored in to any recommendations on reduced class size include projected school enrolments, teacher supply and associated costs.

Statistical data illustrates the current class size in DEIS Urban Band 1 primary schools², with almost half having an average class size of 19 pupils or less. It is also worthwhile to note that this refers to mainstream classroom teachers only and there are a further 1,200 resource posts in the 229 Band 1 schools as well as other teaching posts. The current position in relation to legacy posts and support teacher posts is discussed with a review underway in relation to the support teachers. Legacy posts may be considered in terms of a future allocation model, but there are no proposed reductions or alterations for 2022 in respect of these posts.

While some education partners have called for a reduction in class size to 15:1 for junior classes and 18:1 for senior classes for all Urban Band 1 primary schools, there is insufficient evidence (as set out in the report) to justify implementing this reduction across the board. However, it is evident from the findings of this report that, for those schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage, a

¹ Full list of supports contained in Appendix 1

² Hereinafter referred to in this report as DEIS Band 1 schools

reduction in class size, with a focus on junior classes, should form part of the overall consideration of DEIS resource allocation.

Section 1 - Context and Background

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), is the Department of Education's (DoE) main policy instrument aimed at tackling educational disadvantage. The plan sets out the Department's vision for education to more fully become a proven pathway to better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion.

The 2005 *DEIS - An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion* (DEIS Action Plan), provided for the introduction of a *"new integrated School Support Programme which will bring together, and build upon, existing interventions for schools and school clusters/communities with a concentrated level of educational disadvantage. The differences between urban and rural disadvantage will be taken into account in targeting actions under the programme"* (Department of Education and Skills 2005 p 5). The development of an integrated support programme was based on the principle of the whole school approach to the provision of services to address educational disadvantage and underpinned by action planning for improvement by individual schools under their DEIS School Action Plan.

One of the key supports provided in the DEIS Action Plan in 2005 was a reduced class size for Urban Band 1 DEIS primary schools. It stated that *"maximum class sizes will be reduced to 20:1 in all junior classes (junior infants through 2nd class) and 24:1 in all senior classes (3rd class through 6th class) for the 150 urban/town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage"* (Department of Education and Skills 2005 p 8). Currently this reduced class size is applied to all 229 Urban Band 1 primary schools. It is also worth noting that a further measure to support all DEIS urban primary schools was the allocation of administrative principals on lower enrolment and staffing figures than apply in primary schools generally.

1.1 DEIS Review

Recent reports indicate that DEIS is having a positive effect on tackling educational disadvantage for the majority of young people. In its report on the most recent results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) the Educational Research Centre notes that at post-primary level, there is evidence of a narrowing of the achievement gap in reading between students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools over time (Gilleece et al. 2020). Findings from PISA also provide evidence of a reduction in the percentage of low achievers in mathematics at post-primary level between 2012 and 2018. Ongoing evaluations of the DEIS Programme have shown an improvement in educational outcomes, literacy and numeracy rates, and attendance and retention rates (Weir et al. 2010; Weir & McAvinue 2012; Weir et al. 2017). However, it is also evident that a gap still remains between DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

In order to provide a renewed approach to DEIS, a review of the programme was initiated in 2015 following the publication of the Department of Education commissioned Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) Report *"Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS"* (Smyth et al. 2015) and a DEIS Review Advisory Group was established on foot of this to review the DEIS School Support Programme. After a comprehensive and extensive process of consultations with relevant stakeholders (including education partners, academics, practitioners and students), recommendations on a new framework of supports were put forward. The objective of the review was to develop a new methodology for the identification of schools and a renewed framework of supports for schools to tackle educational disadvantage. This resulted in the publication of the Report on the Review of DEIS and DEIS Plan 2017 in February 2017.

The review examined all aspects of DEIS, including the range and impacts of different elements of the supports provided under DEIS, the potential for innovation within and between schools and the scope for increased integration of services provided by other Departments and Agencies in order to improve the effectiveness of the range of interventions deployed.

One proposal emerging during the consultation process was for a further reduction in class size in DEIS primary schools, in particular a reduction to a ratio of 15:1 in DEIS Band 1 primary schools. In considering this, the Advisory Group noted the following (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p. 49-50):

- *“While the allocation of additional teaching resources had served to improve learning outcomes, achievement levels in these schools were still low and warranted a continuation of current supports.*
- *Many DEIS schools hold legacy and other posts additional to their general allocation creating an inequity between these schools and schools, which did not exist when those earlier schemes were in place, although they may now serve the same pupil cohort.*
- *Early years education provision has improved considerably since 2005 with children now more likely to be more school-ready than had previously been the case.*
- *The Programme for Government commitment at that time which stated that ‘smaller classes, for junior and senior infants in particular, are proven to increase pupil achievement, especially for disadvantaged children’.*
- *Input from education partners at primary level which suggested a class size of 15:1 for DEIS Band 1 schools.*
- *The difficulty in determining an optimum class size”.*

Following on from this, the group made two recommendations in relation to class size (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a, p. 51):

- *“A new Monitoring and Evaluation Framework should include evaluation of the level of teaching resources for schools participating in the SSP [School Support Programme] to inform future policy in this area.*
- *Pending any change to the recommended teacher allocation for urban primary schools supporting the highest levels of pupils at risk of educational disadvantage, the current recommended class size for these schools should apply”.*

1.2 DEIS Plan 2017

DEIS Plan 2017 (Department of Education and Skills, 2017b) is based on five key goals. Its aim is for the Irish education system to become the best in Europe at harnessing education to break down barriers, by equipping learners to contribute effectively to society. The DEIS Plan presents an ambitious set of objectives and actions to support children who are at greatest risk of educational disadvantage. The core elements of the plan comprise:

- A new methodology for the identification of schools. Previously, levels of disadvantage were measured using survey instruments at primary level. Improved centrally held data which are updated following each Census and subjected to rigorous quality checks means that we now have an objective way of measuring levels of disadvantage of all primary and post-primary schools, which is more responsive to demographic and other changes.

- A new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which brings together and builds upon existing interventions for schools and school clusters/communities with a concentrated level of educational disadvantage.

In the 2020/21 school³ year there were 887 schools in the DEIS Programme serving over 185,000 pupils. The breakdown is as follows:

Number of DEIS School by DEIS Band for 2020/21 School Year	
Primary DEIS Band 1	229
Primary DEIS Band 2	104
Primary Rural	356
Post Primary	198

Figure 1.1 Number of DEIS Schools by DEIS Band for the 2020/21 school year

The total Department annual spend on DEIS is over €150million. Additional funding of over €60 million is provided from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for the School Meals Programme. The full list of resources and supports provided to DEIS Schools is at Appendix 1.

1.3 Class Size Working Group

Under the DEIS Plan, *Goal 2 – To improve the learning experience and outcomes of pupils in DEIS schools*, consideration is given to additional teaching resources. Action 27 (Department of Education and Skills 2017b, p33) states “Evaluation of the level of teaching resources for schools participating in the SSP to be undertaken within the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to inform future policy in this area”.

To facilitate this, a Class Size Working Group was established comprising representatives from the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO), Irish Primary Principals’ Network (IPPN), Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA), An Foras Patrúnachta, the Educational Research Centre (ERC), the Inspectorate and other relevant units from within the Department of Education. Appendix 2 shows the Terms of Reference of the group, which met on four separate occasions with further work being undertaken by members outside of these meetings.

While the core work of the group was to consider the optimum class size for DEIS schools, it could not be considered in isolation given there are many other areas which require consideration in terms of contributing to effective learning and improved educational outcomes in the classroom. It is also the case that a reduced class size is just one of the many supports provided to DEIS Band 1 primary schools and thus, as referenced in the ESRI Report, *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS* (Smyth et al. 2015, p.viii) “the provision of additional funding and multi-faceted supports makes it difficult to disentangle which elements of the programme work best. It is likely that any effects reflect the comprehensive package of supports put in place”.

³ Data analysis carried out later in the report uses data from 2018/19 school year. Any difference in school numbers is due to closures/amalgamations.

In line with the Terms of Reference for the Class Size Working Group⁴, the objective of this report is to look at the available evidence as to the optimum class size for DEIS schools, taking into account the current situation in DEIS schools and the education system in general and to make recommendations to the DEIS Steering Group based on this⁵.

One point worth noting is that class size refers to the number of students ordinarily in a classroom, while pupil-teacher ratio indicates the number of students enrolled relative to total teaching posts, and this includes teaching staff not assigned to classrooms. Pupil-teacher ratio therefore reflects more than the class size: it also reflects overall staffing resources within a school and the level of professional input possible in students' learning.

The focus of this report is on **class size**, i.e. number of students ordinarily in a classroom.

It is also important to note that the analysis for this report was carried out before the onset of the Covid19 pandemic and its subsequent effect on the delivery of education. Therefore there are no references to the utilisation of remote learning during school closures or the additional supports provided to schools in September 2020 to facilitate reopening.

⁴ The terms of reference for the class size working group are detailed at Appendix 2.

⁵ As previously referenced this report was prepared in early 2020 and does not take account of the additional resources and support provided in terms of supporting schools throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Section 2 – Research and Evidence on the effectiveness of class size reduction as a strategy to address educational disadvantage⁶

Measures to reduce class size are based on the premise that smaller classes create an advantage for students that can narrow achievement gaps via increased capacity on the part of the teacher to manage and engage the class overall (fewer disciplinary issues) and to provide tailored individual or small group teaching and learning. The issue of the impact of class size on pupil achievement is one of the most widely researched topics in education. Until the 1970s, studies of its effects tended to take the form of small-scale experimental studies and informal reviews. Eventually, the development of more sophisticated meta-analytic techniques permitted the results of a variety of early class size reduction studies to be synthesised. This led to several broad conclusions. First, reducing class size (to fewer than 20 pupils) was associated with modest increases in academic achievement. Second, the benefits were greater in earlier grades. Third, pupils from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds benefited most from small classes (Glass & Smith 1979; Robinson 1990). Also, according to more recent research (Hanushek & Woessmann 2017), the international evidence overall provides little confidence that quantitative measures of expenditure and class size are a major driver of student achievement, across and within countries.

Since the mid-1950s in Ireland, the issue of class size (*i.e.* the number of students ordinarily in a classroom⁷) has been a regular feature on the educational agenda and reducing it a feature of educational policy (Weir et al. 2010).

Weir et al. (2017) review of the literature on reduced class size identified a body of research that indicated that, in some situations, reducing class size may be important in producing improvements in student achievement. The evidence indicated that smaller classes (fewer than 20 students) in the early grades may positively impact student outcomes, the effects can be long-term, and that effects are greatest for children from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds. Much of the evidence supporting the effectiveness of reduced class size has come from four large-scale evaluations of class size reduction programmes implemented in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s: Project STAR (Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio) in Tennessee; SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education) in Wisconsin; California's state-wide class size reduction initiative; and Florida's class size reduction programme.

Project STAR, implemented in the 1980s, has provided some of the most rigorous and widely cited evidence for the positive impacts of reduced class size on student outcomes. Findings from a randomised controlled trial of Project STAR demonstrate that students in small classes outperformed students in regular classes, that the benefits were greatest for students in the first four years of schooling, and for students from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds (Mosteller 1995). These findings are consistent with results from an earlier meta-analysis of the effects of reduced class size, conducted by Glass and Smith (1979).

