

# We can do better

INTO Pre-Budget Submission 2022



# Budget 2022 #WeCanDoBetter

The pandemic has laid bare the lack of investment in our primary education system. Successive governments have failed in their duty to ensure our primary schools are funded, our school leaders supported, and our class sizes lowered. As we move forward, now is the time to commit to a long-term strategic investment in primary and special education.

The standard of entrants to teaching, of pupils' literacy and numeracy levels and of public satisfaction with education is high, but class sizes and funding are bottom of the league and school leaders require urgent support.

Smaller classes have a positive impact on pupils' learning and development, contributing to better life outcomes. During a pandemic, we had the particular shame of being the only country in the EU to issue guidance for social distancing in classes of 30 or more. The government has the opportunity over the next few years to bring our class sizes into line with the rest of Europe. We hope they will seize that opportunity.

Our principals deserve the support they need to be leaders within their schools. Principals and teaching principals in Irish primary schools are overworked, underpaid and struggling under never-ending administrative work emerging from the Department of Education and other state agencies. It is time to address workload issues. After years of campaigning, this year, as part of a range of pandemic supports, we finally secured one leadership and management day (release day) per week for our teaching principals. We must ensure this is now guaranteed every year.

Strong schools are led by strong school management teams. During the pandemic, school leaders relied on their colleagues as never before to implement changes at school level. Change won't end and it is time to restore the key middle management posts cut during the recession. Middle management posts stand at 73% of what they were in 2009, but the workload in schools has increased significantly. We want to see these posts restored, over a two-year period.

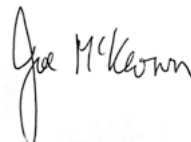
School funding remains shamefully low for primary education, standing at one euro per pupil per school day. So many teachers have become fundraisers, raising funds to cover basic school costs. Over the last eighteen months, fundraising efforts have been decimated and many schools will struggle to meet basic expenditure. It is time to restore school funding to pre-recession levels.

If we value primary education, rhetoric needs to be backed up with investment. Over the course of this crisis, we have heard many politicians highlight the essential function of primary education. We hope politicians will follow through on their commitments and demand the necessary budget funding needed to meet the challenges of primary education.

In this pre-budget submission, we set out the INTO's key priorities to government ahead of Budget 2022.



John Boyle, INTO General Secretary



Joe McKeown, INTO President



## Smaller classes

Smaller classes support inclusion and diversity, allow for more individual attention and meet the ambition of our government to establish the best education system in Europe.

Irish primary class sizes remain the largest in the European Union. The average class size in Irish primary schools sits at 23.3 compared to the EU average of 20 pupils per class. 85% of primary pupils are taught in classes above the European average and 14.4% of pupils in our primary schools learn in a supersized classroom of more than 30 pupils. The falling demographics in primary schools present a unique opportunity to reach EU norms, through retention of the existing teacher numbers.

€ It would cost €14.5 million in a full year and €4.8m in 2022 to reduce class sizes by one student. (Source: Dáil Q&A no. 406 and 407, 1 June 2021)

## Increased funding

School capitation grants were significantly reduced during the recession. While these grants have decreased, many costs associated with running schools have risen. An immediate capitation restoration is now needed for schools' basic needs.

A survey undertaken by the Catholic Primary School Management Association found that parents pay €46 million to support basic school funding each year.

The current grant of €183 per pupil – a euro per day in the primary school year, represents a 9% decrease on the 2010 figure. The Consumer Price Index has increased by 9% since then.

€ It would cost €10 million in a full year to increase primary school capitation to pre-2011 levels and €3.3m in 2022. (Source: Dáil PQ no. 425, 1 June 2021).

## Support leadership

At the heart of a strong school community is a well-supported school leader. During the pandemic, our school principals rose to the challenge time and time again.

It's critical that teaching principals have time to carry out administrative duties and all schools should have a full restoration of middle management posts. In addition, access to a supply panel of substitute teachers reduces workload for principals and ensures that every child can be taught by a qualified teacher, every day.

week to enable teaching principals to focus on the vast functions of school leadership they are responsible for. The INTO secured this during the pandemic. We reiterate our demand that this needs to be guaranteed each and every year, to provide for the time to engage in the management of the school.

