



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Statement of Strategy 2023-2025



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Foreword by the Minister

I am delighted to welcome this Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 for the Department of Education. This strategy sets out the Department's strategic direction and priorities for the next three years. It follows the progress of the 2021-2023 strategy with a continued focus on key areas such as supporting children's learning in the aftermath of the pandemic, addressing educational disadvantage, migrant inclusion, supporting children and young people with special educational needs, combatting climate change and supporting the active participation of children and young people in the system.

This work does not happen in isolation and I would like to sincerely thank school communities for the work they have done and continue to do to deliver a high quality education experience for all of our children and young people.

Our vision is an education system in which every child and young person feels valued and is actively supported and nurtured to reach their full potential. I look forward to continuing to work in collaboration with all education partners and our colleagues across Government to deliver this agenda.

Norma Foley TD

Minister for Education

Foreword by the Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion

As Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion, I welcome the publication of the Statement of Strategy for the Department 2023-2025.

While we have made excellent progress in the development of services for students with special educational needs and their families as well as those facing disadvantage and exclusion, there remains much to be done. Delivery of the Department's strategic priorities contained within this strategy will see improved capacity, service delivery and supports for all those with special educational needs and their families.

I look forward to working in partnership with parents, guardians and students along with our agencies and stakeholders to progress these vital areas and to make a real difference to the lives of children and young people over the next three years.

Josepha Madigan TD

Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion

Foreword by the Minister of State with responsibility for Sport and Physical Education

As Minister of State with special responsibility for Sport and Physical Education, I welcome the publication of the Department of Education Statement of Strategy 2023-2025.

The Department of Education recognises the importance of physical activity in the educational setting and remains committed to developing this area further, including collaboration on strategies and initiatives relating to physical activity and education, identifying and promoting ways to maximise physical activity throughout the school day, and encouraging greater use of school and community facilities.

This work also involves close cooperation with Government Departments, including the Department of Health and the Department of Transport, Sports, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht and Media. I look forward to working with colleagues in the Department of Education and across the education sector to deliver on these commitments over the next three years.

Thomas Byrne TD

Minister of State with responsibility for Sport and Physical Education

Introduction from the Secretary General

I am pleased to introduce the Department's Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 which sets out the direction and high-level work programme that the Department plans to undertake during the next three years.

The new Statement of Strategy reflects the key ambitions in *Our Shared Future, the Programme for Government* that contains a number of important commitments intended to support the education sector, including children and young people, teachers and others working in our schools, parents and families.

This Statement of Strategy builds upon progress in the 2021-2023 strategy and describes the goals and attached a set of strategic actions to each goal. The Department will publish Forbairt, an annual plan that sets out our high-level priorities. Forbairt 2023 has already been published and can be found [here](#). In this way, we will drive progress on, and be accountable for, the achievement of each of our goals.

In preparing this Statement of Strategy, the Department engaged in a wide external and internal consultation process. This included, for the first time, two BEACONS (Bringing Education Alive for Our Communities on a National Scale) events. These were consultative events with children and young people, parents and teachers in the Dublin West and Laois areas that provided valuable input into this strategy.

Our staff strive to deliver services to a high standard with commitment, professionalism and dedication. This Statement of Strategy sets out our plan up to 2025 and helps us focus on our strategic priorities ensuring that, in conjunction with our partners, we respond effectively and innovatively to the needs of our children and young people in the delivery of education services.

Bernie McNally

Secretary General

1. Vision, Mission, Values

Our vision is an education system that is of the highest quality and where every member of our educational communities, including our children and young people, their families and all the staff that engage with them feel valued and supported. In helping every child and young person to develop and realise their full potential, we are contributing to social progress and economic development and to the cohesion and well-being of an inclusive and sustainable society.

We are committed to further strengthening our efforts to tackle educational inequality, including for those who have been additionally disadvantaged during the Covid-19 pandemic and those with special educational needs.

Our approach to improving the education system is shaped by the knowledge, experience and passion that exists within school communities. We recognise the vital role schools play in the lives of our children and young people. We will continue to support our school communities in nurturing a holistic approach for the education of our children and young people in a safe environment, where they can be creative and innovative and experience a positive learning experience. We will support the development of an environment where excellence and achievement are recognised and celebrated in all their forms, where children can experience joy in their learning and where all members of our school communities are supported and learn from each other.

Quality assurance underpins our work. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education works to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all children and young people in Irish education settings and to support the development of the Irish education system.

Vision

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

Mission

To ensure that all children and young people have access to a positive learning experience and to facilitate them, through learning to realise their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development.

Our Values

We place children and young people at the centre of education strategies and policies and value learning as a public good, in light of its core role in the development of an inclusive, sustainable and healthy society.

