




An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

A photograph of a classroom scene. A teacher with long dark curly hair is leaning over a desk, interacting with a group of young students. The students are wearing red school sweaters. In the background, there are backpacks hanging on a rack. The image is partially covered by a dark green diagonal overlay.

Statement of Strategy 2021-2023

Department of Education



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Foreword by the Minister



I am delighted to welcome this *Statement of Strategy 2021-2023* for the Department of Education. This strategy charts the significant work programme to be undertaken by the Department of Education over the next three years.

At its best, our education system can provide one of the greatest sources of strength and joy in a child or young person's life. Whether based in the bustling hub of a city centre or in the broad expanses of a rural village, each school maintains the beating heart of every Irish community, as it fosters and grows the next generation. A school is more than just a centre of academic learning for students. It is also a safe space where lifetime bonds are forged, personalities grow and the transfer of knowledge helps build the next generation of society's thinkers and doers. It is also a place where those battling educational challenges should find acceptance and encouragement and where a sense of achievement must be based on personal growth as much as academic achievement.

There is no doubt that Covid-19 impacted profoundly on schools in 2020 and continues to do so into this year. I do not underestimate what this means for students, their families, and staff in the school community both now and into the future.

Last July, I published *Reopening Our Schools: The Roadmap for The Full Return to School*, along with details of a financial package of over €639 million to support its implementation in 2019/2020. This suite of measures and resources, combined with the generous commitment of school communities throughout the country enabled the safe return to schools in September.

2020 also saw alternative arrangements put in place for the State examinations, including the Calculated Grades model and, later in the year, the holding of written Leaving Certificate examinations, as well as Junior Cycle examinations for adult students and early school leavers. This has enabled record numbers of students to progress to further and higher education. Others have used the process to enter the world of work. We simply would not have achieved what we did last year had we not worked collaboratively over a sustained period of time. This year, given the loss in learning for sixth year students which occurred this year and last, a system of Accredited Grades is being offered in parallel to the conventional examinations. I look forward to continuing in a spirit of partnership to advance areas of common interest over the next three years.

We look forward to an ambitious programme of investment and advancement in our education system. We will proactively progress a new Digital Education strategy and continued investment in schools' broadband and ICT infrastructure to ensure that schools and students benefit from new technologies and gain important technical skills. We will continue to invest in Ireland's school buildings through our building programmes and, through improved demographic planning, aim to ensure that every student has access to a school place which meets their needs.

We will ensure that Ireland's curriculum continues to serve our students by progressing Senior Cycle reform, primary curriculum reform and advancing new initiatives such as the Modern Foreign Language initiative at primary level.

A key priority is to reduce pupil teacher ratios and to increase capitation grants so that every school has the staff and resources they need to deliver for all of their students. We will increase investment in the DEIS programme and continued exploration of new approaches to support students at risk of educational disadvantage. School leaders and staff must be able to benefit from regular and fit-for-purpose Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and we will seek to

increase access to support services for schools from the National Council for Special Education and the National Educational Psychological Service.

Above all, we know that people are at the centre of our school system. Consequently we will promote wellbeing in our school communities and ensure that all students and staff are nurtured and supported. As we strive to ensure excellence in all aspects of our work, we will ensure that excellence and empathy are harmonious goals and not competing ideals.

I look forward to working in collaboration with all education partners and our colleagues across Government to advance this agenda. Níl teorainn le neart an léinn agus tacaíocht an phobail ag obair le chéile.

Norma Foley TD

Minister for Education

Foreword by the Minister of State



As the first Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion, I welcome the publication of the *Statement of Strategy for the Department for 2021-2023*. In September 2020, I published my Action Priorities for Special Education. These priorities are now at the core of this Statement of Strategy. As Minister, I aim to be a champion for students with special educational needs and their families, as well as those facing disadvantage and exclusion.

The strategy sets out the priorities, challenges, and reforms to be met in education, recognising the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on schools and other education settings. Covid-19 is likely to remain a factor in the 2021/2022 school year and so it is important that we recognise the particular challenges which students with special educational needs have in living with Covid-19 and the impact that it can have on their education.

Our commitment to students with special educational needs is evidenced by the record budget that has been secured for the area – over €2 billion, or over one fifth of the total education budget. Given this investment, and having regard to the particular needs of the students involved, it is important to have a clear set of priorities so that supports are provided effectively. A one-size-fits-all approach to education for students with special educational needs will not work. To address this, I intend to work closely with all of our partners to deliver in key areas within Special Education and Inclusion.

At the heart of our work is the individual – their voice must be at the core of planning and education provision. With this in mind, I will support our special schools and increase the provision of special education supports and special classes in our mainstream schools. I will look to progress and expand the school inclusion model and review and update the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act.

The importance of wellbeing for our children and young people can not be emphasised enough, and we will work to expand the capacity of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to support students of special educational needs in this context. The '*National Anti-Bullying Plan*' will also be advanced.

I want to support exceptionally high-performing students, and develop a strategy to enhance their learning opportunity while also assisting students with complex needs, through reforming the Summer Provision programme.

My Department values the work of teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) and will strive to improve professional training for these groups. We will provide for the continued recruitment and allocation of SNAs, while supporting the delivery of the new national online SNA training programme.

