



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

Inclusive education for all

Department of Education and Youth
Statement of Strategy 2025–2028

Acknowledgements

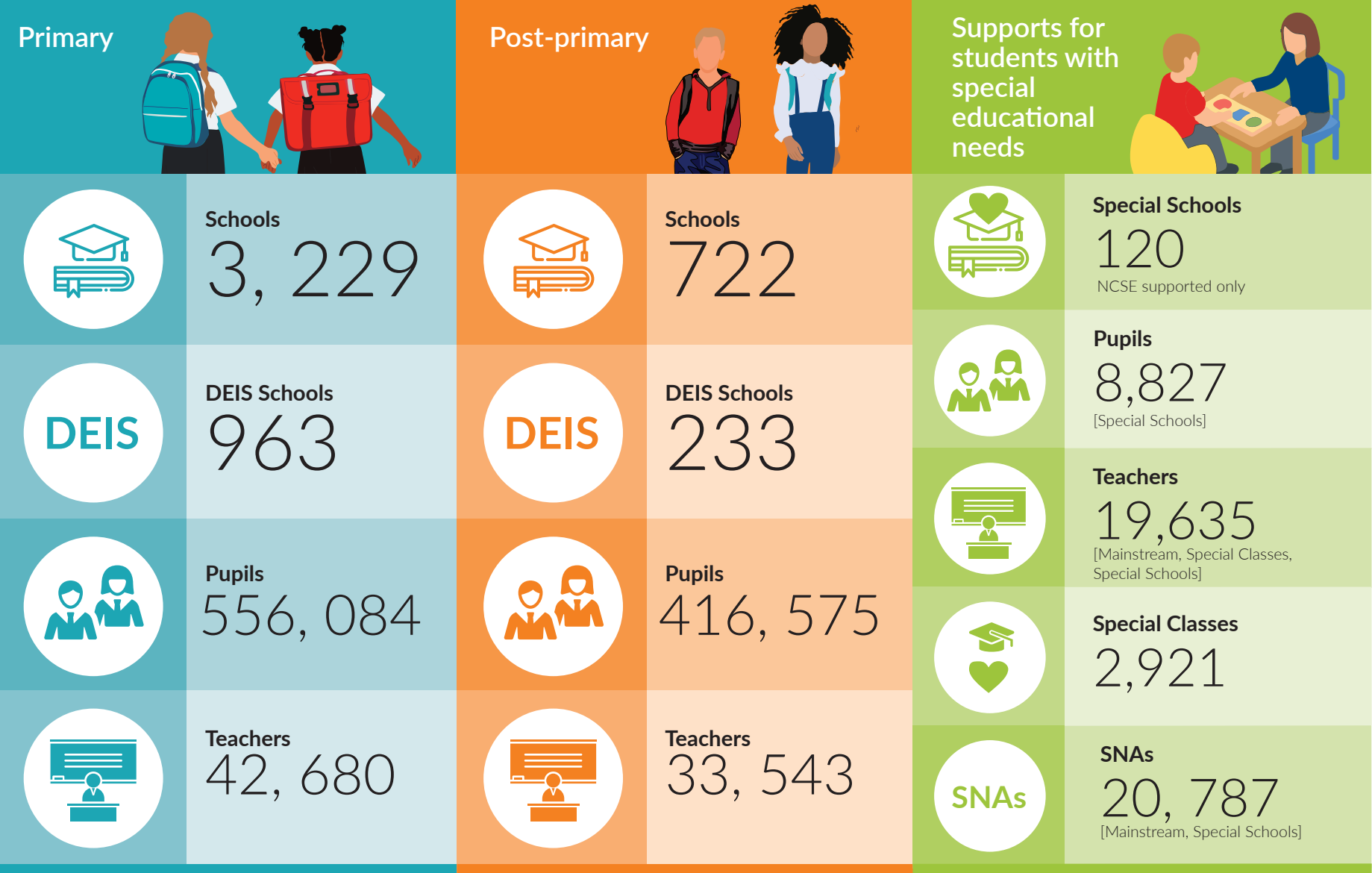
The Department of Education and Youth would like to acknowledge and thank all of the students, teachers, special needs assistants, school leaders, parents, members of boards of management, other school staff and the education partners and stakeholders who contributed to the development of this Statement of Strategy through their participation in consultations.

