



Educate
Together

Budget 2023

Pre-budget submission 2023

Educate Together

Ireland's equality-based schools

Further information:

Luke O'Shaughnessy, Communications Manager

01 4292500 / info@educatetogether.ie



About Educate Together

Educate Together is the representative body for 117 equality-based schools in Ireland. A registered charity, Educate Together is the management body for 96 national schools and patron (or patron/trustee partner) of 21 post-primary schools, including voluntary secondary schools, community schools and community colleges. Educate Together is an independent charity which advocates for changes in areas of educational policy that will have a significant impact on generations of young people in Ireland.

As the management body for the fastest growing sector of primary schools, Educate Together works closely with the Department of Education (DE) and other partners to ensure the smooth running of the education system. As an equality-based school patron across primary and post-primary level, we teach a comprehensive Ethical Education curriculum, and we strive to ensure that every one of the 35,000 children and young people in our schools is supported to achieve their full potential. We are also working to increase access to Educate Together schools in order to meet the rapidly increasing demand for equality-based education, in line with government policy.

Educate Together is proud to have a reputation as an inclusive school network, welcoming students from a range of backgrounds and supporting every child to belong and achieve, whatever their educational needs. 57% of Educate Together schools have specialist autism classes; a much higher proportion than other sectors, and our network is highly diverse, ranging from small rural primary schools to large urban secondary schools.



Introduction

Budget 2023 is an opportunity for Government to live up to its stated targets for Ireland's education system and to properly resource that system via a range of targeted and improved supports to schools, management bodies and to the Department of Education's budget.

Educate Together proposes that the following changes need to be implemented to properly address the challenges faced in the Irish education system:

Invest in education

The rate of investment in education per child in Ireland consistently lags what is invested in other OECD countries. This limits educational potential and leaves many school communities across the country fundraising simply to make ends meet. Educate Together is calling for an increase to the overall education budget to bring investment in line with the OECD average of 4.5% of GDP.

Eliminate school inequalities

Government grants meet around half of the running costs of a primary school, leaving families to foot the rest of the bill, and children in disadvantage schools further behind. A 50% increase in capitation is now required, simply to enable primary schools to pay their bills in the coming school year.

Support voluntary initiative

The continued lack of proper funding for educational management bodies is a cause for great concern as these vital support bodies struggle to meet escalating demands. In the last 15 years, Educate Together's school network has doubled in size, yet its core management body grant has decreased in that time. A review of the management body grant is long overdue and Educate Together is calling for an increase of 50%.



Introduction (continued)

Fund school patronage transfers

Regarding the Government's 'reconfiguration' programme to identify religious-run schools to transfer to multi-denominational patronage, Educate Together has repeatedly pointed to the lack of funding as a major barrier to progress. The lack of specific funding for the process raises questions about the government's ability to achieve its own target of 400 multi-denominational schools by 2030. Educate Together is calling on the Government to properly resource the reconfiguration programme.

Invest in inclusion

Poor planning has left our education system out-of-step with the needs of children and young people. Families of autistic children and those with other disabilities and additional needs face impossible challenges in accessing services and school places. A comprehensive strategy and plan is required in order to re-balance provision so that every child can access a suitable school place in their local area, as well as suitable therapeutic and other supports.

Significant investment in our education system is necessary to make our education system work for more children and young people and their families. The introduction of a wide-ranging package of measures, as outlined below, will surely improve the daily life of those in our school communities.

Pilot Nurture Schools in Ireland

Despite decades of investment in DEIS and other schemes to tackle educational disadvantage, our education system continues to fail children and young people from poorer families and we need to find new ways to address this inequality. The Nurture Approach is an evidence-based intervention which involves creating a unique learner profile used to shape an individualised plan for each student to help them address barriers to their learning. Educate Together is currently supporting the Nurture Approach in a third of our schools through training and other resources. Educate Together is calling for every school to be provided with access to CPD, and resource appropriate staffing and skills to implement the Nurture approach in their school.



1) Invest in education

Ireland currently ranks the lowest out of 40 OECD countries in terms of how much of its national wealth it invests into education. Just 3% of our GDP is spent on educational institutions here, compared to an OECD average of 4.5%*, and chronic underinvestment is beginning to show, with serious concerns now emerging at all levels of our education system.

For decades in Ireland, we prided ourselves on having excellent primary and second-level schools. But Covid-19 has shone a light on the growing inequities in our system. Research before, during and after the pandemic has shown persistent inequalities: while wealthier families compensate through fundraising and paying for out-of-school supports, underfunding of our schools impacts most on poor and working-class students and those with additional needs.

Investment in education benefits every aspect of society, reducing inequalities and building strong foundations for future social and economic development. Instead of cutting taxes we need to invest now in our children and in our future through education.

- **Budget 2023**: Increase the overall education budget to bring investment in line with the OECD average of 4.5% of GDP

*www.esri.ie/publications/all-in-this-together-new-and-enduring-forms-of-inequality-post-pandemic

2) Eliminate school inequalities by providing adequate funding to primary schools

Primary school capitation currently stands at €183 per pupil - nearly 10% lower than it was in 2010. Research has shown that state grants only meet around half of the costs of running a primary school, leaving parents to foot the rest of the bill. This leads to huge inequalities, with some communities able to fund the gap and others are left behind.

With recent increases in energy and other costs, primary schools will face unprecedented funding challenges this coming September. Parents are already facing a cost-of-living crisis and can no longer plug the gap. More than a decade of underfunding of this crucial stage of children's education means that a 50% increase in capitation is now required, simply to enable primary schools to pay their bills in the coming school year.

