

Green Party Education Policy



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1. Summary & Highlights

Investment in education and the welfare of our youth is needed now more than ever. It will result in an economic return. If we fail to invest effectively, the ability of our workforce to attract and retain jobs will be seriously damaged in decades to come. The Green Party will strengthen **Excellence, Equality** and **Inclusion** throughout the education system. Ireland is a very open economy and there is substantial competition for jobs here from across Europe. The Post-primary Education Forum representing parents, teachers and school managers proposed in their "A 2020 Vision for Education" (2013) that education funding be 7.5% of GDP by 2020. We plan a steady increase across all educational levels from the current 6% (OECD Education at a Glance, 2013) up to **7% of GDP by 2020**. This will strengthen the education of the Irish workforce and increase educational income from abroad.

The highlights of our proposed educational reform are:

- Enhanced Special Needs supports
- Fairer schools' admission policies
- Strong investment in teacher training
- Improved teacher-pupil ratios with more small-group learning opportunities
- Pre-primary strong regulation
- Funding for an additional year pre-school education
- Easier travel to school, including support for small rural schools
- Primary level reform of curriculum, skills development and homework
- Radical reform of the Leaving Certificate
- Grow rather than shrink the Further Education sector
- Third level Central Application Office entry system reform
- Third level inter-college flexibility for greater student choice
- Grow third level online training to tap into worldwide educational market

2. Education Policy

2.1. Special Needs

We will **protect** and value **Teaching Resource Hours** and the role of **Special Needs Assistants** in school. All **Special Needs** Assistants must have a recognised appropriate qualification. We will strongly maintain and improve supports for students with special needs. We will use school expertise, in conjunction with parents, in allocating student access to learning supports. This will reduce over-reliance on costly assessments (National Education Psychological Service) and give more flexibility to schools. We will systematically review the needs and welfare of students with special needs to create and ensure an integrated approach across our health and education systems.

2.2. School Admissions and Religious Education

All schools receiving any state funding should be fair, transparent and inclusive in their policies and practices for entrance and expulsion of students. A key goal is to end the cherry-picking of students by certain schools. In the tradition of comprehensive and community schools, they should proactively welcome children of diverse characteristics, needs and abilities, cultures and socio-economic groups¹. We propose the elimination of Section 37 (1) of the Education and Employment Equality Act 1998

A strong **admissions policy** aims to balance the needs of the environment, as well as the diverse needs of both individual students and communities. Long-term development of housing and education provision/admission policies will aim to minimise travel costs for students, parents and the community. Travel costs represent ecological costs, financial costs, and time costs. Minimising these costs is most easily achieved when everyone goes to the nearest school. However, the Green Party supports the element of choice in the Irish school system, where students can apply to schools with an ethos that suits them. The varied kinds of ethos found in Irish schools is one of the strengths of the educational system. However, **we will end the practice where schools can discriminate against pupils in the admissions process on the basis of religion, or of special educational needs**. The main determinants of who should be admitted should be the geographic range (to be established by each school in consultation with the department of education), a preference for students if an older sibling has previously attended, and finally a lottery system based on all the applications received before a certain date. While we recognize the concerns of certain minority religions regarding the inability of students to attend a school of their own ethos in certain circumstances, we consider that the rights of individual children to an education in a nearby school (which is mainly funded by all taxpayers, regardless of their religion) is paramount.

We will meet these two potentially conflicting needs by encouraging students to attend schools nearer their homes and keeping religious activities of schools to after (or before) the core school day. This may, for example, potentially include simultaneous extra-curricular classes from different religious groups taking place alongside each other within the same school buildings. This change in approach

¹ A 2020 VISION FOR EDUCATION FÍS DON OIDEACHAS 2020 Post-Primary Education Forum (2013) The Post-Primary Education Forum (PPEF) is an umbrella group comprising representation from parents, trade unions, school leaders and management bodies involved in the post- primary education sector in Ireland.

