

MAKE THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION A HIGH PRIORITY

GENERAL ELECTION 2024

The future of education can significantly influence voter decisions in the upcoming General Election on 4 July 2024.

The **Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU)**, **National Education Union (NEU)**, and **Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)** believe it is time to move past political stalemates and divisions on education and start listening to those who truly understand the issues – the teachers, school leaders and education staff working in schools.

Education must be well resourced, with fully qualified teachers and educational staff who are appropriately paid and supported to deliver life-changing learning to our young people.

We urge everyone – parents, grandparents and anyone with an interest in education or the future of our community – to join the UTU, NEU and INTO in sending a clear message to all political parties. **Each child matters and each vote counts.**

Here are some questions to ask prospective candidates and political representatives as they campaign for **YOUR VOTE** in the General Election:

EDUCATION FUNDING

- How will you fight for a fully funded education budget, crucial for our children's future and our economy?
- Smaller classes are often seen as beneficial, because they allow teachers to focus more on the needs of individual students. At the primary level, the average class in The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries is 21 pupils. At lower secondary level, average class size in OECD countries is 23 students. How will you address increased class sizes?

EDUCATION WORKFORCE

- What actions will you and your party take to prevent recruitment and retention issues from endangering teaching and non-teaching positions in education?
- What steps will you take to advocate for teachers and school leaders to ensure that their overwhelming workloads are significantly reduced?

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

- Regarding Special education needs how will you and your party progress special educational needs (SEN) so that children across all areas have equal opportunities to access education which best suits them as individuals?
- How do you plan to fund and resource SEN in our current system and situation?

MAKE THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION A HIGH PRIORITY

INTO, UTU and NEU, on behalf of the majority of teachers are standing up for the future of education and call on all political parties standing in this election to do likewise.

Education is not a privilege, it is a human right, guaranteed legally for all without any discrimination. Both individuals and society benefit from the right to education. It is fundamental for human, social and economic development and a key element to achieving lasting peace and sustainable development. It is a powerful tool in developing the full potential of everyone and in promoting individual and collective wellbeing.

As such education needs to be well resourced, with fully qualified teachers, appropriately paid and supported to deliver life changing learning to children.

INTO, UTU and NEU believe that our politicians need to work together to develop a long term strategy for education, where education is protected from the burden of austerity, by decisions made at Westminster and through a programme for Government in the new assembly which puts education at the centre of all policy and programmes.

The politicians must be aware that INTO, UTU and NEU will not allow the draconian measures that have been imposed on our colleagues in England and Wales, such as the academies, and the non-transference of scale points from one school to another to be imposed here.

We will continue to vigorously oppose, by all means necessary, any changes to the education system that has a negative effect on our members and the young people in their care.

**EACH
CHILD
MATTERS
AND
EACH
VOTE
COUNTS**

#1 INCREASE EDUCATION FUNDING

INTO, UTU and NEU are calling for a commitment to substantially increase funding to the education sector.

Schools budgets have been cut repeatedly over the last 15 years.

There exists in education an ever-increasing gap between those who have and have not, between those who can and cannot.

More budget cuts translate simply into a loss of teaching staff, which results in increased class sizes, a loss of classroom assistants and support staff, cuts to SEN provision in a system that has an increasing number of children who require much needed additional learning support, a lowering of nutritional standards in our school canteens, reduction in resources of ICT and transport provision, the list goes on.

All of this, in an already crumbling system, where teachers are struggling to deliver a quality education service. It's quite simple, any further budget cuts are marginalising children and young people and must not be allowed to continue.

At the end of 2023, the launch of the Independent Review of Education Volume 2 confirmed that,

“Education in Northern Ireland has suffered from significant real terms cuts over the past 13

years” adding that “these cuts are having a lasting and detrimental impact on learners and need to be reversed” (paragraph 10.4).

The Independent Review of Education also added that,

“there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that, when comparing funding per learner, the Northern Ireland education system has been significantly underfunded over the last decade in comparison to those in England, Scotland and Wales. This puts learners in Northern Ireland at a disadvantage in comparison to their peers in other jurisdictions” (paragraph 10.11), producing a funding gap of £155m (paragraph 10.12).

The financial analysis in the Independent Review of Education were understood by the wider teaching profession confirmation what schools have been warning about for more than a decade. Schools are not given sufficient funding to meet the needs of their children and are not funded equitably with schools elsewhere on these islands.

Schools cannot function like this any longer. A first action, ahead of any work to address the flawed funding formula or wider system-

level budgetary pressures, is to ensure that schools are consulted urgently as to what funding they require. This is to meet the needs of their children; and that funding must be made available directly to school budgets, for the sake of our children and young people.



#2 INVEST IN THE EDUCATION WORKFORCE

INTO, UTU and NEU are calling for a commitment to ensure that the workload of all principals, vice principals and teachers is managed fairly and consistently to ensure that all teaching professionals can discharge their roles and responsibilities effectively for the benefit of the teaching and learning of pupils.

