



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Annual Report 2021

Department of Education



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Foreword by the Minister



The Annual Report for 2021 captures the work of the Department through a period of unique challenges for the entire education community. The report charts the unprecedented levels of collaboration, support and achievement from all the partners in education, working together with Public Health in the face of the continued global pandemic. With this backdrop, I am pleased to note the continued progress against the three high level goals of our strategic plan.

In January 2021, on foot of a recommendation from public health advice to reduce overall mobility within the community, schools regrettably remained closed to pupils following the Christmas break. The Department continued to follow public health advice to support our schools with re-opening, and significant efforts by all the education partners enabled us to re-open schools on a phased basis, prioritising examination students, our junior classes and students with additional needs for the return of in-person teaching and learning.

In recognition of the significant difficulties faced by some students during the period of closures, Government approved the COVID-19 Learning and Supports Scheme (CLASS) aimed at mitigating the impact to students' learning and wellbeing due to COVID-19 closures and restrictions. This fund brought to €102.6 million the additional supports put in place in 2021 to mitigate learning loss and support wellbeing.

Early in 2021 we entered into a new phase of planning for the State Examinations. In acknowledgement of the disruption faced by students during their senior cycle, students were provided with the option of both Leaving Certificate examinations and a system of Accredited Grades. This ensured a pathway for progression for 2021 Leaving Certificate Students.

The Department's commitment to investment in our school infrastructure was further supported through the National Development Plan 2021-2030, which aims to provide capital funding of over €4.4bn for investment in school infrastructure during the period 2021 to 2025.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) supports announced in 2021 included reducing class-size in DEIS Urban Band 1 primary schools, expanding the school completion programme to more schools and increasing the number of post-primary schools eligible for an additional deputy principal. In addition significant work completed in 2021, including provision of funding in Budget 2022, paved the way for the significant expansion of the DEIS programme from September 2022.

In total, €100 million in funding was provided to schools to support the purchase of digital devices and infrastructure in the 2020/2021 school year. Schools were provided with €50 million in funding to address the digital divide, under the Government's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) funded by the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility. Through this initiative, schools have been enabled to invest in digital infrastructure to support students who are most at risk of educational disadvantage through the digital divide.

I was delighted to launch a new arts in education initiative, BLAST 2021. BLAST – Bringing Live Arts to Students and Teachers has enabled schools to apply for a trained Artist in Education (AiE) to work in an Arts and Creative Residency during the school year. Creativity has an enormously positive impact on young people and never has this been more important.

I would like to acknowledge the work of my colleague, Minister of State Josepha Madigan and of the Department's officials, as well as the officials of aegis bodies of the Department. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to all of those working across the education sector; your tireless work and commitment contributed greatly to the achievements of the Department and I look forward to working with you as we advance our future objectives.

Norma Foley TD
Minister for Education

Foreword by Minister of State Madigan



The 2021 Annual Report highlights the significant work undertaken in the areas of special education and inclusion, and I welcome its publication by the Department of Education.

As Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education, last year I committed to working in collaboration with our partners, to ensure that the key priorities to reform and develop special education provision in Ireland were achieved. This report notes a number of those important achievements.

Children with special educational needs were particularly impacted by the requirements to close schools for in-school learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In recognition of this, the provision of 2021 summer education programmes was expanded for pupils with complex special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage, with these students given access to an enhanced summer programme of education. The total funding made available to provide for the programme was up to €40 million, a one hundred per cent increase on the previous allocation.

The provision of education for children with special educational needs is an ongoing priority for me and for Government. We continue to make strides in ensuring that there is appropriate provision for every child. The numbers of special classes, special education teachers and special needs assistants are at unprecedented levels. In 2021, we made further progress in opening more special classes, and in addressing the needs of the children in our school communities.

Making additional provision for children with special educational needs accounts for 25% of the annual education of €9.2 billion. This funding provided for a range of additional supports in 2021, including an additional 990 special needs assistants and an additional 145 special education teachers. In 2021, 2,775 payments were made to primary schools, and 991 to post-primary schools, towards the cost of assistive technology, amounting to over €3.6 million. Funding of €26.17 million was issued for home tuition, with 424 grants sanctioned for Special Educational Needs Home Tuition.

It is essential that legislation governing the education of students with additional needs is up-to-date, fully operational, and reflective of the lived experiences of students and families. With this goal in mind, I announced the commencement of a full review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 which provides for the education of children aged under 18 years with special educational needs. This important work, which will seek the views of those who have experienced and are experiencing this system, as well as advocates and experts, will be progressed further during 2022.

I would like to thank my colleague Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, officials in the Department and of course the education stakeholders for the work undertaken and progress made in 2021. I look forward to continuing our collaboration in order to further progress our shared goals of meeting the needs of children and young people with additional educational needs, and supporting them to be fully included and to achieve their potential.

Josepha Madigan TD
Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion

Statement from the Secretary General



I am pleased to introduce the 2021 Annual Report of the Department of Education, my first since joining the Department as Secretary General in February 2022.

The report documents the work that was undertaken throughout 2021, and the strong response of the Department to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim to ensure that all children and young people access the highest quality education, and to support our education workforce to deliver this important outcome, remained at the forefront of the Department's efforts.

Close collaboration and engagement with our stakeholders continued in 2021, working together to find solutions on challenging issues, including the re-opening of schools for in-school teaching and learning, and ensuring that the Leaving Certificate could be completed.

Huge efforts were again demonstrated by our school communities and our young people in their engagement with remote and online learning. Education partners worked tenaciously to facilitate a re-opening of schools on a phased basis, prioritising examination students, our junior classes and students with additional needs. As has been the case throughout the pandemic, the reopening of schools in September 2021 was carried out in close consultation with Public Health services.

The work of the Advisory Group on Planning for State Examinations 2021 provided a platform for all partners to work collaboratively to ensure that the class of 2021 had real choice and experienced a system to enable their progression that was fair and equitable.

The impact of COVID-19 on education requires ongoing mitigation measures for the wider school community, but particularly for students who are most at risk of educational disadvantage. During 2021, the Department put in place a range of measures, including additional funding for the Summer and Minor Works Schemes, an increase in the funding for technology to help address the digital divide, and a reduction in class-size in DEIS Urban Band 1 primary schools.

Across the Department, work continued on progressing the Department's high-level goals as set out in the Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023. Throughout 2021, the Department continued to advance new initiatives, and maintained a high volume of essential services, operating with minimal disruption.

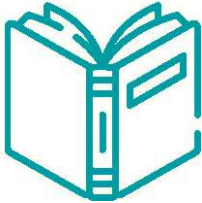
I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by staff in the Department this year and all those that worked with us across the education sector. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, Seán Ó Foghlú, for his dedication and contribution to the education sector during his ten years as Secretary General.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Ministers, staff of the Department, our education partners and wide range of stakeholders to deliver on our shared objectives of providing a high quality and inclusive education for all children and young people that addresses their needs, interests and ambitions.

Bernie McNally
Secretary General

Introduction

This is the 2021 Annual Report of the Department of Education. This report provides details on the progress made in respect of the three high-level goals outlined in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023 and the work undertaken as the Department continued to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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

The aim of this 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. Key actions taken in 2021 to progress this goal include:

- €50 million in funding provided to primary and post-primary schools to address the digital divide, under Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan
- Consultation on a revised Early Years Education Inspection Model to extend the scope of EYEI beyond the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme which will include children from birth to three
- Public consultation on a new National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to 2030 was launched in April 2021, acknowledging the importance of our role in achieving our Sustainable Development Goals, and ensuring that as a sector play we play our role in confronting the climate crisis
- Additional supports provided for schools to support the running of Leaving Certificate Examinations and Accredited Grades process. Students were provided with the option of both Leaving Certificate examinations and a system of Accredited Grades, ensuring a pathway for progression for 2021 Leaving Certificate Students



Goal 2:

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

This goal is about ensuring that equity of opportunity and inclusivity are fundamental principles in our education system. This goal aims to develop a system that welcomes and meaningfully engages all students, including those with special educational needs and students at risk of educational disadvantage. Key actions taken in 2021 to progress this goal include:

- Launch of the COVID-19 Learning and Supports Scheme for measures to mitigate learning loss and provide targeted additional teaching supports for students following COVID-19 school closures
- Expansion of the July Education Programme into summer education programmes for pupils with complex special educational needs and those at greatest risk of

educational disadvantage in 2021. The total funding available to provide the programme was up to €40 million, a 100% increase on the allocation for summer provision in 2020.

- Over €150m spent on social inclusion and tackling educational disadvantage, including an extension of the School Completion Programme to include 14 urban primary and 14 post-primary schools included in DEIS in 2017 and a reduction of the enrolment threshold for the allocation of an additional deputy principal in DEIS post-primary schools, from 700 to 600 pupils
- Review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 commenced to ensure that legislation on education for students with additional needs is up-to-date, fully operational, and reflective of the lived experiences of students and families.



Goal 3:

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

This goal is about the important role that the Department and its agencies have in providing strategic leadership within the sector and across government. 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. Key actions taken in 2021 to progress this goal include:

- Work continued on the development of 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
- A number of additional teacher supply measures were put in place in response to the COVID-19 emergency, including flexible arrangements for initial teacher education (ITE) students, temporary changes to the career break scheme to permit teachers on career break to carry out unlimited substitute work, amendments to the Registration Regulations to allow for third and final year ITE students to register with the Teaching Council
- Funding of €62 million minor works for primary, special and post-primary schools
- The Government-funded Pathfinder Programme was launched, with a budget of €14 million, testing and demonstrating energy efficiency and decarbonisation retrofit approaches in the schools sector

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 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

Progress on the 3 key Strategic Goals in 2021

The Department made significant progress in achieving the goals detailed in the Strategy Statement despite the difficulties presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. The Annual Report 2021 acknowledges the progress that was made under each of our three goals.

Goal 1: Ensure education standards and improve the learning experience to meet the needs of all learners, in schools and early years settings

This goal is about providing 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 today's complex world. The Department will develop and improve learning and assessment through the 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.

1.1 Curriculum at primary level

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment published the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework for consultation in February 2020. Drawing on work with the Schools Forum, research, and work with education partners and wider stakeholders, the draft framework sets out proposals for the redevelopment of the primary curriculum. Three significant themes have been presented to support the need to change the structure of the Primary Curriculum:

- Alignment and continuity of the learners' educational experiences; from entry to primary school from early years' education and on exit from primary school to post-primary education.
- Provision of an appropriate thematic early years' educational experience in the infant classes of primary school to align with the Aistear curriculum framework.
- Provision of an appropriate subject-centred education in the later years of primary education to prepare the learner for transition to post-primary education and the new Junior Cycle experience

The impact of COVID-19 required changes to the consultation timeline with a revised two-phased approach agreed upon and put in place. Phase two consultation was launched on 19 October 2021 and focused on feedback from the school community, including teachers, parents, school leaders and pupils, as well as wider stakeholder groups. This process concluded at the end of December 2021.

During phase two, participants were given the opportunity to contribute through:

- focus groups
- an online questionnaire
- written submissions
- consultation materials for school-based workshops.

The finalised Primary Curriculum Framework is due to be published in 2022, with the development of curriculum specifications taking place in the following years. It will likely be the 2025/26 school year at the earliest before the individual subject specifications are introduced to schools, with the exception of the Primary Mathematics curriculum which will be introduced earlier.

1.2 Curriculum at post-primary level – Junior Cycle

Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) is proceeding. All subjects have had new specifications introduced in line with the Framework for Junior Cycle since September 2019. Students entering third year in 2021 will be the first cohort to sit the entirety of their Junior Cycle examinations under the new Framework. A comprehensive CPD programme for teachers is used to support the introduction of these new specifications.

Of the 21 subjects available under the Framework for Junior Cycle, four – Gaelige, English, Mathematics and History – are compulsory. The requirement to study History at Junior Cycle comes as a result of the decision of the Minister of Education and Skills in October 2019 to award History special core status within the Framework for Junior Cycle.

The direction of Junior Cycle reform is consistent with practice in other high-performing education systems such as New Zealand, Queensland, Estonia and Finland, where schools have been given greater autonomy and flexibility in developing the programmes they offer.

1.2.1 Junior Certificate Examinations

The Minister for Education confirmed that the Junior Cycle examinations would not be run in 2021 following a Government decision on 17 February. Schools were provided with guidance on continuing to engage this year group in online learning and assessment during the period of school closure and through in-person learning when schools re-open.

This decision followed intensive engagement with education stakeholders bilaterally and through the Planning for State Examinations 2021 Advisory Group and sub-group.

In line with arrangements previously agreed in relation to Junior Cycle 2020, schools were given autonomy to decide whether to run school-based assessments and what form they would take. Their options included school-designed examinations, tasks, projects, assignments, essay style questions, presentations, or other tasks agreed at a local level.

Students due to complete the Junior Cycle in 2021 received a written school report on their learning achievements in each subject, short course and/or priority learning unit. The work and achievement of third year Junior Cycle students were recognised with a state certificate from the Department of Education due to the decision not to run Junior Cycle examinations in 2021.

The State Examinations Commission also put in place specific arrangements for adult learners and early school leavers to give them an opportunity to take final Junior Cycle examinations which, prior to the decision of 17 February, they had been due to sit in 2021.

1.3 Curriculum at post-primary level – Senior Cycle

There is a number of developments taking place at Senior Cycle, including a broad review and implementation of new and revised specifications.

1.3.1 Leaving Certificate 2021

For the 2021 Leaving Certificate, following an intensive set of engagements with stakeholders, arrangements in respect of the 2021 state exams were decided on by Government on 17 February 2021, with both written examinations and Accredited Grades available to Leaving Certificate students. The Leaving Certificate written exams successfully commenced on 9 June 2021 with the orals in language subjects and the practical components in other subjects having taken place earlier including during the Easter holidays.

1.3.2 Supporting the establishment of Accredited Grades

Thirty-one inspectors were assigned to support the design and implementation of the Accredited Grades system in 2021. The Inspectorate participated in the Advisory Group on Planning for State Examinations in 2021 and the Programme Board for Accredited Grades as part of this work. Inspectors contributed to the development of memoranda and policy papers and developed the guidance for teachers, schools and out-of-school candidates. Inspectors also contributed to the design and refinement of the data collection system facilitating the collection of data from schools. The inspectorate assisted in the development of improved processes for out-of-school learners, and in providing online and telephone support to all schools as they engaged in the estimation and alignment processes in schools. Inspectors also conducted a very small number of administrative reviews relating to Accredited Grades.

1.3.3 Accredited Grades Support Service – Phone and Email

The Inspectorate managed and operated the Accredited Grades phone service in April – June 2021. The service dealt with 3,783 calls over the course of ten weeks. Over half of all calls (52.5%) related to data entry queries. Almost one-fifth of calls received (19.3%) related to the processes and procedures for determining an Accredited Grade. Other prominent themes included guidance relating to out-of-school subjects and out-of-school learners (9.1%), the Leaving Certificate Applied (6.3%), the State Exams Commission (6.1%), and consequences of changing subject levels on examination day (1.4%).

Alongside the phone service, inspectors responded to 1,100 email queries received over the period 23 April – 17 June. Over a fifth of all emails (22%) related to aspects of the Accredited Grades process for in-school candidates. A further 22% requested changes to candidates' choices on the portal. 12% related to aspects of the Accredited Grades process for out-of-school candidates and 11% related to the data entry system or data correction. Other overarching themes included sitting examinations (6%), standardisation (6%), and Leaving Certificate Applied (3%).

1.3.4 Physical Education

There are two recent developments in relation to Physical Education at Senior Cycle: a new specification for examinable Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) subject and a new non-examinable Framework for Senior Cycle Physical Education (SCPE). Both were introduced on a phased basis from September 2018.

LCPE was introduced to 64 schools as part of the phase 1 introduction from September 2018. National rollout of LCPE began in September 2020 with 194 more schools offering LCPE for the first time. As of September 2021, 286 schools offered LCPE as an examinable subject.

1.3.5 Leaving Certificate Computer Science

The new subject of Leaving Certificate Computer Science (LCCS) was introduced on a phased basis to 40 schools in September 2018. From September 2020, LCCS was available to schools nationally as a full optional subject. The numbers of schools offering the subject is growing. There are currently approximately 145 schools across the country offering this subject to their students.

In November 2021, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) commenced an expression of interest process for schools who are considering the introduction of LCCS onto their curriculum, to ascertain teachers' professional learning needs so as to support the effective delivery of the new subject in schools.

1.3.6 Leaving Certificate Irish

Consultation by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) on new draft specifications for Leaving Certificate Irish (T1 and T2) commenced in February 2021 and, in response to stakeholder concerns and requests, extended the closing date to the end of November 2021. To support stakeholder participation, the NCCA employed a wide range of consultation tools including an online survey, bilateral and focus group meetings and written submissions.

This extension of the closing date allowed the NCCA to also commence an early enactment review of the Junior Cycle Irish L1 and L2 specifications.

The consultation generated significant interest and a high volume of responses. The NCCA has commenced a detailed analysis and consideration of all the feedback received.

1.3.7 NCCA Senior Cycle Review

Between 2016 and 2020 the NCCA undertook an extensive review of senior cycle programmes and vocational pathways. The NCCA's Advisory Report on the Senior Cycle was submitted to the Department for consideration in 2021.

The Advisory Report maps out, in broad terms, an ambitious programme of work, which would enable the development and construction of the components that would make up a Framework for Senior Cycle and will involve further ongoing stakeholder engagement and consultation.