will better enable the inclusion of the currently greater religious diversity in Ireland, and help reduce cultural isolation among different groups of children of diverse faiths and of no faith. We propose amending Rule 68 of the Rules for National Schools which states that "...a religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school..." to instead state that "...a moral and ethical spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school...". This change in religious education may impact on the role that religious bodies wish to maintain in particular schools. Accordingly, we will continue the work of the Advisory body on Patronage and Pluralism that represents patron bodies and parents. We will expand its remit to ensure that all schools are welcoming and inclusive, whilst still respecting their particular ethos. In particular, we will work to prevent any pupil or group of pupils being separated from their peers during the school day based on their religious or cultural background. During core school hours there will be non-denominational instruction on morals, ethics and religions. This approach will provide all pupils in Irish schools with an education about a wide range of thought systems and cultures.

2.3. Teacher Training

We welcome educational reform, including that of the Junior Cycle, but careful attention needs to be paid to ensure that **teachers are properly trained and resourced**, and the extra time required to develop teaching materials and lesson plans is factored into the roll-out plan. Without this extra investment, the reform will fail our students, since reform is futile unless resources to back it up are fully implemented. We will fund training programmes for teachers in how to implement **innovative teaching practices** including peer-to-peer learning, more effective group learning, develop Junior Cycle short courses and target online learning skills. These methods are particularly well suited to ICT (information and communication technology) training and ICT based learning, where teachers need to facilitate the learning of constantly changing technology, without necessarily having learned it ahead of their students. We will ensure that teachers have received innovative ICT training to deliver the reformed Junior Cert in a confident and effective manner.

The Green Party will review and **improve** the system of **training and continuing professional development for teachers** after qualification. This will include:

- A survey of current professional courses available at primary and secondary level.
- Placements in schools identified as having 'very good' or 'excellent' teaching by the inspectorate should be part of ongoing teacher training as a cost effective, practical and contextual method of provision.
- Mentoring of trainee teachers by existing teachers at second level, similar to primary level mentoring, as called for in the Post Primary Education Forum "A 2020 Vision for Education" document.
- Regular In-service training available for Transition Year teaching, since there is no training available, and the standard of delivery of this year varies markedly amongst teachers and schools.
- A fully resourced training in-service for the reformed Junior Cycle curriculum.

- Further training supports in (i) Special Education Needs (SEN) including the specific requirements to assist exceptionally able children, including the Special Education Support Services (SESS) (ii) team teaching, peer learning and project learning methods (iii) Nationwide ICT training for teachers under the National Centre for Technology in Education, so that ALL teachers have developed ICT skills relevant to teaching. The use of ICT in supporting those with Additional Educational Needs should be a component of all ICT training (iv) Further training supports in the teaching of English as a second language in mainstream classes (v) training for senior management in schools allied with probationary periods for senior managers.
- Ensure the provision and delivery of training for teachers on how to incorporate mental resilience and emotional awareness into their education programmes/classes and teach the skills of mental resilience and recognition of emotional states to their students.

A **likely predictor of educational success** is a **motivated teaching workforce**, and increased autonomy and responsibility for teachers will motivate them². Motivated teachers can lead to motivated students. We will review curricular change to ensure that it is **increasing the autonomy of teachers** to adapt the learning environment both to their own teaching strengths and the aptitudes of their students. We recognise that teachers need support at a time of radical reform of the system alongside an increase in workload, including IT facilities for the teachers themselves and time for class preparation. We will improve the status of teaching in the community by providing supports (including fee supports) for teachers seeking more extensive further education at Masters or PhD level, and other forms of further study. Appointments to posts of responsibility will not be based on seniority but on experience, qualifications, and skills, including previous experience working in the private sector. Increasing the chances of promotion based on performance will increase teacher motivation. We will pay closer attention to the suitability of entrants into the teaching profession. All teachers applying to enter teacher training or applying for teaching positions will have aptitude assessment in a live classroom setting. This will help determine their suitability for a teaching career. We will introduce stress support/management for teachers. Each school will be required to provide time and resources to regularly review and implement changes of practice to help teachers deal with stress, burn-out, and other mental health issues.

