



Standing Up for Education

Labour's plan for investment and reform of our education system

Our Proposals

- Deliver the smallest class sizes in the history of the State
- End the use of prefabs in our schools
- Reduce school costs for parents
- Make 21st century skills and subjects part of the education of every child
- Double the number of multi-denominational schools by 2021
- Amend the Equal Status Act so that local children can access local schools
- Create 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places over the next five years
- Extend free part-time 3rd level education to those at work, and ensure that 100,000 places are available over the lifetime of the next Government.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a great liberating force in society. Investment in and reform of education will help us build a more equal Ireland. Making every school fit for the digital age, making sure that every child is welcome in every school and launching a skills revolution are our priorities.

Labour in government has ensured that ensure all teachers working in our schools are qualified. We have reduced the rental bill for prefabs in schools by 40% and provided high-speed broadband free of charge to every second-level school. We will now ensure that all primary schools are similarly equipped.

We delivered the first improvements to literacy and numeracy results for a generation, reformed the Junior Cert to give all of our students the skills they need for the modern world, and introduced new subjects like coding, philosophy and Chinese.

A strong economy and a decent society requires that every child has the opportunity to access a top quality education fit for the digital age.

Labour in government has driven real change and reform towards a more pluralist system of school patronage which reflects the diverse beliefs of families across Ireland. We need to build on that work to ensure that local schools welcome local children, and to double the number of multi-denominational schools across Ireland.

The key to reaching full employment and maintaining it is to invest in people. This means investing in those currently at work and in those who will be the workers of the future, including those who don't go to third level and those who leave school early.



Delivering the smallest class sizes in the history of the State

Irish class sizes are significantly higher than international norms. Smaller class sizes provide more time for a teacher to spend with each child, and have been shown to have a particularly positive impact on young children and those in disadvantaged communities.

In the last budget, we reduced class sizes in primary schools back to their smallest ever level. We also improved the guidance counselling staffing and leadership of second-level schools.

We will continue to reduce class sizes to an historic low, reaching an average class size of 20, and putting an end to any classes with over 30 pupils. We will improve the staffing of second-level schools, to provide guidance and counselling to all students, and to increase subject choice. We will reform the model of leadership in schools.

A new National Convention

In the 1990s, Labour convened a National Convention on Education, to get the views of everyone involved in education and set out an agreed agenda for reform and investment. That

Convention led to the drafting of the Education Act which has governed our school sector since 1998.

We believe that now is the right time to repeat that exercise. Within 100 days of taking office, we will establish a new National Convention on Education, to report within 12 months on the long-term priorities for reform and investment in the education sector.

21st century school buildings

Every child should have the right to be safe and warm in school.

Labour in government has by 40% the amount spent on renting prefabs in schools. We have provided €2.2bn for new school buildings in every county across Ireland. And we have funded small devolved projects to protect the quality of our school buildings.

We will end the use of prefabs in our schools by 2021. Our Digital Strategy for Schools will see investment of €210m in broadband and technology. Every school will have access to technical support and continuous professional

development for teachers so that investment in technology is about more than replacing a blackboard with a tablet. We will substantially increase the amount spent on school buildings, with a budget of €3.8bn between 2016 and 2021. Using Sports Capital Grants, we will prioritise joint applications from schools and local sports clubs, so that facilities used by schools during the day remain at the centre of community activity outside school hours.

21st century teaching in primary schools

Labour in government made literacy and numeracy a national cause, and delivered the first improvements to literacy and numeracy results for a generation. We have begun reform of the primary curriculum to improve the quality of English and Irish teaching. We put an end to unqualified teachers working in our schools. We have introduced coding and Chinese as courses for the new junior cycle.

We will set new targets for literacy and numeracy improvement, with a particular focus on improving reading and maths levels in disadvantaged schools. Our aim will be to keep Ireland in the top 5 countries in the OECD for reading, and to make sure we are in the top 10 countries for maths and science by 2020. We will rebalance the primary curriculum, with every child getting at least 90 minutes of science and 90 minutes of PE each week.

Children have a constitutional right to opt out of religious education. We will work with schools to make this a reality by issuing new instructions on how to accommodate children of minority faiths or those from non-religious families. We will provide Leaving Cert subjects in coding or computer science, PE and politics and society, while introducing philosophy and a new culture and heritage course for the Junior Cycle. For students with special needs who require assistive technologies, we will ensure they are provided with training specific to their requirements so they can fully realise their potential.