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Key Figures infographic

Overview of the School System in Numbers



Source: Education indicators for Ireland 2024

Source: Education indicators for Ireland 2024

Source: Special Educational Needs Allocations 2023/24

A note on language

Education system

Recognising the transfer of youth services to this department, references to the education system are understood to encompass formal and non-formal education and to be inclusive of youth services.

Inclusive education

Inclusion is a process designed to increase the engagement of each child and young person in their learning, build the capacity of all schools and settings to create welcoming cultures and communities and, at system level, reduce exclusion within and from education.



Foreword by the Minister

As Minister for Education and Youth, I am delighted to welcome this Statement of Strategy 2025–2028 for the Department of Education and Youth. Education is at the heart of all of our ambitions as a country. Excellent and innovative education is essential to delivering a fair society and a strong economy. I am privileged to have the opportunity in this role to ensure Ireland continues to be a world leader in providing a high standard in education and youth services.

This strategy sets out the strategic direction and priorities for the next three years and reaffirms our commitment to creating a world-class education system which breaks down barriers and ensures every child can achieve their full potential.

Our focus over the next three years will be on the key areas of supporting children and young people with special educational needs and tackling educational disadvantage. The establishment of an Education Therapy Service will be a key part of my plan. We will also implement measures to tackle the unacceptably high rate of absenteeism in our schools.

Our plan will place a focus on fostering inclusion for all children and young people in our schools and youth services and ensuring that children and young people are valued and involved in shaping their education and development experiences. Ensuring that the education and youth sectors are prominent areas of focus during Ireland’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2026 will also be a key priority for the department.

Continued progress in these areas will not be possible without a high quality, and dedicated education and youth services workforce. The biggest influence on outcomes in our education system is the quality of teaching and the quality of learning. I will take measures to support our teachers, including earlier access to permanent contracts, investment in teacher education and professional development, and I will ensure we identify further actions to empower school leadership, with training, mentoring and resources.

I am committed to ensuring the development of the workforce to deliver a world-class education system to equip our children and young people with the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world. A world-class education system also means ensuring we have a curriculum which fully equips children and young people to succeed and thrive in our changing world.

I am particularly pleased to acknowledge the transfer of youth services to this department. I am confident that this will have a positive impact on enhancing the full education experience for all children and young people, encompassing formal and non-formal education and inclusive of youth services.

I look forward to continuing to work in collaboration with all education partners and our colleagues across Government to achieve this ambitious goal.

Helen McEntee TD
Minister for Education and Youth



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 2025–2028.

This strategy outlines the continued commitment to ensuring access to inclusive and high-quality education for all children and young people including those with additional needs. The establishment of the Education Therapy Service is an important feature of this strategy and one which I believe will strengthen supports for children with additional needs in all of our schools. In addition, the work being done to improve how we forward plan for the provision of special class and special school placements is being given an increased focus.

This builds on and reflects the recently published Review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004. This represented a significant step forward in ensuring that education policy and legislation in this area is informed by the lived experiences of children and young people on the one hand and that they support the best possible educational outcomes, in line with international standards, on the other.

I am committed to ensuring that the department continues to foster an education system that works for every child and young person. I am also determined to make meaningful progress in enhancing supports for children and young people with special educational needs.

As Minister with responsibility for the school transport schemes, I am delighted to highlight how it plays an important role in making sure children and young people can get to their nearest suitable school in a safe and reliable way. Every school day, more than 173,000 students use the scheme to get to school. This includes children living in rural or remote areas and many students with additional needs. In many communities, school transport is the vital link that helps children travel from home to school and back again. The Department of Education and Youth will continue to embed equity, and inclusion in the School Transport Schemes. This will ensure that children and young people, whatever their ability or location, have an equal opportunity to learn and thrive.