- **Budget 2023**: Increase the primary school capitation grant by 50%

3) Support voluntary initiative by restoring funding for voluntary management bodies

Volunteers who manage schools save the state millions. Our education system is significantly enhanced by the skills, time and initiative of more than 22,000 volunteers on primary school boards of management alone. These volunteers bring huge added value to our education system and they deserve adequate support and recognition.

The management bodies that support these volunteers operate on a fraction of the costs of their state counterparts, as well as bringing significant educational value to the system. The grants paid to management bodies to advise and support primary school boards of management have not increased since 2006, while the costs involved in supporting school management have risen sharply, as the legal, HR and governance requirements have increased. Because of their lean structures, a small investment in voluntary management bodies goes a long way; increasing management body grants by 50% would represent a tiny cost to the state, but would have a hugely positive impact on the thousands of volunteers that manage our primary schools.

As a management body for 96 primary schools, Educate Together receives a total core grant of €133,000, reduced in 2006 from €144,000. Since then the number of boards of management we support has more than doubled and the demands of boards and of the DE and other statutory bodies has increased. The volunteers who manage our schools need more support, not less, and a review of this grant is long overdue.

- **Budget 2023: Increase management body grants by 50%**



4) Fund school patronage transfers

The government has pledged to increase the number of multi-denominational schools to 400 by the year 2030. Parents have been seeking this change for decades, yet the Department of Education's 'reconfiguration' programme, which aims to identify religious-run schools that could transfer to multi-denominational patronage, has no dedicated programme budget, nor roadmap, or interim targets.

Lack of resources for change is a key reason for lack of progress in school transfers to date and it is clear now that reforms will not happen without strategic investment to support and incentivise change. Northern Ireland recently invested an additional £1.9m STG to support schools through the transformation process as they work towards integrated status. This investment will respond to parental demand in Northern Ireland and enable a greater number of children from different community backgrounds to be educated together.

Instead of paying continued lip service to reconfiguration, the government must properly fund a programme of change. It is beyond time for annual ring-fenced funding to be put in place for the Department of Education to support the amalgamation and reconfiguration of existing facilities so that all families can finally access schools that match their conscience and lawful preference. Ring-fenced capital funding is also required for the building of new schools where this is required.

- **Budget 2023: Invest 5.9 million* to kick-start the Government's reconfiguration programme**

*A strategy and plan must be funded in the first instance and actual costs will be based on the actions in that plan. This figure is based on the additional figure invested in integrated education in Northern Ireland this year, adjusted pro-rata per head of population.



5) Invest in inclusion

Educate Together believes that every child should have access to an inclusive education in their local area, no matter what their background or educational needs, and we have been working towards this future for more than 40 years. Current policies to move towards greater inclusion system-wide are to be welcomed. However, aspirations must be met with planning and investment if inclusion is to be achieved.

The current situation is unacceptable: poor planning has left our system out-of-step with the needs of children and young people. Families of autistic children and those with other disabilities and additional needs face impossible challenges in accessing assessments, therapeutic services and even school places. English as an additional language provision is insufficient, and children from migrant and refugee backgrounds are currently without crucial translation, interpretation and mother tongue services.

Schools that welcome students with additional needs are left without the funding and supports they need to provide an appropriate education and research also shows that teachers still lack confidence in meeting the needs of children with additional needs and those from migrant backgrounds.

These challenges are exacerbated in developing schools, which cater for large numbers of children with additional needs and are relatively understaffed because of issues with current staffing models. All of this impacts negatively not only on students with additional needs but on all students.*

The following are required to get us onto the right path:

- A comprehensive strategy and plan to re-balance provision so that every child can access both a suitable school place and necessary services in their local area.
- Multi-annual funding to implement the plan over a five-year period. This should include:
 - immediate allocation of additional teacher, assistant and management posts in developing schools where they are urgently needed.
 - increased funding for assessments, therapeutic and language supports, and funding of structures to coordinate provision across schools, the HSE and other bodies.
 - increased investment in teacher education to build greater confidence and capacity in inclusion across early years, primary and second-level education.
- **Budget 2023: Provide one-off funding to develop a comprehensive plan to re-balance school provision.**
- **Budget 2023: Ensure sufficient multi-annual funding to implement the plan over five years.**

*www.rte.ie/news/education/2021/0329/1206788-special-needs-support

6) Pilot the successful Nurture Schools approach in Ireland

The past two years have negatively impacted all schools, in particular children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and from families of low social and economic capital who are at risk of educational disadvantage. Despite decades of investment in DEIS and other schemes to tackle educational disadvantage, our education system continues to fail children and young people from poorer families and we need to find new ways to address this inequality.

The Nurture Approach is an evidence-based intervention which involves creating a unique learner profile used to shape an individualised plan for each student to help them address barriers to their learning. Educate Together is currently supporting a third of our schools through training and other resources, the approach is also in many other schools nationally.

This intervention works, children's engagement with school and learning increases, their relationships with school staff and peers improves - we know once these things improve so too do their outcomes from education.

- **Budget 2023: Implement a pilot project to demonstrate the positive outcome of the Nurture approach for students in Ireland.**
- **Budget 2023: Provide every school with access to CPD, and resource appropriate staffing and skills to implement the Nurture approach in their school.**



Further information:

Luke O'Shaughnessy, Communications Manager

info@educatetogether.ie

www.educatetogether.ie

01 429 2500

Company Number 286202

Registered Charity Number 20033309



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