2.4. Improved Teacher-Pupil Ratio

The goal of the Green Party in improving pupil-teacher ratio is not simply that a given class of nineteen students now has eighteen in it. Our primary goal in reducing the pupil teacher ratio is to enable the more flexible use of alternative teaching experiences, such as one-on-one learning, and enabling small group peer-to-peer learning. These experiences may only represent a small number of hours in a student's learning year, but they can be critical in establishing new patterns of engagement and understanding among students and teachers. They also permit greater time devoted to active

² Karabenick, S. A., & Conley, A. (2011). Teacher Motivation for Professional Development. Math and Science Partnership - Motivation Assessment Program, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109; EEJ Thoonen, PJC Slegers, FJ Oort, THD Peetsma, FP Geijsell (2011) How to Improve Teaching Practices: The Role of Teacher Motivation, Organizational Factors, and Leadership Practices *Educational Administration Quarterly* 47: 496-536

learning outside the classroom and school, where higher levels of student supervision are required and improve student and teacher motivation.

2.5. Pre-Primary

After rapid expansion in the provision of pre-school facilities, staff training and facility management are less than perfect. We **will comprehensively review pre-school childcare provision** across families, childcare, and creches. This will assess how parents can take an increased role in the management of pre-school facilities of all kinds, to ensure greater openness and better care. It will also investigate improving availability of more alternative child-care options in each geographic area: an increase in choice for parents can help drive better standards. We will also review how to effectively implement **stronger regulation of this sector**.

2.5.1. Pre-Primary to Primary Transition

Evidence suggests that starting students earlier in ‘academic style’ education has negative, rather than positive, impacts on long term educational development. Preschool care in Ireland is poorly developed, and children are commencing in primary school very young (40% at age 4). This is in marked contrast to early education elsewhere in Europe. We will reform this area in two ways. Firstly, we will extend funding for pre-school from one to two years, allowing more children to join primary school at a later age. Secondly, we will reform the provision of Junior and Senior Infant classes, resourcing it sufficiently to bring it more in line with more flexible pre-school education than with formal schooling.

2.5.2. Information Flow from Pre-primary to Primary

We will draw up regulations to enable a smoother transition from pre-school to primary. This will make sure that useful knowledge about an individual child’s characteristics and needs will be communicated from the pre-school environment to the primary school. A report on every child will be completed on leaving pre-school care.

2.6. Primary

The **primary curriculum** needs an **extensive review**. Currently, it is too packed with an excessive emphasis on delivering too much prescribed content in too many subjects. Ireland has the lowest primary core curriculum time dedicated to mathematics in the OECD (OECD Education at a Glance Report, 2013), and a very low dedication to science. The revised curriculum should place a greater emphasis on **helping children acquire skills** rather than knowledge. This will give teachers greater autonomy in adapting the curriculum to the learning styles of their students. In parallel with the existing emphasis on literacy and numeracy, greater emphasis will be on:

- **ICT skills**, including but not limited to creative programming skills and internet research skills. This will be linked to upgrading ICT facilities in many schools, and integrated with expansion of the teaching of mathematics skills.
- **Greater physical activity** during the school week. We will further promote and reward schools for participating in the existing programmes to encourage movement such as the

Active school flag, Fitness weeks, Community Health Weeks and for providing students with opportunities to be active - before, after and during the school day. Investment in schools which do not currently have proper indoor PE facilities needs to be prioritised to ensure that all students the facilities necessary to support this initiative. While fitness is not the primary responsibility of the schools, they need to play their part in helping children build lifelong patterns of physical activity to protect their health and reduce where possible the increase in childhood obesity.

- **Scientific enquiry skills:** observation and experimentation, primarily in the natural world, thus developing their scientific skills, numeracy skills, and environmental awareness.
- **Art, music and drama skills:** promoting creativity and confidence that are the basis of future academic performance.
- **English language skills:** competence in oral language is the basis of literacy and success in learning.
- Rather than rigidly giving each subject or skill a particular time allocation in each year, school principals will devise a teaching plan that will enable flexibility for teachers with particular specialisations to deliver more material on those subjects in a year when the students are in their class.

