

into

**MAKE
PRIMARY
EDUCATION A
HIGH PRIORITY**

IRISH PRIMARY EDUCATION

KEY STATS



22.8

average
class size

558,143

primary
school pupils



41,623

teaching
staff

1,529

teachers work
in special
schools



3,231

primary
schools

10,123

pupils enrolled in
special classes
in primary
schools

8%

of primary
students are in
Irish-medium
schools

687

primary
schools have
DEIS status

41.8%

are small
primary schools
(4 or fewer
teachers)

13.4%

of primary
students
are in small
schools

As the curtain falls on the current government's term and the last budget looms, all eyes turn to their final budgetary decisions – decisions that will undoubtedly shape their legacy approaching the upcoming elections. Substantially increased investment in our primary and special schools is absolutely vital. With the global stage showcasing countries that surpass us in educational funding relative to their GDP, the message is clear—we must spend much more on our education system in Ireland.

Our pre-budget submission advocates for three strategic priorities that aim to address significant challenges in primary and special education. These initiatives come at a critical juncture, as we navigate through a cost of living and housing crisis, face a drain of our talented teachers to overseas destinations and grapple with worrying recruitment and retention challenges within our educational system. The frustrations are palpable among educators, struggling to deliver the curriculum in the EU's largest class sizes. The inadequate supports and lack of leadership opportunities which are essential for nurturing a rewarding lifelong career in education are key contributory factors to Ireland's acute teacher shortages.

As other nations boldly invest in their educational systems, the question arises: why don't we? Our detailed proposal requests a modest yet significant increase in funding of primary education by €87.5 million annually. This investment is not just a fiscal measure but would pave a meaningful step towards securing the future of our nation's primary education system. Let's seize this critical moment and make primary education a high priority.

Yours sincerely,

Carmel Browne, President
John Boyle, General Secretary



#1 INVEST IN SMALLER CLASSES

The INTO is advocating for a two-point reduction of average class sizes in all primary schools in the forthcoming budget.

Currently, Ireland stands out in the European Union for having the largest class sizes, with an average of 22.8¹ pupils per class, compared to the EU average of just 20². A reduction of two would align our class sizes closely with those of our European neighbours and would be especially timely as projections suggest a decrease in primary school enrolments from 556,000 in 2023 to 542,000 by 2025³. By retaining the current number of class teachers, government can achieve this class size reduction at minimal additional cost to the exchequer.

Having class sizes of 20 would enable teachers to meet the broad spectrum of needs that children are presenting with. Smaller class sizes mean more personalised attention for each student, more effective use of modern teaching methods and crucial support for children with additional needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is imperative for the government to prioritise equal educational opportunities for Ireland's primary school children, giving them the best start in the education system, ensuring they can benefit fully from the new curriculum and providing them with the same advantages as their European peers in classes of 20 pupils. This is not just an educational necessity but a moral imperative. The current classroom overcrowding continues to disadvantage our youngest citizens. This government has one last opportunity to bring Ireland into line with Europe. They must seize that opportunity.

Cost

€42 million

Based on information provided via a Parliamentary Question, the Department of Education calculates the cost of a two-point reduction in class sizes to be €42 million in a full year. Source: Dáil Parliamentary Question no 337, 14 May 2024.



¹www.gov.ie/en/publication/055810-education-statistics/#education-indicators

²https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EAG_PERS_RATIO

³www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/289143/3fe06be4-1842-40f7-8963-c771aa62bd5d.pdf#page=null

#2 STRENGTHEN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The INTO is calling for the full reinstatement of the assistant principal roles which were cut in primary and special schools in the austerity period.

500 Assistant Principal 2 (AP2) positions were restored in the 2024 budget, but this still leaves a significant shortfall of approximately 1,700 middle management roles yet to be reinstated to bring schools to the level they had fifteen years ago, before the moratorium on promotions was imposed.

Assistant principals play a crucial role in supporting both principals and deputy principals across a spectrum of responsibilities. These include enhancing teaching and learning, leading school development, supporting pupil wellbeing, coordinating special education, implementing inclusion strategies and integrating various educational reforms such as the Literacy, Numeracy, Digital, STEM, Gaeltacht and Sustainable education strategies and the Cineáltas Action Plan on Bullying.

The restoration of these promoted posts not only facilitates smoother school operations and improved pupil supports but also offers vital career progression and valuable middle management experience for teachers. The lack of action to restore these critical roles was a major point of contention at the INTO Congress 2024, where delegates voiced strong disapproval of the government's inadequate investment in distributive leadership over the past 15 years.

