



# JMB Pre-Budget Submission 2023



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Five key post-primary domains from the Chief Inspector's Report 2016-2020 will act as a framework for this submission:



**1. Leadership and Management in Schools**



**2. The Quality of Education Provision**



**3. Inclusion**



**4. Partnerships with Parents and Young People**



**5. Looking Forward**

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# Summary of Recommendations

## 1. Leadership and Management in Schools

### 1.1 Sustainable School Leadership for Renewal

In light of the growing demands on school leaders, it is essential that the Department commits to the elimination of the practice of allocating a fraction of a deputy principal to any school, regardless of enrolment. Incredibly, schools with enrolments near 400 students do not have a full deputy principal post. In schools with a fraction of a deputy post, savings could be made by prioritising such senior leadership roles over other elements of a school's allocation and we are happy to explore this possibility further, but we strongly urge the Department to begin with a commitment to end this unacceptable model of allocation.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › JMB strongly urges the Department to immediately end the practice of allocating a fraction of a deputy principal to any school
- › The JMB/ETBI/ACCS submission to the Minister, outlining our prioritising of deputy principal positions across schools of all capacities, should receive serious consideration in respect of staffing allocations in 2023
- › In line with the School Self-Evaluation framework's encouragement of reflection on practice, the JMB strongly recommends that the Department considers the ongoing enormous pressure on school principals before initiating any further significant policy agendas impacting on their workload



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision

### 2.1 Renewing the Curriculum

#### 1. Junior Cycle

Two outstanding policy-level issues relating to junior cycle reform remain to be addressed by the Department. The first relates to the inadequacy of the replacement hours to be provided for the 22 hours per year, pro-rata, professional time for teachers. It is regrettable that the Department is providing less than the number of hours lost to allow for this.

Secondly, the continuing failure to achieve a re-negotiation or an agreed re-interpretation of the agreement on scheduling SLAR meetings, is leaving school management and teachers in an impossible position.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › Staffing resources lost in the reduction of the class-contact week to 21:20 hours, pro-rata, must be replaced in full each year
- › Agreement on a framework for scheduling SLAR meetings that protects tuition time must be achieved as a matter of priority

#### 2. Towards a Framework for Senior Cycle

Policy change of the magnitude announced in March 2022 by the Minister will demand an equivalent response in terms of the resources required to implement it. Clarity and cohesion of policy is required, and not developed 'on the hoof' as occurred with junior cycle. JMB will ensure our members continue to have the school management voice heard while continuing to contribute to the national discourse around the emerging Senior Cycle renewal process.

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## Summary of Recommendations [continued]

### 3. Resourcing SPHE and RSE

Parallel to the production of specifications, teacher professional development and subject recognition by the Teaching Council also remain priorities, as school management consistently report a dearth of teachers personally and professionally prepared and willing to teach SPHE and, in particular, RSE. There exists a need to adequately train and professionally develop RSE teachers in their own right – developing expertise in every aspect of both the course materials and the likely questions necessarily arising in the classroom setting.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › The Department should put in place CPD and post-graduate development opportunities for contemporary teachers in SPHE and in RSE, a vital aspect of our education provision
- › In terms of supporting schools' engagement with transgender students, JMB urges the Minister to positively consider resourcing a service-delivery proposal with TENI which has the support of the management bodies and teacher unions

## 2.2 Making Realistic Provision for Guidance Counselling Services

JMB is seeking a meaningful increase in provision for guidance counselling in the face of a generation of students with unprecedented needs in terms of trauma recovery, metacognitive skills loss, career plan damage and a raft of other crises attributable in part to the Covid pandemic, as well as the new challenges of traumatised refugee children and an emerging senior cycle demanding significant guidance counselling in terms of expanded course choices and progression routes.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › JMB is seeking a meaningful increase in provision for guidance counselling, as well as therapeutic counselling interventions, in the face of a generation of students with unprecedented needs
- › The adverse treatment of fee-charging schools in terms of their reduced guidance and counselling allocation (based, as it is on a higher PTR), should be discontinued
- › JMB urges the Department to support the training of new guidance counsellors, particularly in light of (a) the cost to individual teachers and (b) substituted release for training, supervision, and work-shadowing

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## Summary of Recommendations [continued]

### 2.3 Realising the Goals of the *Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027*

The revised *Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027* sets out three ambitious strands of activity, presenting challenges to system and schools alike. The core tasks, however, remain unchanged from the previous strategy:

1. Invest: Put relevant and adequate technologies in place. This must be centrally funded but spending locally determined
2. Facilitate: Provide every school with an ICT Coordinator with time for duties
3. Motivate: Empower teachers. This must also be resourced in terms of digital champions and teacher-release
4. Plan: Locate the school on a continuum of digital maturity and set jointly developed, achievable targets for progression
5. Focus: Reflect on developments at junior cycle and during the school closures and begin to consider how technologies can be part of the forthcoming national conversation around the emergence of the new Framework for Senior Cycle
6. Monitor and Evaluate: Celebrate successes and address deficiencies

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › To underpin the three pillars of the new Digital Strategy for Schools, adequate annualised funding must provide for school-wide remote device purchase, up-to-date teacher CPD in digitally supported teaching and assessment, on-site technical and administrative support, and enhanced Wi-Fi infrastructure
- › DEIS school communities continue to require significant infrastructural investment in light of their particular challenges around inclusion
- › Adverse treatment of schools in the fee-charging sector, in which grants such as those for ICT are reduced by 50%, must be discontinued
- › Grant aid must be restored for the purchasing, maintenance, and support of school administration packages

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## Summary of Recommendations [continued]

### 2.4 Teacher Supply

Arising from significant reported challenges in the area, the JMB supported and strongly promoted our schools' participation in the Department's survey of unmet subject teacher demand in 2021/22. The findings fully aligned with the JMB's own annual data-gathering exercise on recruitment challenges, particularly in Irish, home economics, and guidance counselling. We urge the Department and the Inspectorate to set out the range of acceptable, if temporary, options schools may employ to ensure subject provision, and compliance with capitation funding requirements in particular.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › Strategic and binding proposals to address the issue of inadequate teacher supply must emerge from the national conversation on this issue – self regulation by ITE providers and granular qualification recognition criteria must be addressed as a matter of urgency
- › While current, high-level approaches will have long-term effects, JMB urges the Department to implement immediate, short term alleviation strategies to assist recruitment for the forthcoming school year
- › The Department and Inspectorate should prepare guidelines for schools on how to make provision for Gaeilge, Home Economics and Guidance Counselling in light of the current severe teacher supply crisis in these subjects



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## Summary of Recommendations [continued]

### 3. Inclusion

#### 3.1 Supporting Students with Special and Additional Educational Needs

The overall policy objective of the Department of Education is to promote inclusive education for children and young people with SEN in mainstream settings. Such a policy, of course, carries resourcing implications and, along with demographic growth across the school-going population, the state's investment in terms of special education teachers and special needs assistants will need to meet this growing need.

In light of such a national commitment, JMB reminds government that we still have not made any distinct provision for an expanded range of SEN coordination responsibilities which inevitably inflated as our students with additional needs continue to re-engage with school life, and as we welcome a diverse range of non-English speaking students from Ukraine over the coming year. As a matter of urgency, the government must make distinct provision for SEN Coordination.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › The landscape of SEN provision was radically worsened by the Covid pandemic and schools must now face the challenges of supporting students from Ukraine. JMB urges that the adequacy of the SET and EAL allocation to schools be reviewed in light of these challenges and that adequate provision be made to ensure the levels of provision such vulnerable students deserve
- › A special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) must be appointed to all post-primary schools with a weekly allocation of at least 10% of a school's 'profile hours' (with a baseline threshold of 2 hours per week) to be flexibly deployed by management but ring-fenced to the SENCO and their team
- › The proposed implementation of a profile-based model of SNA allocation and deployment must be accompanied by appropriate capacity-building measures at school level
- › JMB strongly recommends the establishment of a dedicated ASD and special class advisory team within the new integrated teacher education support service, to support the expanding network of special classes in mainstream settings



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## Summary of Recommendations [continued]

### 3.2 Investing in Our DEIS Schools

While the argument that greater emphasis on planning, target setting, and evaluation is fundamental to effective leadership for school improvement, an equivalent argument may be made for liberating the DEIS school principal from the work and worry overwhelm to which they are daily subjected, to provide precisely such leadership.