€ The cost of providing one leadership and management day for every teaching principal is €17 million per year. Source: Dáil Q&A no. 408, 1 June 2021). This includes the cost of all days and does not represent the difference in cost between the existing entitlements and the cost of a day per week.

## Restore middle management posts

Budgets since 2017 have failed to build on restoration of middle management posts, started in Budget 2017. Over 5,000 posts were lost during the recession and the number of middle management posts remains at 73% of what it was in 2009. Budget 2022 must begin the process of delivering the restoration of these posts.

€ The estimated cost of lifting the moratorium on posts of responsibility and restoring them to pre-moratorium levels at primary level over a two-year period would be €9.5m per annum and €3.15m in 2022. (Source: Dáil PQ no. 424, 1 June 2021)

## A minimum of one day per week for teaching principals

Budget 2022 must provide for the continuation of a minimum of one leadership and management day (release day) per

## Establish supply panels on a nationwide basis

This union has consistently advocated for the establishment of teacher supply panels to provide substitution for teacher absences. The substitute teacher supply panel has been expanded from a pilot scheme consisting of 6 base schools to 115 substitute teacher supply panels nationwide, with almost 330 newly appointed supply panel teachers employed, providing substitute cover to almost 2,300 schools across the country. This must be extended to cover all primary and special schools.

€ No cost was provided by the Department of Education on the running of a national supply panel. (Source: Dáil PQ no. 436, 1 June 2021).

We estimate that an additional 100 posts would be required to provide cover to every school. Most of the cost of these posts is already provided for in the substitution budget.

# Reduce class sizes

While some recent budgets have lowered class sizes in our schools to their lowest ever levels, class sizes in Ireland remain well above both EU and OECD averages. With 23.3 students on average in an Irish primary classroom, compared to the EU average of 20 or the OECD average of 21, it is clear Irish students are losing out. Class sizes have a huge impact on children's learning with evidence showing that in smaller classes learning outcomes significantly improve.

Schools are requested annually by the Department of Education in the staffing circular to use their mainstream staffing resources to ensure that class numbers are kept as low as possible, and to prioritise smaller classes for infant pupils, where smaller classes are deemed to have the most impact. Younger children benefit greatly from smaller classes – initial education lays the foundations for future learning, so smaller class sizes are especially valuable for the early years of education when children are developing literacy and numeracy skills.

Evidence shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds do better in smaller classes. According to an Education Research Centre Report (2017) "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."

The issue of supersized classrooms rose to national attention during the pandemic, with Ireland the only country in the EU having to contend with public health planning for classes of thirty or more pupils. Indeed, throughout the crisis,

these large classes made it more difficult to implement risk mitigation measures aimed at protecting the whole school community. OECD Education at a Glance (September 2020) stated that "countries with smaller classes will find it easier to comply with the new restrictions on social distancing".

During the 2020 general election, the INTO ran a campaign to highlight the need to lower class sizes. All political parties, including Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party, pledged to lowering class sizes to the EU average over the coming years of government. Ahead of last year's budget, INTO members called on the government to start this process with a one-point reduction, which successfully reduced class sizes by one pupil. This year, we must see another reduction in class sizes to move us towards the EU average of 20 to 1. Any reduction to class size must be simultaneously passed on to DEIS schools, which serve our most disadvantaged pupils.

The complexity of the contemporary classroom is such that, with larger class sizes, teachers are finding it challenging to meet the broad spectrum of needs of children. When class numbers are of a more reasonable size, modern teaching methods work, and teachers are able to spend the time needed with children.

Echoing the words of Minister for Education Norma Foley, as demographics at primary level shift, there is a unique opportunity to deliver lower class sizes over the coming years. The projected decrease in the number of primary pupils of 50,000 between now and 2026 provides an opportunity to deliver on the commitment to reduce class size to EU norms.



