An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

Annual Report 2024

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Foreword by the Minister

I am very pleased to present the Department of Education's 2024 Annual Report, which outlines the significant work undertaken during the year in which we marked 100 years since the establishment of the Department of Education.

2024 saw the publication of the Numeracy, Literacy and Digital Literacy strategy and implementation plan. This strategy covers early childhood to post-primary school and seeks to build on the achievements of the 2011 literacy and numeracy strategy. The strategy has been informed by extensive research and consultation including the views of learners, parents, early learning and care (ELC) school staff, education stakeholders and members of the public. The implementation plan for the strategy includes over 100 actions to build on the success of the previous national literacy and numeracy strategy.

Redevelopment of the primary curriculum continued to progress in 2024. Public consultation on the draft specifications commenced in March 2024 and concluded in June 2024. The feedback from the consultation was subsequently analysed and two consultation reports were published in late 2024.

The inaugural Senior Cycle Redevelopment Conference for school leaders took place in Croke Park Conference Centre in February. The event was attended by almost 300 school leaders, as well as important stakeholders within the Senior Cycle education sector. Significant investment of €9 million was made available to primary and special schools at the end of 2024. This was to ensure that schools have essential resources and materials to deliver a curriculum that meets the needs of all learners. The first of the grants were specifically aimed at supporting the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education and Arts education.

The delivery of high-quality internet connectivity for all schools is a key objective of my department. In 2024, through the implementation of the National Broadband Plan Intervention Area, commercial provision, and through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan funded by the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility, all primary schools are now on 100 Mbps or greater connectivity.

One of the key achievements of 2024 was the publication of the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) 2024-2030, alongside the plan for Implementation and Action for 2024-2026. Over its lifetime this strategy will improve educational outcomes and ensure equity of access, participation and opportunity for Traveller and Roma children and young people enrolled in our schools.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all those who work within the education sector, the department's officials, the officials of aegis bodies of the department, principals, teachers and all those who work in our schools. Their work and commitment contributed greatly to the achievements of the department in 2024. My appointment as Minister for Education and Youth in January 2025 was a huge honour and I look forward to working collaboratively with Minister of State Michael Moynihan and with all those within the education sector to advance our future objectives.

Helen McEntee TD
Minister for Education and Youth

Foreword by Minister Moynihan

I am very pleased to present the Department of Education's 2024 Annual Report, which outlines the significant work undertaken during the year in which we marked 100 years since the establishment of the Department of Education.

As Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion, I welcome the publication of the 2024 Annual Report of the Department of Education.

Budget 2024 saw additional funding of €11 million secured to better support special schools. These supports, rolled out in September 2024 included all such schools being entitled to an administrative deputy principal position as well as the allocation of an additional 100 post-primary teaching posts targeted at special schools with post primary-aged students.
In June the Educational Therapy Support Service (ETSS) was established. The expansion of therapy services within the NCSE is expected to build on the achievements and impacts of this element of the School Inclusion Model (SIM) pilot programme, which provided support to 75 schools as part of the pilot.

In 2024 four new special schools were established in counties Kildare, Limerick, Meath and Wexford. These schools were established where there was identified demand in areas and where children were travelling long distances to avail of specialist provision. Twelve established special schools also expanded capacity.

The School Transport 2030 report was published in early 2024 following a comprehensive analysis and review of the scheme as it currently operates. The recommended changes to the future operation of the schemes include expansion of the current eligibility criteria, addressing current operational challenges and moving towards better integration with public transport to ensure the best value for money to the Exchequer. It is proposed to expand access to the scheme so that an additional 100,000 pupils can be carried by 2030. This will support the Climate Action Plan target of reducing escort to education journeys by private car and promoting more sustainable modes of transport.

We continued to keep the annual cost of school transport tickets low in 2024, to improve accessibility to the scheme.

I look forward to working with my colleague, the Minister for Education and Youth Helen McEntee, the staff of the department, the National Council for Special Education, teachers and special needs assistants. Together with our stakeholders and the wider education sector we will progress our shared ambition to ensure that children and young people with additional educational needs are supported in every way to fully achieve their potential.

Michael Moynihan TD
Minister of State with responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion

Statement from the Secretary General

I am delighted to introduce the 2024 Annual Report of the Department of Education. This report affords our department the opportunity to reflect on the work of the year.

In April, the inaugural Forum on Physical Education took place. The Forum brought together stakeholders from across the area of physical education, including teachers, school leaders, students, academics and policymakers, to examine how physical activity could be brought into classroom learning.

The Bí Cineálta Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools were published in June. These 'Bí Cineálta' ('Be Kind') procedures were developed in collaboration with the education partners and are greatly informed by the views of children and young people, parents, school staff, board of management members and the wider education community.

The 'Bí Cineálta' procedures are centred on a child rights-based approach and support a partnership model where all members of the school community work together to prevent and address bullying behaviour.

The department's Data Strategy 2024-27 was published in 2024. It aims to strengthen the foundations of the department's data ecosystem and promote consistency of understanding and practice.

The report of the expert group on student participation was published on 10 October 2024. The report contains five strategic recommendations to help the department to embed a culture of the participation of children and young people in policy development. The report is written with its audience, children and young people, in mind and includes a 'making it happen' section so that the children and young people can see how their views have been taken into account.

The department published its Student Participation Implementation Plan also on 10 October 2024. This plan contains 50 actions to be implemented by the end of 2026. This work will help the department to embed a culture of the participation of children and young people, including those who may be seldom heard, in the development of department policy.

The extension of free schoolbooks to Junior Cycle students in the Free Education Scheme in 2024 is a landmark moment in Irish education and resulted in free schoolbooks for up to 213,000 students in over 670 recognised post-primary schools, from September 2024.

During 2024, the Department of Education continued to progress the implementation of the recommendations arising from a High-Level Independent Review of the Department's Current Child Protection Policies and Processes, and from the recommendations from the *Report of*

the Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools Run by Religious Orders.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by staff in the department and all those working in the education sector for their work this year and I look forward to working with them and all our education stakeholders to deliver on our shared objectives

Bernie McNally
Secretary General

Introduction

This is the 2024 Annual Report of the Department of Education[1]. This report provides details on the progress made in respect of the four high level goals outlined in the department's Statement of Strategy 2023 – 2025.

A new government was formed on 23 January 2025, and as such, a new Statement of Strategy is being prepared in 2025. In addition, an Education Plan for 2025 was published on 19 June 2025.

Our Vision

Vision

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

Our Mission

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

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

[1] The Department changed its name to the Department of Education and Youth on 1 May 2025

Progress on the Four key Strategic Goals in 2024

The Department of Education made significant progress in 2024 towards achieving the goals detailed in the Statement of Strategy 2023 – 2025. This Annual Report 2024 outlines the progress that was made under each of the four high level goals contained in that strategy.

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

The aim of this goal is to provide every child and young person with a learning experience that supports them to reach their full potential, and to develop the knowledge and skills they need to navigate today's complex world. Key actions taken in 2024 to progress this goal include:

- The publication of Ireland's Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood'
- The Physical Activity in Teaching and Learning Pilot Programme was launched
- The pilot programme School of Excellence in Creativity for 2025 was launched

Goal 2:

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

Equity of opportunity and inclusivity are fundamental principles in our education system. The objective of this goal is to develop a system that welcomes and meaningfully engages all students, including those with special educational needs and students at risk of educational disadvantage. Key actions taken in 2024 to progress this goal include:

- The Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) was published
- Publication of guidelines for "Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations in Schools"
- The Educational Therapy Support Service (ETSS) was established

Goal 3:

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

Working with our agencies, the department provides strategic leadership to support the delivery of the right systems and infrastructure across the education sector. Together with our valued partners in the sector, we deliver high quality education to all children and young people whilst supporting the delivery of a wide range of cross-governmental strategies. Key actions taken in 2024 to progress this goal include:

- The School Leadership and Governance Renewal Project Unit was established
- The Report of the independent Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools Run by Religious Orders was published
- Aistear the early childhood curriculum framework, was published

Goal 4:

Organisational Excellence and Innovation

Working to serve the public and their elected representatives effectively, we remain committed to innovating in collaboration with aegis bodies and stakeholders to help children and young people to realise their potential. Key actions taken in 2024 to progress this goal include:

- The Education Statistics Data hub, a search facility that allows users to find data of interest or get answers to tailor-made requests was launched
- The department added new dedicated research staff within our central policy unit to coordinate and further strengthen the links between evidence and policy
- The Department of Education Inspectorate Report (2021-2023) and Thematic Review was published

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

1.1 Curriculum at primary level

The Primary Mathematics Curriculum was published in September 2023. Much of 'what' children will learn remains unchanged, but it provides a greater emphasis on enhancing 'how' children learn mathematics best. A suite of professional development supports provided by the Department, Oide and the NCSE, to support familiarisation and enactment of the new curriculum continued in 2024.

Public consultation on other draft specifications commenced in March 2024 and concluded in June 2024. The feedback from the consultation was subsequently analysed and two consultation reports were published in late 2024. The following new specifications will be available for the 2025/2026 school year:

- Language (updated to included Modern Foreign Languages) (MFL) in stages 3 and 4 (third class to sixth class)
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education
- Wellbeing
- Arts Education
- Social and Environmental Education

Significant investment of €9.7 million was made available to primary and special schools in 2024. This was to ensure that schools could purchase essential resources and materials to deliver a curriculum that meets the needs of all learners. The grants in 2024 were specifically aimed at supporting the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education and Arts education

1.2 Curriculum at post primary level – Junior Cycle

The State Examinations Commission issued the results of the 2024 Junior Cycle examinations on 9 October 2024. A total of 72,828 candidates received their results, a 3% increase on 2023.

Circular 0051/2024 was issued and detailed the prescribed material for Junior Cycle English (For the student cohort commencing Junior Cycle in 2024 and presenting for examination in 2027)

1.3 Curriculum at post primary level – Senior Cycle

A total of 60,839 candidates sat Leaving Certificate examination programmes in 2024 compared to 61,736 in 2023. The State Examinations Commission issued the results of the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied to candidates on 23 August 2024.

Circular 0070/2024 was issued and detailed the prescribed material for the Leaving Certificate Irish Examination in June 2027

1.4 Senior Cycle Redevelopment

Since the announcement of the Senior Cycle Redevelopment programme in March 2022, significant progress has been made in its implementation.

The first group of students to benefit from changes introduced in September 2022 to the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) Link Modules, permitting access to the programme without meeting the criteria previously applicable, received an integrated statement of results from the State Examinations Commission (SEC) in 2024.

In September 2024, revised specifications were published for the nine Tranche 1 subjects – Drama, Film and Theatre Studies (DFTS); Climate Action and Sustainable Development (CASD), Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Business, Arabic, Ancient Greek and Latin. A launch event for the two new subjects (DFTS and CASD) was hosted in the Irish Film Institute showcasing what and how students will learn in these two new areas – the 100 schools who were selected to become Phase One schools (the first schools to offer the subjects) were in attendance.

Guidelines on the completion of Additional Assessment Components (AACs) in the Tranche 1 subjects were published in December.

Schools have been supported in the introduction of the new Tranche 1 Science specifications by a Science Implementation Support Grant, worth €12m, with enhanced support for DEIS schools which was paid in December 2024.

A revised Transition Year Programme Statement was published in September 2024 and there was record participation in Transition Year in the 2024/25 school year at over 60,000 students for the first time.

Following the development of Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programme for students with special educational needs, the Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programme Statement and associated modules were published in September 2024 with further modules due for implementation in schools from this coming September.

The Department of Education and Youth also responded in 2024 to a call for timely, effective communication in respect of Senior Cycle Redevelopment, to help support and inform schools, stakeholders and the wider community. The first, now annual, Senior Cycle Redevelopment Conference for School Leaders, with almost 400 school leaders attending, was held in Croke Park in February. Information notes have issued to schools regularly since November 2023, providing key updates.

The real momentum that is now in the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme could be seen building as 2024 progressed.

1.5 National and International Testing

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2023 results were released on 4 December 2024. The results showed that students in Ireland continue to perform highly in TIMSS.

Ireland's mean achievement at Fourth Grade (fourth class) in Mathematics and Science were similar to the two previous cycles (2019 and 2015) and statistically significantly higher than 2011. Ireland's mean achievement at Eighth Grade (second year) in Mathematics and Science remained relatively stable over the three most recent cycles that Ireland participated in at this grade (2015, 2019 and 2023). [2]

In addition to this, the Educational Research Centre (ERC), launched a context report on 'Cultivating Creativity - What the PISA 2022 results say about creative thinking in Ireland' on 4 July 2024. The report draws on data from the student, parent and school questionnaires from PISA 2022 and explores young people's experience of creativity and creative thinking inside and outside of school, and within the home environment. Further context reports for PIRLS and NAMER are due in early 2025.

1.6 Foreign Languages

Over 1,300 primary schools participated in the Say Yes to Languages 10-week module in 2024 supported by Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI).

The focus for the department and its support services during 2024 was on planning for the introduction of foreign languages as part of the primary language curriculum on a phased basis from September 2025. Pilot language upskilling programmes for primary teachers were undertaken during 2024 with a view to expanding the provision of language upskilling programmes and opportunities.

191 Foreign Language Assistants were deployed to post primary schools around the country to support the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Over 17,500 TY students from 200 schools participated in #Thinklanguages week in November 2024, a week-long celebration showcasing the growing enthusiasm for language learning as well as the variety of languages spoken in our schools today and the cultures they represent.

1.7 Modern Foreign Languages

The department worked with its support service Oide and with PPLI, which implements the Department's Languages Connect Strategy, on planning the Teacher Professional Learning

[2] https://www.iea.nl/publications/timss-2023-international-report

(TPL) and Language Upskilling that will be required for teaching modern foreign languages (MFL) in primary schools, as well as development of resources and other supports. The Department has also engaged with the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers in this regard.

The department communicated with schools in relation to plans to support the roll out of the new Primary Curriculum, including MFL and this will continue into 2025. Over time, ITE providers will ensure that Newly Qualified Teachers have the necessary skills and competences to teach MFL. A FAQ document has been developed and will be circulated to all schools. It aims to help have a better understanding and hopefully answer any questions they have. The department will be progressing and continuing engagement with PPLI, OIDE and ITE into 2025.

1.8 Irish Sign Language (ISL)

In 2024, the Minister requested that the NCCA begin the development of a curriculum for Irish Sign Language at primary and post-primary level. This directly relates to action 5.3.9 in the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2024-2033 – 'Develop a curriculum at primary and post-primary level for Irish Sign Language to support the learning of ISL and learning in other areas for ISL users'.

1.9 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

For Senior Cycle, a draft SPHE specification was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and approved by the Minister in 2024. The updated SPHE curriculum for Senior Cycle will support 60 hours of teaching and learning over two years, reflecting the importance of SPHE for young people at this stage in their post-primary education. Schools have until September 2027 to introduce the specification for students entering fifth year.

1.10 Physical Activity Pilot

The Physical Activity in Teaching and Learning Pilot Programme was launched in 2024. The purpose of this pilot programme is to support the integration of physical activity into teaching and learning. The pilot programme will facilitate teachers and school leaders, through the provision of a grant, to use physical activity to progress learning in a curricular or cross-curricular area. There are currently 24 schools taking part in the first year of the programme over the 2024/2025 school year.

1.11 Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033

Ireland's Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood was published in May 2024. Developed by the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth, this strategy spans early childhood to post-primary education.

Informed by extensive research and consultation, the strategy builds on the achievements of the 2011 literacy and numeracy strategy. It aims to drive systematic improvements in literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy across the education continuum while strengthening supports for the critical roles of parents and communities in fostering these skills.
The areas for development and action, as identified in the strategy, are grouped under five pillars:

Pillar 1: Enabling parents and communities to support learners' literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.
Pillar 2: Supporting the professional practice of early years educators, childminders and teachers.
Pillar 3: Supporting leadership in early learning and care and in the school system.
Pillar 4: Improving the learner experience through curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.
Pillar 5: Supporting diverse learners to achieve their potential.

A comprehensive five-year implementation plan, published alongside the strategy, serves as the blueprint that transforms the strategy into actionable steps. Measuring the success of the strategy will be a continuous process, including identifying areas for improvement throughout its lifetime.