Stronger school leadership

The quality of school leadership has an enormous impact on educational outcomes. Though we have

very many fine school leaders, they currently don't require any leadership qualifications, and have to spend too much of their time on administrative duties.

In 2015, we established a new Centre for School Leadership, with a budget of €3m to mentor and support new school leaders, and to fund school leadership qualifications. In the last budget, we provided more time for Deputy Principals in second level schools to focus on their leadership duties, and provided Teaching Principals with more days out of the classroom. We introduced digital roll-books to reduce school reliance on paper records.

We will ensure that every newly appointed principal has a Masters-level qualification in school leadership by 2020. We will give local Education and Training Boards the responsibility for delivering school building projects, removing the need for school principals to act as project managers, and we will explore how ETBs can provide greater administrative support to all schools.

Reducing school costs for parents

Parents pay too much for young children to go to school. We will reduce the cost of education for parents.

“**LABOUR IN
GOVERNMENT MADE
LITERACY AND NUMERACY
A NATIONAL CAUSE,
AND DELIVERED THE
FIRST IMPROVEMENTS
TO LITERACY AND
NUMERACY RESULTS FOR
A GENERATION**”

Labour in government provided an additional €15m in ring-fenced funding for schools which established book rental schemes to reduce costs for parents. We expanded school meals programmes and made sure that parents were consulted about the uniform policies of schools.

We will increase funding to schools by €60 per child, in return for an end to voluntary contributions and other charges on parents. We will abolish all school transport charges by 2018, and make travel to school using leap cards free for children. Book rental schemes will be a typical feature of every school, reducing book costs for parents by at least 80%. We will double the annual funding available for book rental schemes, and only provide this funding to schools which use it to establish or expand such schemes. We will end the charging of fees to apply for a school place.

Giving parents a greater say

Irish parents hugely value education, as do our young people. Unfortunately, they get little say in how their local schools are run.

In government, we have developed work on a Parents' Charter that would give parents a say in all school policies. We have increased funding to parents' bodies and student bodies. We introduced the Education Passport to provide clear information on children's progress when they are transferring from primary to second-level school.

We will legislate for our Parents' and Students' Charter. We will publish a new 'School View' website, giving parents information on school performance, subject choice and extracurricular options. This will be of far greater value than the narrowly based "league tables" that are published regularly. We will introduce an Early Education Passport, to ease the transition from pre-school to primary school.

Greater school choice

A growing number of parents want their children to experience multi-denominational education. Multi-denominational schools can be more inclusive of all children in a community, regardless of their background. We cannot provide choice of school in every town and village across Ireland,

but we can build a national network of multi-denominational schools. The wishes of those who want denominational education, and those who want multidenominational education, must be respected equally.

In government, we established the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, and have progressed their recommendations. Since 2011, there has been a 43% increase in the number of multi-denominational schools, with a 54% increase in the number of children attending such schools. We recognised Educate Together as a patron of second-level schools.

We believe that more needs to be done to provide greater school choice. We will continue to provide new schools in areas where the population is increasing, and we will speed up the process of reorganising schools in areas where parents have demanded an alternative to the status quo, with a ring-fenced fund of €10m each year to support such reorganisations and the work of patrons establishing new schools. This reorganisation will include examining whether federal models could provide better support to small schools in rural communities. We will provide a further 100 multi-denominational schools by 2021. We will publish a White Paper to build on the report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism, and clearly set out long-term policy in this area.

Local schools for local children

Children benefit from meeting and getting to know children from various backgrounds and religions. Diversity in our schools is an opportunity for our society, not something we should feel threatened by.

The anecdotal evidence of parents feeling forced to baptise their children to ensure a school place must come to an end.

Labour's Admission to Schools Bill will go a long way to improve the fairness of access to schools for all children. It will ban the practice of charging parents to apply for a school place, and make sure that all schools are welcoming of all children.

We will amend the Equal Status Act, to ensure

that publicly funded schools prioritise children from the local community, rather than focusing on their religion. It will still be possible for schools to prioritise on the grounds of religion in cases where the ethos of the school might otherwise be diminished, such as in the case of minority faith schools which serve dispersed communities.

