



# Joint Managerial Body

## ***Pre-Budget Submission 2020***

*For further information contact:*

*General Secretary*

*Tel: 01 2838255*

*Fax: 01 2695461*

*E-mail: [info@jmb.ie](mailto:info@jmb.ie)*

## Summary of Recommendations

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In this submission, JMB tracks the five overarching Goals of *Cumasú*: The Government's Action Plan for Education 2019 and points out where even modest, targeted investment can make significant differences to the lived reality in our schools.

### GOAL 1

*We will shape a responsive education and training system that meets the needs and raises the aspirations of all learners.*

#### ***Junior Cycle***

Recommendations:

- Agreement on a framework for scheduling Subject Learning and Assessment Review meetings that protects tuition time must be achieved as a matter of priority
- Staffing resources lost in the reduction of the class-contact week to 21:20 hours, pro-rata, must be replaced in full each year
- An effective communications strategy must be put in place to inform and advocate for this national educational initiative with parents and guardians

#### ***Technologies***

Recommendations:

- As part of the implementation of the new Digital Strategy for Schools adequate annualised ICT funding must be provided for teacher CPD, technical support and enhanced Wi-Fi infrastructure
- Requiring schools to compete for access to supplementary ICT grant-aid as set out in Circular 0018/2019, must be discontinued on the basis that it represents the embedding of serious inequity within our system
- 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

#### ***Guidance & Counselling***

Recommendations:

- The restoration of guidance and counselling allocation to schools to pre-cutback levels within both free and fee scheme schools must be addressed as a priority
- 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 and work-shadowing

## ***Relationships & Sexuality Education***

### **Recommendations:**

- While educators await the emergence of revised curricular specifications in RSE, the Department should put in place CPD and post-graduate development opportunities for contemporary teachers in this vital aspect of our education provision
- JMB urges the Minister to positively consider a forthcoming service-delivery proposal from TENI which has the wholehearted support of the management bodies and teacher unions

## **GOAL 2**

*We will advance the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage and learners with special educational needs in order to support them to achieve their potential.*

### ***The DEIS Programme***

#### **Recommendations:**

- 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
- We seek, as an immediate action, the provision of a second deputy principal in DEIS schools of between 600 and 699 students, with an extension of this allocation to all schools over 500 students from 2020/21

### ***Special Educational Needs***

#### **Recommendations:**

- The new profile model has not restored the 15% cut in the allocation of resource hours to students with SEN – this must be immediately reversed
- A special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) must be appointed to all post-primary schools with a weekly allocation of 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 challenges of mainstreaming students with profound and enduring special needs must be explored in advance of the enrolment of a growing cohort of such students into post-primary level
- JMB urges the Minister to consider the establishment of a nationwide team of therapists fully within the Department of Education and not outsourced from other Departments such as Health or DCYA

### **GOAL 3**

*We will equip education and training providers with the skills and support to provide a quality learning experience.*

#### ***School Funding***

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
- In 2017, the then Minister agreed that it was planned to abolish the basic salary payment made by boards of management to their teachers which is a unique feature of the Voluntary Secondary sector. A board of management with 30 teachers pays out €16,875, which schools in the other sectors have available to use on the resourcing of teaching and learning. The current Minister must eliminate immediately this systematic cut to our schools' funding

#### ***School Leadership***

Recommendations:

- The JMB strongly recommends that the Department allows time for the embedding of the current raft of initiatives affecting the workload and responsibility-load of principals
- A second deputy principal must now be appointed to schools with enrolments of over 500 students, where a second deputy is not currently provided-for
- We urge the Department to provide for a restoration of all posts lost in recent cutbacks and to provide for a more equitable allocation of Assistant Principal posts across schools of different enrolments

#### ***Teacher Supply***

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 inflexible, 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, such as removing barriers to retired teachers and those on job-share to increase the scope of their permitted teaching service

## **GOAL 4**

*We will intensify the relationships between education and the wider community, society and the economy.*

### ***Education for Enterprise***

Recommendation:

- A high-level, standing Forum on Second-Level Education should be established to continuously align our contemporary educational provision with the needs of the young people we serve

### ***Adult & Further Education***

Recommendation:

- JMB and our colleagues at ACCS insist that we be afforded the recognition our providers deserve at policy level and that we are included, as of right, in all decisions impacting on such provision within our schools

### ***Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities***

Recommendation:

- Expanding the use of school facilities will require a funding model to safely and appropriately open such facilities to the wider community

### ***Supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals***

Recommendation:

JMB would very much appreciate the advocacy of the Minister of Education & Skills and his officials in support of the establishment of a secure funding-stream for the duration of the JMB-Global Schoolroom project in Sierra Leone

## **GOAL 5**

*We will lead in the delivery of strategic direction and supportive systems in partnership with key stakeholders in education and training.*

### ***The Pupil-Teacher Ratio***

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 over the past six years
- 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 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

### ***Demographic growth and school buildings***

Recommendations:

1. A major increase in the Capital Budget for voluntary secondary schools:

- To meet the targets of the Six Year Plan
- 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 projects to be approved under a new Summer Works Scheme
- To allow for a greater number of Emergency Works to be approved
- To eliminate prefabricated classrooms

2. A special five-year plan to provide a full-sized P.E. Hall facility in every school with an interim scheme to replace obsolete sports equipment

### ***National Level Strategic Planning***

Recommendation:

- A Department-led oversight structure with both a mandate and authority to take an overall view of policy and practice developments must be established to map system (i.e. school) capacity against policy priority