I look forward to working in partnership with parents, guardians, students and schools, 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.

Michael Moynihan TD
Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion



Introduction from the Secretary General

I am pleased to introduce the Department of Education and Youth Statement of Strategy 2025–2028 which sets out the direction and high-level work programme that the department plans to undertake over the next three years.

This strategy reflects the commitments in the Programme for Government 2025 – Securing Ireland’s Future. In line with Better Public Services: A transformation strategy to deliver for the public and build trust, the department also engaged in wide external and internal consultation in developing this Statement of Strategy. Acting on our values, children and young people were placed at the heart of this process. Their voices and perspectives informed and shaped all stages of the consultations including with our education partners and stakeholders and members of the education workforce.

This Statement of Strategy builds upon progress in the 2023–2025 strategy and will be supported by the publication of an annual Education Plan to monitor progress and ensure delivery on our goals and objectives.

The Department of Education and Youth stays committed to the delivery of high-quality education and youth services through the professionalism, dedication, and expertise of our staff. We are committed to continuing to develop policy which will deliver the best outcomes for all children and young people, and represent effective use of Exchequer investment in a fiscally sustainable manner. We have an ambitious work programme and this Statement of Strategy sets out a framework to guide our actions up to 2028, aligning our strategic priorities with national objectives.

In collaboration with our stakeholders, we will continue to develop and implement responsive, evidence-informed approaches that address the diverse and evolving needs of children and young people across the education and youth services sector.

Bernie McNally
Secretary General of the Department of Education and Youth



How the Strategy was developed

Research

- Programme for Government.
- UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- Better Public Services: A transformation strategy to deliver for the public and build trust.
- National and departmental strategies and policies, and Inspectorate reports.
- Opportunities for Youth: National Strategy for Youth Work and Related Services 2024–2028.
- Relevant international law and human rights conventions, in particular the UNCRC and the UNCRPD.

Consultation

- Focus groups with students, teachers, special needs assistants, school leaders and other school staff
- School community engagement events (including students, teachers, parents, members of boards of management, special needs assistants).
- Education partners and stakeholders workshop.
- Engagement with Department of Education and Youth agencies and aegis bodies.
- Workshop with Department of Education and Youth staff.
- Submissions from Government departments.
- Consultation with Ministers and Management Board.



Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty

Under Section 42.2 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the Department is required to set out in its Statement of Strategy an assessment of the human rights and equality issues that it believes to be relevant to its functions and purpose as well as the actions that it is currently taking or proposes to take to address those issues.

As part of the design-led and people-focused approach adopted to the creation of this Statement of Strategy, the department visited and engaged with several school communities around the country in order to form a better understanding of their lived experiences.

Following an analysis of the data from those engagements, the below have been identified as the most pertinent areas in which the department has need to give due regard for human rights and equality issues.

Action(s) to be taken:

Special Education Provision

Implement the actions as outlined in the 2025 Review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004.

Continue to provide access to appropriate education for children and young people with special educational needs, and ensure they have access to the supports they need on their journey through the education system.



Children’s Rights

Continue to be mindful of the obligation, placed on the Department by its commitment to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006), to seek the views of children and young people in policy development and educational provision and youth services.

Continue to implement the Young Ireland National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023–2028 to ensure that the voice of children and young people is at the centre of what we do.

Continue to implement *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying* to ensure that we continue to work together towards a diverse, inclusive Irish society free from bullying in all its forms and where individual difference is valued and celebrated. And continue to create an environment in which every child and young person feels safe to enjoy their right to an education.

Continue the progress towards providing greater school options through the patronage process for new schools, the planned parental survey to ascertain parental preference at primary level for existing schools, and the provision of alternatives for children whose parents wish them to attend school without attending religious instruction.

Gender Equality

Continue to promote and advocate for gender equality including through the implementation of *Zero Tolerance: Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence*.