"Posts of responsibility are an essential element of a school's leadership and management structure. They provide opportunities for teachers to gain valuable management experience while allowing the principal to empower others to support teaching and learning in schools. In my school, there were 48 teachers in 2009 and 24 of them had promoted posts, including eight senior AP1 posts. Today we have 73 teachers with just 21 promoted posts, only five of them AP1s. It's not enough to run the school effectively."

**Postholder, large urban
DEIS Band 1 school**

Cost

€9.5 million

Based on the allowances payable for promotional posts from August 2025 the annual cost of restoring 250 AP1 posts and 1,450 AP2 posts from the start of the 2025/26 school year would be €9.5 million.



#3 INCREASE SCHOOL FUNDING

The INTO is urging a 20% increase in two of the core grants paid annually to primary and special schools, the capitation and minor works grants, and a higher ancillary services grant.

Currently, the capitation grant stands at €200 per pupil, the same as thirteen years ago, despite significant inflationary pressures that have increased operational costs. There is a particularly pronounced discrepancy of €145 per student in the capitation grant for primary pupils in comparison with the grant for post-primary students. This chasm in the funding designed to cover school running costs in the two sectors - utilities, insurance and teaching resources - remains unexplained by government.



"Our energy and insurance costs have risen by more than €15,000 over the last two school years. Unless our direct funding is raised by 20%, we will have stark choices to make next year. Either switch off heating and lighting for protracted periods or continue to rely on hard-pressed parents who are contributing to the day to day running costs of the school."

**Principal Teacher, school with
260 pupils in Co Cork**



The call for increased capitation comes at a critical time as temporary grants, like the enhanced cleaning and 'cost of living' supports previously offered by the government, appear unlikely to feature in the 2024/25 school year.

The annual minor works grant for maintaining school facilities has remained static since 2010 remaining at €5,500 per school and €18.50 per pupil. A 100 pupil school gets just €7,350 per year for essential maintenance and upgrading. Many school buildings are falling into disrepair.

The ancillary services grant for paying school caretakers and cleaners has not been increased in line with increases to hourly payment rates for these workers. Consequently, schools have been forced to reduce hours of attendance for ancillary staff. Owing to changes in the manner in which the ancillary services grant is to be paid, resulting from primary school secretaries being paid centrally by the Department of Education together with the rise in hourly rates, the INTO is also calling for this funding stream to be increased by €10 million.

These increases will alleviate the financial pressures on our schools and reduce the dependence on parental contributions.

Against a backdrop where OECD data reveals Ireland spends on average 10% less per primary student than other developed nations⁴, there is a critical need for a serious re-evaluation of school funding policy for primary and special schools.

INTO asserts that substantial funding improvements are essential not just for maintaining basic school operations but for ensuring that all children, particularly those in disadvantaged areas and DEIS schools, receive equitable educational opportunities. The proposed 20% increase in key grants will directly support the core needs of schools—ensuring they are adequately cleaned, furnished, heated, insured, maintained, secured, ventilated, and equipped with suitable teaching materials, thus upholding the fundamental right of every child to a safe and modern learning environment.

⁴Ireland: USD 9 589, OECD Average USD 10 658. www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/92a10307-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/92a10307-en#section-d1e26503-5fd4854431

Cost

€36 million

Based on information provided via a Parliamentary Question, the Department of Education calculated the cost of increasing the Capitation grant by 20% to be €20.2 million in a full year. The Department further noted that the cost of increasing the Minor Works Grant to schools by 20% would cost €5.8 million. Source: Dáil Parliamentary Question no 339, 14 May 2024.

The payment formula for Ancillary Grant changed when school secretaries were placed on the Department of Education payroll. The INTO is seeking an increase of €10 million in full year funding for the revised ancillary services grant to ensure that schools can contract caretakers and cleaners for enough hours at decent wages.





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Cost: €42 million



#2 STRENGTHEN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The INTO is calling for the full reinstatement of 1,700 assistant principal (AP) roles that were cut in primary and special schools in the austerity period.

Cost: €9.5 million



#3 INCREASE SCHOOL FUNDING

The INTO is urging a 20% increase in two of the core grants paid annually to primary and special schools, the capitation and minor works grant, together with a substantial increase in the Ancillary Services Grant.

Cost: €36 million

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