## Cumasú: Empowering through Learning - Action Plan for Education 2019

### *Policy, Pragmatism and Potential*

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*Education matters because it can transform lives and because it offers possibilities for fulfilling potential. The benefits of this are felt by learners, their families, and our wider society. They contribute to our social and economic activities and help to raise standards in so many ways.*

*The Programme for Government recognises this, saying that education “is the key to giving every child an equal opportunity in life. No child should be left behind in economic recovery and we should use our strengthening economy to become a leader in the provision of world-class education and skills.”*

*Government of Ireland, 2019*

The late Concepta Conaty, educationalist and inclusion advocate, reminded us during the years of the Celtic Tiger that:

*‘... disturbingly, difficulties remain in education that cannot be solved merely by money. The resources needed are surely financial, but they are also the more significant people resources. In order to be solved, the educational problems of Irish society need people and their talents as much as they need government grants’<sup>1</sup>.*

It is into this fiscal vs human space that the notions of *systemsworld* and *lifeworld* emerge. The former should always be in service to the latter. We have, however, just begun to emerge from an extended period when systemsworld recession-survival strategies collided with a neo-liberal explosion of policy implementation and threatened the very lifeworld of our schools. This is not hyperbole. People and school communities have been at breaking-point in recent years due to the psychologically damaging effects of waves-without-troughs of cuts and circulars – a hundred a year in education.

While it is generally accepted that we are out of recession at macro-level, the micro-level cuts have not been reversed and the circulars still apply, along with their associated accountability measures. It is the strong contention of the JMB that to bring some humanity back into our education system, the systemsworld-lifeworld relationship needs to be recalibrated. We have been moving too fast without adequate resources and we need time and space to allow our spirits to catch up.

This is not about standing still. Each of the policy initiatives framed under successive governments’ action plans is worthwhile and necessary – it’s just that in its enthusiasm to ‘create the best education and training service in Europe by 2026’<sup>2</sup>, it simply forgot about its people. Concepta Conaty was right – ‘people technology’ by far outweighs ‘thing technology’.

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<sup>1</sup> Including All, Concepta Conaty, Veritas 2002, Page 13

<sup>2</sup> Action Plan for Education 2017, DES, Page 5

Our resources should be in service to our human needs – cognitive, spiritual, social, physical and emotional. Our policies must keep pace with our ability to implement them. George Bernard Shaw reminds us that ‘reformers have the idea that change can be achieved by brute sanity’, so it’s not always about being right – it’s about being real.

In this pre-budget submission, JMB reflects on the current policy agenda of the Department of Education & Skills as framed in ‘*Cumasú: Empowering through Learning - Action Plan for Education 2019*’ and attempts to ground policy in pragmatism. While some of the positions outlined in this submission reflect emerging policy and implementation challenges, many of our concerns around the gap between rhetoric and reality represent perennial issues such as the case for equalisation of funding across the post-primary sector, the restoration of special education supports and the resourcing of a fit-for-purpose building programme.

In any event, our commentary is made in a spirit of partnership and optimism and we recommend a set of implementable, value-for-money actions which will make the *Cumasú* Goals a success for all:

### **GOAL 1**

We will shape a responsive education and training system that meets the needs and raises the aspirations of all learners.

### **GOAL 2**

We will advance the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage and learners with special educational needs in order to support them to achieve their potential.

### **GOAL 3**

We will equip education and training providers with the skills and support to provide a quality learning experience.

### **GOAL 4**

We will intensify the relationships between education and the wider community, society and the economy.

### **GOAL 5**

We will lead in the delivery of strategic direction and supportive systems in partnership with key stakeholders in education and training.



## GOAL 1

**We will shape a responsive education and training system that meets the needs and raises the aspirations of all learners.**

*Approximately one out of every four people across the country can be classed as a student, which gives us an idea of the relevance of education in peoples' lives and on the national agenda.*

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*Minister McHugh, 2019*

### *Junior Cycle*

While the Framework for Junior Cycle continues to be implemented across our schools, several outstanding issues remain to be addressed. The most serious 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 incomprehensible 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, it betrays a set of values we have never associated with our Minister or his officials. It is time to remediate this injustice 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, Circular 0079/2018, and previous relevant circulars, cite the DES-union agreement on scheduling SLAR meetings thus:

*'Since professional collaboration meetings can only be held when the relevant subject teachers can be present, a limited number of meetings may need to draw on teachers' bundled time to run beyond normal school tuition hours for some of the duration of the meeting'.*

There are 27 subjects on the junior cycle curriculum, as listed in Appendix 1 of the circular. Once rolled-out, even a medium-sized school will offer at least 20 of these. Such provision will require 40 SLAR meetings per year, into the foreseeable future.

If teachers cite the clause '... a limited number of meetings may need to draw on teachers' bundled time to run beyond normal school tuition hours ...' and seek to have their SLAR meetings begin within tuition time (a rational interpretation of the wording) this would require an average of say, five 40-minute class periods to be substituted-for in respect of virtually every SLAR meeting for the next 20 – 30 years at least. This represents a staggering loss of over 133 hours of tuition time every year, not to mention the cost of cover, the unavailability of substitutes, parents' concerns around multiple 'free classes' and the student discipline issues this would raise in 200 untaught last-class-of-the-day sub-periods every school year.

In reality however, teachers are taking the clause above at face-value and seeking to have the entire SLAR meeting take place within tuition time. This would represent a loss of four

teaching hours per teacher per subject each year and twice that if, as is the case with the majority, teachers have a second subject.

