



Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

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

Roundtable Discussion on Leaving Certificate Reform

Tuesday October 5th, 2021

1. Introduction

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) is the oldest and largest teachers' trade union in Ireland. It represents almost 50,000 teachers at both primary and post primary level across the 32 counties.

Today we 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. Special Schools have traditionally been designated as Primary Schools by the Department. The INTO represents most teachers teaching in special schools. 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 Curricula 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.

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 L1 and L2 Learning Programmes at Junior Cycle to access certification to acknowledge their educational achievement. 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 of all pupils, including those with special needs, those whose mother tongue is Irish and those receiving education through the medium of Irish. These students require 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.