

Submission on Draft School Sector Climate Action Mandate

By Irish National Teachers' Organisation



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Introduction

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) represents over 42,000 teachers in primary and special schools in the Republic of Ireland.

We welcome the opportunity to submit observations and comments on the Draft School Sector Climate Action Mandate. Each sector must play its part towards the reduction in Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030. We are in support of a dedicated Mandate for schools, separate from the rest of the public sector, and which is tailored to reflect the particular circumstances in schools and designed to minimise the burden where possible.

We wish to submit the following observations and comments on the Draft School Sector Climate Action Mandate.

Under the 'Our Schools' heading:

Include and support the role of an energy / sustainable champion as part of the school leadership team within the assignment/re-assignment of roles and responsibilities to post holders in accordance with the relevant Department circulars (currently primary Circular 0044/2019 and post primary Circular 0003/2018).

INTO agrees with the proposal to have an energy champion in schools. However, specific detail is required in relation to the role of the energy champion. Guidance and resources must be provided to enable a post-holder to take on these roles and responsibilities. In School Management (ISM) teams in schools are already stretched with legal requirements (e.g. Child protection, anti-bullying, supporting wellbeing) and other initiatives. Many schools still do not have their full complement of posts of responsibility as these have not been fully restored. Schools cannot be expected to take on the important roles and responsibilities associated with energy sustainability, as well as all of the schools other identified priorities without adequate ISM teams. In that regard the full restoration of middle management posts is required to achieve this aim.

Incorporate appropriate climate action and sustainability training into learning and development strategies for staff.

It is unclear from the document what is meant by this. Are individual schools to be made responsible for incorporating climate action and sustainability training into learning and development strategies for staff? We have serious concerns about workload issues particularly for Principal teachers that could be generated from this requirement. In addition, how are principals (or other staff members) supposed to have the requisite knowledge to do this? There must be a commitment by the DE to provide climate action/ sustainability training to school on a national level in an easily accessible format, e.g. perhaps similar to the way in which child protection training was provided in the form of videos and other templates and resources. In addition, there must be time made available to schools in the form of in-service days to provide for whole staff training.



Engage on climate issues, including a focus on ideas and potential to decreasing the school's carbon footprint during staff workshops (at least annually).

We submit there is a lack of detail here in relation to the engagement on climate issues. Is this intended to be internal engagement within a school? Who is running/leading these staff workshops? Will there be external expertise provided to schools for these workshops?

There must be a commitment by the DE to roll out workshops on a national level. Time will also be required for any staff workshops. This time must be made available in the form of in-service days for whole staff workshops.

Under the 'Schools Way of Working' heading:

Promote and facilitate Education for Sustainable Development and learning by:

- *raising awareness and promote sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) including Goal 13 - Climate Action themes through the range of curricular subjects.*

Schools should be provided with template lessons and resources on climate action themes that can be utilised across the range of curricular subjects.

- *participating in Education for Sustainable Development programmes and activities (for example. ECO UNESCO, World Wise Global Schools, Take 1 programme etc.)*

We are concerned that participation in such programmes and activities could lead to additional workloads for schools and in particular for Principal teachers. Schools should have the discretion and flexibility whether to engage with any programmes and activities depending on their own circumstances at a point in time. There needs to be the full restoration of posts of responsibility to enable schools to participate in these programmes and activities.

- *considering how elements of the 17 SDG can be integrated into school life, for example. food waste, bio-diversity, water consumption, recycling, reusing, walking and cycling etc.*

There is a need for further information and resources for schools so that they can meaningfully engage with this. The information and resources must be provided in an easily accessible language.

- *Continue to engage in available programmes such as the Green Schools which provides a very practical initiative in raising the climate action agenda*

While these programmes are commendable, we are concerned that participation in available programmes could lead to additional workloads for schools and in particular for Principal teachers. Schools should have the discretion and flexibility whether to engage with any programmes and initiatives depending on their own circumstances at a point in time. There needs to be the full restoration of posts of responsibility to enable schools to participate in these programmes.