Failure to achieve a re-negotiation or an agreed re-interpretation of this clause will leave school management and teachers in an impossible position; will result in some schools not being in a position to operate SLAR meetings; will cause friction between staff and principals; will erode the whole intention of junior cycle reform; will create 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.

Finally, while JCT has provided high quality professional development and support to both teachers and school leaders, the absence of a coherent communications strategy with parents is emerging as seriously problematic at school level. Parents and guardians are understandably challenged by new concepts around learning outcomes and assessment expectations, not to mention the changing landscape of reporting. It is essential that the Department ensures a fit-for-purpose communications strategy is put in place to ensure coherence of expectation and language between school and family in this most important of shared national educational enterprises.

## **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**
- **An effective communications strategy must be put in place to inform and advocate for this national educational initiative with parents and guardians**

## ***Technologies***

While JMB welcomes the provision of annualised funding for infrastructure in schools, the emergence in Circular 0018/2019 of a tranche of monies to be competitively sought by over 4000 schools represents a very unwelcome development. Schools are already highly accountable for the resources they receive for digital and all other initiatives. The introduction of yet another resource model based on form-filling, accountability-seeking, compliance-based and competitive access represents the worst of funding equity measures and JMB urges the Department not to continue with, or worse – inflate, such an approach in future.

To-date, a significant number of schools in our sector continue to report utilising their grant as ‘catch-up’ in terms of outdated or dysfunctional equipment and other infrastructural replacement. We must also ‘catch-up’ in terms of wi-fi infrastructure, technical support, teacher development in the use of technologies and supports for digital content production by teachers themselves.

While schools are re-developing their ICT policy frameworks, digital integration aspirations cannot be met without a parallel investment in pedagogy. ICT amplifies good teaching – it does not replace it. Our educators must be in a position to critically evaluate what is good in terms of teaching and learning, and what is ineffective. It is only by having a digitally-skilled teaching force that we can begin to tap into the potential for the appropriate use of technologies in the classroom and this must represent the next focus for policymakers to channel their investment.

Meanwhile, the funding previously provided for school administration packages ended six years ago. Schools now must fund this software from their own resources. On a per-capita basis this can be as high as €11.50 per pupil. The establishment of PPOD has not obviated the need for a school administration suite in every school and the inequitable funding model of voluntary secondary schools means that these costs must come out of a shrinking capitation budget. JMB therefore seeks a refund of the school administration package costs to schools on an invoiced basis.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **As part of the implementation of the new Digital Strategy for Schools adequate annualised ICT funding must be provided for teacher CPD, technical support and enhanced Wi-Fi infrastructure**
- **Requiring schools to compete for access to supplementary ICT grant-aid as set out in Circular 0018/2019, must be discontinued on the basis that it represents the embedding of serious inequity within our system**
- **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**

## ***Guidance & Counselling***

The argument for at least a restoration of G&C provision in our schools to pre-cutbacks levels, has been well made by one representative organisation after another and need not be re-rehearsed here. 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 G&C 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 provision for, these core activities.

Schools nonetheless need additional capacity, particularly in light of the complexity of future work-life and life-skills to be coped-with by contemporary young people. In particular, the emergence of a generation of students carrying profound levels of anxiety not experienced in scope or scale by any previous generation, requires that the school counsellor be

professionally developed, up to date, supported and supervised to levels higher than any of their predecessors.

The cohort of young people facing personal challenges and in need of sound career advice is not limited to free-scheme schools. The erosion of guidance counselling provision to fee-charging schools, greater than that of free-scheme schools, is being reported as having a seriously deleterious impact on that sector and JMB urges that allocation of G&C hours in such schools be aligned with those in the other sectors.

JMB has carried-out surveys of teacher supply challenges and, for the past two years, has identified that the supply of trained and qualified guidance counsellors is such that recruitment and retention are now serious issues at school level. We urge the Department to support the training of new GCs, 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.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **The restoration of guidance and counselling allocation to schools to pre-cutback levels within both free and fee scheme schools must be addressed as a priority**
- **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 and work-shadowing**

## ***Relationships & Sexuality Education***

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 patrons, parents and policy-makers in the development of high-quality programmes of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) 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.

JMB is encouraged by the scope of the current RSE review being undertaken by the NCCA which includes:

- 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?

As a matter of priority, and in advance of the emergence of a new set of curriculum specifications for RSE which could take some time, the Department should invest in a new round of training opportunities for teachers to maintain and increase the pool of such educators available for scheduling into RSE classes. 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. The development of a post-graduate diploma course in SPHE/RSE is 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 provide practical tools and resources to schools and staff. JMB urges the Minister to positively consider a forthcoming service-delivery proposal from TENI which has the wholehearted support of the management bodies and teacher unions.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **While educators await the emergence of revised curricular specifications in RSE, the Department should put in place CPD and post-graduate development opportunities for contemporary teachers in this vital aspect of our education provision**
- **JMB urges the Minister to positively consider a forthcoming service-delivery proposal from TENI which has the wholehearted support of the management bodies and teacher unions**

## GOAL 2

**We will advance the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage and learners with special educational needs in order to support them to achieve their potential.**

*We must use our education and training services in a flexible, adaptive and innovative way, so as to prepare people for the future. We are building on our progress and looking at what we need to do next, in order to serve the best needs of learners and society.*

*Minister McHugh, 2019*

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### *The DEIS Programme*

In 2018, JMB presented a submission to the Minister and Department with a view to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the DEIS investment in our 49 voluntary secondary schools within programme. The submission dealt with the following areas:

1. Policy – Learning from the ESRI Report
2. Current provision
3. Suggestions for immediate interventions to combat educational disadvantage in voluntary secondary DEIS schools

Low, or no-cost, immediate improvements can be made to the efficiency and effectiveness of our DEIS schools by an earlier advance of the second capitation-tranche; seed-capital for book rental schemes; VAT and PRSI rationalisation; providing clarity of expectation around SSE and JCSP, among a range of other possibilities.