It is vital that all schools, both mainstream and special schools, have appropriate accommodation and facilities for students with special educational needs. The Assistive Technology Support scheme and Home Tuition scheme remain vitally important for students with additional needs. Irish Sign Language must be supported within educational settings.

I understand that some groups may need additional assistance at different stages in their lives, and in that regard we will progress targeted educational supports for students with English as an additional language, and those who are homeless or living in family hubs.

I look forward to working with our agencies and partners to progress these vital areas and make a real difference to students' lives over the next three years. Ar aghaidh leis an obair.

Josepha Madigan TD

Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion

Introduction Secretary General



I am pleased to introduce the *Department's Statement of Strategy 2021-2023*, which sets out the direction and high-level work programme that the Department plans to undertake during the next three years.

Over recent months, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we worked hand in hand with our partners, to move with speed and agility as we responded innovatively to the immediate issues of continuing to deliver the vast range of education services.

As we continue to live with Covid-19, and deal with the fall-out from the crisis, our planning is taking place against the backdrop of the pandemic remaining a key challenge. There will be implications for how we support service delivery – including sustaining the operation of schools, holding the State examinations and providing additional supports to vulnerable students. We will also work to mitigate the longer term impact the crisis has had on learning and participation, which has exacerbated inequalities and re-emphasised the urgent need to achieve greater inclusion in education.

This *Statement of Strategy* describes the goals and attaches a set of strategic actions to each goal, which, along with the key indicators, will enable progress in areas such as educational performance, to be monitored. We will develop regular Action Plans detailing our high level priorities to be delivered in the short term. In this way, progress towards the achievement of our goals will be monitored.

In preparing this *Statement of Strategy*, the Department engaged in a wide external and internal consultation process. The large number of considered contributions have greatly helped to inform and guide the development of this *Statement of Strategy*. We will continue to develop our working relationships with our many partners and other Government Departments and offices, including the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, so that we can deliver on our Mission of an education system that “*facilitate children and young people, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development.*”

Our staff strives to deliver these services to a high standard and their commitment, professionalism and dedication were never more evident than during the current pandemic. The Department will continue to demonstrate strong commitment to initiatives, including the successor to *Our Public Service 2020*, which underpin the development of excellence within the Civil Service.

Seán Ó Foghlú
Secretary General

Vision

An education system where every child and young person feels valued and is actively supported and nurtured to reach their full potential

Schools and other educational settings have a leading role in their communities and what happens in classrooms reaches into hearts and homes right across the country. The scale of the sector alone means that any impact is widespread. In this past school year, there were almost 1 million students attending nearly 4,000 schools, supported by over 80,000 staff.

The foundations of Ireland's economy rest with our investment in education. But we know that education transcends economics and what is taught in our schools goes far beyond the core curriculum. We must strive to deliver an education system that is of the highest quality and where every child and young person feels valued and nurtured and where a sense of community is aligned with a global vision. In helping every student to reach their full potential, we are contributing to social and economic development and to the cohesion and well-being of an inclusive society.

We will strive to ensure that every child has access to an educational experience that supports both their academic and personal development. This will continue by increasing investment in our school infrastructure, supporting the continuous professional development of school staff and improving services for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Equally, we must redouble our efforts to tackle educational inequality and ensure no child loses out in our education system, including those who have been additionally disadvantaged during the Covid-19 pandemic. This must come not only from increasing resources for students at risk of disadvantage, but by ensuring that the education system is conscious of the needs of all students.

Children and young people, school leaders, teachers, SNAs, support staff, and volunteers are the life-blood of our school communities. Our approach to improving the education system must be shaped by the wisdom and vitality that exists within these communities. We must recognise the vital role schools play in the lives of our children and young people and how the experience can enrich not just their academic achievement but also their creativity, capacity for self-expression, sporting talents, and wellbeing. In short, we must not just create classrooms; we must continue to build communities, an all-encompassing environment where excellence and accomplishment is supported and nourished.

Our Mission and Our Values

Our Mission

To facilitate children and young people, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development.

Our Values

We place the student at the centre of education strategy and policy development and value learning as a public good, in light of its core role in the development, cohesion and wellbeing of an inclusive society.

We believe in the vital importance of open communication, consultation and collaboration with stakeholders within the education sector and with the wider community.

We are committed to the principles of continuous improvement, innovation and evaluation which will underpin evidence-based policy development and programme delivery.

The achievement of our goals will be underpinned by the overarching values for the Civil Service, as set out in the *Civil Service Renewal Plan*.

We value our staff and all those who work in schools and in other education settings in our education system. We work to create an environment where all of us can learn, develop and contribute to the goals of the education system.

We are accountable, open to change, and respectful in our dealings with the public and work colleagues.