⁶ This section draws heavily on the earlier reviews of Kelleher and Weir (2017) and Weir et al. (2017).

⁷Class size is distinct from *student-teacher ratio*, which is a measure of the total number of students in a school at the end of the school year divided by the number of teaching posts in the school. Class size is the more accurate reflection of the everyday classroom context than is a student-teacher ratio. For example, in 2014/15, average class size in primary schools in Ireland (24.9) differed from student-teacher ratio (16.2) by 9 students (Department of Education and Skills 2015).

Throughout the past decade, the body of research on reducing class size to tackle educational disadvantage has grown. However, while many small-scale studies have been conducted, no large-scale randomised controlled trial has been undertaken since Project STAR. Nonetheless, secondary analyses of data from Project STAR have provided further insights, and, together with a series of smaller-scale studies conducted internationally, have served to enhance our understanding of class size effects. Recent reviews have evaluated the research evidence to draw together the key findings about the effects of a smaller class size on student achievement. For example, Zyngier (2014) conducted a systematic review of 112 studies undertaken internationally from 1979 to 2014, to assess the evidence for class size reduction effects, particularly for children from culturally, linguistically, and economically disadvantaged communities. In addition, Schanzenbach (2014) reviewed the academic literature on class size effects, focusing on Project STAR and various quasi-experimental studies conducted internationally, while Shin and Chung (2009) completed a meta-analysis involving 17 impact studies of class size effects conducted in the United States. These syntheses have produced findings consistent with the earlier review by Archer and Weir (2005), earlier work by Glass and Smith (1979), and findings from Project STAR.

2.1 Effects of Reduced Class Size

The research evidence indicates that children perform better in smaller classes, especially in the earlier grades (Schanzenbach 2014; Shin & Chung 2009; Zyngier 2014), and that the number of students in a class should be fewer than 20 in order to maximise the beneficial effects (Glass & Smith 1979; Zyngier 2014). The achievement of students in small classes tends to be 0.15 to 0.20 standard deviations above the achievement of students in regular classes (Glass & Smith 1979; Molner et al. 1999; Mosteller 1995; Shin & Chung 2009). For example, in Project STAR, classes containing an average of 15 students had average mathematics and reading scores that were 0.15 to 0.20 standard deviations higher than in classes with an average of 22 students (Word et al. 1990).

Findings from the literature also indicate that the small class size effect decreases as grade level increases, indicating that reduced class size can be most effective in the early grades, and in particular, in the first four years of schooling (Shin & Chung 2009). The longer that children are exposed to small class sizes in the early grades, the greater the benefits in later grades (Zyngier 2014). Moreover, achievement gains made as a result of long-term exposure to small class size persist even when students are later exposed to standard class sizes (Zyngier 2014). For example, using data from Project STAR, Finn et al. (2001) demonstrated that, when returned to standard classes in later grades, students who were in small classes in the early grades performed better than students who had been in standard classes in the early grades. Enduring effects in later grades were observed for students who had been in small classes for three to four years, while the benefits were greatest for students who had attended small classes for the first four years. These students demonstrated achievement gains of almost a whole school year, when compared to their peers who had attended standard classes during the first four years. Findings from quasi-experimental studies have also indicated performance gains for students in smaller classes in later primary school (Angrist & Lavy 1999; Fredriksson et al 2013), especially for disadvantaged students (Angrist & Lavy 1999). However, more research is needed before definitive conclusions can be drawn about the impact on older primary level students (Schanzenbach 2014; Zyngier 2014).

While all students benefit from small class sizes in the early grades, research consistently indicates that students from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds benefit most (Glass & Smith 1979; Schanzenbach 2014; Zyngier 2014). Data from Project STAR demonstrate that the small class size

advantage for students from minority backgrounds is about two to three times that for other students (Finn & Achilles 1999). Evidence further indicates that achievement gains made by students from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds placed in small classes in the early grades are retained over subsequent years (Zyngier 2014). For example, using data from Project STAR, Nye et al. (2004) demonstrated that for students from minority backgrounds, small classes in the first four years of schooling have a significant, positive effect on achievement over the following five years. Analyses of Project STAR data also demonstrate that for students from disadvantaged backgrounds especially, exposure to small classes in the early years increases the likelihood of high-school graduation (Finn et al. 2005) and college enrolment (Dynarski, et al. 2013).

An important issue that arises in discussions of class size reductions is whether or not there is an optimal class size for beneficial effects on student achievement. Reviews of the evidence suggest that class size should be fewer than 20 students in order to maximise the beneficial effects (Glass & Smith 1979; Zyngier 2014). While it is sometimes assumed that 20 is the upper threshold, Blatchford et al. (2011) pointed out that this is based on research such as Project STAR, in which 20 was simply the midpoint of the class sizes compared. In their study, Blatchford et al. (2011) were unable to determine specific class sizes above or below which beneficial effects were likely to occur. The authors concluded that class size thresholds must be considered alongside other important factors such as teachers' beliefs and practices, and their experiences of various class sizes. Zyngier (2014, p.16) concluded from his review that 'when it is planned thoughtfully and funded adequately, long-term exposure to small classes in the early grades generates substantial advantages for students and those extra gains are greater the longer students are exposed to those classes'.

2.2 Unintended consequences

Poorly planned class size reduction interventions, however, can have unintended negative consequences (Chingos 2013; Ready 2008). First, universal class size reduction policies, such as California's state-wide class reduction initiative, can reduce the supply of quality teachers to disadvantaged schools by creating competition between schools for qualified teachers (Jepsen & Rivkin 2009). As a result, students in disadvantaged schools may be exposed to the least qualified and least experienced teachers, and so will not gain fully from a reduced class size (Jepsen & Rivkin 2009). Second, universal class size reduction policies inadvertently incentivise the use of multi-grade classes in schools, as schools may establish such classes in an attempt to reduce costs, while fulfilling class size reduction obligations (Sims 2008). In analysing the California policy, Sims (2008) identified that multi-grade classes produced negative effects on student achievement, which cancelled out any positive impacts of the reduced class size. Therefore, as a result of the policy, students were, in fact, 'worse off in achievement terms' (Sims 2008, p.477). In addition, Sims found evidence that schools serving greater concentrations of disadvantaged students were more severely impacted by multigrade classes, despite being no more likely than other schools to establish them. Third, as observed with both the California and Florida universal class size reduction programmes, such reductions in class size put pressure on resources such as space and facilities and can lead to overcrowding. These difficulties disproportionately impact low-income and racial minority students (Ready 2008).

2.3 Effective class size reduction

The lessons learned from the California and Florida initiatives highlight that policy in the area of class size reduction must be viewed within the wider educational policy context. As Chingos (2013, p. 425)

noted, 'education initiatives do not operate in a vacuum. Policies designed to affect one dimension of a students' educational experience are likely to affect others as well' Therefore, to be effective, class size reduction needs to be planned carefully. Overall, according to Chingos (2013), the evidence supports the targeting of class size reduction policy to where it is most effective – at younger children in schools with high levels of disadvantage. Alongside this, he states that adequate support and development for teachers and adequate resourcing for schools must be provided to ensure the maximum benefits of class size reduction are achieved.

The effects of a reduced class size can be lasting and can be observed for a variety of life course outcomes (Schanzenbach 2014). Research indicates that students exposed to small classes fare better than their contemporaries exposed to regular classes on a variety of social, economic, and educational outcome indicators (Chetty et al. 2011; Dynarski et al 2013; Finn et al. 2005; Krueger 1999; Krueger & Whitmore 2001; Krueger & Whitmore 2002). In particular, long-term attendance in small classes impacts a range of educational outcomes beyond standardised test results (Zyngier 2014), such as levels of school completion and college enrolment.

Few studies have explicitly sought to address the question of why students perform better in small classes than in regular classes. However, the available research suggests that smaller class sizes may impact student achievement through such factors as increased individualised instruction, improved teacher-student interactions, better classroom management, and increased interaction among students (e.g. Blatchford et al. 2004; Graue et al. 2007). The evidence strongly implicates classroom behaviour and particularly student engagement behaviours as mediating the relationship between class size and student achievement (Zyngier 2014). Data from Project STAR indicate that students are more engaged in small classes and their behaviour is less disruptive (Finn et al. 2003). In addition, students spend more time on task, while teachers spend less time on classroom management and more time on teaching (Graue et al. 2007). Students in small classes also continue to have higher engagement in subsequent grades (Finn 1997).

However, the evidence suggests that teachers need to adopt teaching practices that are appropriate for small classes in order to maximise the beneficial effects of a reduced class size (Zyngier 2014). According to Hattie (2005, p.417), 'teaching practices that are conducive to successful student learning are more likely to occur in smaller, rather than larger classes'. Hattie's research noted that teachers are not necessarily equipped with these practices when assigned to smaller classes. A potential difficulty, therefore, arises where teachers fail to adapt their methods when moving from large to small classes, which may occur if teachers are ill-equipped, lack experience, or are unwilling to adapt. Evidence suggests that the performance of students is higher with more experienced teachers (Krueger 1999), while new teachers can reduce student achievement by about the same amount as class size reduction enhances it (Jepsen & Rivkin 2009). Schools with high concentrations of students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds often have the least qualified and least experienced teachers, thus limiting their ability to maximise the benefits of a reduced class size (Jepsen & Rivkin 2009). Therefore, while class size reductions provide opportunities to use more effective teaching methods, teachers need both time and support to develop and implement new techniques (Bascia & Faubert 2012). However, in Ireland there is a very high standard of entrants to the teaching profession which is widely recognised and there is no specific evidence that the effectiveness of teaching methods is an issue in Ireland.

While expenditure and class size cannot account for the cross-country variation in educational achievement, several studies have found positive associations of student achievement with the quality of the instructional material and the quality of the teaching force. Hattie (2015b) also adopts the same view saying that typically expensive proposals such as lower class size, have minimal effect on improving student learning and what should be focused on is the variability in the effectiveness

of teachers and to reduce this by ensuring teachers and school leaders work together on common understandings about progress and high expectations for the impact of their teaching. He terms this the politics of collaborative expertise and believes all students deserve a year's progress from a year's input no matter where they start.

2.4 Teaching Methods and Class Size

There is some evidence that class size makes a difference to the approach taken by teachers at primary level, with smaller class sizes allowing a greater focus on differentiated activities and group activities. In assessing the teaching approaches taken with classes of differing size, it is important to keep in mind that class size is correlated with other school characteristics, in particular DEIS status and school type (in terms of fee-paying status, language medium and gender mix). For example, the vast majority of children in DEIS Band 1 schools have class sizes of fewer than 25 pupils, whereas over three-quarters of children attending non-DEIS schools are in class sizes of greater than 25 pupils (with over one-third attending classes of greater than 30 pupils as set out in the next chapter).

Overall, the findings suggest that children in smaller class sizes may benefit in terms of the opportunity their teacher has to employ more active methods. The results point to the significance of class size for teaching approaches – with smaller classes allowing more active approaches while teachers of larger classes are more likely to take more traditional approaches, perhaps reflecting greater logistical and space constraints.