As of the end of 2021, the Minister and her officials were considering the report carefully, with a view to delivering a Senior Cycle programme that meets the needs of the students of today and the future, and to publication of the report in 2022.

1.3.8 Other subject areas

The NCCA has completed the development of new specifications for LC Arabic and LC Classical languages in 2021.

Legislation relating to the Leaving Certificate

- Education (Leaving Certificate 2021) (Accredited Grades) Act 2021 ([Act 8 of 2021](#))
- Education (Leaving Certificate 2021) (Accredited Grades) Act 2021 (Commencement) Order 2021 ([S.I. No. 268 of 2021](#)), art. 2
- Education (Leaving Certificate 2021) (Accredited Grades) Act 2021 (Withholding of Accredited Grades and Appeals) Regulations 2021 (S.I. No. 453 of 2021)

Circulars relating to curriculum

- 0004/2021 – Prescribed Material for Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2023
- 0016/2021 – Prescribed Material for the Junior Cycle Examination in 2023 and Leaving Certificate Examination in 2023
- Circular 0018/2021 – Standardised Testing and Other Matters - Academic Year 2020/21 and Subsequent Years
- 0059/2021 – Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to school year 2021/22

Accredited Grades publications

- A Guide to State Examinations and Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021
- State Examinations and Accredited Grades - Arrangements for Leaving Certificate Applied 2021
- 2021 Leaving Certificate Candidate Self Service Portal – Before You Start Guide – published for parents, guardians and students
- Guide to Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021 for out-of-school subjects and out-of-school learners published, outlining the new process for out-of-school subjects, out-of-school learners, and non-circular languages (NCLS)
- Supporting teaching, learning and assessment in the context of Accredited Grades 2021 is published
- Out of school learners and student studying subjects entirely outside of school – Accredited Grades 2021 published
- Leaving Certificate 2021: your questions answered published
- Guide for schools and students on implementing the Accredited Grades process for out-of-school subjects and out-of-school learners
- Leaving Certificate 2021 document library and other information published for students and schools
- Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021. Guide for schools on providing estimated percentage marks published and Leaving Certificate Applied 2021 – Guide for schools on providing estimated percentage marks published.
- Out-of-school learners and students studying subjects entirely outside of school – your questions answered

1.4 Literacy and Numeracy

The Department of Education is committed to raising standards in literacy and numeracy in early years, primary and post-primary settings. In 2011 the Department published Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020. The Interim review of the strategy was published in 2017 with updated and new targets for literacy and numeracy, identifying the priority areas such as numeracy and DEIS.

Work commenced in 2021 on the next iteration of the Literacy and Numeracy strategy and will be informed by robust research to include consideration of national and international practice, by stakeholder engagement and public consultation.

DCU Institute of Education is engaged by way of public procurement to conduct a review in relation to literacy (including digital literacy) and numeracy. The research element of the development process for the new strategy consists of the following:

- Review of the existing Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and the Interim Review
- Review of relevant research – national and international
- Review of national and international best practice

- Identification of recommendations/actions.

The research will take cognisance of English, Gaeilge, Irish Sign Language and the diversity of languages used within the Irish context and multiple languages in the international context. It will also take into account the many types of learners within the Irish early years and school system i.e. mainstream learners at early years, primary schools and post-primary school, learners with special educational needs, learners with English as an additional language (EAL), learners in schools in the DEIS programme and learners in centres for education, specifically Youthreach.

The report is due with the Department in early 2022 and will form the basis for all other stages of consultation.

1.5 National and International Testing

The National Assessments of Maths and English Reading (NAMER) were administered to schools in 2021 and the results are due for publication in 2022.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 was carried out in 148 schools, of which 32 are schools in the DEIS programme, between 27 September and 21 October 2021. Results will be available at the end of 2022.

1.6 Grant to schools to purchase books, audio books and other media

Funding of €20 million to enable all schools (primary and post-primary) to purchase books, audio books and other media for the purposes of improving their existing literacy resource banks was announced in October 2021.

This funding was paid to schools before the end of the 2021/2022 school year and is in addition to that already given for the school books rental scheme and book grants to all recognised primary and post-primary schools within the Free Education Scheme, in order to alleviate the cost of school books for parents.

1.7 STEM Education Policy Statement and Implementation Plan

The Department's STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026, published in November 2017, sets out the ambitious goals and actions required to achieve and improve the STEM education experience and outcomes for all learners.

The STEM implementation plan 2017-2019 built on a range of reforms and initiatives already underway in STEM, in areas such as curriculum and assessment reform, teacher professional development, embedding digital learning and advances in initial teacher education while providing a roadmap to address the areas for development.

Development of the next phase of the implementation plan has commenced with the launch of the public consultation on 13 December 2021. This ran until 26 January 2022. A consultant was engaged to conduct a series of focus groups in 2022 as part of the consultation process. Bilateral meetings with key stakeholders were also held in early 2022.

Throughout Q3 and Q4 2021, the Gender Balance in STEM Advisory group developed a set of recommendations for the promotion of gender balance in STEM education. These recommendations were published in early 2022. It is intended that these will be used to inform actions relating to Gender Balance in STEM in the new Implementation Plan.

The STEM and the Arts Advisory Group has tendered for a literature review on effective STEAM Education Practices. This review was submitted for consideration by the STEM and the Arts Advisory Group at the end of 2021 and will be published in 2022. This research will inform recommendations in relation to the promotion of STEM and the Arts or STEAM learning.

1.8 Foreign Languages

Minister Foley invited primary schools to participate in a primary languages sampler module called “Say Yes to Languages” during 2021/22. Approximately 500 schools volunteered and all were facilitated, in three phases running from November 2021 to May 2022.

Schools were provided with a grant of up to €1,200 (for four classrooms) to participate and the module was delivered by a mixture of classroom teachers and external providers including post primary language teachers, foreign language assistants from post-primary schools, and local community members including parents. Schools selected the language of choice depending on their individual school context and 11 languages were selected: French, Spanish, Irish Sign Language (ISL), Italian, German, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, Arabic and Tamil.

Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) managed the implementation of the module and provided participating schools with training and resources.

The learning from the module will be used to inform the possible introduction of languages at primary level as proposed in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework.

Awareness raising (www.languagesconnect.ie) about the importance of learning a foreign language continued during 2021. A reimagined #ThinkLanguages event was held on-line for over 12,000 Transition Year students from 150 schools, an increase from 3,000 participants in 2020.

Ireland participated in Spain’s Visiting Spanish Teacher Programme for the first time under a two-year pilot in 2021. Two Spanish teachers were placed in Irish schools in 2021 under the scheme.

1.9 Creative Youth

“A plan to enable the Creative Potential of Every Child and Young Person” was launched in December 2017. The aim of this plan is to deliver the Government’s commitment to ensure that every child in Ireland has practical access to tuition, experience and participation in music, drama, arts and coding by 2022.

1.9.1 Creative Schools

As of the end of 2021, more than 600 schools had engaged in the Creative Schools programme. Creative Schools support schools and Youthreach centres in their efforts to put creativity and the arts at the heart of children’s and young people’s lives. All schools are eligible to apply to participate in the programme.

1.9.2 Creative Clusters

Creative Clusters is a pilot initiative of the Department of Education, led by and in partnership with the Teacher Education Centres (ESCI) and funded through the Schools Excellence Fund. Creative Clusters is one of the key “in-school” initiatives of Creative Youth and is open to both primary and post-primary schools.

A Creative Cluster consists of up to five schools collaborating on the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of an innovative arts and creative learning project which supports them to address a common issue or challenge, identified by that cluster. Creative Clusters include schools at different stages of their journey in using creativity in the classroom. Clusters consist exclusively of primary schools, exclusively of post-primary schools or of a combination of primary and post-primary schools.

The Creative Clusters initiative commenced in the 2018-19 academic year with the establishment of 23 clusters comprising 71 schools countrywide, while a further 21 Clusters comprising 77 schools were established and joined the initiative for the 2019/20 academic year. A new group of clusters, comprising 72 schools, joined the programme from September 2021. Engagement with the programme is on the basis of a two-year cycle.

1.9.3 Local Creative Youth Partnerships

Three Local Creative Youth Partnerships were established in 2019 to promote creativity for young people as part of the Creative Ireland Programme and they were piloted across three education and training boards (ETB). Three additional partnerships were established in 2021

These partnerships are networks which enable information sharing, collaboration between local creative youth service providers to bring about better use of existing resources, practices and initiatives in an ETB area, while providing new opportunities for young people to access creative initiatives.

The six ETBs involved are:

- Kerry Education and Training Board
- Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board
- Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
- Cork Education and Training Board
- Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board
- Mayo Sligo Leitrim Education and Training Board

The Department provides annual funding of €100,000 to each Local Creative Youth Partnership to help develop their Partnership and deliver their operating activities. The development to date has included engagement with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Hub na nÓg.

1.9.4 Teacher-Artist Partnership & Residency Programme

The Teacher/Artist Partnership (TAP) CPD and residency initiative was developed in 2014 in response to the objectives outlined in the Arts in Education Charter 2012 to support and enhance arts education. It is a unique arts-in-education initiative in which artists work in partnership with primary school teachers.

The TAP programme now exists in a face-to-face and Online TAP format. In addition, given international interest in TAP, an international online TAP CPD programme is now being designed under the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership Programme which is being led and managed by Tralee Education Centre with four European partners based in Serbia, Greece, Austria and the Netherlands. The Department of Education allocated €250,000 in funding to the TAP programme in 2021.

1.9.5 Arts in Junior Cycle

Arts in Junior Cycle consists of a series of professional development experiences for teachers to support engagement with the arts and learning in Junior Cycle. The workshops embody the principles and key skills which underpin the Framework for Junior Cycle and the Arts in Education Charter and provide teachers with practical and creative methodologies to engage with learning outcomes in their classroom. The initiative is based on partnership and collaboration with key elective partners across the arts and education sectors. The initiative is administered through Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) and Monaghan Education Centre. Funding is provided by the Departments of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media and Education towards primary and post primary CPD under the Creative Ireland Programme. The Department allocated €244,000 to the Arts in Junior Cycle programme in 2021.

1.9.6 BLAST

The BLAST (Bringing Live Arts to Students and Teachers) Artists in Residency Initiative for schools was developed by the Department of Education in 2021. 489 BLAST residencies were awarded to schools in 2021. This initiative enables schools to apply for a trained Artist in Education (AiE) Artist to work in an Arts and Creative Residency in the 2021-2022 school year. The Department allocated €475,000 to this new programme in 2021.

1.10 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

A joint public consultation on a new National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to 2030 was launched in April 2021 with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

Information from the approximately 90 detailed submissions and 150 survey responses together with feedback from a range of fora and bilateral meetings will be used in the development of the new strategy ESD 2030 which will be aligned to UNESCO's Roadmap for ESD for 2030. The strategy and an implementation plan (2022 – 2025) were published in 2022.

ESD has three strands: Environmental, Social and Political and aims to ensure that “by 2030, all learners will acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development” (SDG 4.7). ESD will continue to contribute to the SDG National Implementation Plan and to the Climate Action Plan.

1.10.1 Sustainable Development Goals – National Implementation Plan

The Department of Education continued to play its part in contributing to the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as set out in the cross government National Implementation Plan, particularly in relation to SDG 4 – Quality Education. Updates regarding the SDGs have been entered in the later SDG obligation section of the report.

1.11 Section 29

Under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, an appeal may be made to the Department of Education in respect of a decision by a school board of management or a person acting on behalf of a board of management to permanently exclude a student from the school, to suspend a student from attendance at the school for a period or periods totalling not less than 20 school days in a school year or to refuse to enrol a student in the school.

During 2021 a total of 359 appeals were received under section 29 of the Act of which

- 74 appeals were withdrawn by the parent before the appeal was considered by the Appeals Committee
- 24 appeals were allowed by the appeals committee
- 177 appeals were disallowed by the appeals committee and 84 appeals were not determined under the provisions of section 29 (f) of the Education Act 1998 which provides that appeals shall not be determined when an appeal is not made within the period specified in the procedures for making appeals and for other reasons.

Section 29 appeals have been held online since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. This has allowed services to continue and for all committee members and parties to attend hearings safely as required.

1.12 Child Protection

The Parents and Learners Unit received a total of 302 alleged child protection concerns in 2021. These were transmitted to the appropriate authorities in accordance with the Department's Procedures for Responding to Child Protection Concerns which come to the attention of staff employed by the Department of Education.

All staff members in the Department are required to complete a mandatory training webinar on the implementation of these procedures.

The Department commissioned a high level independent review of the Department's current child protection policies and processes during 2021. The report on this review is due to be published in 2022.

1.13 Gaeltacht Education Policy 2017-2022

Over €20m has been allocated for the provision of a range of additional supports to strengthen educational provision through the medium of Irish, particularly in Gaeltacht schools, since the commencement of the implementation of the policy in early 2017. This includes a budget allocation of €6.4 million in 2021.

1.14 Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

A range of additional supports continued to be provided to 105 primary schools and 29 post-primary schools participating in the scheme in 2021 to support them in implementing the language-based criteria. These additional resources included additional Irish-language support teaching hours, an annual grant for the purchase of Irish-medium resources and additional continuing professional development provided by An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) and support from the Inspectorate.

1.15 Gaeltacht E-hub Project

The successful implementation of the blended learning e-Hub project continued in Gaeltacht post-primary schools in 2021 despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Three e-teachers based in two e-hub schools delivered the Irish-medium online Leaving Certificate Physics course to 21 students in eight Gaeltacht post-primary receiver schools under the supervision of e-mentors. Eight students from the second cohort of participating students successfully achieved Calculated/Accredited Grades as an alternative to the normal Leaving Certificate examinations in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional resources, including funding for the purchase of ICT equipment and allocation of additional

teaching support hours, continued to be provided to participating schools to support project implementation during 2021.

An independent review of the pilot project was carried out in 2021 by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) Northern Ireland, which found the e-hub project to be highly effective. The researchers commented that the project was well resourced and managed effectively, that the lessons were effective and successful in progressing learning, and that the digital learning environment was well-designed and safe. They noted that the project had the potential to be scaled up to provide a wider range of subjects to small groups of students in more Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools.

1.16 Forás Pilot Project

Implementation of the Forás language development pilot programme, which aims to assist selected Junior Cycle students in post-primary Gaeltacht schools to access the curriculum through the medium of Irish, continued during the year. Each of the two post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht selected to participate in this pilot continued to receive an additional allocation of one whole-time equivalent teacher to support project implementation in 2021.

1.17 Evaluation of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

The Inspectorate/Education Research Centre (ERC) Research and Evaluation Study to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme continued during 2021.

The Department published a comprehensive Case-Study Report on 12 primary and seven post-primary schools as part of this research project in September 2021. These case studies were carried out by the ERC in collaboration with the Inspectorate and include self-reflections from schools on the impact of the Scheme. This report included many positive findings in relation to the practice of boards of management, teachers, pupils and parents regarding the use of Irish, schools' re-energised vision for the Irish language and Gaeltacht identity, the increased use and promotion of Irish language and culture in school communities, the effective implementation of early immersion in Irish in all case-study primary schools, the innovative strategies being implemented in a number of schools to extend the use of Irish, and the use of digital technology as a teaching resource in certain instances.

A number of areas were identified as requiring further development, including the use of Irish as the language of socialisation among students in some post-primary schools, better facilitation of the effective transition from naíonraí to Gaeltacht primary schools in some cases, and the need to strengthen the involvement of parents and pupils/students in action-planning and school self-evaluation. Schools have been encouraged to use the findings of the Case-Study Report to strengthen and improve the quality of immersion education in schools.

1.18 Support for Island Schools

A package of additional supports continued to be made available in 2021 to each of the five island post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht. These resources, which include increased teacher allocation and an additional annual ring-fenced budget for each island post-primary school, have been provided as part of the overall implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education and are available in addition to the supports that the schools already receive as part of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme.

Ongoing advice was provided to the Department of Rural and Community Development to support the development of a national Islands Policy to address the specific challenges faced by island communities which were identified in the consultation process.

1.19 Irish-medium Teacher Education Programmes

A key aim of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 is to increase the supply of teachers who can deliver high quality Irish-medium education in primary and post-primary schools.

In total, 108 students are participating in the Irish-medium B.Ed. programme in the 2021/22 academic year, including 39 first year students. The first student teacher cohort will graduate in 2023.

All 30 funded places were filled in 2021 on the two-year blended-learning Irish-medium M.Ed. in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht Education (M.Oid. san Oideachas Lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta), with additional Irish-language entry and exit criteria, for primary and post-primary teachers and principals, which is being delivered in Mary Immaculate College.

Approval for the secondment of two teaching posts to the *Máistir Gairmiúil san Oideachas (Irish-medium Professional Masters in Education for post-primary teachers)* in NUI, Galway was granted again in 2021. The aim of the provision of these additional resources is to work towards increasing the number of post-primary teachers with sufficient Irish-language proficiency to teach through the medium of Irish.

1.20 Advisory Committee for the Policy on Gaeltacht Education

Two online meetings of the Advisory Committee for the Policy on Gaeltacht Education took place in June and December 2021.

1.21 An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)

Additional supports and resources continued to be provided in 2021 to COGG to support their central role in the implementation of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education and the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. This included ongoing funding for the allocation of two education officer posts to COGG to facilitate the delivery of the programme of CPD to schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. This support was provided online in line with public health requirements.