Continue to support gender balance in STEM education and careers through the continued implementation of the *STEM Education Policy 2017–2026*.

Traveller and Roma Inclusion

Continue to implement the *Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024–2030* with the continued aim of improving educational outcomes for Traveller and Roma children and young people. Ensure that Traveller and Roma children and young people access high-quality education in an inclusive environment, experience good quality learning and attain appropriate development outcomes.

Educational Disadvantage

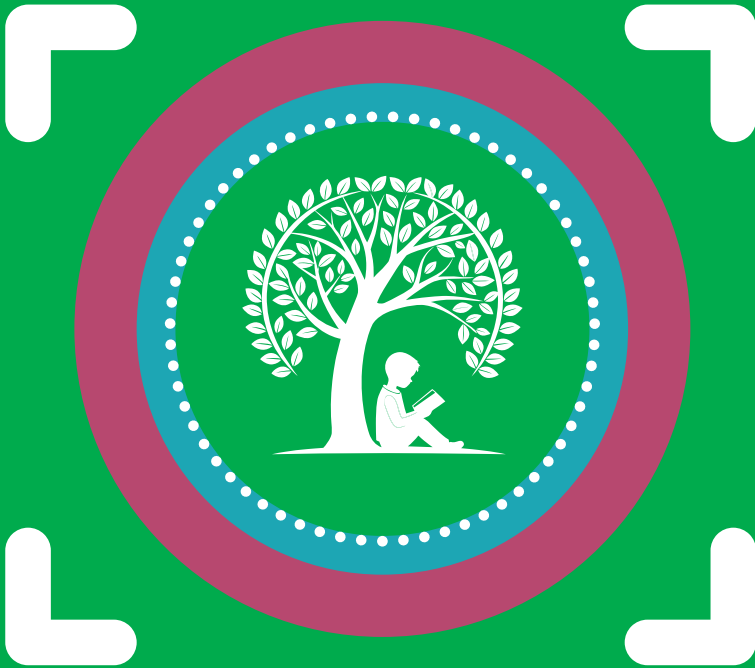
Publish an updated DEIS Action Plan and set out actions to increase innovation to tackle sustained levels of disadvantage.



Our Vision and Values

Vision

A world-class education system where every child and young person is supported and nurtured to achieve their full potential and where barriers to their learning are removed.



Mission

To ensure that all children and young people have access to an enjoyable experience of learning and development to facilitate them to realise their full potential and contribute to Ireland’s social, economic and cultural development.

Our Values

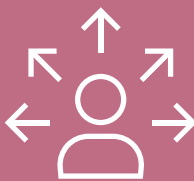
- We place children and young people at the centre of the Department’s strategies and policies. We value learning and development as a collective public good, in light of its core role in the development of an inclusive, sustainable and healthy society.
- We believe in the vital importance of open and meaningful communication, consultation and collaboration with stakeholders within education, the youth sector and wider communities. We value quality and are committed to the principle of continuous improvement and being open to external ideas, challenges and debate.
- As a Government Department, we foster a culture of accountability, efficiency, fiscal sustainability and value for money which is rooted in a public service ethos of independence, integrity, impartiality, openness and respect.
- 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 youth services and other education settings. 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.

Our Strategic Goals



1

Deliver a learning experience for students to highest international standards.



2

Break down barriers for groups at risk of exclusion.



3

Equip learners of all ages and abilities to participate and succeed in a changing world.



4

Support Ireland to be a leader across a broad range of fields.



5

Support students and all those who work in the education sector.

Outcomes

The Department of Education and Youth’s ambition is that:

Every child and young person experiences school and/or youth services as a safe space where they are supported to thrive and feel they belong.

Children and young people achieve to the best of their ability and potential.

Wellbeing is nurtured and supported in our school communities to support success in school and life.

The performance gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools is closed and retention rates in DEIS schools continue to improve.

The level of absenteeism in schools is reduced.

