



EDUCATION

Our plan to transform primary
and second level education in Ireland

Labour

Our Mission is the provision of an inclusive and genuinely free of charge secular system of State run education, rooted in our communities, where every child is treated equally, where we invest in tackling disadvantage and provide the support every child needs to meet their full potential in world class schools where staff are resourced, respected, and valued.

Ireland now has the resources and Labour has the political will necessary to transform our model of education at primary and secondary level to ensure it represents the modern diversity of our country. Our comprehensive plan to build better together will invest in the future, guarantee equality of access, and ensure every child can thrive and succeed.

Our Education proposals are focused around six pillars of change:

1. Ensuring inclusive and reformed education with genuine separation of Church & State.
2. Tackling disadvantage.
3. Making education truly free.
4. Realising the rights of children with additional needs.
5. Providing world class schools with reduced class sizes.
6. Addressing the staffing crisis.

INCLUSIVE AND REFORMED EDUCATION

Labour will hold a new National Convention on Education, inclusive of young people and children, stakeholders, and an assembly of citizens to plan for a modern, secular, and equality-based model of education. Our objective is to secure a State run school system with religious instruction separated from the school day.

We will implement an ambitious programme of patronage divestment to multi-denominational patronage bodies like Educate Together and Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to provide more parental choice and recognise the growing diversity of our population.

Under Labour the process will recognise the importance of local primary schools and how those developed historically. We will seek to develop a renewed option of divestment to Community National Schools with reforms to ensure much stronger local control, democratic participation, and independence for the school board through the overall patronage of ETBs.

Every child should be treated equally when applying for a school place, and Labour will end the archaic policy of where up to 25% of school places are reserved for children and grandchildren of past pupils, while retaining the sibling rule.

Labour will also:

- » Provide financial incentives to support schools that divest to multi-denominational patronage, and that end gender segregation, acting to phase out state supported single sex schools within a decade.
- » Move religious instruction outside of daily teaching hours in order to ensure full respect for the beliefs of parents and children.
- » Phase out state subsidies for private fee paying second level schools.
- » Implement and resource the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy.
- » Address the use of reduced timetables, and the impact on vulnerable and disadvantaged students, with more tailored supports.

The Leaving Certificate

The Leaving Certificate, even with continuous assessment and project work, is still an outdated system bound by rote learning and terminal exams that cause mental stress for students. In a digital age it is time to review and replace our current system. The National Convention on Education will address this and ensure the voices of young people are heard.

Curriculums

An Gaeilge will remain central to our schools and Labour will trial the teaching of a full year at primary level in Irish and additional subjects at second level as Gaeilge. We will ensure education on sex and relationships is objective and inclusive. Primary schools will be resourced for the new foreign languages' initiative, and technology and digital skills will continue to be integrated in the school day. We will review existing subjects and the provision of new additions for the second level curriculum.

Digital Literacy

Labour will introduce a curriculum on digital media literacy, make schools smartphone free, ensure a robust legislative and regulatory framework is in place to protect children, and provide increased funding and resources for awareness campaigns, wellbeing training and support services.



TACKLE DISADVANTAGE

Labour will introduce a new DEIS+ cluster model as a focused stream of investment to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and trauma in areas with long term socio-economic and education disadvantage. It will provide for clusters of multidisciplinary teams modelled on the City Connects programme so that each child can access the services or resources they need to succeed, thrive, and achieve their full potential complemented by staffed nurture rooms and an expanded teacher support service.

Labour will commission a full review of the DEIS scheme with input from all stakeholders, and we will introduce lower pupil teacher ratios for all DEIS schools including a benchmark of 15:1 in urban band 1, and increased capitation grants to address historic underfunding. We will continue to invest in literacy and extend the JCSP Library Demonstration Project to more DEIS schools, progressively increase funding for the School Completion Programme and appoint more Home School Community Liaison Coordinators.

Labour will expand the Hot School Meals programme to every school and:

- » Introduce a programme during school holidays to provide students with meals.
- » Improve the nutritional content and quality of meals and phase out disposable/single-use containers by investing in kitchen facilities.
- » Transfer responsibility and oversight for School Meals to the Department of Education and encourage the involvement of local social enterprises in the provision of meals.

MAKE EDUCATION TRULY FREE

Education is our greatest tool for creating a more equal and prosperous Ireland and cost should not be a barrier for any child to reach their potential. Labour will ensure a fair start for every child and cut costs for parents by making education genuinely free, starting with a ban on voluntary contributions and increased annual capitation funding in line with the real costs of running a school.