1.22 New Policy for Irish-medium Education

Planning work on the development of a policy for Irish-medium education outside the Gaeltacht was undertaken in 2021, led by the Gaeltacht Education Unit in conjunction with other sections of the Department of Education. An intradepartmental working group was established in September 2021 to progress this work.

1.23 Teacher Allocations

71,620 teaching posts were allocated at primary and post-primary level in 2020. The redeployment process in 2021 involved the redeployment of 257 permanent teachers at primary level and 34 permanent teachers at post-primary level. A supplementary redeployment panel is used for filling any remaining permanent posts on completion of the process to redeploy permanent surplus teachers at primary level. There were just under 1,288 teachers on the supplementary redeployment panel in 2021.

1.24 New Allocation Model for SEN Teaching Resources

9,324 special education teaching posts were allocated to primary schools. Almost 1,400 of these posts are shared among schools, with over 2,750 schools involved in a sharing arrangement. 4,392 whole time equivalent posts were allocated under the SEN model to post-primary schools for the 2021/22 school year.

1.25 National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS)

The Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) provides a comprehensive, school-based, consultative, psychological service to recognised schools in two ways – through the provision of an individual casework service for students and a support and development service for school staff.

The NEPS casework service involves the provision of a psychological service for a student, with the psychologist working with the student, teachers and parents, and other professionals if appropriate, to identify need and plan for intervention and review to support the student in school. This service extended to over 8,500 students in 2021. Additionally, under the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments process, private psychologists provided assessment to schools for over 900 students.

The NEPS Support and Development service, reaching an estimated 25,000 teachers annually, is an applied psychological service for school staff to help build their capability to respond to the wellbeing, academic, social and emotional needs of all students, and particularly those who are experiencing barriers to their wellbeing, learning, inclusion and participation.

1.26 Small schools project

A two-year action research project aimed at supporting the sustainability of small schools was launched by the Minister in July 2021.

The project aims are to encourage small schools to cluster together in local groups, enabling them to collaborate and identify common challenges and trial innovative solutions. This project was developed by a working group of school management bodies and teachers' unions with the Department for Education, as part of the programme of work of the Primary Education Forum (PEF). The PEF comprises all primary education partners, including parent representatives, working collaboratively with the Department of Education.

Six project clusters of small schools will be formed, two in Galway, and one in each of Donegal, Kerry, Wicklow and Waterford, consisting of between three and five schools per cluster. The clusters will be supported by part-time local coordinators sponsored by the education partners, working with a national coordinator under the guidance of a steering group. As an integral part of the project, an evaluation will take place and a final report, including analysis of scalability of actions undertaken, will be compiled.

1.27 Quality in Early Education

The focus of the Early Years Education Inspectorate (EYEI) quality framework on process quality, early learning, and professional pedagogy and practice is widely welcomed as recognising and validating the work of early years professionals and their contribution to supporting children's learning, well-being and development at this critical stage of life.

The key messages emerging from the Chief Inspector's Report 2016-2020 regarding inspections of ELC settings delivering the ECCE programme over this period were that:

- The overall quality of provision in almost all ELC settings delivering the ECCE programme is good, very good or excellent
- There is potential to enhance learners' communication and higher order thinking skills
- There is need to embed internal review and self-reflection in all ELC settings
- Further action is required to facilitate effective transitioning of children from pre-school to primary education

The number of ELC settings on active contract each year to deliver the ECCE programme fluctuates and the total number of Early Years Education Inspections carried out in Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings delivering the free pre-school in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme since Inspection commenced was 2,702 by the end of 2021. The 2020/21 inspection programme which was suspended in March 2020 due to public health advice to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic resumed in April 2021.

A key trend since 2017 has been the notable increase in the inclusion of children with disabilities in ELC settings. These children are being supported with a range of measures provided as a result of the introduction of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) including the deployment of trained inclusion coordinators in many settings.

Following a request to the Department's Inspectorate to extend the scope of EYEI to allow for evaluation of provision for children aged 0-6 years a consultation was launched in November 2021 on a revised Early Years Education Inspection Model which includes children from birth to three, with the intention to extend inspections beyond the ECCE programme.

The Department continued to produce the Insights series of webinars in 2021 which were developed to share findings from EYEI and research with Early Years Educators, parents and infant teachers in primary schools and to support continued engagement with ELC settings and quality improvement in provision and practice. These are published online at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c71c0-insights/>.

1.27.1 Síolta and Aistear

The Department plays a key role in ensuring that early years education which is delivered in pre-schools funded through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme, supports children in their learning and development through the implementation of *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, and *Aistear*, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

The National Síolta Aistear Initiative (NSAI), which commenced in 2016, is supporting the coordinated national implementation and rollout of both frameworks, including the development of materials, resources and continuing professional development opportunities (CPD) for early years practitioners. The Department is working in partnership with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), Better Start Quality Development Services (QDS) and the NCCA on the initiative with two national Development Officers in post to support the work of the initiative. The Department leads the work of the NSAI Steering Group and agrees an annual work plan for the initiative.

The focus of NSAI in 2021, in line with commitments set out in *First 5*¹ and in *Nurturing Skills*² has been the development of a single, modular, blended training programme to

¹ First 5 A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028

² Nurturing Skills, The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, 2022-2028

support the roll-out of *Síolta* and *Aistear*, with plans for an accelerated roll-out to achieve full national coverage, and structured linkages between the training programme and mentoring supports provided by Better Start QDS.

1.27.2 Professional Qualifications and Standards – Early Years

The Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PACG) were published in April 2019 by the Department of Education. The guidelines set out the knowledge, practice and values essential for professionals for Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) degree programmes for the ELC sector. The purpose of the PACG is to support the development of professional awards that will lead to the formation of early childhood educator graduates who are fully prepared to take on the complex challenges of practice in this field.

The Qualifications Advisory Board (QAB) was jointly instituted in 2020 by the Minister for Education and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on a non-statutory basis to review Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) Sector for their coherence to the PACG. Approvals commenced in May 2020 and as of the end of December 2021 a total of 20 programmes had been approved by the QAB as meeting the PACG). Providers continue to engage with the QAB and programmes continue to be submitted for approval.

1.27.3 Workforce Development Plan for the ELC sector

The Workforce Development Plan for the ELC sector is crucial to the goal of giving early years practitioners the skills and support they need to provide a quality learning experience for young children. It is also an objective of *First 5* Implementation of the Workforce Development Plan is being led by the Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration and Youth and the Department of Education.

The work of the Steering Group and Consultation groups, established in 2019 and representing a wide range of stakeholders in ELC and School-Age Childcare (SAC) progressed in 2021. The Department of Education worked closely with DCEDIY on leading working groups relevant to our expertise and inputting into the final plan, *Nurturing Skills*, which was published by DCEDIY in December 2021, along with a three-year Implementation Plan spanning 2022-2024. The Implementation Plan contains a number of actions which will be led, or co-led, by the Department of Education.

1.27.4 Contribution to Early Years Policy Development

The EYEI and Early Years Education Policy Unit also contributed to a number of reports in 2021. The Department engaged closely with the OECD on its Country Policy Review of Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland. The report considers how carefully designed policies can support meaningful interactions for all children as part of their ELC experience and makes recommendations for Ireland across three areas, including workforce development and quality assurance and improvement which are of relevance to the work of the Department of Education. The implementation of recommendations will be considered by the Department in consultation with colleagues in DCEDIY, having regard to a number of other DCEDIY reports also published in 2021 on which the Department also contributed.

The Department was a member of the Expert Group on a new funding model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare (SAC). The Expert Group published a report: *Partnership for the Public Good, a new Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare*.

The Department was also a member of the Review Oversight Group for the Review of the ELC and SAC Operating Model which was commissioned by DCEDIY in 2021.

1.28 Digital Strategy

In order to build on the achievements under the previous Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, work on the development of a new Digital Strategy for schools, commenced in 2020. In 2021 an extensive consultation process was undertaken to inform its development and to ensure all voices were heard. The implementation of the new Digital Strategy will be supported by the investment of €200 million, committed to under the National Development Plan and Project 2040.

The vision of the Digital Strategy is to empower schools to harness the opportunities of digital transformation to build digital competence and an effective digital education ecosystem so as to develop competent, critically engaged, active learners while supporting them to reach their potential and participate fully as global citizens in a digital world.

The new strategy builds on the key achievements under the previous strategy and aligns closely with the EU Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027. It also takes into consideration the National Digital Strategy 'Harnessing Digital: The Digital Ireland Framework' as well as other relevant policies and strategies. The strategy will continue to work towards ensuring learners have the opportunities to develop their digital skills so that they can navigate the digital world in a confident and competent manner. Ultimately a fundamental focus of the strategy is learners and their wellbeing and ensuring that all of the policies, supports and resources are aimed at providing opportunities for learners to develop their digital skills.

1.29 Digital Learning Framework

In advance of the formal publication in 2022 of the new Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 €50m in ICT grant funding was issued to schools. In addition, €50m funding issued as part of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) to address the needs of learners at risk of educational disadvantage through the digital divide. The NRRP is supported by the NextGeneration EU facility.

The Department provides broadband connectivity to all recognised primary, special and post-primary schools through the Schools Broadband Programme at an annual cost of some €13 million. Many primary schools are on 100 Mbps or greater connectivity currently, with an early priority of the new Digital Strategy to 2027 being to provide all primary schools with high speed connectivity by 2023. This will be achieved through the ongoing implementation of the National Broadband Plan Intervention Area, commercial provision.

Work with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications continued on the provision of improved broadband connectivity to primary schools as identified under the National Broadband Plan Broadband Connection Point Programme, with some 150 schools of the 679 provided with high-speed broadband and work ongoing on the balance. The anticipated delivery date for all 679 schools is early in 2023.

In 2021 the Department was successful in including a project as part of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan funded by the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility. This project will capture the schools not included in the National Broadband Plan Intervention Area, or to receive enhanced connectivity through industry provision. This project commenced implementation in 2021.

Ireland is expected to receive more than €900 million in grants over the lifetime of the Facility. The Recovery and Resilience Facility is the largest component of NextGenerationEU, the European Union's response to the global pandemic. The aim is to help repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the pandemic and to prepare for a post-COVID-19 Europe that is greener, more digital, more resilient and fit to face the future.

Goal 2: Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all students are supported to fulfil their potential

This goal is about ensuring equity of opportunity and inclusivity are fundamental principles in our education system. This goal aims to develop a system that welcomes and meaningfully engages all students, including those with special educational needs and students at risk of educational disadvantage.

2.1 DEIS Identification

Work continued during 2021 on the development of a DEIS identification model to identify the concentrated levels of disadvantage of schools. The refined model is an objective, statistics-based process, using school enrolment data and data available from Census 2016 under the HP Deprivation Index.

2.2 DEIS Plan Implementation

In the 2021/22 academic year there are 884 schools in the DEIS Programme serving over 180,000 pupils – 687 primary and 197 post –primary schools. The total Department spend on DEIS in 2021 is over €150 million, which includes €26.07 million for the School Completion Programme. This includes the provision of 415 HSCL coordinators in urban primary and post-primary DEIS schools, additional teaching resources in DEIS Urban Band 1 schools, DEIS grants, enhanced guidance provision in DEIS post-primary schools and an enhanced school book grant paid to DEIS schools.

Budget 2021 provided for:

- An extension of the School Completion Programme in September 2021 to include 14 urban primary and 14 post-primary schools newly included in DEIS in 2017.
- A 5% increase in funding for the School Completion Programme from September 2021 to support the attendance and participation of vulnerable learners and those at risk of education disadvantage.
- A reduction of the enrolment threshold for the allocation of an additional deputy principal in DEIS post-primary schools, from 700 to 600 pupils

2.3 ERC Research on DEIS

In June 2021 the ERC published a report examining the home and school learning environments of 15-year olds in DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The report – Beyond achievement: home, school and wellbeing findings from PISA 2018 for students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools – also describes findings regarding students' attitudes, educational and career aspirations, and wellbeing.

Some of the key positive findings were that students in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools had access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities, and virtually all participating students had principals who reported that there were school policies in place to support student wellbeing. Another welcome finding was that parents of students in DEIS schools generally held positive views regarding school policies aimed at supporting parental involvement in education.

2.4 Retention to Leaving Certificate in DEIS Post-primary Schools

The latest Retention Report published by the Department in November 2021 measures the percentage of students who entered the first year of post-primary school in 2014 and who completed Leaving Certificate in 2019, or 2020 (for those who availed of transition year). The report shows that 91.5% of the students who entered their first year of post-primary school in 2014 completed their Leaving Certificate in 2019 or 2020, while 97.6% sat the Junior Certificate examination in 2017 or 2018.

Schools participating in the DEIS programme have seen retention rates to Leaving Certificate improve since the introduction of DEIS – from 68.2% for the 2001 entry cohort to 84.8% for the 2014 entry cohort. The gap in retention rates between DEIS and non-DEIS schools has narrowed from a gap of 16.8% for the 2001 entry cohort to 8.6% for the 2014 entry cohort.

2.5 Reduced School Days

The Department of Education published guidelines on the recording and notification of the use of reduced school days in September 2021. The guidelines were developed to provide clarity to school authorities and parents/guardians around the use of reduced school days in schools and to ensure that reduced school days are only used in a manner that is limited, appropriate and absolutely necessary.

The following guidelines on the use of reduced school days were published in 2021:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/63545-the-use-of-reduced-school-days/?msclkid=6c35f167cd1e11eca806f3d768257dcf>

2.6 Transfer of Educational Welfare Functions

In line with the arrangements set out as part of the current Government formation, and formalised under SI 588 of 2020, educational welfare functions, including the administration of the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme have been under the remit of the Minister for Education since January 2021. The Child and Family Agency (Amendment) Act 2021 amended the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, with the effect that Tusla reports to the Minister for Education in respect of education welfare functions

Publications in 2021 (Social Inclusion):

Review of Class Size in DEIS Urban Band 1 Primary Schools

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0d766-review-of-class-size-in-deis-urban-band-1-schools/>

NTRIS Pilot Baseline Research Report Out of the Shadows

https://1d3ad8c0-4fe5-46e5-9b07-dc213044ac84.filesusr.com/ugd/5cfafe_0dc001ab34414419b855ebe82b7890f1.pdf

2.7 Special Educational Needs

2.7.1 Catering for Students with Special Educational Needs

The Department oversees the provision of a range of educational supports and services for children with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools including teachers, special needs assistants, assistive technology, specialist equipment, enhanced capitation and special transport arrangements.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is responsible, through its network of special educational needs organisers, for processing applications from schools for supports for children with special educational needs.

2.7.2 Special Education Provision

The State currently spends in excess of 25% of its annual education and training budget of €9.2 billion on making additional provision for children with special educational needs.

The main supports that this funding is provided for are as follows:

2.7.3 Special Needs Assistants

Budget 2021 provided an additional 990 special needs assistants (SNAs). This resulted in 18,004 SNAs having been allocated to schools by 31 December 2021.

2.7.4 Special Education Teachers

Budget 2021 provided for an additional 145 special education teachers which brought the total provision to 13,765 in 2021.

2.7.5 Special Classes

There are 2,148 special classes in mainstream schools providing specialist education for 12,289 pupils with 2,457 special class teachers for the 2021/2022 school year.

Children attending special classes benefit from a reduced pupil:teacher ratio ranging from 6:1 to 11:1

2.7.6 Special Schools

There are 126 special schools providing specialist education for 8,682 pupils with special educational needs, including hospital schools and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) units with over 1,500 teachers. Children attending special schools benefit from a reduced pupil:teacher ratio ranging from 6:1 to 11:1. Two new special schools opened in Cork and Dublin for the 2021/22 school-year.

2.7.7 Assistive Technology Scheme

2,775 payments were made to primary schools, and 991 to post-primary schools, towards the cost of assistive technology, amounting to over €3.6 million in 2021.

The type of equipment provided under the assistive technology scheme is varied, and includes audiology supports for children with hearing impairment, equipment to assist children with visual impairment, and computer equipment for children with physical or severe communication disabilities, where it has been outlined that the equipment is essential to access the curriculum.

2.7.8 Irish Sign Language Scheme

The Irish Sign Language (ISL) Scheme assists Deaf/Hard of Hearing children and their families to acquire competency in a language at the earliest possible opportunity.

The child's family members, parents and siblings may also be included in the ISL tuition, which is provided, in the main, at the child's home, under this scheme in order to ensure that the child can both communicate with their family members and to assist them to acquire fluent language skills while engaged in meaningful activity with capable users of the language and significant others. A grant is paid to parents to employ an ISL tutor. In the majority of cases ISL tuition is for one hour per week up until the end of June, rising to 7.5 hours per week for July and August.

The total funding available for the ISL tuition scheme is in the region of €310,000 annually. There were 176 children and their families supported under the scheme by approximately 47 tutors in the 2020/21 school year.

2.7.9 Special Education Home Tuition Scheme

The purpose of the Home Tuition Grant Scheme is to provide a compensatory educational service for students, enrolled in schools, with a significant medical condition, which has caused, and is likely to continue to cause, major disruption to their attendance at school. The scheme also provides a compensatory educational service for children with special educational needs seeking an educational placement. Provision is also made for early educational intervention for children with autism.

€26.17 million in grant funding issued to parents towards the provision of home tuition in 2021. 424 home tuition grants were sanctioned for Home Tuition for children with special educational needs during the 2020/21 school year.