2.5 Research on Implementation of Reduced Class Size in DEIS Primary Schools

As part of the Educational Research Centre's (ERC) independent evaluation of DEIS, periodic studies have been undertaken in order to assess the extent to which the recommended junior class sizes under DEIS have been implemented. Most recently, Kelleher & Weir (2017) sought to assess the extent to which the recommended junior class sizes were achieved in DEIS Band 1 schools in 2014/15. They also sought to determine whether there had been any change to the level of positive discrimination towards junior classes in DEIS Band 1 schools that had been found in an earlier study of class size in DEIS Band 1 schools in 2009/2010 (Weir & McAvinue 2012) *i.e.* have schools prioritised lower class size at the junior classes.

The ERC analysis revealed a high level of implementation of the maximum class size policy under DEIS in 2014/15 and also indicated a class size advantage for junior classes in DEIS Band 1 schools over junior classes in urban non-DEIS schools. However, while there was clear evidence of positive discrimination towards DEIS Band 1 schools in terms of junior class size in 2014/15, a comparison of the data between 2009/10 and 2014/15 revealed some erosion of this positive discrimination over time. Specifically, average junior class sizes in DEIS Band 1 schools increased by 4.4% (or 0.8 of a student) between 2009/10 and 2014/15, while the corresponding increase for junior classes in urban non-DEIS schools was 1% (or 0.3 of a student). Also, the percentage of smaller junior classes (20 or fewer students) decreased in all DEIS Band 1 schools over time, with the very junior classes, particularly first class, most affected. In 2009/10, 72% of junior classes in DEIS Band 1 schools had 20 or fewer students, compared to 64% in 2014/15. The percentage of junior classes of 22 or fewer also decreased over time in DEIS Band 1 schools (from 89% in 2009/10 to 82% in 2014/15), while the percentage of larger classes (25 or more students) increased (from 4% in 2009/10 to 8% in 2014/15). Urban non-DEIS schools, in comparison, experienced marginal decreases in the percentages of junior

classes of 20 or fewer students (from 8% to 6%) and 22 or fewer students (14% to 12%), and a small increase in the percentage of junior classes of 25 or more students (75% to 77%). These findings provide further evidence of some erosion of positive discrimination over time for DEIS Band 1 schools.

In conclusion, junior classes in DEIS Band 1 schools were substantially smaller than junior classes in non-DEIS schools in 2014/15, confirming the positive impact of class size policy under DEIS. However, there is evidence of some erosion of positive discrimination since comparable analyses were undertaken on the size of classes in DEIS Band 1 schools in 2009/10.

2.6 Conclusion

The evidence suggests that class size reduction is an area where educational policy can have a definite positive impact on student outcomes if adequately resourced and implemented in a planned manner with junior classes prioritised. The recent literature is largely in agreement with the earlier literature in terms of conditions of effectiveness. Specifically, those most likely to benefit are children in the early grades and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Reductions in class size must be viewed within the wider educational policy context, and benefits are greatest when teachers are enabled to exploit the opportunities provided by small classes and have the necessary expertise as well as high expectations for their students. It is important to note that while the existing research referred to in this chapter is extremely informative, much of it, such as the STAR project was conducted in the USA, in disadvantaged communities and therefore the overall context needs to be taken into account given the high quality of teachers in this country. Further targeted research in the Irish context is required. Further national research on class size needs to take into account other relevant factors, including the overall quality of teaching, teaching and learning strategies, context of the school community, characteristics of students, and leadership and management, in order to help to establish the optimum class size and other conditions for teaching and learning.

Section 3 – Statistics on Class Size in DEIS Primary Schools

3.1 Allocation of Primary School Teachers by the Department of Education

The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30th September. The staffing schedule operates on the basis of enrolment bands.

The staffing schedule at primary level for ordinary schools currently operates on a general average of 26 pupils to every 1 teacher (26:1) as outlined in DoE Circular 0018/2020 (Department of Education 2020a). This is historically the lowest ever allocation ratio at primary level and delivers on a commitment made in the *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future* (Department of the Taoiseach 2020) to further reduce primary schools class size⁸.

Comparing Class Size in Ireland with International Markers			
	Ireland	OECD Average	EU Average
Average class size at primary level	24.5	21	20
Ratio of students to teaching staff	15.3	14.6	14

Figure 3.1⁹ International comparison of average class size and ratio of students to teaching staff using data from OECD report Education at a Glance 2020

Lower enrolment thresholds apply to DEIS Band 1 primary schools, 20:1, 24:1 and 22:1 for junior schools, senior schools and vertical schools respectively. It is important to note that the staffing schedule ratio is an overall classroom teacher allocation ratio and is not a reference to individual class size or average class size. The configuration of classes and the deployment of classroom teachers are done at local school level by the school principal.

School authorities are requested to ensure that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible, taking all relevant contextual factors into account (*e.g.* classroom accommodation, fluctuating enrolment *etc.*). However, school authorities should, where possible, use their autonomy under the staffing schedule to implement smaller class sizes for junior classes. DEIS Band 1 vertical schools should implement the recommended 20:1 ratio at junior level and 24:1 at senior level.

One of the major concerns which arose throughout the discussions of the Class Size Working Group was the fact that while the mainstream allocation has reduced in recent times to 26:1, there has been no corresponding decrease in the allocation to DEIS Band 1 schools, thus resulting in a smaller gap in teacher allocations between DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

⁸ Budget 2021 announced a further 1 point reduction in the staffing schedule in mainstream schools to 25:1. There will also be a 1 point reduction in the staffing schedule for Senior DEIS Band 1 schools, reducing to 23:1.

⁹ Based on OECD 2018 data (extract from Education at a Glance 2020, OECD: Available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0a184-education-at-a-glance-oecd-indicators-2020/>)

3.2 Current Provision of Class Size in DEIS primary schools

The policy to ensure DEIS Band 1 primary schools have a lower class size is a central element of the DEIS Programme. The original DEIS Plan contained a commitment to have maximum junior class sizes of 20 and maximum senior class sizes of 24 in urban primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. Urban Band 2 schools or rural schools did not receive any additional allocation to reduce class size and this is still the case. The fact that lower class sizes are not available in DEIS Band 2 schools arose in discussions of the Working Group as it was felt that many of these schools face similar pressures to those faced by DEIS Band 1 schools.

In order to streamline the teacher allocation process, a revised staffing schedule was introduced in 2012 for DEIS Band 1 schools. This provides for the application of the staffing schedule to accommodate class size of 20:1 at junior classes and 24:1 at senior (*i.e.* 20:1 in junior schools, 24:1 in senior schools and 22:1 in vertical schools). This is a lower enrolment threshold than the staffing schedule in other primary schools and there has been no change in the DEIS primary staffing schedule since 2012.

Staffing Schedule Ratio in DEIS Band 1 Primary Schools		
School Type	Class Size	Number of Schools 2018/19
Junior	20:1	32
Vertical	22:1	174
Senior	24:1	26

Figure 3.2 – Staffing schedule ratio in Junior, Vertical and Senior DEIS Band 1 primary schools as per Circular 0018/2020

While the staffing schedule is as set out above, the actual class size of some DEIS schools may not be accurately reflected given the existence of posts such as legacy posts and other additional mainstream teaching posts. Analysis has been carried out using data from the Primary Online Database system (POD), combined with teacher allocations data for the individual schools from the Department's Primary Teachers Database. The Department's Primary Teachers Database provides information on all posts allocated to each primary school.

3.3 Average Class Sizes

The Primary Online Database system provides information on class sizes, which is input directly by primary schools. The Department's Primary Teachers Database provides information on all posts allocated by the Department to each primary school.

The information provided by primary schools on the POD reports that 45% of class sizes in DEIS Band 1 schools are between 10 and 19 pupils with 43% of class sizes consisting of between 20 and 24 pupils. This figure includes mainstream classroom teachers only.

Primary Class sizes 2018/19					
Class Size	Non-DEIS	DEIS Rural	DEIS Band 1	DEIS Band 2	All Schools
0-9	0.7%	6.5%	0.5%	0.1%	1.0%
10-19	11.8%	30.4%	45.0%	17.3%	16.9%
20-24	25.4%	27.0%	42.0%	36.0%	28.0%
25-29	43.8%	26.2%	11.1%	36.9%	38.8%
30-34	17.5%	9.1%	1.3%	8.8%	14.7%
35-39	0.7%	0.6%	0.1%	0.8%	0.7%
Over 40	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%

Figure 3.3 –Average class sizes in both DEIS and non-DEIS primary schools using POD data

When the staffing schedule data from the Department’s Primary Teachers Database is analysed to include legacy and teaching principal posts, together with the mainstream class teacher posts the effective staffing schedule (i.e. pupil teacher ratio) in 98% of DEIS Band 1 schools is less than 24:1.

Overall Effective Staffing Schedule DEIS Band 1 2018/2019¹⁰

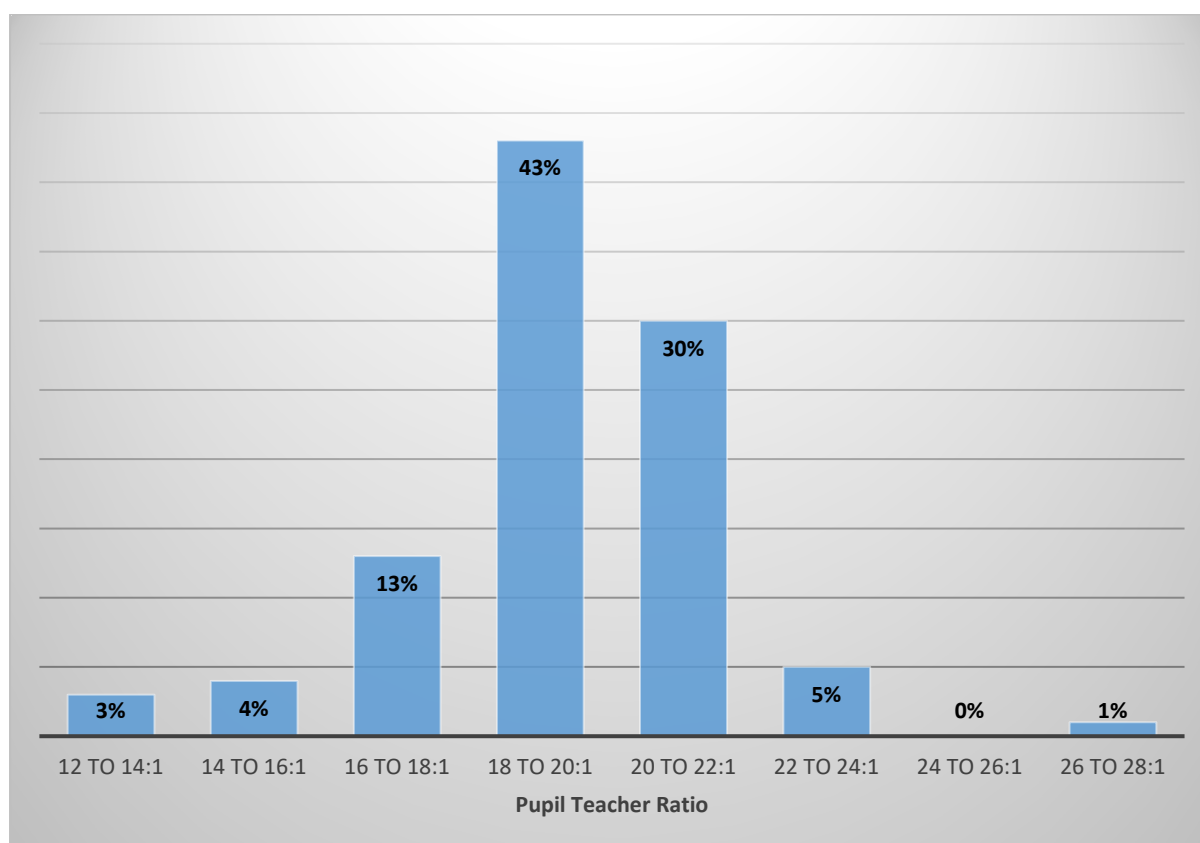


Figure 3.4 – Effective staffing schedule in DEIS Band 1 schools (including legacy and teaching principal posts) using Primary Teacher Database data

¹⁰ Overall staffing schedule calculated on mainstream class teacher, legacy posts and teaching principal post allocated 2018/19 school year

Further analysis of this data indicates that of the 232 DEIS Band 1 schools in 2018/19, 226 were operating within the recommended staffing schedule. The majority of schools were operating with a schedule of two points or lower than the recommended schedule providing the opportunity for lower class sizes. Further analysis will be required on the six instances which were above the recommended and provided for allocation.