1.12 STEM Education Policy Statement 2017-2026

Implementation of the STEM Education Policy Statement continued throughout 2024, with significant progress made in key areas. The partnership between the Department of Education and Research Ireland remained central to supporting education and public engagement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) across the school communities. Through the Research Ireland Discover Programme, eight projects received funding in 2024, further promoting STEM education initiatives.

The department continued to provide support, including financial support, for informal STEM education projects, including the Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition (YSTE), SciFest, Science Blast, and the Engineers Ireland STEPS Programme. These initiatives played a vital role in fostering interest and participation in STEM among students nationwide. In addition, STEM professional development remained a key priority, with ongoing provision of training through Department of Education support services, as well as the continued availability of online STEM resources throughout the year

Further efforts to enhance STEM engagement were reflected in the publication of the second edition of the STEM Newsletter [3] which highlighted developments and best practices in STEM education. A survey of schools on industry engagement in STEM was completed in collaboration with BioPharmaChem Ireland, providing valuable insights into how schools interact with STEM-related industries. Additionally, an evaluation of the STEM Education

[3] https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/stem-news-issue-2.pdf

Grant Scheme was conducted, assessing the impact of funding provided for STEM projects in primary and post-primary schools.

1.13 Creative Youth

Approved by Government in 2022, the Creative Ireland Programme has five pillars - Creative Communities, Creative Industries, Creative Health and Wellbeing, Creative Climate Action and Sustainability and Creative Youth. The Department of Education is centrally involved in the Creative Youth pillar. In 2024, the Department continued to work with D/TCAGSM, DCEDIY, DFHERIS and the Arts Council in its implementation, with the aim of expanding creative engagement opportunities for children and young people, especially the seldom heard and those hardest to reach, and to empower young people through diverse creative experiences.

1.14 Creative Clusters

Creative Clusters is an initiative of the department, led by and in partnership with the Teacher Education Centres (ESCI) and initially 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.

In 2024, 42 new creative clusters, involving 138 schools, were established, which brings the total number of schools reached through Creative Clusters initiative since 2018 to 440 across 125 clusters. Engagement with the programme is based on a two-year cycle

1.15 BLAST

The BLAST (Bringing Live Arts to Students and Teachers) Artists in Residency Initiative for schools was developed by the department in 2021. This initiative enables schools to apply for a trained artist in education (AiE) to work in an arts and creative residency. In 2024, another 425 schools took part in the initiative.

1.16 I Am Creative

In 2024, the “I am Creative” initiative ran for a second year on a phased basis, with strong positive feedback from special schools involved in the pilot. “I am Creative” is the first programme developed specifically for special educational settings to train teachers, artists, SNAs and school leaders together in supporting an artist residency.

The “I am Creative” research report was published in 2024 (I am Creative: A Research Report, Morrissey, 2024 which, along with other ongoing research and evaluation of Creative

Initiatives, form part of an overall macro evaluation of Creative Youth's impact on the lives of children and young people.

1.17 School of Excellence in Creativity Pilot Programme

The pilot programme School of Excellence in Creativity was launched in 2024, with participating schools tasked to review, evaluate and develop creativity in their school. From September 2024, eight participating schools were supported to explore two inter-related strands – pedagogies to support creativity, and adapting learning environments to support creativity, with participating schools reporting on the impact of the initiative in their school.

1.18 Decade of Centenary/Commemorations

The department held events to mark 100 years since the establishment of the Department of Education. On 24 January 2024, the department commemorated primary and post-primary education since the establishment of the Irish Free State. Two specially commissioned reports, 'Primary and Post-Primary Education in the Irish Free State, 1922–1937' by Dr Patrick O'Donovan, and '"The School Man" Minister Donogh O'Malley and the Free Secondary Education Scheme' by Dr. Miriam Nyhan Grey, were presented.

A photo-essay was also funded through the Decade of Centenaries programme. It follows the journey and careers of pioneering professional women in the Inspectorate from the 1830s to 1998. It was written by Frances Moss and Fintan O'Mahony, post-primary inspectors, with support and contributions from historians Patrick O'Donovan and Sinead McCoole, and contributions from former inspectors, Emer Egan, Doreen McMorris and Maura Clancy.

On 19 September 2024, an event was held in the department marking 100 years since the establishment of the Department of Education. Students attended from Barefield National School in Co. Clare and provided wonderful musical entertainment. Students from transition year in Kinsale Community College took part in a Q&A.Students from two primary schools in Carlow and the Navan Road Dublin participated in a recording of extracts from the 1937 Dúchas folklore project.

1.19 Digital Strategy for Schools

The Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027 sets out the department's policy approach to continue the progress made in embedding digital technology across the curriculum and in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment in primary and post primary schools. Key to this strategy is that all learners are given the opportunity to use digital technologies in their learning to reach their full potential and provide them with the necessary digital skills needed for an increasingly digital world.

Under the strategy, the department continues to invest in supporting schools in digital technology in education. The second tranche of ICT grant funding issued to schools in April 2024, bringing the total ICT grant funding issued under this current Digital Strategy to €100m.

Work has been ongoing under the various objectives set out in the current strategy since publication in 2022, and the associated Implementation Plan was published in November 2024. This Implementation Plan provides an overview of the many actions underway since the publication of the strategy, as well as new actions to be undertaken with associated timelines.

1.20 Online Safety

The safe and ethical use of digital technologies is a key component of the Digital Strategy for Schools. Webwise is the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Centre which support teachers, students and parents on online safety. It provides a wide range of training material and resources. This is part of the Irish Safer Internet Centre (SIC), and the partners in the SIC are Webwise, Hotline.ie, ISPCC Childline and the National Parents Council.

Throughout the implementation of the Digital Strategy for Schools, Webwise continued to develop and disseminate relevant resources that help teachers integrate digital citizenship and online safety into teaching and learning in their schools. Webwise also ran campaigns addressing key topical issues as they arose.

Initiatives developed in 2024 include the Digital Citizenship Champion programme provided by Webwise in collaboration with Oide's Technology in Education team which upskills teachers to champion digital citizenship in schools and through their local Education Centre. In addition, the "Agree to Agree" pilot online safety initiative, involving three Education Centres and 21 primary schools, was launched. It will facilitate each school in collaborating, designing and implementing an Internet and Technology Use Agreement. It will also raise awareness of the 'Keeping Childhood Smartphone Free' guidelines and all the education resources available through Webwise.

1.21 Guidance Counsellors

Under the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance (2024-2030) a number of actions have progressed to ensure that students have access to high-quality guidance. For example, in 2024, the department worked to confirm the scope of practice of guidance counsellors and clarify roles and responsibilities around whole school guidance in post-primary schools.
The inaugural circular on guidance was developed to support whole school guidance and guidance counselling in all post primary schools in Ireland.

The department provided funding to a Higher Education Institution to create a training course for post-primary teachers wishing to upskill in the area of guidance counselling. Foundation work for a national consultation on post-primary guidance began, with the consultation planned to open in Spring 2025.

Progress will continue in 2025 with, for example, a review of guidance supports to students in special schools in collaboration with the SEN unit. This is to ensure that students in special schools are in receipt of high-quality guidance.

1.22 Child Protection

In 2024, the department received a total of 601 alleged child protection concerns which came to the attention of staff employed by the department. These were transmitted to the appropriate authorities as provided for in accordance with the department's Procedures for Responding to Child Protection Concerns. All staff members in the department complete a mandatory webinar training on the implementation of these procedures.

During 2024, the department continued to progress the implementation of the recommendations arising from a High-Level Independent Review of the department's current child protection policies and processes, and recommendations of the Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools Run by Religious Orders. Engagement between the department and education partners took place to further update the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023). The plan was to publish the updated procedures in Q2 2025.

1.23 Section 29 Appeals

Where a Board of Management of a school makes the decision to refuse a school place to a child, or suspends a child for 20 days or more in a school year, or expels a child, the parent of that child can appeal that decision to an independent appeals committee under section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

In 2024, the department received a total of 456 of these appeals. All the appeals were determined by an independent appeals committee appointed by the Minister. From the 456 appeals received, a total of 50 appeals were upheld, 227 were disallowed, 58 appeals were withdrawn, and 121 appeals did not comply with the terms of the appeals process.

1.24 Measures to Prevent and Address Bullying

As part of the implementation of Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying, the Bí Cineálta: Procedures to Prevent and Address Bullying Behaviour for Primary and Post-Primary Schools were published in June 2024.

The 2013 anti-bullying procedures have been updated to take account of gender identity bullying, cyberbullying, racist bullying, sexist bullying, and sexual harassment. The Bí Cineálta procedures support schools to develop clear strategies to prevent and address these bullying behaviours.

The requirements of the procedures must be implemented in schools from the beginning of the 2025/2026 school year. Implementation of the procedures is being supported by a suite of professional learning resources and information sessions for school staff, Board of Management members and parents, including a half-day school closure during the 2024/2025 school year.

The inaugural Cineáltas Showcase and Sharing Best Practice event was held in Croke Park in September 2024. 17 schools, which were randomly selected, showcased what their school

has done to prevent and address bullying behaviour and to promote equality, inclusion, diversity and wellbeing. 82 nominations were received from school communities for the best practice awards. Five primary and five post-primary schools were recognised for best practice at the event. Videos of the showcase schools were sent to all schools during anti-bullying week in November 2024.

1.25 Teaching Council

The department is responsible for the governance of the Teaching Council. Their role is to promote teaching as a profession; promote the professional development of teachers to maintain and improve the quality of teaching in the State; provide for the establishment of standards, policies and procedures for the education and training of teachers; to provide for the registration and regulation of teachers and to enhance professional standards and competence.

Accountability, fairness and transparency across the Teaching Council's organisational activities have been ensured throughout the year through regular returns to the department's Sectoral Governance section and regular Agency Governance Framework meetings between the Teaching Council and the Department.

1.26 Teacher Supply

The PME Fee Refund Scheme was announced in Budget 2024. This payment of €2,000 subject to statutory deductions, to be made in 2025, aims to encourage newly qualified primary and post-primary teachers to take up teaching roles. The tender process for the expansion of upskilling programmes, free to teachers, announced in Budget 2024 in Irish, French, politics & society, and computer science commenced which complement existing programmes in maths, physics, and Spanish.

Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) may be employed in primary schools to complete the Droichead process while employed on a Supply Panel or Principal Release Time Post to provide substitute cover for teachers who are absent on short-term leave.

The Teaching Transforms campaign continued to promote the teaching profession and encourage students to follow a career in teaching. The campaign uses digital, radio and video media, and is supported by a dedicated webpage, www.gov.ie/teachingtransforms. Promotion campaigns have been developed to coincide with the CAO closing date and change of mind deadline in recent years.

An Ghaeilge

1.27 Content and Language Integrated Learning

During 2024, work continued on the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) project for Irish. From September 2024, 86 new primary schools deliver strands of the PE curriculum through Irish, using the CLIL approach, to 293 classes. 39 existing schools participated again in 2024/25 delivering strands of the mathematics curriculum through Irish

using the CLIL approach to 67 classes. At post primary level, 7 schools were engaged on the project delivering a range of subject classes through Irish using the CLIL approach to 12 classes. All schools received sustained support from Oide with learning centred on teaching practice and CLIL concepts.

In addition, An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) published the first in a series of resources to support schools delivering PE through Irish for junior and senior infants. 330 English medium schools registered for access to these resources and over 50 gaelscoileanna and 15 gaeltacht primary schools.

Irish summer courses for primary teachers were rolled out in education centres across the country providing opportunities for teachers to enhance their competence in Irish, with 336 teachers attending in 2024. COGG continued to develop the An Tairseach portal for resources in 2024 and there are now over 2,500 quality Irish resources available to schools.

The department provided funding of €180,000 to Foras na Gaeilge to support the expansion of the Gaelbhratach scheme which aims to encourage the speaking of Irish during the school day, outside of the Irish class. Additional supports and resources continued to be provided to COGG in 2024 to support their role in the implementation of the policy on Gaeltacht Education and the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme.

1.28 An tAonad Gaeilge um Scoileanna Meán-Bhéarla

In March 2024, the department established a new unit, An tAonad Gaeilge um Scoileanna Meán-Bhéarla, to support the teaching and learning of Irish in schools that operate through English. The key task of the new Unit is to develop an Action Plan for Irish in English-medium schools. The Action Plan will include impactful and measurable actions that can be implemented within a two-year timeframe. The development of the plan will be informed by an extensive consultation with national and school stakeholders. The consultation commenced in January 2025.

1.29 Development of a policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht

In 2024, significant work on the development of a new policy for Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht was progressed within the department. The policy will sit within the overall framework of the 20-year Strategy for the Irish language 2010-2030 and will build on the achievements of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022.

A public consultation process was undertaken to gather the views of stakeholders, including young people, parents, education professionals, education stakeholders and Irish-language organisations. Sealbhú, the research centre in DCU, carried out an analysis of all information gathered during the consultation and their reports were published in June 2024.

A review of international literature on immersion education in minority language contexts, carried out by Sealbhú DCU to inform policy development, was also published by the department in 2024.

A consultation event took place in September 2024, to give stakeholders an opportunity to share their opinions on the draft policy framework with officials from the department.

1.30 Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

The validation process for Gaeltacht School recognition, which had commenced in October 2022, was completed in March 2024. The purpose of the validation process was to confirm that schools participating in the scheme are fulfilling the language-based criteria as set out in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme. 102 primary schools and 19 post-primary schools were officially awarded recognition as Gaeltacht Schools at a series of regional events in October 2024.

A range of additional supports continued to be provided to schools participating in the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme in 2024 to support them in implementing the language-based criteria as set out in the scheme. These resources included additional Irish-language support teaching hours, an annual grant for the purchase of Irish-medium resources, continuing professional development provided by An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) and support from the Inspectorate.

1.31 Irish-medium Teacher Education Programmes

A key aim of the Policy on Gaeltacht Education is to increase the supply of teachers who can deliver high quality Irish-medium education in primary and post-primary schools. Funding is provided under the policy for two programmes – a four-year B.Ed. (Primary) degree and a two-year blended-learning M.Ed. in Irish-Medium and Gaeltacht Education.
164 students are participating in the Irish-medium B.Ed. programme in Marino Institute of Education in the 2024/25 academic year.
48 students are participating in the M.Ed. in Irish-medium and Gaeltacht Education (M.Oid. san Oideachas Lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta) in Trinity College Dublin in the 2024/25 academic year.

1.32 Advisory Committee for the Policy on Gaeltacht Education

Two meetings of the Advisory Committee for the Policy on Gaeltacht Education took place in June and December 2024. Topics discussed at the meetings included the future direction for schools still on their journey towards recognition under the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme, supports provided under the scheme, and research carried out by the Educational Research Centre (ERC).

1.33 E-Hub Project

The successful implementation of the blended learning e-Hub project continued in Gaeltacht post-primary schools in 2024. In the 2024/25 school year, 24 students across 9 schools, including 4 island schools, are studying Leaving Certificate Physics and/or Chemistry through the medium of Irish via blended learning. 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 the year.

1.34 Support for Island Schools

A package of additional supports continues to be made available to each of the five island post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht. These resources, which include an increased teacher allocation and an additional annual ring-fenced budget for each island post-primary school, are in addition to the supports the schools already receive as part of the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme.

1.35 An tAonad um Oideachas Gaeltachta publications issued in 2024

Circular 0020/2024 – Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme: Continued Implementation of the Scheme (2024/25) in Primary Schools and Special Schools

Circular 0021/2024 – Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme: Continued Implementation of the Scheme (2024/25) in Post-primary Schools

Circular 0022/2024 - Invitation to Primary Schools in Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas to Consider Joining the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme

Consultation for the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht: Report on comparative jurisdictions

Consultation for the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht: Report on the public response to the questionnaire

Consultation for the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht: Short report on the public response to the questionnaire

Consultation for the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht: Report on Written Submissions

Consultation for the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht: Report on Focus Groups

Consultation for the policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht: Summary of Policy Proposals

Inspections

Throughout 2024, the Inspectorate carried out a programme of inspection and advisory visits across a range of educational settings. These included early learning and care (ELC) settings, primary and special schools, post-primary schools, centres for education, and other educational institutions. The work was conducted in alignment with the Inspectorate's commitment to accountability, continuous improvement, and capacity building and followed established codes of practice and inspection guidelines.

Almost 3000 inspection and advisory activities were completed across various settings and schools with almost half of these activities resulting in a published report. These inspection activities varied in focus and duration and supported the Inspectorate's risk-based approach to inspection. The selection of schools and settings for inspection was informed by a variety of factors, including inspection history, findings from previous evaluations and other relevant data such as complaints and staff changes.

