

**MOVING FORWARD. TOGETHER.
AG BOGADH AR AGHAIDH. LE CHÉILE.**

Empowering the Next Generation



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Fianna Fáil values education, and we understand the level of ambition and investment that is needed to ensure that Ireland's education system continues to deliver for our students and young people.

If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:

- 1. Expand the School Transport Service to provide 100,000 more places by 2030 - no other party has allocated as much funding to achieve this vital commitment.**
- 2. Reduce the Pupil Teacher Ratio to 19:1 - we are the only party to provide this commitment.**
- 3. Set up a new Small Schools Initiative to provide greater support to these schools - no other party has recognised this vital sector.**
- 4. Roll out the first national Therapy Service in Education to support students with SEN - this is a core Fianna Fáil value.**
- 5. Invest in School Buildings to ensure Modern Facilities - we have invested more funding in this sector than ever before, and we are the only party to commit to specific funding in PE halls and capital investment.**



Fianna Fáil is the party of education. We have led every major expansion of education in Ireland, and if returned to government we will build on this proud legacy. When Fianna Fáil came back into government in 2020, we took on the challenges of health, housing, and education. We did this not because it was the easy or expedient option, but because we believe in using government to make a difference in people's lives.

Under Fianna Fáil leadership, the education sector has enjoyed sustained progress over the last four and a half years. There are 9,000 more teachers working across the school sector than there were before, as well as the lowest ever pupil-teacher ratio. We have reduced by half the number of classes with more than 30 pupils. We have introduced upskilling and greater promotional opportunities for existing teachers, while almost €5 billion has been invested in school buildings.

We have introduced Ireland's first free Schoolbooks Scheme, implemented a dramatic reduction in the cost of school transport, and dramatically extended the free hot school meals scheme across the country. These are just some of the transformative changes introduced since Fianna Fáil took responsibility for education in 2020.

However we must always have greater ambition and vision for our students and the education sector. That is why we have a comprehensive range of proposals across every element of the education sector. If re-elected to government, Fianna Fáil will continue to increase funding and staffing in the education sector, will continue to expand special education and will continue to improve the student experience. We will create 100,000 more School Transport places by 2030, continue to crack down on smartphones and set up a new Small Schools initiative.

1. Excellence in Education

Since 2020, under Fianna Fáil leadership, Ireland's ranking in all three core educational outcomes of reading, mathematics and science have improved. In addition, school completion has reached its highest ever level. We want to ensure that Ireland remains among the top-performing countries in the world and to that end we introduced the most far-reaching reform of the Leaving Certificate cycle in half a century. This will involve delivering on important reforms, such as in School Transport and guidance services.

If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:

- Expand the School Transport Service to include 100,000 students by 2030.
- Support the rollout of more international languages in primary and secondary schools.
- Continue the reform of the Leaving Certificate in order to broaden the range of learning and examination approaches involved.
- Reform the Irish language curriculum so that a greater emphasis is placed on speaking the language and expand opportunities for students to attend Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí.
- Introduce universal elements to all Transition Year programmes in each secondary school to ensure that every student can access a rich and diverse TY programme.
- Introduce a single application process for students applying for third-level courses, further education courses and/or apprenticeships.
- Overhaul guidance services in schools to ensure that all students have access to career guidance advice.

2. Supporting Schools and School Staff

Schools could not function without the immense talent and commitment of school staff, who go above and beyond to make a difference in their students' lives. We know that this is far from easy, and that is why we have invested in school staff, through successive increases under the public sector pay deal, significant increases in posts of responsibility and the introduction of more favourable staffing schedules. The pupil teacher ratio is now at the lowest ever level.

We will build on this by continuing to increase the funding provided to schools, reducing the pupil teacher ratio, and providing dedicated supports to principals and boards of management.

If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:

- Reduce the general Pupil Teacher Ratio at primary level to 19:1 and work with schools to build on our progress to date and eliminate very large classes.
- Negotiate a new public sector pay deal following the completion of the present agreement.
- Increase capitation funding by 40% to help schools with increased running costs.
- Trial new administrative supports for Principals and Boards of Management to reduce their workloads.
- Encourage the rotation of STEM teachers in an area so that clusters of schools can benefit.
- Increase bursaries for student teachers to promote accessibility into the profession.
- Reform the redeployment panels for both primary and secondary schools.

3. A new Charter for Small Schools

Small schools are the lifeblood of their community, serving not only as educational centres but also vital community infrastructure. In government, Fianna Fáil has protected these schools by providing them with more staff, providing greater support to teaching principals and increasing their funding. If returned to government, we will protect small schools by piloting a new Small Schools Initiative, which will provide significant additional support to all small schools.

If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:

- Set up a new Small Schools Initiative providing €13 million to small schools for additional administrative and leadership supports.
- Reduce the PTR to 19:1 which will provide significant assistance to small schools.



4. Special Education

Every child must be supported to reach their full potential, irrespective of their background or specific needs. We have increased the budget for Special Education to nearly €3 billion per year, supporting students across special schools, classes and mainstream classes as well. We have more than doubled the number of special classes and introduced 16 new special schools nationwide. We have quadrupled the number of summer provision camps for children with additional needs and educational disadvantage and have introduced a new pilot scheme to place therapists directly into special schools to ensure children have rapid access to the supports they need.