DEIS Band 1 Staffing Schedule Analysis 2018/19				
Effective class size band	Junior	Vertical	Senior	Total
12 to 14:1	4	2	-	6
14 to 16:1	6	4	-	10
16 to 18:1	5	24	2	31
18 to 20:1	16	81	2	99
20 to 22:1	1	57	12	70
22 to 24:1	-	2	10	12
24 to 26:1	-	1	-	1
26 to 28:1	-	3	-	3

Figure 3.5 - Effective staffing schedule in DEIS Band 1 schools (including legacy and teaching principal posts) using Primary Teacher Database data

It is important to note that DEIS Band 1 schools also had an overall combined allocation of:

- over 1,200 resource posts under the new SEN model
- 156 special class teacher Posts
- 142 EAL posts
- over 1,200 special needs assistants.

Details in relation to class size of DEIS Band 2 schools, who operate under the mainstream staffing schedule, is attached at Appendix 3.

3.4 Junior Infant Classes

Evidence points to the fact that smaller class size is more effective in junior classes. Therefore, the current situation in relation to Junior Infants classes has been examined. Data reported on POD from DEIS primary schools reports that Junior Infant classes in DEIS Band 1 schools are smaller than the average class size across both schools in the other DEIS bands and non DEIS schools. 64% of DEIS Band 1 schools have Junior Infant classes with less than 20 pupils. In comparison, non-DEIS schools and DEIS Urban Band 2 schools have class sizes of 25 to 29 pupils at Junior Infants in over a quarter of their Junior Infant classes. While this data reflects the class sizes based on the mainstream classroom teacher per class, it does not account for any other posts which were allocated to the school and may be used to support the main classroom teacher and as already referred to, this should also be taken into consideration as it constitutes an additional support to the mainstream teacher and the school in general.

The teacher allocation for each primary school provides for a class size within the recommended ratios and school authorities are requested to ensure that the number of pupils in any class is kept as low as possible. The provision of a lower class size at the early stages of primary school is evident.

Data from the POD reports that pupils in DEIS Band 1 schools, on average enrol in primary school at a younger age than pupils in other categories of school. 60% of all junior infant pupils in DEIS Band 1 schools were aged four in September 2018. This reduces to just over 40% for pupils in DEIS Rural and non-DEIS schools, where the majority of junior infant pupils are five years old.

Junior Infant Class Sizes 2018/19					
Class Size	Non-DEIS	DEIS Rural	DEIS Band 1	DEIS Band 2	All Schools
0-9	1.76%	11.05%	0.54%	0.00%	2.38%
10-19	27.14%	44.19%	64.23%	25.70%	32.02%
20-24	33.38%	26.16%	32.79%	47.49%	33.33%
25-29	31.19%	14.83%	2.17%	25.70%	26.81%
30-34	6.34%	3.20%	0.27%	1.12%	5.26%
35-39	0.20%	0.58%	0.00%	0.00%	0.20%

Figure 3.6 – Junior infant class sizes in DEIS and non-DEIS schools using 2018/19 POD data

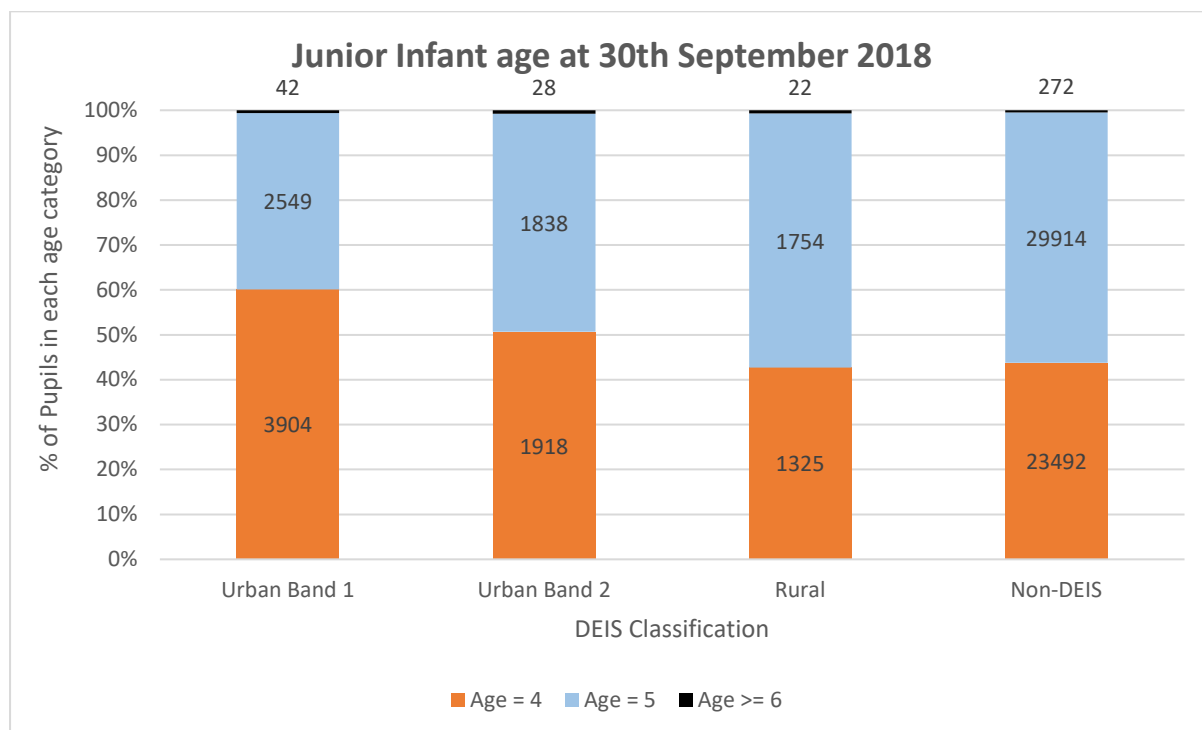


Figure 3.7 – The age of pupils in Junior Infants at 30th Sept 2018 using 2018/19 POD data

3.5 Class Size across Primary School Classes

Using the POD data DEIS Band 1 schools report class sizes of 5 to 6 pupils smaller than the national average across the different stages, accounting for class size increases as pupils progress through primary school grades. POD data also provides evidence of the preferential class size provided to DEIS Band 1 schools in comparison with primary schools in the other categories. Schools in all categories report a slight increase in class size as pupils progress through the primary school classes.

Class Sizes across Primary School Classes in DEIS schools

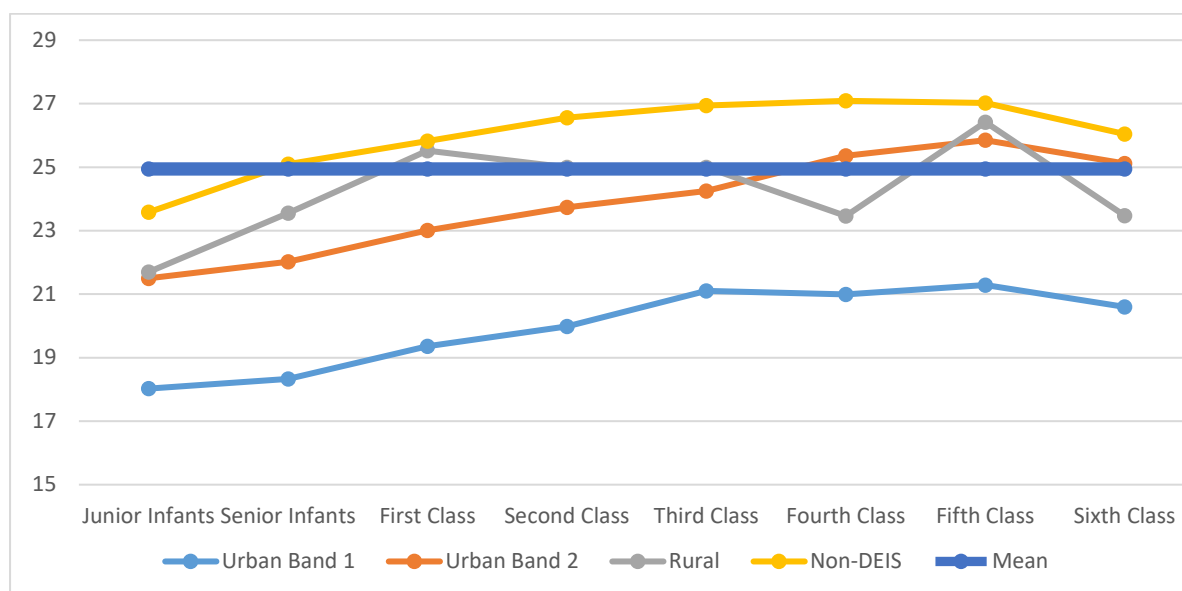


Figure 3.8 Average class sizes across all primary schools class by DEIS Band using 2018/19 POD data

3.6 Class Sizes by the Total Enrolment of School

The POD data reports that when schools of similar total enrolment are compared, a similar pattern of class size differentiation is reported. In junior classes, DEIS Band 1 schools report a lower average in all cases. DEIS Band 1 schools report an average class size in junior classes of 20 or less when overall school enrolment is 500 pupils or less.

Average Class Size by Total Enrolment of Primary School – Junior Classes 2018/19				
Total Enrolment	Average Class Size			
	DEIS Band 1	DEIS Band 2	DEIS Rural	Non-DEIS
0-99	17	22	16	18
100-199	18	23	24	25
200-299	19	22	26	26
300-399	20	22	26	25
400-499	19	24	23	26
500-599	21	23		26
600-699				26
700-799	22			27
800-899	21	26		27
900-999		25		29
1000-1100				28

Figure 3.9 Average class size by the total enrolment of DEIS primary school using 2018/19 POD data – Junior classes only

At the senior grade classes, the trend for a lower average in DEIS Band 1 schools continues when compared with schools of similar size across the other categories. Data from POD shows us that, in general, class sizes increase at the senior grades and the gap in average class size between DEIS Band 1 schools and the other categories remains similar, regardless of the overall enrolment of the school.