Our Goals

In pursuing our mission, in a challenging and dynamic environment, the Department is working for the period 2021 to 2023 to achieve the following Strategic Goals:



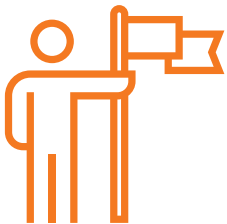
Goal 1:

Support the provision of high-quality education and improve the learning experience to meet the needs of all students, in schools and early years settings



Goal 2:

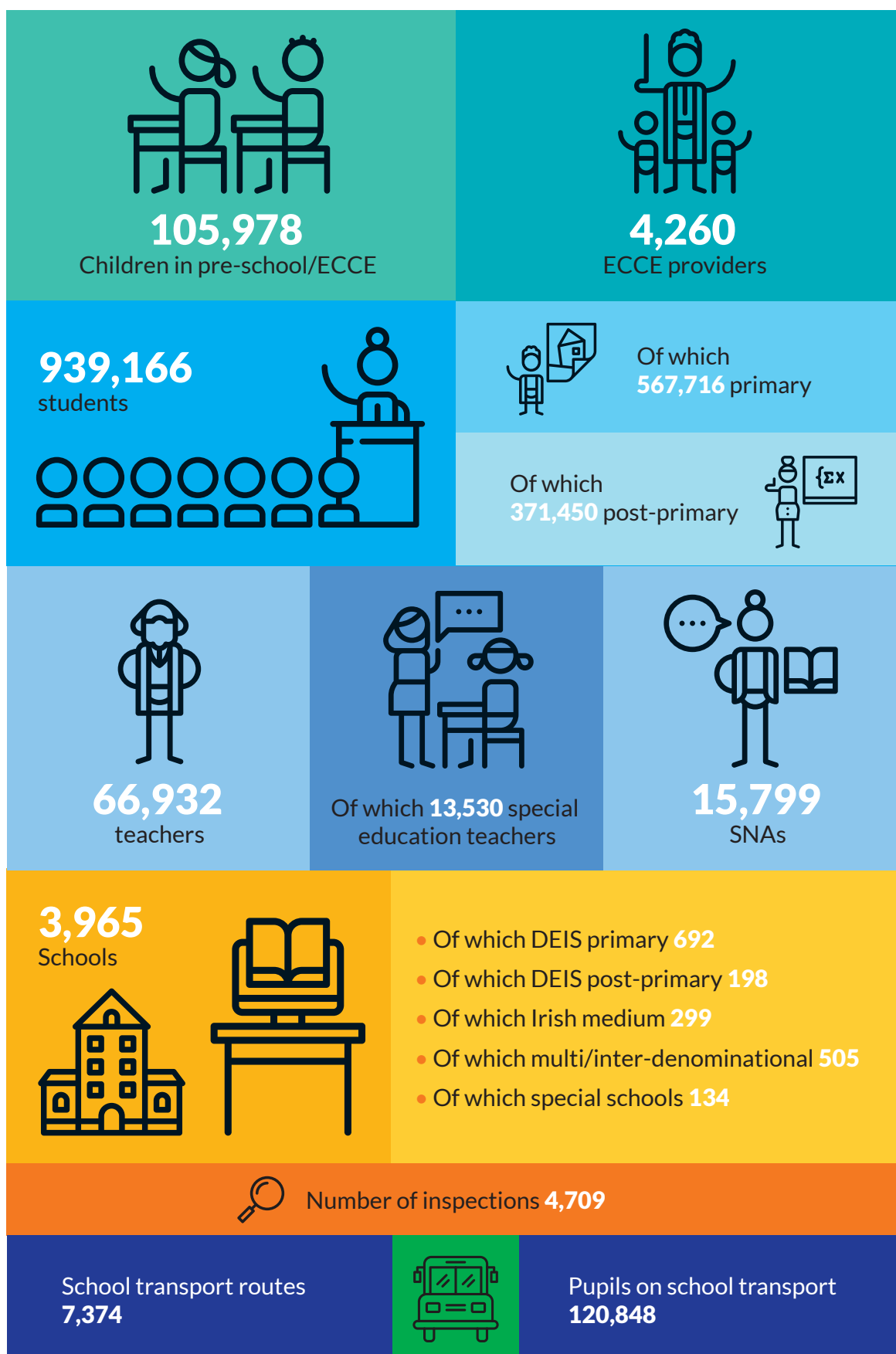
Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all students are supported to fulfil their potential



Goal 3:

Together with our partners, provide strategic leadership and support for the delivery of the right systems and infrastructure for the sector

Key figures



Key challenges and opportunities in our operating environment

The education system provides opportunities for learning and engagement across a person's lifetime. Learning environments enable students to take part, achieve their potential, and support broader societal and economic goals. The period of school closures in 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-19 has had an immediate impact on our school communities. In addition to supporting education provision during this challenging time, we must be cognisant of the longer term impact on education of the Covid-19 pandemic and develop and implement appropriate responses in the coming years to ameliorate its negative effects. The closure of our schools highlighted their centrality in the lives of families, communities and workplaces. It emphasised anew how important schools and other education settings are to students, how they support wellbeing and socialisation, and how they support parents' workforce participation.

The Department recognises the important role that schools and education settings play and this, as well as the available public health advice, will continue to inform our decisions as we work to provide an open and safe school environment. We will continue to work closely with partners, including student and parent representatives, to ensure that our school communities receive appropriate supports to help them at this time. Equally importantly, we are working with those involved in the management and leadership of schools and other education settings, teacher representatives, and other bodies to ensure that they receive the supports they need to help them operate in the current environment.

We will continue to provide appropriate supports and policy responses as long as the impact of Covid-19 is evident in our schools. We will take account of the long-term impact of Covid-19 on teaching and learning and on broader society in our formulation of policy in the coming years.