In terms of higher-level goals, it must be comprehended that secondary schools' student populations do not map directly onto the local community which throws-up some significant anomalies in terms of the proportion and absolute numbers of those experiencing disadvantage within a particular school. For example, a large non-DEIS secondary school can have significantly more students experiencing social and economic disadvantage than its smaller DEIS neighbour.

This anomaly raises the question of the 'multiplier effect', cited on many occasions by DES as justification for the shape of the DEIS model. JMB does not argue against the principle that students in a school with a high concentration of disadvantaged peers have lower achievement levels than those in schools with a more socially advantaged intake, all else being equal. While the utilisation of CSO Census data in the identification of areas of socio-economic deprivation is to be welcomed, the ESRI report proposes a degree of tapering of supports for schools rather than a sharp withdrawal below the specified cut-off. JMB supports such a proposal and seeks to have comprehended those larger schools with high absolute numbers of disadvantaged students, as opposed to proportion. This is not to deny the existence or impact of the 'multiplier effect'. What, in all justice, is required is a good-faith attempt to map resourcing against need, even though this will emerge as being more complex than heretofore.

Meanwhile, the JMB was particularly gratified to see in the ESRI report an acknowledgement that enhanced resourcing arising from participation in the DEIS programme completely fails to match the overall deficit in funding experienced by disadvantaged schools. Such a deficit must be reflected in any revised policy or budgetary strategy.

Finally, what is usually neglected in considerations of the programme is the workload of the principal in DEIS schools. The impact of policy and initiative overload 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 called for the provision of a second deputy principal in DEIS schools of between 600 and 699 students. With only ten such schools nationally, JMB urges the Minister to implement this equity measure for the forthcoming school year, with an extension of the initiative to all DEIS schools over 500 students from 2020/21.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **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**
- **We seek, as an immediate action, the provision of a second deputy principal in DEIS schools of between 600 and 699 students, with an extension of this allocation to all DEIS schools over 500 students from 2020/21**

## ***Special Educational Needs***

### ***(a) In-School Coordination***

The introduction of a new school-profile based model of allocating resource hours to schools has been broadly welcomed but its impact will be significantly weakened unless the Department:

- (a) restores the quantum of hours to schools that were lost due to the cutbacks in 2010, and,
- (b) makes distinct provision for an expanded range of SEN coordination responsibilities.

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. New principals (the majority of the national school-leader cohort) find utilising students' hours for coordination problematic
4. There is no clarity or advice on the proportion of hours which should be dedicated for SENCO activities
5. SENCOs continually express their sense of being overwhelmed by their demands of the role
6. 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
7. Voluntary secondary schools are given no time for duties in their posts of responsibility
8. 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 demands 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.

#### ***(b) Making Provision for Students with Autism***

Although teaching resources exist for supporting educational outcomes for young people with autism, no whole-school framework is in place which schools are finding accessible and implementable. To address this gap in provision, JMB invited the autism advocacy organisation, AsIAM, to create a working group of experts in education and autism to produce an online supporting framework on how secondary schools could become autism friendly.

An online resource has now been developed with a roadmap to inclusion based on the principles of Universal Design. The school can decide where they are on their journey to becoming autism friendly, and the online resource houses links from both policy and practical related supports, 'how to's', and testimonials from schools who have been on the journey.

While this resource has been funded without state support, the emergence of a significantly increased cohort of young people with autism – currently at primary school level – will have policy and resourcing implications for post-primary now and into the years ahead. JMB urges the Department to expand the post-graduate training provision for teachers which is currently heavily oversubscribed and to investigate the challenges faced by schools under the policy of mainstreaming even the most profoundly affected young people with autism, its co-morbidities and other conditions requiring highly specialist educational interventions.

#### ***(c) Towards a New Model of Support***

JMB very much welcomes the trialling of a 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*'. In particular, the recognition of the need for timely and consistent access to occupational, speech and language and behavioural therapeutic services represents both an opportunity and a challenge for the Department. It is the view of JMB that the Minister considers the establishment of a nationwide team of therapists fully within the Department of Education and not outsourced from other Departments such as Health or DCYA. Education requires to be ring-fenced from both capital and current expenditure overruns in other Departments as this full-service model will require (a) to be developed as a long-term, indeed permanent, model of addressing additional care needs and (b) will demand education-specific professional expertise from its growing team of therapists and psychologists.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **The new profile model has not restored the 15% cut in the allocation of resource hours to students with SEN – this must be immediately reversed**
- **A special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) must be appointed to all post-primary schools with a weekly allocation of 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 challenges of mainstreaming students with profound and enduring special needs must be explored in advance of the enrolment of a growing cohort of such students into post-primary level**
- **JMB urges the Minister to consider the establishment of a nationwide team of therapists fully within the Department of Education and not outsourced from other Departments such as Health or DCYA**

## GOAL 3

**We will equip education and training providers with the skills and support to provide a quality learning experience.**

*Cumasú allows us to measure different areas to see where we are making solid progress but, equally importantly, those areas where we need to focus our efforts. If we are to ensure that education truly empowers people, then we need to be ambitious about what we can achieve.*

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*Minister McHugh, 2019*

### ***School Funding***

At our 2019 Annual Conference, the President of AMCSS/JMB Mrs Deirdre Matthews, reminded the Minister that ‘schools are educational, not fundraising, enterprises’. In this, she is supported by Barnardos who, in a recent submission on school costs, said:

*‘No other public service has to subsidise their funding to keep the show on the road, so why should the Department of Education expect schools to have to undertake extensive fundraising activities from parents and staff to fund necessities?’*

In addition to the general reduction in capitation grants by 11% over four Budgets in recent years, schools in the Voluntary Secondary sector are severely disadvantaged in terms of annual grant support vis-à-vis the other two post-primary sectors. On average over 30% of total annual expenditure in a Voluntary Secondary school must be raised through fund-raising in the local community which places a huge burden on school management, reducing the time available for all the other responsibilities that school management must undertake.

