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**AMCSS/JMB
39th ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

Flourishing Schools:

Education for Purpose and Meaning

Reports 2026

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Introduction

This report provides an overview of the work of the Secretariat of Secondary Schools (SSS) over the period of the Strategic Development Plan 2022–2025, structured around its five strategic goals and outlines the key developments under each goal, together with an assessment of progress to inform the next phase of strategic planning. SSS refers to the corporate body, governed by the Board of Directors, with its work carried out through its two divisions, JMB and AMCSS.

This period reflects a phase of transition as the education system emerged from the disruption associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside the implementation of significant policy and system reforms. In this context, the organisation has strengthened its capacity to support schools, inform policy and respond to the evolving demands of leadership and governance.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Board of Directors for its leadership and oversight, and the members of the Strategy, Finance, Nominations and Risk Committees for their sustained engagement and support. I also wish to acknowledge the Councils of JMB and AMCSS, the JMB National Advisory Groups, and the staff of JMB for their professionalism and commitment. The significant voluntary contribution of all those serving in governance and advisory roles is central to the work of the organisation and, without it, the work of the organisation could not be carried out



Strategic Goal 1: Denominational Education

To support and strengthen the characteristic spirit and denominational ethos of voluntary secondary schools.

This strategic intent is realised through a coherent framework, encompassing constitutional governance, partnership engagement, AMCSS regional development and the formation of current and future school leaders.

Over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan, the Secretariat of Secondary Schools (SSS) has played a central role in supporting, articulating and developing denominational education within an evolving and increasingly complex educational and social landscape. On behalf of the Council of AMCSS, this work has been characterised by sustained collaboration with CEP, APTCS and patrons, engagement with school leaders and a structured approach to the development of ethos as a lived and dynamic dimension of school life.

1.1 Living Out our Constitution

The Constitution of the Secretariat of Secondary Schools CLG (SSS) sets out the principal and subsidiary objects of the organisation and the operation of its work through its two divisions, JMB and AMCSS. In line with its commitment to living out its Constitution and Internal Regulations, SSS has ensured that these foundational documents are accessible through the JMB website and embedded in the organisation's governance and operational practice.

A professional development event was convened to support structured engagement by members of AMCSS Steering Committees and JMB Council with the Constitution and Internal Regulations, and with the values that underpin them. This engagement also reinforced understanding of the organisation's relationships with key partners, including the Catholic Education Partnership (CEP), the Association of Patrons and Trustees of Catholic Schools (APTCS), and the Irish Schoolheads' Association (ISA). Together, this supported a shared and practical understanding of the governance framework underpinning the work of SSS.

Council meeting structures have been refined to support alignment between the constitutional framework and organisational practice by more clearly reflecting and giving effect to the contribution of member schools through AMCSS and JMB regional structures, as well as through engagement with ISA partners.

1.2 Advancing Catholic Education

SSS has worked closely with key partners, including the Association of Patrons and Trustees of Catholic Schools and the Catholic Education Partnership, to support a coherent

and system-wide approach to Catholic education. This collaboration has resulted in the development of agreed guidelines for schools and patrons where schools are considering an amalgamation or an additional school accommodation project. This work has also extended to ongoing engagement with the review of boards of management training, ensuring that governance structures continue to reflect the evolving needs of schools, while remaining aligned with the characteristic spirit and patronage of voluntary secondary schools. Through this engagement, SSS has supported the development of governance models that are both responsive to increasing regulatory and organisational complexity and faithful to the values underpinning denominational education.

A significant strand of work over the period has been informed by a structured process of research, engagement and system development. JMB advocated for and supported the post-Covid updating of the Genesis research on parental choice in Catholic education, providing important insight into the factors influencing parents in choosing Catholic schools.

Arising from the Genesis research 2019 and 2023, a set of ten statements on Catholic education was developed to support school leaders in articulating the nature and value of Catholic education within their school communities. Subsequent engagement with school leaders, in collaboration with the Association of Patrons and Trustees of Catholic Schools, highlighted a clear need for support in enabling leaders to confidently articulate the value of Catholic education in contemporary contexts, particularly in engaging with students, parents and staff.

To further this aim, SSS also participated in a bespoke study trip to Western Australia designed as a joint project by ACE Ireland and GRACE as a formation experience for system and emerging system leaders from Ireland. The aim of the visit was to deepen knowledge, develop skills and learn new ways to revitalise Catholic education in Ireland. This programme of engagement provided an opportunity to work with and learn from system leaders in Catholic education in Western Australia and to examine the application of a unifying vision for Catholic education across leadership and governance structures. A written report was agreed by the study group analysing the learnings from the study trip with recommendations for the Irish system.