The environment in which the education system operates is a complex one. Some of the major external factors which need to be taken into account when articulating strategic directions for the sector are set out below.

Political environment

The Government has set out key ambitions in *Our Shared Future, the Programme for Government*, which seeks to recover from the impacts of Covid-19. There are a number of important commitments intended to support the education sector and the students within it.

Brexit presents significant political, economic and social challenges for Ireland. Given the extent of the inter-connectedness of the economy and people. Accordingly the maintenance and enhancement of the close co-operation in education and people on a North-South and East-West basis remains a priority for the Department.

Economic environment

Although the economy was in a strong position at the beginning of 2020, with GDP growth of 5.6% in 2019 and a labour market close to full employment, the pandemic has presented considerable challenges. The OECD's *Strategic Foresight Report 2020* reported negative trends in indicators of economic, gender, skills, regional, and ethnic inequalities for 2020.

We must ensure that our students receive the best possible preparation for their lives when they leave school.

In the face of these circumstances, the Department must redouble its efforts to assist students who have special educational needs, those who are educationally disadvantaged, including those who are homeless or living in direct provision facilities.

Increasing demographic pressures

As outlined in our Projections of Full-Time Enrolment, post-primary enrolments are projected to continue rising over the short term, with enrolments in 2020 standing at 379,183. Enrolments in primary schools in 2020 stood at 561,410, down slightly on 2019 (567,716). Enrolments at this level are projected to fall over the coming years.

Delivery and reform in the context of Covid

Covid-19 has been a disrupting force across Irish society, and most certainly within our education system. The pandemic and impacts of school closures have shed new light on the important role of schooling in supporting children to thrive and flourish. As we move forward in responding to the pandemic and its aftermath, we must keep the health and wellbeing of children and young people to the fore.

The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly affected how education is delivered. The potential and importance of digital learning and use of digital technologies in education have come into sharper focus in light of events surrounding Covid-19. The Department also had to re-focus to help the sector through provision of guidance and resources. This was also true of the work of our agencies and support services. Periods of remote learning have underlined the importance of digital technologies in a modern education system. For this reason, €100 million in ICT funding was provided during 2020 to facilitate schools to develop their ICT capacity and to support students at risk of being negatively impacted by a digital divide. We must continue to develop the digital capacity of our education system and to ensure that all schools are supported to achieve this.

In addition to mitigating the short and medium term impacts of Covid it will be important to continue with longer term strategic reforms including the current review of the Senior Cycle to ensure that we are equipping students with the necessary tools and provide the best preparation pathways to progress after school. At primary level, we will continue with the phased review of the primary curriculum and its link with the Aistear programme in early years provision.

The impact of distance learning on special education has also been made clear, including the risk of regression and loss of key skills. The Department has been very clear in its ambition to prioritise a return to in-school education for students with the greatest level of need. This has re-emphasised the importance of bespoke provision for special education, including the important role played by special schools, special classes, and SEN supports in mainstream classes, as we advance towards the roll-out of a model of school inclusion that will see additional therapeutic supports made available in schools for the first time.

As part of enhancing inclusion in education over the term of this Statement of Strategy, we will continue to invest and build on existing supports for special education in all of our schools, expanding the number of special class places, investing in CPD in the area of special education, supporting our Special Education Teachers and Special Needs Assistants, and enhancing our special schools. An expanded summer provision programme and a temporary supplementary in-home education provision for students with special educational needs have also demonstrated the Department's commitment to innovative and targeted responses in this area. It is crucial to build on these to ensure that effective support and provision is available to every child with additional needs to achieve their full potential.

The Department will continue to work with education partners, bringing reliable guidance to all, ensuring that parents, guardians, principals and teachers have the information and resources they need to promote health, wellbeing and learning for children and young people.

These developments will take place in the context of *Our Public Service 2030*, the new public service reform plan.

Skills and capacity

It remains crucial that teachers, school leaders, and all of the education workforce are supported in their professional practice. Initial and continuing teacher education programmes need to reflect the skills and experience which teachers and school leaders require, as well as acknowledging and celebrating the diversity which they meet in classrooms today.

Over the term of the *Statement of Strategy*, we will continue to address learning and development needs of Department staff to ensure that they are equipped with the essential skills needed to be effective in delivering for the citizen. The Department will continue to implement reforms associated with Civil Service renewal and will engage with OneLearning to access common learning and development interventions. We will work to adapt to new ways of working in light of the changes brought about by Covid-19 while protecting continuity of service to our customers.

Working to play a full role in achieving overarching cross-Government Objectives

Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic

In common with all Government Departments, the Department of Education has been involved in the national response to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Dealing with the immediate impact of the pandemic on schools and society has been the priority for the Department since early 2020, and we will continue to support students and the education system throughout.

We will continue to work with relevant Government Departments and other partners in mitigating the impact of Covid-19 in the longer term. The disruption to society caused by the Covid-19 pandemic will have an impact over the lifetime of this strategy. We will work with others to ensure that a coherent package of measures are developed to address these impacts and ensure that appropriate responses are developed on a cross-Government basis.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Department is committed to contributing to the national effort to implement the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals and sees Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as key to achieving these. Over the lifetime of this Statement of Strategy we will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and in particular to SDG 4 – Quality Education “to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” through the SDG National Implementation Plan.