2.6.1. Homework Reform

The extensive use of homework in some primary schools is not based on any evidence that it is valuable at this age³. Too much homework too young may build a culture of fear, failure and boredom that damages future academic performance. Available evidence provides no indication that homework in primary school improves grades in tests, and some indication that it may actually reduce academic performance if used more than once a month per core subject⁴. We **seek to protect childhood** as a place **for exploration, play and discovery**. Primary school homework activities should centre on developing independence and creativity. We will act on the 2010 Oireachtas submission proposal of the IPPN (Irish Primary Principal's Network) suggesting that homework in its current form in primary schools should be phased out. We will conduct a systematic review of actual practices in schools informed by the input of teachers, parents and international experts, and implement continued monitoring of actual practice in schools, to maximise benefits to children. We will define clear guidelines with age-appropriate and child-appropriate limits. These guidelines will clarify the goals of homework. These include encouraging the engagement of the parents/guardians with the child in more open-ended educational experiences, supported by the school. These guidelines will help parents and teachers to work together to encourage confidence in the growing child.

2.6.2. 2.6.2 Education Provision and Balancing Parental Provision

In order to ensure better work-life balance for parents juggling their working arrangements and their childcare/children's education, can the Council consider the policy of:

³ Review of Educational Research , 2006, 76:1-62

⁴ Homework and Attainment in Primary Schools (1999) British Educational Research Journal, 25, 323-341

1. putting pre-school childcare facilities into every primary school in the country. Co-locating them allows parents with more than one child to do a single drop-off, thereby reducing traffic and parents' stress levels;
2. requiring before-school and after-school child care service provision in every primary school in the country;
3. planning safe walking and cycling routes to school from the residential areas to be served by the school at the stage when new school sites are being identified and procured. The necessary land should be acquired in tandem with the school site itself, if required

2.7. Secondary

2.7.1. Guidance Teachers

The Green Party proposes restoring the ex-quota guidance provision in second level schools. The decision by the Department of Education and Skills to remove the ex-quota guidance allocation in second level schools has resulted in a reduction of 51.4% in the time allocated to guidance counselling services. Schools are being faced with making extremely difficult choices between subject provision and guidance.

At a time of immense need among young people, we are witnessing a shameful reduction in counselling services. Cuts to such services reduce the opportunity for young people to have crucial easy access to professionally trained counsellors. The personal, educational and vocational support services in schools through the work of their guidance counsellor has deteriorated seriously in the past three years. Research has showed that one-to-one counselling had been neglected, and counselling has become a reactionary crisis intervention service.

2.7.2. Junior Cycle

We do not support the proposed new Junior Certificate assessment of children starting in second year, as many students are too young at this stage for such assessment and its associated stresses. We will explore alternative (and more flexible) assessment options at different stages, and pilot moving the proposed new Junior Certificate continuous assessment to 3rd year only. We are concerned that the absence of a State awarded Junior Certificate under the new scheme could damage prospects of students planning to attend third level in the UK. The Junior Certificate is used by UK Third Level colleges in offering provisional places prior to Leaving Certificate results, and we think it unlikely that school issued certificates will be considered equivalent when students are ranked versus UK students. State certification of a core component of the final examination Junior Cycle results should be implemented to avoid this problem.

2.7.3. Leaving Certificate Examination Reform

We will introduce far-reaching changes into the mode of Leaving Certificate assessment, to improve real learning skills rather than a focus on memory recall learning for a specific exam. This will include much greater use of unseen material in the examination process.

Developing critical thinking skills is vital for students to grow into effective citizens and workers. For this reason, we will pay particular attention to the development of these skills within the Leaving Certificate syllabus. By placing the focus on assessment of critical thinking, we hope that teachers will

devise useful approaches to teaching critical thinking, that are appropriate to their own students. To support this, we will increase training in the teaching of critical skills.