Gaeilge

Cinntoidh rialtas ina bhfuil Páirtí an Lucht Oibre páirteach go bhfuil áit ollmhór ag teanga na Gaeilge san earnáil oideachais. Tugadh isteach curaclam nua teanga comhtháite cheana do na páistí is óige i mbunscoileanna, ionas go mbeidh said in ann an Béarla agus an Ghaeilge a labhairt le chéile. Soláthraítear tumoideachas Gaeilge iomlán ar feadh dhá bhliain i nGaelscoileanna leis an curaclam nua. Toradh dearfach atá ceangailte leis na marcanna méadaithe a bhaineann le scrúdú béil na hArdeistiméireachta ná go bhfuil méadú tagtha ar úsáid labhartha na teanga, agus méadú 42% eile ar líon na ndaltaí a thugann faoin ábhar ag an ardleibhéal.

Leanfar ar aghaidh le forbairt agus le cothú oideachais trí Ghaeilge ionas go mbeidh

rochtain níos fearr ag tuismitheoirí ar scoileanna ina gcuirtear ar chumas daoine an teanga a labhairt. Smaointear le cur chun cinn an oideachas dara-leibhéal i nGaeilge, go háirithe in áiteanna go bhfuil éileamh cruthanta ó Ghaelscoileanna agus scoileanna Gaeltachta. Bunófar córas cigireachta chun a chinntiú go bhfuil áiteanna réamhoideachais d'ardchaighdeán ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge do thuismitheoirí sa Ghaeltacht agus lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht. Cruthófar freisin córas cigireachta chun monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar choláistí samhraidh trasna na tíre.

Any Government that Labour is part of will ensure that Irish has central part of the Irish Education system. We have introduced a new integrated languages curriculum for the youngest children in primary schools, so that children learn to speak English and Irish together. The new curriculum allows for two full years of immersion in Irish in Gaelscoileanna. The increased marks for oral Irish language at Leaving Cert level has increased the spoken use of the language, while also increasing to 42% the numbers taking the subject at higher level.



We will continue the growth of Irish-medium education so that parents have greater access to schools that allow for education through Irish. We will consider the development of second level education through Irish, especially in places that have proven demand from Gaelscoileanna. We will put an inspection system in place to ensure that high-quality, Irish-medium pre-school places are available for parents in Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas. Added to that, we will put in place a new inspection system for Summer Colleges across the country.

Valuing vocational opportunity

We value the opportunities which college provides. But not every young person wants to go to college, and a well-functioning economy requires people with a variety of skills and experience.

In government, we have begun implementing reform of the Junior Cert, to ensure better focus on the skills young people need such as communication and teamwork. We have introduced 25 new types of apprenticeships.

We will begin reform of the Leaving Cert, with a particular urgency attached to the need to develop vocational Leaving Cert options. We will complete a review of all PLC courses in the first half of 2016, and begin reforming the sector to ensure that further education and training opportunities are available all year round. We will provide 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities over the next five years.

In a modern economy, many people need to continually upskill and reskill throughout their lives. We will provide an increased fund of €25m each year to enhance the availability of life-long learning options in the community, from literacy and numeracy education for those who want to avail of catch-up training, to specific skills training options for those who are looking to reskill in their spare time.

Our ambition is three fold; we want to eradicate illiteracy, afford existing workers the opportunity for second chance education and

equip workers with the necessary skills and training to be able to adapt to the skills of the future. Ultimately, this is about supporting people in their ambition to progress and improve their livelihoods to benefit themselves and their families.

We will invest €10m in the development of regional skills forums which bring together employers and education providers, to make sure we are giving people the skills they need to get local employment. The development of Technological Universities in the South-East, South-West, Dublin and the North-West will bring university-level, industry-relevant education opportunities to each of these regions.

50,000 apprenticeships and traineeships

Over recent decades, the number of people going straight to college from school has continued to rise – we have one of the best educated populations in the developed world. But college isn't the right fit for every young person, and doesn't prepare people for every type of career. Across the developed world, apprenticeships and traineeships provide a valid and valued alternative to college. They allow people to prepare for stable and sustainable careers.