Average Class Size by Total Enrolment of Primary School – Senior Classes 2018/19				
Total Enrolment	Average Class Size			
	DEIS Band 1	DEIS Band 2	DEIS Rural	Non-DEIS
0-99	18	22	18	20
100-199	20	24	26	26
200-299	21	26	27	27
300-399	22	26	25	27
400-499	23	26	28	28
500-599	22	24	-	27
600-699	-	-	-	27
700-799	23	-	-	28
800-899	24	27	-	27
900-999	-	27	-	28
1000-1100	-	-	-	27

Figure 3.10 Average class size by the total enrolment of DEIS primary school using 2018/19 POD data – Senior classes only

3.7 Legacy Posts

Background

Teaching posts referred to as “legacy posts” are posts that were allocated to schools under pre-DEIS programmes aimed at tackling educational disadvantage such as Breaking the Cycle, Giving Children an Even Break and the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme. Following the introduction of DEIS in 2006, these posts were retained in a number of schools in addition to the general staffing allocations to all DEIS schools.

Budget 2012 provided for the phased withdrawal of approximately 428 of these legacy posts, which were spread across 173 DEIS Band 1 and Band 2 primary schools, 163 post primary schools, 16 rural DEIS primary schools and 17 Non-DEIS schools. Following representations made by, and on behalf of schools and their representatives, the impact of the withdrawal of these legacy posts from DEIS Band 1 and DEIS Band 2 primary schools was examined and a report was published by the Department of Education in February 2012.

On the basis of this report, the Government agreed on a concessionary basis that 140 DEIS Band 1 and DEIS Band 2 primary schools would retain their entitlement to implement more favourable pupil teacher ratios from the previous disadvantage schemes for the 2012/13 school year. However, the retention of these posts was on the basis that they would be subsumed into schools staffing complements as and when enrolments rose.

Current Situation

Following the announcement of the review of the DEIS programme in 2015, the Minister for Education and Skills decided to pause the process of subsuming these posts until the review was complete. This situation is still the case and no legacy posts have been subsumed into the mainstream allocation in any school since that time.

Consequently, there are currently 144 legacy posts in the system at a total cost of €8.65 million per annum¹¹. These posts are spread across 88 schools (73 posts in 47 DEIS Band 1 and 71 posts in 41 DEIS Band 2). In terms of DEIS Band 1 Schools, the number of legacy posts held in individual schools ranges from 1 post to 7 posts. The number of legacy posts held by individual DEIS Band 2 schools ranges from 1 post to 4 posts. In the majority of cases, these posts are being used to reduce overall class size.

Legacy Teaching Posts in DEIS Band 1 schools	
Number of schools	Number of Legacy post
29	1
14	2
3	3
1	7
Total - 47	Total Legacy Posts – 73

Figure 3.11 Number of DEIS Band 1 schools with Legacy Teaching Posts 2019/20 school year

Legacy Teaching Posts in DEIS Band 1 schools	
Number of schools	Number of Legacy post
21	1
13	2
4	3
3	4
Total - 41	Total Legacy Posts - 71

Figure 3.12 Number of DEIS Band 1 schools with Legacy Teaching Posts 2019/20 school year

The situation with regards to legacy posts presents a tension between overall equity on one hand, and maintaining stability in existing resources for those schools which have these legacy posts, on

¹¹ Refers to school year 2019/20 school year

the other. As referenced in the Report on the Review of DEIS (Department of Education and Skills 2017a), the equity of how these legacy posts are allocated needs to be considered given that schools, which did not exist when those earlier schemes were in place, but may now serve the same pupil cohort, do not have access to this support.

On the other hand, the importance of these posts to the schools involved and the value they bring was stressed by members of the Working Group and a strong preference was given by some members that these posts should remain in place.

3.8 Support Teacher Posts

In 1995, the Support Teacher Project was established in order to assist primary schools with children who were experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. These are stand-alone posts which were introduced to provide a behaviour support service to primary schools and provide support to combat challenging behaviour and for the social, emotional and personal development of the targeted children in a holistic manner.

There are currently 41 Support Teacher Posts operating in 48 schools at a cost of €2.46 million per annum. While individual posts are managed within schools, there is currently no formal national management structure to support this service. Given the developments in relation to schools' supports in this area overall, the Inspectorate has conducted evaluations in a number of primary schools in Dublin and Cork which have support teachers. A composite report on the quality of work of support teachers was published by the DoE Inspectorate in December 2020 (Department of Education and Skills 2020b). This report recommends the retention of the Support Teacher Projects to be used as an integrated support, within the special education framework, targeted at serving the most disadvantaged communities.

Section 4 - Additional Resources and supports to schools

4.1 Allocation of Special Education Teachers to Schools

While this report's objective is to consider class size, the indicator of class size is a very partial reflection of the level of overall supports available to an individual school and so should not be considered in isolation. Moreover, the research evidence confirms that the efficacy of reduced class sizes is related to teaching and learning strategies and school leadership. As well as the other supports provided to DEIS schools under the SSP, they avail of support under the new model for allocation of special education teachers, which was introduced for mainstream schools in September 2017¹². This model is designed to distribute special education teaching resources fairly to schools, taking into account their profiled needs. Based on policy advice received from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the new allocation model was developed to create a profile for each school which is needs-based and gives schools autonomy to decide how to deploy the resources they have, based on the needs of pupils.

The Special Education Teaching allocation model provides a single unified allocation for special educational support teaching needs to each school, based on each school's educational profile, which takes account of:

- A baseline component provided to every mainstream school based on the number of enrolments that each school has. This is designed to support inclusion, prevention of learning difficulties and early intervention.
- A school educational profile component, which includes:
 - The number of pupils with complex needs.
 - The learning support needs in schools as evidenced by attainment levels in standardised test results.
 - The social context of the school including disadvantage and gender.

The profiled allocations initially made to schools in 2017 have now been revised to take account of more up to date profiling data, including updated enrolments and the revised allocations have taken effect from September 2019. While the allocation of special education teachers is not included in a school's class size, it does form an important part of the overall teaching resources provided to a school. Since it was first introduced in 2017, there has been in excess of an additional 1,000 special education teachers provided for. The total number of special education teachers has increased by 39% since 2011, from 9,740 in 2011, to over 13,600 at present.

The number of special education teachers currently allocated to schools represents an average ratio of **1 special education teacher for every 4 mainstream teachers at primary school level, or approximately 1 special education teacher for every 100 pupils**. However, as special education teachers are allocated to schools based on the profiled needs of each school, taking account of the number of pupils with complex needs, the learning support needs in schools, and the social context of the school, many DEIS schools receive allocations of special education teaching support, which are above the average ratios already referenced. In fact initial analysis shows that for the **2019/20 school year, there are almost 60,000 special education teaching hours, which is the equivalent of 2,400 posts, allocated to DEIS schools and over half of these hours are allocated to DEIS Band 1 schools**.¹³

¹² <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR2017-01-18.html>

¹³ A similar allocation of special education teachers was provided for the 2018/19 school year which forms the basis for the analysis in Chapter 3.

In deploying special education teachers, schools are advised that special education teaching support can be provided in a variety of ways. The special education teacher may work in the classroom with the class teacher or withdraw pupils in small groups and/or individually for a period of time (depending upon the nature of pupils needs) for intensive teaching of key skills. The range of teaching supports should include team-teaching, small group teaching and, where necessary, individualised teaching to address specific learning needs.

Whereas special education teachers are not mainstream class teachers, and should not be used as such, the provision of additional special education teachers to schools has a significant impact on class sizes, as these teachers may work in the class along with the class teacher for part of the day, or provide additional support for groups of pupils who would otherwise have been attending a mainstream class for the entirety of the school day.

It is the Department's view that the total number of special education teachers allocated to DEIS schools should therefore be taken account of when considering issues regarding class size in DEIS primary schools, and/or with regard to the overall ratio of teachers to pupils in these schools.

Further consideration is required in relation to how best to progress Action 29 in DEIS Plan, which states that "Teacher allocation for urban primary schools supporting the highest levels of pupils at risk of educational disadvantage to be reviewed in context of improved school data and development of SEN Resource Allocation Model" (Department of Education and Skills 2017b p33).

4.2 In School and Pre School Therapy Services Demonstration Project

A demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services was put in place over the course of the 2018/19 school year. The project has been developed by the Department of Education, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Department of Health, and the Health Service Executive and is being managed and co-ordinated by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

The purpose of the project is to test a model of tailored therapeutic supports by providing speech and language and occupational therapy within 'educational settings'. This innovative pilot will complement existing HSE funded provision of essential therapy services. The project is taking place in the Health Service Executive (HSE) Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) 7 Region of South West Dublin, Kildare and West Wicklow and 75 schools, including a representative sample of primary, post primary, and special schools have been taking part. 75 Pre-school settings associated with primary schools participating in the project have also been included.

Children who are attending pilot schools and who receive therapy supports from the HSE will continue to access such services. The in-school therapy model is designed to supplement, not to replace existing services. It provides for a clinical Speech and Language Therapy service delivery model of specialist, targeted and universal supports in line with best practice which see pupils receiving supports along a continuum of provision depending on the extent or severity of needs of the child/pupil.

The project was evaluated over the course of the 2018/19 school year¹⁴. Although initially designed as a one year pilot, a Government decision of 12th February, 2019, in relation to the Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme, also agreed to the establishment of a pilot of a new School Inclusion Model for

¹⁴ This evaluation report is available at <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Demo-project-evaluation-flnal-for-web-upload.pdf>.

children with special educational and additional care needs involving up to 75 participating schools in the CHO 7 region over the course of the 2019/20 school year.

4.3 School Inclusion Model

As part of its decision to provide for additional Special Needs Assistant (SNA) posts in July 2015, the Government agreed that a review of the scheme would be undertaken to examine whether the scheme continued to meet its objectives and that resources were being utilised efficiently and effectively given the very significant amount of money allocated to the scheme on an annual basis.

The NCSE published Policy Advice Paper No. 6 – *Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme: A New School Inclusion Model to Deliver the Right Supports at the Right Time to Students with Additional Care Needs*¹⁵ in March 2018. The NCSE review found that the SNA scheme, as currently configured, works well in meeting the needs of younger children and students for whom it was originally designed. The scheme is greatly valued by parents, students and schools and there is evidence of an enduring loyalty and a strong attachment between many schools, students, parents and the SNAs.

The NCSE concluded that a better model of support was required. They considered that what is needed is the right support at the right time provided by a range of personnel with relevant qualifications and skill-sets. In February 2019, following engagement with the relevant Departments with a proposed implementation plan, to include a governance framework and detailed costing of proposals having due regard to the significant amount of State investment in this area, the Government approved the trialling of a new School Inclusion Model for the 2019/20 school year comprising the :

- establishment of a pilot of a new service model for children with special educational and additional care needs involving up to 75 participating schools in the Community Healthcare Organisation area (CHO 7). The pilot is planned to cover the 2019/20 school year. The new service model will have the following elements:
 - (i) the introduction of a new frontloaded allocation model of SNAs to be allocated in line with profiled need having regard to the approach taken by the New Allocation Model for Special Education Teachers,
 - (ii) the expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to support pilot schools, and,
 - (iii) continuation of the pre-school and in-school demonstration project in the pilot area to ensure a wrap-around service for the pilot schools;
- establishment, on a pilot basis, of an NCSE Regional Support Team in the Community Healthcare Organisation area (CHO 7) in which the pilot is to take place, to include specialists in relevant disciplines, in order to inform teacher continuing professional development and best practice in schools in that area;
 - development of a National Training Programme for SNAs and a pilot roll-out;
 - provision of a nursing service for children with complex medical needs in schools to complement existing HSE-supported nursing provision; and
 - trialling in the NCSE of a new functional operation model in order to better reflect the establishment of the NCSE Support Service and regional teams, and to more fully integrate supports for the piloting of the new model.

