



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Forbairt

# Annual Statement of Priorities

# 2024

Department of Education

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# **1. Statement from Ministers and Secretary General of the Department of Education**

## **Minister for Education Norma Foley TD**

I am very pleased to publish Forbairt 2024, a statement of priority actions which we aim to deliver this year, derived from my Department's Statement of Strategy 2023-2025. We have developed this concise list of strategic actions focusing on key areas such as supporting children's learning in the aftermath of the pandemic, addressing educational disadvantage, migrant inclusion, supporting children and young people with special educational needs, combatting climate change and supporting the active participation of children and young people in the system. I am particularly happy to note that all this work is supported by the largest ever investment in Education with a budget of €10.5 billion.

I would like to sincerely thank school communities for the work which they have done, and continue to do, to both shape and deliver the work outlined for 2024. Our vision is an education system in which every child and young person feels valued and is actively supported and nurtured to reach their full potential. I look forward to working in collaboration with all education partners to advance this agenda.

## **Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion**

### **Josepha Madigan TD**

As Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion, I am pleased that 2024 makes the biggest ever commitment to students with special educational needs and their families. The budget in 2024 of over €2.7 billion will fund vital services to support those with the greatest educational need to achieve the best possible outcomes. We have the capacity, through our policies and investment, to provide more opportunity for every child and young person to develop and fulfil their potential. Forbairt 2024 outlines our focus for the year ahead. The delivery of these priorities will make a positive difference to the lives of our children and young people. I look forward to continuing to work in partnership with our education community to progress these strategic actions.

**Minister of State with responsibility for Sport and Physical Education Thomas Byrne TD**

As Minister of State with special responsibility for Sport and Physical Education, I welcome the publication of Forbairt 2024.

In recognising the importance of physical activity in the educational setting, the Department of Education is committed to the expansion of initiatives, such as the Active School Flag programme, to the promotion of physical activity in teaching and learning, and to encouraging greater use of school and community facilities.

I look forward to collaborating with colleagues in the Department of Education and across the education sector to deliver on the strategic actions outlined in this plan.

**Secretary General of the Department of Education Bernie McNally**

I am pleased to welcome Forbairt 2024, an annual plan that sets out our high-level priorities for the year. These priorities fit under our Statement of Strategy 2023-2025 and demonstrate our commitment to delivery and accountability.

The staff of the Department of Education strive to develop policy and deliver services to a high standard with professionalism and dedication. Publishing these priority actions in Forbairt 2024 helps us ensure that, together with our partners, we facilitate children and young people, through learning, to achieve their full potential.

## 2. Our Vision, Mission and Goals

### Vision

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

### Mission

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

### Goals

- Goal 1** Enable the provision of high-quality education and improve the learning experience to meet the needs of all children and young people, in schools and early learning and care settings.
- Goal 2** Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all children and young people 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
- Goal 4** Organisational Excellence and Innovation

## Overview of the school system in numbers

### Primary

Primary schools	<b>3,231</b>
DEIS schools	<b>966</b>
Primary pupils	<b>558,143</b>
Primary teachers	<b>41,623</b>

Source: Education Indicators for Ireland 2023

### Post-primary

Post-primary schools	<b>727</b>
DEIS schools	<b>235</b>
Post-primary pupils	<b>406,392</b>
Post-primary teachers	<b>32,450</b>

Source: Education Indicators for Ireland 2023

## Supports for students with special educational needs

Total number of special schools	<b>130</b>	Number of special classes	<b>2,920</b>
Children attending special schools	<b>8,789</b>	Number of special needs assistants	<b>20,792</b>
Number of teachers in special education	<b>19,293</b>		

Source: SEN allocations 2023/24

### 3. Statement of priority actions for delivery in 2024

We are committed to continued development and improvement in the education sector, through delivery of the strategic goals set out in the statement of strategy 2023-2025. We will continue to drive and enable improvement and reform across the sector, ensuring that our education system is fit for purpose. We will work with our partners to continually enhance provision and ensure the system is positioned to respond to future challenges.

The table below sets out the priority actions for the Department, and their timelines, which we commit to delivering in 2024. Agreeing a finite number of priorities will enable us to focus on the major challenges and on the strategic issues which will have the greatest impact in the coming year. It will also help us, in collaboration with aegis bodies and stakeholders, to manage the pace and scale of change.