2.7.10 Summer Education Programme 2021

In 2021, the July Education Programme was expanded into summer education programmes for pupils with complex special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage. This was in response to COVID-19.

Students with complex special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage will have access to an enhanced summer programme of education under this expansion of the summer programme.

The total funding available to provide the programme was up to €40 million, a 100% increase on the allocation for summer provision in 2020.

The programme's aims were to support pupils to re-engage with education, to build their confidence and increase their motivation, promote wellbeing and for some who are at key transition stages, help to ensure they can move on to their planned educational placement in September, along with their peers.

For the first time ever, all schools (primary and-post primary) can provide summer programmes. Prior to this expansion, summer programmes were only available to special schools and pupils in special classes in primary schools and in DEIS schools.

A home-based summer programme continued to be made available for children with complex needs where their schools are not providing a school based programme

2.7.11 Middletown Centre for Autism

The Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) project is a jointly funded initiative between the Department of Education in Northern Ireland (DE) and the Department of Education aimed at supporting the promotion of excellence in the development and harmonisation of education and allied services to children and young people with autistic spectrum disorders.

A new chairperson and four new directors were appointed to the board of the Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) in 2021. Appointments to the chair and vice chair positions rotate between DE and the Department, on the appointment of each board. The term of office of the board members will expire in March 2024.

The centre provides a comprehensive nationwide training service for parents and educational professionals. Parents can view the range of courses which the centre has available through the website www.middletownautism.com. The centre also has a research division.

At the request of this Department and as approved by the North South Ministerial Council, the Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) commenced provision, on a limited pilot basis in

the south, of an intensive educational assessment and learning support service to children on an outreach basis (MCA Pilot). Alongside increasing the number of users that have benefited from the centre's services, an important aim of the expansion of services was to further embed the centre as an essential delivery body of the range of services available to support children with autism on an all-island basis.

The expansion of the centre's services in the South have enabled the centre to pilot the provision of direct support to children, the completion of targeted research projects in order to inform future policy development and an increase in the number of training places offered to both parents and professionals, particularly highlighting key life stages for a child with autism.

2.7.12 Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme and School Inclusion Model (SIM)

The NCSE's Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme, published in May 2018, found that the SNA Scheme, as currently configured, works well in meeting the needs of younger children and students for whom it was originally designed, and is greatly valued by parents, students and schools. However, it was found to be less effective for older primary and post-primary students.

Government approved the trialling of a new School Inclusion Model (SIM) in February 2019. The School Inclusion Model (SIM) is based on policy advice from the National Council for Special Education, based on the principle of providing the right support at the right time delivered by a range of personnel with relevant qualifications and skill-sets. Its purpose is to help students achieve better outcomes. Independent evaluation is a central part of the project and the outcome will inform future policy on extending the SIM. The project includes a number of elements:

- Provision of in-school therapies (speech and language, occupational)
- Allocation of SNAs on a frontloaded basis
- Additional professional supports for the school including psychology, behavioural and professional development
- Training of SNAs

The Government approved the trialling of the model for the 2019/20 school year in February 2019. Initially designed as a one-year pilot involving up to 75 participating schools in the CHO 7 region, it was interrupted by COVID-19 due to the closure of schools for in-school learning and the diversion of HSE therapists from the project to COVID-19 related work. It was then extended to the 2020/21 school year which has also been interrupted by the pandemic.

Progress has been made on aspects of the model but much remains to be done in terms of in-school implementation and evaluation. The pilot has now recommenced in CHO 7 and planning for an expansion is underway at present.

2.7.13 In-School Speech and Language Therapy and School Inclusion Model (SIM)

A demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services took place over the course of the 2018/19 school year. The project was developed by the Departments of Education, the then Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Health, and the Health Service Executive and managed and co-ordinated by the NCSE.

The purpose of the project was to test a model of tailored therapeutic supports by providing speech and language and occupational therapy within 'educational settings'. This innovative pilot complemented existing HSE funded provision of essential therapy services.

The project took place in the Health Service Executive (HSE) Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) 7 Region of South West Dublin, Kildare and West Wicklow. 75 schools,

including a representative sample of primary, post-primary, and special schools took part. 75 Pre-school settings associated with primary schools participating in the project were included. 150 settings participated in the demonstration project in total.

Children attending pilot schools and who received therapy supports from the HSE also continued to access such services. The in-school therapy model was designed to supplement, not to replace existing services.

The project was evaluated over the course of the 2018/19 school year. This evaluation report has now been completed and is available at <https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Demo-project-evaluation-final-for-web-upload.pdf>

Although initially designed as a one year pilot, a Government decision of 12 February, 2019, in relation to the Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme, also agreed to the establishment of a pilot of a new School Inclusion Model for children with special educational and additional care needs involving up to 75 participating schools in the CHO 7 region over the course of the 2019/20 school year.

The demonstration project to provide in-school and pre-school therapy services continued, as part of the School Inclusion Model, over the course of the 2019/20 school year.

As all schools closed from 12 March, 2020, due to the COVID-19 crisis, it was not possible to fully complete the pilot of the School Inclusion Model over the course of the 2019/20 school year.

In order to support the work of the HSE in responding to COVID-19, the speech and language and occupational therapists which had been assigned to the School Inclusion Model were recalled to the HSE from 12 March 2020, and continue to remain employed by the HSE. The pilot recommenced in CHO7 in November 2021.

Approval was granted to the NCSE to directly recruit therapists to continue the Pilot of the School Inclusion Model, over the course of the 2020/21 school year.

It was also announced that as part of the 2021 Budget measures, funding was made available to extend the School Inclusion Model (SIM), which includes therapy provision. Planning for its expansion is underway.

2.7.14 Training of SNAs

The National Training Programme for Special Needs Assistants is part of the 'School Inclusion Model' which aims to build schools' capacity to include children with additional needs and to provide other supports for pupils. The Department of Education is funding the initiative, as part of the School Inclusion Model. (SIM)

Special needs assistants play a huge role in helping to ensure the inclusion of pupils with significant care needs in education and in school life. This was acknowledged in the Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme published by the NCSE in 2018. The review made a number of recommendations regarding SNAs and the need for a more broadly based set of supports including therapeutic supports for pupils with complex needs. The review also referenced the training needs of SNAs. The NCSE recommended that a new national training programme be developed for existing SNAs who do not have the requisite level of training and for new SNAs on appointment. The NCSE also recommended that training tailored to the complex specific needs of some students being cared for by SNAs would also be provided.

The policy advice was considered by the Department. It was decided that priority should be given to the development of a training programme for SNAs who may not have had a recent opportunity to access a training programme tailored to their role.

The NCSE has awarded a four-year contract to UCD School of Education to design and deliver a new national online training programme for special needs assistants (SNAs) employed in Irish schools. The target is to provide training to 3,500 SNAs during this period.

The programme began in January 2021 with the intention of recruiting the first cohort of 500 SNAs in the first year, with 3,500 places available on the programme over the following four years. The programme constitutes a national training programme for SNAs working in the Irish education system, in primary, post-primary and special schools.

The programme is open free of charge to all SNAs employed in all recognised schools, primary, post-primary and special schools. This is a major educational initiative, which will enhance the knowledge, skills and expertise of personnel who are crucial to the inclusion of students with additional care needs in the education system.

The first cohort of students has now completed the programme, with 460 meeting the programme requirements in full. The second cohort of 950 students enrolled in September 2021 and will complete the programme in May 2022.

2.8 Home Tuition Schemes

A total of 186 home tuition applications were processed in 2021 in respect of the following schemes – home tuition for students without a school place, children in care without a school place and students on maternity-related absences. Of these, 159 were as a result of no school placement, 17 were from children in care with no school placement and a total of 10 applications were made under the scheme for maternity-related absences.

Publications in 2021 in relation to the Home Tuition Grant:

Circular 0048/2021

Home Tuition Grant Scheme for children without a school place

1. Children without a school place – (NSP)
2. Children in Care without a school place – (CIC)

Circular 0049/2021

Home Tuition Grant Scheme in respect of Maternity-related Absences

2.9 Wellbeing promotion

Work continued to support the mental health and wellbeing of students through implementation of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* in 2021. Much of the focus of wellbeing work in 2021 was on supporting schools during COVID-19. A range of wellbeing resources was developed for parents, students and school staff.

The design of the Wellbeing continuing professional development (CPD) programme for schools was completed. However, roll-out of face-to-face training for schools was delayed due to COVID-19.

A dedicated Wellbeing in Education page was developed, bringing together wellbeing supports developed by the Department and the Department's support services in 2021.

A revision of the Student Support Team Guidelines for all post-primary schools was completed and distributed to all post-primary schools in 2021.

In partnership with the Department of Health, all schools received copies of a leaflet outlining the range of mental health services available for young people.

2.10 Access and Inclusion in Early Years Settings

2.10.1 Early Start

The Department funds and administers the Early Start pre-school classes established in 1994/95 in 40 primary schools in designated areas of urban disadvantage throughout the country. Early Start is a one-year pre-school scheme which has an educational programme aimed to enhance overall development, help prevent school failure and offset the effects of social disadvantage. The educational programme can cater for 1,620 children.

Each Early Start pre-school child attracts capitation funding of €95.23 per annum. In addition, each full and half Early Start unit receives non-pay funding in respect of start-up grants for materials or equipment, as well as an annual grant to foster parental involvement.

Non-pay funding amounting to €214,109.23 was paid out to Early Start units in 2021.

2.10.2 Rutland Street Pre-school Project

The Rutland Street Pre-school Project, established in 1969, is a two-year pre-school programme in a Dublin inner city community, catering for 3-5 year-olds. Although not part of Early Start, it was used to pilot many of the approaches later incorporated in the Early Start programme. The Rutland Street Pre-school Project's budget for non-teaching pay and non-pay elements is administered by the Department. The staffing for the school is an administrative principal, seven teachers and five childcare workers, for 103 children. The Rutland Street Pre-school Project received an annual grant from the Department, which totalled €122,580 in 2021.

2.10.3 Supporting Inclusion and Diversity

The Department plays a support role in the ongoing development of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) which was launched in June 2016 by the DCEDIY. AIM is a model of universal and targeted supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the ECCE programme. The Department is a member of the Cross-Sectoral Implementation Group steering the AIM initiative, and continued to provide supports to the AIM model through participation in its working groups in 2021.

An end-of-three-year evaluation of AIM (which was delayed in 2020 due to COVID-19) took place between December 2020 and December 2021.

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

This goal is about the important role that the Department and its agencies have in providing strategic leadership within the sector and across government. It 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.

3.1 Teacher Supply Action Plan

Following a call by the HEA, on behalf of the Department, to all providers of initial teacher education, three programmes to upskill registered teachers in targeted post-primary subjects (Spanish, mathematics and physics) commenced in January 2021.

In May 2021, an updated technical report Developing a Teacher Demand and Supply Model for Ireland 2020-2038 was published, taking account of policy developments and revised student demographic projections.

A national consultative forum for stakeholders on teacher supply was held in May 2021. The forum was held online due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Responding to the challenges of COVID-19 in the context of Teacher Supply

Additional teacher supply measures were put in place in 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including;

Flexible arrangements for initial teacher education (ITE) students:

The Department and the Teaching Council engaged with higher education institutions providing professional masters of education (PME) programmes to ensure flexibility in programme delivery and enhance the availability of PME students to support schools.

Career break and job sharing schemes:

For the 2021/22 school year, temporary changes were made to the career break scheme to permit teachers on career break to carry out unlimited substitute work and to the job sharing scheme, permitting job sharing teachers to carry out substitute work on the days they were rostered off.

Teaching Council campaign:

The Teaching Council contacted the 111,700 teachers on its register to raise awareness regarding teacher substitute challenges and to ask teachers, where possible, to make themselves available for substitution in schools.

Induction arrangements for teachers newly qualified outside Ireland:

The Teaching Council renewed the provision made in 2020, into 2021, through Registration Regulations allowing, on an exceptional basis, teachers who had qualified outside of Ireland

but who had not completed the required period of induction in the country in which they have qualified, to compete their induction in Ireland.

Route of Registration for Third and Final Year ITE Students:

The Teaching Council amended the Registration Regulations to allow for third and final year ITE students to register with them. This enabled such students to teach in schools and alleviate the deficit of substitute teachers in the context of the pandemic. The Department worked with the Council to achieve this outcome.

Publication relating to Teacher Supply:

“Developing a Teacher Demand and Supply Model for Ireland 2021-2038, A Technical Report” was published in May 2021, in conjunction with Statistics Section.

Legislation relating to the Teaching Council:

Statutory Instrument S.I. No. 745 of 2021: Teaching Council (Registration) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2021

3.2 Teacher Education Policy, ITE & Professional Development

The Department promotes the continuation of learning and quality of teaching and learning, through the provision of initial teacher education, induction, continuing professional development (CPD) and supports for teachers and principals. The majority of this support is provided by the initial teacher education programmes, national teacher education support services and by local education centres. The national teacher education support services are the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) and the Centre for School Leadership (CSL).

CPD for primary and post-primary teachers was provided in a wide range of subject areas throughout 2021. These included support for the implementation of the Primary Languages Curriculum and new senior cycle examinable subjects and revised senior cycle subject specifications. Furthermore, over 600 places were provided on college-based post-graduate programmes in leadership and special educational needs.

Professional development support for the implementation of the relevant actions in the areas of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM), Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools (DEIS), Digital Strategy for Schools, Languages Connect, Creativity, the CLIL project supported by PDST, Health and Wellbeing and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) continued to be prioritised in 2021.

3.2.1 Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

Procedures for Professional Accreditation of Programmes of ITE (2021)

All new primary and post-primary programmes submitted to the Teaching Council for accreditation must now be in alignment with *Céim*. *Céim* sets out the requirements which all programmes of qualification for teaching in Ireland must meet in order to gain accreditation from the Teaching Council. It is also a benchmark for anyone seeking to register as a teacher in Ireland.

The Procedures for Professional Accreditation of Programmes of ITE were published in April 2021 and support *Céim* by outlining the Council's procedures for how programmes are reviewed and accredited in accordance with *Céim*

In November 2021, the Teaching Council commenced Cycle 2 accreditation of existing programmes, which involves a scheduled review of 68 programmes of ITE in 14 higher education institutions between 2021 and 2023.

Gaeltacht Entry Route to Primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

Under a long established arrangement, up to 10% of places in state-funded primary ITE programmes are reserved for candidates from the Gaeltacht, who normally reside in an official Gaeltacht designated area and whose normal language of the home is Irish.

The entry route was designed specifically to attract students into primary teaching who are from the Gaeltacht and who speak Irish as their first language. The aim of the Gaeltacht Entry route is consistent with the Department of Education's *Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022*, which sets out a vision for Gaeltacht education that recognises the role that schools and early-years settings play in providing high quality Irish-medium education and in fostering Irish-language proficiency and usage in the wider Gaeltacht community.

Discussions between the Department and the relevant stakeholders took place in relation to the challenges with the administration of the Gaeltacht Entry route. The Department published a circular advising of a change to the criteria for the entry route from September 2022 in June 2021. The minimum grade for Irish will increase to H3 – taking it above the general-entry level of H4, but the places will be protected for students who are resident in a Gaeltacht Language Planning Area. This is to ensure continued availability of a route for students who can bring the richness of Irish as their first language to the teaching profession.

The terms of the Gaeltacht Entry Route will be kept under review in the context of the development of Department of Education policy in relation to the Irish language and Irish-medium education.

School Placement

The School Placement Innovation report was published by the Teaching Council in August 2021. It highlighted the innovative practice developed in school placement in response to COVID-19 measures.

School Placement is a critical part of ITE as it enables the student teacher to experience teaching and learning in a variety of contexts, and to participate in school life in a way that is structured and supported.

The School Placement Working Group (SPWG) was convened by the Teaching Council in November 2018 to review the implementation of school placement guidelines and the recommendations of Teaching Council commissioned research on school placement.

The Group identified a number of key challenges with regard to school placement, including the sourcing and administration of school placement, the financial cost of school placement, and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders (with a particular focus on supporting teachers who host student teachers). These challenges formed the basis of an Action Plan on School Placement which was issued in March 2021.

The SPWG recommended the establishment of a School Placement Implementation Group to oversee two WGs, a Placement System Working Group (PSWG) and a Treoraithe Professional Learning Group. The establishment of these groups was delayed due to the impact of COVID-19 on system resources and work practices. The PSWG was established in Q2 2021 and met on three occasions: September, October, and November 2021. The Treoraithe Professional Learning Group is due to be established in 2022.

Policy Statement on Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

The Department commenced development of a policy statement for ITE in 2019. Extensive consultation has taken place with all stakeholders connected with ITE, including all ITE providers and Departmental policy areas connected to ITE. This policy statement will attempt to document policy and provision of ITE and provide some clarity around the vision for ITE.

While it was hoped to publish the document in late 2021, work has continued to finalise the statement, with an expected date of publication in 2022.

Initial Teacher Education graduates

There were 1,202 graduates from State-funded primary concurrent and consecutive initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and 1,574 graduates from State-funded post-primary concurrent and consecutive ITE programmes in 2020. There were also 683 primary and 157 post-primary graduates on consecutive programmes from Hibernia College in 2020.

While only estimated figures are available for 2021, it is expected that there will be some 1200 primary graduates and over 1760 post-primary graduates from State-funded programmes, with some 721 primary and 188 post-primary expected to graduate from Hibernia College.