INTO, UTU and NEU welcomed the revision of the Workload Agreement in 2024. This Agreement by management and the Teachers' Unions recognised the importance of the role of the professional teacher in ensuring that the educational needs of young people are met as fully as possible. The Workload Agreement is designed to make teachers' workload manageable and capable of being carried out within reasonable working hours.

However increasingly, workload seems to be a growing problem for the teachers in our schools. In some cases, school management systems are still making excessive demands on teachers, not always by choice but often because excessive demands are made on them. Threat of closure, demands of unregulated tests, uncapped numbers, shrinking budgets, increasing class sizes and lack of support for increasing numbers of pupils with special educational needs to name a few!

It is a popular misconception that teachers only work from 9 am - 3:30 pm. The school day may be shorter than the average office day, but teachers put in extra hours above and beyond their call of duty. Before and after school, weekends holidays, and working late nights, marking books, planning lessons, deciphering new initiatives, planning for an inspector who may or may not appear at your school. All this leads to burnt out, exhausted and devalued teachers, too stressed and too anxious to do their job well.

It is a given that teaching is a demanding career, but it should not dominate teachers' lives. Teachers also have families and responsibilities outside of school, and cannot permit these to be eclipsed by marking, preparation, tracking, data collection and the sheer exhaustion of it all.



With the prospect of burn out we can also add the prospect of working until you are 68. What this means is that teachers starting now, have the prospect of being in a classroom for 47 years. At least 8 more years has been added on to a teacher's career, keeping young teachers out of employment and off the career ladder.

Funding must be released to deliver on the recommendations as:

- It is an historical and outstanding commitment to the profession.
- It has already been accepted by management that to do so would bring about improvements to the effectiveness of our education system, an aim which we all share.

Teachers want to teach and want learning in our classrooms to be at the centre of all that they do. We need commitment from our politicians that reducing the overall burden on teachers will be a priority.

The disparity in pay, especially in the main professional grades, continues to cause a crisis in recruitment and retention of teachers, with young teachers leaving this jurisdiction to work in schools in sunnier climes. With the current gap between here and Scotland, this brain drain will, in all likelihood, become even more pronounced into the future.

In many instances, qualified teachers may never see the inside of a classroom, as they are snapped up even before they have finished their qualifications to work in other industries at substantially higher pay. Training colleges are in the position that they are unable to fill their quota of places for teachers.

Currently schools struggle to recruit teachers in specific subject areas in post-primary schools, both for full time places and supply teaching. School leaders spend many hours attempting to access sufficiently trained, subject-specific supply teachers to cover for teacher absences, leading to situations where exam classes will not have access to the necessary expertise to allow the pupils to reach their full potential, or the grades required to further their education at university.



#3 SUPPORT SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

INTO, UTU and NEU are calling for a commitment to relevant and appropriate financing, supporting, and resourcing of Special Educational Needs in all schools.

Special Schools serve a vital role in providing education and support to students with complex needs. These students require specialised support from teachers and wider staff to help them reach their full potential, and special schools are designed to provide this support in a safe and nurturing environment.

The recent Independent Review of Education states,

“Furthermore, we recommend an additional annual capital allocation of £25m (above current capital budget levels for an estimated period of 5 years) to address current needs in the provision of SEN facilities in both special and mainstream schools.”

The financial and service cuts to special schools have raised concerns about the quality of education and support that these schools are able to provide. These financial and service cuts have led to reduced staffing levels, increased workload and a more stressful work environment for teachers and staff members. This can lead to lower morale and

higher levels of stress, which can negatively impact on the quality of care and education provided to students, and on the duty of care bestowed on staff as everyone feels the pressure within a school.

Due to all of the reductions in outside supports and staffing levels in schools whilst class sizes continue to grow there also continues to be an unacceptable level of violence against teachers and school support staff.

We do not believe that Children with SEN being placed in mainstream schools are receiving the same levels of support as they would if they were placed in a special school.

Although it has been commented on that there has been damage due to action short strike action on children’s education, it is, in fact, the cuts to education which have had a much more negative impact on children’s experiences.

Clear action needs to be taken in relation to our Special Needs Sector to ensure that

our young people are getting the best chances in life.

The recent Independent Review of Education stated,

“There must be greater access to specialist support within schools, with a particular focus on support at Stages 1 and 2. At Stage 3, the educational institution should have flexibility in the use of allocated resources. The practice of automatically allocating classroom assistant hours should cease. A comprehensive Learner Support Workforce Programme should be developed and implemented to increase the number of specialist provision professionals (such as trained SEN teachers, Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists etc.) whilst reducing the number of classroom assistants.”

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**#2 INVEST IN
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**#3 SUPPORT
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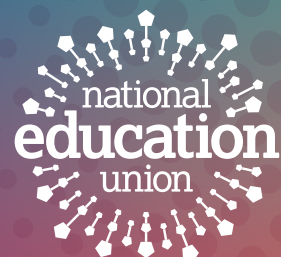
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