



JMB

JOINT MANAGERIAL BODY
For Voluntary Secondary Schools

Pre-Budget Submission 2022

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Hope for Recovery

Summary of Recommendations

In this submission, JMB tracks key high-level goals of the Department of Education's Statement of Strategy 2021 - 2023

1. Sustainable School Leadership for Recovery

'For school leaders working in these demanding and chaotic circumstances, the pressure is relentless, the options are limited, the sleepless night are frequent. They are reliant on guidance about COVID-19 responses, processes, procedures, and protocols from above, which can change, almost overnight, depending on how the virus develops. School leaders are walking a tightrope without a safety net. There are no precedents and no guides to leading schools in a pandemic' (Harris 2020).

The Government must enable our principals and deputies to lead their schools with personal and professional sustainability. This can only be achieved by identifying and addressing all the resource and support limiting factors affecting the capacity to provide for the needs of their school communities.

Recommendations:

- **JMB strongly urges the Department to end the practice of allocating a fraction of a deputy principal to any school**
- **Boarding schools may require an additional range of specific supports in terms of accommodation configuration, social distancing and Covid-related health and safety provision**
- **In line with the Programme for Government's commitment '*that schools be given the time to implement required changes*', the JMB strongly recommends that the Department allows at least two further academic years to lapse before initiating any further policy agendas impacting on the workload of principals**

2. Enhancing Guidance & Counselling Services

The JMB urges the Department to provide at least a restoration of guidance and counselling provision in our schools to pre-financial crash cutback levels. Whilst 600 posts have been reinstated to schools, this does not represent a restoration, as the school student population continues to grow significantly at post-primary level leaving guidance counsellors, who are already overstretched, working with fewer contact hours and a larger student population.

Recommendations:

- **JMB demands a meaningful increase in provision for guidance and 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 and work-shadowing**

3. Resourcing Digital Technologies for Learning

The legacy of historic underinvestment has led to continued significant inequity in the digital capacity of different schools. Such inequities have not been remediated by the annualised funding over the term of the outgoing strategy. In particular, system-level bottlenecks emerged during the school closures that require to be seen by government as national priorities and not drawing on the dedicated funding assigned to the strategy for schools. The infrastructure priorities include immediate roll-out of 200mb fibre broadband to every school, and a once-and-for-all elimination of socially inequitable digital poverty – an appropriate device for every child, as a national project.

Recommendations:

- **As part of the review of the state’s Digital Strategy for Schools, adequate emergency, and thereafter annualised ICT funding, must be adjusted upwards to provide for school-wide remote device purchase, up-to-date teacher CPD in distance teaching and assessment, on-site technical and administrative support, and enhanced Wi-Fi infrastructure**
- **DEIS school communities require significant infrastructural investment in light of their experience of distance teaching and learning since March 2020**
- **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**

4. Re-energising Curricular Reform

Junior and Senior Cycles

At junior cycle, the decision to reduce the assessment requirement in respect of two successive year groups is 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. Meanwhile, several outstanding policy-level issues remain to be addressed by the Department; the inadequacy of the replacement hours to be provided for the 22 hours per year, pro-rata, professional time for teachers and the scheduling of SLAR meetings outside of tuition time.

JMB is conscious that the NCCA’s Senior Cycle Review Advisory Report, recently submitted to the Minister, represents a significant milestone in the journey toward an eventual Framework for Senior Cycle. Whether the next steps involve a steady-state approach, with incrementalism leading to enhanced versions of what we currently have or a more fundamental reform aligning with the voices expressed in the consultation phases, we will inevitably return to the adequacy of resources as one of the key conducive conditions for change.

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**

Resourcing Relationships & Sexuality Education

JMB presented a submission and engaged in person with the Oireachtas Joint Committee's review of Relationships and Sexuality Education in 2018. 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.

There is also an urgent need for a targeted, evidence-based programme to support young transgender people in post-primary schools.

Recommendations:

- **The Department should put in place CPD and post-graduate development opportunities for contemporary teachers in RSE, a vital aspect of our education provision**
- **JMB urges the Minister to positively consider service-delivery proposals from TENI which has the support of the management bodies and teacher unions**

5. Towards Equitable and Fair School Funding

'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 future changes in family income' (ESRI).

If ever there was a time for this long-standing and indefensible inequity in sectoral funding to be finally and comprehensively resolved, it is now.

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, costing a school with 30 teachers €16,875 per annum. While 20% of this deduction was removed in Budget 2020, the new Minister must now eliminate completely this systematic cut to our schools' funding**

6. 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. The 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.

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 2020/21**
- **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**

7. School Buildings: Demographic Growth and Physical Education

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 welcomes the commitment in the Programme for Government to ‘deliver a programme to build and modernise P.E. and school sports 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 DES 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**

8. The Cost of Schooling on Families

Voluntary secondary schools already operate under an inequitable funding regime and must look to parents to make up the shortfall in financial resourcing when compared to other sectors. We agree with the conclusion of Barnardos in their School Costs Survey that:

‘The Department is still failing to realise that an increase in basic funding for primary and secondary schools will reduce the need for voluntary contributions to be paid’.