¹⁵ <https://ncse.ie/comprehensive-review-of-the-special-needs-assistant-scheme>

More details on the School Inclusion Model are attached in Appendix 4 including the main features of the implementation plan. The fact that it provides in-school therapy support would be extremely beneficial for many of the issues encountered in DEIS schools and its progress will be monitored and evaluated carefully by the Department. The pilot commenced in September 2019. However, as all schools closed from 12th March, 2020, due to the COVID crisis, it was not possible to fully complete the pilot of the School Inclusion Model over the course of the 2019/20 school year.

Approval has been granted to the NCSE to directly recruit therapists to continue the Pilot of the School Inclusion Model, over the course of the 2020/21 school year, and recruitment of therapists is currently underway.

Arrangements are in place for the independent evaluation of the SIM. The ESRI has been appointed following a public tendering process. The evaluation is required to determine the impact of the SIM on the students, SNAs, parents and schools involved, including the outcomes attained.

It was also announced that as part of the 2021 Budget measures, that funding is being made available next year to extend the School Inclusion Model (SIM), which includes therapy provision, to two other pilot areas in 2021.

4.4 Supports available to DEIS schools under the School Support Programme

In terms of supporting teachers and principals in DEIS schools, there are various Actions contained in DEIS Plan 2017 with this objective. For example, Action 35 sets out that DEIS schools applying for the range of supports available from the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers will receive priority over other schools within the current capacity. The CSL will give priority to DEIS Principals who wish to access the coaching service and, for the post-graduate diploma in school leadership, a number of places have been reserved for teachers from DEIS Schools.

All teachers in DEIS schools can now access both the Incredible Years Teacher Programme and the Friends Programme which are supported by the NEPS. Teachers in all DEIS schools have been invited to apply for places on these programmes, which are being delivered through the Education Centre Network. The Incredible Years Teacher Programme is an evidence-based programme for teachers, partnering with parents, which reduces behavioural difficulties and strengthens social and emotional competence in primary school-age children. The Friends programme reduces anxiety and promotes coping and resilience in children and young people from 4-18 years and can be delivered by teachers universally or to targeted smaller groups of pupils.

All DEIS urban primary schools and all DEIS post primary schools have access to a Home School Community Liaison Coordinator (HSCL) who provide a vital support in developing real partnerships between parents, teachers and communities with the objective of combating educational disadvantage. HSCL's, as agents of change, work in an integrated way with all other support services to implement a whole-school approach to improving attendance, participation and retention in education for the most marginalised and educationally disadvantaged pupils.

Circular 0016/2019 (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a), which issued in February 2019, on the role of the HSCL Co-ordinator, has emphasised the importance of the HSCL role in transitions across the education continuum, from early years, through the school system and on to further and higher education. HSCLs play a key role in effecting these successful transitions with a renewed focus on the transition from pre-school to primary school and this results in better relations with parents and teachers in general, with greater parental involvement in school life and in the education of their children.

4.5 School Planning

DEIS Plan 2017 has a renewed focus on target and goal setting linking deployment of additional resources to outputs and outcomes. *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills 2016) provides a unified and coherent set of standards for two dimensions of the work of schools:

- teaching and learning
- leadership and management.

It is designed for teachers and for school leaders to use in implementing the most effective and engaging teaching and learning approaches and in enhancing the quality of leadership in their schools. Through the provision of a set of standards describing 'effective practice' and 'highly effective practice', the framework helps schools to identify their strengths and areas for development and enables them to take ownership of their own development and improvement. In this way, the quality framework seeks to assist schools to embed self-evaluation, reflective practice and responsiveness to the needs of learners in their classrooms and other learning settings.

The quality framework provides a comprehensive picture of quality teaching and learning and quality leadership and management. It is designed to provide the widest possible scope to teachers, school leaders and others to identify and achieve excellence in teaching and learning and leadership and management. In summary, the framework allows for selection of what is most relevant to suit the specific purpose of individual teachers or schools. As set out in section 2.3 and 2.4, this is vital for improving educational outcomes regardless of class size.

Section 5 - Issues to be considered in terms of any proposed change to Class Size

5.1 Projections of school enrolments

At the time the analysis for this report was conducted in late 2019, the projected enrolments (Department of Education and Skills 2019b) for primary school showed enrolments are expected to have peaked in 2018 with 567,772 pupils enrolled in September 2018. Under the M2F2 scenario¹⁶, which predicts medium migration and a decrease in the fertility rate, enrolments are projected to fall by 134,000 pupils over the coming years to reach 433,795 by 2036. Annual falls will average 11,000 pupils per year between 2021 and 2028, and enrolments are projected to decline below the previous low point of 439,560 in 2034.

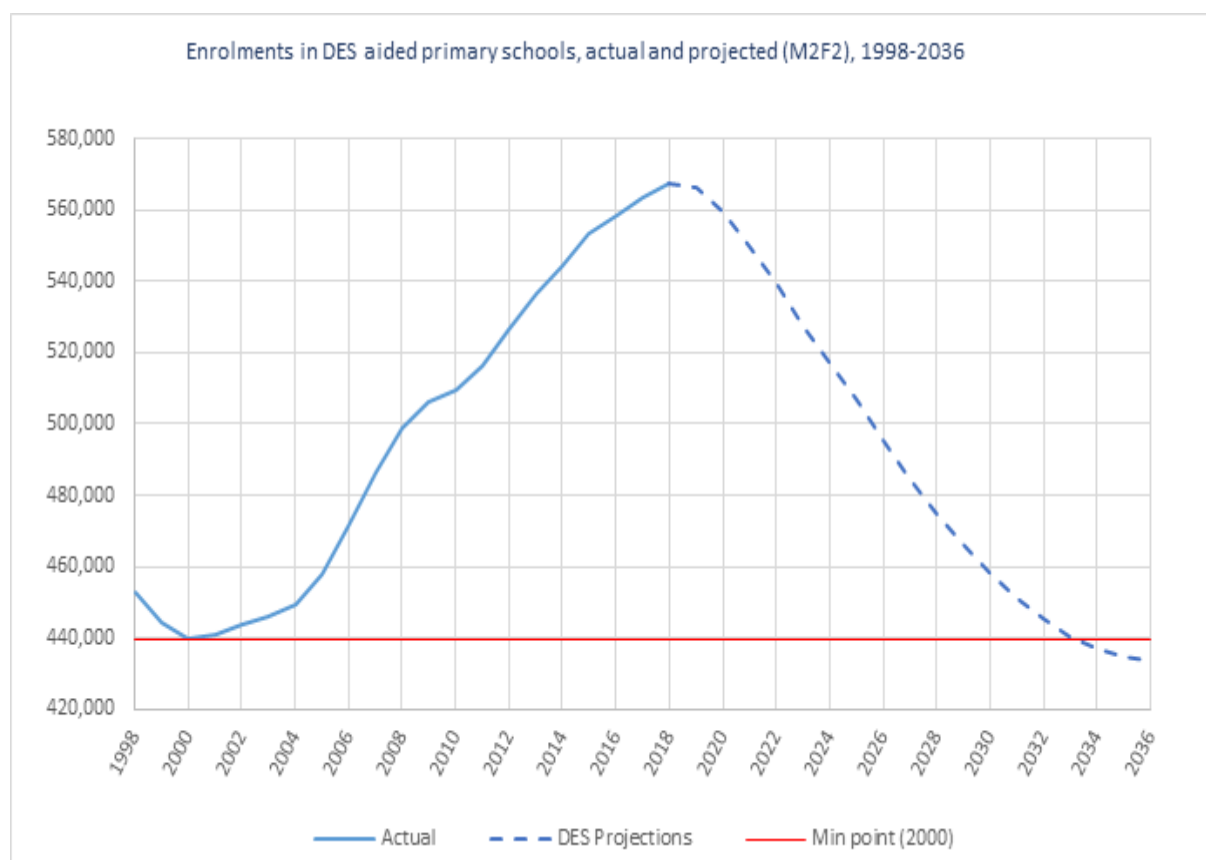


Figure 5.1 Actual and projected enrolments in DEIS primary schools 1998-2036 using the M2F2 scenario from Department of Education Project of full time enrolment Primary and Second Level 2019-2036.

¹⁶ M2F2 is a scenario which assumes a moderate level of inward migration, and a decline in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) from 1.8 to 1.6 between 2016 and 2031.

Looking further out, the number of children aged 5 to 12 is projected to begin increasing again from 2038 onwards, although under the M2F2 scenario enrolments are unlikely to return to current levels.

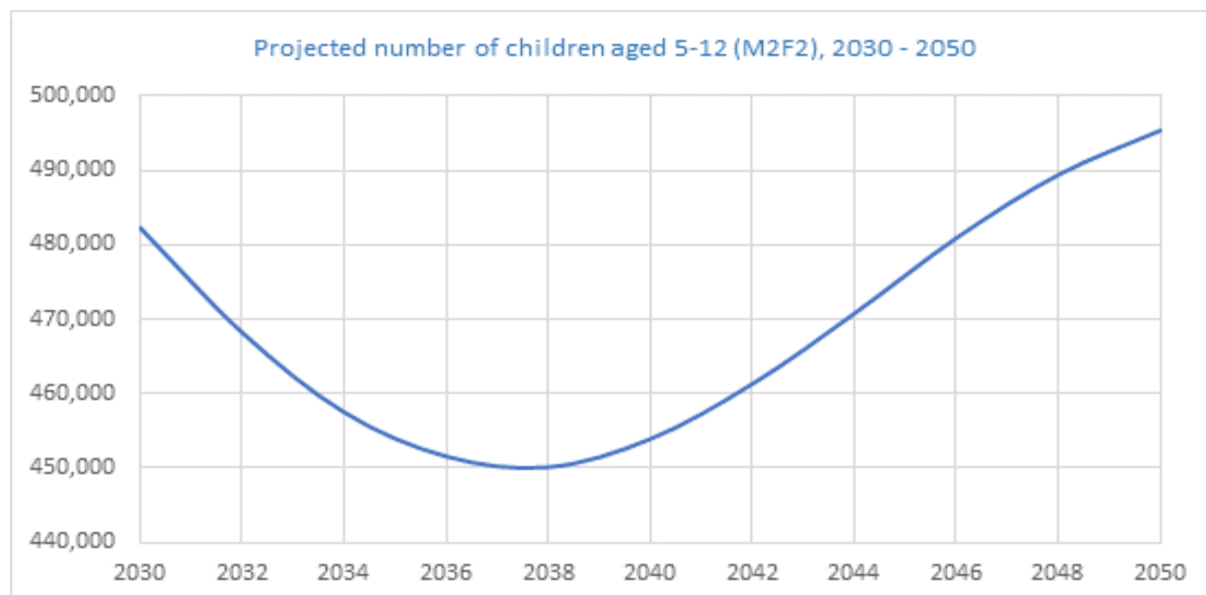


Figure 5.2 Projected enrolments of children aged 5-12 years old in primary schools 2030-2050 using the M2F2 scenario from Department of Education Project of full time enrolment Primary and Second Level 2019-2036

5.2 Teacher Supply

Management bodies and schools have, in recent years, reported difficulties for some schools in recruiting teachers. At primary level this relates mainly to the recruitment of substitute teachers.