Ireland’s performance in numeracy and science is improved and our high performance in literacy is maintained.

The education and youth services workforces are valued and supported.

All children and young people have the support they need to access school and education.

Youth services are available to all young people who wish to use them.

Education and youth services policies and strategies are informed by national and international research, evidence, and stakeholder engagement, including with children and young people.

Children and young people have a say in the decisions that affect them and their education and development experiences.

All stakeholders experience a high-level of support and service from the Department of Education and Youth.

All schools and youth services embody a positive culture of support and inclusion.

All children and young people experience learning and development that is to the highest international standards.



1

Deliver a learning experience for students to highest international standards.

Goal 1 Objectives

- 1.1** Continue to implement curriculum reform to ensure that children have the critical skills, knowledge and competences they need to succeed and thrive in a rapidly changing world.
- 1.2** Promote high quality practice and provide quality assurance through implementation of a responsive programme of school and setting inspections and educational advice, and by supporting the development of school self-evaluation processes.
- 1.3** Implement policies to maintain high literacy (including media literacy) rates and continue to improve in numeracy and science.
- 1.4** Foster an inclusive approach, and positive attitudes, to Irish, including increasing the use and enjoyment of Irish and improving the integration of supports for Irish in English-medium schools
- 1.5** Support the provision of high-quality education through Irish in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht settings
- 1.6** Support the wellbeing and physical health of students through the provision of targeted programmes including school meals, Active Flag and Cineáltas and ensuring adequate time and space for physical activity is available
- 1.7** Share learning and good practice through the publication of individual and composite inspection reports and other findings and evidence from research commissioned or conducted, in addition to drawing from international best practice
- 1.8** Support the development and delivery of a diversity of high-quality youth work and youth services, drawing from and contributing to best practice internationally.
- 1.9** Strengthen the role of parents and students, and deliver progress in providing greater school choice.
- 1.10** Implement a school building programme which prioritises new school places in areas of demographic growth, appropriate special education provision, essential refurbishment and maintenance, ICT and digital needs, and climate action.
- 1.11** Strengthen long-term strategic and contingency planning.
- 1.12** Continue to make policy decisions which produce the best educational outcomes for children and young people and which are fiscally sustainable.

2

Break down
barriers for
groups at risk
of exclusion.



Goal 2 Objectives

- 2.1 Provide access to appropriate education and equitable supports for all children and young people
- 2.2 Improve the learning experience and learning outcomes for learners impacted by disadvantage
- 2.3 Implement policies and improve supports for learners with special education needs to support their participation and progression through the education system
- 2.4 Improve quality, promote excellence and innovation, and increase autonomy for schools
- 2.5 Take steps to ensure schools can support their local communities through the use of school buildings and facilities out of hours
- 2.6 Provide an efficient, effective and sustainable school transport service