The Minister should now 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.

Recommendations:

- **Seed capital and a flexible quantum of teacher hours for administration must be provided to schools for the establishment and operation of school book rental schemes**
- **Guidelines and encouragement, not threats to cut funding, should be offered to schools to review school uniform policies**
- **The government must commit to eliminating the need for schools to seek voluntary subscriptions from families, as a matter of urgency**

9. Resourcing Recovery for Students with Special Educational Needs

While both State and schools remained highly concerned about the fate of students with special education needs during the school closures, there has been clear evidence of a loss of engagement, skills, learning and human connection that will require to be treated with the urgency it deserves as schools continue on their reopening journeys. As a matter of urgency, the government must increase the SET allocation to all schools by at least 30% and, once and for all, 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.

Recommendations:

- **The landscape of SEN provision has been radically worsened by the Covid pandemic and schools will need at least a 30% increase in SET allocation to mitigate its worst effects**
- **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 paused until its key backing conditions have been established agreed**
- **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**

10. Our DEIS Schools

Of all the stress-points JMB experienced during the school closures, it was across our 50 DEIS principals that the most worrying levels of anxiety, overwhelm and distress were evidenced. It is finally time for this inhuman imposition of un-resourced responsibility to change. As an immediate action in 2021, we now call on the Department to allocate a full deputy principal in DEIS schools of up to 400 students. JMB urges the Minister to implement this equity measure immediately and to broaden its scope to include all schools with fractions of deputy principal positions thereafter.

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 DEIS schools of up to 400 students and to broaden its scope to include all schools with fractions of deputy principal positions thereafter**
- **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**

11. Resourcing Anti-Bullying Strategies

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 notes the intention of the Inspectorate to have school's compliance with the Department's 2013 Anti-Bullying Procedures given specific attention during incidental inspections from September 2021. Meanwhile, the recently published OECD report Education at a Glance 2020 ranks Ireland in last place out of 36 countries for investment in second-level education as a percentage of GDP. Thus, the Department repeatedly sets out high demands on schools in respect of anti-bullying measures but clearly the State is neglecting its responsibility to provide its schools with the resources we need to tackle bullying effectively and to support positive mental health development in our students.

Recommendations:

- **The Oireachtas Joint Committee's report will, when published, carry a significant set of recommendations and JMB urges the Department to give serious consideration to their implementation**
- **Similarly, the outcomes of the Inspectorate's engagement with school on anti-bullying will 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**

12. Fee-charging and Boarding Schools

Our Constitution and legislation enshrine the right of parents to the choice of school for their children. The right of religious groups to promote denominational education is also protected in our legislation. The overwhelming majority of fee-charging schools are denominational in character and those of minority-faith ethos provide for the constitutional rights of families which would otherwise be denied given the geographical challenges mitigated by boarding schools. Since Budget 2009 however, government has adopted a position of differentiating between fee-charging and free-scheme schools in a wide range of resourcing mechanisms which have had a significant impact on these not-for-profit educational enterprises. JMB seeks a review of this policy, aligned with an overarching review of funding across all voluntary secondary schools.

Recommendations:

- **JMB urges the Minister to commission an independent review of state resourcing across the entire voluntary secondary school sector**
- **In fee-charging schools offering to provide special classes on a no-fee basis, the Department should approve such applications.**

JMB Pre-Budget Submission 2022

Hope for Recovery

Introduction

The 2021 JMB Annual Conference had, as its central theme, ‘Hope for Recovery’. In citing ‘hope’ as a core intention, we were not signalling some vague sense of optimism, but rather adopting the deeper and richer meaning of this value as so beautifully articulated by the poet and president, Václav Havel:

Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but, rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.

The more unpropitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper that hope is.

Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.

In short, I think that the deepest and most important form of hope, the only one that can keep us above water and urge us to good works, and the only true source of the breathtaking dimension of the human spirit and its efforts, is something we get, as it were, from “elsewhere.”

It is also this hope, above all, which gives us the strength to live and continually to try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now.

‘... the certainty that something makes sense’. So, what makes sense for our troubled and struggling country at this point in its history? What makes sense for our government and public institutions? What makes sense for our anxious families and their children? And what makes sense for our precious school communities?

Learning makes sense, or we will be doomed as individuals and as a society to repeat the failures of the past and to fail to celebrate our successes.

Community makes sense, or individuals will be left at the mercy of our own limited mind-sets or those from outside who would exploit us, as we have seen so clearly in 2021.

Resilience makes sense, or we will fall into a downward spiral of fear and lethargy, unable to lift or be lifted to our proper place in family, society, and the world.