The progress made with free schoolbooks must now be extended to the other costs of going to school. Labour will seek to introduce a universal Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance with provision of free uniforms where those are used. We will provide free school transport and invest in enough bus places, introduce a bike to school scheme, abolish State exam fees, ensure every child has access to the assistive technology they need, and provide funding to cover the cost of Home Economics materials and ingredients, as is done with subjects like Wood technology and metalwork.

REALISE THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

It is unacceptable that every school year hundreds of children with additional needs cannot access a school place near where they live or must travel for long distances every morning.

Labour will introduce an Autism Guarantee to secure an appropriate school place for every child and develop a fully inclusive model of education that vindicates the right to education for all children and complies with the UNCRPD and UNCRC. That means better long-term planning, multi-annual funding, and the use of Ministerial power to open classes when necessary. The system must better anticipate the future needs of children through improved data collection, and clear information on what resources and staffing are needed, and how budgets are allocated. Labour will:

- » Update the EPSEN Act and introduce a right to assessment of educational needs and individual education plans.
- » Provide sufficient current and capital funding to meet demand for special school places and classes integrated in mainstream schools and ensure school designs are fully accessible and take sensory processing into account.
- » Change the resource allocation model for special education teachers to ensure greater information on complex needs is taken into account. Schools should not be losing out, and disability advocacy organisations and DPOs must be part of the process when developing new policy initiatives.
- » Expand the Educational Therapy Support Service through the NCSE for more in-school therapists and provide better training for teachers during their degrees.
- » Invest in child-centred SNA provision, and value SNAs by removing the 72-hour obligation and provide training to a QQI Level 6 equivalent.
- » Undertake an Autism Audit of all schools and provide Autism CPD training to school staff to ensure that mainstream schools can facilitate the inclusion of children with Autism to the greatest extent possible.
- » Increase funding for the Summer Programme so that no child with additional needs is left without a place.
- » Provide additional time and supports in State exams for young people with dyslexia and other learning challenges.
- » Invest in pathways to further and higher education, apprenticeships, and bridging services for school leavers with additional needs.

WORLD CLASS SCHOOLS

Ireland has some of the largest class sizes in the EU and spends less than other developed nations. At second level demand for scarce school places will continue to grow in the years ahead and we will put in place enough new classrooms and introduce a centralised admission process. Labour will build a world class education system that educates our children to the highest standard and we will:



- » Reduce class sizes to the European average and ensure the capital programme is accurately profiled to our growing population to provide classrooms and school where they are needed, when they are needed.
- » Resource schools to adequately support children who are homeless or refugees.
- » Equalise the primary school day with the same hours for all classes.
- » Set continuously higher school standards for literacy and numeracy, assess the progress of Cineáltas: the Action Plan on Bullying, and continue to review curriculums at all levels.
- » Ensure tuition at higher level is available in every core subject in every school in the country, using remote learning and technology where necessary.
- » Review the complex school grants system to ensure it is fit for purpose and meeting the modern needs of schools at both primary and second level and increase the level of the Minor Works grant to cover increased maintenance costs.
- » Expand the NEPS service by hiring more educational psychologists, extend the pilot counselling support to all primary schools, and increase guidance and counselling posts in secondary schools.
- » Provide recurring annual funding for school libraries and develop a new national school library policy strategy incorporating the value of reading for joy.
- » Invest in modern PE halls, and resource science labs with new equipment, chemicals, and glassware for the changes to Leaving Certificate science subjects.
- » Develop a comprehensive plan to upgrade the energy efficiency of all schools.
- » Increase grants for digital technology and develop a new Digital Strategy for schools.

ADDRESS THE STAFFING CRISIS

The growing teacher recruitment and retention crisis is damaging the education of children, disrupting schools, putting huge pressure on principals and school management, and must be addressed. Labour will establish a teacher staffing taskforce to consider a broad range of issues including casualisation, pay scales, incremental credit for those working as teachers abroad, and shortening the PME to one year, and then act on its recommendations.

We will also:

- » Restore school leadership and middle management posts and invest in continuous professional development.
- » Put in place additional supports for educational staff when they are assaulted at work.
- » Support a more diverse teaching workforce with supports like the outreach learning hubs for improving Irish, and other pathfinder projects to encourage new entrants from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- » Value all educational and support staff with decent pay and conditions for school secretaries and caretakers.
- » Develop key worker housing to support the provision of public services in our cities and towns.

**BUILDING
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TOGETHER**



2 Whitefriars, Aungier Street, Dublin 2, Ireland. D02 A008
Tel: +353 1 6784700 Email: info@labour.ie
www.labour.ie