As an immediate action, we now call on the Department to allocate a full deputy principal in all schools of up to 400 students and to allocate a second deputy principal to schools within the DEIS Programme with enrolments of between 400 and 599 students.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › DEIS school principals worked tirelessly during the pandemic and they must, as a matter of urgency, be provided with acceptable levels of senior leadership support to allow them and their school communities to survive the extreme challenges in the wake of this crisis
- › We seek, as an immediate action, the allocation of a full deputy principal in all schools of up to 400 students and the allocation of a second deputy principal to schools within the DEIS Programme with enrolments of between 400 and 599 students
- › The Department's reconfiguration of the DEIS scheme must go further to provide for a more equitable framework for addressing disadvantage. The all-or-nothing approach to DEIS inclusion must be reviewed to provide schools with high numbers of students experiencing disadvantage with targeted supports

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## Summary of Recommendations [continued]

### 3.3 The Challenges of Developing and Implementing Anti-Bullying Strategies

Student bullying, and its impact on mental health, can only be addressed when our anti-bullying policies are properly resourced. We need our year heads and student support teams to have time for duties, ring-fenced and allocated-for; guidance and counselling provision expanded; a full deputy principal in every school, not fractions, and time provided for the necessary in-school group meetings involved, particularly in relation to teachers investigating incidents of bullying.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › In implementing their anti-bullying policies as set out in the Department's 2013 procedures, schools' most pressing needs centre on time and expertise. School management requires devolved authority to free-up relevant staff for the necessary in-school group meetings involved in fact-finding, planning and in consultation, and particularly in relation to teachers investigating incidents of bullying
- › The Inspectorate's engagement with schools on anti-bullying will continue to surface the key challenges to this perennial task and JMB looks forward to working collaboratively on the findings to better support our school communities in this ever-evolving facet of social living



### 4. Partnerships with Parents and Young People



#### 4.1 The Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill

The JMB has long argued for greater coherence in national educational policymaking, and we therefore welcome the bringing-together of a clearly articulated set of principles underpinning the relationship between parents and students on the one hand and schools on the other. We do, however, have concerns around an undermining of the principle of subsidiarity in which decisions are best made at the lowest appropriate level, i.e., by the school community itself, as well as the potential for the emergence of an adversarial culture in the partnership between schools and the families they serve.

#### 4.2 Eliminating the Need for Voluntary Contributions

JMB welcomes the overdue, though significant, abolition of the basic salary payment made by boards of management to their teachers, hitherto a unique feature of the Voluntary Secondary sector. The Minister and government must, however, understand that voluntary secondary school communities are suffering due to long-standing, systemic underfunding and that the capacity of families to replace the monies denied by the state to this post-primary sector alone has now all but gone. As energy costs for families increase and general cost-of-living inflation spirals, it is becoming increasingly difficult on every level, including moral, for schools to seek voluntary subscriptions from hard-pressed families to make up a deficit unnecessarily created by government in its unequal funding of schools by sector.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › A commencement must be made to address the inequitable funding of schools in the Voluntary Secondary sector by initiating the Equalisation process already conceded by government
- › JMB urges the immediate index-linking of all capitation grants to allow schools to pay their bills
- › A government-level commitment must be made to eliminating, over a three-year period, the need for schools to seek voluntary contributions from families

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## Summary of Recommendations [continued]

### 5. Looking Forward

#### 5.1 School Buildings: Demographic Growth and Physical Education

Many voluntary secondary schools have been serving their communities for more than 100 years, were built or extended-to with no or limited State assistance and are now in need of major refurbishment and extensions. JMB is concerned that with exponentially increasing building costs, a fall-off in parties responding to calls for tenders, and, in our view, a lack of sufficient personnel in the School Building Unit, even the targets of the current Six Year Plan will not be met.

Meanwhile, JMB welcomes the commitment to deliver a programme to build and modernise P.E. and school sport facilities, as our research indicates that just 50% of schools have a full-sized P.E. Hall.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › A major increase in the Capital Budget for voluntary secondary schools is required:
- › To allow for additional schools not on the Six Year Plan but in serious need of refurbishment and extensions to be added to the List
- › To meet a greater number of demands under the Additional Accommodation scheme
- › To allow for a greater number of categories to be approved under the Summer Works Scheme
- › To allow for a greater number of Emergency Works to be approved
- › To eliminate prefabricated classrooms
- › JMB urges that as many forms of delivery be put in place so that major projects be progressed through the Department's stages in an efficient and speedy manner
- › A special five-year plan is required to provide a full-sized P.E. Hall facility in every school with an interim scheme to replace obsolete sports equipment

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## Summary of Recommendations [continued]

### 5.2 The Pupil-Teacher Ratio

If the pandemic-related school closures have proved anything, it is the centrality of the teacher-student relationship that makes all the difference in the enterprise of the school. Even the most engaged, resourced, and supported student cannot form an educative relationship with a screen.

It should not be forgotten that the increase of the PTR to 19:1 coupled with the reduction in guidance counselling, EAL, and Traveller support hours from schools (an effective PTR increase), have had a very severe impact on the educational experience being offered in schools. The perception that increasing the PTR in any school by a point means an additional student in a classroom is completely wrong – it means subject and specialist teachers are lost to the school. In particular, forthcoming policy change at senior cycle, for example in relation to broadening participation in Transition Year and LCVP, will carry significant implications for staffing levels if they are to succeed.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › The pupil teacher ratio for schools in the Free Education sector must be restored to 18:1 in order to alleviate the impact of the cutbacks on staffing in schools in recent years and to support a recovery of the teaching time lost in the pandemic-related closures
- › Fee-charging schools, a long-standing and successful example of Public-Private Partnership, are a net contributor to the economy. The pupil-teacher ratio in these schools must be reduced as a first step from 23:1 to 21:1
- › As staffing allocations in areas such as professional time for teachers of junior cycle are based on a PTR model, schools in this sector are doubly discriminated-against – a practice which requires greater equity



# JMB Pre-Budget Submission 2023

Recovery and Renewal



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# Introduction

The Covid pandemic has caused multiple, unanticipated, and layered impacts that have severely affected societies across the world. 'Addressing these impacts in the aftermath of such a complex crisis requires collaborative approaches where the whole-of-society works together to build and strengthen its resilience'<sup>1</sup>. Such approaches, wherein key decisions were made by stakeholders on a shared responsibility basis, became a notable feature of our country's education enterprise response during the crisis, and will hopefully continue as a 'bottom up' complement to the 'top down' architecture of classical policymaking in the public space.

Resilience, however, involves more than an ability to weather adversity and to bounce back. It has also been used to refer to systems that survive being jostled around – whether or not they go back to where they were before, or to any stable state, for that matter. Our almost universal tendency to speak of the 'new normal' perhaps points to a desire to capitalise on some of the few positive outcomes and trends emerging from the flux of societal, workplace, and technological change brought about by the pandemic, while at the same time hankering for a significant degree of re-setting at both system and school levels.

This tension between the 'normal' and the 'new' was echoed in the 2022 JMB Annual Conference theme of 'Recovery and Renewal in Our Faith Schools'. Our schools will need time to recover and will need space to renew. We have barely begun to process what we have been through, at psychological, sociological, or spiritual levels. Rushing to adopt and assimilate what were essentially emergency responses, without allowing sufficient space for considering unintended or longer-term impacts, could lead to a serious erosion of the human spirit in the rush to reform our human capital.

It is into this much needed time and space that the characteristic spirit of our school communities emerges as a key response to our twin tasks of recovery and renewal. Our school leaders have always struggled to liberate themselves from overwhelming administrative burdens to enact their essential leadership for learning role. Now, they must equally foster a healing and recovering, yet forward-looking, school community. This is the true meaning of *Priomhoide* – the one who fosters.

To achieve this, our policymakers and evaluators must trust that if a school community takes time to allow its spirit to catch up with the hurried journey it has been on, that such time is time very well spent. In this respect, we commend the wisdom of the Chief Inspector, Dr Harold Hislop, in allowing for precisely such a reflective possibility in the next phase of the school self-evaluation process.

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1 Andrew G. McClelland, et al, 'Post-Covid recovery and renewal through whole-of-society resilience in cities', Journal of Safety Science and Resilience, 2022,

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022, the Chief Inspector presented his report on findings from inspection, advisory, and research activities between September 2016 and December 2020. Five key post-primary domains reported-on will act as a framework for this submission:



## 1. Leadership and Management in Schools



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision



## 3. Inclusion



## 4. Partnerships with Parents and Young People



## 5. Looking Forward

This submission sets out the key concerns of our voluntary secondary school principals and management - a unique and vital sector of our public service as we have seen in recent times.





# 1. Leadership and Management in Schools

## Key Messages from the Chief Inspector's Report:

- › Inspection findings show that clear communication practices and strong cultures of collaboration lie at the heart of effective schools
- › Effective leaders and managers communicate well and demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the quality of provision for learners
- › The role of school leaders and managers in establishing and maintaining new routines and protocols under their Covid-19 implementation plan resulted in a sense of order, security, and calm for their school communities
- › The Inspectorate research findings indicated that schools reopened successfully thanks to a combination of their very effective preparation and the supports provided by the Department and other partners
- › Those in leadership and management positions in schools need to place a more substantial focus on the leadership of teaching and learning
- › Alternative governance structures for state-funded schools should be pursued actively with the aim of providing schools with more efficient and systematic supports

## Sustainable School Leadership for Renewal

'In summary, our research shows that the work of school leaders was complex and important through these challenging pandemic times and that leaders prioritised compassionate, humanising goals that grounded all other work at this time. They made sense of what was happening and what they needed to do by maintaining this focus and understanding their positions within their communities. They mobilised communication practices that were reassuring as well as open and honest. Promisingly, these leaders optimistically looked to a post-pandemic future that may build upon the disruptions that originally seemed threatening and dangerous but were made sense of in ways that could open new opportunities for schools'.<sup>2</sup>

At this point in mid-2022, there exists a palpable sense of 'optimistically looking to a post-pandemic future' amongst our school leaders and their communities. Having transformed what could have been a catastrophic fracturing of their school communities, into creative, life-affirming, at times dispersed, families of adults and young people caring for and about each other, principals, in particular, are now looking forward to a sustained period of renewal. As is

<sup>2</sup> Longmuir F. Leading in lockdown: Community, communication and compassion in response to the COVID-19 crisis. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*. July 2021.