Faith makes sense, whatever our denomination or spiritual foundations as, in President Havel’s words, *the breathtaking dimension of the human spirit and its efforts, is something we get, as it were, from “elsewhere.”*

Finally, love makes sense, for our schools are sites of love and hope or they are nothing.

In short, our schools and our education system make sense – urgent sense. To keep our national investment in last place out of 36 countries for investment in second-level education as a percentage of GDP (OECD 2020) does not make sense.

In this submission, which tracks key goals of the recently published Department of Education’s Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023, we argue not for a blunt percentage increase in the financing of education, but for high-impact and well-targeted investments in the range of areas comprehended in this document.

To be fair, the Department, its officials, and Ministers, have long been prudent and creative in their deployment of limited resources with high-impact initiatives such as the ‘laptop-and-projector in every classroom’ scheme of some years ago, the prioritisation of additional deputy principals to enhance school leadership, and the profile model of allocating special education teachers.

In this new landscape of re-framed personal and communal values brought about by our experience of the global pandemic, we need to reflect carefully and compassionately on our priorities for recovery. 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.

It makes sense to listen to them.

High-Level Goal: Support the provision of high-quality education and improve the learning experience to meet the needs of all students, in schools and early years settings

From the Statement of Strategy

Our goal is to provide every child and young person with a learning experience that supports them to reach their potential and to develop the knowledge and skills they need to navigate in today’s complex world. We will develop and improve learning and assessment through continuation of the programme of curricular reform and an exploration of new approaches to teaching and learning. We will focus on the development of the whole person, mindful of the challenges children and young people face in the modern world, not least those posed by the use of technology.

The successful delivery of this goal means that children, young people and the wider school community will be supported to deal with the impact of Covid-19, both immediate and long-term. The standards associated with the education system will be upheld and enhanced and teachers, leaders and other members of the education workforce will be supported through continuous professional development and other interventions to continue to provide a quality assured learning experience for all students.

Sustainable School Leadership for Recovery

From the Statement of Strategy: We will support school communities through and post Covid-19 to enable continuity of education and assessment, and to help alleviate the impact of Covid-19 especially for those students at risk of educational disadvantage.

‘For school leaders working in these demanding and chaotic circumstances, the pressure is relentless, the options are limited, the sleepless night are frequent. Meanwhile, they are caught in the unfavourable position of being the pinch point in the system. They are reliant on guidance about COVID-19 responses, processes, procedures, and protocols from above. These can change, almost overnight, depending on how the virus develops. Simultaneously, school leaders are dealing with fluid and changing staffing situations meaning they are having to do much more with less. The social distancing of staff and students means extra work and extra pressure on those staff who can return to work. Every expectation either from above or below asks more of school leaders professionally and personally. This is a perfect storm with imperfect leadership responses, and no one can predict what might be the best solutions, the best actions, the side effects of any actions taken in this crisis. School leaders are walking a tightrope without a safety net. There are no precedents and no guides to leading schools in a pandemic.’¹

Since March 2020, as the literature base is now confirming, our voluntary secondary principals have consistently put their own wellbeing on the line and consequently 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.

¹ Alma Harris & Michelle Jones (2020) COVID 19 – school leadership in disruptive times, *School Leadership & Management*, 40:4, 243-247,

What is less certain however, is that our principals are well supported and resourced to carry out their legislatively determined roles. 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 but 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 this 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.

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.

The Government, on behalf of the people, continues to face many choices. One of these, if their rhetoric that schools *'will play a key role in our recovery after Covid-19'* is to be believed, must be to enable their school leaders to lead and manage sustainably. In simple terms, the additional staffing resources provided as a result of the pandemic will be required in every school for the foreseeable future.

Boarding schools may require an additional range of specific supports in terms of accommodation configuration, social distancing and Covid-related health and safety provision.

In 2020, JMB very much welcomed the decision by the Inspectorate to reduce its programme of in-school evaluations for a year, a policy substantially extended until the end of the 2021 calendar 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 allows at least two academic years to lapse before initiating any further policy agendas impacting on the workload of principals.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **JMB strongly urges the Department to end the practice of allocating a fraction of a deputy principal to any school**
- **Boarding schools may require an additional range of specific supports in terms of accommodation configuration, social distancing and Covid-related health and safety provision**
- **In line with the Programme's commitment *'that schools be given the time to implement required changes'*, the JMB strongly recommends that the**

Department allows at least two further academic years to lapse before initiating any further policy agendas impacting on the workload of principals

Enhancing Guidance & Counselling Services

From the Statement of Strategy: We will support the mental health and wellbeing of students through implementation of the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* and ensuring that wellbeing supports recognise the impact of Covid-19 on students. We will also develop a strategy to enhance learning opportunities for exceptionally able students.