It is time for this long-standing and indefensible inequity to be finally and comprehensively resolved. It is generally acknowledged that a Voluntary Secondary school of 400 pupils receives €90 per pupil less per annum in grants from the State than a similarly sized Community School and €212 per pupil less than a 400-pupil school in the ETB sector.

In November 2017, the then Minister acknowledged the Department’s commitment to JMB in a reply to a parliamentary question from Deputy John Brassil, as to why a review of funding to schools has not taken place. The Minister stated:

*‘Given that it has not yet been possible to restore grant funding levels in the schools sector due to the many other competing priorities for available funding the review referred to by the Deputy has not yet taken place.*

*However, it has been agreed with the JMB that any future improvements in funding should be directed in the first instance at the elimination of the salary grant deduction from the capitation payable to voluntary secondary schools. This salary grant deduction amounts to €563 (inclusive of ER PRSI) per teaching post. The estimated annual cost of eliminating the salary grant deduction is approximately €7m’.*

It is now open to the current Minister to implement the promise of his predecessor through the abolition of the basic salary payment made by boards of management to their teachers which is a unique feature of the Voluntary Secondary sector. A board of management with 30 teachers pays out €16,875, which schools in the other sectors have available to use on the resourcing of teaching and learning.

The time and energy, not to mention anxiety and pressure, expended in the struggle to make ends meet in our secondary schools must now be ended.

## **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**
- **In 2017, the then Minister agreed that it was planned to abolish the basic salary payment made by boards of management to their teachers which is a unique feature of the Voluntary Secondary sector. A board of management with 30 teachers pays out €16,875, which schools in the other sectors have available to use on the resourcing of teaching and learning. The current Minister must eliminate immediately this systematic cut to our schools' funding**

## ***School Leadership***

JMB acknowledges and welcomes the provision of additional deputy principals in larger schools in recent times. This represents a cost-effective model of enhancing the leadership base in our schools and we urge the Minister to expand this provision to medium-sized schools next year.

More broadly, however, what is needed is a fundamental reconstitution of the principal as leader of learning. We are constantly urged to embed policy as 'whole-school' enterprises and to create collaborative, professional learning communities of practice. Such re-culturation absolutely aligns with the vocational foundations of the school principal yet each leader is systematically prevented from even initiating this deep-change by an oppressive workload not directly linked to this goal in the first instance. Meanwhile, addressing the serious issues of role clarity and personal-professional capacity requires three concurrent developments, each within the scope of the Department to initiate immediately:

1. Provide time to allow for the embedding for the raft of initiatives already overwhelming school leaders
2. Restore all posts lost during the recessionary cutbacks, and,
3. Provide for a more equitable allocation of Assistant Principal posts across schools of different enrolments

This latter point was illustrated by the JMB President at Conference:

*‘Our school enrolment is 902, and we have an allocation of 3 deputy principals, 8 assistant principal I posts, including programme coordinator, and 10 assistant principal II posts.*

*Contrast this to a school just down the street whose enrolment is 620 and has an allocation of just 1 deputy principal, 5 assistant principal I posts and 7 assistant principal II posts.*

*These figures illustrate how the schools over 500 pupils have been particularly disadvantaged compared to schools over 700 and 900 students, under circular 03/2018’.*

In terms of middle-management, the implementation of the new model for appointments to posts of responsibility represents a real opportunity to put in place a structure of shared leadership appropriate to contemporary schools. JMB looks forward to continuing its engagement with the Department in the delivery of a restored and fit-for-purpose model of distributed leadership with genuine equity for schools of all sizes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The JMB strongly recommends that the Department allows time for the embedding of the current raft of initiatives affecting the workload and responsibility-load of principals**
- **A second deputy principal must now be appointed to schools with enrolments of over 500 students, where a second deputy is not currently provided-for**
- **We urge the Department to provide for a restoration of all posts lost in recent cutbacks and to provide for a more equitable allocation of Assistant Principal posts across schools of different enrolments**

## *Teacher Supply*

Arising from significant reported challenges in the area, the JMB carried out its, by now, annual survey of its member schools in 2018/19 on the availability of new and/or replacement teachers across the range of subjects and services required by our schools. The findings, in terms of subject availability, speak for themselves:

Rank	2016/17	2017/18	2017/18	2018/19	2018/19	2018/19
	<b>Permanent</b>	<b>Permanent</b>	<b>Substitute</b>	<b>Permanent</b>	<b>Substitute</b>	<b>Unable to Recruit</b>
1	Irish	Irish	Irish	Irish	Irish	Irish
2	French	French	French	French	Maths	Maths
3	Maths	Maths	Science	Maths	French	French
4	Home Ec.	Home Ec.	Home Ec.	Home Ec.	Home Ec.	Home Ec.
5	German	Spanish	German	Physics	Science	German
6	Physics	Guidance	Spanish	Science	Physics	Physics
7	Science	Biology	Physics	Guidance	Chemistry	Spanish
8	Spanish	Business	Music	German	English	Science
9	Guidance	Music	Art	Phys. Ed.	German	Guidance
10	English	Art	Maths	Chemistry	Spanish	-