Developments during the year included a pilot of wellbeing promotion inspections in primary and post-primary schools and the publication of a children and young person's page in subject inspections and curriculum evaluations.

1.36 Ongoing development of Early Years Education Inspection

Inspections of early education provision in early learning and care (ELC) settings funded by the Department of Children,Equality,Disability,Integration and Youth were carried out nationally in 2024 across sessional preschool and full day-care settings. This programme of inspection was informed by the Guide to Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) published in August 2022. Access to the Guide to EYEI is available online at: www.gov.ie - Guide to Early Years Education Inspections.

The planned programme of inspection sought to ensure that the diverse range of ELC settings was represented in the national sample of settings. In 2024, this included small scale sessional preschools (up to 22 children enrolled), which comprised the majority of provision in the ELC sector, larger scale preschool settings, including chains of centrally owned and managed ELC provision, and full day-care settings that provided for babies and toddlers in addition to children availing of the ECCE programme of free preschool, part-time childcare and school age childcare. A total of 440 EYEI were completed in 2024. Follow-through Inspections, conducted based on risk assessment, were completed in 70 settings. In addition, 36 full day care inspections were carried out in 2024.

1.37 Support for Quality Improvement

In 2024, the inspectorate continued the development and publication of information and resources to support staff in ELC settings to engage in internal review and quality improvement activity in line with the quality framework for EYEI. This included collaboration with ELC settings and primary schools to provide exemplars of effective practice and photographs to illustrate the Insights: Quality in Education Webinar Series (https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c71c0-insights/). These resources address a range of topics including, for example, transitions, partnership with parents, outdoor learning, early literacy, promoting resilience and working with mixed-age groups.

1.38 Evaluation of Coláistí Gaeilge

The Inspectorate conducts an annual programme of inspection in a sample of the courses organised by individual Coláistí Gaeilge at the request of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (DTCAGSM). Responsibility for the Coláistí Gaeilge has since transferred to the Department for Rural, Community Development and the Gaeltacht).

Approximately 20% of the total number of courses organised are inspected annually. During summer 2024, 25 inspections were conducted in a random selection of Coláistí Gaeilge. Inspections are conducted as a means of assuring the quality of education provided for students in these courses and reporting on findings. Advice is offered to the teachers, principals and management committees of colleges. Inspections focus on three areas: the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; the quality of leadership and management; and the quality of Irish-language and cultural experiences for students. In line with other inspection models, child protection and anti-bullying compliance checks were also carried out on the Irish-language courses inspected. In conjunction with DTCAGSM, forward planning for the quality assurance of Irish-language courses in summer 2025 has commenced.

1.39 Scéim aitheantais scoileanna gaeltachta

Following inspection visits, 102 primary and 19 post-primary schools were officially recognised as Gaeltacht schools as a result of their implementation of the Scheme's language-based criteria, including Irish-medium immersion education and fostering Irish language use in their communities. A number of post-primary schools participating in the Scheme are still working towards implementation of the language-based criteria and these schools continue to receive targeted support from the department. Further information on the Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme is available at gov.ie/gaeltachteducation.

1.40 Evaluation of Teachers' Courses

The Inspectorate provides quality assurance of the summer course programme through evaluating and approving summer course applications (including the appeals process) and in the evaluation of a sample of summer courses annually. In March/April 2024, a team of eleven inspectors evaluated summer course applications against the agreed criteria for the recognition of summer courses. In addition, the co-ordinating inspector reviewed the quality

assurance handbooks (a requirement for online courses only), which the various providers were required to submit with their applications.

In summer 2024, a team of 30 inspectors evaluated a range of summer courses across the various categories. In total, 51 courses were evaluated: 24 face-to-face courses, 26 online courses and 1 blended course.

1.41 Monitoring Compliance with Child Protection

As part of the department's oversight of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (Revised 2023), 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 on a school's compliance with the 2023 procedures.

Level 1 monitoring was conducted in 1,636 schools during 2024. 95.7% (1,566 of 1,636 schools) were fully compliant with the level 1 checks at the time of the inspection. 4.3% (70 of 1,636 schools) were not fully compliant with level 1 checks at the time of the inspection. At the end of 2024, 4 schools remain non-compliant with level 1 checks.
Level 2 monitoring was conducted in 144 settings during 2024. 88.8% (128 of 144 settings) were fully compliant with level 2 checks at the time of the inspection. 11.2% (16 of 144 settings) were not fully compliant with level 2 checks at the time of the inspection. At the end of 2024, 2 schools remain non-complaint with level 2 checks.

Twenty-two Final Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections (CPSI) inspections were conducted during 2024. Twenty-one schools (95.5%) were fully compliant with level 3 checks at the end of the Final CPSI. An Inspector liaised with the remaining school to enable full compliance to be achieved by year end. Three Final CPSI and Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections for use in boarding facilities (CPSIBF) were conducted during 2024. One school (1 of 3 schools) was fully complaint at the time of the final inspection. Inspectors liaised with the two remaining schools who were non-complaint to enable them to achieve full compliance by year end.

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

Social Inclusion

2.1 DEIS 2024

In July 2024, the OECD Education for Inclusive Societies project published the 'Review of Resourcing Schools to Address Educational Disadvantage in Ireland'[4] This review provides an independent expert opinion on the current resource allocation model for the DEIS programme and, drawing on international examples, informs a policy approach for an equitable distribution of supplementary resources to support students at risk of educational disadvantage attending all schools, both DEIS and non-DEIS.

The department is working with other government departments and agencies, the education partners, and stakeholders across the education sector to develop tangible actions informed by the recommendations set out in the OECD review. A new DEIS Plan will be published in 2025.

The department commenced implementation of some of the recommendations from the OECD review in 2024 through the extension of the Counselling in Primary Schools pilot to 61 schools in areas with high levels of disadvantage and the provision of funding for 15 Community Link Workers to improve engagement between schools and Traveller and Roma families and communities experiencing disadvantage.

The department allocates almost €180 million annually to provide additional supports to almost 1,200 schools and 260,000 children and young people in the DEIS programme. One in four students attends a DEIS school.

2.2 Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024-2030

The Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) was published in July 2024 by the Department of Education, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and in collaboration with Traveller and Roma organisations.
This is a six-year strategy which aims to build on ongoing work across the continuum of education, including early learning and childcare, school (primary and post-primary) and further and higher education, to improve outcomes and ensure equity of access, opportunity and outcomes, as well as meaningful participation, for all Travellers and Roma.
TRES is a key action within the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS II) and aligns with the 2020 Programme for Government commitment to expand access to higher education for the Traveller community.

[4] OECD Review of Resourcing Schools to Address Educational Disadvantage in Ireland

The strategy contains a number of actions grouped under four themes: Participation and Experience, Access and Outcomes, Partnership and Delivering Change. It will be supported by three two-year implementation plans. The first plan (2024-2026) was published alongside the strategy and provides the foundation to commence implementation of the strategy and establish new initiatives.

This includes the establishment of a TRES Oversight Group to monitor progress and oversee the implementation of actions contained within the TRES over the six-year period. The group will also oversee the implementation of the education-related actions from the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024-2030 (NTRIS II). This oversight group includes membership from Traveller and Roma organisations.

A Traveller and Roma Education Forum was also established in November 2024 to facilitate consultation between policy makers and members of the Traveller and Roma communities. This group will also inform the review of progress and identify areas where further action, consultation, research and evaluation are required.

Some of the key actions under the current plan will include increasing the number of young people remaining in school to sixth year and achieving a Leaving Certificate, promoting training on inclusion and diversity through teacher professional learning, addressing racism and discrimination by developing more targeted cultural competence training and teaching Traveller culture and history through the curriculum. The strategy will also promote diversity in the education sector workforce.

2.3 National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy- Supporting Traveller and Roma (STAR) Pilot Project

This pilot project was established in 2019 under the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, supported by the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion and Youth. The project supported 55 schools with circa. 1,400 Traveller and Roma students across four regions, Co. Galway. Co. Wexford, North Dublin City and Cork City.

The STAR pilot project was officially completed in June 2024, with the extension of supports to June 2025 allowing time for consideration of the findings of the independent evaluation which was undertaken between May 2023 and May 2024. The report was published in January 2025.

The STAR pilot project was designed to inform the development of evidence-based policies, and the findings of the evaluation offer valuable insight into the challenges and successes of addressing educational disadvantage in the Traveller and Roma communities. The initial findings and recommendations of the evaluation of STAR played a key role in the development of the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy.

Building on the structures and collaboration under the STAR pilot, actions under the TRES and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028 NTRIS II (whole of Government Strategy), ensures a strong outcomes-focused approach, supported by an integrated, co-ordinated and collaborative response at a local and national level.

2.4 Out of school review

Action 88 of the DEIS Plan provided for a review of current out of school education provision to inform future policy in this area. This review was completed, and the Report on the Review of Out-of-School Education Provision was published in May 2022. The report sets out an implementation plan to progress the recommendations of the review. A working group consisting of a representative cross section of expertise from relevant Government Departments and agencies, was established in October 2022 to oversee the implementation of the recommendations.

During 2024 the Implementation Group engaged extensively with relevant stakeholders, including alternative education providers, school principals, educational welfare officers, children and young people and parents.

The report of the Implementation Group, together with an action plan to implement the recommendations in the report, is currently being finalised and will be published in 2025.

2.5 The Guidance Allocation Model

The guidance allocation model is based on principles of equity and inclusion. DEIS schools, for example, receive an increased allocation when compared with non-DEIS schools. Under the framework for lifelong guidance,[5] action 5.4 commits the Department to consider the effectiveness of the guidance-allocation model in post primary schools with a view to strengthening the quality of guidance counselling services. Work commenced on this action during 2024.

2.6 Dormant Accounts Fund

In 2024, almost €3m in dormant accounts funding, benefiting over 30,000 students at risk of educational disadvantage, was allocated. Eighteen unique projects were delivered nationally, including measures supporting literacy and numeracy, the retention and progression of Traveller and Roma students in education, transitions planning for school leavers with additional education needs, and supports for children and young people seeking international protection.

2.7 Free Schoolbooks Scheme

In March 2024, the Minister announced details of a new scheme which provided free schoolbooks to Junior Cycle students in post-primary schools in the Free Education Scheme.

[5] https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/national-strategic-framework-for-lifelong-guidance-2024-2030.pdf

Special schools that have students enrolled in Junior Cycle programmes also received this funding. More than 213,000 students enrolled in approximately 670 post-primary schools and over 65 special schools benefited from the new scheme in the 2024/25 academic year.

The investment of €68 million in 2024 significantly increased the funding that was previously provided to post-primary schools for schoolbooks. It reinforced the Government's commitment to expand the free schoolbooks scheme to schools nationwide, as resources allow.

The grant under the Junior Cycle scheme was paid to post-primary schools in the Free Education Scheme in March 2024. This was to ensure that schools had funding in place to make the necessary arrangements to implement the new scheme in advance of the start of this school year. For the 2024/25 school year schools received a per capita rate of €309 per student enrolled based on September 2023 enrolment figures.

Additionally, Budget 2024 saw an investment of over €47 million to continue implementation of the free schoolbooks scheme at primary level. In May 2024, the Minister also announced details of year 2 of the Primary Schoolbooks Scheme which provides at a minimum, free schoolbooks, workbooks and copybooks to all pupils enrolled in recognised primary and special schools. More than 555,000 pupils enrolled in approximately 3,230 primary schools, including over 130 special schools continued to benefit from this scheme in 2024/25 school year.

The grant under the Primary Schoolbooks Scheme was paid to recognised primary and special schools in May 2024. For the 2024/25 school year, schools received a per capita rate of €80 per pupil enrolled based on September 2023 enrolment figures.

The Department also allocated an administration support grant to schools for the 2024/25 school year, based on the size of the school, to assist with the additional work required in order to implement the scheme. The post-primary administration support grant for 2024/2025 was paid to schools in May 2024 while the primary administration support grant for 2024/2025 issued in June 2024.

This brought the total investment in schoolbooks in the 2024/25 school year to over €115 million.

2.8 Special Education

For the 2024/25 school year, 408 additional special classes were sanctioned by the NCSE, 289 at primary school level and 119 at post primary. These classes were added to the existing 2,927 classes nationwide to provide over 20,500 specialist places for children.
In addition, four new special schools were established in counties Kildare, Limerick, Meath and Wexford. These schools were established where there was identified demand and in areas where children were travelling long distances to avail of specialist provision. Twelve established special schools also expanded capacity.

Additional funding of €11 million was secured in Budget 2024 to better support special schools. These supports, rolled out in September 2024, included all such schools being entitled to an administrative deputy principal position, as well as the allocation of an additional 100 post-primary teaching posts targeted at special schools with post primary-aged students.

2.9 Understanding Behaviours of Concern & Responding to Crisis Situations in Schools.

On 12 December 2024, the department published the "Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations in Schools" Guidelines.

Aligned to the publication is a training programme consisting of 3 levels, including procured external training on understanding behaviours of concern and responding to crisis situations.

The publication of Circular 0081/2024 serves to inform schools about the "Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations Guidelines for Schools," with a particular focus on the recording and reporting of physical restraint. The guidelines include templates and detailed guidance to support schools in this process. Schools will be required to report instances of restraint being used to the NCSE from September 2025. In addition, the Inspectorate will have a role in monitoring the use of physical restraint in schools.

2.10 NCSE Policy Advice and Development of a Roadmap for Inclusive Education

One of the specific recommendations in NCSE policy advice, external support in the guise of the European Commission's Technical Support Instrument (TSI) programme has been progressed. The department applied for access to this programme which is intended to support member States as they plan significant system reforms. The support, in this instance, is provided by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education.
In January 2024, the department officially launched the project attended by education stakeholders.

- In March 2024 the department held internal stakeholder consultation.
- In May 2024 the department held external stakeholder consultation.
- In June 2024 the department held a 3-day workshop event which was attended by parents, teachers, school leaders, education unions and management bodies, HEIs and representative bodies.
- In October and November 2024, the department conducted student engagement by visiting 8 schools and held focus groups with the students.

The consultations confirmed key findings from the policy and legislation analysis. The discussions and exchanges between stakeholders pointed to current challenges, such as attitudinal barriers towards inclusive education, lack of data, the constant recurring message of the need for resources (especially related to therapy and health services). The consultation

events resulted in key themes and messages emerging which will feed into the final roadmap for a more inclusive education system.

2.11 Transitions

Under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy (CES) for People with Disabilities, the department is leading on the implementation of a number of actions supporting transitions and progression in education from early childhood through to further education and training and higher education.

A Transitions Programme Steering Group, chaired by the Department of Education and including representation from the HSE, the DCEDIY, the NCSE, ETBI and Solas, established under the strategy, is working to oversee development of a Transition Programme that aims to provide access to all school leavers requiring specialist supports to an appropriate transition programme.

Specifically in relation to the transition of students with special educational need post school, the department is supporting two transitions pilot programmes – one as part of the department's commitment to implementing actions under the CES for persons with disabilities: the second funded under Dormant Accounts Funding 2023.

The CES Transitions pilot project, which has been running in 20 schools (10 in Dublin/10 in Galway) since late 2022, provides an opportunity for education and other key stakeholders to work together to provide wraparound support and joined up thinking which builds capacity in schools to meet the transition needs of young people with intellectual disabilities and other complex educational needs, thus preparing them for greater independence and participation in society after post-primary education. The in-school element of the current pilot finished in the 20 participating schools at the end of the 2023/24 school year. A second round of the pilot in 41 special schools for the 2024/25 school year is currently underway.
The work is overseen by the NCSE.

The DAF 22 Transitions programme is a collaboration between the department and Walkinstown Association for People with an Intellectual Disability (WALK), an experienced NGO working in the area of disability services. The key objective is similar to CES - ensure that students are supported to make optimal transitions from school. WALK is currently engaging with and delivering their existing Peer Ability programme in 11 schools based in Louth, Dublin, Westmeath, Cavan, and Cork supporting 170 students in their final 2 years in school. The programme is funded through the Dormant Accounts Fund. Both the DAF 22 WALK pilot and the CES Transitions pilot are subject to an external evaluation.