Climate action

Undoubtedly, climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing global society. We must all play our part to mitigate its impacts. The Department has a strong research programme and is working in partnership with SEAI to develop and test best practice for the schools sector in relation to climate action measures.

Over the lifetime of this *Statement of Strategy* we will implement the following strategic actions:

- Participate in the Review of the National Development Plan and the development of the Climate Action Plan 2021 which will set the parameters for delivering on Government commitments in relation to the Climate Action Agenda
- Ensure that the schools infrastructure programme reflects the requirements of the Climate Action Plan 2021 and incorporates best practice and learnings from the Department's research programme on climate action measures
- Engage in a review of the current school transport scheme to include sustainability in transport options and explore alternatives
- Develop and co-ordinate implementation of a follow-on National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to 2030

Public sector equality and human rights duty

The Department of Education is conscious of its key role in promoting, protecting and vindicating the achievement of the key human right to education. The right to education is contained in a number of international human rights conventions to which Ireland is a party, namely:

- The International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13)

- The Convention on the Rights of Child (Article 28)
- The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (Article 10)
- The Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Article 5) and
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24)

The Department's mission, to facilitate children and young people, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development, is a key element in ensuring that Ireland fulfils its obligations under these conventions and ensures that Ireland's education system recognises the rights of children and young people to an education, whatever their circumstances. The promotion of equality and human rights and ensuring access to an equitable system, underpins our mission and drives our day to day work.

The Department will continue to attend appearances by Ireland before the UN Treaty monitoring bodies to account for the implementation of the right to education under these treaties.

The Department is also committed to continuously creating a better work environment for staff that promotes positive engagement, open communication, fairness, equality and respect.

This *Statement of Strategy* articulates a strong focus on equality and human rights throughout and this is set specifically at the core of the second high level goal to "*Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all students are supported to fulfil their potential*". Together with the appointment by Government of the first-ever Minister of State with responsibility for special education and inclusion, the voice of the child and young person will be incorporated into policy making in this area to underpin this commitment.

During the period covered by this strategy we are committed to:

- Exploring innovative approaches to ensuring inclusive education for all students
- Tackling educational inequality through the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme
- Narrowing the digital divide through increasing access to broadband and digital technology for schools
- Promoting the learning of the Irish language through continued investment in Irish-medium education and curricular focus
- Progressing the implementation of a school inclusion model
- Ensuring that our curriculum continues to meet the learning needs of our students through initiatives such as the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative
- Ensuring that teachers and school leaders are provided with appropriate continuing professional development supports to assist them in developing relevant pedagogical skills and delivering inclusive teaching and learning in a variety of school contexts
- Continuing to increase the diversity of school type in order to offer parents more choice, including the transfer of schools to alternative patronage such as Community National Schools
- Exploring the scope for a Citizens Assembly on Education as set out in the Programme for Government
- Engaging in a review of the current school transport scheme to provide a better service for all students

Innovation

Innovation in education is about creating new ideas or processes that can lead to positive changes which will benefit students. Innovation is considered a critical requirement for public service organisations to improve services both today and for tomorrow.

Many innovations have been championed across the Department and the education sector with the pace of innovation increasing exponentially during the Covid-19 crisis, we demonstrated our agility as an organisation as we responded and adapted creatively, in collaboration with our stakeholders, to support students and deliver efficient and inclusive services.

During the lifespan of this *Statement of Strategy*, we will develop an innovation strategy to build on this approach. We will deepen and continue to drive a culture of innovation across the Department and the sector to deliver now and to help shape the future. Reflective of the *Innovation Strategy for the Irish Public Service* our three priorities to support innovation will be:

- Citizen-centric Innovation
- Culture of Innovation, where all staff are inspired, empowered and enabled to innovate
- Scale Up Innovation, where we will work across sectors and our agencies to optimise efficiency by scaling innovations

Work with other Government Departments

Ní neart go cur le chéile

Our Mission, to facilitate children and young people through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development can not be achieved in isolation.

The Department of Education works with a range of other Government Departments in progressing cross-Government priorities and interdepartmental work. Given the synergies between our areas of responsibility, we work most closely with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Our high-level cooperation with these and other Departments is summarised below.

We will work with the **Department of the Taoiseach** to implement the education commitments in the Programme for Government and to streamline Government communications so that citizens can access information in a convenient, effective manner. Engagement through a range of Cabinet Committees, Senior Officials Groups, etc. will continue, as will collaborative work to progress education actions outlined as part of the North East Inner City Initiative.

We will work with the **Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth** to support children and their families, ensure access to early years provision and improve educational outcomes across the primary and post-primary sector for Traveller children, migrant children and other children at risk of educational disadvantage, to support the implementation of the *Migrant Integration Strategy and National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy*, develop curricula and inspection and self-evaluation models to quality assure early years provision, cooperate in relation to youth justice matters and the implementation of the *Youth Justice Strategy*, encourage greater dissemination of research, evaluation and learning from the What Works initiative, tackle child poverty and ensure equal access to a quality education, ensure that the safety, well-being and protection of children is a priority, develop the workforce in the sector, implement the findings of the review of structures and systems in the early learning and care and school-aged childcare sectors when completed, advance the School Inclusion model and to progress a co-ordinated inter-agency approach to strengthen supports for students in direct provision.