# 1. Leadership and Management in Schools [continued]

noted in the CI's report: 'During the period of school closures, schools reported considerable success in engaging with the majority of pupils and students in mainstream schools and demonstrated high levels of adaptability. The reopening of schools was achieved through the extraordinary efforts of school leaders and whole school communities and was supported by an extensive suite of financial and advisory supports provided by the Department of Education'.

JMB wishes to record its appreciation of the extraordinary investment made by the State in mitigating the worst effects of the pandemic on our schools, though the differential treatment of fee-charging schools in the allocation of Covid support funding was very regrettable. We nonetheless recognise both the advocacy of the Minister at the Cabinet table in securing funding, as well as the lengths to which Department officials engaged in a collaborative model of decision-making, all of which supported our communities at school level over two successive years. Equally, the CI's report acknowledged the price paid by school leaders during this crisis: 'The Inspectorate research findings indicated that schools reopened successfully thanks to a combination of their very effective preparation and the supports provided by the Department and other partners. However, this success came at a cost for many school leaders who reported, during discussions with inspectors, that they experienced significant pressure and high stress levels'.

Schools and individuals cannot run on adrenaline forever. Decisions and policies constructed to bridge school and system during an emergency may not be appropriate to a longer-term sustainable future. It is time, in 2022/2023, to begin to process what has transacted in our school communities and to identify opportunities for progress, such as our rapid digital upskilling, as well as identifying where we need to re-set, such as a return to dynamic, relational, and differentiated teaching in our classrooms.

In this context, JMB very much welcomes the Inspectorate's approach to the next phase of School Self-Evaluation, in which precisely such a period of reflection and renewal may be framed within a school's SSE framework over the next four years.

That said, it is crystal clear that the time for empowered, enabled, resourced, and liberated school leadership has come. It is no longer acceptable that a school principal remains overwhelmed by administrative and other non-core workloads to the detriment of her or his key role as the leader of learning. To this end, JMB acknowledges and welcomes the provision of additional deputy principals in larger schools in recent times, which represents a cost-effective model of enhancing the leadership base in our schools. We have relied on a single person at the neck of a responsibility hourglass for far too long. Schools need a unitary apex leader, but to exercise the type of transformational leadership demanded of them, fit-for-purpose second and third tiers are essential. JMB is in no doubt that many of our principals have been running on empty. Witness the term '*the school will ...*' repeated time and again in each and every policy document issued by the Department during the crisis. For '*the school will ...*' or '*schools will ...*', read '*the principal will ...*'. Meanwhile, the teaching and learning mission of the school, and its associated administrative workloads, continue apace.



# 1. Leadership and Management in Schools [continued]

**In light of these demands, long-standing and new, it is essential that the Department commits to the elimination of the practice of allocating a fraction of a deputy principal to any school, regardless of enrolment. Incredibly, schools with enrolments near 400 students do not have a full deputy principal post. In schools with a fraction of a deputy post, savings could be made by prioritising such senior leadership roles over other elements of a school's allocation and we are happy to explore this possibility further, but we strongly urge the Department to begin with a commitment to end this unacceptable model of allocation.**

**In May 2022, JMB, with the support of ACCS and ETBI, made a submission to the Minister and her Department outlining our prioritising of deputy principal positions across schools of all capacities. We look forward to engaging with the Department on this proposal and urge the Minister to give serious consideration to both the rationale for such enhancements, as well as to the cost-effectiveness of the model.**

In 2022, JMB very much welcomed the decision by the Inspectorate to reduce its programme of in-school evaluations for the remainder of the academic year. In line with such a reasoned approach, and also the government's commitment 'that schools be given the time to implement required changes', the JMB strongly recommends that the Department considers the ongoing enormous pressure on school principals before initiating any further significant policy agendas impacting on their workload.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › JMB strongly urges the Department to immediately end the practice of allocating a fraction of a deputy principal to any school
- › The JMB/ETBI/ACCS submission to the Minister, outlining our prioritising of deputy principal positions across schools of all capacities, should receive serious consideration in respect of staffing allocations in 2023
- › In line with the School Self-Evaluation framework's encouragement of reflection on practice, the JMB strongly recommends that the Department considers the ongoing enormous pressure on school principals before initiating any further significant policy agendas impacting on their workload



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision

### Key Messages from the Chief Inspector's Report:

- › Irish students continue to perform well in international assessments in reading, Mathematics and Science; there is scope to improve outcomes for students with higher abilities, including exceptionally able students
- › The proportion of students studying subjects at higher level has increased steadily in almost all subjects
- › Schools have made good progress in relation to whole-school literacy; vocabulary development and oral literacy were identified as areas for further development in inspections of English
- › High-quality learning environments, and high levels of student enjoyment and motivation are evident in post-primary schools; collaborative learning practices for students require further development

The remarkable achievements of educators in the Irish school context, as consistently echoed across the CI Report, are all the more extraordinary when set against the backdrop of a level of underfunding almost unique in the developed world.

The findings of the OECD Education at a Glance 2021 report shows that Ireland uniquely spends a mere 3% of its wealth on education, less than virtually any other country comprehended in the report. Post-primary funding, at 1.1%, represents the lowest investment, well below the OECD averages of almost double that figure.

As a key recommendation, JMB seeks that government commits to a three-year phased increase in exchequer funding of education to bring the resourcing of Ireland's system to at least OECD/EU norms in terms of GDP ratios, and that a systematic investment in the ageing infrastructure of voluntary secondary schools becomes a commitment over the next decade.

### 2.1 Renewing the Curriculum

#### 1. Junior Cycle

The CI Report reflects a broadly positive picture of implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle:

- › The *Junior Cycle Framework* is being implemented successfully in many schools; cross-curricular sharing of expertise, focused on inclusive task design and the further alignment of subject department plans with the new subject specifications, are areas for development.



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision [continued]

- › Challenges remain in relation to how assessment is carried out, how assessment findings are used, and the quality of formative feedback that students receive; Covid-19 led to much new thinking in this area. The implementation of classroom-based assessments (CBAs) in Junior Cycle has meant the use of a wider range of assessment approaches and has given teachers opportunities to engage in collaborative discussions and moderation meetings concerning students' achievements.

The decision to reduce the requirement for Classroom-Based Assessments from two to one and abandon the Assessment Tasks in respect of two successive year groups was a welcome adaptation of the Framework in terms of responsiveness to the Covid crisis, but points to an urgent need to revitalise the reforms at school and system levels.

JMB has been actively engaging with the University of Limerick's research mandate from NCCA to establish a systematic review of the implementation and impact of junior cycle reforms across all stakeholders and sectors. It is expected that the learnings from such an independent study will generate significant opportunities for ongoing policy in the area of curriculum and assessment and JMB encourages the Minister and partners to engage positively with all recommendations as they emerge. In particular, the timing of this research will allow for some much-needed insight into the effect of the changes to assessment and reporting since the initial school closures, as well as adding to our learning-base in relation to remote teaching and learning at lower secondary level.

Meanwhile, two outstanding policy-level issues remain to be addressed by the Department. The first relates to the inadequacy of the replacement hours to be provided for the 22 hours per year, pro-rata, professional time for teachers. It is regrettable that the Department is providing less than the number of hours lost to allow for this. The missing hours must come from somewhere – reducing curricular options, enlarging class size, cutting special needs time – the Department's assertion that 'the quantum of hours provided to replace TPT were never intended to fully compensate for those lost' is not only meaningless, but it also betrays a set of values we have never associated with the Department or its officials. It is time to remedy this issue once and for all and to fully compensate school communities for the loss of hours they must allocate under the junior cycle agreements.

In an equally serious development, the continuing failure to achieve a re-negotiation or an agreed re-interpretation of the DE-union agreement on scheduling SLAR meetings, is leaving school management and teachers in an impossible position; resulting in some schools not being in a position to operate SLAR meetings; is causing friction between staff and principals; is eroding the whole intention of junior cycle reform; is creating a SLAR substitution precedent which will only escalate and from which there will be no return, and will alienate both teachers and management from the junior cycle enterprise.

In the absence of a renegotiated or clarified position on the holding of SLAR meetings exclusively outside tuition time, JMB continually warned that classroom-based assessment outcomes which had not been moderated through the SLAR meeting process could not be reported-on in a student's Junior Cycle profile of Achievement (JCPA). The Department's clarification at the end



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision [continued]

of May 2022 that such was precisely the case may lead to the Department and teacher unions coming closer to an agreed position on the holding of meetings, but we should not have, for seven years, had to prevaricate on an issue that would never have surfaced had the management bodies, i.e. the employer representative, been fully engaged with when the Junior Cycle Framework implementation agreement was being negotiated.

Thus, as the senior cycle review proceeds, the voice of those ultimately responsible for implementing curricular change – school management – must be given due weight as this next and most critical of national projects gets underway.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › Staffing resources lost in the reduction of the class-contact week to 21:20 hours, pro-rata, must be replaced in full each year
- › Agreement on a framework for scheduling SLAR meetings that protects tuition time must be achieved as a matter of priority

### 2. Towards a Framework for Senior Cycle

JMB welcomed the publication by the Minister of the NCCA's Advisory Report on Senior Cycle and the suite of initial provisions supporting its implementation. While commentary from both the profession and the public was focussed on certain assessment provisions, the scope of both the report and the range of reform interventions announced amount to a liberation of key elements of the current curriculum from the constraints of boundaries and siloing no longer fit for purpose in the lives of contemporary students. This programme porosity is the essence of a curricular framework, as opposed to the existing top-down set of ring-fenced syllabuses and options, and will demand both system-level supports, as well as enhanced guidance supports at school level as an immediate priority.