€ It would cost €14.5 million in a full year and €4.8m in 2022 to reduce class sizes by one student. (Source: Dáil Q&A no. 406 and 407, 1 June 2021)

*Note: class size must be distinguished from pupil-teacher ratio. While the latter takes account of the total number of teachers in the primary school system, (including administrative principals and SEN teachers), class size refers to the number of children taught by a classroom teacher.*

At the heart of a strong school community is a well-supported school leader. During the pandemic our school principals rose to the challenge time and time again. No school in the state would have opened but for their trojan work behind the scenes. An OECD report stated in February 2021 that:

“Nowhere has the role of school heads been more visible than during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, with generalised lockdowns and school closures in countries all over the world. Not only did they have to co-ordinate measures to maintain learning continuity during the lockdown and school closures, but they were also responsible for ensuring a safe learning environment when schools were allowed to reopen”

and that:

“school heads are the glue that holds everyone together”.

The two critical areas where primary schools urgently need support for leadership relate to principal teachers', especially teaching principals', need for time to carry out administrative duties and to the further restoration of posts of responsibility. In addition, access to a supply panel of substitute teachers reduces workload for principals and ensures that every child can be taught by a qualified teacher, every day.

## Posts of responsibility

In 2009, a moratorium on promotion in schools was imposed. As a result, schools lost over 5,000 'posts of responsibility' (PORs), limiting their ability to meet the growing challenges of curricular and regulatory change. In addition, there were fewer opportunities for career progression for teachers within our education system. These middle management posts were positive steps on the career ladder for teachers. Such posts, now categorised as 'assistant principals', involve a teacher taking on particular responsibility for activities or a curricular, pastoral or organisational area (for example choir/music, sport and physical education, science, special education, wellbeing, library etc.) in return for a responsibility allowance (currently €3,967 or €8,968 per annum).

The cutting of these posts left schools without supports in a range of curricular and other areas and limited career progression for teachers.

2017 saw the first, and to date the only, structured restoration of posts of responsibility to schools since the moratorium

on promotion in schools was first introduced in March 2009.

This happened in conjunction with significant reform of the nature of these posts, and how teachers are appointed to them. Assistant principals are now appointed, on merit, to positions of strategic importance in the leadership, management and administration of the school. In line with the principles of distributed leadership, assistant principals work in teams in collaboration with the principal and/or deputy principal and have shared responsibility, commensurate with the level of the post, for areas such as teaching and learning, pupil support including wellbeing, special education and inclusion and development of individuals and staff teams. (see: [Circular 0044/2019](#))

The INTO acknowledged these 1,300 posts, but viewed their filling as merely a start to restoration and continues to demand full restoration to pre-2009 levels. It has been acknowledged by government that the 2017 tranche of posts was envisaged as a start of restoration – Minister Norma Foley in responding to PQ 453 in September 2020, said:

“Budget 2017 allowed for the commencement of restoration of middle management posts as part of an agreed distributed leadership model and meant lifting the longstanding moratorium on these posts with effect from the 2017/18 school year. This recognises the key role school leadership has in promoting a school environment which is welcoming, inclusive and accountable.”

€ **The estimated cost of lifting the moratorium on posts of responsibility and restoring them to pre-moratorium levels at primary level over a two-year period would be €9.5m per annum and €3.15m in 2022.**  
(Source: Dáil PQ 424, 1 June 2021)

## Leadership and management days

All principals have seen their conditions of employment change considerably and workload increase exponentially in recent years. Increased paperwork, initiatives and additional child protection accountability measures have seen school leaders overwhelmed and under resourced. For teaching principals, this increased workload must be carried out while having responsibility for teaching a class, often a multigrade one.

The government's own Primary Education Forum has recognised the issue of workload as it relates to teaching principals in particular. INTO, alongside other key stakeholders, has participated in meetings of the forum and shared our experiences.

At INTO Congress 2021, principal teachers called for the appointment of an independent auditor to carry out a comprehensive review of the role of principal, as the workload and expectations placed on them have reached breaking point.

School leaders have regularly condemned the incessant stream of new initiatives and procedures, which mean that they are always on duty, with no right to disconnect from the demands of the role.