We will work with the **Department of Defence** to support the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning to develop our systems to respond to national emergencies, drawing on the experiences in the Covid-19 pandemic.

We will work with the **Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment** to enhance enterprise engagement on a range of matters including education for sustainable development, work on the senior cycle programme and vocational pathways, and the implementation of Languages Connect, our foreign languages strategy.

We will work with the **Department of Environment, Climate and Communications** to incorporate best practice climate action measures in the schools infrastructure programme, engage in a review of the current school transport scheme to include sustainability in transport options, contribute to the implementation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals including and the development of a new Education for Sustainable Development Strategy, particularly Goal 4 – Quality Education, and to improve broadband connectivity to primary schools.

We will work with the **Department of Foreign Affairs** to develop a new *Education for Sustainable Development Strategy*, advance relevant post-Brexit arrangements, and to progress the schools-sector Global Footprint Initiative.

We will work with the **Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science** to progress transitions reform and guidance, the Review of Senior Cycle, curriculum development including Junior Cycle Reform and Leaving Certificate Irish curricular developments, the inclusion agenda including retention and pathways to progression, the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, Education for Sustainable Development Strategy and Digital Strategy*, teacher supply, teacher education, STEM and foreign languages, creativity and the Creative Ireland Programme, entrepreneurship and the *Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence*.

We will work with the **Department of Health** to ensure that a coordinated Covid-19 response is implemented across the public service, that mental health supports continue to be available for young people, development of the School Inclusion Model, continuation of cooperation on health-related education initiatives such as the Lifeskills survey, Healthy Lifestyle guidance for schools, Active School week, and Concussion in Sport, and to progress the National Identity Management Commission overseeing the implementation of the National Mental Health Policy *Sharing the Vision*.

We will work with the **Department of Housing and Local Government** to address issues arising in relation to homeless students and to continue to cooperate with regard to school infrastructure planning processes.

We will work with the **Department of Justice** to align inter-agency work focussed on enhancing community wellbeing and safety.

We will work with the **Department of Public Expenditure and Reform** to continue to lead the roll-out of shared services (HR, Pensions Administration, Payroll and Financial Management) in the education sector, further professionalise and develop public procurement through the Office of Government Procurement, work collectively with ICT leaders to transform how government delivers its services through implementation of the Public Service ICT Strategy, and develop and implement alternative and innovative delivery models to achieve better services.

We will work with the **Department of Rural and Community Development** to contribute to the delivery of “*Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2020-2025*”, in areas of mutual interest such as broadband provision in rural areas and the development of a cross-government islands policy.

We will work with the **Department of Social Protection** to support the implementation of the *Roadmap for Social Inclusion*, ensure that students most in need continue to be prioritised for inclusion in the School Meals Programme, reduce the number of children experiencing consistent poverty, improve educational outcomes, and to mitigate the impact of socio-economic deprivation.

We will work with the **Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sports and Media** to support the progression of the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill, advance the education elements of the *20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language, 2010-2030*, and to implement the Creative Youth Initiative and the *Arts in Education Charter*.

We will work with the **Department of Transport** to engage in a review of the current school transport scheme to include sustainability in transport options.



Goal 1:

Support the provision of high-quality education and improve the learning experience to meet the needs of all students, in schools and early years settings

Our goal is to provide every child and young person with a learning experience that supports them to reach their potential and to develop the knowledge and skills they need to navigate in today's complex world. We will develop and improve learning and assessment through continuation of the programme of curricular reform and an exploration of new approaches to teaching and learning. We will focus on the development of the whole person, mindful of the challenges children and young people face in the modern world, not least those posed by the use of technology.

We recognise that education is about far more than a student's academic performance and career development skills. It is also about students' personal development, self-actualisation, civic mindedness, wellbeing and capacity for self-expression. We will seek to give greater recognition to this and extend support to the further development of these attributes in all students.

The successful delivery of this goal means that children, young people and the wider school community will be supported to deal with the impact of Covid-19, both immediate and long-term. The standards associated with the education system will be upheld and enhanced and teachers, leaders and other members of the education workforce will be supported through continuous professional development and other interventions to continue to provide a quality assured learning experience for all students.

Strategic actions

To achieve this goal we will implement the following strategic actions:

1. Supporting school communities through and post Covid-19 to enable continuity of education and assessment, and to help alleviate the impact of Covid-19 especially for those students at risk of educational disadvantage.
2. Develop and support the education workforce to strengthen their teaching, leadership and student support capability, through Continuing Professional Development and by building on the experience gained during Covid-19 to deliver a deliberate and considered increase in the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching, learning and assessment.
3. Strengthen the learning experience through curriculum and assessment development, including early years curricular provision, embedding the new primary curriculum and the Junior Cycle and advancing reform of the Senior Cycle.
4. Actively support the furtherance of inclusive environments in our schools and education centres to ensure that students of all backgrounds and additional needs have the confidence and reassurance to reach their full potential, and ensuring that our education system is fully welcoming of diversity and inclusion.

5. Ensure that key transition points are effective and support the best learning outcomes for all students, as they move from pre-school to primary, primary to post-primary and post-primary to further education and training, higher education and the world of work.