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

- A long-term planning strategy by DES, based on projected future need, is vital if we are to have a guaranteed qualified cohort of young teachers coming through
- Address the current impasse regarding the inequality of salary for young teachers as current pay policy is leading many graduates to emigrate
- The fractionalisation of secondary teaching posts is having a huge effect
- It is impossible to get a Home Economics replacement teacher. Our single training college needs to take in at least triple the cohort if not quadruple to meet anywhere near the national demand
- The Teaching Council needs to work with the universities in relation to how places are allocated on the PME courses
- A two year part-time post-graduate course in Irish and modern continental languages similar to that provided for out-of-field Maths would help alleviate teacher deficits
- We need a standing connection between PME Providers, Second Level School Representatives and the Allocations Section in DES

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.

#### **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, such as removing barriers to retired teachers and those on job-share to increase the scope of their permitted teaching service**

## GOAL 4

**We will intensify the relationships between education and the wider community, society and the economy.**

*Central to all our work and deliberations must be how we treat each other and a recognition of the importance of the wellbeing of all those dealing with our education and training services. It is quite evident that, now more than ever, dignity and respect must be at the heart of our education system.*

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*Minister McHugh, 2019*

### ***Education for Enterprise***

While everyone has to make a living, it is a serious mistake to view the educational enterprise as a vehicle for the production of entrepreneurs, artists, scientists, technologists or any other profile the state currently views as a contemporary priority. These priorities change all the time. The mission at the heart of education must be to create lovers of learning – lifelong, multifaceted, agile and life-enhancing. The curriculum must therefore be relevant, coherent, engaging and professionally mediated by enthusiastic teachers. We identify some characteristics of such provision as:

- Coherent and with clear continuity between its various phases
- A preparation for the challenges of life
- A preparation for further and higher education
- A preparation for the world of work
- A preparation for citizenship
- Authentically holistic, which includes an awareness, understanding and experience of the sacred in human experience

Individuals and society benefit from the provision of a broadly-based, yet rigorous education and the current curriculum provides scope for the majority of students to engage in areas of core learning and subjects of their choosing as well as achieving to academically challenging standards generally aligning with their capacity. In terms of improvement, JMB would identify the following as priorities:

- Curriculum specifications should be updated and revised regularly in light of developments in subject areas
- The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme as a whole is due for revision, not simply its modules on a piecemeal basis
- RSE should be better supported and integrated into a revised and updated Senior Cycle SPHE framework
- The backwash on senior cycle from third-level entry demands is no longer appropriate or acceptable. At the very least, work on broadening entry routes to

higher education should be recommenced as this development appears to have stalled

- The senior cycle review is providing evidence of a need for re-imagined purposes and reconfigured pathways to accommodate the needs of diverse students with multiple life possibilities. The JMB sees the review outcomes as demanding evolution, rather than revolution at upper secondary, which is not to argue for conservatism but for a level of responsible and courageous innovation

Civic discourse on education and schooling is, at times, limited, reactive and often focussed on peripheral developments. Small scale add-ons or short-lived adjustments to the current ‘factory model’ of schooling in Ireland are just tinkering. What is really needed is a national conversation on post-primary education in general. This will need to encompass not just a vision but propose courageous steps to address the mismatch between the knowledge, skills, aptitudes and attitudes young people need to live a rich and full adult life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the educational structures which are currently in place to prepare them. This process should begin and be underpinned by a permanent Forum on Second-Level Education.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- **A high-level, standing Forum on Second-Level Education should be established to continuously align our contemporary educational provision with the needs of the young people we serve**

#### ***Adult & Further Education***

JMB and ACCS FE-providing schools now work closely together under a structure known as JFERG - the Joint Further Education Representative Group. We have established sound working relationships with DES, FESS, SOLAS and QQI and have set out a Memorandum of Understanding for our engagement with ETBI. Our aim is to achieve a coherent way forward for our FE providers and keep this vital element of JMB school provision alive into the future.

In a major step forward, JMB and ACCS have secured funding from SOLAS to set up a Further Education Support Unit which will carry out the following functions:

- Establish arrangements with JFERG schools both nationally and regionally to work effectively with ETB and SOLAS structures
- Coordinate and support schools in relation to planning and re-focusing provision in consultation with SOLAS in response to the recommendations from the PLC evaluation.
- Coordinate the provision of relevant CPD to JFERG schools
- Provide a communication channel facilitating the exchange of information between JFERG, ETB, ETBI, SOLAS, QQI and other relevant stakeholders

- Support JFERG schools with the process of QQI Quality Assurance, QQI re-engagement and QQI programme validation
- Contribute to the establishment of formal arrangements through ETB FET Services to facilitate collaboration between ETB FET services and JFERG schools
- Collaborate to develop and share FET mechanisms to support and encourage cohesive, integrated local planning and delivery

JMB is anxious about the Department's proposed changes to the funding model of further education in mixed-provision settings such as our schools. We insist that JMB and our colleagues at ACCS be afforded the recognition our providers deserve at policy level and that we be included in all decisions impacting on such provision within our schools.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- **JMB and our colleagues at ACCS insist that we be afforded the recognition our providers deserve at policy level and that we are included, as of right, in all decisions impacting on such provision within our schools**

#### ***Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities***

The core function of a school is schooling. In the case of our schools, everything we do must ultimately lead to enhanced teaching and learning outcomes for our students. That said, there are times and situations wherein the wider community can also benefit by availing of certain facilities and other assets held in trust by the school.