2.12 Enhanced In-School Therapy Supports Pilot

Through the Progressing Disability Services Oversight Group, the department has been working with the Department of Health, DCEDIY and the HSE to develop and strengthen more coherent structures to enable children and young people to access therapeutic supports, including those who attend special schools.

As a result of this engagement, Phase 1 of the enhanced in-school therapy supports pilot commenced in September 2024, in six schools in the Cork and Dublin. An additional ten schools were announced as part of the pilot on 8 November 2024.

This integrated pilot programme will see the delivery of enhanced in-school therapy supports provided by the HSE's Children's Disability Network Teams and will be supported by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

The focus of this pilot is to provide the effective delivery of enhanced in-school therapy supports to children in selected special schools. This pilot will supplement existing services provided through Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs). Children with special needs will continue to have access to HSE/HSE funded children's services for individualised interventions from clinicians, such as speech and language therapists as required and in line with the child and families' goals.

A detailed evaluation of the pilot programme will inform the future development of policy in both education and health provision.

2.13 The National Nursing Pilot Programme

The National Nursing Programme Pilot for Children with Complex Healthcare Needs is a nationwide pilot scheme implemented in partnership with the HSE and NCSE.

It was envisioned that approximately 25 students per year would require this support and in 2024, twenty-two students in twenty-one schools received nursing supports which extends the HSE Paediatric Home Care Packages (PHCPs) for eligible students from their home into the school setting

The department, the NCSE and the HSE are continuing to keep the details of the scheme under review to ensure it is meeting the needs of these children with complex and acute nursing needs.

2.14 Home Tuition Schemes

During 2024, a total of 206 home tuition applications were processed under the Home Tuition Schemes. 189 were because of no school placement, 15 related to children in care with no school placement, and two applications were made under the scheme for maternity related absences.

Adjustments were made to the provisions of the home tuition schemes on an equitable basis.

Provision in the 2024 home tuition schemes allows for the sanctioning of hours for each sibling seeking home tuition which replaced the previous arrangement whereby the sanctioned hours were divided amongst siblings, regardless of the school levels of the children.

The Children in Care (CIC) home tuition grant scheme was adjusted so that if, following six weeks of tuition, the child remains in care and requires an extension to CIC, a further six weeks can be granted without moving to the No School Place (NSP) home tuition scheme, as was previously the case.

2.15 Irish Sign Language Provision

The department provides a range of supports for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, either in mainstream classes, 25 special classes or through the 2 established schools for Deaf children. There is longstanding existing provision in place, which provides a dedicated special needs assistant with ISL competency to support students in mainstream settings access to the curriculum and engage in school activities.

The Irish Sign Language (ISL) Scheme, established in 2022 is managed by the NCSE. The scheme is being implemented on a phased basis to allow for learning from the initial phase and to implement improvements, if required, to subsequent phases. There are currently 2 ISL Specialist Classroom Support and 2 ISL Advisors in place.

The review of the Phase 1 commenced in Q4 2024. The outcome of this review will facilitate discussions regarding the on-going development of the scheme, including future recruitment and resourcing of these roles.

The ISL Tuition Scheme assists deaf/hard of hearing children and their families to acquire competency in a language at the earliest possible opportunity.
In the 2024 calendar year 215 children and their families have/are being supported under the scheme by approximately 80 tutors.

Under the Department of Education Assistive Technology scheme, over 400 children benefitted from specialised equipment for the visually and hearing impaired in 2024.

2.16 The Educational Therapy Support Service (ETSS)

The Educational Therapy Support Service (ETSS) was established in June 2024. The expansion of therapy services within the NCSE is expected to build on the achievements and impacts of this element of the School Inclusion Model (SIM) pilot programme, which provided support to 75 schools as part of the pilot.

The ETSS provides 2 strands of support. Strand 1 involves Regional Therapy Support and includes Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) seminars with in-school support. one hundred and eleven teachers have been supported through a mixture of Teacher Professional Learning Seminars and in-school support visits in 93 schools in the Eastern region.

Strand II provides Sustained In-School Therapy for a period of 24 months, in line with the SIM. The NCSE intends to deliver Strand II of the ETSS initially, in its Eastern and Western regions.

Dublin is the base for the Eastern region and since September 2024, 22 schools in this region are currently availing of this service. Limerick has been identified as the most suitable hub for the Western region. This includes Kerry, Clare, Limerick, Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. It is planned that Strand II will be available in the Western Region for the 2025/2026 school year.

Further recruitment within the NCSE to achieve the full complement of 39 therapists, which is currently ongoing, will assist the NCSE in the delivery and expansion of the services provided above.

2.17 SNA Work Force Development Plan

The first SNA Workforce Development Plan is due for delivery in September 2025. It will undertake a more holistic and strategic approach to examination of future SNA policy under the following pillars.

Pillar 1 – Review and development of the SNA role
Pillar 2 – Establish a quality framework
Pillar 3 – Establish a SNA learning and development programme
Pillar 4 – Support SNA recruitment, retention and diversity
Pillar 5 – Develop a communications strategy

The plan will encompass an understanding of the SNA role and how they and other stakeholders can best be supported to provide the most effective service to children with significant additional care needs in our schools.

Extensive research and analysis was completed in 2024, which included focus groups with school leaders and teachers and the first national SNA Survey which was completed by 35% of the SNA workforce.

The collaboration and planning phase commenced in early 2024. Working groups were established for each of the pillars and met a number of times during the year. Two stakeholder groups, the first consisting of representatives of management bodies, unions and advocacy groups and the second, consisting of SNAs from each of the education sectors, also met with the department to discuss progress with the plan. The Steering Group also met five times in 2024 to review progress.

Engagement with children and young people commenced in late 2024 to embed the voice of children and young people in policy decisions on the SNA role that impact them. A Children Advisory Group and a Youth Advisory Group were established to help plan the consultation approach. €2.7 billion was dedicated to children with special educational needs in 2024. This provided for an additional 745 teachers and 1,216 special needs assistants.
At the end of 2024 the number of special education teachers in mainstream classes, special classes and special schools reached over 20,000.

The total number of SNAs also increased to just under 22,500 posts. €11 million was provided to special schools to ensure all of these schools could avail of an assistant principal post and to create 100 post-primary teaching posts in this setting, to ensure a greater range of the national curriculum subjects can be taught to improve student progression and transition. In addition, €20 million of additional funding was again secured for the Summer Programme which allowed the programme to build on the momentum of previous years.

2.18 Summer Programme

In 2024, the Summer Programme was underpinned by €40m in funding which was utilised to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children. The number of schools running a Summer Programme was the highest ever with almost 1,600 schools participating in 1,735 individual schemes, a 20% increase from 2023. Of those, 72 special schools ran a programme, a 22% increase. Over 12,000 children also participated in the home-based programme. Overall, more than 58,000 children participated in the wider Summer Programme, a 16% increase compared to 2023.

In 2024, the Student Teacher Placement initiative was introduced to support special schools. This initiative allowed special schools to recruit up to two graduate teachers/ final-year PME student teachers, bolstering the capacity of schools to deliver the programme. The paid placements ran from the third week in May until the end of the Programme, greatly benefitting schools during this busy period.

The initiative aimed to enhance the knowledge of student teachers about working in a special school setting, providing them with valuable practical experience and assisting in preparing them for future roles within the education sector. Over 40 student teachers took up this new role in 2024.

In 2024, Munster Technological University (MTU) and Nano Nagle Special School in Kerry collaborated on a successful pilot project. Children with a variety of ages and abilities from the special school participated in the pilot project for two weeks at the beginning of July where a variety of activities took place on MTU's campus.

The consultation process completed with the conclusion of the adult child and young adults focus groups, where the themes that arose in the initial survey stage were explored further. The final piece of consultation engagement occurred by way of an easy access survey that was available in easy read, read aloud, ISL and Irish versions to ensure children and people of all abilities could share their views.
A range of open policy days considered the feedback from same are included in the final report. Recommendations were finalised by the steering group and the report prepared for review. The report was presented to the management board for consideration and presentation to the Minister will conclude the review in early 2025.

2.19 Special Education Publications in 2024

Understanding Behaviours of Concern and Responding to Crisis Situations .

SET Guidelines and supporting documentation to aid schools in supporting Children/Young people with Special Education Needs –

The Role of Special Needs Assistants Report on Focus Groups with School Leaders

Report on National Survey of Special Needs Assistants -

New measures to support the Forward Planning for Special Education Provision

Appointment of Administrative Deputy Principals and Staffing Arrangements in Special Schools to take effect from the 2024/2025 school year.

Report of Education Need for the Purpose of the Assessment of Need Disability Act 2005

2.10 Focused evaluations of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordination

During 2024, the Inspectorate conducted a focused evaluation of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordination in 30 DEIS schools. A composite report on the 30 evaluations entitled Improving Outcomes and Experiences for Children and Young People: Evaluation of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) in Primary and Post-Primary Schools was published in December 2024.

The report highlighted aspects of effective practice in many schools, including the vision that school leaders developed for parental involvement, strong links between the schools and their local communities and good collaboration between the HSCL and the other Tusla Education Welfare Services. It also identified areas where HSCL could be strengthened, including making better use of data such as attendance figures, assessment results and parent and staff survey responses to inform the work of HSCL coordinators, and improving the effectiveness of schools' systems to monitor whether the strategies implemented were meeting their improvement targets.

2.11 Inspections of provision for children and young people with special educational needs

The Inspectorate conducted 96 incidental inspections in primary and post-primary schools in September and October 2024. These inspections focused on the support provided to children and young people with special educational needs at the beginning of the school year. The report highlights positive aspects of practice including evidence of the preparation of Student Support Files. It also indicated shortcomings, including a lack of consistency across schools

in regard to when to commence additional special education teaching during the month of September.

2.12 EAL follow-up inspections

The Inspectorate evaluated the provision for English as an Additional Language (EAL) through conducting Incidental Inspections in a sample of 83 schools in 2023. In September 2024, inspectors conducted follow up inspections in 8 of these schools. The purpose of these inspections was to evaluate progress in implementing the recommendations made during the initial inspections.

2.13 Autism Primary Special Class

Between September and December 2024, the Inspectorate conduced inspections of 20 special classes for autistic pupils in mainstream primary schools. A composite report on the findings will issue in 2025. The report will be the second in a series of three thematic reports from the Inspectorate. The first report: Early Intervention Classes for Children with Autism: Towards a coherent, inclusive system was published in June 2024. The third report will be published in 2026 and will focus on the quality of provision in special classes for young people with autism in post-primary schools.

2.14 Assistive Technology focused Inspections

During the October to December 2024 period, the Inspectorate conducted 39 inspections in primary and post-primary schools to determine the extent to which schools are using the assistive technology (AT) scheme to support the inclusion, access and participation of children and young people with special educational needs in primary and post-primary schools. A composite report on the findings will issue in 2025.

2.15 National Educational Psychological Service

The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) of the department provides a school-based psychological service to all recognised primary and post-primary schools through the application of psychological theory and practice to support the wellbeing, and the academic, social and emotional development of all learners. NEPS has particular regard for children with special educational needs (SEN) and those at risk of educational disadvantage.

The NEPS service provides access for all schools to:

- Psychological support in the event of a Critical Incident
- A Casework Service for individual children where there is a need for intensive consultation and assessment
- A school staff Support and Development Service, to build school capability to provide a comprehensive continuum of support in schools and
- Ongoing access to advice and support for schools.

There are currently 234 whole-time equivalent NEPS educational psychologists employed across the 6 NEPS regions, delivering a psychological service to schools.
The NEPS casework service extends to over 9000 students each year. The NEPS Support and Development service 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.

In 2024, NEPS responded to 392 critical incidents.

In September 2024, NEPS moved from an eight-region structure to a six-region structure. This new structure better meets the need of balancing the demands of both providing a high quality educational psychological service to all schools in Ireland as well as meeting the demands of NEPS policy-related work with the Department.

In addition to Assistant Directors in NEPS with primary responsibility for the leadership and management of service delivery in each of the new six NEPS regions, Assistant Directors are in place with responsibility for policy area including Workforce Planning and Professional Learning, Wellbeing and Social Inclusion, Special Education and the Counselling in Primary Schools Pilot.

2.16 Wellbeing

The Wellbeing Office enhanced the resources for schools on the dedicated wellbeing portal accessed via 'Wellbeing in Education' on Gov.ie. This portal hosts all the wellbeing and mental health supports and resources that have been developed by the department and the department's support services. Some key updates throughout 2024 included:

- Video case studies that highlight best practice in wellbeing promotion in our schools from visits with two post primary and four primary schools recording their experience and reflections of using SSE to initiate a wellbeing promotion review and development Cycle
- An online updated library of wellbeing resources for primary and post-primary schools
- An online updated Teacher Professional Learning Directory of training offerings from all Department services and agencies for primary and post-primary schools for the 2024 – 2025 academic year

The wellbeing office coordinated the development of emotional wellbeing 2 resources for Junior Cycle SPHE with partners University of Limerick, NCCA and the HSE.
The wellbeing office tendered for and selected Jigsaw as the provider for the delivery of a new national programme of mental health and wellbeing resources and training for post-primary schools.

Results from the Schools Data Collection Questionnaire/Survey in October 2024 revealed that 710 of 722 (98%) post-primary schools have established a Student Support Team (as set

out in the Department / NEPS Student Support Teams in Post Primary Schools: A Guide to Establishing and Reviewing an Existing Team (2021) guidelines for schools).

The Wellbeing Policy Statement & Framework for Practice Implementation Plan comes to the end of its lifecycle in 2025 and so the Wellbeing Office undertook an internal review of the implementation Plan in 2024. This will inform the next consultation phase for its replacement in 2025. 26 of 32 (81%) of the actions are complete by end of 2024.

Work is continuing on the Counselling in Primary Schools Pilot which was established in 2023. Strand 1 is the provision of one-to-one counselling sessions to support a small number of children in counties Cavan, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Monaghan and Tipperary. The Department has set up county panels of pre-approved private counsellors providing one-to-one counselling in primary schools in counties Cavan, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Monaghan and Tipperary. To date, 41 counsellors have been recruited across the seven pilot counties. In 2024 a total of 547 children availed of counselling supports through the counselling pilot.

In October 2024, the department announced the extension of Strand 1 of the Counselling in Primary Schools Pilot to 61 urban DEIS primary schools in Tallaght, Clondalkin, Finglas, Ballymun and Darndale. The schools that will now be included in the pilot have been identified by the Department of Education as supporting children from areas with some of the highest levels of disadvantage in the State.

Strand 2 of the pilot involves the introduction of Education Wellbeing Teams to provide enhanced in-school supports for a cluster of primary schools in Cork, Carlow, Dublin 7 and Dublin 16. The Wellbeing Practitioner is a new type of practitioner being introduced as part of this pilot to provide enhanced in-school support. The practitioners are graduates from psychology, education and social science and have undergone an in-depth training programme provided by NEPS.

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

3.1 Oide - Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) Provision

Oide, the department funded support service for teachers and school leaders, provides a variety of professional learning to teachers that places the learner at the centre of the learning experience.

Oide promotes the quality of teaching and learning through the provision of an efficient, effective and responsive model of professional learning and support for school leaders and teachers. It aims to facilitate optimum teaching and learning to enable students to achieve their potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development.
In 2024, Oide provided 234,176 interactions of TPL and 41,900 school support hours in the following areas:

Primary Teacher Professional Learning

- Inclusion
- Maths Recovery
- Reading Recovery
- Primary Language Curriculum/Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile (PLC/CTB)
- Small Schools
- Primary Mathematics Curriculum
- Primary Wellbeing
- Arts and Social and Environmental Education

3.2 Droichead Induction

Oide, through its Droichead Induction Division, supported 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).

In 2024, 2,398 schools (1,698 primary, 700 post-primary) supported 8,197 NQTs (4,080 primary, 4,117 post-primary) undertaking the Droichead process.

In 2024 Oide provided 19,858 interactions of TPL and 1,619 school support hours in the following areas:

- Droichead for NQTs
- Professional Support Team (PST)
- Cluster Meetings
- NQT Voice Events

- Droichead Refresher Events
- Droichead Information Sessions: These sessions provided information about the Droichead process to principals
- Advanced Mentoring Events
- Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Presentations
- Gaeilge Professional Learning Events
- Droichead School Support
- Associate Events
- Online Induction Workshops

3.3 Post-primary Teacher Professional Learning

- Whole School Planning and Self-evaluation Day
- Subject Specific Full Cluster Day Professional Learning Experiences (PLE)
- Post-primary Subject Specific Supports
- Post-primary teams offered a diverse range of PLE to support subject learning at both junior and senior cycle in the following subjects: Mathematics, Computer Science, English, History, Classical subjects, Home Economics, Religious Education Politics and Society, Modern Foreign Languages, Science, Technology, Business, Visual Art, Geography and Music.