Policy change of this magnitude will demand an equivalent response in terms of the resources required to implement it. In reflecting on a senior cycle reform agenda in advance of the recent announcements, our school leaders paid explicit attention to the logistics of change, the CPD required, the operability or otherwise of implementation demands and their key considerations included:

- › Clarity and cohesion of policy – not developed 'on the hoof' as occurred with junior cycle
- › Leadership for learning prioritised – liberating the principal and senior management team to develop the core function of the school
- › Fit-for-purpose DP, AP, and administrative support for a contemporary, high-demand and high-functioning educational enterprise



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision [continued]

- › PTR reduced to expand the curriculum and reduce overcrowded classes of young adults. This is the key lever for sustainable change at senior cycle as no number of creative programmes or pathways can continue to be provided on a shoestring
- › Expanded and professionally developed guidance and counselling service
- › Any emerging CPD programme must not disrupt and erode the life of the schools – be courageous around deploying school closure for this vital national enterprise
- › Develop multi-disciplinary teams and approaches in support of students with SEN, as most have complex needs which cannot be met by low-cost single approach methods
- › Junior cycle reform almost completely failed to engage parents – this cannot be allowed to happen for senior cycle
- › The physical environment of the school is not aligned with contemporary needs and a programme of adaptation, refurbishment and additionality will be required to create learning spaces which align with an integrated, holistic, high-wellbeing approach to upper secondary education
- › Voluntary secondary schools spend inordinate amounts of time fundraising. Our schools should be resourced equitably – the current situation is discriminatory
- › Digital technologies will inevitably be embedded in new programmes (as is the case, for example, with LC PE), thus infrastructural and CPD bottlenecks must be removed in advance of any new developments at senior cycle
- › Boards of Management will require dedicated sources of advice and support if they are to be answerable in terms of their statutory leadership for learning role
- › Provide the principal with the authority to make locally contextualised decisions around their school's senior cycle programme, deployment of adequate resources and some degree of liberation from the top-down, externally mandated curricular tramlines we have been shaped into for generations

JMB now looks forward to engaging with the Minister, Department officials and the other stakeholders involved in this important phase of the initiative and will ensure our members continue to have the school management voice heard while continuing to contribute to the national discourse around the emerging Senior Cycle renewal process.

### 3. Resourcing SPHE and RSE

While JMB concurs with the Chief Inspector's statement that 'the ongoing review of SPHE curricula provides an opportunity to strengthen an integrated approach to SPHE from primary through to Senior Cycle', we are concerned at the pace of such reform in light of contemporary challenges facing children and young people across the nation. Parallel to the production of specifications, teacher professional development and subject recognition by the Teaching



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## 2. The Quality of Education Provision [continued]

Council also remain priorities, as school management consistently report a dearth of teachers personally and professionally prepared and willing to teach SPHE and, in particular, RSE.

JMB is nonetheless encouraged by the scope of the RSE review which has been undertaken by the NCCA, and which included:

- › How the RSE curriculum is planned, how it is taught and how parents are involved
- › That the entire curriculum is being taught in schools to a high standard
- › The role of the classroom teacher in teaching the curriculum and the appropriate level of supports which are currently being provided by external providers
- › What time is given to it, what resources are being provided, and what support materials are being used
- › How effective is the continuing professional development opportunities which are currently provided by the Department and other bodies to RSE teachers?

JMB presented a submission and engaged in person with the Oireachtas Joint Committee's review of Relationships and Sexuality Education, and the Committee agreed with us that as a matter of priority the Department should invest in the provision of ongoing training opportunities for teachers to maintain and increase the pool of such educators available for scheduling into RSE classes.

Education cannot be deemed to be holistic in any sense if it ignores either our actions or the spiritual or moral basis of the values that inform such actions. Neither can we be deemed to be fulfilling our school mission statements, the majority of which cite 'development of the whole person', if we ignore the values and the humanity underpinning our sexuality and sexual activity. It is therefore incumbent upon schools to engage fully with parents in the development of high-quality RSE programmes congruent with the ethos of the school and setting out to educate, in the truest sense, the values, understandings and actions of the generation of young people in their care.

There equally exists a need to adequately train and professionally develop RSE teachers in their own right – developing expertise in every aspect of both the course materials and the likely questions necessarily arising in the classroom setting. The development of a post-graduate diploma course in SPHE/RSE and recognition of the subject for registration by the Teaching Council are particularly to be recommended.

### **Transgender Students**

There is an urgent need for a targeted, evidence-based programme to support young transgender people in post-primary schools. A school's response should be holistic and integrated, where the support of the student is the key consideration.

A key partner with JMB in providing professional and effective pastoral support to transgender students, their families and their schools is the advocacy and support organisation, Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI). TENI is seeking funding to deliver training and create and





## 2. The Quality of Education Provision [continued]

provide practical tools and resources to schools and staff. JMB urges the Minister to positively consider a service-delivery model from TENI which has the support of the management bodies and teacher unions.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › The Department should put in place CPD and post-graduate development opportunities for contemporary teachers in SPHE and in RSE, a vital aspect of our education provision
- › In terms of supporting schools' engagement with transgender students, JMB urges the Minister to positively consider resourcing a service-delivery proposal with TENI which has the support of the management bodies and teacher unions

### 2.2 Making Realistic Provision for Guidance Counselling Services

The CI Report makes repeated reference to the need for system-level supports to enhance provision for guidance counselling in our schools:

- › The additional Guidance and Counselling resources provided in response to the Covid-19 pandemic are a welcome additional support for students; however, further system supports in Guidance and Counselling will be required
- › Continued enhancement of system supports will be required in the area of Guidance and Counselling to address challenges related to recruitment, curriculum and increasing levels of anxiety among students

Such calls for enhancement of the service pre-date both the announcements regarding senior cycle and the arrival of students from Ukraine. As these emerging demands collide with the already inadequate allocation of hours for guidance counselling, not yet fully restored from before the financial crash cuts of over a decade ago, the capacity of schools to cope will be unsustainable and cases relating to young people in crisis will spill over into already overwhelmed child and adolescent mental health services.

Thus, even in crude cost-effectiveness terms, the Chief Inspector's calls for system support enhancement must be responded-to.

At this point, JMB is now seeking a meaningful increase in provision for guidance and counselling in the face of a generation of students with unprecedented needs in terms of trauma recovery, metacognitive skills loss, career plan damage and a raft of other crises attributable in part to the Covid pandemic, as well as the new challenges of traumatised refugee children and an emerging senior cycle demanding significant guidance counselling in terms of expanded course choices and progression routes.



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision [continued]

What has emerged in the tentative restoration approaches undertaken thus far is a re-modelling of provision which does not restrict the allocation of the full quantum of guidance hours to a single person. Management bodies have supported this flexibility and, by and large, its evolution has been effective in creating a school-wide appreciation of, and a broadening of provision for, these core activities.

In seeking an increase in provision, JMB is cognisant of the difficulties of recruiting fully qualified and experienced guidance and counselling personnel. The model of deployment currently in place, however, facilitates a realignment of role and responsibility on a school-wide basis to ensure each student receives the restorative care, whether personal, psychological, pedagogical, or career-related, they deserve. However, we cannot carry out this critical task on behalf of society on a shoestring. The money spent on such an early, school-level intervention will pay itself back to the exchequer in many multiples over the next five to ten years when it will become the responsibility of our clinics, hospitals, social workers, psychiatric services, employers and, indeed, prisons who will have to bear the burden.

As the challenges facing this generation of young people know no borders, territorial or social, the adverse treatment of fee-charging schools in terms of their reduced guidance and counselling allocation (based, as it is on a higher PTR), should be discontinued.

In terms of supply challenges, we urge the Department to support the training of new guidance counsellors, particularly in light of (a) the cost to individual teachers (b) release for training, now more frequently only offered in school time, and (c) time for shadowing. We need a structure mirroring that provided for special education teachers, and which increases post-graduate opportunities to specialise in this much needed field. Meanwhile, we request a review of current guidance counsellor qualifications recognition policy, and whether there's scope for broadening/expediting this, given the ongoing recruitment crisis. As an immediate measure, the Department should collaborate with existing guidance counselling programme providers to offer extra-mural courses, particularly in the Munster region.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › JMB seeks a meaningful increase in provision for guidance counselling, as well as therapeutic counselling interventions, in the face of a generation of students with unprecedented needs
- › The adverse treatment of fee-charging schools in terms of their reduced guidance and counselling allocation (based, as it is on a higher PTR), should be discontinued
- › JMB urges the Department to support the training of new guidance counsellors, particularly in light of (a) the cost to individual teachers and (b) substituted release for training, supervision, and work-shadowing



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision [continued]

### 2.3 Realising the Goals of the *Digital Strategy for Schools to 2027*

The terms 'digital' and 'technologies' appear over 300 times in the CI Report and point to a clear policy-level prioritisation of ICT in the landscape of education and schooling. Specific references include:

- › In response to Covid-19, there has been a considerable increase in the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning
- › Learning from the Covid-19 pandemic should be built on, particularly with regard to the use of digital technology to support teaching and learning, and in enhancing communication with parents to support their involvement in their child's education
- › Inspection findings revealed considerable variation in the extent to which digital technologies were embedded in teaching and learning
- › The Digital Strategy for Schools provided a rationale and an action plan for integrating digital technologies into teaching and learning

The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 offered the first coherent national framework aligning system level expectations and resourcing with the ultimate school-level goal of enhancing the experience and outcomes for contemporary students growing up as 'digital natives'. The revised Strategy to 2027 sets out three ambitious pillars, presenting challenges to system and schools alike:

#### **Pillar 1:**

This is about ensuring that digital technologies are embedded in teaching, learning and assessment. It focuses on how best teachers and school leaders can be supported, and addresses inclusion, school planning, digital skills and competences and the curriculum

#### **Pillar 2:**

This pillar focuses on the technology itself and broadband connectivity in schools and considers how to support schools in purchasing and maintaining digital devices and other technology purchased through procurement frameworks, and other possible solutions around the important area of technical support

#### **Pillar 3:**

This pillar looks at system alignment, online safety, new and emerging issues in the area of digital technologies in education, engagement with parents and the wider school community as well as with industry

Each pillar contains overarching objectives, which will be supported by a more detailed Implementation Plan, the first iteration of which will run from 2022-2024.