In government, we expanded apprenticeships beyond a focus solely on construction-related trades. We have developed 21st century apprenticeships in 25 new areas, including catering, financial services and ICT – meaning over 4,000 people will begin apprenticeships in 2016, compared to just 1,200 in 2012.

Over the next five years, we will develop 60 new types of apprenticeships and create 50,000 new apprenticeships and traineeships. We will ensure that apprenticeships are available to young jobseekers, and to those who want to reach the top of their professions. We will make sure that people can progress from apprenticeships to higher education, and vice versa, and make work placements a central element of all college courses.

We will phase out the JobBridge and Gateway schemes to reflect the needs of the post-crisis labour market. Both schemes were highly successful in keeping people close to the labour market during the crisis, but they are not needed as permanent features of our economy. We will increase the number of places on JobsPlus by 10,000 to meet the needs of the long-term unemployed, and set up a one stop shop for education and training advice centres attached to the INTREO offices so that access to guidance on careers and courses is not confined to the unemployed.

Free part-time 3rd level education for those at work

Many people who are working have ambitions to build their careers, or to work in different sectors. Giving people the opportunity to reskill while in employment will reduce the numbers of people who currently must leave their jobs in order to retrain.

Labour in government has provided over 40,000 opportunities through Momentum and Springboard, giving people free access to courses that will help them find employment in growing sectors.

We will now refocus these programmes, and make a total of 100,000 free part-time places available through Momentum, Springboard and eCollege by 2021.

Access to higher education

College provides young people with incredible opportunities. No young person should miss out on those opportunities because of an inability to pay.

In government, we have protected and enhanced the student hardship fund. We remain committed to ensuring that cost is not a barrier for entry to third-level education. We established an expert group to advise on future funding of higher education.

We recognise that higher education must be made more affordable, and that we need to

invest in a system that can give the quality opportunities our young people deserve.

Our spending plans for the next five years include increased demographic funding of €15m each year so that the rising numbers of students don't lead to a reduction in quality. In 2017, we will reduce the student contribution by €500, replacing this element of the student contribution with state funding. We will provide an initial €25m to third-level institutions to improve staff-student ratios. These actions will be taken pending the publication of the options to be presented by the Expert Group on Higher Education Funding, which will require a national discussion to find a solution that provides the necessary funding to the sector without reducing accessibility or leaving the next generation of students with an enormous debt burden to shoulder.

We will provide an additional €10m per year to provide emergency funding to students in need, and to better support students with disabilities. Eligibility for student grants will be assessed using the same means test that applies for social welfare payments. All colleges will be required to allow students to pay their student contribution by monthly direct debit, with no charge levied on this option. Income thresholds for student grants will be index-linked so that the value of these grants is not eroded by inflation. We will provide a new €60m fund to support postgraduate students.

Labour will prioritise even greater funding for infrastructural projects if economic growth continues to exceed expectations. The capital plan will be reviewed in 2016. Subject to the continued strong performance of the public finances, we will bring forward a number of additional key projects to expand the plan.

If finances permit, we will provide funding for further and higher education facilities that will ensure universal access to the skills needed to benefit from our recovery.

Costings

Policy Proposal	2021 Cost (current)
School staffing - reducing average class sizes at primary level to 20, and reducing pupil-teacher ratio at second-level to 17:1	167
€60 increase for primary and post primary school capitation in return for ending voluntary contributions	148
Abolish all school transport charges and provide free leap card travel to school	30
Double funding to book rental schemes	15
Increase school leaving age to 17	25
Restore School Completion Programme	6
Increased funding for school meals programme	25
Funding for renewal of DEIS programme	30
Allocation of additional 1,000 resource teachers	50
Additional educational psychologists	12
Full year cost of school view website	2
Multi-denominational schools	10
Expand Area-Based Childcare schemes	5
Increase funding for iScoil	1
Restore funding of School Completion Programmes	6
Increased availability of speech and language therapy	10
Allocation of additional 1,000 SNA posts	30
50,000 apprenticeships and traineeships	131
Free part-time education	46
Ending JobBridge	-18
Cutting student contribution by €500	37
Third level demographic	75
Third level staff/student ratio improvement	25
Postgrad supports and enhanced SAF	63
Regional skills forums	10
Total spending on education and skills	941



The Labour Party,

W: www.labour.ie,

T: 01-678 4700

f /thelabourparty

t @labour