The Steering Group on Teacher Supply, chaired by the Secretary General of the Department, is overseeing the implementation of the Teacher Supply Action Plan (Department of Education and Skills 2018), which was launched by the Minister in November 2018. The Teacher Supply Action Plan identifies 22 actions under four policy headings:

- data/research requirements;
- initial teacher education policy, provision, funding and support;
- policies and arrangements for schools and teachers that impact on teacher mobility/supply;
- promotion of the teaching profession.

A number of actions following from the plan support the supply of teachers in primary schools, including:

- **Campaign to promote the teaching profession:** A campaign to promote the teaching profession and encourage applications to initial teacher education programmes has been ongoing since the end of 2018.
- **Substitute teacher recruitment portal:** The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) have created *Sub Seeker*, an

online service to match available teachers with short term substitute vacancies in schools. The portal was launched in December 2019 and is available for use free of charge to all schools and teachers.

- **Substitute teacher supply panels:** following the successful pilot scheme in 2019/20, substitute teacher supply panels for primary schools have been expanded nationwide in the 2020/21 school year to 115 additional locations, incorporating 2,300 schools approximately and with more than 328 full time additional teaching posts allocated.
- **Teachers on career break:** In recent years, teachers on career break have been allowed to take up employment without a restriction on days/hours worked. This initiative was in place for the 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/2021 school years. The measure is reviewed on an annual basis and is dependent on the requirements of the system in any given year.
- **Arrangements for job-sharing teachers:** For the 2020/21 school year, teachers who are job sharing are for the first time allowed to work additional hours.

It may be noted that although the above actions are clearly relevant and necessary, from a comparative EU perspective, Ireland has a relatively strong profile in teacher supply and planning (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture 2019).

5.3 Costs Associated with a Reduction in Class Size

The current level of funding provided to DEIS schools highlights the Government's and the Department's commitment to ensuring education becomes a proven pathway to better opportunities for all learners, especially those at risk of not maximising the benefits of education.

As with all proposals and recommendations, there is an associated cost and the Department operates within a given financial envelope. Any proposed reduction in class size of DEIS Band 1 schools would obviously have an immediate cost in terms of teacher salary, additional classrooms and other associated costs.

Analysis of the Primary Teacher Database indicates that a one point reduction in the current DEIS Band 1 staffing schedule would require approximately 50 additional posts. **This would result in an immediate cost of in the region of €2.5million for each one point reduction.**

There has been ongoing calls for a reduction of class size in all DEIS Band 1 schools to 15:1 in junior classes and 18:1 in senior classes by the INTO and during the consultation process in the review of the DEIS programme. **Based on an initial assessment of the current DEIS Band 1 schools this would result in over 300 additional posts at a full year cost of over €15 million.**

Such a level of a reduction in class size would likely result in the requirement of additional classrooms; the estimated current cost of permanent classroom provision is just over €200,000 per classroom. All of this needs to be considered in terms of the data as set out in 5.1 regarding future enrolments and the overall budgetary position of the Government.

Section 6 – Key Areas of Consideration by Class Size Working Group and Recommendations

Summary

This report has emerged from a review of DEIS, focusing on a key concern which emerged from the consultation process following the review, namely, the issue of class size. A condensed review of the literature on class size indicates that gains in learning are more likely when reductions in class size are targeted at younger children (junior classes) and more educationally disadvantaged groups. The literature also confirms that the efficacy of class size reductions is mediated by teaching and learning strategies and the effectiveness of school leadership and management. The report then considered recent and current trends in class size, drawing from international and national data sources, and focusing comparisons between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. An overview of other supports to schools, and in particular special education teacher and SNA supports, as well as supports under the SSP, was provided, to give a fuller context to a consideration of class size. Next, the report considered auxiliary but highly relevant data and sources of information which should be used to inform decision-making about class size, namely population projections, implications for number of classrooms, and teacher supply issues.

This final section now synthesises the information presented in previous sections and provides overall conclusions and recommendation.

Areas for further consideration as raised at meetings of the **Class Size Working Group**:

- **Urban Band 2 schools have the same staffing schedule as non-DEIS schools.** Some members of the Working Group felt that this should be addressed in some way and should be looked at in terms of the development of the new DEIS resource allocation model. The assignment of an Administrative Principal at a lower enrolment was also suggested by some members as a means to providing further supports to Urban Band 2 schools.
- Another area for consideration in terms of the development of a new resource allocation model for DEIS is the targeting of additional resources at those schools with the absolute highest levels of disadvantage
- A reduction in class size is not the answer to all the difficulties encountered in DEIS schools. Other areas that arose in the context of discussion in the Group included enhanced access to behavioural supports, art and play therapy, DEIS specific continuous professional development and whether the National Behaviour Support Service (now part of the NCSE Support Service) could be extended to primary schools.

6.1 Conclusions

- Call for more research. There is a **need for further, targeted research** on the topic of class size within Ireland with a focus needed on longitudinal research and on the combination of factors which may be relevant to achieving optimal learning outcomes for all students.
- One of the key findings of the evaluation of DEIS (Smyth et al. 2015) is **the importance of school climate** and the need to ensure that schools provide an environment which is

conducive to successful engagement with education. This is where a whole school approach is vital to ensuring a positive school climate where everyone has a role. Particular emphasis is given to this approach in Ireland, which is recognised internationally, and the implementation of the DoE Wellbeing policy (DES 2019c) enables schools to respond to new and complex challenges linked to an increasingly diverse society.

- Under DEIS Plan 2017, Goal 3 is focused on developing leadership capacity, strengthening teaching and learning as well as the importance of quality Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and continuous professional development. All of this needs to take account of the extra challenges faced by teachers in DEIS schools. Student teachers need to be fully informed on DEIS and given a foundation on which to build so that they can face the challenges and issues they may encounter in DEIS schools.
- Increased participation of under-represented groups such as those students from DEIS schools in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is being addressed under the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) Fund with specific PATH funding to access ITE. Under this programme, partnerships have been forged with local DEIS schools to provide young people with an opportunity and a space to explore teaching as a career.
- The potential for school leaders and teachers in DEIS schools to share their expertise and knowledge and provide support to each other should be further facilitated. This is backed up by Hattie (2015b), who puts forward the need for communities to promote and share professional development aimed at improving teacher effectiveness and expertise. There are a number of Principals Networks established throughout the country.
- In determining an optimum class size, consideration should also be given as to what is the minimum a class size should be for a student to optimise their educational outcomes and have appropriate social interaction and engagement with their peers.

6.2 Recommendations

A challenge in the examination and evaluation of any programme is to assess not only the outcomes but also the degree to which any change in outcomes is attributable to the support itself, in this case the impact of lower class size in DEIS schools on educational outcomes. As already set out in the ESRI's Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS (Smyth et al. 2015), since schools receive a suite of additional resources and supports under DEIS it is extremely difficult to disaggregate out which support is responsible for the improvements in retention, attendance and educational outcomes seen in DEIS schools in recent times.

A detailed examination of the existing evidence and research is contained in Section 2. To summarise, it indicates that:

- reducing class size results in modest increases in academic achievement, the benefits are greater in the earlier grades,
- where there are benefits, the effects are greatest for children from minority and/or disadvantaged backgrounds.

The literature also indicates that the benefits of smaller class size decrease as grade level increases indicating that it is not as effective in improving educational outcomes as pupils progress to the more senior grades. While smaller classes are often seen as beneficial, with some evidence smaller

classes may benefit specific groups of students such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, overall evidence of effect on class size on student performance is mixed (Fredriksson et al. 2013).

What is lacking in the evidence is a specific number for the optimum class size for beneficial effects on student achievement with Blatchford et al. (2003) unable to determine specific class sizes above or below which beneficial effects were likely to occur. Class size thresholds need to be considered alongside other important factors, which have been referenced throughout this report. These include teacher expertise, adjustment of teaching practice, access to other necessary supports and effective school leadership. Hattie (2015a) claims that the greatest influence on student progression in learning is having highly expert, inspired and passionate teachers and school leaders working together to maximise the effect of their teaching on all students. Improvements in student achievement requires a collective effort from the student themselves, school leaders, teachers, parents and policy makers. Ireland is fortunate to have a highly skilled and dedicated teaching profession and this should be recognised, in particular given the challenges faced in DEIS schools. The DEIS Plan has placed a renewed focus on supporting and fostering best practice in schools through inter-agency collaboration and numerous initiatives are underway to support this.

Class size should also not be considered on its own, as it does not take into account the additional supports available to an individual school. Consideration of class size must be set in the context of the overall supports available to schools including the allocation of special education teachers and other potential supports such as the school inclusion model.

Time and again, the issue of school climate and teacher expectations has been raised both anecdotally and in international research. Hattie (2015b) also points out that a major influence on learning is the expectations of the students and the teachers and that research shows that “a teacher typically has high, medium or low expectations for all the students in their class, with the students of high-expectation teachers being very successful in achieving their teachers’ expectations and the students of teachers with low expectations being similarly successful at making lower gains”.

The INTO has proposed a 15:1 class size in DEIS Band 1 schools for junior classes and 18:1 for senior classes. As set out in Section 5.3, this would have high financial implications as well as a requirement for over 300 additional teachers.

Following on from the consultation process to inform the development of the refined DEIS identification methodology, the Department will build on the DEIS identification model to refine the resource allocation model under DEIS. The overall objective is to match resources to identified need.

The DEIS identification model is based on HP deprivation indices derived from the latest census data available (Census 2016) and on 2018/19 school enrolments. Comprehensive analysis has been undertaken on this. While it is intended to implement any change in resources on a phased basis, the initial step will involve a communications and consultation process with the relevant stakeholders on the refined identification methodology, which has commenced. This is to ensure a full understanding of the methodology to be applied and to discuss any potential issues which may arise as well as providing any clarifications sought. The objective of the refined model is to ensure the provision of supports is prioritised to those schools with the highest levels of concentrated disadvantage.

Subsequent to this first phase, it is envisaged that the process to develop a resource allocation model will commence. The development of a resource allocation model will involve consultation with stakeholders and the input of the education partners will be sought as part of the overall consultation process.

Given the evidence as set out in this report in Section 2, it is proposed that, within the context of the resources available and in line with the principle of aligning resources for DEIS schools with overall need, consideration should be given to a possible reduction in class size for DEIS Band 1 schools with a focus on the junior classes (the first four years) as a further support for those schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. The details regarding the revised staffing schedule, the extent of any proposed reduction and the number of schools it could potentially be applied to would need to be considered in the context of other inclusion supports (e.g. DEIS, special educational needs) and the overall allocation of the suite of supports provided under the DEIS programme within the available financial envelope. A lower class size for those schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage may form part of the overall consultation on DEIS and be informed by the findings of this Report.