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision [continued]

While JMB welcomes the Department facilitation of the early payment of the first tranche of funding from the overall commitment of €200m over the lifetime of this strategy we express concern at fee-charging schools continuing to receive funding at a 50% rate. That said, JMB also very much welcomed the issuing of €50 million in grant funding from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan to schools in December 2021, aimed specifically at supporting students who are most at risk of educational disadvantage through the digital divide.

In welcoming such improved resourcing, it remains the case that the digital enhancement of teaching and learning must become a teacher-driven phenomenon. The urgent need for teachers to upskill themselves for remote teaching during the school closures should not be seen by government as a 'job done', emergency-driven, self-led form of opportunistic CPD, transforming the entire profession into fully developed, digital age practitioners. The CI Report's emphasis on the need to embed learnings from the Covid-19 experience demands, in the first instance, a degree of reflection and processing. What occurred during the closures was remediation, not transformation. What motivates large numbers of teachers to change their practice is seeing that something new is better than what they are currently doing and having the wherewithal to try it. Infrastructure and instruction must go hand-in hand. We have now moved considerably in terms of remote engagement, but this does not translate into the core purpose of technology in the classroom – the amplification of engaging and relevant teaching and assessment practices by educators.

The Framework for Junior Cycle has presented a uniquely timed opportunity for teachers to try new methodologies, jointly decide on content with their students, introduce group and dialogic learning, collaborate with peers in subject departments, reconsider assessment modalities, experiment with e-portfolios and a range of other enhancements. The Department and school leaders need to concentrate on removing barriers to innovation, facilitating collaborative approaches, and finding digital champions. Teachers themselves will do the rest.

The core tasks remain unchanged from the previous strategy:

1. **Invest:** Put relevant and adequate technologies in place. This must be centrally funded but spending locally determined
2. **Facilitate:** Provide every school with an ICT Coordinator with time for duties
3. **Motivate:** Empower teachers. This must also be resourced in terms of digital champions and teacher-release
4. **Plan:** Locate the school on a continuum of digital maturity and set jointly developed, achievable targets for progression
5. **Focus:** Reflect on developments at junior cycle and during the school closures and begin to consider how technologies can be part of the forthcoming national conversation around the emergence of the new Framework for Senior Cycle
6. **Monitor and Evaluate:** Celebrate successes and address deficiencies

The core business of a school is not teaching and learning, it is teaching *for* learning. Everything a school does must have a learning focus and this, in the current technological revolution,



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision [continued]

must begin with the teacher. The spectrum of digital empowerment and motivation amongst teachers is very wide. Teachers will need to be equipped to both structure and populate digital classroom materials customised to their particular students' needs. Capacity already exists to build-in ongoing assessment (including self-assessment) capabilities to such digital teaching frameworks. Students also will generate content – indeed it will be impossible to stop them. School-day, school-calendar and school-wall boundaries will disappear. This is already happening in Irish schools and this new strategy must resource, reinforce and affirm, rather than reiterate a set of expectations and aspirations disconnected from the realities of a school system only now beginning its recovery from trauma.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › To underpin the three pillars of the new Digital Strategy for Schools, adequate annualised funding must provide for school-wide remote device purchase, up-to-date teacher CPD in digitally supported teaching and assessment, on-site technical and administrative support, and enhanced Wi-Fi infrastructure
- › DEIS school communities continue to require significant infrastructural investment in light of their particular challenges around inclusion
- › Adverse treatment of schools in the fee-charging sector, in which grants such as those for ICT are reduced by 50%, must be discontinued
- › Grant aid must be restored for the purchasing, maintenance, and support of school administration packages

### 2.4 Teacher Supply

Arising from significant reported challenges in the area, the JMB supported and strongly promoted our schools' participation in the Department's survey of unmet subject teacher demand in 2021/22. The findings fully aligned with the JMB's own annual data-gathering exercise on recruitment challenges, with the top ten subject teacher shortages emerging as:

1. Mathematics
2. Gaeilge
3. Home economics
4. Learning support
5. Special educational needs
6. English
7. Religious education
8. Guidance Counselling
9. French
10. Physical education



## 2. The Quality of Education Provision [continued]

School leaders in our sector recommend that to address this critical issue:

- › A long-term planning strategy by the Department, based on projected future need, is vital if we are to have a guaranteed qualified cohort of young teachers coming through
- › It is impossible to get a Home Economics replacement teacher. Our single training college does not have sufficient capacity to meet anywhere near the national demand, and a second college in the eastern region must be provided as a matter of urgency
- › Students in second year on PME courses should have their employability in schools, while on placement or otherwise, clarified and regularised
- › We need a standing connection between PME Providers, Second Level School Representatives, and the Teacher Supply Section in the Department

JMB appreciates the level of seriousness and urgency with which the Department and its associated agencies have been affording this crisis. We are, however, anxious that approaches relying on self-regulation at initial teacher education provider level, coupled by increasingly onerous recognition pathways for teachers from outside the jurisdiction are adding to the problem.

Our schools are extraordinarily compliant with the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools, as well as all other aspects of regulation in this area. In light of the current crisis in Irish, home economics, and guidance counselling however, we urge the Department and the Inspectorate to set out the range of acceptable, if temporary, options schools may employ to ensure subject provision, and compliance with capitation funding requirements in particular.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › Strategic and binding proposals to address the issue of inadequate teacher supply must emerge from the national conversation on this issue – self regulation by ITE providers and granular qualification recognition criteria must be addressed as a matter of urgency
- › While current, high-level approaches will have long-term effects, JMB urges the Department to implement immediate, short term alleviation strategies to assist recruitment for the forthcoming school year
- › The Department and Inspectorate should prepare guidelines for schools on how to make provision for Gaelge, Home Economics, and Guidance Counselling in light of the current severe teacher supply crisis in these subjects



## 3. Inclusion

### Key Messages from the Chief Inspector's Report:

- › Our education system must strive to achieve full inclusion for all
- › Meaningful inclusion implies that all students are taught in stimulating and supportive classroom environments where they are respected and valued, and where their individual needs are addressed
- › While the system of establishing special classes is intended to support learners with different needs on a journey towards full inclusion, there is a risk that these children and young people will be seen as being separate from their mainstream peers, and that partial inclusion may be perceived incorrectly as a successful outcome for the learner
- › Social inclusion is a key priority for the Department of Education
- › The DEIS Plan 2017 aims to promote better educational outcomes for students from the most disadvantaged communities and to maximise the chances of every child and young person getting the best possible opportunity to fulfil their educational potential

### 3.1 Supporting Students with Special and Additional Educational Needs

The Chief Inspector's Report points to a largely positive, though developing, picture of special education provision across our schools:

- › Whole-school evaluation (WSE) inspection findings at primary and post-primary level are reflective of schools' earliest experiences of deploying their resources in line with the special education teacher (SET) model. These indicate that school leaders, on the whole, made good decisions that were informed by the principles of the model, and that they were working to make their schools as inclusive as possible
- › The findings also indicate that the quality of teaching of pupils with SEN was good and that there was greater emphasis on the provision of in-class support
- › However, inspectors identified scope for development in some aspects of leadership, and teachers' collaborative practice. These included the need to ensure that strategies implemented in schools were aligned fully with addressing the students' identified priority learning needs

As the CI Report sets out, 'the overall policy objective of the Department of Education is to promote inclusive education for children and young people with SEN in mainstream settings. Where this is not possible, the policy commitment is to provide for specialised settings through special-class or special-school placements'.

Such a policy, of course, carries resourcing implications and, along with demographic growth across the school-going population, the state's investment in terms of special education teachers and special needs assistants has been growing significantly in recent years.



### 3. Inclusion [continued]

In light of such a national commitment, JMB reminds government that we still have not made any distinct provision for an expanded range of SEN coordination responsibilities which inevitably inflated as our students with additional needs continue to re-engage with school life, and as we welcome a diverse range of non-English speaking students from Ukraine over the coming year.