In addition to delivering these priority actions, the Department provides a comprehensive range of operations and services, some of which are highlighted in section 4. We are committed to enhancing service delivery to the sector and 2024 will see a continued focus on improved customer service. We will support the development of an environment where excellence and achievement are recognised and celebrated in all their forms, where children can experience joy in their learning and where all members of our school communities are supported and learn from each other.

#### Goal 1: Provision and Quality of Education

#	Action	Quarter
1	Lead the development and implementation of a number of priority actions that improve teacher supply in the short, medium and long term.	Q4
2	Implement the Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 Actions, including priority actions.	Q3
3	Publish the Numeracy, Literacy and Digital Literacy strategy and implementation plan.	Q2

4	Publish the Updated Aistear Curriculum Framework, and work with partners (DCEDIY, NCCA & Better Start) on the implementation of the Curriculum.	Q4
5	Advance implementation of the Primary Curriculum Framework, including publication of draft specifications for consultation and piloting teacher upskilling programmes for Modern Foreign Languages.	Q4
6	Initiate and implement certain key actions set out in the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance: Strategic Action Plan (2024-2030).	Q4
7	Support teacher professional learning, and in particular oral skills, through provision of centrally designed Irish courses in Education Centres for English-medium schools. Progress and embed curricular reforms through the development of resources to support the promotion of the Irish language in schools.	Q4
8	Publish the Action Plan to 2026 under the Languages Connect – Foreign Languages strategy.	Q1
9	Deliver the State Exams in 2024, and confirm the approach to the overall aggregate level of results.	Q4
10	Deliver 2024 actions in the Department’s implementation plan for Creative Youth to support learners’ creativity and creative thinking, including a focus on seldom heard children and young people.	Q4
11	Publish an updated SPHE/RSE specification for Senior Cycle for introduction to schools in September 2024, and publish the draft Primary specification for consultation.	Q3
12	Work collaboratively with colleagues in the development of an action plan to implement recommendations of <i>What Subject Inspections Tell Us About Junior Cycle</i> , as part of supporting continued implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework.	Q4
13	Advance delivery on the redevelopment of the Senior Cycle; including finalisation of the nine Tranche 1 subject specifications.	Q3
14	Develop CPD frameworks for roll out of new or updated professional development for teachers at primary and post primary level, including for priority areas such as	Q3



	the Primary Curricular Framework (PCF), Senior Cycle Reform, SPHE, child protection and anti-bullying, and launch a Pre-Commencement professional learning programme for new primary principals.	
15	Finalise the new policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht and submit it to the Minister.	Q3
16	Advance the 2024 actions of the Initial Teacher Education Policy Statement.	Q4
17	Provide support for schools to embed the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) cycle 2022 - 2026 by conducting school advisory visits, evaluating schools' engagement with SSE during WSE MLLs, conducting a shared evaluation of learning project in primary and post-primary schools, and establishing networks of schools to share practice on SSE.	Q4
18	Hold a Forum on Physical Education, involving relevant stakeholders, which is focused on how physical activity can best be embedded within daily school life.	Q2
19	Develop and commence implementation of a pilot programme focused on the promotion of Physical Activity in Teaching and Learning.	Q4
20	Support the review and expansion of the Active School Flag programme.	Q4

## Goal 2: Special Education and Inclusion

#	Action	Quarter
21	Continue to develop and deliver the pilot programme of counselling and wellbeing supports for primary school pupils.	Q2
22	Publish the 2023 Annual Implementation and Evaluation Report for Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying. Publish Bí Cineálta procedures to prevent and address bullying in schools, following consultation with the education partners.	Q4