In relation to legacy posts, these posts are being retained for the 2021/22 school year with a view to them being taken into consideration in the context of the application of any resource allocation model to be applied under DEIS. Any proposed changes would be introduced on a phased basis following consultation with relevant stakeholders. Overall the intention is that the application of the identification and resource allocation model will operate on the following principles:

1. Prioritising the provision of supports to children with the highest levels of disadvantage.
2. Permitting DEIS to be administered at the level of the school and prioritise schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage.
3. Being consistent with the allocation of resources on a sliding scale that reflects the relative need of each school.

Research shows that a lower class size is not effective without the necessary teacher expertise and adjustment of approach to teaching a smaller class and that the quality of teaching is more important than class size. While it is widely recognised that we have a skilled and dedicated teaching profession, a reduction in class size should be aligned with appropriate continuous professional development in teacher expertise to ensure and to build upon approaches to teach differently and more effectively in smaller classes and consideration may be given to an examination of this within the Department to ensure sufficient support is available.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Supports provided under DEIS

Resources for DEIS Urban Primary schools:

- Reduced class sizes – application of a staffing schedule to DEIS Band 1 schools to accommodate class size of 20:1 at junior classes and 24:1 at senior classes,
- Allocation of Administrative Principal on lower enrolment and staffing figures than apply in Primary schools generally (116 in DEIS Band 1),
- Additional grant aid based on level of disadvantage,
- Enhanced rate of funding under the School Books Grant Scheme
- Access to Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Services,
- Priority access to Schools Meals Programme,
- Access to a range of supports under School Completion Programme,
- Access to literacy / numeracy support service to specific literacy / numeracy measures,
- Priority access to Centre for School Leadership,
- Expansion of NEPS provision in DEIS schools,
- Roll out of Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme and Friends Programme to all DEIS school,
- Priority access to a range of professional development supports.

Resources for DEIS Rural primary schools:

- Additional grant aid based on level of disadvantage,
- Enhanced rate of funding under the School Books Grant Scheme,
- Priority access to Schools Meals Programme,
- Access to a range of supports under School Completion Programme,
- Access to literacy / numeracy support service to specific literacy / numeracy measures,
- Priority access to Centre for School Leadership,
- Expansion of NEPS provision in DEIS schools,
- Roll out of Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme and Friends Programme to all DEIS schools,
- Priority access to a range of professional development supports.

Resources for DEIS Post-primary schools:

- Additional grant based on level of disadvantage,
- Enhanced guidance allocation of 1.15 of the Pupil Teacher Ratio (non-DEIS allocation is 0.4),
- Enhanced rate of funding under the School Books Grant Scheme,
- Access to Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) services,
- Priority access to Schools Meals Programme,
- Access to a range of supports under School Completion Programme,
- Access to Junior Certificate Schools Programme,
- Access to Leaving Certificate Applied Programme,
- Priority access to Centre for School Leadership,
- Priority access to a range of professional development supports,
- Expansion of NEPS provision in DEIS schools,
- Roll out of Friends Programme to all DEIS schools.

Appendix 2 Class Size Working Group Terms of Reference

Introduction

Action 27 in DEIS Plan 2017 commits to undertake an evaluation of the level of teaching resources participating in the School Support Programme to inform future policy in this area.

The ultimate task of the Working Group therefore is to report to the Steering Committee on the Optimum Class Size in DEIS Primary schools and to make a recommendation based on the findings of the group having considered the matter fully, taking into account all evidenced based research and available information

Terms of Reference

- To consider the current situation in DEIS Schools
- To consider best practice in the context of international research
- To consider the issue of legacy posts currently in the system
- To consider the impact of behavioural and other issues which impinge on class teaching and climate and how schools might be supported
- To consider the effect of frontloading the system with teachers at a time when enrolments are at a peak and will begin to decline.
- To consider the cost of any proposed recommendations.
- To prepare and present a report to the Steering Group and make recommendations as to the optimum class size in DEIS Primary School
- To consider how any recommendations will be communicated to schools

Membership

INTO: D. Ni Craith; S. Loftus

IPPN: M. Doyle

CPSMA: F. Kelly

ETBI: T. Lowe

An Foras Pátrúnachta: L. Ní Mhaoláin

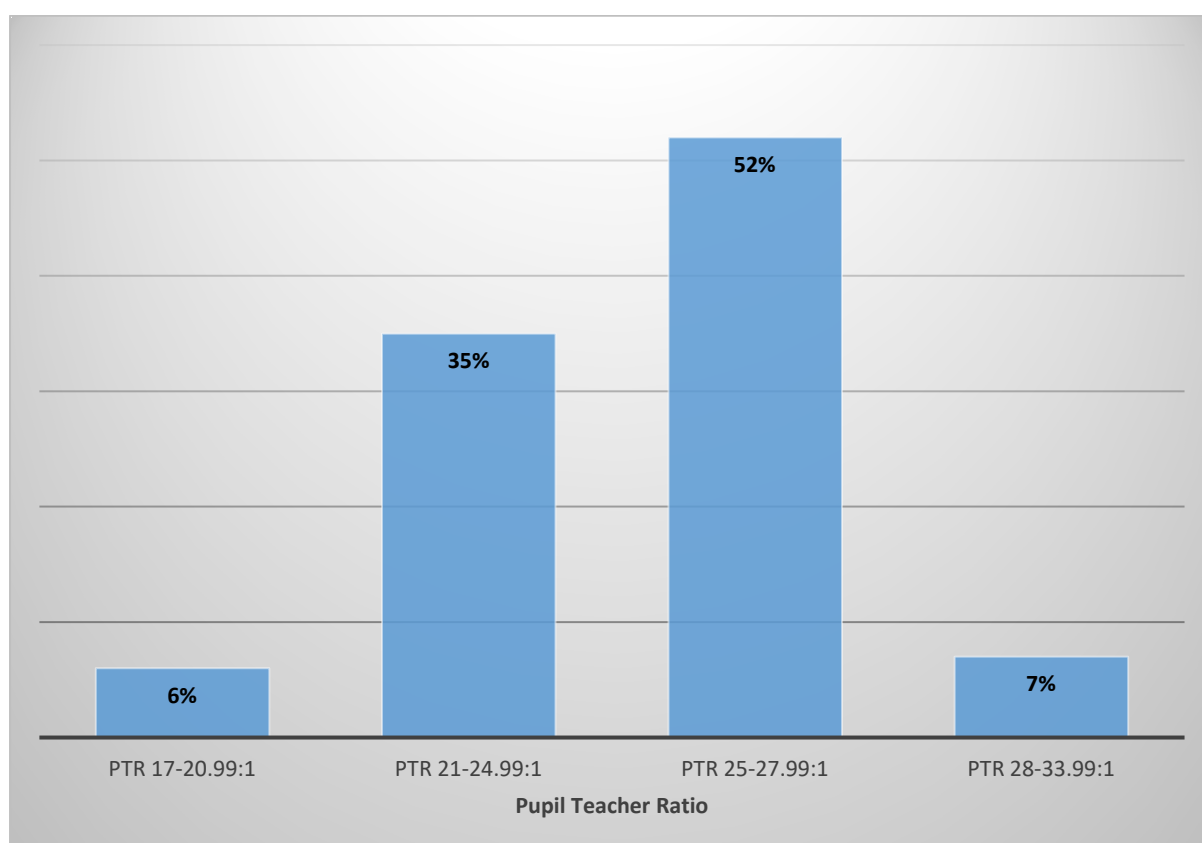
ERC: L. Kavanagh (to February 2018); L. Gilleece (from February 2018)

Department of Education:

- Statistics Unit: E. Ellis
- Social Inclusion Unit: C. O'Brien; M. Cregg; S. Mulhall
- Special Education Unit: T. Reynolds
- Inspectorate: F. Rushe
- Teacher Allocations: G. Martin

Appendix 3 DEIS Band 2 Class Size Statistics

DEIS BAND 2
Overall PTR (*Provisional*) calculated on
**Mainstream Class Teacher, Legacy,
Teaching Principal** Posts school Allocated
2018/19



Effective PTR in DEIS Band 2 Schools 2018/19:

PTR 17 – 20.99:1	-	6 Schools
PTR 21 – 24.99:1	-	38 Schools
PTR 25 – 27.99:1	-	56 Schools
PTR 28 – 34:1	-	7 Schools

These schools also have access to 611 special education resource posts, 111 special class teacher posts, 99 English as an Additional Language (EAL) posts and 630 Special Needs Assistants.

Appendix 4 Main features of implementation plan for operationalising the NCSE policy recommendations

The key features are:

Completion and evaluation of the pre-school and in-school therapy demonstration project

In-school therapy support is an essential part of the tiered model of support for schools and students. The availability of this service alongside other elements of the Model will ensure that students have access to therapy supports on a tiered, consistent, equitable and timely basis as required. The evaluation of the current multi agency pilot already underway in HSE area CHO7 will inform this development.

Development of an SNA allocation model

The front loading of SNAs in line with the School Profile commenced in the 2019/20 school year in the HSE area CHO7. This is a key element of the new service model. Front loading of SNAs eliminates the need for an individual assessment for each student and will reduce the delays in making supports available to students. The School Profile methodology was introduced in 2017 for the making of Special Education Teacher allocations to schools and has worked well, being accepted by the school system and helping to improve practice in individual schools by giving greater autonomy to principals regarding the deployment of teaching supports. A key feature to building confidence in the teacher allocation model was that no school lost resources in the initial stages.

Establishment of NCSE Regional Teams

The NCSE's current Support Service and regional teams will trial a new functional operating model with local teams across five regions comprising teachers, SENOs and visiting teachers. Currently, these personnel work closely with schools, teachers and families and actively collaborate with other services, for example, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPs).

Other experts and practitioners may be added to these teams depending on the outcome of the new service pilot and its evaluation. In this regard, the NCSE Regional Team for the pilot area will include speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and behaviour practitioners to support the new service model by leveraging teaching skills and better informing practice.

Expansion of the NEPS service

A further feature of the Model is to ensure that NEPS is adequately resourced to provide a psychological service for students with complex educational needs, including those enrolled in special schools and special classes. The service has been expanded for the duration of the pilot with further expansion to be considered following completion of the pilot of the new service model.

Design and delivery of training for SNAs and schools

The design and roll out, on a pilot basis, of a national training programme for SNAs is an urgent priority. There is risk in having complex medical and care procedures carried out by untrained personnel. This is one of the recommendations of the NCSE that is being prioritised.

Develop a nursing scheme for children with most complex needs

Another key recommendation of the NCSE relates to the provision of nursing support for children with the most complex medical needs while at school. This is an urgent priority given the significant duty of care obligations owed to these children having regard to their needs. A Working Group has been established to progress this recommendation and work is underway in this regard.

Developing appropriate professional oversight and management structures within NCSE

Appropriate oversight and management arrangements are essential to ensure high quality service and standards. During the period of the pilot, current management and professional and clinical oversight processes and structures will be streamlined. The regional team structure and associated organisational, governance and reporting arrangements is trialling a new functional operating model introduced to better support the existing NCSE Support Service and regional teams, and the pilot model.

Piloting and evaluation of new service Model

The Model is comprised of a number of component parts which are interlinked and designed to deliver an integrated and holistic suite of supports for schools and students. A comprehensive independent evaluation of the pilot will be undertaken to test its effectiveness and to provide guidance on issues to consider in any potential mainstreaming of the Model.

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