As a matter of urgency, the government must make distinct provision for SEN Coordination. The JMB has repeatedly asserted the need for a dedicated post of SEN Co-Ordinator (SENCO) in every school. Principals' feedback has emphatically asserted the following points:

1. There is absolute unanimity that every school must have a dedicated SEN Coordinator
2. Continuing to find coordination time from within the resource-hours allocation to students is widely seen as unethical and inefficient
3. There is no clarity or advice on the proportion of hours which should be dedicated for SENCO activities
4. SENCOs continually express their sense of being overwhelmed by their demands of the role
5. Principals report being unable to keep a SENCO in the role for any extended length of time, due to the role expansion, admin overload and lack of time
6. Voluntary secondary schools are given no time for duties in their posts of responsibility
7. Principals agree that SENCO time should be given as a flexible but adequate quantum of hours each year

The current practice of taking resource hours away from students for in-school coordination is flawed, insufficient and widely seen as unethical. The JMB urges that the Department immediately provides for SENCO functions as a post of responsibility with time for duties or as a separate, pro-rata allocation of hours to each school.

The Chief Inspector rightly asserts that 'policymakers and education partners will need to reflect on the effectiveness and inclusiveness of current provision as they plan for Ireland's future response to the obligations arising from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities'. In light of this mandate, the current government's commitment to 'make further progress towards a needs-based, responsive set of state supports for students with special educational needs' is welcome. The first phase of this new full-service support model based on the NCSE policy advice of 2017, *'Delivering for Students with Additional Care Needs: The Right Support at the Right Time in Schools'*, was postponed in 2020. As the then proposal was to implement solely the profile model of SNA allocation to schools without proper trialling, the JMB welcomed the pause. The capacity of school management to both identify additional, often complex, care needs and make resource allocation decisions (a) is already exceeded in terms of an oppressive workload, (b) has never been fully resourced or supported in terms of training and external advice, and (c) leaves principals exposed to immediate and *post hoc* challenges relating to their deployment decisions and their consequences. Indeed, schools with significant SNA allocations will need a dedicated person to manage this resource. The administration alone virtually constitutes a senior management role in itself, and the current proposals presume the principal will undertake everything from recruitment to identification and re-identification of ever-changing of care-need,





### 3. Inclusion [continued]

to deployment, to HR and IR operations, to training and CPD, to conflict resolution, to professional accountability etc. etc.

It is the position of the JMB that as a profile-based model of SNA allocation is now being considered, the professional development needs of school leaders, SENCOs, SETs and SNAs must be met; sufficient coordination and administration capacity must be provided to operate the model effectively; the industrial relations parameters relating to current SNA terms and conditions must be fully resolved, and the voice of families must be heard and comprehended, particularly in relation to the devaluing of clinical judgements and their consequences.

Meanwhile, the CI Report places particular emphasis on the task of making provision for students with autism, stating 'a number of important aspects that relate to provision for children with autism require attention including enrolment practices, review of placements and the integration of learners attending special classes into mainstream provision'. JMB welcomes the highlighting of system and school-level challenges in ASD and other special class provision. We recommend the integration of the special education support service into the forthcoming teacher education support service, and also the establishment of an ASD-specific advisory unit, resourced with appropriately qualified and experienced personnel, and who will visit schools to support the journey in these high-demand areas of provision, from forming, to norming, to performing. High level policy, however worthy and shared, demands accessible and professionalised school-level advice and guidance in realising the Chief Inspector's call that 'classes for pupils/students with autism and other special classes should prioritise places for those with complex needs, and pupils/students with less complex needs should be included in mainstream classes with appropriate support'.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › The landscape of SEN provision was radically worsened by the Covid pandemic and schools must now face the challenges of supporting students from Ukraine. JMB urges that the adequacy of the SET and EAL allocation to schools be reviewed in light of these challenges and that adequate provision be made to ensure the levels of provision such vulnerable students deserve
- › A special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) must be appointed to all post-primary schools with a weekly allocation of at least 10% of a school's 'profile hours' (with a baseline threshold of 2 hours per week) to be flexibly deployed by management but ring-fenced to the SENCO and their team
- › The proposed implementation of a profile-based model of SNA allocation and deployment must be accompanied by appropriate capacity-building measures at school level
- › JMB strongly recommends the establishment of a dedicated ASD and special class advisory team within the new integrated teacher education support service, to support the expanding network of special classes in mainstream settings



## 3. Inclusion [continued]

### 3.2 Investing in Our DEIS Schools

The CI Report's commentary on the quality of DEIS provision points to a need to link effective leadership with outcomes in the key indicator areas set out in the DEIS planning process:

- › The quality of leadership of the DEIS action planning for improvement process in schools requires improvement in a significant minority of schools
- › There is scope to develop DEIS action planning in relation to attendance, particularly in post-primary schools
- › Post-primary schools in the DEIS programme require additional support to assist them in ensuring that data and information available in the schools are used to best effect in the planning process
- › The learning outcomes of pupils in the target group were tracked clearly in only half of the DEIS schools included in the SEN review
- › In DEIS schools, students' attitudes towards Mathematics become more negative as they progress through the school system. Addressing this will require the focused attention of schools and of the teacher support services
- › Support teachers were effective in enhancing educational opportunities for learners with behavioural difficulties, but they need to monitor learners' progress and achievements systematically; their roles and responsibilities also need to be clarified

While the argument that greater emphasis on planning, target setting, and evaluation is fundamental to effective leadership for school improvement, an equivalent argument may be made for liberating the DEIS school principal from the work and worry overwhelm to which they are daily subjected, to provide precisely such leadership.

Principalship of a school within the DEIS programme is a uniquely difficult proposition within the spectrum of school leadership domains in the Irish setting. Indeed, in addressing 'The Leading and Assessment Challenge, the Evaluation and Accountability Challenge and the Sustainability and Growth Challenge' as far back as 2015<sup>3</sup> the Chief Inspector stated 'I readily admit that none of the leadership challenges that I have spoken about is easily addressed and few of the practical tasks arising from them are readily solved', a position pre-dating the waves-without-troughs challenges of unrestored funding and staffing cuts, a global pandemic with severe consequences for disadvantaged communities, successive waves of curricular and other policy change, ever-increasing legislative and regulatory accountability and oversight, spiralling energy costs for schools, and now an influx of refugee children, all most likely preceding another economic recession.

<sup>3</sup> "Reflections on Leadership Challenges in Irish Schools"- Address by Dr Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, to the Annual Conference of European Network for Improving Research and Development in Education Leadership and Management (2015)



## 3. Inclusion [continued]

The lengths to which DEIS school leaders and their communities went to maintain student engagement and inclusivity during the pandemic emergency may perhaps never be known, but of all the stress-points JMB experienced during the school closures, it was across our then 50, and now 70, DEIS school principals that the most worrying levels of anxiety, overwhelm, and distress were evidenced. It is finally time for this inhumane imposition of un-resourced responsibility to change.

The impact of policy and initiative overload on DEIS schools is but one factor. What is far more concerning is the effect of higher levels of student behavioural challenges due to emotional, social, and cognitive-capacity issues which erode the time and energies of the DEIS school leader, particularly in our underfunded and under-staffed voluntary secondary schools.

As an immediate action, we now call on the Department to allocate a full deputy principal in all schools of up to 400 students and to allocate a second deputy principal to schools within the DEIS Programme with enrolments of between 400 and 599 students.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › DEIS school principals worked tirelessly during the pandemic and they must, as a matter of urgency, be provided with acceptable levels of senior leadership support to allow them and their school communities to survive the extreme challenges in the wake of this crisis
- › We seek, as an immediate action, the allocation of a full deputy principal in all schools of up to 400 students and the allocation of a second deputy principal to schools within the DEIS Programme with enrolments of between 400 and 599 students
- › The Department's reconfiguration of the DEIS scheme must go further to provide for a more equitable framework for addressing disadvantage. The all-or-nothing approach to DEIS inclusion must be reviewed to provide schools with high numbers of students experiencing disadvantage with targeted supports

### 3.3 The Challenges of Developing and Implementing Anti-Bullying Strategies

The CI Report presents a broadly positive picture of the effectiveness of anti-bullying awareness and measures within an overall school culture of care and safety for all:

Data from surveys administered during whole-school inspections pointed to high levels of positivity among pupils and parents in relation to key wellbeing indicators such as enjoying school, feeling safe and cared for, and feeling that the pupils are being treated with respect

In their responses to the Inspectorate survey, almost all pupils agreed that there were clear rules



### 3. Inclusion [continued]

in their school in relation to bullying, that they had learned about different kinds of bullying, and that if someone was bullying them, they could get help from a teacher or other adult in the school

Overall findings were generally positive about the provision of information to parents, and in relation to school climate and atmosphere. For example, over 90% of parents reported that they had been informed of the school's anti-bullying policy and that they knew who to approach if their child experienced bullying

The JMB position is that student bullying, and its impact on mental health, can only be addressed when our anti-bullying policies are:

1. School-wide
2. SPHE driven, and,
3. Properly resourced

There is no 'silver bullet' which will resolve the problem of bullying in schools, and we need every single person in the school to attack the problem, from every possible aspect, every single day. The anti-bullying policies and procedures in our schools reflect this approach and JMB welcomes the Inspectorate's attention to schools' compliance with the Department's 2013 Anti-Bullying Procedures during their inspections.

Given, however, the low ranking of Ireland (in last place out of 36 countries) for investment in second-level education as a percentage of GDP, the Department's appropriately high demands on schools in respect of anti-bullying measures must now be met by matching levels of resourcing.