Responding to the challenges of COVID-19 in context of Initial Teacher Education

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional Gaeltacht learning periods could not go ahead as planned and the Department and Teaching Council agreed that these could take place online. This ensured that there were no barriers to students completing their ITE programme and graduating as planned in 2021. While the online alternative programme worked well, the shared aim of all stakeholders is to return to a normal in person GLP in 2022.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) provided greater programme flexibility to enable Year 3 and Year 4 student teachers on concurrent programmes and all student teachers on consecutive (PME) programmes to support schools up to the end of term (December 2021). These measures had a positive impact in the overall goal of keeping our schools open despite pressure on teacher supply caused by the ongoing issue of COVID-19.

The Department, HEIs providing initial teacher education (ITE) and the Teaching Council, continued to work together to maintain the integrity of the students' ITE experiences and support students in satisfactorily completing their ITE programmes, while also identifying potential adaptations to ensure the ongoing availability of student teachers to support schools pre and post-Christmas 2021.

The TES support services, at request of the Department, supported the HSE Public Health Schools Teams with school-based contact tracing in March 2021. This work was deemed of the utmost priority in the education system during spring 2021, in ensuring schools could implement effective mitigation policies to limit the spread of COVID-19 in schools and communities. This work involved PDST and JCT advisers as well as CSL co-ordinators working alongside existing Public Health teams to advise principals and leaders in education settings about the procedures to identify the contacts of positive cases and report these correctly to the HSE.

The Department announced measures to increase the availability of substitute teachers for schools in November 2021:-

- Teacher education support services released teachers who were on secondment to make themselves available to provide substitute cover in schools.
- The majority of continuing professional development (CPD) where substitution was required had been deferred until after the February 2022 mid-term break while Planned CPD relating to reforms in Senior Cycle examinable subjects continued.
- During the period when schools were closed, the Teacher education support services continued to provide supports to schools and teachers remotely. Planned face-to-face CPD support was adapted and delivered remotely via webinars. A significant level of support was provided to support schools and teachers in providing remote teaching and learning to students.

A single Integrated Teacher Support Service

The Department promotes the quality of teaching and learning through the provision of continuing professional development and supports for teachers and principals. The professional development needs of teachers are met through the provision of an induction programme for newly-qualified teachers, dedicated support for school leaders, national CPD for curricular and policy reform, and ongoing support for teachers. The supports, which are funded through the Department's Teacher Education section, are currently delivered by four different services:

- Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) (cross sectoral service covering primary and senior cycle at post-primary)
- Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) (junior cycle)
- National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) (primary and post-primary)
- Centre for School Leadership (CSL) (primary and post-primary).

The Department commenced a project in 2021 to integrate the four support services into one integrated support service. The development of a single integrated teacher support service is in line with the Department's policy of promoting quality teaching and learning through the provision of CPD and to support teachers and school leaders. Steering, implementation and working groups have been established to help progress the integration of the services. A project plan has been created and a number of meetings held with stakeholders to provide updates and collect feedback on the project. Work is continuing on the project with the new integrated service to be established by September 2023.

3.2.2 Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)

In 2021, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) continued to provide a comprehensive professional development programme to support teachers and school leaders. The year commenced with the full programme of CPD seminars, workshops, professional learning communities and school support, along with a full suite of webinars and online courses.

The work of the PDST during 2021 was significantly impacted upon by COVID-19. It had several implications for the redesign, reimagining and realignment of provision. The move to remote teaching and learning in January 2021 meant that the team had to adapt its services, as had been done in 2020.

CPD for the second school term went ahead as planned, with no evidence of reduced appetite or attendance in any area. PDST also put in place further supports to respond directly to the needs of teachers and school leaders who, for the second time, found themselves conducting their work with students remotely. PDST continued to respond to school support requests with schools still keen to receive curriculum and programme support at both primary and post-primary levels for groups of teachers or whole staff.

Specific areas were prioritised in 2021, with modes of provision adapted to allow for remote and distance learning. This included offering remote support clinics with the specific purpose for the here and now in being responsive to the immediate needs of teachers across all areas at primary level and post-primary level. Bespoke school support continued to be in high demand.

A priority was the continuation of supports for newly appointed school leaders and teachers of new Leaving Certificate subjects and specifications. However, some aspects of CPD had to be paused as they could only be facilitated in-person.

Health and Wellbeing

The primary and post-primary teams' support provision continued in 2021 across all of the following areas: SPHE, RSE, Stay Safe, Child Protection, JC and SC Personal Safety, Anti Bullying, Mental Health and Substance Misuse as part of the new Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice. The Wellbeing Action Research Project was a key priority for the team in association with NEPS. The PDST designed and facilitated support for all pilot schools involved as well as coordinating a shared learning event to mark the end of the pilot. This project informed the national provision of support for the framework in 2021.

In 2021, Senior Cycle CPD was provided for the subject specifications of economics, politics and society, art, classical studies, agricultural science, computer science, applied maths, LCPE, and for the revised module descriptors for LCA.

PDST's bespoke school support continued to be in high demand. In 2021 there were 26700 teacher CPD interactions during primary in-school support and 7169 PP teacher CPD interactions during PP in-school support.

Support for schools was prioritised in all areas in 2021, including School Leadership where bespoke modules were facilitated within the PDST's national programmes. Targeted provision for DEIS schools continued through contextualised school support, Reading Recovery, Maths Recovery, JCSP and DEIS Excellence Cluster Projects.

In collaboration with Dublin West and Navan education centres, PDST prepared two online training webinars for teachers running Department- funded summer camps in English and in Irish during July and August 2021. 610 teachers attending the live English webinar and 94 teachers attended the Irish language webinar.

School Leadership

Support for school leaders was provided through PDST's national programmes: Misneach, Tánaiste, Comhar, Forbairt, Lionraí and Meitheal as well as a series of supports for School Self Evaluation. The PDST leadership team supported school leaders across the continuum of leadership, principal, deputy principal, middle leaders and teacher leaders through a suite of national programmes, learning events targeting current issues and contextualised school support with participation of 3073 at primary, 1390 at post-primary and 822 cross-sectoral.

Civitas Parium

The PDST Research Committee launched Civitas Parium In 2021. This is a bespoke conceptual framework to inform and further develop the PDST's suite of collaborative professional development supports. Rooted in reflective practice, the framework is empowered by a focus upon curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation and sustained by the overt priority afforded to the needs of all learners. It also provides a means by which PDST

collaborative models can be further evaluated and built upon to ensure their future efficiency and sustainability.

Civitas Parium is the core conceptual framework for PDST models of collaborative professional development. Through the sharing of this document the framework will be communicated across the organisation to inform practice, encourage reflection and support the PDST aim of providing high quality professional development and support that empowers teachers and schools to provide the best possible education for all pupils/students. The framework is also aligned to the overall goal for the PDST to be widely acknowledged as an innovative, responsive and trusted provider of continuing professional development and support for teachers and schools.

The document can be accessed here <https://www.pdst.ie/publications>

3.2.3 PDST's Technology in Education

PDST's Technology in Education (PDST TiE) team continued to support the digital transformation in schools in 2021 through broadband connections and upgrades, infrastructure support, cybersecurity, internet safety and cyberbullying supports, resources for teachers through Scoilnet and providing professional development for teachers and school leaders to enhance professional digital competence.

Over 80,000 children and young people from schools across Ireland participated remotely in Safer Internet Day 2021, organised by the Webwise team. Leading up to the day, 100 students from across Ireland engaged in an online peer-led training programme with the theme of the training programme this year focusing on building digital resilience and managing your online wellbeing.

HTML Heroes, a new online safety programme for teachers of first and second classes, was launched. The resource contains five lessons that explore using the internet safely, communicating online, playing and learning online, getting help and support

Scoilnet, the Department's official portal for Irish education resources, now has over 25,000 teacher-developed resources available. With school closures in the early months of 2021, traffic to the website increased by approximately 45% across most key measurables of website usage (page views; resource clicks; active searches) when compared to the first three months of 2019, when schools were fully open.

Following the high levels of interest in two versions of the course on Teaching Online for Primary and Post-primary teachers, two sets of courses (for primary and post-primary) were developed, enabling teachers to progress some of the skills and competencies developed during the Teaching Online course: The course are:

- Assessment Feedback and Digital Technologies (post-primary)
- Using Video to Enhance and Create Resources (post-primary)
- Assessment Feedback and Digital Technologies (primary)
- How to Create and Use Instructional Videos (primary)

Blended learning toolkits were very popular throughout 2021 with primary and post-primary teachers in maximising their newly established skills in digital technologies to engage in a blended learning approach in their classrooms.

A suite of bilingual infographics was developed, addressing a number of key areas.

School support was a prominent mode of support in 2021, with support also provided for digital communities of practice, school excellence fund clusters and digital portfolio initiatives.

3.3 Other Irish language Supports

CLIL

CLIL (content and language integrated learning) is identified within the Primary Language Curriculum as an effective pedagogy to improve language learning outcomes. CLIL is a methodology whereby the teaching of language and content are integrated within the same lesson(s). A pilot project in the area of CLIL and the Irish language in primary schools commenced in 2019. Seven schools were selected to take part in the pilot project. On 12 May 2021 the seven schools involved were invited to attend an information webinar with the PDST to update them on the progress of the pilot project.

In 2021, a suite of physical education materials has been designed by the PDST, in collaboration with COGG, for use in 2022.

Gaeilge Bheo

The PDST language teams designed a suite of live and interactive online sessions, entitled Gaeilge Bheo, which explored the area of teaching of Irish, to support remote teaching and learning. Each session involved an online Gaeilge mini-lesson and a reflective/share session.

Due to the success and feedback from Gaeilge Bheo participants, the approach was adapted and extended in the 2021/22 academic year.

Primary Gaeilge Workshops / Webinars

The Irish-language team in the PDST consistently provides a series of workshops/webinars every year exploring the teaching of Irish. For example, the Gaeilge team provided a webinar on Gaeilge Neamhfhoirmiúil (Informal Irish) (T2) and a webinar on preparing for Seachtain na Gaeilge (T2) in the 2020/21 school year.

3.4 National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT)

The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) supports the induction of primary and post-primary newly qualified teachers (NQTs) into the teaching profession in Ireland in line with the requirements of the Department of Education and the policies of the Teaching Council including *Droichead, The Integrated Professional Induction Framework for NQTs* (2017). Many of NIPT's provisions and events were impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. 3,641 primary NQTs completed the Droichead programme in 2021, with 3,125 post-primary NQTs completing the programme.

PST Training

NIPT prioritised and facilitated professional support team (PST) training in 2021, with 1,076 participants at primary and 238 participants at post-primary. It aimed to provide participants with the initial knowledge and skills required to be effective PST members to support and guide newly qualified teachers (NQTs) through the induction process. PST training continued to be facilitated online for the academic year.

Cluster Meetings

It is a Teaching Council requirement that NQTs undertaking *Droichead* as a route of induction must attend one different two-hour cluster meeting per term for the duration of their *Droichead* process. In addition, the *Droichead* Transitional Arrangements, published by the Teaching Council, facilitated the accommodation of NQTs who had not fully completed their cluster meeting requirements in 2019 and 2020, due to the impact of COVID-19. Participation figures for 2021 were a total 4,644 for primary and 3,170 for post-primary.

NQT Voice Events

NIPT co-ordinates the invitation of a random selection of NQTs who had engaged in the *Droichead* process to a sector-specific NQT Voice shared learning event to engage in professional conversations about their experience of the *Droichead* process. These events provide an opportunity to review induction from the NQT perspective, to explore possibilities and make recommendations. NQTs voice their *Droichead* experience, sharing individual and collective experiences. NIPT utilises this feedback to contribute to the development of different aspects of *Droichead* provisions such as cluster meetings, PST training, PST professional development, observations, *Taisce*, etc. Although attendance numbers were impacted by COVID-19, two events were held in 2021 for the primary sector with eight schools represented. 77 post-primary schools were represented in five other events.

PST Professional Development

Droichead Refresher events were held for post-primary participants, with 305 in attendance. The aim of these events was to further complement PST's knowledge of the *Droichead* process as well as provide advice, support and resources to assist their engagement with NQTs in schools.

***Droichead* School Support**

NIPT provided for live online video, phone and email support, providing approx. 1,000 hours of school support during 2021.

NIPT, in collaboration with the Teaching and Learning section of the Teaching Council, offered a joint presentation and webinar for all ITE final year students in March 2021. Two in-person events, as well as one joint cross-sectoral webinar were held, with approximately 1,450 cross-sectoral registrations).

Online Induction Workshops

NIPT currently provides a range of bespoke support via its online induction workshops which are available 24/7 for NQTs' convenience. A total of 4,320 people participated in online induction workshops in 2021.

3.5 Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) – Supporting Junior Cycle Reform

Over 24,000 teachers attended online cluster CPD in the period between January and March 2021. Workshops were provided for all Junior Cycle subjects, including the PE short course. The whole school team offered online workshops to all schools, including special schools, resulting in engagement with a further 8,826 teachers. Interactive online workshops were offered to support teachers in the Junior Cycle wellbeing curricular short course areas of CSPE and SPHE with some 1,480 teachers attending.

Schools and teachers that were unable to avail of clusters, due to issues with COVID-19, were given the opportunity to attend a second set of online cluster events offered in September 2021. An additional 6,239 teachers were accommodated by this addition to the schedule.

A series of live Q&A events and webinars were provided to support school leaders in planning for the implementation of the 400-hour Wellbeing programme in accordance with the phased implementation of *The Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015).

Two major online learning events, one in spring and the second in autumn, offered a range of webinars and workshops to support subject teachers and school leaders with Junior Cycle reform in 2021. One-off elective learning events were offered by all subject teams. Arts in Junior Cycle continued to provide online workshops and develop resources and programmes to support professional learning and engagement with the arts and learning in Junior Cycle. STE(A)M in Junior Cycle continued to provide online workshops for teachers in partnership with external, informal CPD providers. The initiative was expanded in 2021 to provide a series of online workshops to support teachers to collaborate across Junior Cycle subject areas to plan for and implement a STE(A)M in Action in School Project in their schools. In total 11,682 teachers attended online elective events between January and December 2021.

Online cluster material was repurposed and hosted on the JCT website for asynchronous access to professional learning by teachers in consideration of the substitution pressure on schools given the COVID-19 context. This allowed teachers to access material from their second teaching subject area at a time of their own convenience. All teams developed resources and supports to assist teachers with returning to school in spring. Online supports and podcasts were developed to support teachers operating in pandemic classrooms and to assist teachers and students navigating the changing assessment landscape put in place as a result of COVID-19. The JCT website, www.jct.ie, recorded 2,000,000+ views in 2021.

September 2021 saw the establishment of the Junior Cycle Implementation Support Team (JCIS). A consultation process began to help schools identify their specific needs and to work with the JCIS team to co-design a staff development day to address those needs. Two significant Communities of Practice were established; one to support schools engaging with the Artistic Performance Short Course and another to support school leaders in developing assessment practices in their schools.

3.6 Additions to support Irish Language education

A dedicated JCIS national region was established to support Gaelcholáistí and Gaeltacht schools: Support for the function of the Junior Cycle in Ghaelcholáistí and Gaeltacht Schools. . In order to support the Policy for Gaeltacht Education (2017–2022), a JCIS initiative was established and a new support module designed to promote the improvement of students' literary and communicative skills in order to achieve one of the language improvement goals for Gaeltacht schools and Gaelcholáistí. In 2021, a new section was added to the JCT website to offer resources and supports for schools teaching Irish through another subject through involvement with the programme to use Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

3.7 Centre for School Leadership (CSL)

The CSL is a partnership between the Department of Education, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN), and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD), and was established in September 2015 with a role in leading, supporting, enhancing and advising on high-quality programmes (Mentoring, Coaching and Aspiring Leaders) to develop and support school leadership, particularly principals across the primary and post-primary school network.

The Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership (PDSL) has been offered across a large number of education centres since September 2018. The NQF Level 9 programme had an intake of 284 participants for the fifth cohort in September 2021. The course is provided by a University of Limerick (UL)-led consortium in conjunction with University College Dublin (UCD) and the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG).

Since September 2017, every newly appointed principal in a primary or post-primary school has access to a trained CSL mentor. Over 500 experienced principals are trained as mentors. Principals in their second year of appointment have access to a group mentoring programme which is operated through IPPN and NAPD. In 2021/2022 a total of 238 primary mentoring relationships and 74 post-primary mentoring relationships were overseen by CSL. Online professional learning was provided for mentors during the year with a number of *comhrás* and webinars organised by the team. The team also developed resources to assist mentors in guiding newly appointed principals through the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic presented to school leaders.

A total of 1,069 principals have availed of one-to-one coaching provided by CSL since 2017. A further 286 school leadership teams are currently availing of team coaching, in primary and post-primary schools. The focus of the coaching is on developing the skillsets required to meet the standards stated in the Looking at Our Schools publications.

The CSL team hosted, designed and led a pilot Middle Leadership Action Research Project in collaboration with IPPN, NAPD, DES Inspectorate and Clare and Kildare Education Centres. This project commenced with 34 schools in the Clare and Kildare education centre areas in September 2021.

3.8 Development of a research-based framework for the evaluation of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The Department, in conjunction with the Educational Research Centre (ERC), continued the development of an evaluation framework for CPD in 2021. This framework will help ensure that CPD provision meets the needs of teachers, schools, students and the Department efficiently and effectively and ensure the best use of available resources. Due to COVID-19, the timeline for completion of this research project has been extended to Q1 2023.