6. Support Irish language learning, extend Irish-medium provision and implement the Gaeltacht education policy.

7. Consider detailed proposals to promote and support extracurricular activities within school and work toward a policy paper on these measures over the course of the strategy.

8. Develop and use quality assurance approaches in schools and early years settings that encourage high standards of provision for students, including students with additional needs, and build strong collaborative and self-evaluative practice in schools and settings.



Goal 2:

Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all students are supported to fulfil their potential

Equity of opportunity and inclusivity must be fundamental principles in our education system. Our aim is to develop a system that welcomes and meaningfully engages all students, including those with special educational needs and students at risk of educational disadvantage.

Fostering wellbeing and personal development enables students to fully participate in school and prepares them effectively for active and responsible citizenship. We will continue to support the mental health and wellbeing of students particularly mindful of the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people throughout the system. Schools play a vital role in their communities and under this goal we will advance work to encourage and support collaboration within the education sector, build stronger links between schools and the wider community and provide for greater choice and diversity of school type.

The successful delivery of this goal means that our school system is open and welcoming for all students irrespective of background or ability. In particular students at risk of educational disadvantage and students with special educational needs will be supported to achieve their potential. All students and the wider school community will have access to resources and supports in the right place at the right time based on their needs and the relationship between schools and the wider community will be strengthened.

Strategic actions

To achieve this goal we will implement the following strategic actions:

1. Support the mental health and wellbeing of students through implementation of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* and ensuring that wellbeing supports recognise the impact of Covid-19 on students.
2. Support the participation and progression of students with special educational needs through the delivery of integrated resources, in particular by advancing towards the roll out of the School Inclusion Model and a new Special Needs Assistants (SNA) allocation model.
3. Increase the development of special class places for students with additional needs in new and existing mainstream schools, as well as continued support for the development of special schools as a vital part of our education system through effective forecasting of future need and equipping schools to better support students with special educational needs.
4. Help students at risk of educational disadvantage to access appropriate education resources which reflect their diverse needs and support improved outcomes, including through the development and publication of a *Traveller Education Strategy* and through ensuring early identification of supports for students who are at risk of disengaging from school.
5. Address the retention and achievement gap between Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) and non-DEIS schools through the DEIS programme.

6. Ensure policy in the area of special education is fully up to date by conducting a review of the EPSEN Act.
7. Develop a strategy to enhance learning opportunities for exceptionally able students.
8. Increase the diversity of school type in order to offer parents and students more choice through the process to reconfigure schools to increase diversity and strengthen the relationship between schools and their local communities.



Goal 3:

Together with our partners, provide strategic leadership and support for the delivery of the right systems and infrastructure for the sector

The Department and its agencies have an important role in providing strategic leadership within the sector and across government. This involves coordination with sectoral stakeholders, the broader public sector, the political system and other governmental bodies and cross-sectoral work programmes. The aim of this goal is to strengthen these partnerships and to work together as we deliver a first-class education experience for all students.

Strengthening evidence informed policy development and implementation is a key focus for the Department in this strategic period. We will continue to increase the use of robust data to inform key policy decisions and put in place appropriate structures to build capacity to ensure education policy development and implementation is underpinned by strong evidence, research and evaluation. We will deliver appropriate infrastructure to provide appropriate school places for all, including students with special educational needs, and we will continue work on the energy research programme to inform a deep energy retrofit programme across the sector. We will continue to develop our capacity to innovate and work with the sector to develop new ways of working to continuously improve the education system. In partnership with Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science we will begin exploratory work on a citizens' assembly on the future of education.

The successful delivery of this goal means that our school infrastructure programme is informed by demographics, climate action measures and other evidence to ensure school places are available for students, our school transport scheme is responsive to student's needs, our policies and implementation plans are informed by research and evidence, shared services models provide efficient back office functions in the Department and for the sector, and that this activity is undertaken in partnership with the sector.

Strategic actions

To achieve this goal we will implement the following strategic actions:

1. Support the delivery of an extensive schools infrastructure programme, which incorporates best practice in climate action measures and ensures a place for all students.
2. Improve options for staff professional training in the area of special education in order to continue the development of an inclusive and welcoming education system.
3. Develop appropriate structures and build capacity to ensure education policy development and implementation is underpinned by strong evidence, research and evaluation which is outcomes focused and cognisant of best international practice.
4. Develop and deliver high quality shared services and information systems for the sector.
5. Build on our experience of our continuing efforts to manage through Covid-19 to strengthen relationships with key partners such as students, parents, teachers, and advocacy groups, and to facilitate their input into policy and service developments.

Education Indicators

The Department publishes a range of statistical reports which provide an overview of the different sectors of education. The annual *Education Indicators for Ireland* report presents a comprehensive set of educational indicators for the education system in Ireland by means of a statistical overview of the work of the Department of Education and its agencies.

We will continue to report on the implementation of our reform programme through the Action Plan framework over the period 2021-2023. Under the framework, we will monitor our progress against quarterly scheduled actions and publish regular Action Plans, quarterly progress reports and reviews. The Action Plans and reviews will include indicators taken from the *Education Indicators for Ireland* report to provide an enhanced view of our progress. In addition, we will continue to publish key statistics documents and updates on the implementation of our strategies.