So, what do we need?

- › We need our year heads and student support teams to have time for duties, ring-fenced and allocated-for
- › We need our guidance and counselling provision to be immediately expanded to meet with needs of contemporary students
- › We need a full deputy principal in every school, not fractions
- › We need to invest in team-teaching and greater learning support for students with special educational needs
- › We need teacher training and ongoing expert advice, particularly around empowering students to speak out
- › We need leadership development on school-wide approaches that work, and,
- › We need to free-up time for the necessary in-school group meetings involved, and particularly in relation to teachers investigating incidents of bullying



### 3. Inclusion [continued]

Our schools will always face the challenge of bullying and, among other actions, every school continues to:

1. Review their existing policies in line with the Department's *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2013)
2. Ensure their SPHE programme is well-developed and well-delivered
3. Provide teacher professional development on anti-bullying strategies, and,
4. Provide for parent and student support in tackling online bullying in particular

The mental health of our young people has never been at greater risk. We must now invest in giving schools the resources they need to support this uniquely challenged generation.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › In implementing their anti-bullying policies as set out in the Department's 2013 procedures, schools' most pressing needs centre on time and expertise. School management requires devolved authority to free-up relevant staff for the necessary in-school group meetings involved in fact-finding, planning and in consultation, and particularly in relation to teachers investigating incidents of bullying
- › The Inspectorate's engagement with schools on anti-bullying will continue to surface the key challenges to this perennial task and JMB looks forward to working collaboratively on the findings to better support our school communities in this ever-evolving facet of social living



## 4. Partnerships with Parents and Young People

### Key Messages from the Chief Inspector's Report:

- › Partnership in education is a crucial element of an effective education system. Schools, parents and communities working together in a genuinely participative way can benefit the learning and wellbeing of children and young people in our schools
- › Covid-19 has highlighted the role that effective partnership and communication between schools and families can have in supporting wellbeing and learning among children and young people
- › Schools should continue to promote meaningful engagement and the participation of parents in their child's education
- › Student participation and student leadership should continue to be promoted and developed at setting and school level. The views of children and young people should be valued, and they should be enabled to have influence in their education experiences and the work of the school
- › Schools should ensure that parents' views are listened to, and that parents are enabled to have influence on the work of the school, including in the context of the Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill and the guidelines that will be developed subsequent to the enactment of this legislation

### 4.1 The Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill

The JMB has long argued for greater coherence in national educational policymaking, and we therefore welcome the bringing-together of a clearly articulated set of principles underpinning the relationship between parents and students on the one hand and schools on the other. It is in this very framing, however, that three philosophical but very important issues emerge.

Firstly, the very essence of the charter is adversarial in its underpinnings. Schools represent perhaps the greatest example of authentic partnership in the life of our country. The family-school axis is founded on the common moral enterprise of educating young people to live a full and rich life, now and into the future. To polarise school and family is to erode and change the character of this partnership and it would be most regretful if this Bill were to change children into customers, parents into challengers, and schools into defensive and fearful entities.

Secondly, and arising from its underpinning assumptions, the charter essentially sets out a series of rights but ignores the associated responsibilities. We do not for an instant believe that any parents are unaware of their constitutional and, indeed, moral responsibility to act as the primary educator of their children or that they do not take these most seriously. What is needed however, in parallel to the set of parents' expectations framed in any eventual charter is an equivalent set of expectations a school has a right to be afforded.



## 4. Partnerships with Parents and Young People [continued]

Finally, any neutral reading of the set of principles underpinning the forthcoming Charter legislation would lead one to the conclusion that none of its fourteen areas are comprehended by legislation, regulation or any other imperative. The exact opposite is the case. Our schools operate under a raft of laws, regulations, guidelines, indicators, expectations, compliance frameworks, accountability measures, external evaluation criteria, codes of conduct, self-evaluation procedures, reporting and feedback demands as well as their foundational mission statements and, most importantly, the essential moral agency of Irish educators. Each and every principle framed in the proposed charter is already fully comprehended by an existing self-developed or externally mandated set of demands and none will come as news to school communities already fully engaged with their partner families.

JMB does not argue against the framing of a set of rights in a Parent and Student Charter. The principles, as framed in the draft Bill, represent an ethical framework for parents founded on democratic civic values and setting-out their appropriate engagement in their children's school.

We do, however, have concerns around:

- › a failure to recognise that each of these provisions is already underpinned by legislation and regulation and all are well established in schools in our sector
- › an undermining of the principle of subsidiarity in which decisions are best made at the lowest appropriate level, i.e., by the school community itself
- › the potential for the emergence of an adversarial culture in the partnership between schools and the families they serve
- › a failure to recognise that while parents have a fully appreciated focus on their own child's situation, the education and safety of the whole cohort of students must remain the overarching focus of school authorities
- › no identification of responsibilities associated with the Charter's set of rights
- › the potential for the emergence of additional layers of bureaucracy in already overwhelmed schools, and, critically,
- › no recognition that schools in the voluntary sector are obliged to seek 30% of their funding from hard-pressed families

### 4.2 Eliminating the Need for Voluntary Contributions

Our final point above represents perhaps the longest-running failure of the state to abide by a core founding intention of the Republic, that of 'cherishing all the children of the nation equally':

*'It is clear that voluntary secondary schools receive a significantly lower proportion of funding from the state and, as a result, are more reliant on voluntary contributions from parents and on general fund-raising. This reliance on discretionary funding is seen to pose challenges given lower levels of resources among some families, especially those with children attending DEIS schools, and means that funding sources are vulnerable to*



## 4. Partnerships with Parents and Young People [continued]

*future changes in family income. Sectoral differences are also evident in the expenditure of schools, with voluntary secondary schools more likely to be required to cover from the capitation grant items paid centrally in case of the other sectors and, in addition, need to engage in substantial fund-raising and request voluntary contributions from parents to fund the basic day-to-day running of the school.'*

*'Governance and Funding of Voluntary Secondary Schools in Ireland'. (2013)  
Merike Darmody and Emer Smyth. ESRI*

JMB welcomes the overdue, though significant, abolition of the basic salary payment made by boards of management to their teachers, hitherto a unique feature of the Voluntary Secondary sector. The Minister and government must, however, understand that voluntary secondary school communities are suffering due to long-standing, systemic underfunding and that the capacity of families to replace the monies denied by the state to this post-primary sector alone has now all but gone. As energy costs for families increase and general cost-of-living inflation spirals, it is becoming increasingly difficult on every level, including moral, for schools to seek voluntary subscriptions from hard-pressed families to make up a deficit unnecessarily created by government in its unequal funding of schools by sector.

**Indeed, current and projected inflationary pressures are already impacting on school budgets and the JMB urges the immediate index-linking of all capitation grants to allow schools to pay their bills.**

The fact is that all voluntary secondary schools operate under severe funding restrictions and are acutely aware that the families they serve are equally not immune to financial pressures. Under a three-year policy to be agreed at government level, the Minister could eliminate the need for schools in our sector to seek voluntary contributions from families, a measure which would immediately and significantly alleviate the pressures on all concerned.

There will, of course, be many competing priorities in each forthcoming government Budget. Equalisation of funding across all school communities and sectors must be one of them. The Primary and Post-Primary section of the current Programme for Government opens with the words *'Education is a cornerstone of society and a driver of social equality'*. It is the JMB position that now is the time to move beyond the rhetoric of social equality to its actualisation and we welcome the Programme's commitment to *'increase the capitation grant with a view to reducing the reliance on voluntary contributions made to schools'*.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A commencement must be made to address the inequitable funding of schools in the Voluntary Secondary sector by initiating the Equalisation process already conceded by government
- JMB urges the immediate index-linking of all capitation grants to allow schools to pay their bills
- A government-level commitment must be made to eliminating, over a three-year period, the need for schools to seek voluntary contributions from families





## 5. Looking Forward

### Key Messages from the Chief Inspector's Report:

- › Covid-19 has undeniably impacted the education system in significant ways and this impact will have medium and long-term consequences for the development of the education system. Covid-19 was not an entirely negative experience for the education system, of course. The most obvious benefit to arise from the crisis was the advances made in the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in the education sphere
- › The curriculum experience to be offered to students must seek to emphasise that enabling young people to acquire knowledge remains essential but is insufficient; that education systems serve young people best if they also foster their ability to apply that knowledge creatively, to work collaboratively to solve problems, to think critically, to communicate effectively, to adapt flexibly, and to make healthy and informed choices
- › The challenge now facing us is to reform the curriculum and assessment experience at Senior Cycle. This will be a considerably more challenging task than reform at Junior Cycle
- › Irish children and young people move through different phases of provision during their educational journey. Evidence suggests that each transition point is a time of risk for the learner, when discontinuity in provision can create challenges and at times, even result in regression for the learner. It is important that the needs of learners for coherence and continuity in their educational experience are borne in mind by all responsible for educational administration, teaching, and learning

### 5.1 School Buildings: Demographic Growth and Physical Education

The CI Report sets out the range of capital and remedial investment provisions undertaken by the state in respect of school buildings:

'During the 2016 to 2020 period, there was expenditure of circa €271 million under the Department's Minor Works Scheme, which relates to the provision of grants to schools primarily for the purpose of small-scale improvement works to school buildings and grounds. Furthermore, in this period, progress was made on the provision of support for maintenance and smaller-scale works to existing schools. Funding for these works is made available through the Summer Works Scheme and the Emergency Works Scheme respectively. In addition, a deep energy retrofit programme was piloted. The purpose of the programme was to identify and test retrofit solutions for reducing energy consumption and achieving energy efficiencies in older school buildings'.