23	Publish updated Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools and publish an Implementation report on the independent review of Child Protection.	Q4
24	Develop a structure and working protocol, through which the NEPS and NCSE progress a seamless response to promote better outcomes for children and young people.	Q4
25	Consult and engage with education stakeholders on key issues including access to therapy services and building school and teacher capacity in areas of special education provision. Use this engagement to inform the develop a roadmap for a system level response to the NCSE policy advice on inclusive education.	Q4
26	Publish guidelines on behaviours of concern and commence the associated training programme for schools.	Q2
27	Establish the first Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Workforce Development Plan, to include a review of the SNA employment contract, over the two years 2024-2025.	Q4
28	Ensure that sufficient special class and special school provision is available to meet the needs of children with special educational needs via effective forward planning, the establishment of new special schools or places, the implementation of the additional budgetary measures for special schools, and the progression of a range of other actions to address the particular challenges facing special schools.	Q4
29	Complete the OECD Strength Through Diversity: Education for Inclusive Societies Project, to inform future policy on resource allocation with the goal of tackling educational disadvantage in order to provide every student with the opportunity to reach their potential.	Q2

30	Complete consultation on the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy and finalise the draft strategy for submission to the relevant Ministers in the Departments of Education; Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth; and Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science.	Q2
31	Deliver the summer programme 2024 through a process of continuous improvement and inclusive practice and put in place effective monitoring and oversight with the assistance of the Inspectorate.	Q3
32	Publish the Action Plan of the Working Group charged with progressing the recommendations in the report of the Review of Out of School Education Provision.	Q2
33	Complete the review of the EPSEN Act 2004.	Q3
34	Provide access to education to children and young people arriving from Ukraine and deliver supports to the sector on a regional basis through the Regional Education and Language Teams (REALTs). REALTs will also support Tusla Education Support Services in providing access to education for those seeking International Protection.	Q4
35	Undertake on-line, school specific, surveys of Catholic primary schools in 2024 to determine local interest in reconfiguring to multi-denominational patronage. Provide reports on the outcomes and lead out on appropriate follow up action as required.	Q4
36	Issue revised guidelines on the use of school buildings and sports facilities outside of school hours to enhance awareness and support community usage.	Q1
37	Publish the Report of the Expert Group on Student Participation.	Q2
38	Introduce child-friendly versions of inspection findings and recommendations. Provide additional information supports to parents and children about inspection.	Q4
39	Publish updated Guidelines for the free schoolbooks scheme in primary and special schools, and extend the free schoolbooks scheme for children and young	Q2

	people in junior cycle years in post-primary schools in the free education scheme.	
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### Goal 3: System Supports and Infrastructure

#	Action	Quarter
40	Deliver on the NDP commitment to improve school infrastructure, prioritising special education needs accommodation and necessary additional capacity, within the constraints of available funding.	Q4
41	Implement Department's actions under the Climate Action Plan as best as possible and within the constraints of available resources.	Q4
42	Publish the Review of the School Transport Scheme and implement the recommendations on a phased basis.	Q2
43	Enhance the integration of research, data and evidence into the education policy development cycle, with a focus on outcomes and cognisant of best international practices, through the establishment of a dedicated section within the Department, alignment of research priorities with Forbairt, further mapping of available evidence and the establishment of a sectoral network.	Q4
44	Complete spending review to support the budgetary process and update Departmental compendium on research, evidence and data to reflect evidence-informed policy work in 2024, including a case study of how research has informed policy development and implementation.	Q4
45	Fully complete the migration of all 16 ETB Payrolls to ESBS-ETB Payroll Shared Services and deliver the Department's shared service and ICT programmes of work.	Q1
46	Complete the Periodic Critical Review (PCR) of the Teaching Council. Design and commence the PCR of the National Council for Special Education.	Q4
47	Conduct focused evaluations of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordination.	Q2

48	Noting the Government's intention to convene a Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education, progress preparations to provide information and support as may be requested by the Assembly, including the provision of appropriate support for the inclusion of the voices of children and young people.	Q4
49	Publish the Supports for Survivors of Residential Institutional Abuse Bill 2023.	Q1
50	Provide support for the independently led Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools Run by Religious Orders in order to ensure completion and submission of its final report to the Minister by 7 June 2024.	Q2
51	Subject to Government approval of the proposal to fund an initiative on Tackling Educational Disadvantage in Northern Ireland, to progress the delivery and oversight of the projects under the initiative during 2024.	Q4
52	Prepare and implement proposals to manage the preparations for the upcoming EU Presidency in respect of Education, including the arrangement of senior official-level engagement with the EU Institutions.	Q4

#### Goal 4: Organisational Excellence and Innovation

#	Action	Quarter
53	Develop a cross-departmental Customer Service improvement programme to support the Customer Charter and Customer Service Strategy 2024-2026 and deliver against timebound actions contained in it.	Q4
54	Publish a revised Data Strategy.	Q2

## 4. Strategic Enablers and Service Delivery

The day-to-day management and operation of our school system relies on a network of operational supports and service delivery mechanisms to ensure that we deliver a high-quality service to all our internal and external stakeholders. Through the Department, our aegis bodies and partners, we are committed to ensuring the effective and efficient delivery of these services.