Indicators that will be used to measure progress against the goals of the three year *Statement of Strategy* include:

- Performance
- Progression into further education and training and higher education

Appendix 1: Strategies

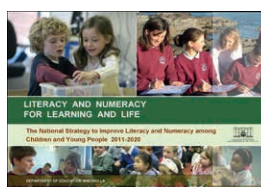
A number of key national education strategies underpin our work and drive the significant changes that are being planned and implemented across the continuum of education. Our whole-of-system approach enables us to integrate these strategies and monitor their progress as they each contribute towards our vision for education.



The **National Síolta Aistear Initiative** is designed to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of practice in early childhood care and education settings, for children from birth to six years. It was established in 2016 to support the coordinated rollout of Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, 2006) and Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009). It is funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and is being developed and implemented in collaboration with the Department of Education and agencies of both Departments.



This **Wellbeing Policy Statement** provides an overarching structure encompassing existing, ongoing and developing work in this area including the Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum at the primary level, and the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Programme at the post-primary level. This policy is for all those with an interest in wellbeing promotion in education, clearly outlining best practice in this area.



Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011-2020 is the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy standards in our early years, primary and post-primary settings. This strategy sought to address significant concerns about how well our young people are developing the literacy and numeracy skills that they will need to participate fully in the education system, to live satisfying and rewarding lives, and to participate as active and informed citizens in our society. An interim review of the strategy, published in 2017, has shown the considerable progress made, at the mid-way point in the strategy but also identified areas where additional focus is needed. Priority actions and targets have been identified which set the trajectory needed across the education system to successfully enhance our students' achievements, particularly in numeracy.

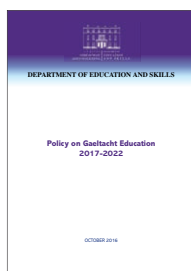


The **DEIS Plan 2017** aims at improving educational outcomes for students at risk of educational disadvantage throughout the education continuum, including narrowing the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools in attendance, achievement and retention, and improving progression opportunities for students in DEIS schools.

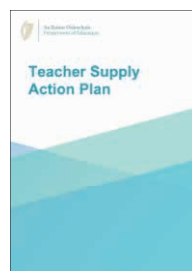


20 year strategy for the Irish Language – Implementation Plan – Department of Education and Skills.

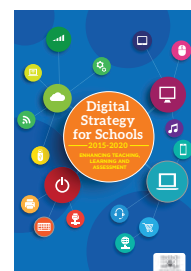
The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language outlines an integrated approach to the Irish language, in which 9 areas of action are specified, including education, the Gaeltacht, the family, the community, the media, technology and the economy.



The overarching goal of the **Policy on Gaeltacht Education** is to ensure the availability of a high quality and relevant Irish-medium educational experience for young people living in Gaeltacht areas in order to support the use of Irish as the main language of families and of Gaeltacht communities. The policy aims to ensure that a sufficient number of schools and early-years' settings use Irish as the language of communication and instruction for all areas of learning (apart from English and other languages), in each of the Language-Planning Areas within the Gaeltacht (as set out under the Gaeltacht Act, 2012).



The **Teacher Supply Action Plan** is a programme of actions to address issues about the supply of teachers, including the development of a model of teacher demand and supply and the development by higher education institutions (HEIs) of new initial teacher education (ITE) and teacher upskilling programmes to meet the needs of the school system.



The **Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment** outlines a vision for the embedding of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment in primary and post-primary schools. The Strategy outlines a programme of work across a number of themes: Teaching, learning and assessment using digital technologies Teachers' Professional learning, Leadership, research and policy ICT infrastructure.

For 2021 onward, building on the *Digital Strategy*, an expert working group will make recommendations for a follow on strategy which will further promote the effective use of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment practices in schools.



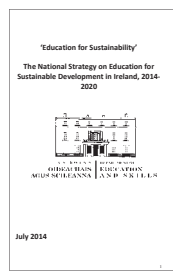
Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026.

This strategy sets out an ambitious roadmap and targets for the teaching and learning of foreign languages, through a number of measures targeted at improving proficiency, diversity and immersion.



STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026.

The plan is designed to equip students with analytical, creativity and critical thinking skills to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. The plan includes an increased focus on encouraging traditionally under-represented groups to participate in STEM activities, increasing links between the education system and industry, and reviewing the supports in place to ensure our teachers feel confident to incorporate STEM.



Education for Sustainable Development: The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland, 2014-2020.

The strategy aims to ensure that education contributes to sustainable development by equipping students with the relevant knowledge, the key dispositions and skills, and the values that will motivate and empower them throughout their lives to become informed active citizens who take action for a more sustainable future in accordance with the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Appendix 2: Non-commercial Bodies under the aegis of the Department

An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)

Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA)

Educational Research Centre (ERC)

National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

Residential Institution Redress Board (RIRB)

Residential Institution Review Committee (RIRC)

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board (RISF) Caranua

State Examinations Commission (SEC)

The Teaching Council

Appendix 3: Acronyms and Initialisms

Acronyms and Initialisms

CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DE	Department of Education
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
ELC	Early Learning and Care
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
EU	European Union
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NCSE	National Council For Special Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEN	Special Education Needs
SNA	Special Needs Assistants
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education