The JMB urges the Department to provide at least a restoration of guidance and counselling provision in our schools to pre-financial crash cutback levels. Whilst 600 posts have been reinstated to schools, this does not represent a restoration, as the school student population continues to grow significantly at post-primary level leaving guidance counsellors, who are already overstretched, working with fewer contact hours and a larger student population

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors (2019) reports that a majority of their members support students with mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, self-harm, suicide ideation) on either a daily (64%) or weekly (32%) basis. The increase in mental health issues in our young population is now well established. The issue of waiting times for mental health services is significant and nearly two thirds of guidance counsellors report challenges related to ‘holding’ students for prolonged periods due to referral difficulties. Long waiting times to access appropriate mental health supports such as CAMHS can be deeply distressing for students and guidance counsellors are often left holding these vulnerable young students. Ireland has also the fourth highest incidence of teenage suicide in the 37 study countries of the EU/OECD region (UNICEF 2017)².

Within the Action Plan for Education 2019, the Department committed to ‘enhance’ guidance counselling in second level schools and we had expected that this would have informed Budget 2021. Indecon (2019)³ also identified that ‘there is no additional or separate guidance support for children with special education needs and there is currently no policy to support an alternative or separate guidance provision for children with special education needs in mainstream post-primary’.

At this point, JMB is now demanding 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 but which must continue to be mediated by their school.

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

² UNICEF (2017) *Annual Report 2017*, available: https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_102899.html

³ Indecon (2019) *Indecon Review of Career Guidance*, available: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/EducationReports/indecon-review-of-career-guidance.pdf>

large, its evolution has been effective in creating a school-wide appreciation of, and provision for, these core activities.

In demanding 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.

Meanwhile, 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. The immediate and long-term effects of the pandemic on young people knows no borders, territorial or social.

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. We also believe there exists scope for including qualified guidance counsellors in the list of professions maintained to issue Irish work visas to professionals from non-EEA countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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- **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**

Resourcing Digital Technologies for Learning

From the Statement of Strategy: We will develop and support the education workforce to strengthen their teaching, leadership, and student support capability, through Continuing Professional Development and by building on the experience gained during Covid-19 to deliver a deliberate and considered increase in the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching, learning and assessment.

Investment: The legacy of historic underinvestment has led to continued significant inequity in the digital capacity of different schools. Such inequities have not been remediated by the annualised funding over the term of the outgoing strategy. In particular, system-level bottlenecks emerged during the school closures that require to be seen by government as national priorities and not drawing on the dedicated funding assigned to the strategy for schools. The three infrastructure priorities are:

- a) Immediate roll-out of 200mb broadband to every school
- b) All connections to be via fibre, and removal of inadequate and unreliable satellite or other wave-based services
- c) Once and for all elimination of socially inequitable digital poverty – an appropriate device for every child as a national project

Devices for All: One of the legacies of the pandemic was to leave our teachers operating didactically at the top of the classroom. In a classroom where every student has a tablet computer however, there is no ‘top of the room’. Everyone becomes a researcher, teacher/sharer, and a learner. It is therefore imperative that tablet computers become normed in Irish schools. Most of the early-adopters’ teething problems have now been resolved. Even a matching-funding initiative on the part of government would enable students from all SES backgrounds to access e-learning and will re-energise the Junior Cycle Framework, while building foundations for a subsequent Senior Cycle Framework.

In many respects, the pandemic and its school closures have highlighted how education inequity profoundly affects those in society who have the least. For example, in the USA it has been noted that –

‘The pandemic has highlighted disparities in access to digital devices and the internet. When schools were closed, 15 percent of U.S. households and 35 percent of low-income households with school-age children did not have a high-speed internet connection at home. In early April, nearly 2/3 of leaders in high-poverty districts reported that a lack of basic technology was a ‘major’ problem’. (Darling Hammond 2020)⁴

Time: Schools are very time-poor in terms of sharing teacher craft-knowledge. The hours provided by the Croke Park Agreement have now virtually disappeared in terms of their CPD availability. The Department should trust their school leaders and give them the authority to schedule authentic learning experiences for their staff.

Good Practice: PDST Technology in Education could consider providing a new series of seminars for school leaders initially to share ideas on ICT integration and reflect on the

⁴ <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/covid-new-deal-education-top-10-state-policymoves> cited in Harris and Jones (2020)

learnings from the school closures. Everyone has limited experience and ideas. The key to new ideas, reducing implementation anxieties and unlocking potential is social. Set up occasions whereby principals can learn from specialists and particularly from other principals and have their questions answered.