The core issue here is not the 'will' but the 'way'. Engagement with further and adult education, use of sports facilities, provision of computer classes, drama and musical engagements, hobby and leisure classes etc. all require insurance, staffing, caretaking, coordination, supervision, key-holding, locking-up, reporting, financial arrangements, building protection, alarm-management, car-parking supervision, heating, lighting, gas, etc. etc.

If the Department is serious about expanding the use of school facilities, there must be a funding framework put in place which does not erode the already inadequate funding status of the core school or place further workload burdens on management.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- **Expanding the use of school facilities will require a funding model to safely and appropriately open such facilities to the wider community**



## ***Supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals***

### ***The Joint Global Schoolroom-JMB Initiative***

The Irish educational charity, Global Schoolroom (GS), has been working in Sierra Leone, a country devastated by both the Ebola crisis and a destructive civil war. While GS has been working extensively with classroom teachers, there exists a gap in its provision around school leadership and, specifically, principalship.

Following discussions between GS and JMB on capacity-building within school leadership, JMB Council approved the undertaking of a JMB outreach initiative with GS, supporting the development of school leadership interventions and, eventually, programmes.

In 2018/19, GS and JMB agreed to work together to do the following:

- a. establish a baseline study of needs of educational leaders working in the areas in which GS works, or plans to work in the near future;
- b. develop content and materials based on analysis of needs in line with best practice and context;
- c. provide up-to-date training, insights and advice to such leaders, based on contemporary research evidence

To-date, four visits have taken place to eight schools in Sierra Leone and while there are obvious risks to bringing a first-world lens to a third-world landscape, the degree of commonality between the Irish and Sierra Leonean professional educator stories is perhaps more remarkable than the immediate differences. That said, the classic stress-inducing collisions between demands and resources, compliance and capacity, culture and cultivation are all evident in Sierra Leone and are, to a significant degree, amplified and overwhelming.

In terms of the JMB participation in this Global Schoolroom leaders' initiative, three key areas stand out as having potential for high impact:

1. Capacity-building in Principalship and Deputy Principalship
2. Senior teacher leadership development and succession
3. School Governance

The involvement of JMB in this leadership development project with Global Schoolroom has, to-date, represented an innovative outreach initiative with significant learning on both sides. We have now established strong working relationships with GS, the trustees and the schools in Sierra Leone and both organisations are now considering how best to move the project forward. JMB appreciates that this initiative falls within the ambit of the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade, and Irish Aid in particular. In seeking a sustainable funding model for this outreach work however, we would very much appreciate the advocacy of the Minister of Education & Skills and his officials in support of the establishment of a secure funding-stream for the duration of the project.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**JMB would very much appreciate the advocacy of the Minister of Education & Skills and his officials in support of the establishment of a secure funding-stream for the duration of the JMB-Global Schoolroom project in Sierra Leone**

## GOAL 5

**We will lead in the delivery of strategic direction and supportive systems in partnership with key stakeholders in education and training.**

*I am committed to continuing with the reforms underway, in a carefully managed and paced way. I want to ensure that there is a logical sequence to what's being implemented on the ground.*

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*Minister McHugh, 2019*

### ***The Pupil-Teacher Ratio***

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 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 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. 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.

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. As one fee-charging school after another migrates to the free-scheme, the net cost to the exchequer increases rather than achieving any saving.

### **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 over the past six years**
- **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 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**

### *Demographic growth and school buildings*

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 has welcomed the publication of the Six Year Plan for major capital investment. However, it is imperative that the capital budget for schools be increased substantially. Many voluntary secondary schools have been serving their communities for more than 150 years. Many 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 increasing building costs and lack of sufficient personnel in the School Building Unit, the targets in the Six Year Plan will not be met. There are schools on the list that still have not received a Technical Visit from officials in the Building Unit. Other schools that have had a Technical Visit are still waiting for a Schedule of Accommodation.

It is the JMB view that schools due to go to construction need to have Technical Visits immediately with Schedules of Accommodation being issued shortly afterwards. With the time required to design, get statutory approvals and agreement with DES and tendering, it will be a huge task to meet the targets of the Six Year Plan.

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 Six Year Plan List. These schools and the communities they serve cannot wait until 2022 or 2023 to be assessed for capital investment. A mechanism must be found to have these schools added to the current List and additional funding made available to meet their needs.

There is an increasing demand under the Additional Accommodation Scheme to provide additional classrooms and practical rooms for our schools, and to replace prefab classrooms. 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.

In successive programmes for government, the elimination of prefabricated classrooms has been specifically identified as a national priority yet, very little progress has been made so far.

JMB research indicates that just 50% of schools have a full-sized P.E. Hall and 72% of PE Halls were either fully funded or partially funded by the schools themselves. Funding for

adequate sports facilities in our schools must be identified as a government priority. In addition, schools 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:**

### **1. A major increase in the Capital Budget for voluntary secondary schools:**

- **To meet the targets of the Six Year Plan**
- **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 projects to be approved under a new Summer Works Scheme**
- **To allow for a greater number of Emergency Works to be approved**
- **To eliminate prefabricated classrooms**

### **2. A special five-year plan to provide a full-sized P.E. Hall facility in every school with an interim scheme to replace obsolete sports equipment**

## ***National Level Strategic Planning***

The advent of an ever-expanding suite of evaluation strategies by the Inspectorate, with two new modes added this year alone, means that Irish schools must be among the most externally inspected schools in Europe. The holy grail of evaluation, however, is for responsible self-evaluation to underpin decision-making at school level and for the Inspectorate to provide an advisory and support role in this.