We will complete a thorough review of each Leaving Certificate subject examination. This will quantify how much each subject exam is assessing varied student skills (memory, lateral thinking, logical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, environmental awareness, visual, musical skills, critical thinking skills, independent project work). This review will form the basis for a reform and improvement of the examinations to provide a broader assessment of skills, and to communicate that information on different skills as part of the examination results. Changing assessment will allow teachers to broaden the range of teaching they can deliver to students. We will review the benefits of a staggered examination of the Leaving Certificate over the final year, with 80% of exam results coming on-stream before students leave school. This will allow better counselling in choice of course prior to leaving school, informed by what grades students are likely to achieve. Poor choice of third level subjects represents a costly waste of taxpayers' money. We will restore funding for guidance counsellors to support students in their decision-making.

2.7.4 State Exam Fees

The Green Party seeks to abolish fees for sitting the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. At present, students without a medical card must pay €109 to sit the Junior Cert and €116 for the Leaving Cert. To many hard pressed families, these exam fees are an unwelcome source of extra stress. Abolishing them would bring Ireland closer to truly free second level education.

2.7.5 Relationships and Sexuality Education

The Green Party proposes to ensure that external RSE programmes are provided to educate students most in need pending the review of RSE undertaken in April of 2018. We would ensure all teachers who undertake the teaching of SPHE are formally trained in an ongoing course reflective of the complex nature of the subject to ensure the module is provided by professionals trained to deal with the sensitive topics included in the curriculum. We would ensure that teachers are fully prepared to provide the course in its entirety

2.8. Higher Education

2.8.1. Investment

Increased funding is needed to cope with projected increased demand. Funding per student in Irish higher education is 30 per cent below UK levels (Economic and Social Research Institute, A Study of Future Demand for Higher Education in Ireland, 2012). Thus, the higher education system is providing good value for money. However, more money is needed, since that report also estimates that the number of students joining third level will increase in the next decade, and there are areas where improving the quality of the educational provision needs further investment. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 ("Hunt report") highlights that projected numbers of new entrants will rise to almost 50,000 students in 2015, and to almost 65,000 in 2025. Expensive fees in most of the UK will further accelerate the decline in the number of Irish students studying in the UK, while increasing pressure of UK students seeking to study in Ireland. Substantial additional funding will be needed just to keep up with the predicted growth in enrolment.

2.8.2. Third Level Entry

The Irish Universities Association has stated that, contrary to the often-stated opinion that the leaving certificate is currently fair, that it “promotes significant inequity through the capacity of the more advantaged to game the system.”⁵ Our objective is to transform third level entry so that the competitive points race is greatly diminished, allowing deeper second level learning to occur with less emphasis on exam technique. We will do this in three ways.

(1) The various changes proposed by the Irish Universities Association to reform entry will be piloted in third level colleges and results of these pilot studies will inform further changes to entry. In addition to the proposals they suggested, we will investigate whether more specific matching of examined subjects to chosen courses would allow better matching of skills to courses, as is common in the UK and other education systems, which suffer less from the points race phenomenon, since the interchangeability of points across subjects creates a false sense in students’ minds that very different learning experiences are somehow equal.

(2) Third level entry reform will markedly increase the proportion of students entering by non-standard routes.

(3) We will channel entry into fewer more generalist courses, enabling students to make decisions after entry into college, and to compete at college level for places on courses with more highly restricted numbers. Thus, students will complete an initial general course semester or year at third level prior to entering into highly competitive courses, with progress to the more competitive courses dependent on third level assessment within the colleges themselves. This alternative approach is intended to improve course choices for students and allow better selection of appropriate students, applying third level selection criteria for third level courses.