3.4 Support for Post-primary Programmes

In addition to in-school support, the post-primary teams are offered a diverse range of PLE to support the different post-primary programmes, as follows:

- Roll out of TPL for Senior Cycle Redevelopment for Tranche 1 subjects commenced in Term 1 of 2024/2025. This TPL includes that for phase 1 schools who are introducing 2 brand new senior cycle subjects, Climate Action and Sustainable Development (CASD) and Drama, Film and Theatre Studies (DFTS)
- In October 2024, a meet and greet was held for Phase 1 schools who are introducing the new Senior Cycle Drama, Film and Theatre Studies
- Guidance
- Junior Certificate School Programme
- Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes
- Transition Year – including engaging with the new Transition Year (TY) Programme Statement.
- Leaving Certificate Applied

Bespoke School Support was provided across all areas where available.

3.5 Leadership

Oide Leadership provides professional learning for school leaders at each stage of the leadership continuum including teacher leaders, middle leaders, and senior leaders. The team uses a blended approach of online and face to face provision.

In total for this period Leadership provided 11,894 interactions of TPL in the following areas:

- Leadership programmes including
  - Misneach (Induction for Newly appointed Principals),
  - Tánaiste (Induction for Newly appointed Deputy Principals),
  - Forbairt (Development programme for Senior Leadership Teams) and
  - Comhar (a blended programme of professional learning for Assistant Principals).
- Mentoring for newly appointed principals in primary and post-primary schools
- Bespoke Mentoring
- Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership
- Coaching for principals and school leadership teams in Primary and Post-Primary Schools.
- Endorsement of programmes of professional learning addressing school leadership

3.6 Oide Host Education Centre

In 2024, the department announced that Monaghan Education Support Centre was taking on the role of the host for the administrative support of Oide.

The host Education Support Centre will provide administrative support, and this is not an exhaustive list, such as:

- employing all administrative staff based at the host education centre
- liaise, in collaboration with Oide, with other Education Support Centres with responsibility for delivering aspects of the Oide business plan about budget and financial management requirements
- ensure compliance with all relevant public financial procedures and legislation
- provide information on data and governance arrangements
- work on automating contracts
- look at existing Service Level Agreement documents with other Education Support Centres where Oide administration staff are employed

The Management Committee of the host Education Support Centre has responsibility for the corporate and financial governance of Oide.

In Quarter 2 of 2024, the host Education Support Centre commenced a recruitment campaign for the posts of Human Resource Manager, Head of Finance and Head of Administration. The Head of Finance and Human Resource Manager were appointed in 2024 with the recruitment campaign for the Head of Administration having completed in Quarter 4 of 2024 with the appointment finalised in Quarter 1 2025.

3.7 Aistear

Aistear the early childhood curriculum framework, was published in December 2024, following a process of updating the previous version (2009). Aistear is the early childhood curriculum framework, for all children from birth to six years in all settings, other than primary and special schools.

The updating was led by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), under the aegis of the Department of Education, working in close collaboration with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Youth and Integration and the early childhood sector.

The new Aistear framework promotes a view of babies, toddlers, and young children as capable and confident learners who thrive in caring and respectful relationships. It provides information for adults to help them to provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that all children can grow and develop.
The updated framework is accompanied by The Guidance for Good Practice. This second document supports educators to understand and engage with the vision, principles and themes in Aistear.

3.8 Cosán

The Department remains committed to supporting Cosán and providing ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers and is dedicated to the further development and integration of Cosán – the Teaching Council's National Framework for Teachers' Learning. Through Cosán, the Teaching Council aims to foster a culture of professional learning where teachers actively engage in their own growth, benefiting both themselves and their students. A key focus of Cosán is the promotion of reflective practice and collaboration among teachers.

Reflective practice is a vital component of both professional studies and student placement under the revised Standards for Initial Teacher Education.

3.9 Social, Personal and Health Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education

In 2024, the department provided and supported a wide variety of professional learning activities for teachers through Oide, Education Support Centres, Department Agencies and other initiatives. These services offer a pathway for progression for teachers interested in developing their skills in teaching SPHE / RSE and, in so doing, build capacity and leadership within the teaching profession in relation to the teaching of SPHE / RSE.

In February 2024, the second cohort of 43 participants commenced the NQF Level 9 Graduate Diploma in Social, Personal and Health Education / Relationships and Sexuality Education (SPHE / RSE) Programme which is run by Dublin City University (DCU).

The most recent circular for the NQF Level 9 Graduate Diploma in Social, Personal and Health Education / Relationships and Sexuality Education (SPHE / RSE) Programme 2025 was published in December 2024 inviting applications for the next programme which commences in February 2025.

3.10 Teacher Professional Networks (TPN) Funding Scheme

The Teacher Professional Networks Funding Scheme was established to support the work of Teachers' Groups and Associations (TGAs) which afford professional learning experience (PLE) and professional peer support to all post-primary teachers. The principal objective of the TPN is to advance the teaching, learning and / or classroom management skills of post-primary teachers in order to bring about improved learning outcomes for students. PLE events organised by TGAs in 2024 included suitable strategies which support teachers and have meaningful links with the national priorities being implemented by the Department of Education.

A total of 31 TGAs were registered with the scheme in 2024.

3.11 Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century (TL21) Programme

The TL21 Programme is a workshop based professional learning experience (PLE) programme for teachers and school leaders that promotes innovative practice and professional learning communities in post-primary schools. The programme has been running since 2003. The programme is a research-led one and its two main aims are:

- to strengthen teachers' capacities as co-operative and self-critical authors of their own work
- to enable students to take an active and responsible part in their own learning

This programme is managed by the Education Department, Maynooth University (MU). The programme is constructed on a partnership model, the chief partners being the university, the participating schools, the network of Education Support Centres and the Department of Education. Funding for the programme is provided by the Department of Education. Accreditation is available in either of two forms:

- TL21 Certificate of Participation issued by the Education Support Centre to each participant, itemising their attendance at PLE workshops over the two years
- University accreditation option, leading to M.Ed. in Innovative Learning. Individuals are invited to indicate their interest during the first year of the workshops in Maynooth University in Year 2

The programme runs over a two-year cycle with 11 Education Support Centres participating in the 2023 / 2025 cycle.

In 2024, the TL21 Programme was shortlisted for a National Education Award under the category "*Best Education Outreach Programme*".

3.12 The Teacher's Research Exchange (T-REX)

The Teachers' Research Exchange (T-REX) is a bespoke social networking and collaboration platform, led by Mary Immaculate College (with partners University of Limerick (UL), University of Galway, Marino Institute of Education (MIE), Dublin City University (DCU), Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI) and Oide). T-REX is co-funded by the Department of Education, the Teaching Council and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), which configures communication, participation, and sharing for educational professionals across the island of Ireland.

This is a platform through which teachers are supported in engaging with, and the purpose of this engagement is to support quality teaching and learning in our schools and early years education settings. It is a place for all professionals involved in educational research to converse, collaborate and share their work to help make research useful.

T-REX provides a digital bridge to facilitate collaborations and dialogue between members of different professional backgrounds – student teachers, practising teachers, higher educational professionals and education support professionals so that high quality research can be shared across professional boundaries and to grow the online community with ongoing innovations in teaching and learning and, thereby, enhance the quality of education experienced by all learners.

The fact that this is a virtual platform and is available free of charge to enable access by any teacher, student teacher and other educationalists means members do not have to travel to a physical location to take part in professional conversations and collaborations.

A T-REX National Coordinator was appointed in April 2024 with a focus on expanding membership across the array of involved organisations and engage with the network of professionals in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Oide, Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI) and other organisations to prepare promotion and engagement actions. A Communications and Marketing Officer was appointed in December 2024.

3.13 North-South Shared Island Teacher's Research Exchange Platform Pilot Project

The Government of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive are cooperating on a number of projects and programmes that are supported through the Shared Island Fund. At the North-South Ministerial Council Education Sector meeting in May 2024, a pilot cooperation on addressing educational underachievement was approved which includes the North-South Shared Island Teachers' Research Exchange Platform (T-REX) pilot project which is being implemented and overseen by the Department of Education Ireland and Department of Education Northern Ireland.

The North-South Shared Ireland Teachers' Research Exchange Platform (T-REX) Pilot Project will link teachers' evidence-based practice in both jurisdictions in the classroom with an online collaborative platform, enabling that effective practice to be shared between education professionals (including higher education). The funding requested under the Shared Island initiative will be used to develop the information technology infrastructure and professional infrastructure to support an island-wide multi-professional community of education stakeholders to address educational underachievement across the island. There are two aspects to this process:

- Information Technology Infrastructure
- Professional Community Developmental Programmes

The posts for a North-South Director and Analyst Programmer Level 2 were both approved in 2024 with recruitment underway to fill both posts. Mary Immaculate College have been meeting with Stranmillis University College regarding planning around the content and programme development for the Digital Badge in Evidence-Based Approaches to Alleviating Educational Disadvantage. Software development is ongoing with a tender document being developed to outline the core software development priorities for the project.

3.14 Gaeltacht Placement

The current requirements for Gaeltacht Learning Periods (GLPs) for primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes takes the form of 2 x 2 week placements, which are outlined in the Teaching Council's Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education. A total of 2,358 students were funded to complete their placement in the Gaeltacht over the course of the year.

3.15 HEI flexibilities

Initial Teacher Education providers have continued with existing flexibilities that enable student teachers to provide valuable support to schools as substitute teachers. 3rd and 4th year undergraduate teachers are eligible to apply for registration with the Teaching Council under registration Route 5 (Student Teachers). In 2024, more than 1,554 student teachers registered under Route 5.

3.16 Policy statement on Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

The Department's Policy Statement on Initial Teacher Education was launched in March 2023. The policy statement reflects on a significant period of change for the provision of initial teacher education (ITE) in Ireland and sets out a vision for initial teacher education to 2030.

The policy statement includes a phased implementation plan with actions in its first phase to the end of 2024. These actions included the commissioning by the Department and Teaching Council of significant longitudinal research on teaching and teacher education, which began in 2023 with significant progress on literature and policy review and research instrument design in 2024.

3.17 Initial Teacher Education graduates

In 2023, there were 1278 graduates from State-funded primary concurrent and consecutive initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and 1,728 graduates from State-funded post-primary concurrent and consecutive ITE programmes. In addition, there were 804 primary and 348 post-primary graduates on consecutive programmes from Hibernia College.

3.18 Professional Accreditation of Programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

In October 2024, the Teaching Council presented a report to the Department on standards, quality and good practice in ITE. This report was based on findings from the 2nd cycle of accreditation of all ITE programmes under Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education, published in 2020. The report had a particular emphasis on two of the seven core elements of Céim, namely Inclusive Education and Global Citizenship. The accreditation process demonstrated that all Higher Education Institution (HEI) programmes meet the standards regarding these core elements of Céim, and provide specific content learning, inclusive pedagogical approaches and school placement opportunities related to inclusive education.

All 54 ITE programmes across 14 HEIs are accredited under the new standards by the Teaching Council.

3.19 Developing a School Workforce Plan

Work commenced in 2024 on developing a plan for the school workforce, which includes Teachers, SNAs and other staff employed by schools. This work forms one pillar of a strategy on the future of education and provides an opportunity to holistically enhance and develop the critical roles of the school workforce. This work aligns with the Programme for Government (PfG), *Securing Ireland's Future*, which commits the Department to

develop a workforce plan for the education sector to ensure that we continue to attract, retain and return people into the sector and that the appropriate conditions and supports exist to ensure that they meet the needs of children and young people, society and the economy over the coming decades.

In 2024 the Steering Group met twice, and detailed preparation work commenced on Module 1 and aligning this with other workforce planning ongoing in the Department.

3.20 Teacher Workforce Planning Project - UNESCO

A teacher workforce planning project, supported by UNESCO and the EU Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support, began in October 2024

This two-year project will involve consultations with key stakeholders to develop recommendations relating to strategic workforce planning for teachers.

By focusing on long-term planning for teachers in Ireland, it reflects a commitment to anticipating future needs and aligning educational resources accordingly. The involvement of key stakeholders in consultations highlights a collaborative and inclusive process, ensuring that outcomes are informed, practical, and widely supported.

Supported by UNESCO and the EU Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support, the project benefits from international expertise. The project is rooted in evidence-based practices and aims to reform and enhance existing structures, not just address immediate issues. It embraces innovation in policy development, using data-driven approaches and modern planning tools to guide its recommendations. This initiative reflects how a strategic, collaborative, and internationally supported project can serve as a model for organisational excellence and innovative reform in the education sector.

3.21 Education Support Centres

The network of Education Support Centres (ESCs) consists of 21 full time and 7 part time centres spread across the country. Monaghan Education Support Centre provides the administrative headquarters for the department-funded professional development support service for teachers (Oide). A range of other smaller professional development support programmes and initiatives are administered across other ESCs, including the Active School Flag, Teacher Fee Refund Scheme, Guidance Counsellor Supervision Programme and Teacher Professional Networks.

During 2024, ESCs continued to facilitate the local delivery of national programmes of teacher professional learning on behalf of the Department of Education in their defined geographical areas of responsibility. In addition to this ESCs provided local support for the educational community from early years, through primary and post-primary sectors. They responded to identified local needs by sourcing the provision required in their catchment area in a format that suited teachers, whether that be online, in person or a mix of both. This involved collaboration with other centres or with outside agencies to ensure high quality provision for participants.

3.22 School Leadership and Governance Renewal Project Unit

The School Leadership and Governance Renewal Project Unit was established in 2024 as part of longer-term strategic planning for the sector.

The overarching goal of the unit is the enhancement of effective school leadership and governance to serve students better, to ensure schools operate more effectively as organisations, and to contribute to wider policy objectives. The deliverable will be a plan to support enhanced leadership and governance for the school sector that will have actions over for the short, medium, and long term, and if appropriate, to develop a framework for the sector.

In 2024, the unit undertook planning and scoping work to identify initial areas for review. In undertaking a strategic examination of leadership and governance, the department is ensuring that the governance system is fit for purpose for current and future challenges, and that our school leaders are supported as agents of change.

3.23 Periodic Critical Review

The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 requires that non-commercial State Bodies shall be subject to Periodic Critical Review (PCR) no later than every 5 years, with a focus on the ongoing business case for each entity, its performance and efficiency and effectiveness, and its governance arrangements.

The aim of the PCR process is to provide a robust challenge to, and assurance on, the continuing business need for the organisation in question, both in function and form, and to secure improvements in accountability, efficiency and effectiveness. The PCR process also encompasses the extent to which the governance structure of the public body and the department's oversight is consistent with the body's legislative underpinning and is aligned to its business needs.

The PCR involved desktop research, a review of key governance documentation, a review of the operation of the Teaching Council, extensive stakeholder consultation and analysis and reporting.

The PCR was published on 24 July 2024. The report contains 47 recommendations. Progress of these recommendations has commenced and will be overseen by a working group and also managed via the standing oversight arrangements. The biannual high-level oversight meetings will be used for this purpose and there will be an item added to the standing agenda where progress in relation to the PCR will be discussed.

3.24 School Planning and Building

The department is committed to ensuring that all learners have access to modern, high-quality learning environments. Central to this mission is the provision of adequate accommodation to meet the growing demand for school places, particularly for children with additional needs and more generally in areas experiencing rising enrolments. There is a strong emphasis on maximising existing capacity as much as possible and using capital funding allocations to provide the necessary additional capacity to meet prioritised needs.

From 2020 to the end of 2024, the department has invested over €5.7 billion in schools across the country, completing more than 1,150 school building projects. This investment is supporting the operation of the school system and ensuring that the required capacity is available for children needing school places – particularly those with additional needs.

This programme is designed to support nearly one million students and more than 100,000 staff, building on the progress already made in responding to demographic changes and increasing provision for children with special educational needs.

