

A FAIR START FOR EVERY CHILD

Labour's Fair Start policy on work is one of our five policy commitments that must be at the core of any agreement with other parties in the next Dáil.

It is expensive to raise a family in Ireland. **Labour will fight to ensure that no child is left behind.** We want all of our children to be treated equally and given the chance to fulfil their potential.

ENDING CHILD POVERTY

One in ten children are living in consistent poverty, and one in four are living in households deprived of two or more basic necessities. Nearly 4,000 children are in emergency homeless accommodation. Children are bearing the brunt of Fine Gael's uncaring policies that have failed to prioritise action on child poverty.

Labour will develop and implement an ambitious strategy to eliminate child poverty. We will strive to achieve similarly low levels of child poverty by learning from what worked in other countries. Labour agrees with the goals of the NoChild2020 campaign: making primary school genuinely free-of-charge; healthy school meals; meeting children's healthcare needs; access to arts and culture; more comprehensive childcare; and targeted payments to families at greatest risk of poverty. **Labour will restore the Combat Poverty Agency and give it a central remit in developing a strategy to eliminate child poverty. We will resource the CSO to publish reliable data on child poverty.**

Labour will restore full social protection payments to under-25s and boost the incomes of lone parents.

GENUINELY FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION

Despite the guarantee in the Constitution, we have free primary education only in name. Back-to-school costs can be up to €380 for a child in primary school, with almost three-quarters of parents being asked to make a cash contribution to cover the basic costs of their child's school. In addition, many schools continue to ask parents to buy crested or branded uniforms and half of

parents with primary-school aged children report an increase in schoolbook prices every year.

Labour will make primary education genuinely free-of-charge, including a free schoolbooks scheme, a uniform grant and free healthy school meals.

REDUCED CLASSROOM SIZES

Irish primary school classes are among the largest and worst-funded in Europe, according to the OECD. The average class size in Irish primary schools is 25, compared with an EU average of 20. **Labour will reduce primary class sizes to the EU average by 2025 on a cost-neutral basis.** This is possible because a reducing population of children is lowering the demand for primary school places, creating the opportunity to move towards European norms on smaller class sizes. These are especially beneficial for children with special needs or who do not have English as a first language. In addition, we will reduce DEIS class sizes in proportion to reductions in regular class sizes, and increase capitation to DEIS schools.

MORE SUPPORTS FOR TEACHERS AND SPECIAL SCHOOL ASSISTANCE

Irish primary school teachers are among the hardest working in Europe, with an average of 905 hours per year, compared with 726 hours at second level and an EU average of 754 hours. Many teachers are tasked with providing additional assistants without the adequate training or resources. This is neither fair for teachers nor the children in their classrooms. **Labour will end the two-tier pay system for teachers and school secretaries.**



Labour will continue to expand the provision of Special Needs Assistants in schools. We will set continuously higher targets for school improvements in literacy and numeracy. These basic skills are the foundation for social inclusion and access to later opportunities, and **Labour will push for every child to have a sufficient level of literacy and numeracy**, regardless of their background.

INCREASED FLEXIBILITY AND CERTAINTY FOR PARENTS

The 9-to-5 school and work day is a product of the previous century. Times have changed. Working parents need a new balance between certainty and flexibility of hours, to achieve a better work-life balance.

Labour will implement a National Flexible Working Strategy. The strategy will develop good practice standards for permitting people to work from home or from other locations. The strategy will pay particular attention to the gender dimension of work-life balance, given that women still are disproportionately likely to be the primary caregivers for children. As a first step, **we will introduce a right to flexible working hours** where an employer only has to make a reasonable adjustment to allow for them, to reduce stress and wasted time from commuting, and to facilitate work-life balance for parents and carers in particular. In addition, **we will examine the introduction of local flexibility for school starting times** to better align the schedules of parents and students while also reducing the numbers commuting at peak-times. **Labour will also**

enforce a right to certainty of working hours. Too many people do not know the days or hours they will get on a week-to-week basis. This is disruptive to family life and to childcare arrangements, as well as affecting people's weekly pay.

REDUCING THE COST OF SECONDARY AND THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION

At €3000, Ireland's administrative fees for third-level education service will be the highest in the EU, post-Brexit. This is not to mention the additional costs such as expensive accommodation, transport and books.

Labour believes that everyone should have the opportunity to learn and to develop, at any age and regardless of their background. **We will progressively and sustainably reduce the cost of third level education. Specifically, Labour will develop an implementation strategy to increase university funding, for both teaching and research, building on the recommendations of the Cassells report.**

Third level research is part of the engine of long-term economic growth and it is essential for Ireland's future prosperity. **Labour will investigate drawing on the National Training Fund and other sources of funding to find a sustainable way to end the current crisis of funding at third level, and to reduce casualisation of staff in this sector.** This implementation strategy will include a review of the third-level grant system, including its assessment process, to ensure grants are better targeted at those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