2.8.3. Greater Student Mobility

We will reform funding models to benefit student access and mobility. In essence, under this approach, the state funding follows the student, not the institution. We will structure and invest in the Further Education sector, spanning post-Junior Certificate stage to lifelong learning. We will reform both the Further Education and Third Level sectors to allow greater mobility between relevant courses, so that a student starting after school in a local college may naturally transition at a later stage to carry forward credits to a more specialised centre elsewhere. The current HEA approach of trying to engineer strategic alliances among nearby Irish institutions offers little benefit to the students in those institutions, and may simply add layers of bureaucracy. Instead, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) should negotiate with third level institutes to set and monitor yearly targets for increased mobility, as judged by students transferring courses, and by students taking modules in other institutions. This pressure for improved mobility within the Irish third level system will prepare it to take an active part in the complex future of world class higher education, involving active international strategic alliances and collaborations between institutions. The Green Party calls for the introduction of non-means tested maintenance grants in addition to SUSI for students with physical disabilities

⁵ The IUA (Irish Universities Association) August 2012 report on “Reform of Entry to University”.

2.8.4. Increase in PhD Graduates.

PhD level research helps drive innovation and economic growth. Companies are attracted to countries that invest in this level of training⁶. The proportion of those educated to PhD level in Ireland is only at OECD average, well below that of Germany. We will increase the proportion of the research budget to support quality training at research MSc and PhD levels, with a goal of increasing the number of graduating PhDs in 2020 by 20% versus 2012 levels. We will set more ambitious targets for third level institutes in attracting EU and other non-exchequer research funding to Ireland, with greater supports for third level institutes that succeed in this. We will revise company tax incentives to ensure that a greater proportion of the tax credits for research currently benefiting Irish industry are going into increased research training of company staff. This will include graduate research MSc and PhD level training. This will up-skill the research capabilities of the Irish workforce and will improve Ireland's long-term competitiveness.

2.8.5. Online Education to Expand Education as an Export.

We will build on the economic return of building a strong third level sector attracting students from abroad. Particular emphasis will be on developing distance learning/blended learning approaches that showcase our educational skills via e-learning platforms that attract new students worldwide. This investment will bring new teaching jobs into Ireland that brings income into the country. It will also attract international students to spend periods of study in Ireland. To develop this, we will strategically grow the range and quality of courses relying on computer-delivered "e-learning". Online learning (e-learning) is creating a revolution in how people worldwide are gaining new skills and qualifications. We need to strongly position Ireland in this sector, building on our English language environment and educational track record. We will:

- Review the long-term development of e-learning in Universities, Institutes of Technology and Further Education Centres.
- Invest in and **promote** a greater number and variety of **Irish third level e-learning courses**.
- Build Ireland's brand reputation for e-learning and "blended" e-learning/ traditional learning, by regularly assessing course quality.
- Promote Irish e-learning offerings abroad using combined marketing teams from different colleges.
- A proportion of this programme will be dedicated to building online teaching resources appropriate for communities in developing countries that need them most.

2.9. Further Education, including PLC courses

Lower access to and uptake of post-secondary education among those from disadvantaged communities will be tackled by **increased structured investment in the Further Education sector**. The OECD 2013 "Education at a Glance" report highlights the relationship between low youth unemployment in countries that adopt youth education within workplace-based formal apprenticeship

⁶ [Halse C.](#) Mowbray S (2011) Editorial: the impact of the doctorate. *Studies in higher education*. 36:513-525

training. We will roll out **more extensive use of apprenticeship based training approaches** for 15-20 year olds such as that adopted in Germany. However, compared to other countries, we have less experience of such an apprenticeship based training culture in Ireland. Accordingly, we will pilot investment in training programmes for workplace trainers, led by practitioners from companies with strong experience in this area.

We will support the recommendations of the McIver Report (2004) on Further Education to adequately resource this area. We will provide stronger supports for students from disadvantaged backgrounds accessing FE educational routes. We will maintain and develop a full range of courses across the sector, from technical to professional to arts education. **We will reverse the recent government financial and structural downgrading of Further Education**, which effectively seek to replace the broader educational role to a more limited workforce training role. We will:

- Lift the cap on student numbers for Further Education centres.
- Reverse changes to the Pupil Teacher Ratio that will allow specialist courses to be maintained with adequate teaching staff.
- Reverse cuts to guidance support.
- The current application of “section 30” regulations to Further Education sector is inappropriate. We will ensure distinct registration of Further Education teaching by the Teaching Council or another body, including recognition of industry experience in evaluating teacher qualifications.