In 2024 alone, over 350 school building projects were delivered. 300 large-scale and additional accommodation projects—including 40 new school buildings—were under construction at the start of the year. 90 additional projects also began construction in 2024. Together, these projects are contributing over 550,000 square metres of new and modernised

educational space. Five new special schools opened in 2024. These projects are providing over 600 classrooms for students with special education needs

Between 2020 and 2024, more than 65 building projects were completed in special schools, resulting in over 260 new classrooms, alongside nearly 900 additional classrooms for special education within mainstream schools. During this same period, over 3,000 smaller-scale refurbishment and maintenance projects were carried out under the Emergency Works and Summer Works Schemes, with more than 750 projects completed in 2024 alone. In addition, circa.100 PE halls (at post-primary level) and General-Purpose rooms (at primary level) have been delivered through large-scale projects, with another 80 either under construction or commencing construction in 2024. The department has also delivered more than 280 science laboratories through a mix of large-scale, additional accommodation, and modular projects since 2020.

The department continues to prioritise school infrastructure, with a particular emphasis on addressing the pressures at post-primary level due to demographic growth and housing developments. Providing suitable accommodation for children with special educational needs remains at the core of its investment strategy.

Under the rollout of the Schools PV Programme (funded under the Climate Action Fund) to provide all schools with 6kW of rooftop solar panels. Over 3,000 schools have progressed to tender stage with over 1,000 confirmed installations.

3.25 Planning and Building unit publications in 2024

"Maintenance Matters" manual, a simple and user-friendly guide for schools that guides them on good practice in relation to maintenance matters. An updated web version of the manual was published in June 2024 and received very positive feedback from school patron bodies.

'Procedures on the use of School Property and School Sports Facilities outside of School Hours' published in June 2024

The ***"School Sector Climate Action Roadmap"***, updated in 2024 sets out the strategies to be implemented to achieve Climate Action Plan targets.

3.26 School Transport

The School Transport Scheme is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department of Education. At the end of 2024, over 172,500 children were transported daily in approximately 7,900 vehicles across 10,300 routes to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country. These daily trips cover over 100 million kilometres. this figure includes over 143,800 pupils travelling on primary and post primary services, 21,700 pupils with special educational needs, and 6,800 pupils who have arrived to Ireland from Ukraine.

The scheme is made up of three separate schemes, the school transport scheme for primary, post primary and for children with special educational needs. Transport is also provided for children who have arrived in Ireland from Ukraine and those residing in IPAS/EROC centres.

A phased implementation of the school transport review's recommendations began at the start of the 2024/2025 school year which includes 14 pilot projects underway in conjunction with the Department of Transport and Bus Éireann. transport. It is intended to continue the existing pilots for the upcoming school year. An initial evaluation is underway, with plans for a further evaluation at the end of the 2025/2026 school year. The evaluation will provide valuable insights into the impact of increased demand on the scheme, the potential for integrating public transport with school transport services, and opportunities to promote more sustainable modes of transport.

In 2024, a Working Group was established comprising representatives from School Transport Section, Special Education Section, the NCSE and Bus Éireann to explore and progress improvements to the scheme for children with special educational needs.
The rate of the STG was increased with effect from the start of the 2024/2025 school year.
A Technology Working Group was established to oversee and progress a number of projects with a view to improving systems, efficiency, customer service, and reporting capability.

An information pack relating to the employment of School Transport Escorts issued to schools at the start of the 2024/2025 school year and is reviewed and updated regularly.

The pay rate for School Transport Escorts was reviewed, and with effect from 1 October 2024 it was increased.

The total expenditure on the scheme in 2024 was €512m.

Projects are in progress to enhance the customer experience. A customer service case management solution was introduced in 2024 in School Transport Section in the Department, which will improve efficiencies in query answering times.

A call centre is in place in Bus Éireann for dedicated school transport queries. In 2024, staff in the call centre answered over 40,000 calls and 21,000 web chats.

Following the publication of School Transport 2030 Review of the School Transport Scheme, a phased implementation of the recommendations began at the start of the 2024/2025 school year.

3.27 Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools run by Religious Orders

The Report of the independent Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools Run by Religious Orders was published on 3 September 2024, following

the approval of Government. The Government also accepted the primary recommendation of the Report, which was to establish a Commission of Investigation.

The Report of the Scoping Inquiry made a number of further recommendations, including that consideration be given by the Government to establishing a redress scheme and that the Government approach the relevant religious orders about contributing to a redress scheme.

A high level Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) was convened to examine and advise on the recommendations of the Report and to prepare draft terms of reference for the Commission of Investigation.

3.28 Supports for Survivors of Residential Institutional Abuse Bill 2024

In April 2024, Government approved the publication of the Supports for Survivors of Residential Institutional Abuse Bill 2024. The Bill has two main purposes – to enable the delivery of ongoing health and education supports to survivors of abuse in residential institutions and to allow the dissolution of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Board, also known as Caranua.

The Bill completed Dáil Committee Stage in June 2024, and it is expected that the Bill will complete its passage through the legislative process in 2025.

3.29 Forbairt Annual Statement of Priorities

Forbairt, the Annual Statement of Priorities provided a roadmap to the delivery of the strategic and operational priorities set out in our Statement of Strategy 2023-2025. Forbairt assists in managing the pace and sequence of change towards longer term strategic goals and enables us to demonstrate ongoing change and reform in the sector and report progress. Progress reports issued at the end of each quarter, which provided an update on all actions.

From 2025, Fobairt will be replaced by the Education Plan.

3.30 Ukrainian response co-ordination

The department continued to lead the co-ordination of the Education response programme for Ukraine with a clear focus on integration of Ukrainian children and young people into our school communities. Areas of work coordinated included the following: programme governance, planning and reporting; continued oversight of the Regional Education and Language Teams including contracts and information hub; collaboration to adjust existing policies and processes, EAL, Special Education, School transport, AEARS registration, pre-enrolments during summer and EAL for summer programmes.

The department also worked in further extending the remit of the REALT coordinators to become the first point-of contact to find school places for non-Ukrainian IPAS arrivals and children under the IRPP. The department worked with colleagues in DCEDIY during

relocations of BOTPs from state contracted accommodation to minimise disruption of any children attending school may have faced as a result especially those with SEN or in their Leaving Certificate year.

At the end of 2024, 17,383 Ukrainian pupils were enrolled in schools across Ireland. Of these, 10,459 were enrolled in primary schools while 6,924 were enrolled in post primary schools. Funding was available to ETBs for the following sanctioned personnel:

- 16 ESOL Co-ordinators,
- 16 ESOL Administrative staff,
- 1 REALT National Co-ordinator,
- 16 REALT Co-ordinator
- 17 REALT Administrative staff

3.31 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 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. Eight internal audit reports were considered and approved by the Audit Committee in 2024. 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 2024.

3.32 External Staff Relations

The department is responsible for managing industrial relations across the School and Further Education sectors. This includes leading engagement with staff representative bodies at a number of industrial relations forums and providing the necessary secretarial support for the operation of the forums. The department also leads on referrals that are made to the States industrial relations machinery including at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and the Labour Court.

The department undertakes industrial relations negotiations on behalf of the State in the education and training sector and provide industrial relations and employment law advice to the Minister. The department oversaw the operation of the provisions of the Public Service Agreement 2024-2026 agreement in the sector during 2024 and issued circulars implementing the pay increases due.

Goal 4: Organisational Excellence and Innovation

4.1 Children and young people

The department established a Student Participation Unit in April 2023 to promote the participation of children and young people in the development of department policy. An expert group, chaired by Professor Laura Lundy, was established in May 2023 to advise the department on how best to progress its work.

The expert group looked at what the department was doing with regard to the participation agenda, what was working well, what could be improved upon and benchmarked this against international conventions and national policies. The department engaged with 174 children and young people to inform this work. This included a child advisory group and a youth advisory group which were involved throughout the process. The report of the expert group was published, along with the department's Student Participation Implementation Plan, on 10 October 2024.

The five high-level recommendations of the expert group are as follows:

- That the department builds on its understanding
- That the department develops its processes
- That the department communicates with children and young people
- That the department promotes good practice
- That the department holds itself accountable

The department's Student Participation Implementation Plan 2024 – 2026 contains 50 actions grouped under each of the five recommendations. The actions will be implemented from Q4 2024 to end 2026, the department will then publish an implementation report which will be heavily informed by the views of children and young people.

Led by the student participation project team within the Inspectorate, in 2024, as planned and following consultation with partners, a student friendly summary page was included in inspection reports on curriculum evaluations in primary schools and inspection reports on subject inspections in post primary schools. This page includes children-friendly versions of inspection findings and recommendations.

The Inspectorate published accessible student- friendly information about its work for 2024 in the form of the annual newsletter from the Chief Inspector and used social media to promote the newsletter. The Inspectorate published a video series that highlights good practice in children and young people's participation and leadership as observed by the Inspectorate in primary and post primary schools. Four videos in the series were published.

The Inspectorate raised awareness, ongoing in 2024, of the importance and benefits of children and young peoples' participation among children and young people, parents, and the education system through its publication of webinars, videos, presentations nationally and internationally, and its various publications.

4.2 Parents

Parents are a critical stakeholder in the education system. Parents' views contribute across a wide range of policy and other developments. The National Parents Council is the national representative body for parents of children in primary and post-primary education and plays an important role as a channel of communication between parents and the Department of Education and Youth.

During 2024, the department continued to provide annual funding to the National Parents Council to support this work and its work to support parents' associations in schools. The department also continued to provide funding to the National Parents Council to provide anti-bullying training for parents.

During 2024, the department continued to work with the Irish Primary Principals Network and the National Parents Council on the Partnership Schools Ireland project. The aim of the project is to make available a research-based methodology and a training programme to Irish school communities with a view to more effective engagement among all members of the school community.

In 2024, led by the parent participation project team, the Inspectorate undertook research with parents, using focus groups, about the current inspection resource supports for parents and the ways that inspectors might enhance engagement with parents during inspections. Initial development work was undertaken, and is ongoing into 2025, to action the findings of the research.

4.3 Inspectorate Report

The Department of Education Inspectorate Report (2021-2023) and Thematic Review, published in December 2024 provided information on what is happening in schools based on information collected during a wide range of inspections and research, including:

- 1,231 inspections in early learning and care settings that provide the ECCE programme
- 4,362 inspections in primary and special schools
- 1,909 inspections in post-primary schools and centres for education

The report identified that high-quality education was generally provided across schools, early learning, and care settings in Ireland and that stability in education quality was maintained during and after COVID-19. The education system has actively addressed attendance issues post-COVID and this is ongoing. The report highlighted areas for ongoing improvement to strengthen the education system.

4.4 Support for schools to embed the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) cycle 2022 - 2026

Between January to December 2024, the Inspectorate conducted 132 whole-school evaluations across a range of primary, post-primary and special schools. This model of inspection took account of schools identified priorities and their engagement with, and the outcomes of, self-evaluation.

In 2024, 246 advisory visits were conducted in schools and these engagements continued to provide the inspectorate with a range of perspectives on how SSE is working.
The Inspectorate liaised with the school leadership team in Oide on the provision of support for SSE in schools. Meetings were held with team leaders. Materials that were provided to the Inspectorate were reviewed and the feedback was adopted by OIDE to inform the final content of CPD programmes that were delivered to school leaders and teachers.

Between January and May 2024, the Inspectorate completed its research work regarding the Shared Evaluation of Learning project. This project was conducted with a small number of schools. Inspectors visited and worked with primary and post-primary school leaders and explored their engagement and implementation of the SSE process in their schools. In particular, they placed a focus on the domains and standards contained in the Leadership and Management section of the quality framework in their discussions in schools.

The Inspectorate collaborated with stakeholders to seek their views on the future direction of SSE and its complementarity with external evaluation. Consultation meetings were held with external partners including leadership bodies, unions and school principals. In addition, conversations within the Inspectorate and with other sections in the Department provided useful insights regarding the future direction of SSE. Feedback provided has indicated the need to explore how innovative practices can be shared between schools by the creation of school clusters. This consultative process will continue in 2025 to include the voices of parents and students.

4.5 Transformation and Innovation

The department’s Transformation Week took place in October 2024. The theme was Transformation in Action, and the week provided an opportunity to showcase the breadth of innovation and transformation across the Public Service through events highlighting initiatives at national level that deliver better services for the Irish public. Department staff also had the opportunity to attend events hosted by other departments, broadening their exposure to cross-governmental efforts. A series of engaging and informative online presentations from a variety of speakers offered staff the chance to gain new insights, inspiring them to continue embedding transformative thinking in their roles.

4.6 Strategy and Development

During 2024, the department held two Strategic Dialogue Days for staff. The first, in March, was focused on the areas of Climate and Sustainability and Inclusion and Equity. The second Strategic Dialogue Day, held in July, had a focus on design principles, and included a talk on the history of education and learnings for the future, by Anne Looney, Executive Dean of the Institute of Education, DCU.

Planning for Education 2050, a long-term strategy for education in Ireland was also advanced in 2024

4.7 Research Unit

In 2024, the department added new dedicated research staff within the Central Policy Unit to coordinate and further strengthen the links between evidence and policy.

A strategic approach to capacity building has been pursued which has included the development of a research inventory for the department, research workshops with staff, and engagement with the wider educational research community to leverage existing external research capacity.

4.8 Communications and Stakeholder Engagement

In 2024, the Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Unit played a pivotal role in communicating the department's work and providing information to a range of stakeholders.

During the year, the unit managed a seven-day on-call press office, responding to about 680 media queries and issuing 120 press releases, while supporting ministerial engagements and liaising closely with the Government Information Service.

A key focus of the unit was producing a wide range of print and digital content for different audiences, including online information and videos, graphics, and written materials for the department's website, social media channels, and department policy documents, reports and publications.

Major public information campaigns included 'Teaching Transforms' to raise awareness of the teaching profession; and 'School Transport' and 'Free School Books' to raise awareness of these initiatives with parents and guardians.

The unit supported several high-profile events and announcements throughout the year such as the Cinéaltas showcase in Croke Park, Senior Cycle Redevelopment, and Gaeltacht School Recognition Scheme.

In 2024, the unit expanded its remit to include stakeholder engagement, establishing the Post-Primary Education Forum to complement the existing Primary Education Forum. This

work supports more inclusive consultation and feedback processes, helping to shape policy and improve the pace and sequence of change.

Internal communications were strengthened through regular newsletters and departmental updates.

All advertising and communications adhered to the Official Languages Act, with 20% of materials available in Irish and 5% of advertising spend allocated to Irish-language media. The department submitted its return to An Coimisinéir Teanga and continues to refine its metrics in collaboration with the Commission.

4.9 Irish Language

The department is committed to the provision of services in Irish in accordance with its obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003 and Official Languages Act (Amendment) 2021. The department's approach to meeting these obligations is outlined in the department's Irish Language Scheme and its Customer Charter.

In 2024, the department worked to raise awareness among staff in relation to the additional Irish language requirements contained in the 2021 Amendment Act, and to increase awareness amongst staff of Irish language training opportunities and organising events for Seachtain na Gaeilge. Having established an Official Languages Act Network in 2019 we utilise this forum to ensure that staff are aware of our obligations and plan any developments in accordance with the relevant legislation. This network meets on a quarterly basis. Meetings were held in February, June, September and December 2024.

Throughout 2024, the department worked to ensure we increased our public information offering in Irish on services and initiatives through the website and social media channels. In compliance with Section 10A (Advertising by Public Bodies) of the Official Languages (Amendment) Act, the department submitted its report on advertising for 2024 to Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga. In 2024, 27.66% of the department's advertising was in the Irish language which exceeds the 20% statutory requirement. In 2024, 13% of the Department's advertising spend was in the Irish language through Irish language media, which exceeds the 5% statutory requirement.

The department continued to fulfil its obligations to provide public services in Irish under the Official Languages Act 2003 and Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 through dedicated Irish-language telephone and email services for those wishing to correspond with the Department in Irish. With a view to understanding and improving the provision of services in Irish, the department, along with other Civil Service bodies, collaborated with the University of Galway in their study into Irish language proficiency in the civil service. The outcome of this study will inform the department's approach to implementing the recommendations of the *National Plan for Irish Language Public Services 2024 – 2030*, which was published in December 2024.

The department has a dedicated unit to coordinate complaints from Oifig an Choimisinéir Teanga relating to failures to fulfil our obligations under the Official Languages Act. Five such complaints were received in 2024.

4.10 Protected Disclosures

The Protected Disclosures (Amendment) Act 2022 amended Ireland's existing national whistle-blower protection law and provided for the establishment of an Office of the Protected Disclosures Commissioner as well as requiring all public sector employers and 'prescribed persons' to revise and update procedures and channels for receiving protected disclosures.