We believe in the vital importance of open and meaningful 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, evaluation and sharing learning which will underpin evidence-informed policy development and programme delivery.

The achievement of our goals will be underpinned by the values for the Civil Service, as set out in the *Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy*.

We value our staff and all people 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 everyone with whom we engage.

2. Key Challenges and Opportunities in our Operating Environment

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

Political environment

The Government set out key ambitions in the *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, which seek to overcome the challenges presented in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing climate and biodiversity emergency. The Programme outlines the commitment to building an education system founded on the principles of excellence, inclusion and sustainability and the pledge to continue to strive for excellence.

The ongoing war in Ukraine and increased levels of migration internationally have also required the education system to adapt and respond effectively. The Department is committed to meeting the needs of all students, including recent and established migrant children and young people.

Economic Environment

The impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also been felt in the economic sphere with inflation presenting a significant challenge in 2022 and early 2023. The ongoing strength of the Irish economy remains a key enabler in permitting the Department to work towards its vision for the education system.

The Department continues to work to ensure that education remains accessible to all students including those who are homeless or living in temporary facilities. The new scheme announced in March 2023, to eliminate the cost of schoolbooks in primary schools and special schools, is just one example of a newly developed support that will benefit all school communities from autumn 2023.

Changing Demographic Pressures

As outlined in our Projections of Full-Time Enrolment (2021), post-primary enrolments were projected to increase by 8% in the short term and expected to peak in 2024 at 408,794. At primary level, enrolments are projected to continue to decline, reaching a low point in 2033. Due to the arrival of Ukrainian students, and higher than expected post-Covid migration, enrolments at both levels are above the projections for the 2022/2023 school year. As of May 2023, 15,589 Ukrainian pupils had been enrolled in schools across Ireland with 10,105 accommodated in primary schools and 5,484 in post-primary schools. Balancing the need to

meet current demands as well as plan appropriately for the future will be an important consideration for the Department throughout the lifespan of this Strategy.

Post Covid-19 impact

Covid-19 had a significant disruptive impact on our education system. One of its impacts was on the wellbeing of children and young people and the department is committed to continuing to provide a range of measures to address this. As we move forward, the Department continues to harness the learning from the experience of responding to the pandemic including the potential and importance of digital learning and use of digital technology in education. We must continue to develop the digital capacity of our education system and the digital skills of our students and wider school communities.

Skills and capacity

Preparing students to participate as active citizens and meet the needs of the future is central to the delivery of an international exemplar education system. Our education system will need to provide students with the skills to thrive in a low-carbon and digitalised society while ensuring a culture of innovation is promoted.

Climate Action

In order to achieve a carbon neutral economy by 2050 a whole of Government approach is imperative. We will support and deliver on commitments in the Government's Climate Action Plan that help position the schools sector to meet climate action targets for 2030 and 2050.

Collaboration

The Department will continue to work with education partners ensuring that parents, guardians, principals and teachers and others working in our schools have the information and resources they need to promote and support wellbeing and learning for children and young people. This collaboration will also take place in the context of wider cross government strategies and international commitments including, inter alia:

- *Better Public Services* – the new public service transformation 2030 plan.
- *ESD to 2030: Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development*
- *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education Policy Statement 2017-2026*
- *Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP23)*
- UN Sustainable Development Goals