We will continue this progress by setting up more special classes and schools, and deliver greater supports to schools in special education. We will roll out a national Therapy Service in education, providing therapists directly to schools to work with children with special educational needs.



If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:

- Roll out the first national Therapy Service in Education, with therapists providing therapies in schools. We will start with special schools, and extend to special classes and DEIS Plus schools. To make this a reality, we will significantly expand the number of college places for therapists, particularly in expedited courses for graduates with relevant skills.
- Continue to hire more special education teachers and special needs assistants to ensure that every student receives the support they need.
- Expand the availability of early intervention classes, under the remit of the Department of Education, so that those children in need of an early intervention can access it in their local school.
- Implement a mandatory disability education module during teacher training, along with a mandatory placement in a special class or school for all student teachers.
- Continue to expand the free-of-charge Summer Programme for students with special educational needs.
- Ensure that schools in every community have special classes so that all students can attend local schools.
- Continue the establishment of new special schools across the country.
- Introduce a national centralised application system for children applying for a place in a special school or in a special class within a mainstream school.
- Reform the Drumcondra Tests which are used to gauge student learning to include assessments for dyslexia.
- Complete the Review of the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act and introduce necessary legislative changes to ensure that it meets the needs of students.

5. Modernising school buildings and delivering school places

Schools are about so much more than their physical building, but there is no doubt that modern and fit-for-purpose facilities can be transformative for a school community. Over our term of government we have invested €5 billion into school buildings, which has delivered over 950 building projects and with construction currently underway at approximately 350 other projects.

We have provided significant capital funding to schools through the Minor Works and Summer Works Scheme to carry out important upgrade and maintenance works. But we recognise that principals and schools need more investment to bring their school buildings up to scratch.

If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:

- Set up a new dedicated €1 billion PE Hall Fund, in co-operation with the Sports Capital Fund, to provide specific new Physical Education facilities to schools.
- Create a dedicated funding stream for childcare facilities to be provided on school sites.
- Continue to invest in Ireland's school buildings to provide more school places and modernising existing buildings.
- Develop a common application system and dates for applications across schools to reduce the stress associated with applying for school places.
- Implement an annual Summer Works Programme so that schools can carry out important improvement works.
- Increase the Minor Works Grants that are paid to schools on an annual basis to ensure that schools can carry out regular maintenance to their schools.

6. Tackling disadvantage in education

Fianna Fáil believes in equality of opportunity, which is why we are the party who established free second-level education, founded the DEIS model and created Ireland's first ever free Schoolbooks scheme. These policies have helped to transform Ireland as an economy and society, and have provided opportunities to generations of people. We want to do more to embed equal opportunity and to support areas where there are particular concentrations of disadvantage.

If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:

- Establish a new DEIS Plus Scheme to support schools with the highest level of educational disadvantage.
- Expand the JCSP School Library Programme.
- Prioritise additional funding for ETBs in counties with a high number of towns and areas experiencing deprivation.
- Extend the Free Hot School Meals programme to all secondary schools and improve the quality of the programme.
- Expand the Home School Liaison Co-Ordinator service to every second-level school with an identified attendance problem.
- Provide more Community Link Workers to schools to support Traveller and Roma students and their progression in education.

7. Keeping Childhood Smartphone Free

Parents and educators are rightly concerned by the negative impacts that smartphones are having on children and young people. They are harming childrens' attention spans, exposing them to totally inappropriate content and run the risk of online bullying and harassment. We need radical action and we need it now.

That is why Fianna Fáil in government pioneered the “Keeping Childhood Smartphone Free” initiative, providing bespoke guidance and support to encourage parents and schools to come together to postpone the purchase of smartphones for their children until at least sixth class. It is why we have provided once-off funding to schools to purchase pouches for students to store their smartphones in, providing a much-needed break from the pull of a smartphone screen, as well as establishing a new national database on bullying incidents. We will continue this work and build on our comprehensive wellbeing platform within schools to ensure that school remains a happy and rich place for all students.

If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:

- Ensure enforcement of a ban on smartphone use during the entire school day to protect students' wellbeing and learning.
- Expand the FUSE anti-bullying and online safety programme to more schools and students.
- Assess the ongoing Mental Health pilots to ensure that students experiencing mental health challenges can receive the support they need in school.
- Increase the number of training places on educational psychology courses.

8. Embedding Activity and Creativity

Fianna Fáil believes that school prepares young people for life, and that the school environment should be as supportive and as nurturing as possible. Since 2020, we've introduced increases in the minimum hours of timetabled physical education up to Junior Cycle and launched the BLAST programme, which supports schools to bring in artists to work with their students. We will continue this work by rolling out physical activity and creativity programmes in even more schools.

If returned to government, Fianna Fáil will:

- Increase the number of schools offering Physical Education as a Leaving Certificate exam subject.
- Establish a new School Yard Fund for surface works and equipment.
- Expand the Active School Flag to a greater number of schools, especially secondary schools, through continued funding support.
- Build new Music Education Hubs so that more students can benefit from structured and sustained instruction in music.
- Expand the highly successful BLAST and Creative Schools Programmes.





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