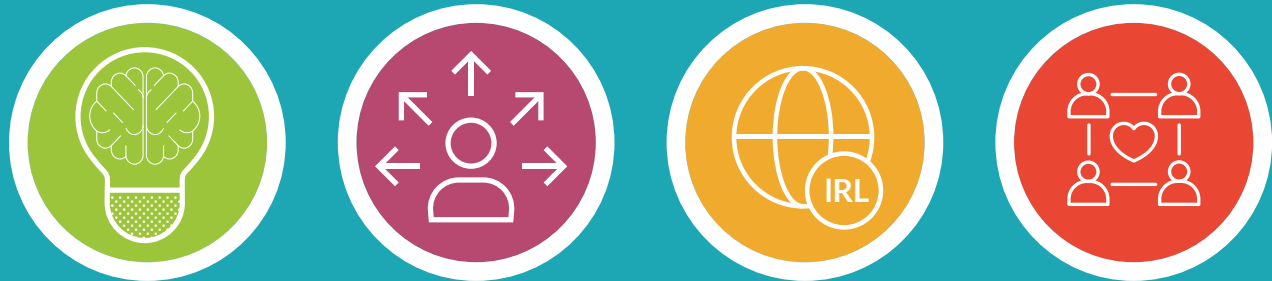


3

**Equip learners
of all ages and
abilities to
participate
and succeed
in a changing
world.**

Goal 3 Objectives

- 3.1** Collaborate with other Government departments to improve transitions between educational levels and access to multiple education pathways and youth services
- 3.2** Enhance capability, knowledge and implementation in climate change adaptation and sustainability
- 3.3** Through the updated Aistear Framework, continue to create a strong environment for excellence in the early years curriculum to deliver an enhanced learning experience for young children
- 3.4** Enhance support for learners to make informed career choices
- 3.5** Continue to implement the Digital Strategy for Schools to empower students to harness the opportunities of digital transformation by developing digital competence and digital literacy, enabling them to reach their potential and participate fully and safely as global citizens in a digital world
- 3.6** Foster a stronger focus on entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation for all children and young people



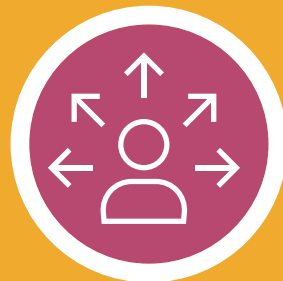


4

Support
Ireland to be
a leader
across a
broad range
of fields.

Goal 4 Objectives

- 4.1 Identify and publish research priorities to support greater coordination, involvement and collaboration.
- 4.2 Establish a Futures Oriented Research Network that brings together policymakers, researchers in higher education institutions and practitioners across the education and youth sectors, to strengthen the evidence base, and to create greater cohesion, co-ordination and collaboration.
- 4.3 Continue to enhance our involvement and consultation with parents, children and young people, and other stakeholders to inform policy development, review and implementation.
- 4.4 Continue to work to promote North-South cooperation on the island of Ireland through the North-South Ministerial Council and other bodies and with the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to enhance cooperation across a range of initiatives including addressing educational disadvantage.
- 4.5 Build links and promote cooperation with education ministries in Britain in the context of the Ireland-UK relationship.
- 4.6 Work to ensure a successful Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the education and youth sectors.
- 4.7 Continue to play an active role in international organisations, such as the OECD and UNESCO.





5

Support students and all those who work in the education sector.

Goal 5 Objectives

- 5.1** Put in place comprehensive workforce development plans to improve teacher supply and underpin the quality and sustainability of the workforce in our schools.
- 5.2** Increase the accessibility of, and enhance engagement with, reliable data.
- 5.3** Work with our agencies, aegis bodies and education partners to increase diversity among teachers and youth workers.
- 5.4** Ensure the education and youth workforce is supported by professional learning opportunities that help meet the needs of all children and young people.
- 5.5** Enhance therapeutic and mental health and wellbeing supports available to schools through NEPS and the NCSE.
- 5.6** Provide appropriate, accessible and timely support and services to our stakeholders and school and youth services communities.
- 5.7** Continue to provide major operational and shared services including payroll and pensions, ICT, procurement and financial services and supports as appropriate, to the education sector.
- 5.8** Continue to support schools with the implementation of climate mitigation measures, including solar panels and retrofitting.
- 5.9** Continue to improve teacher professional development to ensure teachers and school leaders are fully supported to deliver a world-class education system.
- 5.10** Continue to address the legacy of historical abuse.

Implementation, Monitoring and Review

The Strategy will be complemented by the publication of an annual Education Plan. These plans will set out the actions and sub-actions, include expected timescale of delivery, to be achieved in that year under each education pillar of the Programme for Government.

In addition, each year, Education Indicators Ireland will be published to support the monitoring and measuring of progress against the outcomes set out in this strategy.

National and international data and research, including reports on the performance of students in Ireland in literacy, mathematics and science, among other areas, will also continue to be published by the Educational Research Centre, an aegis body of the department.

Finally, the department's annual reports will chart progress year on year on the objectives in the Statement of Strategy.



Notes



Notes