3.9 Cosán

The Department is committed to supporting the development and embedding of Cosán, the Teaching Council's National Framework for Teachers' Learning. The development phase finished and the launch of the 2021 Action Plan took place which marked the beginning of the growth phase of Cosán in 2021. The Cosán Action Plan sets out the actions to support the growth phase of Cosán within the continuum of teacher education, taking into account existing supports, resources and structures that are already in place. Cosán workshops are currently being facilitated in a number of education support centres.

Publications relating to Teacher Education:

PDST Annual Report 2020/2021

PDST CPD Provision and Response to School Closures Jan/Feb 2021.

3.10 Quality Inspections

Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling Visits

When school buildings re-opened in March 2021, it became a national priority to ensure that they remained open in a safe and sustainable way. In support of this priority, the Inspectorate conducted a programme of *Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling* (SSPS) inspection visits to schools. These visits, which resulted in a published report, provided public assurance that the Department's COVID-19 Response Plan was being implemented by school authorities. They also enabled inspectors to provide advice and support to school leaders in relation to creating a safe learning and working environment for all.

Supporting the implementation of DE Guidelines on face coverings in primary schools

Following NPHET recommendations on the wearing of face coverings by children in third class and above in primary schools, a dedicated helpline service was provided to schools to offer guidance and support in implementing this recommendation. This service was staffed by inspectors and dealt with in excess of 170 calls in the period November – December 2021. The focus of this work was on resolving the issues that arose in relation to the wearing of face coverings in an equitable way, and on ensuring that schools remained safe for children and adults.

Curriculum Helpline

During the period of remote teaching and learning due to COVID-19 from January – March 2021, the Inspectorate supported the work of school leaders and teachers to ensure the provision of a rich learning experience for all children and young adults in the online learning environment. As part of this support, the Inspectorate provided a dedicated phone and email advisory service to schools that enabled school principals to discuss issues relating to teaching, learning and assessment in a remote teaching context. The dedicated helpline commenced in January 2021 and ran until April 2021 when it was then extended to cover Accredited Grades queries.

During this period the advisory service dealt with 191 queries. 48.69% were to the phone service, 20.94% were to the email service and the remaining 30.37% originated from direct contacts to individual inspectors. Queries most commonly originated in the primary sector (69.63%) while across both sectors principals accounted for 73.16% of queries with teachers (11.58%) and parents (4.21%) also featuring.

Over a fifth of all queries (20.42%) related to support for vulnerable students. 16.8% of contacts addressed teaching and learning queries mirroring exactly the volume of assessment-related queries. 4.19% of queries focused on curriculum with 41.88% of queries in a more general category that included COVID-19 protocols, health & safety, legislation, circulars, and care of staff.

Supporting the work of the HSE

In 2021, fifty-five Inspectorate staff were assigned to the Public Health School Teams, initially for 50% of their working time and, from April-June 2021, on a full-time basis. In addition a further sixty-seven staff from the Department, its agencies and support services were assigned to the Public Health Schools' Teams from April 2021.

The focus of the work of the Public Health Schools' Teams was on determining the close contacts of a learner who had a positive COVID-19 test result and the actions required once these contacts had been identified. Overall, the Public Health Teams dealt with over 700 calls per month from schools and childcare facilities. This collaborative initiative was instrumental in supporting schools to remain open during the pandemic. The work also

facilitated the sharing of organisational practices and the creation of synergies for the benefit of both the Department and the Health Service Executive.

The Public Health Teams were in operation when the HSE Information Technology System was subjected to a serious cyber-attack during the period. Health Service Executive personnel and Department of Education inspectors collaborated to develop a series of innovative work approaches to ensure continued and seamless provision of service without any drop in productivity during this period.

Research during the period of school closures for in-school learning

The Inspectorate was conscious of the very significant challenges faced by school communities during the initial months of 2021. In light of those challenges, and in order to provide high-quality advice and support to the system, the Inspectorate undertook a comprehensive research programme in early 2021.

The focus of this research was the experience of remote teaching and learning in schools and centres for education when they were closed due to COVID-19. The research captured a range of perspectives, including those of school principals, Youthreach co-ordinators, parents, and learners. It was conducted through focus groups with parents, telephone conversations and surveys with principals and co-ordinators, and online surveys of parents and learners. Inspectors engaged with 1,003 primary principals, 548 post-primary principals and 62 co-ordinators in Youthreach centres. The parent surveys were conducted in 29 primary, post-primary and special schools and a total of 2,640 parents responded. The learner surveys were also conducted in 32 primary, post-primary and special schools and received a total of 2,319 responses. During focus groups carried out in collaboration with the National Parents Council- Primary and the National Parents Council-Post-primary, inspectors also collected the views of sixty-three parents of children in primary schools, post-primary schools and in special schools or classes.

Research in the Early Years Sector

The early years division of the Inspectorate also carried out an extensive research programme in 2021. Surveys were conducted in a sample of settings in advance of resumption of inspection in April 2021 to establish the operational context and challenges for the inspection visits.

The development and publication of information and resources to support ELC settings in 2021 also involved engagement with Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings. Of note is the collaboration with many ELC settings and primary schools to provide exemplars of effective practice and images to illustrate the *Insights: Quality in Education Webinar* series (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c71c0-insights/>). These resources addressed a wide range of topics including transitions, partnership with parents, outdoor learning, early literacy, promoting resilience, working with mixed age groups and more.

Evaluation of Remote Teaching and Learning

As schools engaged with teaching and learning in the online environment, the Inspectorate developed a system of monitoring, evaluating, and supporting teaching and learning in this environment. This work aimed to provide an assurance that schools were meeting the various needs of their learners in the online environment and to support schools as they mediated new ways of teaching and learning.

The Inspectorate worked collaboratively with over 50 schools and centres for education in the January to March 2021 period to develop grounded and practical ways of evaluating the quality of remote education provision. During the development phase, inspectors engaged in two research phases with school communities and piloted an evaluation model over two further phases as inspectors sought to understand the experiences of schools in providing remote teaching and learning.

The work resulted in Ministerial approval for the Evaluation of Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTAL) model and the publication of the *Guide to the Evaluation of Remote Teaching and Learning* in May 2021.

3.11 Quality Assurance - Inspectorate

Monitoring compliance with Child Protection

As part of the Department's oversight of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017, the Inspectorate checks on compliance with the key aspects of the procedures during all school inspections, using one of three levels. Level one checks are undertaken during short inspections such as incidental inspections, curriculum evaluations and subject inspections. Level two checks are undertaken during more intensive inspections such as whole-school evaluations (WSE) and Evaluation of Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Schools. Level three checks are undertaken during a Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection (CPSI) which focuses in an in-depth way at a school's compliance with the 2017 procedures.

Level one monitoring was conducted in 2,632 schools during 2021. 95.9% (2,523 of 2,632 schools) were fully compliant with the level one checks at the time of the inspection. 4.1% (109 of 2,632 schools) were not fully compliant with level 1 checks at the time of the inspection. All the 109 schools which were found to be not fully compliant at the time of the inspection have since provided evidence of compliance.

Level two monitoring was conducted in three settings during 2021 because of necessary adjustments to the inspection programme arising from the impact of COVID-19. All settings were fully compliant with the level 2 checks undertaken.

Fifty final CPSI inspections were conducted during 2021. Forty-four schools (88%) were fully compliant with level three checks at the end of the Final CPSI. Six schools (12%) were not fully compliant with level three checks at the end of the Final CPSI. Two of those schools have since provided evidence of full compliance with level three checks. Inspectors are continuing to engage with the four schools who are not yet fully compliant.

Early Years Education Inspections

Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) in early learning and care (ELC) settings resumed in April 2021 with a focus on Follow-Through (FT) Inspections. Despite the challenging circumstances, forty-one FT inspection and 2 EYEI were completed from April-June 2021. A combination of remote engagement with staff and owner/managers allowed for professional discussions and feedback meetings to take place in a safe environment.

A normal programme of EYEI resumed in September 2021. The ITE approach to the inspection processes, established with the FT inspections continued with remote meetings, emphasis on provision for outdoor learning and pre-arranged onsite visits to indoor learning environments taking place. Feedback from early years educators and leaders in ELC settings was very positive with a strong welcome for the return to a focus on provision for learning and pedagogy.

3.12 Inspection development and review

Development of Early Years Education Inspection Birth to Six Model

One of the actions identified for the Inspectorate in *First Five: A Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children 2019-2028* is to extend the Early Years Education-Focused Inspection (EYEI) Model to all state-funded provision for children aged from birth to six years. In 2021, work to meet this aim involved consultation with key partners, and an extensive listening phase involving visits to ELC settings and meetings with owner/managers and staff working with children. A national consultation process was launched by the Ministers for Education and Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on 9 November 2021. Subsequently, the first field trial of the draft inspection model took place in early December 2021. It is planned that EYEI birth to six will be published in 2022 ready for national implementation from September 2022.

Inspection of prisons

The Inspectorate began to develop a model of inspection of education, training, and progression in prison settings in 2021. Initial work in this area involved work shadowing similar inspections in other jurisdictions, reviewing current literature and participation in various conferences on best practice in this area.

The Inspectorate collaborated with the Office of the Inspector of Prisons to develop the necessary documentation to enable both organisations to work together and share data in 2021. The Inspectorate also collaborated with the Education and Training Boards and Prison school leaders. A site visit was conducted to Limerick Prison School to ensure that the emerging model is fully informed by practice on the ground.

At the conclusion of 2021, the model was in the final stages of development with a number of evaluations planned for prison schools in 2022.

Review of the Youthreach model of inspection

The inspectorate carries out inspections of Youthreach as a routine part of its work. The ESRI carried out a review of Youthreach provision and made a number of recommendations which necessitated a review of the Youthreach model of inspection in 2019.

The review took place in 2021 and involved consultation with the relevant stakeholders, communication with centre leaders, and visits to Community Training Centres. At the end of 2021, the review was nearing completion and the revised model will be piloted in Youthreach Centres and Community Training Centres in 2022.

Alternative Education Model

Alternative Education Centres provide educational provision for some of the most marginalised young people in our society. They include, Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs), Life Centres and Line Projects.

In 2021, the Inspectorate has developed a new model of evaluation (Alternative Education Evaluation) to evaluate provision in these settings. AE evaluations focus on teaching and learning, leadership and management of alternative education setting and on the range of supports provided for learners. The evaluations are intended to promote professional dialogue and reflection with the staff working in AE settings and to promote setting self-evaluation and improvement. The evaluations also provide key data for policy makers and

other personnel at a national level who make policy decisions on the provision for children and young people who learn in AE settings.

The evaluation model has been piloted in two Alternative Education Centres in October/November 2021. It is planned that the model will be piloted in a sample of other centres in 2022 and that feedback from Centre staff and management will be garnered to shape the final evaluation model.

3.13 Impact of Inspection

Developing the Follow-Through Model of Inspection

The Follow-Through inspection model is one of the Inspectorate's suite of inspection models. Its primary purpose is to evaluate and report on the implementation by the school of recommendations made in previous inspections. The Inspectorate explored the potential of the Follow-Through model to provide high-quality information on aspects of leadership in schools as well and how best the Follow-Through model can complement key Department initiatives such as School Self-Evaluation and distributed leadership throughout 2021. This work resulted in enhancements to the model which will be implemented in 2022.

Collaborative engagement with school leaders

The Inspectorate began a research project in 2021 designed to strengthen capacity among school leaders to evaluate the practice of teaching and learning in their schools and to strengthen the capacity of the Inspectorate to support schools and their leaders on their improvement journeys.

The Inspectorate initially established key principles to underpin the project. The principles include ensuring that the activities will focus on the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment practices in classrooms and other learning settings and that the project will be collaborative in nature; involving a team of leaders in the school and inspectors working to strengthen capacity for evaluation. Exploratory conversations with school leaders and their representatives will commence in 2022.

Student and parent voice projects

The Inspectorate has a strong commitment to listening to and consulting with children, young people and parents during its inspection work in schools and early learning and care (ELC) settings. The Inspectorate developed materials to help children and parents be better informed about inspection so that they could interact confidently with visiting inspectors in 2021. A suite of animated videos and accompanying leaflets was created to provide information to children, young people and parents, in early years and care settings, primary and post-primary schools and centres for education following research and consultation with children and young people, and parents. An e-booklet was also created for learners in ELC settings. These materials will be officially launched in 2022.

3.14 European schools

The European Schools are educational institutions set up in the European Union's (EU) Member States to provide education to the children of employees of the Commission and EU institutions. There are approximately 28,000 pupils attending the thirteen European schools, of whom approximately 400 are Irish nationals. Ireland has sixty-three seconded teachers in

the European Schools system including many in management positions in the current school year.

There are also twenty Accredited European Schools in the system, including the Centre for European Schooling in Dunshaughlin, County Meath. These schools offer a European education that meets the pedagogical requirements laid down for the European Schools but within the framework of the national school networks of the Member States.

The Inspectorate conducted seven teacher contract reviews, one deputy director contract review, two whole school evaluations and one accredited European School audit in 2021. The Inspectorate also chaired or was a member of a range of working-groups relating to syllabus revision, the devising of Continuous Professional Development and the general development of policy within the European School system. With the departure of the United Kingdom from the European School system in 2021, responsibility for English in the European Baccalaureate devolved to Ireland, with the support of Malta, during 2021.

3.15 Achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls

The Department is committed to promoting gender equity and empowering girls and women through education for a better life and future. For that reason, the Department appointed a subject matter expert for the education of girls in 2021. This appointment coincides with a number of Department developments in this area. An internal committee was set up within the Department to consider Period Poverty /Dignity in 2021. Work commenced on a pilot project to better inform schools on the topic as part of this. The Department is also strongly committed to progressing positive gender norms in Irish education and also commenced work in 2021 on how teachers can be supported in fostering positive gender norms in the classroom.

3.16 School Building Programme

The Department aims to provide appropriate infrastructure for learning environments so that all learners have access to a modern learning environment. A primary focus of the Department is the provision of accommodation to meet demand for school places in areas where enrolments are rising.

Under Project Ireland 2040, the education sector will receive a total of approximately €4.4 billion capital investment over the period 2021-2025.

This investment will build on the good progress being made on adding capacity to cater for demographic changes and provision for children with special educational needs. This investment will also facilitate an increased focus on the modernisation of existing school stock and help transition the school system for an era of net zero carbon by 2050.

There has been in excess of €3 billion invested in Capital Infrastructure in the Education Sector for Schools at Primary and Post Primary level since 2018.

The Department continued to make progress to increase the infrastructural capacity in the schools sector, in order to meet demographic and other demands in 2021.

During the NDP period 2018 to 2021, 691 school building projects were completed under the Large Scale Capital Programme (LSCP) and the Additional School Accommodation Scheme (ASA). Of these, 179 projects had a capital value in excess of €1 million and 512 were school building projects with a value of less than €1 million. These projects delivered in excess of 64,000 school places, which included permanent accommodation for 292 special classes and additional capacity for 122 classrooms in 22 special schools throughout the country.

In addition, schools approved for additional accommodation under the Department's Additional Accommodation Scheme, which had prefabs in use on their school site, had those prefabs replaced as part of their overall additional accommodation project. Over 589 prefab units were approved for replacement with permanent buildings during the 2018-2021 period.

Good progress has also been made in this period on the maintenance and smaller-scale works to existing schools through the Summer Works Scheme, Emergency Works Scheme and Minor Works Grant Scheme; Piloting of deep energy retrofit projects and the School Remediation Programme.

Under Project Ireland 2040, Minor Works Grant funding totalling €62 million issued to all eligible Primary and Post Primary schools in the free scheme in December 2021.

- €30m of standard Minor Works Grant issued to all primary schools. This funding can be used for improvements to the physical infrastructure of the school, improvement or replacement of mechanical and electrical services, the purchase of standard furniture and physical education equipment, the purchase of floor coverings and window blinds, and the purchase of IT related equipment.
- Additionally in December 2021, due to the exceptional circumstances arising from COVID-19, additional funding of €32 million was paid out in an enhanced Minor Works Grants to primary and post primary schools with a specific focus on providing additional support to schools for the implementation of the ventilation guidance published by the Department in May 2021.

There was in excess of €34 million expenditure on various projects under the Summer Works Scheme in 2021. The Summer Works Scheme, which is demand based, is designed to allow schools, on a devolved funding basis, to carry out necessary and immediate improvement works that will upgrade existing school facilities. It is envisaged that these works can be carried out during the summer months or at other times that avoid disrupting the operation of the school.

Work continued to progress on the sites acquisition programme in 2021. In this regard, 25 sites/property acquisitions were completed in 2021: 23 in the Minister's name and 2 registered to ETBs.

3.17 Energy Efficiency in Schools

The Department is at the forefront of design with respect to sustainable energy in school buildings and this performance has been recognised at both National and International level with sustainable energy awards for excellence in Design and Specification.

Schools designed and built in accordance with the Department's schools technical guidance documents have been achieving A3 Building Energy Ratings since 2009 with schools typically achieving up to 20% higher performance and 25% better carbon performance than required by the 2019 Building Regulations, along with 10% of primary energy provided via photovoltaics and infrastructure provision for electric vehicle charging.

