



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

**INTO Submission to Joint Oireachtas Committee  
on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and  
Science**

**Roundtable Discussion on Leaving Certificate Reform**

Tuesday October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## **1. Introduction**

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), founded in 1868, is the oldest and largest teachers' trade union in Ireland. It represents 42,938 teachers at primary level in the Republic of Ireland and approximately 6,901 teachers at primary and post-primary level in Northern Ireland. The current INTO President (2021–22) is Joe McKeown; John Boyle is the General Secretary and Gerry Murphy is the Northern Secretary.

As an organisation, would like to address Access, Equality and Wellbeing Supports, especially in relation to the education of pupils in Special Schools. We would also like to comment briefly on the Irish Language and Irish Medium Education.

## **2. Background**

There are currently 3,329 primary schools listed on the Department of Education database and of these 133 are Special Schools. The INTO represents most teachers teaching in special schools. Special Schools have traditionally been designated as Primary Schools by the Department. Many Special Schools enrol pupils from age 4 up to the age of 18, teach both the Primary and Post Primary curricula and provide access to State examinations at both junior and senior cycle for their pupils where appropriate and possible.

## **3. Curriculum**

In making this submission INTO is calling for continuity of curriculum experience, in as far as is possible, for all pupils as they navigate their way through our school system. We support the holistic development of the child, as is evidenced in the current and upcoming Primary School Curriculum and as promoted at Junior Cycle in Post Primary schools. The approaches to curriculum, assessment and pedagogy in the early years, at primary level and at junior cycle level reflect the societal aim of facilitating every child to reach his or her full potential.

We also recognise national and international trends towards the development of skills and competencies rather than more traditional content-based curricula. It is widely acknowledged that a skills and competencies-based curriculum will better prepare the pupil of today for living and working and engaging with the social and employment opportunities of tomorrow.

## **4. Access, Equality and Well Being Supports**

We recognise that all pupils with special educational needs should be enabled to access education in settings appropriate to their needs. INTO acknowledges the support provided by NEPS in developing Wellbeing Supports which are available on the DE website. However, it is also important that students should be able to access therapeutic, socio-emotional and counselling support in the school setting. These supports are required from early years right up to senior cycle.

We also hold the position that all pupils, including those with Special Educational Needs should be entitled to access national certification of their educational achievements.

We commend the development by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes at Junior Cycle level.

Students accessing the Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LP) programme are typically those with learning disabilities in the low mild to high moderate range of abilities. These students benefit from an L2LP as it purposely focuses on development and learning in such areas as:

- elementary literacy and numeracy
- language and communication
- mobility and leisure skills
- motor coordination
- social and personal development.

The majority of students of junior cycle age who engage in L2LP programme are enrolled in special schools or in special classes in mainstream post-primary schools, and some are in mixed-ability classes in post-primary schools. In a typical post-primary school, it is estimated that they may amount to two or three students.

The availability of L2LPs in turn, highlighted the fact that there was still a small cohort of students for whom specific programmes and certification were not available. These are students who have learning disabilities in the range of low moderate to severe and profound and are likely to be at an early stage of cognitive development. It is for this group that Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs) have been developed. The programmes are designed to ensure that the students will have an educational experience that addresses their individual needs and enables them to live, participate in, learn, work and contribute with the greatest degree of autonomy to the communities in which they belong. The fact that Level 1 on the National Framework of Qualifications refers to unconstrained awards allows for the recognition of any and all learning below Level 2.

As part of the process of Senior Cycle and Leaving Certificate reform we are calling for the development of age-appropriate curricula and learning programmes at Senior Cycle level that will allow the pupils catered for by L2LP and L1LP at Junior Cycle level to access certification to acknowledge their educational achievement at this level. Therefore, additional courses at Level 1 and Level 2 will be required.

We acknowledge that this will require a wider variety of assessment methodologies which are more compatible with the needs and abilities of this cohort of pupils than the current terminal examination which can exclude many students with special needs attending Special Schools or classes in our education system.

This certification should take account of the fact that not all students may wish to access third level education and will take different paths into the post-school world of work and other activities.

## **5. Irish Language and Irish Medium Education**

We are aware that the question of the Irish Language at Leaving Certificate and Irish Medium Education is topical and complex.

We believe that in an inclusive Education System that Irish at Senior Cycle should be inclusive of the diversity of needs, including those with special needs, those whose mother tongue is Irish and those receiving education through the medium of Irish. These students access to assessment and certification which reflects their needs and abilities.

We recommend that pupils of all abilities and levels of competence should be entitled to the development of their mother tongue, whichever language this may be. INTO believes that this reflects the Government's policies in Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education (2017-2026)

## **6. Conclusion**

Any reform of the Senior Cycle must reflect the diversity of pupils, their needs, abilities and learning styles. The singular focus of Senior Cycle must not be access to Third Level Education only but must focus on a variety of pathways to lifelong learning.

## **7. References**

Introduction to the Primary School Curriculum 1999:

[https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/c4a88a62-7818-4bb2-bb18-4c4ad37bc255/PSEC\\_Introduction-to-Primary-Curriculum\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/c4a88a62-7818-4bb2-bb18-4c4ad37bc255/PSEC_Introduction-to-Primary-Curriculum_Eng.pdf)

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework 2020: <https://ncca.ie/media/4456/ncca-primary-curriculum-framework-2020.pdf>

The Junior Cycle Framework 2015: <https://ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/framework-for-junior-cycle>

L1LPs Junior Cycle for Teachers: [https://www.jct.ie/l1lp/key\\_documents](https://www.jct.ie/l1lp/key_documents)

L2LPs Junior Cycle for Teachers: <https://www.jct.ie/l2lp/l2lp>

Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages 2017-2023:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/dd328-languages-connect-irelands-strategy-for-foreign-languages-in-education-2017-2026/>