Recent meta-analysis<sup>3</sup> research into ‘what works’ in teaching and learning and the effect size of various factors in schooling, elicited the following list as the top ten factors impacting on students’ learning outcomes:

1. Student self-assessment/self-grading
2. Response to intervention
3. Teacher credibility
4. Providing formative assessments
5. Classroom discussion
6. Teacher clarity

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<sup>3</sup>Hattie, J. (2009) Visible Learning

7. Feedback
8. Reciprocal teaching
9. Teacher-student relationships fostered
10. Meta-cognitive strategies taught and used

If valid, this research points to the greatest influence on learning as being sited in the classroom, with teacher effectiveness lying at the heart of the achievement of successful outcomes for young people.

The DES must therefore align everything it does with these findings. We need someone at the ‘top’ of the education policy-making pyramid to have the complete picture. At present the Department is heavily siloed. One section doesn’t speak with the other on an effective basis. In fact, the only people in the country who operate at the centre of the nexus of policy-overload are our principals, who must implement everything. To support a more realistic and grounded policy framework, JMB urges the Department to develop a model of structured input from people with school management experience and to ensure that every major decision is ‘road-tested’ by those charged with its implementation. The lack of inspectors with school management experience is a case in point. DES should use the secondment process, with retained allowances, to boost its school-management perspective and this will represent a small amount of money well spent.

Meanwhile, JMB is extremely conscious of the workload of its principal members and reiterates a plea for a five-year pause in the relentless imposition of disconnected policy imperatives landing on the desks of overwhelmed school leaders. Over 70% of principals in our sector have not completed a six-year cycle and both people and procedures are now at breaking point.

Ministers are, of their role, transitory. A key strategic priority for the Department must be to put in place an oversight structure with both a mandate and authority to take an overall view of policy and practice developments and attack both the incoherence and overload impacting on our schools. Its primary function must be to map system capacity against policy priority. We cannot have ‘joined-up thinking’ if no-one is responsible for doing this thinking. If it is everyone’s responsibility, it is no-one’s responsibility.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

- **A Department-led oversight structure with both a mandate and authority to take an overall view of policy and practice developments must be established to map system (i.e. school) capacity against policy priority**

## Concluding Commentary

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Most of the important things in life cannot be measured. Voluntary secondary schools are caring and inclusive communities. They have adapted to demographic change with significant net migration into Ireland and have led the way in integrating the ‘new Irish’ into local communities. They have been leaders in areas such as special needs, social inclusion and Traveller education. Our schools need no lectures on enterprise, efficiency and effectiveness as they have been labouring under a funding regime which ranks Ireland very low in terms of expenditure on education and per capita investment in each second-level student. In short, we have been providing world-class teaching and learning at bargain basement cost to the state and every performance indicator, internal and international, points to the teaching profession and the management of our schools as a national treasure.

What is yet more remarkable is the wholehearted, quality-focussed character of student experience and outcomes provided by schools within the voluntary secondary sector. The term ‘voluntary’ represents the very best of mission-driven, people-centred service in our country. From our teachers who work well beyond the limits of their contracts, to our leaders who give their very lives to their schools and to our voluntary boards of management who steer each school community, the spirit of our schools is, in every sense, sacred and should not be taken for granted.

The intention of the Minister’s Action Plan to re-focus the education system on a new set of priorities must avoid an emphasis on solely process and output measurements. It is essential that the Minister’s strategy does more than create the *impression* of decisiveness in action. Like so many strategic plans, audit-based innovation programmes and accountability measures before it, this otherwise worthwhile project will falter if it:

- Fails to secure the confidence of teachers
- Does not acknowledge the centrality of the teacher-pupil relationship in the educative process
- Does not achieve change at classroom level
- Fosters dependence and external compliance, especially from school leaders
- Leaves school difference unacknowledged while threatening schools with publication of outcomes, or,
- Diverts scarce resources to monolithic, standardised assessment measures undermining the professional status and moral authority of teachers

The challenges around teacher supply speak for themselves. Proposals to enhance the professionalisation of the teaching profession are welcome at any time but if we are to continue to attract the ‘brightest and the best’ to the profession, it is essential that teachers are supported and affirmed by both the institutions of state and the community at large.

Attention to the school-leadership reform agenda is equally urgent. Principals are hired, in the first instance, as creators of a learning culture within their schools. The great frustration is

that we spend so little of our time at this core task due to an ever-increasing workload, the lack of administrative support, a middle-management structure still requiring expansion and the struggle to fundraise. Nonetheless, principals still manage to dedicate much energy to the essential activity of leading and enhancing learning for *every* member of their school community.

The term ‘Leadership’ does not take on new meaning when preceded by the word ‘Teacher’. The development of a collaboratively formed, authentically collegial learning community should be the key focus of every principal and, in this re-culturation of their schools, principals should be supported and encouraged by the Department. That they are currently being inhibited by the attrition of an overwhelming workload and impossible administrative demands is now beyond argument.

To summarise, the neo-liberal impulse to measure everything must be resisted in education. Schools *are* accountable to the taxpayer and to their school communities but their significant contribution to the development of confident, educated, responsible, healthy, well-adjusted and happy citizens is literally immeasurable.

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 his officials into the future.

**John Curtis, JMB General Secretary**

**July 2019**