All new technologies and approaches are tested to ensure compatibility with school design and operational requirements. Successful and repeatable results are then incorporated into all new school designs and refurbishments. The Department's policy is supported by a strong research programme with fifty three research projects at various stages including the energy website www.energyineducation.ie which is a joint partnership with the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

The Department and the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications established a jointly funded pathfinder programme with the SEAI, testing and demonstrating energy efficiency and decarbonisation retrofit approaches. This pathfinder is a great example

of collaboration ensuring the deployment of new design approaches and technologies are introduced to the educational environment on an evidence based approach.

This Pathfinder programme is paving the way for, and informing, a much larger national schools' programme for the energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008 as included in the National Development Plan. It is facilitating research on a range of typical retrofit options, which will have been tried and tested. It is providing valuable development information for a solution driven delivery strategy which will be founded on a solid evidence base that has proven the robustness and scalability of renewable solutions within the schools' sector.

The pathfinder programme has retrofitted 41 schools across Ireland to date with work on an additional 9 schools added in 2021 underway. Each school undergoes a comprehensive assessment to ensure that the measures are suitable for that school and will deliver value to both the school and learnings for the national retrofit programme.

In addition to the above, preparation for the delivery of the deep energy retrofit of all schools built prior to 2008, the Department of Education is establishing a national energy profile of all schools. The development and testing phases of this commenced in 2021 and has been funded by the European Investment Bank. This involves energy assessors gathering focused information on energy use for 2019 (pre-COVID-19), building types, age, and size along with an overview of general fabric and energy aspects of electrical and mechanical systems etc.

3.18 Website Information on school building projects

The current status of approved projects is listed on a county by county basis on www.gov.ie and is updated on a monthly basis to reflect their progress through the various stages.

3.19 School Transport

Over 121,400 children, including over 15,500 children with special educational needs were transported in over 6,900 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country at a cost of over €289.4 million in 2021. Children with special educational needs were transported to schools on over 3,700 routes at a cost of over €153.4 million in 2021.

3.20 Dealing with Past Abuse

The Department continued to progress the completion of contributions from religious congregations towards the costs incurred by the State in responding to residential institutional child abuse during 2021.

Contributions are being made by the religious congregations under two rounds:

- the legally binding 2002 Indemnity Agreement and
- the 2009 voluntary offers.

One cash contribution amounting to €0.5 million was received on a voluntary basis from congregations in 2021. One further property was fully transferred to the State, while the transfer of four properties (two under the 2002 Indemnity Agreement and two under the 2009 voluntary offers) remained in progress.

The total offers made by the congregations under the two rounds amount to €480.6 million. At the end of December 2021, total contributions amounting to €242.2 million had been received.

The Department continued to furnish the Council of Europe with bi-annual plans detailing the individual and general measures that are being taken to implement the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgement in *O’Keeffe v Ireland*.

A revised ex gratia scheme to implement the ECtHR judgement was opened to applications on 21 July 2021. The Scheme provides for ex gratia payments in the amount of €84,000 to be made to those who satisfy the criteria as set out in the Terms of Scheme. The ex gratia scheme was originally established in 2015 and was put in place to provide those who had instituted legal proceedings against the State in respect of day school sexual abuse and subsequently discontinued those proceedings following rulings in the domestic courts with an opportunity to apply for a payment. The Scheme was paused in 2019 following a report from the Independent Assessor who was of the view that the criteria to qualify for a payment were too restrictive.

A total of 76 applications had been received by the end of 2021. Of these, 54 applications had been approved and 21 had been refused or withdrawn. 54 applicants had accepted an offer and 52 payments had been made. An Applicant whose application was rejected by the Scheme Administrator could appeal that decision to an independent Appeals Officer.

3.21 Action Plan for Education

The Department has operated an Action Plan framework since 2016. The Action Plan for Education framework involves detailed annual action plans based on the Department’s high-level goals for the sector. Owing to the challenges of responding to the COVID-19 crisis, it was agreed not to publish an Action Plan in 2020 and 2021, to enable the Department to respond quickly and appropriately to an ever-evolving crisis situation and prioritise the response within the system alongside the Department’s regular work progress. The emphasis was on responding quickly, to ensure continuity of learning for 2019/20, addressing the specific needs of learners with special educational needs and those at risk of educational disadvantage, and providing wellbeing supports tailored to the circumstances at the time.

3.22 Public Service Reform Programme

Throughout 2021, the Department worked closely with the Reform Delivery Office and the Reform Evaluation Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to support the implementation of *Our Public Service*. This framework supports development and innovation across the public service.

The Public Service Reform Programme Office was responsible for leading Action 14 of *Our Public Service 2020*, namely “Continuous and responsive professional development”, which had three key areas:

- the process for the recognition of core skills
- leadership development, and
- a model of experiential learning opportunities.

2021 saw the development and publication of “*Establishing and Implementing Effective Leadership Development Models in the Irish Public Sector*”, a research paper which reviewed two pioneering leadership programmes within the public service, the *Centre for School Leadership* in the Education sector and the *Health Service Leadership Development Academy* in the Health sector in order to capture learnings from the programme which would be applied across the wider public service.

In addition, significant work took place on the process for recognition for core skills, culminating in a business case for the development of an online resource hub which will provide guidance ‘and real life experience’ relating to existing CPD resources and databases

and the building of bespoke qualifications. This effectively created a 'one-stop shop of existing programmes.' This business case is now with Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for further development.

Given the challenges of COVID-19, it was not possible to progress with the work on experiential learning models. However, that which was learned from this process was captured, and an overall review of the work on Action 14 was developed to help inform the development of future reform programmes.

The Public Service Reform Programme Office organised the Department's Innovation Week in October 2021. The Week allowed reflection on COVID-19 impacts on the public service. A series of interactive webinars saw Department officials, teachers, pupils, parents and support services to discuss innovative responses within the education sector.

3.23 Primary Education Forum

The Primary Education Forum continued to meet throughout 2021, and focussed on the continued response to the COVID-19 crisis across the primary, as well as progressing work in a number of additional areas.

A communications sub-group was established to focus on improving communications between the Department and the Primary sector. This group identified both short term and longer term initiatives which have been implemented.

In addition, an Action Research project was launched in 2021 to examine different initiatives across clusters of small schools. This will take place over a period of two years, starting from January 2022 and each of the 6 clusters is supported by a local coordinator and national coordinator. Over the two year period, the clusters will work together on a variety of self-developed initiatives to explore different ways in which small schools may become more sustainable. This project is overseen by a steering group comprised of Department officials and partners who have each sponsored a cluster.

3.24 Project and Programme Management

The Department also continued to promote the use of appropriate structures and processes to ensure Management Board oversight and governance of the development and implementation of commitments under the Public Service Reform agenda in 2021, and to promote Project and Programme Management structures and methodologies throughout the organisation.

The PSR Programme Office provided a number of these supports in respect of Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate in 2021, including governance, quality assurance and programme management, and continued to focus on improvement through implementation of the lessons learned from the previous year when Calculated Grades had been implemented. In addition, the PSR Programme Office continued to support the Management Board in strategic planning, include building capacity in strategic foresight.

Publications in 2021:

"Establishing and Implementing Effective Leadership Development Models in the Irish Public Sector". This is a research paper which reviews two pioneering leadership programmes within the public service, the *Centre for School Leadership* in the Education sector and the *Health Service Leadership Development Academy* in the Health sector in order to capture learnings from the programme which would be applied across the wider public service.

3.25 Data Protection

A key focus in 2021 was on ensuring GDPR compliance. The Department published a guide to data protection basics for staff and guidelines on handling information securely in a remote working environment.

The Department processed 78 Subject Access Requests under data protection legislation and 567 Freedom of Information requests in 2021.

3.26 Data Governance

Optimising the use of data is a key action under the Public Service Data Strategy 2019-2023. Sharing data across Government facilitates better service delivery, supports better decision making, increases the ease of access to services and drives efficiencies. The Department continued to participate in central initiatives and collaborate with partners both within the education sector and the wider public service to ensure the most effective flow of data in 2021.

3.27 Department Expenditure

The Department's provisional expenditure outturn in 2021 amounted to €9.3 billion. This comprised €8.4 billion in gross voted current expenditure and capital expenditure of €987 million.

The budget allocations in 2021 provided for, among other things, over 2,000 additional posts in schools, including additional teachers and special needs assistants (SNA), additional special education needs measures and further supports to those schools catering for the highest concentrations of educational disadvantage along with catering for increased demographic and payroll requirements.

There was significant COVID-19 financial support made available during 2021 to sustain school reopening. This included funding for the replacement of teachers and non-teaching staff unable to attend for work due to COVID-19, additional release days for principals and deputy principals, enhanced cleaning regimes and PPE equipment, continuation of additional educational psychological services to provide for wellbeing supports for students, measures to allow transport of pupils on the school transport scheme in line with public health advice, a range of enhanced and supplementary educational programmes and increased minor works grants that could be used to address small-scale ventilation improvements at school level.

3.28 Shared Services Implementation

Shared Services projects and operations made progress across multiple programmes and activities in the Education Shared Business Services (ESBS) centre. A total of 19 go-lives were achieved across HR/Payroll and Finance in 2021, and three operations teams are now up and running in ESBS.

Building on a successful first full year of payroll processing in 2020, the Education and Training Board (ETB) payroll operations successfully managed the payroll of its clients throughout 2021 and added four new ETBs to the shared service. The total number of ETBs on the shared service now stands at eleven, and work is progressing on the remaining ETBs who will migrate to the service during 2022 and 2023. Work continued on the migration of VTOS and Youthreach learners to the payroll shared service, although the impact of the pandemic delayed the transfer. ESBS remains focused on the Wave 2 transition, and the introduction of an Expenses module, with further migrations planned during 2022. Work was also progressed on an E-recruitment solution for ETBs.

ESBS continued its support of ETBs with the consolidation of Finance systems in advance of the implementation of a Finance shared service. Five ETBs were migrated from legacy financial software to a common software Financial Management System. This brings a total

of eleven ETBs to that common platform and preparations were progressed for the remaining ETBs to transfer in 2022. Significant progress was made on advancing services for Contracted Training and Tender & Contract Management, in preparation for go-live in 2022. Considerable advances on the design of a Target Operating Model (TOM) were made to stand up the Finance shared service, and work continued on the planning of procurement for a Finance solution.

Work continued in 2021 on the upgrade of the Department's schools employees' payroll function for some 120,000 payees to shared service standards. In addition, work commenced on the pensions programme for both the schools employees payees and those served by ESBS.

As the scale of operations under the shared services programmes increased, tracking of benefits realisation was progressed. Some of the benefits tracked in 2021 include the enhanced arrangements for business continuity and disaster recovery for ETBs who have moved from legacy systems; improved data for control and decision-making in the ETB sector; cloud-based shared services that have effectively supported remote working; improved customer service and continuous improvement; increased standardisation; and the achievement of savings outlined in the business cases over time. Work on the reform of procurement across the education sector continued in 2021, and SSIU supported the work of Education Procurement Service (EPS) and Schools Procurement Unit (SPU) in their contributions to the implementation of the centralised procurement model. SSIU also works with the Office of Government Procurement (OGP) to support sector-wide procurement shared services whilst remaining aligned to OGP regulations. An Education Procurement Programme Board (EPPB) has been established in 2021 with broad representation from across the education sector and other Departments involved in central procurement including Local Government and Defence. Reports to the Board from across the public sector's procurement service providers helps to increase co-operation between providers and the sector, and improves the visibility of central arrangements.

SIU also supports the implementation of shared services in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), including the Higher Education Payroll Shared Service project (HEPSS); the work of HEAnet and EduCampus who provide internet connectivity and shared ICT services to approximately one million students, researchers, and staff across the primary, post-primary, further and higher level education; and to the SUSI Integrated Grant Processing System (IGPS) for third level education.

3.29 Progress of the Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill

The Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill was published in September 2019.

The key aim of the Bill is to improve how schools engage with students and their parents by requiring each school to consult with students and their parents on individual school plans, policies and activities. This will help ensure that the various views of students and parents will be heard and responded to by schools.

The Education Student and Parent Charter Bill was initiated in the Seanad and passed Second Stage in the Dáil in July 2021.

3.30 Review of the Action Plan on Bullying and Anti-bullying Procedures for Schools

The Department recognises that there have been significant developments in research and international best practice relating to bullying since our last Action Plan on Bullying was published nine years ago.

The Department, through the work of our school inspectors from September to November 2021, focused on obtaining evidence of the type of bullying that is happening in our schools and identifying approaches that are successful in addressing it.

Between September and November 2021, the Department of Education Inspectorate conducted a programme of incidental inspections in primary schools, special schools and post-primary schools. Those inspections included a focus on how schools prevent and tackle bullying through promoting a positive school climate and culture. Over 500 of those inspections were carried out. The findings from the inspections, including examples of best practice in the strategies used by schools to prevent and tackle bullying and to create a positive school culture, were recently finalised for publication (April 2022/May 2022). During 2022, the Inspectorate will also extend its monitoring of anti-bullying to other inspection types. It will also develop a model of inspection that will look in a detailed way at school culture and climate in the context of anti-bullying.

The Inspectorate developed its processes for monitoring schools' implementation of the *Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (2013) in 2021. During the 530 incidental inspections carried out in the September to November 2021 period, inspectors collected information about the priorities of schools and Youthreach centres in relation to creating a positive school culture that prevents and tackles bullying. Inspectors also reviewed the actions that schools were taking to implement a number of aspects of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures* such as the extent to which schools have anti-bullying policies in place in line with *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2013) and timely reporting by principals to the board of management on anti-bullying matters.

A report on the findings of the Inspectorate's monitoring of these inspections has been prepared for publication in early 2022.

3.31 Periodic Critical Reviews

The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 includes a requirement that Periodic Critical Reviews (PCRs) of Government Agencies should be carried out every five years. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published the Guide to Periodic Critical Review of Non-Commercial State Bodies in September 2020.

In the Department's consideration of an approach to a timetable for the delivery of PCRs for Agencies the Department intends to carry out the work in two phases. Phase one will include the delivery of a PCR on two bodies, commencing with the delivery of a first PCR on the Teaching Council. It is expected that this PCR will commence during 2022 with a 2nd PCR to be delivered during 2023. On foot of learnings from the first reviews the Department will progress the development of a schedule to deliver further PCRs.

3.32 Pensions and Payroll

The Department provides payroll and pension services to teachers and school staff in all schools (excl. the ETB sector) by issuing payments to over 120,000 people on a fortnightly basis.

In 2021, the Department processed superannuation benefits for over 1,500 teachers and non-teaching staff. The Department also provided for over 760 transfers of pensionable service to/from other public service bodies, administered over 1,000 notional service requests, processed over 1,500 family law queries, and processed over 120 applications for professional added years for employees in the education sector as part of the superannuation process.

The Pension Unit continues to issue pension benefit statements to scheme members and is actively working on improvements to increase the number of statements that can be issued. These improvements are part of a wider project that is underway to improve the capacity and performance of the Pension Unit through streamlining and modernising processes and procedures.

3.33 Internal Audit

The Internal Audit Section of the Department is responsible for providing assurances to the Accounting Officer on the adequacy, efficiency and effectiveness of risk management, internal control systems and governance processes.

The European Social Fund (ESF) Audit Authority, within the Department of Education, ensures that Ireland complies with the regulatory requirements of the European Union in relation to the audit of ESF, promotes best practice in the management, control and audit of ESF in Ireland and ensures that audits are performed in accordance with international auditing standards in order to provide high quality, fair and balanced reports. The European Social Fund (ESF) is managed by the ESF Managing Authority in the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

The annual audit programme of the Internal Audit Section is prepared under the auspices of the Audit Committee, and the Internal Audit Section reports to the Committee on the conduct of this programme and the finalisation of audit reports. As a result of COVID-19, all audits and Audit Committee meetings were conducted remotely as far as possible and in compliance with the latest Public Health guidelines. Seven internal audit reports were considered and approved by the Audit Committee in 2021. The section tracks, on a quarterly basis, progress on the implementation of recommendations arising from internal audit reports.

The ESF Audit Authority reports on an annual basis to the Audit Committee of DFHERIS on the significant findings, recommendations and issues arising from its audit work.

No internal protected disclosures were brought to the attention of the Head of Internal and EU Audit Unit or the Audit Committee in 2021.

3.34 ETB Oversight

In accordance with the Code of Practice for the Governance of Education and Training Boards, the Department, following consultation, put in place updated Oversight Agreements and Performance Delivery Agreements for each of the 16 ETBs.

Both the Oversight Agreements and the Performance Delivery Agreements provide for at least one formal meeting per annum between senior Department officials, representatives of the Board and Top Management of the ETB, to review the Oversight Agreement and the Performance Delivery Agreement and to consider the ETB's Service Plan for the relevant year. Meetings in respect of the 2021 year have been held with each of the ETBs.

3.35 Green public procurement

The Department's procurement policy requires the use of environment considerations in sourcing goods and services. There is an increasing focus on green public procurement (GPP) and relevant examples include the re-use and recycling of redundant mobile phone devices and cleaning services.

3.36 Brexit and the Education Sector

The Department continued to monitor the impact of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) during 2021. The Memorandum of Understanding on the Education Principles of the Common Travel Area was finalised and signed on 14 July 2021, during the visit of the British Secretary of State for Education to Ireland.

3.37 North-South Education Co-operation

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) – Education Sector meeting took place on 9 June 2021 where Ministers discussed a number of shared areas of interest and agreed to review the work programme and make recommendations for the future work programme. Ministers exchanged experiences and outcomes on actions to address COVID-

19 challenges. The Department's joint work on Shared Education continued in the virtual environment during 2021.