Pedagogy: We must retain a relentless focus on what happens in the classroom. Feedback from our principals has indicated that a range of factors require to be simultaneously in place for ICT integration to succeed:

- A nationally set up Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) that can be easily adapted and administered by each school
- Learning platforms are now obligatory for schools. They must have what they need to operate: quality infrastructure with minimum high-speed 200mb fibre-based connectivity for every school
- Clear understanding by teachers of the role of ICT and the need to change from an instructional approach to a co-constructivist approach in the ICT environment
- PDST-led initiatives to develop exemplars in schools and build on the very good work being done in some schools
- Accredited courses for teachers, supported by the Department, with an emphasis on pedagogy
- A buy-in from all stakeholders, management, teachers, the Department, parents, and students. There needs to be an impetus for every school to continuously move towards more ICT integration along with a corresponding budget and CPD for teachers
- A dedicated, regular budget, maintenance, and upgrade schedule

JMB is seriously concerned at the reduction in Digital Strategy investment as announced by the Minister. The previous strategy was underpinned by €210m over five years and the next iteration by €200 million up to 2027 – a significant investment cut, just when schools need funding most.

Also of concern is the low level of recognition given by the Department to technical support. While developments in remote repair and other possibilities are growing, schools cannot afford to embed technologies while sustaining service interruptions due to a lack of resources for technical supports, and the new strategy must address this.

DEIS schools must be prioritised by a more positively differentiated funding allocation model than currently exists for Department grants. Students experiencing SES disadvantage and their schools were stressed to breaking point during the school closures and it is time that the barriers to access and participation to such young people and their educators were finally eliminated.

A digital strategy for schools is not an end in itself. At the heart of the educative enterprise lies the quality of engaged learning that takes place within the classroom – everything else is tangential. We have been focused for too long on hardware, software, networks etc. Serious teachers will always maintain a focus on pedagogy. Our investment should concentrate there, with the technologies trustworthy and well-maintained. This new Digital Strategy must future-proof technological investment in DEIS schools and not leave students' life-chances to the lottery of their school's or their family's financial capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **As part of the review of the state’s Digital Strategy for Schools, adequate emergency, and thereafter annualised ICT funding, must be adjusted upwards to provide for school-wide remote device purchase, up-to-date teacher CPD in distance teaching and assessment, on-site technical and administrative support, and enhanced Wi-Fi infrastructure**
- **DEIS school communities require significant infrastructural investment in light of their experience of distance teaching and learning since March 2020**
- **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**

Re-energising Curricular Reform

From the Statement of Strategy: We will strengthen the learning experience through curriculum and assessment development, including early years curricular provision, embedding the new primary curriculum and the Junior Cycle and advancing reform of the Senior Cycle

1. Junior Cycle

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 is 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, several 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 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, but it also betrays a set of values we have never associated with the Department or its

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, successive junior cycle 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 and 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.

Even during the current crisis, this matter has been reiterated as ‘not having gone away’. JMB notes with interest the inclusion of this issue as an element of the Building Momentum public service agreement process. 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.

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. Renewal of Senior Cycle

JMB is conscious that the NCCA's Senior Cycle Review Advisory Report, recently submitted to the Minister, represents a significant milestone in the journey toward an eventual Framework for Senior Cycle and we would encourage the maintenance of momentum in the process to avoid demoralisation around current provision or ongoing discontinuity between junior and senior cycles. The next phases will also involve significant consultation, but it is expected that the school site will once again emerge as a rich source of feedback as this major national project develops. Once again, voluntary secondary schools will be happy to participate in such development work and will have the support of the JMB in any such undertakings. We believe that the perspective of voluntary secondary schools is of particular value in this discourse as the faith-centred characteristic spirit of these communities, affirmed in constitution, legislation and regulation, provides a rich tradition rooted in the fully human spirit, mind and body. Each voluntary secondary school, though part of a cohesive state provision and centred on the common good, nonetheless brings with it a sense of its own autonomy as an educational enterprise. The principle of subsidiarity from which our legislative and moral authority derives, allows a certain degree of freedom in terms of contextualisation, and affirms our schools' significant rights and responsibilities in terms of the provision of locally relevant, engaging, holistic, pastorally aware, and high-quality student-centred schooling.

Whether the next steps involve a steady-state approach, with incrementalism leading to enhanced versions of what we currently have (TY, LCE, LCA, LCVP) or a more fundamental reform aligning with the voices expressed in the consultation phases, we will inevitably return to the question of resources.

In reflecting on a senior cycle reform agenda, 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
- 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
- Reform a system that removes teachers from schools at a critical time for second-component SEC examinations
- 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 extensive CPD 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 NCCA 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 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 policymakers 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.

Our commitment to the integration of Gospel values into the curriculum and daily life of the school means that the ethical and moral frameworks underpinning what is taught within RSE classes are congruent with Church teaching on sexual morality, within the particular faith tradition – Catholic, Protestant or Jewish in the case of JMB member schools.

This does not mean that an embargo exists around any truly human experience or that faith schools will not discuss or engage with any particular aspect of the curriculum. The exact opposite is the case. The fully human nature of Jesus Christ means that nothing truly human is alien to God and cannot be alien to true educators either.