2.10. Other Areas for Reform

The Green Party will press for reforms in the following additional areas:

(1) Improving healthy travel to and from school. The Green Party strongly supports the Green Flag and “walking bus” initiatives that support students choosing healthy and ecologically friendly transport to school. At local level we will prioritize better cycle and pedestrian access to schools in urban areas and villages, and take these into account in planning future housing and school locations.

(2) Improving English as a second language: We will ensure that adequate resources are restored to ensure that all students in our education system with weak English verbal or written skills receive the proper support in their schools to learn English as a Foreign Language, regardless how long they have been in the country. This will to allow them to overcome language barriers so that they can achieve their full potential and contribute to society and the economy.

(3) Meeting diverse student needs: The Green Party in government will set up an advisory committee with a 12-month timeframe to investigate and advise on the educational provision for exceptionally able students, especially in light of Junior Certificate assessment reform. Greater freedom and material supports for teachers to allow certain students depart from curriculum will improve student motivation and in some cases reduce their disruptive influence on the learning environment of fellow students. Home education provides a vital alternative, currently supported by the constitution and legislation, and is a particularly vital solution for students who cannot fit into mainstream education. We will give home-educated children equal access to school-verified (project) components of Junior

and Leaving Certificate examination, which they are currently denied, since the Dept of Education makes no proper provision for this. We will introduce regulations to give students the opportunity to be flexi-schooled, partly in school and partly at home, as meets their needs. This will be administered by the National Educational Welfare Board registration procedure for each child.

(4) Research shows that the home environment is the most critical predictor of educational success. The Green Party will invest strongly in training supports for parents to help them with different aspects of education, at different stages. We will deliver accessible short linked modules of learning, delivered via phone apps and the web. We will pilot sessions in schools during or after school hours, to help parents to learn to become active supporters of their children's education. These will include English language supports for parents with poor English skills.

(5) We will invest more support for LC applied and LC vocational, and promote more recognition for these alternative qualifications at entry into other courses. We will also review how to incentivise employers to not only value these qualifications, but to also play a more extensive role in work experience and other placement based training.

(6) ICT materials for teaching use in schools are not always available that are suited to the Irish environment, including local language, history, social environment and natural environment. We will provide funding so that schools or teachers developing materials for use in their own classrooms can make them available to other teachers in a useful format.

(7) We will invest in the creaking physical infrastructure of the Irish primary and secondary sectors. We will ensure that cost effective broadband is available in all schools. We will ensure that all new school developments meet high standards of environmental sustainability and will be designed to deal with long term rather than simply short term educational projected needs. We will invest in the refurbishment of schools. We will provide assistance to help schools achieve the Green Schools Flag, and expand its environmental targets.

(8) Third level fees and grants. In the current economic climate, we call for a freezing of the current registration/tuition fees till 2019 and aim where possible to gradually reduce these fees. We will review on an ongoing basis the funding mechanism for third level education (fees grants and loans), to ensure equity and access, but also to avoid imbalances (excessive flows of students into or out of the Irish system from neighbouring countries). We will review the inefficiencies of the third level grant system which cause needless uncertainty and suffering to students. We will increase grant supports for those from disadvantaged backgrounds in parallel with increased alternative entry routes.

(9) Gaeilge. The Green Party strongly supports the continued growth and development of the Irish language. However, we are concerned that the large amount of time and effort dedicated to the language at both primary and secondary level is not leading to a higher usage of the language in daily life.

The Green Party Irish Language Policy has a number of educational reforms. We will:

- Establish two separate Leaving Certificate subjects, Irish language (compulsory) and literature (optional). This will improve communication skills in the Irish language.