To support this, we have ongoing programmes of development and continuous improvement, to ensure that we provide excellent customer service to those who use our services, while continuing to improve our operations and ensure maximum value for money.

These services include:

**Quality Assurance:** In order to deliver a quality education system, we need to constantly monitor and review performance to ensure the achievement of the highest possible standard. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education works to improve the quality of teaching and learning for all children and young people in Irish education settings and to support the development of the Irish education system.

Through our Inspectorate, we deliver on an annual basis:

- Over 3,000 inspections/advisory visits to early learning and care settings, schools, centers for education and other education settings
- Circa 1,200 inspections in primary and special schools
- Circa 630 inspections in post-primary schools
- 1,500 inspection reports are published
- Support for the Droichead programme for newly qualified teachers.

**Professional Development:** Through our Teacher Education Section funded support services, we provide ongoing support and professional upskilling opportunities for educators, to ensure that our teaching profession remains of a high standard and that teachers are supported to implement curricular changes.

Continuous professional development (CPD) is also provided through the national

network of education support centres and appropriate groups, bodies and institutions who are empowered to design, develop and deliver CPD programmes. The Department also provides a number of teacher education programmes through third-level institutions. In addition, a range of leadership supports is available for principals and senior management, to support them in their roles. These professional development supports include:

- In excess of 220,000 CPD interactions delivered annually for primary and post-primary teachers, including school-based, off-site and online supports
- Delivery of a range of post-graduate courses for the school sector supporting the development of existing teachers in a number of areas including special education needs, maths, leadership, physics, RSE and SPHE, Gaeilge and Spanish
- In excess of 12,700 CPD interactions supporting school leaders at primary and post-primary.
- Coaching and mentoring provided to over 560 newly appointed and established school leaders.

**Psychological and Wellbeing supports:** We wish to ensure that all children and young people are positively supported not only in academic and social development, but also in their own wellbeing. We recognise the challenges faced by students and the wider school community and we work to support mental health and wellbeing through the Department's National Educational Psychological Service and other support services. The services support schools to provide strong universal support at the level of whole school and classroom, more targeted support for some children and young people who may be at risk, and more individualised support for those with greatest need. These supports include:

- A team of 227 (whole time equivalents) psychologists, supporting all schools
- NEPS casework service extending to over 8,500 students per year

- NEPS support and development service reaching an estimated 25,000 teachers annually
- Supports for critical incidents
- Training to ensure that the promotion of wellbeing will be at the core of the ethos of every school

**Special Education:** We place emphasis on ensuring that all those who have special educational needs are supported on their journey through the education system and that every child accesses the necessary support to help them achieve their full potential. In 2023, the Department supported:

- 130 special schools and 2,920 special classes
- Over 19,300 teachers working in the area of special education
- Over 20,400 special needs assistants
- Annual Summer Programme, supporting over 50,000 children.

The additional €82 million in funding secured in Budget 2024 allows for an additional 744 SET posts and 1,216 SNA posts, bringing the total number of such posts to over 41,500. It will also allow for the opening of just over 400 new special classes in mainstream schools and 300 additional special school places. This represents a total provision for approximately 2,700 new placements for children with special educational needs across primary, post primary and special school settings.

**Social Inclusion:** We believe that education should provide equality of opportunity to all. We recognise that there are many and profound social challenges which are faced by so many children, which may prevent them from participating fully in their education. We provide a range of supports to schools and students, to support their full inclusion in the education system, including:

- The DEIS programme, providing over €180 million in additional funding annually to approximately 1200 schools



- A team of over 141 educational welfare officers in the Tusla Education Support Service (TESS), who work with families and children in a child-centred way to overcome barriers to their school attendance, participation and retention. There were 7,384 referrals to the educational welfare service in the 2022/23 school year
- In the region of 800 schools engage with the School Completion Programme which delivers a range of interventions to just under 42,000 students and young people to maximise participation levels of those at risk of early school leaving.