JMB is thus 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 in 2018. 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. 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 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 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 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 RSE, a vital aspect of our education provision**
- **JMB urges the Minister to positively consider a forthcoming service-delivery proposal from TENI which has the support of the management bodies and teacher unions**

High-Level Goal: Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all students are supported to fulfil their potential

From the Statement of Strategy

Equity of opportunity and inclusivity must be fundamental principles in our education system. Our aim is to develop a system that welcomes and meaningfully engages all students, including those with special educational needs and students at risk of educational disadvantage.

Fostering wellbeing and personal development enables students to fully participate in school and prepares them effectively for active and responsible citizenship. We will continue to support the mental health and wellbeing of students particularly mindful of the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people throughout the system.

The successful delivery of this goal means that our school system is open and welcoming for all students irrespective of background or ability. All students and the wider school community will have access to resources and supports in the right place at the right time based on their needs and the relationship between schools and the wider community will be strengthened.

Towards Equitable and Fair School Funding

From the Statement of Strategy: The promotion of equality and human rights and ensuring access to an equitable system, underpins our mission and drives our day-to-day work.

This *Statement of Strategy* articulates a strong focus on equality and human rights throughout and this is set specifically at the core of the second high level goal to “*Ensure equity of opportunity in education and that all students are supported to fulfil their potential*”.

‘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 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

If ever there was a time for this long-standing and indefensible inequity in sectoral funding to be finally and comprehensively resolved, it is now. JMB fully accepts that the Irish state will need to borrow substantially to sustain a recovery from the Covid pandemic. Our contention is that we must not, however, borrow from a generation of children and young people for whom this is their one and only chance at education. This generation’s one and only chance

has already been severely compromised. The Minister and government must understand that voluntary secondary school communities are suffering due to long-standing, systemic underfunding and the capacity of families to replace the monies denied by the state to this post-primary sector alone has now all but gone.

In the immediate term, a commencement must be made through the full 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. We have had an acknowledgement from Department officials over the years that this is a matter that would be addressed and is an issue that we raise as a matter of urgency at every eventuality. In that regard, it was gratifying that the then Minister acknowledged the Department's commitment to us in the Oireachtas. In a reply to a parliamentary question on November 23rd, 2017 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'.

While 20% of this deduction was removed in Budget 2020, the new Minister must now eliminate completely this systematic cut to our schools' funding.

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**
- **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, costing a school with 30 teachers €16,875. While 20% of this deduction was removed in Budget 2020, the new Minister must now eliminate completely this systematic cut to our schools' funding**

The Pupil-Teacher Ratio

From the Statement of Strategy: A key priority will be to reduce pupil teacher ratios and to increase capitation grants so that every school has the staff and resources they need to deliver for all of their students. School leaders and staff must be able to benefit from regular and fit-for-purpose Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and we will seek to increase access to support services for schools from the National Council for Special Education and the National Educational Psychological Service.

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 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 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.

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 2020/21

- **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**

School Buildings: Demographic Growth and Physical Education

From the Statement of Strategy: We will continue to invest in Ireland’s school buildings through our building programmes and, through improved demographic planning, aim to ensure that every student has access to a school place which meets their needs.

We will consider detailed proposals to promote and support extracurricular activities within school and work toward a policy paper on these measures over the course of the strategy.

While borrowing for current expenditure is not sustainable or prudent, it is clear that the government intends capitalising on Ireland’s excellent credit rating to invest in infrastructural projects which will positively impact on the public good and help the country recover from the economic and social impacts of the pandemic. If ever there was an appropriate time for significant investment in school buildings and their sports facilities, it is now. 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.

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 increasing building costs and lack of sufficient personnel in the School Building Unit, even the targets of the current Six Year Plan will not be met. The emphasis should now be placed on speed of delivery. 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 DES stages 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 Departments 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.

In previous Programmes for Government, the elimination of prefabricated classrooms has been specifically identified as a national priority but is absent in the current proposals. 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.

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 DES 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**

The Cost of Schooling on Families

From the Statement of Strategy: We will help students at risk of educational disadvantage to access appropriate education resources which reflect their diverse needs and support improved outcomes, including through the development and publication of a *Traveller Education Strategy* and through ensuring early identification of supports for students who are at risk of disengaging from school.

The JMB notes the issuing of the Department's Circular setting-out a range of directives around school uniforms and book rental schemes. The intended focus on affordability and value for money for parents is, of course, already a consideration our school communities take into account when setting-out their uniform and textbook policies. What was new in this Circular was a proposal to provide lesser capitation funding to schools not adhering to the particular operational model set out by the then Minister.

Voluntary secondary schools already operate under an inequitable funding regime and must look to parents to make up the shortfall in financial resourcing when compared to other sectors. We agree with the conclusion of Barnardos in their School Costs Survey that:

'The Department is still failing to realise that an increase in basic funding for primary and secondary schools will reduce this need for voluntary contributions to be paid'.