INTO has recognised the need for a day a week for teaching principals to carry out their leadership since release time was initially recommended in the Report of the Working Group on the Role of the Primary Principal (1999). The INTO secured one leadership and management day (release day) per week for teaching principals during the pandemic. We reiterate our demand that this needs to be guaranteed each and every year, to provide for the time to engage in the management of the school.

€ **The cost of providing one leadership and management day for every teaching principal is €17 million per year.** (Source: Dáil Q&A no. 408, 1 June 2021). **This includes the cost of all days and does not represent the difference in cost between the existing entitlements and the cost of a day per week.**

## Supply Panels

The problem of provision of a reliable method for meeting substitution needs in primary schools is a longstanding one. The fact that every teacher has full class contact time means that if a substitute is not available, schools have no option but to cover a teacher absence through the redeployment of special education staff or splitting the class between other classes. Neither of these options is satisfactory. This union has consistently advocated for the establishment of supply panels to provide substitution for teacher absences. The potential of this approach was recognised as part of the Teacher Supply Action Plan and piloted successfully in the 2019/2020 school year. During our negotiations with the Department of Education during the pandemic, we secured the establishment of a temporary supply panel covering most, but not all, of the country. The substitute teacher supply panel has been

expanded from a pilot scheme consisting of 6 base schools to 115 substitute teacher supply panels nationwide, with almost 330 newly appointed supply panel teachers employed, providing substitute cover to almost 2,300 schools across the country.

This provided a measure of consistency to the availability of qualified teachers to cover a wide range of absences in schools. Every child deserves to be taught by a qualified teacher every day.

Over the last year, the establishment and operation of this supply panel has demonstrated what we have said all along, that it doesn't fundamentally cost additional money to run given there already exists a budget for substitute cover and that it helps schools access short term cover when the need arises.

Budget 2022 must put a national supply panel on a permanent footing, ensuring we maintain access to this critical resource in future years.

€ **No cost was provided by the Department of Education on the running of a national supply panel.** (Source: Dáil Q&A no. 436, 1 June 2021). **We estimate that an additional 100 posts would be required to provide cover to every school. As stated, most of the cost of these posts is already provided for in the substitution budget.**



Schools are struggling to meet basic costs such as heating, cleaning and insurance. The INTO negotiated a series of financial supports for schools tied to the public health advice during the pandemic, but this short-term investment is no substitute for the long term funding restoration which is urgently needed.

Irish primary schools receive significantly less funding than second and third level institutions. Primary schools receive a capitation grant of €1 per pupil per school day to cover their running costs. Second-level schools receive almost double that amount. The standard capitation grant per pupil has dropped from €200 in 2010 to €183 at present, in contrast to the current figure of €316 at post- primary level. This funding disparity is grossly unfair.

A 100-pupil school, which will have 4 classrooms and associated special education provision has €18,300 per annum to cover all day to day running costs of schools including heating, lighting, cleaning, insurance and general upkeep in schools. It should also be noted that a proportion of the grant is intended to be used by schools to assist with the purchase of teaching materials and resources.

The low level of funding of primary schools reflects the fact that annual expenditure per student in Ireland is lower (€6,910) than the OECD average (€7,647) for pre-primary and primary education. The figure for post primary is €8,458.

Education at a Glance 2020 shows per-pupil expenditure at primary level in Ireland is substantially below OECD and EU averages, in the bottom half of the OECD table.

Spend per pupil at primary level is also 11% below the EU average (€7,797).

The Department of Education's funding to primary schools for their day-to-day running costs covers only part of their bill. Parents and local communities are subsidising primary schools to the tune of €46m a year to cover basic costs such as energy and insurance costs – not sophisticated extras to enhance learning, but rather basic necessities required to effectively deliver the curriculum.

**€ The cost of restoring school funding to pre-recession levels is €20 million in a full year.**

*(Source: Dáil Q&A no. 425, 16 April 2021.)*





Vere Foster House  
35 Parnell Square  
Dublin 1

*Phone/Fón:* 01 804 7700

*Fax:* 01 872 2462

*Email:* [info@into.ie](mailto:info@into.ie)

*Web:* [www.into.ie](http://www.into.ie)