**School Transport:** We work to ensure that all children and young people can attend school with the support of the School Transport Scheme. Supports delivered on an annual basis include:

- The transportation of over 161,600 children, including over 19,800 children with special educational needs, on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country.
- This also includes over 7,000 children who have arrived to Ireland from Ukraine for whom school transport scheme services are being provided in the current school year.
- Servicing of 9,700 dedicated transport routes

**School Buildings:** The environment in which students receive their education is of paramount importance. Extensive work is done through the School Building Programme to add capacity, develop and upgrade school facilities across the country for the almost one million students and over 100,000 staff that learn and work in our schools every day, and also in meeting our commitments on climate goals. On an annual basis, through our capital investment programme, we deliver an average of between 150 to 200 school building projects. There are circa. 1,300 projects in the school building programme pipeline at any one time.

**School Supports:** To ensure efficient management of schools, we provide a range of supports and guidance to schools. We work closely with the education partners including representatives of school management, students, staff, parents, and patron bodies in order to support the running of schools. In addition, we provide oversight to our aegis bodies which support the sector. Financial supports and grants of €630m were made available in 2023 to almost 4,000 schools.

**External Staff Relations and sector Terms and Conditions:** We work closely with our education partners and staff to ensure a stable industrial relations environment through timely and effective responses on issues to support successful delivery of policy and operational objectives. We also play a role in supporting the effective use of the education workforce to achieve our objectives by representing the sectors at national pay talks and ensuring compliance with Government pay policy. In addition, we support schools and ETBs in their staff management role by developing and maintaining up to date documentation on terms and conditions of employment as well as operating a number of administrative processes.

**Shared Services and ICT Delivery:** We provide a range of employee and corporate services for our client organisations including primary, post-primary and community and comprehensive schools, education and training boards, and higher education institutions, to ensure efficient and secure operations across the sector. Our portfolio of services includes human resource management, payroll, pensions, finance, procurement and ICT.

**Department Structures and Systems:** We ensure effective, efficient and timely use of our human, financial and system resources within the Department and engage with our partners across the sector to promote good governance, including managing expenditure in line with Government procedures and ensuring proper accountability for the use of resource.

**Research:** We recognise the importance of research, data and evidence at every stage of the policy cycle. The Department of Education established the Research, Policy and Practice Steering Group (RPPSG) in early 2023, with the overall aim to better integrate research, data and evidence into policy design, implementation and evaluation.

The group is made up of representatives from policy units across the Department, as well as research leads from five aegis bodies (Educational Research Council, National Council for Special Education, Teaching Council, State Examinations Commission, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The RPPSG aims to establish a sectoral network and look to increase visibility and cooperation on research studies and align research and policy priorities. The actions outlined in Forbairt will help inform this alignment of the priorities and further support the integration of research, data and evidence into the Department's policy development.

**Servicing the Democratic Process:** In all our work, we are committed to operating transparently and with accountability to both Government and the wider Irish public. On an annual basis, we service:

- Over 350 Freedom of Information requests
- Approximately 70 Subject Access Requests
- Approximately 4,000 Parliamentary Questions
- Approximately 2,000 communications / requests from elected representatives
- Engagement with media on a daily basis to ensure that all requested information is delivered in a timely manner. In 2023, we issued over 100 press releases

**Government Commitments:** Education does not operate in isolation. As a Department, we contribute to other specific policy areas and commitments under the Programme for Government, as well as the wider Government agenda. This collaboration also takes place in the context of wider cross government strategies and international commitments

These include, by way of example only:

- The Climate Action Plan
- The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty to Eliminate Discrimination, Promote Equality, and Protect Human Rights of Staff and Service Users
- Our Rural Future
- Children First
- The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy
- Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028

## **Appendix**

[Programme for Government: Our Shared Future](#)

[Department of Education Statement of Strategy 2023-2025](#)

[Education Indicators for Ireland](#)