It is the JMB position that it is this inequity which should be addressed in the first instance and that to penalise already underfunded schools is not alone discriminatory but is contrary to the Department's own thinking on enhancing school autonomy.

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. Instead of attempting to micro-manage schools with punitive measures, the Minister should 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Seed capital and a flexible quantum of teacher hours for administration must be provided to schools for the establishment and operation of school book rental schemes**
- **Guidelines and encouragement, not threats to cut funding, should be offered to schools to review school uniform policies**
- **The government must commit to eliminating the need for schools to seek voluntary subscriptions from families, as a matter of urgency**

Resourcing Recovery for Students with Special Educational Needs

From the Statement of Strategy: We will support the participation and progression of students with special educational needs through the delivery of integrated resources, in particular by advancing towards the roll out of the School Inclusion Model and a new Special Needs Assistants (SNA) allocation model.

We will also increase the development of special class places for students with additional needs in new and existing mainstream schools, as well as continued support for the development of special schools as a vital part of our education system through effective forecasting of future need and equipping schools to better support students with special educational needs.

While it is clear that both State and schools remained highly concerned about the fate of students with special education needs during the school closures, there has been clear evidence of a loss of engagement, skills, learning and human connection that will require to be treated with the urgency it deserves once schools continue on their reopening journeys. In addition to the enhanced guidance and counselling provision identified earlier, every school will require a pro-rata increase in its special education teacher (SET) allocation for at least the next two years. We still have not restored the quantum of hours to schools that were lost due to the cutbacks in 2010, and nor have we made any distinct provision for an expanded range of SEN coordination responsibilities which will inevitably inflate as this traumatised and disconnected cohort of students continue to re-engage with school life.

As a matter of urgency, the government must increase the SET allocation to all schools by at least 30% and, once and for all, 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 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.

The 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 at the beginning of the first lockdown. 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, 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 the proposed implementation of this model of SNA allocation and deployment be paused until the professional development needs of school leaders, SENCOs, SETs and SNAs have been met; sufficient coordination and administration capacity has been provided to operate the model effectively; the industrial relations parameters relating to current SNA terms and conditions have been fully resolved, and the voice of families have been heard and comprehended, particularly in relation to the devaluing of clinical judgements and their consequences.

Meanwhile, 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 Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. 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 landscape of SEN provision has been radically worsened by the Covid pandemic and schools will need at least a 30% increase in SET allocation to mitigate its worst effects**
- **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 paused until its key backing conditions have been established agreed**
- **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**

Our DEIS Schools

From the Statement of Strategy: We will address the retention and achievement gap between Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) and non-DEIS schools through the DEIS programme.

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. DEIS principals, most without a second deputy, had to implement every single element of distance teaching and learning provision, school administration, junior cycle reporting, calculated/accredited grades administration and all that every school leader had to perform, but also to:

- Completely redesign, administer and arrange for the provision of school meals for hundreds of families across their communities
- Operate remote pedagogy across a school population with little or no appropriate digital infrastructure
- Find ways to support their students with special educational needs – typically well over 50% of their enrolment
- Mitigate the worst effects of lockdown on young people at risk of neglect and/or abuse
- Try to re-establish contact with students who completely disengaged from all school provision
- Provide for book rental scheme operations during a lockdown
- Plan for a Summer Programme to re-engage such ‘lost’ students in advance of re-opening, and this after the school had closed and there was no staff support available

Of all the stress-points JMB experienced during the school closures, it was across our 50 DES principals that the most worrying levels of anxiety, overwhelm and distress were evidenced. It is finally time for this inhuman 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 in 2021, we now call on the Department to allocate a full deputy principal in DEIS schools of up to 400 students. JMB urges the Minister to implement this

equity measure immediately and to broaden its scope to include all schools with fractions of deputy principal positions thereafter.

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 DEIS schools of up to 400 students and to broaden its scope to include all schools with fractions of deputy principal positions thereafter**
- **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**

Resourcing Anti-Bullying Strategies

From the Statement of Strategy: The importance of wellbeing for our children and young people cannot be emphasised enough, and we will work to expand the capacity of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to support students of special educational needs in this context. The ‘*National Anti-Bullying Plan*’ will also be advanced.

The JMB welcomed, and fully engaged with, this year’s Oireachtas Joint Committee’s focus on the topic of Bullying and Mental Health.

Our 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 notes the intention of the Inspectorate to have school’s compliance with the Department’s 2013 Anti-Bullying Procedures given specific attention during incidental inspections from September 2021.

Meanwhile, the recently published OECD report Education at a Glance 2020 ranks Ireland in last place out of 36 countries for investment in second-level education as a percentage of GDP. Thus, the Department repeatedly sets out high demands on schools in respect of anti-bullying measures but clearly the State is neglecting its responsibility to provide its schools with the resources we need to tackle bullying effectively and to support positive mental health development in our students.