Work continued on developing the Education elements of the PEACE PLUS programme and identification of areas of cross-border collaboration. It is intended that PEACE PLUS will be finalised and adopted during 2022.

The Minister participated in a Shared Island Initiative event in October, with a focus on cooperation and interaction right across the education, training, and research sectors.

3.38 Departmental Communications

To support the return to school in March 2021, the Department provided a range of communications materials to schools, to ensure schools had access to key public health messaging. These materials were designed as age and stage appropriate, featuring children and young people from the school system. Materials to support parents' understanding of key public health messages related to the return to school were also developed in a range of formats including video in English, Irish and ISL and provided in writing a range of languages. The education partners played a key role in disseminating these materials. These materials were refreshed during the year, and further materials to support school communities were disseminated through social media, advertising and directly to schools for the return to school in September 2021 and mid-term autumn 2021 returns.

Following the decision to provide a system of Accredited Grades along with examinations to Leaving Certificate 2021 students, a range of communications materials was prepared to support the key actions students were required to take. Information materials were devised in student-friendly formats such as video animations, and information videos, with English, Irish and ISL versions being made available to ensure students and their parents had appropriate information with regard to the different processes.

The Department expanded its use of Irish Sign Language in its materials, with a greater focus on disseminating these to schools and via its social media channels.

Throughout 2021, the Department worked collaboratively with education partners to produce materials and to promote key messages. It also undertook steps to improve the timing and dissemination of materials to the school system.

The Department completed the move of its website to a new platform, gov.ie, in 2021. Gov.ie is a whole of government project, designed with needs of the public in mind. The gov.ie site places strong emphasis on ensuring that members of the public can quickly find information they are seeking, in plain English.

Appendix A – Corporate Data

Summary of Inspectorate activities, 2021

The Inspectorate completed a total of **3369** inspections/advisory visits to schools and other settings in 2021 as outlined below.

	Summary of inspections	
Table 1	Inspections of early learning and care settings participating in the ECCE Programme* including research	211
Table 2	Inspections of primary and special schools	1845
Table 3	Inspections of post-primary schools	662
Table 4	School self-evaluation advisory visits	179
Table 5	Inspections of centres for education	64
Table 6	Other inspections, advisory visits and evaluation activities	408
Total inspections/advisory visits to early learning and care settings, schools, centres for education and other educational settings		3369

*Early Childhood Care and Education Programme

Table 1: Inspections of early learning and care settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, 2021

Early Years Education-focused Inspections	
Early Years Education-focused Inspection	168
Early Years Education-focused Inspection: Follow-through	42
Visits to Early Years settings as part of Research and Development Work	1
Total Early Years Education-focused Inspections	211

Table 2: Inspections of primary and special schools, 2021

Primary and special school inspections	
Whole-School Evaluation	0
Whole-School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning	0
Evaluation of Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS* Schools	0
Incidental Inspection	478
Follow-through Inspection	0
Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN)	0
Curriculum Evaluation	0
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections: Initial	36
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections: Final	30
Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling Inspection Visits	1301
Total of primary and special school inspections	1845

*DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools): An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion

Table 3: Inspections of post-primary schools, 2021

Post-primary school inspections	
Whole-School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning	0
Subject Inspection	5
Programme Evaluation	0
Evaluation of Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS* Schools	0
Incidental Inspection	236
Follow-through Inspection	0
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections: Initial	19
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections: Final	15
Evaluation of Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)	0
Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling Inspection Visits	387
Total of post-primary school inspections	662

*DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools): An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion

Table 4: School self-evaluation advisory visits, 2021

School Self-Evaluation Visits	
School self-evaluation advisory visits to primary schools	119
School self-evaluation advisory visits to post-primary schools	60
Total Self-Evaluation Advisory Visit	179

Table 5: Inspection of centres for education, 2021

Centres for education inspections	
Incidental Inspection	12
Follow-through Inspection	0
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections: Initial	1
Evaluation of Centres for Education	0
Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling Inspection Visits	51
Total of centre for education inspections	64

Table 6: Other inspections and advisory visits, 2021

Other inspections/evaluations of provision for students and young people	
Inspection of Coláistí Gaeilge (Irish Colleges)	0
Inspection of Special Care Units (SCU) ³	3
Inspection conducted under Section 24 of the Education Act 1998	0
Inspections in European Schools	10
Inspection of DEIS Literacy/Numeracy camps for children (English and Irish-medium)	19
Pilot Evaluations of Remote Teaching and Learning	36
Advisory phone calls to DEIS Summer Camp advisors	31

³In 2021, the inspections of the six schools with Special Care Units included 3 bespoke inspections of Special Care Units and 3 subject inspections of Social Personal and Health Education conducted in schools with Special Care Units.

Other inspections/evaluations of provision for students and young people	
Summer Inclusion Programme – Research	93
SEN-Focused Research (Incidentals)	13
Evaluation of summer continuing professional development courses for primary teachers	45
Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme: advisory visits to schools	112
Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme: case study visits	0
School Excellence Fund DEIS: advisory visits to schools	46
School Excellence Fund Step-Up: advisory visits to schools	0
Total other inspections/evaluations	408

Table 7: Publication of inspection reports, 2021

Publication of inspection reports	
Early Years Education Focused Inspections (early years)	33
Early Years – Follow Through (early years)	48
Curriculum Evaluation (primary)	0
Evaluation of Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Schools (primary and post-primary)	0
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections (primary and post-primary)	68
Programme Evaluation (post-primary)	0
Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs (primary)	0
Evaluation of Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs (post-primary)	0
Subject Inspections (post-primary)	2
Whole-School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning (primary)	4
Whole-School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning (post-primary)	7
Follow-through (primary and post-primary)	0
Whole-School Evaluation (primary)	1
Evaluation of Schools at Special Care Units and Children Detention Centres	6
Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling ⁴	1885
Evaluation of Centres for Education	0
Total number of reports published⁵	2054

⁴ Reports for SSPS visits that took place after 26 February 2021 were published on the Department of Education website [here](#).

⁵ The number of reports published in 2021 differs from the number of inspections conducted as not all reports are publishable and not all relate to inspections conducted in the current year.

Table 8: Reports issued to schools and centres, not published, 2021

Issuing of inspection reports	
Reports on Pilot Evaluations of Remote Teaching and Learning	34
Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling ⁶	499
Incidental Inspections – Note on school measures to prevent and tackle bullying	315
Total number of reports issued	848

Supporting the Parliamentary Process	2021
Parliamentary Questions responded to	4875
Memoranda for Government Received for Observations	180
Representations received by Minister and Minister of State Offices	13,624
Responses to Topical Issues	24
Responses to Adjournment (Commencement) Debates	48

Information Services	2021
Emails received through info@education.gov.ie	11,583
Visitors to gov.ie/education	5.1 million
Freedom of Information Requests	
Received	496
Closed	454
Subject Access Requests	
Received	75
Closed	60
Press Releases Issued	119
Twitter followers	77,375

Energy Consumption and Expenditure in 2021

The Department of Education's energy management and reduction programme objective to reduce energy consumption by 33% by 2020 was achieved, with a decrease of 39.4% from our 2009 baseline by the end of that year. The Department remains on course to achieve its target of 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030.

A comprehensive programme of energy actions and behavioural changes continues to encourage energy efficiency in the Department. Major improvements include the installation of sub-metering and Building Management Systems at departmental sites and the continued upgrade of lighting to more energy-efficient alternatives such as LED.

Records have included the figures for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, which was officially formed on 2 August, 2020, and is

⁶ Reports for SSPS visits that took place prior to 26 February 2021 were issued to the school only and not published on the Department of Education website. This figure covers the period from 1 September 2020.

largely co-located with this Department since 2020. The total expenditure for energy for the Department in 2021 was €541,980.20.

Department of Education Energy Consumption (TPER)*								
Category	2009 (kWh)	2015 (kWh)	2016 (kWh)	2017 (kWh)	2018 (kWh)	2019 (kWh)	2020 (kWh)	2021 (kWh)
Electricity	8,267,804	6,024,167	5,779,930	5,289,263	5,621,223	5,380,170	4,628,557	4,381,782
Thermal	2,567,208	2,697,045	2,539,568	2,589,394	2,938,402	3,138,052	2,647,680	2,621,109
Total	10,835,012	8,721,212	8,319,498	7,878,657	8,559,625	8,518,222	7,276,236	7,002,890

* Total Primary Energy Requirement (TPER) is a measure of energy consumption that accounts for the energy that is consumed and/or lost beyond the boundary of the organisation, notably in generating and distributing the electricity that is used. It is the standard measure used in monitoring energy consumption.

Sustainable Development Goals

As noted in this report, DEIS is the main policy initiative of the Department to address educational disadvantage at school level (SDG 4.1 and 4.5)

There were 884 schools in the DEIS Programme serving over 180,000 pupils (*insert as footnote- 2021/22 academic year*) – 687 Primary and 197 Post Primary in September 2021. The Department will spend over €150 million on supports for schools under the DEIS programme in 2021, which includes over €26 million for the School Completion Programme (SCP). This also includes in the region of €16.2 million which has been provided to schools in the form of a DEIS grant for the 2021/22 school year. One of the measures to tackle educational disadvantage was a one-point reduction in the staffing schedule to reduce class-size in all DEIS Urban Band 1 primary schools as part of Budget 2021 measures.

An enhanced summer programme for children with special educational needs and those at most risk of educational disadvantage was provided, as a COVID-19 pandemic response measure, for summer 2021 with a 100% increase in the funding available – up to €40 million. The eligibility criteria were extended in 2021 to include post-primary children with complex needs and children at risk of educational disadvantage.

For the first time ever, all schools (primary and-post primary) could provide summer programmes. Prior to this expansion, summer programmes were only available to special schools and pupils in special classes in primary schools and in DEIS schools.

The STEM Education Policy also contributes to **SDG target 4.5** aiming to improve the STEM education experience and outcomes for all learners.

The next iteration of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which commenced development in 2021 will deliver on **SDG target 4.6**.

The second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD to 2030) will deliver **SDG target 4.7**. ESD is acknowledged as a key enabler for achievement of all 17 SDGs and will specifically also contribute to delivery of **SDG target 13.3** – “*Build knowledge and capacity to meet climate change*”.

In terms of **SDG target 4.a** and **SDG 13** – Climate Change, a review of the School Transport Scheme commenced in 2021. This will take a fresh look at the school transport service and its broader effectiveness and sustainability, and will build upon the commitments within the Programme for Government as they relate to school transport, including examining options to reduce car journeys and support climate action, and assessing how the School Transport Scheme can work in liaison with the Safe Routes to Schools Programme launched in March – funded by the Department of Transport and operated by Green-schools in partnership with the National Transport Authority and the local authorities.

New schools designed and built in accordance with the Department's schools technical guidance documents have been achieving A3 Building Energy Ratings since 2009 with schools typically achieving up to 20% higher performance than required by the current Building Regulations, along with 10% of primary energy provided via photovoltaics and infrastructure provision for electric vehicle charging.

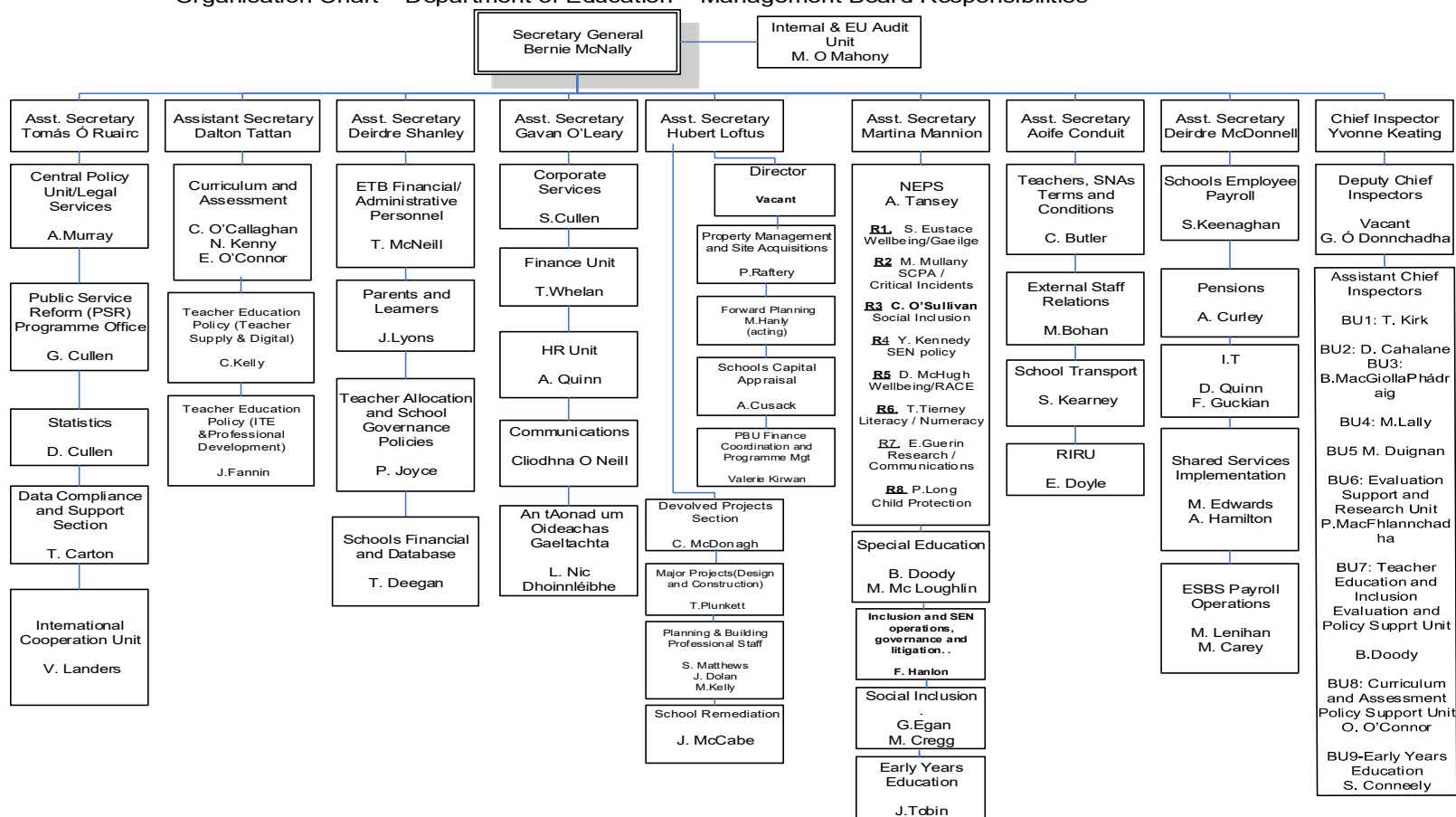
Our School Energy Pathfinder programme which is jointly funded by the Department of Education and SEAI is paving the way for, and informing, a much larger national schools' programme for the energy retrofit of schools built prior to 2008 as included in the National Development Plan. It is facilitating research on a range of typical retrofit options, which will have been tried and tested. The School Energy Pathfinder programme is now in its sixth year, with 41 schools retrofitted to date, with work on an additional 9 schools added in 2021 underway, 2022 will see six additional schools commencing deep retrofit to a Building Energy Rating (BER) of B with renewable heating systems. The upgrades, at a value of up to €22m for the 2021 projects and €28 million for 2022, target energy efficiency improvements and include upgrades to building fabric, external doors, windows, insulation, air tightness, ventilation, lighting and heating upgrades as well as renewable heating systems and technologies.

In preparing for the delivery of the deep energy retrofit of all schools built prior to 2008 the Department are establishing a national energy profile of all schools. Phase 1 of this commenced in 2021 and has been funded by the European Investment Bank. This involves energy assessors gathering focused information on energy use for 2019, building types, age, and size along with an overview of general fabric and energy aspects of electrical and mechanical systems etc.

SEAI and the Department have also partnered for a number of years on a range of initiatives, collectively called 'Energy in Education', to support the improvement of energy efficiency in schools. There is a strong focus on the provision of practical guidance and direction to schools via the Energy in Education project. The website www.energyineducation.ie provides a one stop shop designed to help improve energy use practice and reduce school operating costs along with helping to protect the environment for future generations. The project also provides energy management training for schools along with an energy assessment from a professional.

Appendix B – Organisation Chart

Organisation Chart – Department of Education – Management Board Responsibilities



Appendix C – Bodies under the Aegis of the Department

Non-Commercial Bodies Under Aegis

1. An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG)
2. Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA)
3. Educational Research Centre (ERC)
4. National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)
5. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
6. National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
7. Residential Institutions Redress Board (RIRB)
8. Residential Institutions Review Committee (RIRC)
9. Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board: CARANUA
10. State Examinations Commission (SEC)

Further information on our non-commercial state bodies under the aegis of this Department including contact details and board details can be found on our agencies webpage:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/341d4e-bodies-under-the-aegis-of-the-department-of-education-and-skills/?referrer=http://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Agencies/>

Appendix D – Direct Links to further information on gov.ie

Statistical Information	Education Statistics
Inspectorate Reports	Inspection Reports
Education Legislation	Education Legislation
All Publications	Department of Education publications
Department Circulars	Department Circulars
Special Education	Special Education
School Design	School Building and Design
Press Releases	Department Press Releases
Department Services	Department Services
National Educational Psychological Service	National Educational Psychological Service