- Ensure a high standard of the new Irish language subject in teachers entering primary teacher training (honours B2 or higher), since many trainee teachers are struggling with the existing Irish syllabus.
- Spread out the use of Irish over the teaching of other primary subjects (e.g. Physical Education, history etc), so that the total number of hours devoted to exclusive Irish teaching is reduced.
- Develop online Irish language learning apps that will enable school pupils, parents and everyone to improve and develop their Irish language. These will be loosely aligned to what is taught at different stages of primary and secondary curriculum, so that parents can be well placed to support their children's learning.

(10) Constant review of **cost efficiency** so that education budget can maximise educational and welfare of students. These include:

- School-based reform of some Reasonable Accommodations for students in state exams. A pilot scheme for Leaving Certificate exam papers will be made available in audio format for any candidates who request them through their school. This will save on expensive Educational Psychologist's reports, and on exam 'readers' who cost over 90 Euros a day. It would also help to de-stigmatise the need for alternative format exams for some students.
- Provide more robust mechanism to ensure that teachers who on a consistent long-term basis are not performing their function in the classroom can have their contracts ended.
- Reform the practice of automatically paying principals higher salaries in proportion to the number of students in the school to prevent the constant change of management in smaller schools. These smaller schools should no longer be seen as a training ground for principals to move up into the bigger schools motivated by the financial rewards that come with this.
- There are perceived international reputational advantages to merging into larger universities. However, these reputational advantages are offset by the local disadvantages of lack of competition among colleges competing for local students. Thus, Irish students seeking an Irish education may benefit less from any such merger than international students who are choosing among international colleges. We would support some amalgamations of third level colleges, where clearly identified student benefits are allied with clear long-term cost benefits. In the absence of both of these, we support the autonomy of the existing diversity of Irish colleges.
- We will ensure that costs to primary and secondary parents are minimised in the long run, including regulations to ensure that expensive uniforms, books, other materials, additional charges and hidden costs are explicitly recorded for all schools. Schools failing to control these costs will be penalised. We will complete a cost-benefit analysis of migrating the school curriculum books to electronic tablet formats.

- Support for small rural schools. The Green Party proposes that schools smaller than those currently supported by the government (4 teacher schools) will be permitted in certain areas, when there are clear justifiable savings in travel time and energy for the students.

END

2.11. One Page Summary

Teacher/pupil ratios: The Green Party will raise education investment to 7% GDP by 2020, including improving teacher/pupil ratios as part of the goal.

Special Needs Cuts: The Green Party opposes these cuts: like most educational cuts they are not cost effective. Special needs educational assessments & supports will be urgently reviewed to get the money where it is needed the most.

Extra year funded pre-school: We plan to bring in a second year of funded pre-school education, coupled with reform of junior and senior infant education. We will improve pre-school inspections.

Junior cert reform: The Green Party broadly supports junior cycle reform but would delay assessments till third year, and urgently demand strong investment in teacher training.

Difficulties in getting a child into a local school: The Green Party will end discrimination at entry on the basis of religion or special educational needs.

Secondary school guidance counselling: we will restore financial support for this.

Fee paying schools: We will not alter current funding arrangements for fee-paying schools. All schools receiving any state funding will need to meet clear goals for intake and support of students from wide social, ethnic, economic, special needs and faith backgrounds.

Leaving Cert reform: We will overhaul CAO entry and the leaving certificate examination. Many skills in addition to memory work and exam technique will be increasingly assessed.

Lifelong teacher training: Much greater investment in lifelong teacher training at all levels. At primary level, especially for scientific observation/enquiry, outdoor/sports. At secondary, training in building critical thinking skills.

Invest in Further Education: Post-leaving certificate (PLC) courses have lost substantial funding and supports, closing off opportunities. We will strongly invest in PLC and apprenticeship education and training.

Third level: We will increase **student mobility** between courses and institutions after entry. This will help reduce excessive focus on leaving certificate performance and give students more options. We **oppose any cuts to student grants**.

Fourth level: More of our research budget should be dedicated to PhD training. Investing in human capital drives advances in the knowledge economy.

Invest in developing online education for our students and for students from abroad.

Support for small rural primary schools: Those with fewer than four teachers will be supported in more remote areas where the savings of time and energy in traveling to school justify this.

Document Control

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