Our schools have been doing more with less since the financial crash of 2009. For example, from September 2012, the separate allocation for guidance and counselling was completely abolished and schools were told [in Circular 0009/2012] that the Government was ‘committed to providing greater freedom and autonomy to school Principals and this autonomy is extended whereby the standard staffing allocation must now also be used for the provision of guidance to students’.

This drastic cut (presented as an autonomy measure) has never been fully restored to schools.

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 fully restored immediately
- 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

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:

- **The Oireachtas Committee’s report will, when published, carry a significant set of recommendations and JMB urges the Department to give serious consideration to their implementation**
- **Similarly, the outcomes of the Inspectorate’s engagement with school on anti-bullying will 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**

Fee-charging and Boarding Schools

From the Statement of Strategy: We will increase the diversity of school type in order to offer parents and students more choice through the process to reconfigure schools to increase diversity and strengthen the relationship between schools and their local communities.

Our Constitution and legislation enshrine the right of parents to the choice of school for their children. The right of religious groups to promote denominational education is also protected in our legislation. The overwhelming majority of fee-charging schools are denominational in character and those of minority-faith ethos provide for the constitutional rights of families which would otherwise be denied given the geographical challenges mitigated by boarding schools.

Since Budget 2009, government has adopted a position of differentiating between fee-charging and free-scheme schools in a wide range of resourcing mechanisms which have had a significant impact on these not-for-profit educational enterprises:

1. The Pupil Teacher Ratio

The Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) was increased in fee-charging schools from the universally applied 18:1 to 20:1 in 2009. It was further increased to 21:1 in 2012 and to 23:1 in 2013.

The reduction of 0.6 in the effective PTR announced in autumn 2020 to support schools in mitigating staffing demands due to the Covid-19 crisis was not applied to schools in the fee-charging sector.

2. Provision for Guidance & Counselling

The adverse treatment of fee-charging schools in terms of their reduced guidance and counselling allocation (based, as it is on the higher PTR outlined above, and on a commitment to give fee-charging schools only 50% of the normal allocation), must be discontinued.

3. Covid-19 Supports Funding in 2020/21

These vitally important resources were, without consultation or prior notification, allocated as of right to free-scheme schools only. Following representations from the JMB and individual school authorities, it was decided to make some grant aid available but only on the submission of a detailed written application setting out why such supports were required.

Applicant schools however, reported confusion over the application form and the process in general. There were no instructions given as to the detail required in the application and when grant aid was refused, the Department failed to provide any criteria for the decision when such was requested.

5. Serially Reduced or Unavailable Department Grants

Fee-charging schools are prohibited from accessing the range of capital project grants available to all other schools and must fundraise for every element of their buildings and plant.

In addition, the following list of Department grants is payable to schools in the free scheme only:

- Support Services Grant
- Secretary - School Services Support Fund
- Caretaker - School Services Support Fund
- Transition Year
- Leaving Certificate Applied
- Junior Certificate Schools Programme
- Physics and Chemistry
- Special Needs Grant for students with mild/moderate learning disability
- Book Grants
- Bi-Lingual Grant

Even in the absence of such supports, a policy of paying only 50% of the value of a range of other grants, such as the annual ICT Support Grant, continues.

6. Special Class Provision

The Department of Education currently refuses to sanction the provision of Special Education Classes in fee-charging schools. In all cases where such provision has been sought, the school authorities have committed to the waiving of fees in respect of students enrolled in such classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **JMB urges the Minister to commission an independent review of state resourcing across the entire voluntary secondary school sector**
- **In fee-charging schools offering to provide special classes on a no-fee basis, the Department should approve such applications.**

Concluding Commentary

The significance of the voluntary secondary school in Ireland's educational landscape requires to be recognised, particularly considering the pressures on smaller schools to survive both from the point of view of the curriculum and financially. Under the provisions of the Education Act 1998, the board of management is the body charged with the direct governance of a school. 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 in order 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. The budgetary provision by the Teacher Education Section of the Department works out as a €50 grant per year per board of management across primary and post-primary sectors. This is not a realistic budget. The JMB would welcome engaging with the DES to negotiate a properly resourced training grant for Boards of Management for the boards to meet their functions under the Education Act 1998.

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 in last place out of 36 OECD countries in terms of expenditure on education. 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.

The present intention 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 set of goals 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 only dependence and external compliance, especially from school leaders
- Leaves school difference unacknowledged, 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 highest calibre educators to the profession, it is essential that teachers

are remunerated equitably, 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.

There can be little doubt but that secondary school headship is an extremely challenging position impacting on one’s wellbeing, emotional state, physical health and family life. A high-quality, reality-grounded preparatory programme would serve to reaffirm an aspiring principal of their capacity to do the job or even convince others that it is not for them at this time. In any event, JMB would be prepared to engage with DES in the identification of key elements required of such an initiative and to support its implementation on a system-wide basis.

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

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