With the caveat that expenditure on minor works during this period included €130m additional funding provided in 2020 to help schools to manage and operate in the exceptional circumstances arising from Covid-19, JMB acknowledges and appreciates the focussed and prudent investment made by the state at a particularly challenging time in our history.



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## 5. Looking Forward [continued]

That said, many voluntary secondary schools have been serving their communities for more than 100 years. Many were built or extended-to with no or limited State assistance and are now in need of major refurbishment and extensions.

Projections show that we can expect a continuing increase in enrolments at second level up as far as 2026 of at least 84,000 students. The consequences of this increase in the population of post-primary pupils have placed impossible demands on school management at a time of staffing and resource cuts and physical space limitations.

JMB is concerned that with exponentially increasing building costs, a fall-off in parties responding to calls for tenders, and, in our view, a lack of sufficient personnel in the School Building Unit, even the targets of the current Six Year Plan will not be met. In particular, the difficulty in getting phone-calls or emails responded-to by the Planning and Building Unit remains a significant concern for school authorities. So, while welcoming progress, we urge that as many forms of delivery be put in place so that the major projects be progressed through the Department's construction phases in an efficient and speedy manner.

There are many voluntary secondary schools who have recently applied for, or who are preparing applications for, major works but who are not on the Department's schedule of works. These schools and the communities they serve cannot wait to be assessed for capital investment. A mechanism must be found to have these schools added to the current schedule and additional funding made available to meet their needs.

There continues to be an increasing demand under the Additional Accommodation Scheme to provide additional classrooms and practical rooms for our schools, and to replace prefab classrooms. While we welcome the number of schools receiving grants, current demand clearly exceeds the level of finance available. In addition, the Additional Accommodation Scheme needs to be expanded to allow for General Purpose/Dining Areas, staffrooms, and offices for additional Deputy Principals.

Likewise, the budget for Emergency Works is far too low to meet the needs of our schools. As a result, schools are forced into appealing decisions of the Building Unit in order to deal with serious emergency and safety works in their schools. Indeed, with building and materials inflation soaring, the entire planning and building budget will require to be reconsidered as a matter of urgency.

In previous Programmes for Government, the elimination of prefabricated classrooms has been specifically identified as a national priority but is absent in the current Programme. JMB hopes this is an oversight as too many students and teachers continue to inhabit accommodation which is not fit for purpose in any contemporary model of education provision.

Meanwhile, the CI Report notes: 'There are plans in place for the continued development of teaching and learning facilities for PE. The government is committed to a PE Hall build and modernisation programme, starting in the second half of the [National Development Plan \(2021 – 2030\)](#) period. This will support an increased focus on the upgrade and refurbishment of the existing school stock to ensure that students in all post-primary schools have access to appropriate facilities to support PE learning experiences'.



## 5. Looking Forward [continued]

JMB welcomes the commitment to deliver a programme to build and modernise P.E. and school sport facilities, as our research indicates that just 50% of schools have a full-sized P.E. Hall. In addition, where they exist, 72% of PE Halls were either fully funded or partially funded by the schools themselves. Schools also require funding for replacement sports equipment which is becoming old and obsolete. Such equipment can very specialised and costly but there is no scheme in place unless a new sports hall is being built – a very rare occurrence. JMB believes that such funding should be available on an ongoing basis in a similar way to funding for replacement furniture, fittings, and fixtures.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › A major increase in the Capital Budget for voluntary secondary schools is required:
  - To allow for additional schools not on the Six Year Plan but in serious need of refurbishment and extensions to be added to the List
  - To meet a greater number of demands under the Additional Accommodation scheme
  - To allow for a greater number of categories to be approved under the Summer Works Scheme
  - To allow for a greater number of Emergency Works to be approved
  - To eliminate prefabricated classrooms
- › JMB urges that as many forms of delivery be put in place so that major projects be progressed through the Department's stages in an efficient and speedy manner
- › A special five-year plan is required to provide a full-sized P.E. Hall facility in every school with an interim scheme to replace obsolete sports equipment

### 5.2 The Pupil-Teacher Ratio

From the CI Report: 'The Irish school system was designed for in-person delivery of learning. [Prior to the closures] it had never been intended that ICT would be used to provide remote teaching and learning for all students. This meant that schools, as well as students and parents, faced considerable challenges to maintain teaching and learning'.

If the pandemic-related school closures have proved anything, it is the centrality of the teacher-student relationship that makes all the difference in the enterprise of the school. Even the most engaged, resourced, and supported student cannot form an educative relationship with a screen.

Successive Ministers appear to have forgotten the impact on schools and students of our seriously eroded staffing schedules. Ireland already has a higher ratio of students to teaching



## 5. Looking Forward [continued]

staff at secondary level than the European average, higher compulsory instruction time per student per year as well as significantly higher number of hours teaching time per year per teacher. Ireland nonetheless has one of the highest secondary school completion rates in the world at 89%, while the average school completion rate for OECD countries is 83%.

It should not be forgotten that the increase of the PTR to 19:1 coupled with the reduction in guidance counselling, EAL, and Traveller support hours from schools (an effective PTR increase), have had a very severe impact on the educational experience being offered in schools. The perception that increasing the PTR in any school by a point means an additional student in a classroom is completely wrong – it means subject and specialist teachers are lost to the school.

The current Programme for Government indicates that the State will ‘seek to make further progress in reducing pupil teacher ratios in primary schools’. While such investment at primary level is long overdue, the stark absence of any reference to equivalent treatment at post-primary level is hugely concerning. In particular, forthcoming policy change at senior cycle, for example in relation to broadening participation in Transition Year and LCVP, will carry significant implications for staffing levels if they are to succeed.

Meanwhile, the Irish State recognises and supports the right of parents to send their children to the school of their choice [Education Act 1998 Section 6 (e)]. The fee-charging school Pupil-Teacher Ratio has been increased three times in recent years. Fee-charging schools are a long-standing and successful example of Public-Private Partnership and are a net contributor to the economy. There is no such thing as ‘free’ education – either the State pays, or parents pay. Schools in the fee-charging sector, where parents pay much more, save the State money. An independent study conducted by PWC has shown that the cost to the State on an annual basis for a pupil educated in a fee-charging school is €3,710 compared to €8,900 in a Free Education school.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- › The pupil teacher ratio for schools in the Free Education sector must be restored to 18:1 in order to alleviate the impact of the cutbacks on staffing in schools in recent years and to support a recovery of the teaching time lost in the pandemic-related closures
- › Fee-charging schools, a long-standing and successful example of Public-Private Partnership, are a net contributor to the economy. The pupil-teacher ratio in these schools must be reduced as a first step from 23:1 to 21:1
- › As staffing allocations in areas such as professional time for teachers of junior cycle are based on a PTR model, schools in this sector are doubly discriminated-against – a practice which requires greater equity

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# Concluding Commentary

One of the most commented-upon elements of the Chief Inspector's Report centred on the sustainability of school governance:

'The Irish school system is extraordinarily fortunate in the calibre of those who lead Irish schools and in the volunteerism evident among those who serve on the boards of management of over 4,000 schools throughout the country. Without the efforts that they make, the administration of the system would simply not be possible. However, the current roles of school leaders and volunteer members of boards of management are unlikely to be sustainable into the future. By relying on voluntary boards of management to be the sole administrative mechanism at local level for the vast majority of schools, we create an unsustainable workload for many, if not most, principals and we erode their ability to lead and improve teaching and learning in schools'.

As mandated under its Strategic Development Plan, the JMB is currently planning a major research project to recognise and affirm the significance of the voluntary secondary school sector in Ireland's educational landscape. Under the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the board of management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school, and we anticipate uncovering some resonances with the Chief Inspector's conclusions above. We do, however, disagree with the unsustainability argument. Few countries demonstrate such a democratic, moral, and profoundly child and student-centred model of governance in their school systems. What is not required is unconsidered replacement of this model, or a return to the local education area type proposals first aired in the Green Paper on Education of the 1990's. We need to capitalise on this engagement by civic society in the leadership and management of our schools, primarily by investing in their formation, their continuing development, and the advisory and support services they require.

In recognition of the responsibility which the Education Act has imposed on Boards of Management and the increasingly complex environment in which they must operate, the JMB emphasises the need for the Department to provide a realistic grant for the provision of board of management training to support the training and development of the voluntary members of our boards of management in the discharge of their duties and consistent with national and Departmental priorities. Equally, Boards of Management require a suite of professionally delivered support services, including those relating to building development, vetting, HR, legal, child protection, financial management, and procurement, to list but a few. The JMB would welcome engaging with the Department to negotiate a properly resourced training and support structure for Boards of Management for the boards to meet their functions under the Education Act 1998.

The JMB wishes to record its appreciation for the respectful and collegial working relationships that exist between our organisation, its member schools and the various officers and sections within the Department. The commentary in this submission is set out in a spirit of cooperation in light of our common focus on the quality of our country's educational service. We will be happy to expand on any element of this set of recommendations and look forward to working with the Minister and her officials into the future.

**John Curtis, JMB General Secretary**  
**July 2022**







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