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

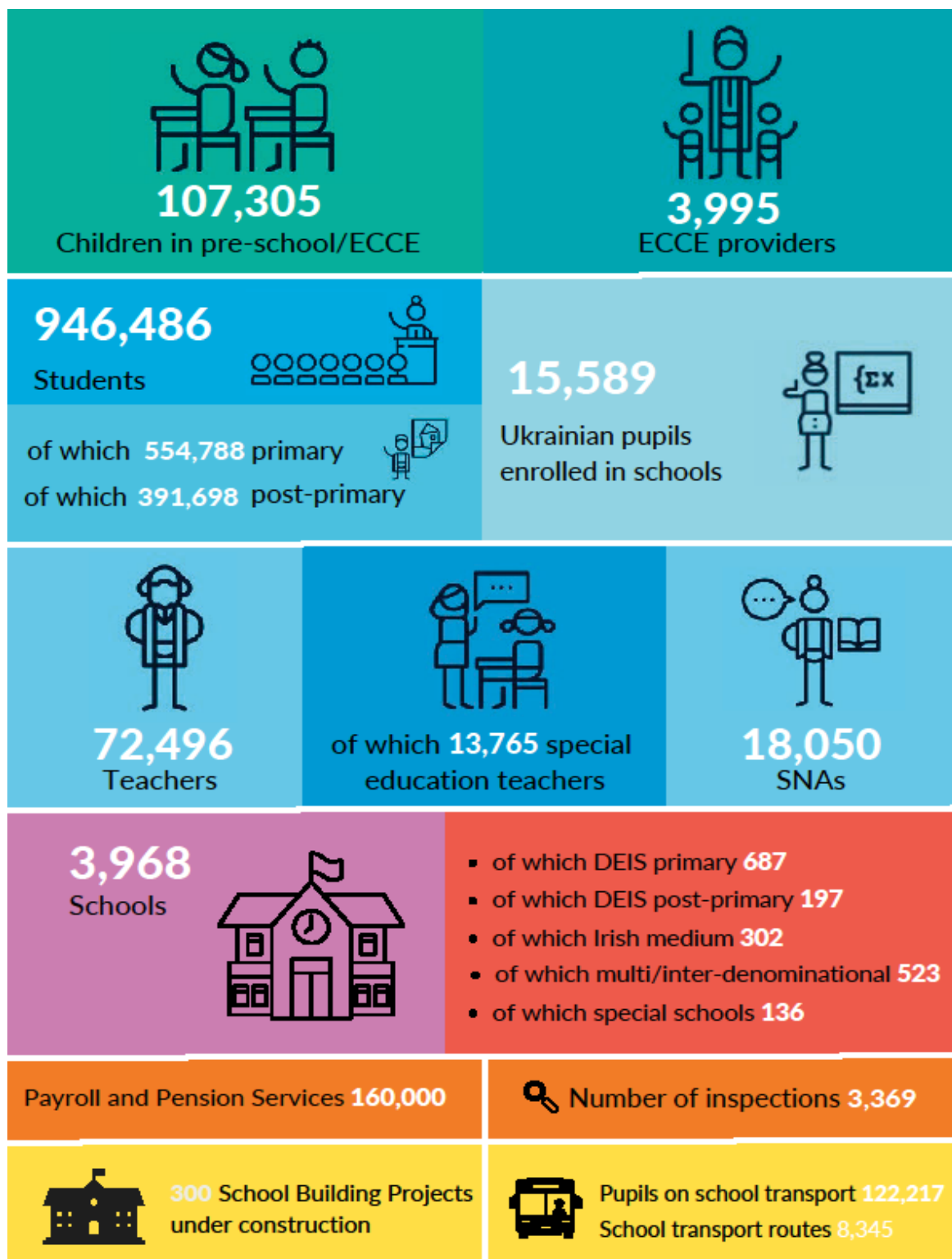
- The International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13)
- The Convention on the Rights of Child (Article 28)
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Article 10)
- The Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Article 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 realise 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. It also 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 ensuring a work environment for staff that promotes positive engagement, open communication, fairness, equality and respect.

3. Key Figures



4. Strategic Goals

In pursuing our mission, the Department is working, for the period 2023 to 2025, to achieve the following strategic goals which reflect the broad spectrum of challenges to be met within the dynamic education environment:

Goal 1 Enable the provision of high-quality education and improve the learning experience to meet the needs of all children and young people, in schools and early learning and care settings.

Providing every child and young person with a learning experience that enables them to realise their potential and to develop the knowledge and skills they need to navigate in today's complex world.

Goal 2 Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all children and young people are supported to fulfil their potential.

Developing an education system that welcomes every child and young person and meets their educational needs irrespective of background or ability.

Goal 3 Together with our partners, provide strategic leadership and support for the delivery of the right systems and infrastructure for the sector

Working with our agencies, the Department will provide strategic leadership to the education sector, strengthen existing partnerships and work collaboratively with sectoral stakeholders, the Irish civil and public service, the EU and international fora. Through this collaboration, we deliver high quality education to all children and young people whilst supporting the delivery of a wide range of cross-governmental strategies.

Goal 4 Organisational Excellence and Innovation

Working to serve the public and their elected representatives effectively, we remain committed to innovating in collaboration with aegis bodies and stakeholders to help children and young people to realise their potential.

5. Strategic Actions

Delivery of our strategic goals will be pursued through a set of strategic actions attached to each goal. The Department will publish *Forbairt*, an annual plan that sets out our high-level priorities for the year. In this way, we will drive progress on the achievement of each of our goals.

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 education agencies.