In line with our requirements under section 22(1) of the Protected Disclosures Act, the department prepared and published its Protected Disclosures Annual Report in March 2024. The department also provided detailed statistical information on protected disclosure activity to the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery & Reform in line with our obligations under section 22(c) of the Act. The department's Protected Disclosures Annual Report is published online.

The department is a member of the Integrity at Work (IAW) Programme which provides a free specialist legal advice service for witnesses and whistle-blowers. The Department, in conjunction with IAW, has provided training sessions to potential recipients of protected disclosures. Officials across the Department also availed of training via the OGP framework in 2024.

The department is also a member of the Inter-Departmental Protected Disclosures Network which meets on a regular basis and the department maintains a close working relationship with the Office of the Protected Disclosures Commission.

The department handled 19 reports of wrongdoing under the Protected Disclosures Act in 2024.

4.11 Ombudsman for Children

The Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002, sets out the role and powers of the Ombudsman for Children's Office.

The department has a dedicated function to coordinate complaints made to the Ombudsman for Children's Office regarding the department's role in supporting education provision. In 2024, the department investigated 11 complaints from his Office.

4.12 International Unit

During 2024, the department continued to engage with and contribute to the work of other Government departments, EU and international organisations and partners.

Engagements included senior department representation and participation at EU and international meetings, conferences, working groups and events. This engagement supported strategic bilateral international relationships and supported the enhancement of

Ireland's reputation for high quality international education cooperation, including with international institutions/organisations, such as the United Nations, UNESCO, Council of Europe and the OECD.

The department supported meetings of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (Education) Council during 2024 under the Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies.

Planning work for Ireland's 2026 EU Presidency continued during 2024 to ensure that a high-quality Education Presidency is delivered. Discussions on the oversight and management of the shared Education Presidency are progressing through the medium of a Joint Steering Group Committee with the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science and Interdepartmental meetings. A visit by MB members to Brussels took place on 24 October 2024 where they had the opportunity to meet with EU Institutions and other relevant officials with plans for future meetings during 2025.

The department supported a number of visits from other Governments and educational organisations to the Department, Agencies and Schools.

The department delivered on the management of relevant EU initiatives, including the recruitment of teachers to meet the needs of European schools and assisted a number of EU partner countries in recruitment to the English Language Assistant Scheme in support of our EU cooperation objectives.

4.13 Education Cooperation with the United Kingdom

In addition to our ongoing bilateral education cooperation at official level with the UK Department for Education, the department contributed to the preparations for the Ireland-UK Summit in 2024. Officials also contributed to the follow up work to build on the education aspects of the Summit.

Senior officials continued to participate in the Common Travel Area engagement with UK counterparts and to deliver on the CTA Education MOU commitments to continue education cooperation and delivery.

4.14 North-South Education Co-operation

The Minister attended the 27th Plenary meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in April which was the first such meeting since July 2021. This was an important moment following restoration of the NI Institutions, allowing for discussions on North South cooperation affecting both jurisdictions.

Following this meeting, the Minister hosted Northern Ireland Ministers for the NSMC Education Sector meeting under the North South Ministerial Council in May 2024, at which an updated education cooperation work programme was agreed by Ministers.

There was ongoing engagement during 2024 between Education Departments on the priorities for cooperation on a North-South basis into the future including a focus on reducing educational disadvantage.

4.15 Shared Island Proposals on Tackling Educational Disadvantage

Government approval for Shared Island funding of up to €24 million was achieved early in 2024 to support projects to tackle educational disadvantage in Northern Ireland and to further strengthen mutual and shared learning on education policy and practice on a North-South basis.

Work continued in close collaboration with the Department of Education in Northern Ireland and all projects under the Shared Island initiative were agreed and implementation started during 2024.

4.16 PEACE IV Programme 2014-2020

The PEACE IV Programme 2014-2020, funding by the EU, UK and Ireland drew to a close during 2023 with the continuation of administrative support and outstanding receipts during 2024.

4.17 PEACEPLUS Programme 2021-2027

Final consideration of applications under Investment Area 3.1 (Formal/Non-Formal Education) of the PEACEPLUS Programme 2021-2027 project call took place during 2024 with a total of five Shared Learning Together project applications approved at Selection Steering Committee meetings with almost €48m of funding awarded. This included funding specifically for a Cross-Border School Civic Exchange project which launched in Oct 2024 and will allow for the possibility of school participation from all over the island.

A number of project launches took place during 2024 with the remaining projects scheduled to launch in 2025.

4.18 Data Protection and Records

Key focus areas in 2024 were on ensuring GDPR compliance and access to records.
In 2024, the unit processed 94 Subject Access Requests under data protection legislation and 434 Freedom of Information/Access to Information on the Environment requests. Data protection training was provided to staff on an ongoing basis.

4.19 Data Strategy 2024-27

The department's Data Strategy 2024-27 was published in June 2024. It focuses, in particular, on strengthening the foundations of the department's data ecosystem and promoting consistency of understandings and practice. The vision of the new strategy is that of an education data culture in which trusted, well-governed, accessible data is understood,

supported and leveraged for the benefit of those who learn, teach and lead across the sector. Its high-level goals and actions centre on four priority areas: strengthen data governance structures and processes, uplift data culture and literacy, focus on data quality and facilitate optimal data use.

4.20 Department Expenditure

The department's provisional gross expenditure outturn in 2024 amounted to €11.91 billion. This comprised of €10.45 billion in current expenditure and capital expenditure of €1.46 billion.

The increased investment in budget allocations in 2024 provided for among other things, additional financial supports for schools to deal with increased day-to-day running costs, the expansion of the free schoolbooks scheme to Junior Cycle pupils, additional teaching and Special Needs Assistant posts provided to further support children with special educational needs, and increased supports for children at risk of education disadvantage. Additional funding was also made available for further Cost of Living measures and Ukraine crisis related supports and to the school building programme to increase capacity within schools.

4.21 Climate Action

Green teams are active across our four main campuses and have driven several initiatives to improve the way we interact with the environment. Through several workshops we have explored issues such as waste, disposable items and other environmental issues. The internal magazine publishes regular articles on our climate actions and environmental issues in addition to campaigns to improve our individual responses to climate challenges.

We have focussed on our consumption of resources such as energy, waste, water and paper in particular. In energy terms we have worked as a community to achieve the mandated 50% energy reduction by 2030. The SEAI annual (provisional) report records our achievement of a 53% reduction at end 2024 (46% at end 2023).

The department must also reduce its total energy related CO_2 from a baseline of 1,692,175 $kgCO_2$ to 484,489 $kgCO_2$ by 2030. Figures from the SEAI suggest that we are moving in the right direction with a 37.6% reduction in 2024. Under the Public Sector Climate Action Mandate, all relevant public bodies are also obliged to reduce fossil fuels by 51% by 2030. Over the next number of years, we will work with the SEAI Partnership Programme and the Office of Public Works to undertake significant projects which will enable us to meet this target.

Using a benchmark of 2022, the department set an objective of reducing our general waste and increasing our recycling and compostable waste. At end 2024, the overall volume of waste across our main campuses had reduced by 13% since 2022. Significantly, there was a 42% reduction in general waste, almost a 50% increase in recycling and compostable waste had increased threefold. The Green Teams and staff throughout the department continue to

seek improvements in the way we generate and dispose of waste from our day-to-day operations.

In line with the climate action plan, the department has established a climate action liaison officer within each business unit to focus on climate actions and particularly paper consumption in 2025. It is expected that a number of projects will be identified to reduce our reliance on paper within business processes and our printing outputs.

The Secretary General and senior management in the department are committed to fully implementing the annual Public Sector Climate Action Mandate. To this end we submit the required data to the SEAI Monitoring and Reporting system every year and will publish the department's Public Sector Climate Action Roadmap on our website on an annual basis.

The department is also required to estimate the carbon emissions associated with every official flight taken and to keep a central record of these emissions. To estimate the emissions associated with an individual flight, the Department of Education uses the carbon calculator developed by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). The ICAO Carbon Emissions Calculator allows us to estimate the emissions attributed to each traveller's air travel.

Biodiversity is a further theme in our climate action programme. We have taken action to reduce pesticides and to increase the diversity of plants within our campus environs. Tree planting took place at our Tullamore office and a number of swift boxes have been installed.

4.22 Procurement

In 2024, the newly expanded Procurement Policy Unit (PPU) oversaw the implementation of a new Contracts Register system with greatly increased functionality to support business units in management of contracts and to ensure continued compliance of same. Furthermore, an addition to the system allows units to store their procurement documentation with the registered contract in case of future audit requirements. The new system also enabled the PPU to provide effective oversight of contracts in place across the department, as well as to monitor potential risk of overstay non-compliance. Office Notices and User-guides for the above were also developed and circulated across the department. The PPU developed a comprehensive system of reporting which enabled business units to meet 3 reporting requirements (40/02 Non-Competitive Procurements, Green Public Procurement and Centralised Procurement Arrangements) in one return, substantially reducing the administrative burden usually placed on units in relation to procurement returns. In terms guidance and training, the PPU developed a substantial suite of resources across key procurement focus areas, available on the intranet to all departmental staff. PPU was available to support any business unit which required procurement advice.

4.23 Statistics

The department's statistics unit monitors and analyses key performance indicators. The department has continued to produce publications on the retention/progressions of different

ethnic minorities through the education system. In 2024, the statistics unit supported all areas of the department by using insights for policy or improving operational performance. During 2024, the unit began assisting the social inclusion unit to revise the method of how DEIS scores are calculated for individuals and schools, as part of the review of the DEIS programme. The unit has also sought to innovate its own methods, by developing a sub-regional scale model for projecting enrolments and by revising the teacher demand/supply model.

4.24 Customer Service

The Customer Support Unit (CSU) was established to act as a central point of contact for all customers and stakeholders of the department with responsibility for providing frontline support and information to the department's customers and stakeholders through email and phone when they are unsure of the appropriate contact points for their business concerns.

The CSU provides the department's customers with a professional, efficient and courteous service and is to the forefront in improving the standards of the customer service received.

The CSU has a c. 98% call answer rate and, in order to enhance coverage and continuity of service, it uses a dedicated call handling communication system.

The department continues to improve information resources available to its customers via the website, circulars and online portals. Between 2023 and 2024, the department has seen a reduction in calls received.

	2024	**2023**
DOE incoming calls (excluding mobiles)	384,650	422,652
DOE outgoing calls (excluding mobiles)	163,892	190,319
CSU incoming calls	38,374	42,303
Emails to info@education.gov.ie	11,278	12,799
Formal complaints received	25	22

Shared Services

4.25 Shared Services Implementation

In 2024, the Shared Services Implementation Unit (SSIU) supported the ongoing development and delivery of the shared services programme in the Department of Education (DoE) and the Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

The suite of projects and operations in the Education Shared Business Service (ESBS) centre continued to expand in 2024.

ETB Shared Services

4.26 ETB Finance Shared Service

At the end of 2024, five ETBs in total have moved to Finance Shared Service. In the course of 2024, three ETBs migrated to ESBS;

- Donegal ETB (July)
- Laois & Offaly ETB (July)
- Limerick & Clare ETB (November)

with 72,157 invoices processed in 2024 totalling over €156.6m for the 5 ETBs.

4.27 ETB Payroll - Key Highlights in 2024

- Go-Live for the 16th (and final) ETB on ESBS-ETB Payroll Shared Services
- All 16 ETBs live for Apprentice and Learner payments by ESBS
- Production of first ever SPS Benefits Statements for all 16 ETBs
- Go Live for 13 ETBs for Travel & Subsistence (T&S) claims

4.28 Payments Processed

647,465 payments were processed in 2024 by ESBS-ETB Payroll Shared Services. In total, since we commenced Payroll Shared Services, we have made over 2,022,137 payments totalling over €3.9bn. Including Apprentice and Learners payments, over €4.5bn has been paid out by ESBS since the commencement of live operations.

4.29 Travel & Subsistence

13 ETBs have now migrated their T&S Payments function to ESBS with the remaining three ETBs scheduled to migrate in Q3 2025.

4.30 ETB Pensions

Improvement Programme

The Pensions Improvement Programme continued with work progressing on compliance issues relating to the administration of the Single Public Sector Pension Scheme. The system has been further cleansed and updated to ensure it is calculating the correct contributions for over 95% of members.

All 16 ETBs have been supported in SPS Pension Scheme compliance by providing the ETBs with 14,071 benefit statements and 16,342 leaver statements to issue to their members up to 2023, a total of 30,413 statements

4.31 ETB Pensioners

There has been continuous engagement with the National Shared Services Office to support them with the update of their pensioner configuration and ETBs with cleansing of pensioner data to allow for the efficient application of pension increases for over 99% of ETB pensioners. Fourteen pensioners (out of 9,731) now remain to be cleansed.

4.32 Other ETB Finance projects

The financial management system (FMS) consolidation project was completed in 2024, with City of Dublin ETB transferring all their processing and reporting activities off their legacy financial systems. As a result, all ETBs are now on the same FMS platform for the first time. Good progress was made across additional finance improvement projects with 15 ETBs now live with GL Conversion, 11 ETBs live with Tender and Contract Management and 15 ETBs live with Dynamic Enterprise Performance Management reporting module by end 2024.

4.33 Higher Education Payroll Shared Service[6]

The ESBS team have continued to expand the DFHERIS shared service programme through the Higher Education Payroll Shared Services (HEPSS) project. In 2024, HEPSS successfully transitioned two Technological Universities to Payroll Shared Service;

- Technological University of the Shannon (September)
- Atlantic Technological University (November)

A critical element of this work involved the unification of their HRM and Payroll Solutions. Services are now being provided to eight HEIs, with work underway for two further transitions in 2025, which are;

- Mary Immaculate College (June)
- Dundalk Institute of Technology (August)

4.34 Reporting & Analytics

In February 2024 the final ETB was onboarded onto the Education Shared Services Reporting and Analytics platform. All 16 ETBs, encompassing approximately 400 end users, are now utilising the Education Shared Services Reporting and Analytics platform which assists them in meeting their operational and regulatory reporting requirements in the area of HR, Pensions, and Payroll.

4.35 Shared Service Implementation Unit

The Education Procurement Programme Board continues to oversee the development and implementation of public procurement services for the education and training board sector in line with government policy for procurement reform and provided a forum for the sector to discuss challenges and solutions.

[6] This work was carried out by the Department of Education as part of a shared service agreement

A series of central procurement competitions were also undertaken by the unit including;

- A central framework for Schools MIS (commenced in 2024, scheduled to conclude in Q2 2025)
- Secure Mobile Phone Pouches (commenced in Q4 2024, scheduled to conclude in Q2 2025)
- Business and Management Consultancy Support contract for the Education sector's transformation programme was put in place in June

The Education Procurement Service (EPS) is leading on the School Books DPS procurement with oversight by SSIU. Procurement for the provision of an ETB FMS commenced in 2024 and is due to conclude in Q1 2026. A new contract was established in 2024 for the provision these services pending the procurement of a permanent solution.

SSIU continued to work with HEAnet and EduCampus, in their provision of Information and Communication Technology shared services to the education sector, through the provision of funding via DFHERIS and leading on governance of both entities. SSIU also continued to support the work of EPS and Schools Procurement Unit.

4.36 ETB Financial Unit

A review of the Code of Practice for the Governance of ETBs was completed by the department in 2024. The review involved updating the code to reflect relevant DPENDR updates to governance requirements and bringing greater emphasis as well as clarity to the board's oversight role, throughout the document. Following completion of the review, a revised code was published in November 2024.

Following the local authority elections in June 2024, it was necessary in accordance with the legislation to reconstitute the ETB boards. In order to support the new board members in the discharge of their functions, ETB Ireland, supported by the department, engaged the IPA to develop and deliver a training programme for all board members and chairpersons of ETBs, and for the chairpersons of audit and risk, and finance committees.

This training outlines the key concepts of governance in a public sector-related environment and will help ensure solid understanding by members of core elements of their functions. Training sessions are also provided to chairpersons of ETB boards, ETB finance committees and ETB audit and risk committees. This training looks at their key functions and responsibilities in leading the work of their respective boards/committees and their formal obligations.