- *Review administration paper-based processes, and evaluate the possibilities for digitisation*

There is a lack of detail in relation to what would be involved in such a review. Are individual schools expected to review administration paper-based approaches, and evaluate the possibilities for digitisation? There are significant workload issues here, and assessments regarding the potential for digitisation would likely need input from external sources with appropriate expertise.

Leadership and management time, deputy principal release days and secretarial support would be required to have sufficient time to undertake such work.

- *Subscribe to the ESD Newsletter: <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/a1d6e-education-for-sustainable-development-newsletter/>*
- *Complete the annual energy Monitoring and Reporting legislated requirement to the SEAI, <https://www.seai.ie/business-and-public-sector/public-sector/monitoring-and-reporting/for-schools/>*

Leadership and management time, deputy principal release days and secretarial support would be required to have sufficient time to undertake the annual energy reporting requirement.

- *Adopt a Sustainability Policy Statement (preparation templates /guidance to be provided).*

We request a copy of any draft template policy statement and guidance documents for observations and feedback.

- *Implement Green Public Procurement (GPP) particularly for purchasing over €25,000.*

Detailed guidance is required for schools engaged in building projects in relation to the concept of green public procurement.

In addition, the Department of Education should provide schools with assistance when making such applications through making a procurement officer available to schools. In addition, the DE should appoint an overseer for all building projects.

Under the 'Schools Buildings' heading:

- *The Department will ensure that its school design guidance supports active travel arrangements including provision of secure and accessible bicycle parking etc.*
- *The school sector will only install renewable heating systems in school buildings, except where one of the following exceptions applies:*
 - *fossil-fuel use is provided for backup, peaking, or operational purposes (and makes up less than 10% of annual heating energy)*



- *fossil-fuel use is only provided as part of a decarbonisation strategy and to support a renewable heating system that maximises the capacity of the existing electrical infrastructure to the school (existing schools only). Over the course of 2023 the incorporation of the decarbonisation strategy for existing projects will result in the relevant phasing and transition arrangements being developed based on the most appropriate approach on a project by project basis*
- *Where the replacement of existing fossil fuel heating is required for an emergency maintenance purpose.*

We submit the following:

- The DE should appoint procurement officers to assist schools in making applications for building works.
- That an overseer should be appointed for all building projects in schools.
- That enhanced minor works grants are made available to schools to replace high energy consuming heating systems and to install more energy efficient ones.
- That enhanced funding is made available for energy conservation (e.g. insulating walls, replacing draughty windows etc.) In that regard, we welcome the DE's confirmation that it intends to invite schools in the coming months to apply for upgrade works under a new climate-focused multi-annual Summer Works Scheme. We look forward to further details of the Scheme before the end of Q4 2022, as well as the commencement of the application process in Q1 2023.

Summary of recommendations:

- Specific detail needs to be provided to schools in respect of the School Sector Climate Action Mandate. Guidance, templates, resources and supports must be provided.
- Specialised expertise in relation to the implementation of the Climate Action Mandate must be made available to schools.
- Leadership and management time, deputy principal release days and secretarial support will be required to ensure that schools have sufficient resources and time to undertake any additional administrative work required.
- The full restoration of posts of responsibility to schools to assist in the implementation of the aims specific to schools as set out in the School Sector Climate Action Mandate.
- Training must be provided by the Department of Education on a national basis. In-service days on a whole school basis must be provided to facilitate attendance at any such training.
- Schools must continue to retain discretion and flexibility as to whether to engage in any programmes, activities and initiatives.
- The DE should appoint procurement officers to assist schools in making applications for building works.
- That an overseer is appointed for all building projects in schools.
- That enhanced funding including an enhanced minor works grant is made available to schools for remedial works and for energy conservation.



- We also call for a full energy audit to be conducted of all school buildings. Where serious issues are identified in individual schools, funding should be provided via the Emergency Works Programme so that these deficiencies can be addressed.

INTO members want to play a proactive and constructive role in their workplaces towards the national effort to reduce Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. They need to be enabled to do so and to engage meaningfully with the Climate Action Mandate by the provision of the appropriate supports and resources.

By INTO

9th December 2022