Goal 1 Enable the provision of high-quality education and improve the learning experience to meet the needs of all children and young people, in schools and early learning and care settings

1. Support school communities to address the impact of Covid-19, especially for those children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage and those experiencing issues with wellbeing, with support from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and through evidence-informed Inspectorate support.
2. Build upon ongoing actions to support the supply of teachers and other members of the education workforce while also developing and supporting the current education workforce to strengthen their capabilities through professional learning.
3. Support our school communities in the use of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment particularly within the context of emerging technologies including artificial intelligence.
4. Strengthen the learning experience through curriculum and assessment development, including early learning and care curricular provision, embedding the primary curriculum, the Junior Cycle and advancing reform of the Senior Cycle and through Inspectorate advice support and evaluation.
5. Manage key transition points to best support children and young people, 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, including the implementation of the policy on Gaeltacht education and the development of policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht.
7. Develop and support the use of quality assurance approaches that encourage high standards of educational provision for children and young people, including those with additional needs, in schools and early learning and care settings. These

approaches include school self-evaluation (SSE), engagement with external evaluation and research, as well as reflective practice at an individual and collaborative level.

8. Promote the benefits of physical activity in our schools, including through the physical education curriculum, and through the implementation of relevant Department and cross-government policies. In parallel, strengthen the physical literacy learning experience providing children and young people with the tools they need to take part in physical activity in support of both health and wellbeing and educational attainment.

Goal 2 Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all children and young people are supported to fulfil their potential

1. Support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people through implementation of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* and *Cineáltas: Action Plan for Bullying* ensuring, among other needs, that wellbeing supports recognise the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people.
2. Support the participation and progression of children and young people with special educational needs, in particular the Department of Education working together with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the HSE, collaborating in the planning, design and delivery of an integrated suite of education supports for schools and their children and young people.
3. Continue to provide for a continuum of education covering the full range of need spanning mainstream classes, through to more specialist placements in a special class or a special school.
4. Help children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage to access appropriate education resources which reflect their diverse needs, including supports provided by the Tusla Education Support Services (TESS) and a responsive inspection programme.
5. Ensure policy in the area of special education is fully up to date following the review of the EPSEN Act.
6. Through the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme and supporting students at risk of educational disadvantage across primary and post-primary schools, reduce the retention and achievement gap between schools in the DEIS programme and non-DEIS schools.
7. Continue to provide access to a high quality and inclusive education for children and young people arriving into Ireland, including those arriving from Ukraine and through international protection processes.

8. Continue the process to reconfigure schools to increase diversity and strengthen the relationship between schools and their local communities.
9. Strengthen the participation and engagement of children and young people in decision-making, inspection and evaluation regarding the education system through the further development of communication and participation strategies and practices.
10. Support families, and particularly those at risk of child poverty, with cost of living initiatives such as the new scheme to deliver free schoolbooks for children in recognised primary schools and special schools and the plans for the roll-out of the Hot School Meals Programme to every primary school in Ireland.

Goal 3 Together with our partners, provide strategic leadership and support for the delivery of the right systems and infrastructure for the sector

1. Support the delivery of an extensive schools infrastructure programme, which incorporates best practice in climate action measures and ensures an appropriate place for all children and young people.
2. Ensure the School Transport Scheme effectively meets the needs of children and young people, including children with special educational needs, and promotes sustainability in transport, including the attainment of climate action targets.
3. Develop appropriate structures and build capacity to enhance the connections between research, policy and practice, ensuring that education policy design, implementation and evaluation is supported by reliable and timely data, is outcomes focused and informed by international best practice.
4. Develop and deliver high quality shared services and information systems for the Department and the sector.
5. Collaborate closely with agencies and aegis bodies to align services with strategic objectives for the system.
6. Strengthen relationships with key partners such as children and young people, parents, teachers, representative and management bodies and advocacy groups, and facilitate their input into policy and service developments.
7. Work collaboratively with colleagues across the Irish civil and public service, the EU and international fora to support a seamless whole of Government approach to educational services in Ireland.

Goal 4 Organisational Excellence and Innovation

1. Deliver efficient and effective customer-centric practices that best serve the public, the Government and the Oireachtas.
2. Use systems design, creative thinking and an innovative culture to improve the quality of services we deliver and maximise the use of digital technology.
3. Continue to build the Department's capacity, ensuring we have people with the skills, knowledge, tools and equipment to deliver on our mission.
4. Continue to enhance our strategic planning capability, including horizon scanning and strategic foresight, to support design and delivery of the education system of the future.
5. Continue to monitor our performance, acknowledging success when achieved, learning when things can be improved, and committing to continuous quality improvement.

Appendix 1 – Non-commercial Bodies under the aegis of the Department

[An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta \(COGG\)](#)

[Educational Research Centre \(ERC\)](#)

[National Council for Curriculum and Assessment \(NCCA\)](#)

[State Examinations Commission \(SEC\)](#)

[The Teaching Council](#)

[National Council for Special Education \(NCSE\)](#)

[CARANUA — Residential Institutions Statutory Fund](#)

[Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse \(CICA\)](#)

[Residential Institution Redress Board \(RIRB\)](#)

[Residential Institutions Review Committee \(RIRC\)](#)