4.37 Athlone Payroll Procurement

The DoE's School Payroll Service in Athlone is the largest such service in the state, with in excess of 165k payees. DoE published a Request for Tenders for a new technology solution for the Schools Payroll function which was expected to conclude in Q1 2025. Standard terms

and conditions for interaction with the market for a cloud-based solution were developed and used in this procurement and this work will be used across other market engagements in 2025 and beyond.

5. Sustainable Development Goals

The department remains firmly committed to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and continues to make significant progress in advancing key priorities and actions. The department actively supports colleagues in the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications to ensure we contribute effectively to delivering this plan.

Aligned with Ireland's whole-of-government approach to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each Minister is accountable for implementing relevant SDG targets. This department leads on the implementation of specific targets under SDG 4 – Quality Education: ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

SDG 4.1 – "*Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes*"
Home Tuition Schemes are provided for students who are without a school place, children in care without a school place and students on maternity related absences.
Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying takes a whole education approach to preventing and addressing bullying behaviour and promotes equality, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing.

During 2024 the Inspectorate:

- Implemented a responsive inspection programme of Youthreach Provision in Centres of Education and Community Training Centres
- Cooperated with the Office of the Inspector of Prisons in the inspection programme of schools located in prisons
- Evaluated provision in settings other than recognised schools that receive funding from the Department of Education
- Evaluated the extent to which the Summer Programme supported the ongoing engagement with education, during the summer period, of children and young people with special educational needs and those at risk of educational disadvantage.
- Conducted focused evaluations of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordination and published
- Conducted a full programme of inspections of aspects of provision for children and young people with special educational needs
- Conducted a programme of inspections in Special Class for Autistic Pupils in Primary Schools
- Conducted a programme of inspections that focused on the use of Assistive Technology to increase the inclusion, participation and engagement of children and young people

In 2024 the following composite reports were published by the Inspectorate:

- The Quality of Education for Children and Young People from Ukraine
- Meeting Additional Language Needs: Whole-school and Classroom Approaches for Inclusive Language Learning (EAL)

- Summer Programme 2023: Building Confidence and Connections: Findings from inspections and follow-up visits
- Early Intervention Classes for Children with Autism: Towards a coherent, inclusive system
- Young People on Alternative Educational and Training Pathways: Evaluation of Youthreach Provision
- Towards High-Quality Learning Experiences for All: Provision for children and young people with special educational needs in primary and post-primary school
- Improving Outcomes and Experiences for Children and Young People - Evaluation of Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) in Primary and Post-Primary Schools

SDG 4.5 – "*eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations"*
The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Programme is the key policy initiative of the department to address concentrated educational disadvantage at school level in a targeted and equitable way across the primary and post-primary sector. There is a Programme for Government commitment to establish a new DEIS Plus Scheme to support schools with the highest levels of educational disadvantage to improve educational outcomes, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

The Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) 2024-2030, alongside the plan for Implementation and Action for 2024-2026, was published on 16 July 2024.
This is a six-year strategy which aims to build on ongoing work across the continuum of education, including early learning and childcare, school (primary and post-primary) and further and higher education, to improve outcomes and ensure equity of access, opportunity and outcomes, as well as meaningful participation, for all Travellers and Roma.

The free schoolbooks scheme, introduced on a phased basis from the 2023/24 school year, provides funding directly to recognised primary, special and post-primary schools in the Free Education Scheme and eliminates schoolbook costs for the families of all children and young people attending these schools.

SDG 4.6 – "*Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy"*
In 2024, the Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood was published. This strategy aims to nurture and enhance literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy skills from birth through young adulthood. It recognises these fundamental skills as essential for personal and educational success, equipping individuals with the ability to access knowledge, information, and opportunities in a rapidly evolving society.
The strategy highlights the critical role of parents and families in supporting children's learning and seeks to strengthen partnerships between families, early learning and care settings, primary schools, and post-primary schools. By fostering collaboration, it aims to establish a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Additionally, it acknowledges that some families may require targeted support to engage fully in their children's education. Challenges such as

language barriers, literacy difficulties, digital exclusion, disabilities, and cultural or historical barriers to participation are recognised as factors that need to be addressed to ensure inclusive and equitable access to learning opportunities.

SDG 4.7 ***"Ensure all learners have the knowledge and skills needed to promote Sustainable Development"***

Ireland's 2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development – ESD to 2030 – aims to achieve SDG target 4.7. ESD is also recognised as a key enabler for the achievement of all 17 SDGs.

In 2024, the department continued to progress implementation of ESD to 2030:

- Funding of €415,000 to organisations to support ESD projects in schools including Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) and teaching resources
- Funding of €458,000 to schools for a range of ESD projects
- Funding of the Take 1 programme, providing TPL to school leaders on the integration of the SDGs into teaching and learning practice using a whole school approach
- Funding for an ESD Research Project through the New Foundations scheme
- Publication of a Leaving Certificate Curriculum on Climate Action and Sustainable Development
- Publication of four ESD Newsletters
- An ESD Stakeholder Forum attended by over 200 stakeholders
- An SDG Stakeholder Forum focused on SDG 4 – Quality Education in collaboration with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and a presentation on ESD to the SDG Champions
- Membership of the SDG Senior Officials Group and Interdepartmental Working Group
- Active participation in the EU Working Group for Schools on Learning for Sustainability
- Membership of the ESD-Net and Greening Education Partnership
- Compilation of Ireland's UN ECE ESD Monitoring Report

ESD to 2030 also contributes to the achievement of

SDG 13.3 ***"improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaption, impact reduction and early warning"***

and to **SDG 12.8** ***"ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature".***

SDG 4a – ***"Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all"***

The Planning and Building Unit provides design and technical guidance for school projects which promote good school designs which foster a safe school environment and positive social interaction for students and teachers. This includes spacious and well-lit social areas to build a sense of communality. School designs enable students to learn in diverse ways by engaging all their senses.

Schools are designed to be lively and welcoming; a suitable place for intellectual, creative, physical and social activity and inclusion; a place that the students will make their own with an atmosphere and sense of scale that is not over-powering, or impersonal. The designs help to provide a stimulus for the school's curricular and extra-curricular activities creating effective learning environments for all.

All new school buildings and extensions to schools are designed to be inclusive and to cater for persons with varying ranges of physical ability to ensure they are not disadvantaged by design limitations. School designs address the skills needed in a global, pluralistic, multicultural society, catering equally and fairly for the needs of all.

Schools provide facilities for physical activity and the promotion of well-being for all students.

Schools are also designed to be durable and functional in order to optimise the significant investment by the state in these important public projects.

Sustainability and energy efficiency are also key elements in the consideration of design for new schools and upgrades to existing schools. The Department has invested significantly in the energy upgrade and decarbonisation of school buildings in line with its Climate Action Roadmap 2023-2030.

The ultimate goal is to ensure that every child and young person can learn in an inspiring and sustainable physical environment that is appropriate to their needs and enables them to reach their full potential.

SDG 5 – *"Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"*

The STEM Education Policy Statement2017-2026 recognises the need to encourage more students to take up STEM subjects and improve STEM learning for everyone, regardless of background, ability, or gender, with a particular focus on increasing female participation.
It acknowledges that meaningful change requires action across the entire STEM education system. There is no single solution to achieving gender balance; instead, multiple approaches are needed to tackle different challenges within the system. These efforts must work together to address barriers that exist at home, in schools, and in society.

Actions being undertaken by the Department include collaboration with Research Ireland, to actively support STEM education and public engagement projects across the country through the Discover Programme. In 2024, the department funded eight projects, including the All-Ireland STEM Passport for Inclusion, led by Maynooth University. This initiative combines an educational qualification (Level 6 NFQ), educational support, and mentorship from industry role models, providing a unique pathway for approximately 5,000 girls to progress to third-level education and pursue a STEM qualification.

6. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Implementation of the 2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development – ESD to 2030 – continued in 2024. The Department delivered €415,000 in funding to organisations for ESD projects in schools including the delivery of Teacher Professional Learning and a range of ESD resources. €458,000 was delivered to schools for ESD projects ranging from school gardens and outdoor learning spaces to recycling and waste management projects, water and air monitoring, ESD workshops, rainwater harvesting systems, marine conservation projects and participation in international ESD competitions among others.

The 9th annual ESD Stakeholder Forum was held on 22 November 2024 with circa. 220 stakeholder attendees. The theme of the forum was "intergenerational equity" and keynote addresses were delivered by David Donoghue, Professor Laura Lundy, Beth Doherty and Professor Daniella Tilbury. A Youth Advisory Group was established to provide youth input on the day.

The Department collaborated with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications on an SDG Stakeholder Forum in June 2024 focused on SDG 4 – quality education.
Four ESD Newsletters were published, providing useful information for schools on ESD projects and resources. Schools around the country shared information on what they are doing in their school to support ESD. A number of competitions were held including one in collaboration with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The Department compiled Ireland's 2024 monitoring report for the UN ECE ESD Steering Committee.

7. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The department is conscious of its key role in promoting, protecting and vindicating the achievement of the key human right to education. The right to education is contained in several international human rights conventions to which Ireland is a party. The department also continues to deliver on its Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty.

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

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is one of the principal international human right instruments and covers a full range of economic, social

and cultural rights, including non-discrimination and the right to education. Ireland signed the ICESCR on 1 October 1973 and ratified it on 8 December 1989.

On 15-16 February 2024, Ireland had its 4th review by the UN expert committee on ICESCR. Ireland's review took place over two meetings at the UN offices in Geneva. The review was public and streamed live on UN WebTV where the video remains available for review.

Across the two days of the live session, and within subsequent written responses, the department responded to questioning covering special education, education for disadvantaged students, data collection and statistical research, school admissions and the RSE/SPHE curriculum. The Committee's concluding observations to Ireland will form the basis of the next cycle of reporting under the ICESCR.

Appendix A – Corporate Data

Annual Report Corporate Data 2024

In 2024, the Inspectorate completed a total of 2,994 inspections and advisory visits to schools and settings.

Table 1: Summary of Inspectorate activities, 2024

Inspections of early learning and care settings participating in the ECCE Programme1	546
Inspections of primary and special schools	1,042
Inspections of post-primary schools	815
School self-evaluation advisory visits	246
Inspections of centres for education	13
Other inspections, advisory visits and evaluation activities	332
Total inspections/advisory visits to early learning and care settings, schools, centres for education and other educational settings	**2,994**

When compared to the 2,717 inspections and advisory visits completed in 2023, this represents a 10% increase in overall activity. This increase can be attributed to a number of factors, including the resumption of certain inspection types that were paused or scaled back in previous years, as well as a thematic focus on specific areas of educational provision.

Table 2: Inspections of early learning and care settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, 2024

Early Years Education Inspection: Pre-School	**440**
Early Years Education Inspection: Follow-through	70
Early Years Education Inspection: Full Day Care	36
Total Early Years Education Inspections	**546**

Table 3: Inspections of primary and special schools, 2024

Actions following final CPSI2	
Advisory phone calls to DEIS[3] summer camp advisors	42
Advisory SASG[4]	2
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection: Final	13
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection: Initial	11
Curriculum evaluation	388
Evaluation for recognition as a Gaeltacht school (Primary)	17
Evaluation of provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)	26
Follow-through inspection	23
HSCL[5] inspection	15
Incidental inspection	204

Inclusion and access focused inspection	108
L2LP inspection	3
Pilot evaluation	7
SEN-focused incidental inspections (primary)	26
Summer Inclusion Programme (primary)	66
Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning	90
Total of primary and special school inspections	**1,042**

Table 4: Inspections of post-primary schools, 2024

Actions following final CPSI	
Advisory SASG	1
Boarding Child Protection Check	14
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection: Final	12
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection: Initial	11
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection: Boarding Facility: Final	2
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection: Boarding Facility: Initial	3
Evaluation for recognition as a Gaeltacht School (post-primary)	16
Evaluation of Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)	14
Follow-through Inspection	17
HSCL Inspection	15
Incidental Inspection	149
Inclusion and Access Focused Inspection	72
L2LP Inspection	28
Pilot Evaluation	10
Programme Evaluation	18
SEN-focused incidental inspections (post-primary)	14
Subject Inspection	289
Summer Inclusion Programme (post-primary)	85
Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning	42
Total of post-primary school inspections	**815**

Table 5: School Self-Evaluation Advisory Visits, 2024

School self-evaluation advisory visits to primary schools	
School self-evaluation advisory visits to post-primary schools	68
Total self-evaluation advisory visits	**246**

Table 6: Inspection of centres for education, 2024

Evaluation of Centres for Education	
Follow-through Inspection	1
Total of centre for education inspections	**13**

Table 7: Other Inspections and Advisory Visits, 2024

Evaluation of summer continuing professional development courses for primary teachers	
Inspection of Coláistí Gaeilge (Irish Colleges)	25
Inspection in European Schools	5
Inspection of settings other than recognised schools	1
International Tests	50
School Excellence Fund: advisory visits to schools	9
Section 29 Appeals (primary)	76
Section 29 Appeals (post-primary)	114
Total other inspections / advisory visits	**332**

Table 8: Publication of Inspection Reports, 2024

Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection – Final (primary and post-primary)	
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection – Initial (primary and post-primary)	17
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection – Boarding Facility – Final (primary and post-primary)	2
Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection – Boarding Facility – Initial (primary and post-primary)	2
Curriculum Evaluation (primary)	386
Early Years Education Inspections (early years)	380
Early Years Education Inspection: Follow-through (early years)	55
Evaluation of Centres for Education	10
Evaluation of Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs (primary)	21
Evaluation of Provision for Students with Special Educational Needs (post-primary)	11
Follow-through inspection (primary and post-primary)	11
Programme Evaluation (post-primary)	9
Subject Inspection (post-primary)	196
Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (primary)	61
Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (post-primary)	27
Total other inspections / advisory visits	**1,196**

Supporting the Parliamentary Process	2022	2023	2024
Parliamentary Questions Responded To	4651	4746	4,181

Memoranda for Government Received for Observations	197	169	146
Responses to Topical Issues	51	48	31
Responses to Adjournment (Commencement) Debates	45	49	31
Representations received by Minister and **Minister of State** Offices	1993	9816	**4,869**

Information Services	**2024**
Info General Enquiries	11,278
Formal Complaints Received	25
Phone calls to the CSU	38,374
Freedom of Information Requests **Received** **Closed**	 434 434
Subject Access Requests **Received** **Closed**	 94 94
Press Releases Issued	207
Twitter / X followers	85,000

Appendix B – Acronyms

AAC	Additional Assessment Component
AT	Assistive Technology
BLAST	Bringing Live Arts to Students and Teachers
CASD	Climate Action and Sustainable Development
CDNT	Children's Disability Network Team
CES	Comprehensive Employment Strategy
CIC	Children in Care
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
COGG	An Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta
CPSI	Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspection
CPSIBF	Child Protection and Safeguarding Inspections for use in boarding facilities
CSU	Customer Support Unit
CTB	Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DCU	Dublin City University
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DFTS	Drama, Film and Theatre Studies
DTCAGSM	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ELC	Early learning and care
EPS	Education Procurement Service
ERC	Educational Research Centre

ESBS	Education Shared Business Service
ESC	Education Support Centre
ESCI	Education Support Centres Ireland
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
ESF	European Social Fund
ETSS	Educational Therapy Support Service
EYEI	Early Years Education Inspection
FMS	Financial management system
GLP	Gaeltacht Learning Period
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HEPSS	Higher Education Payroll Shared Service
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
IAW	Integrity at Work
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDG	Inter-Departmental Group
ISL	Irish Sign Language
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
MIE	Marino Institute of Education
MTU	Munster Technological University
MU	Maynooth University
NAMER	National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading

NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NSP	No School Place
NTRIS	National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCR	Periodic Critical Review
PHCP	Paediatric Home Care Package
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PLC	Primary Language Curriculum
PLE	Professional Learning Experience
PME	Professional Master of Education
PPLI	Post Primary Languages Ireland
PPU	Procurement Policy Unit
PST	Professional Support Team
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SIC	Safer Internet Centre
SIM	School Inclusion Model
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
SSIU	Shared Services Implementation Unit

STAR	Supporting Traveller and Roma
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
T&S	Travel & Subsistence
TGAs	Teachers' Groups and Associations
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning
TPN	Teacher Professional Networks
TRES	Traveller and Roma Education Strategy
T-REX	Teachers' Research Exchange
TSI	Technical Support Instrument
TY	Transition Year
WRC	Workplace Relations Commission
WSE	Whole-school evaluation
YSTE	Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition

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