On return to Ireland, this work gave rise to the establishment of the Croí Committee under the leadership of the Catholic Education Partnership, with the active collaboration of SSS and the Association of Patrons and Trustees of Catholic Schools. The work of the committee has been structured around three interrelated pillars:

- Vision and Mission: including the development and publication of a unifying vision for Catholic education
- Structures and Services: examining how structures and services within Catholic education can be aligned to reduce duplication and enable the more effective sharing of resources across the system
- Leadership Development and Formation: focused on the development of current and future leaders of Catholic schools



This work represents a significant shift from reflection on ethos to the structured development of Catholic education as a coherent system, with particular emphasis on the alignment of vision with leadership, management and governance practice at system and school levels. SSS has engaged actively across all three pillars of this work. In particular, the Council of AMCSS engaged in a structured process of reflection and consultation in relation to the development of the vision document, meeting with representatives of the Vision Pillar to consider successive drafts and to contribute to its ongoing refinement. This process involved detailed engagement with the emerging content of the document and culminated in the preparation and submission of a formal report to the Croí Committee, reflecting the perspectives and experience of school leaders and informing the development of the final vision.

SSS has also continued to support international engagement in Catholic education through its membership of the Catholic Education European Committee and through the sponsorship of principals to participate in international programmes. In 2024, three principals participated in an international colloquium on wellbeing in Catholic education in Rome, led by the University of Notre Dame Australia. This initiative explored wellbeing within the framework of Integral Human Development and involved engagement with international educators and Church bodies. The participating principals subsequently developed a Policy Template for Wellbeing and Integral Human Development in the Catholic Secondary School, which was presented to Council and has contributed to the development of policy and practice in this area.

Engagement has also continued with Church structures supporting Catholic education, including collaboration with the Council for Education and the Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference, and the part-funding of a dedicated role within the Council of Catechetics. SSS was represented on a committee established by the Council for Education to consider issues relating to gender identity in Catholic schools, with the Irish Episcopal Conference currently considering the final guidance document arising from this work.

1.3 Advancing ISA Schools

SSS has maintained ongoing engagement with the Irish Schoolheads' Association. This engagement has supported a shared understanding of denominational education across different patron traditions and has ensured that the perspectives of Protestant voluntary secondary schools are reflected in the work of the organisation.

The Irish Schoolheads' Association is currently engaged in the development of its own governance structures, with a particular focus on alignment with the Constitution of SSS. SSS has supported this work through ongoing engagement and dialogue, recognising the importance of a clear and coherent governance framework in underpinning the work of ISA.

In parallel, SSS is considering how best to support the collective engagement of ISA members in articulating and sustaining the distinct ethos of their schools. It is anticipated that a more structured approach to communication and collaboration between ISA and SSS will be developed further following the completion of this governance work.

1.4 Development of the AMCSS Regional Structure

The organisational structures of AMCSS regions provide a key mechanism through which the constitutional framework of SSS is realised in practice. SSS has supported the development and operation of AMCSS regions through a structured programme of engagement and capacity-building. This has included targeted training for regional steering committees, supporting their role in the effective leadership and coordination of regional activity.

The restructuring of Council meetings has further strengthened the role of regions within the organisation, ensuring that issues identified by member schools at regional level, as well as through engagement with ISA partners, are formally progressed and responded to at subsequent Council meetings. This establishes a clear and coherent link between local, regional and national levels within the organisation.

In addition, a structured approach to the reporting of regional activity to SSS has been developed, supporting transparency and consistency in how regions engage with and inform the work of SSS.

The development of a dedicated section on the JMB website for AMCSS regions, including details of regional membership, meeting schedules and organisational information, further supports the effective operation of regions and facilitates the sharing of information and good practice across the network.

1.5 Developing Prospective Faith School Leaders

Building on this work, SSS has supported the development of leadership capacity through the sponsorship of school leaders and senior leadership teams to participate in structured leadership development and formation programmes in collaboration with Boston College Ireland. Delivered in collaboration with Boston College's Roche Center for Catholic Education and the Lynch School of Education and Human Development, these include a fellowship programme focused on the formation of individual leaders and a School Culture Collaborative programme designed to support senior leadership teams in developing their executive management skills.

Leaders are supported in strengthening internal leadership capacity within their schools, developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to enhance how senior leadership teams operate and how they lead other teams within their schools. The programmes combine spiritual and strategic capacity-building, blending research-informed practice with school-based implementation, and support leaders and leadership teams in articulating their mission, beliefs and values and aligning school culture to these as a lived reality across the school community.

Across both programmes, the work is underpinned by a focus on personal, team and organisational leadership, and the alignment of mission and values within school practice. SSS has supported this work not only through the sponsorship of school leaders, including six participants in the fellowship programme, but also through direct investment in the



School Culture Collaborative, including the funding of a part-time resource to support its delivery. The Deputy President of JMB has also made a significant contribution to the implementation of both programmes, further strengthening the link between system leadership and programme delivery.

In addition, SSS has engaged at system level through participation in the Executive Leadership Circle, a formation and professional development forum for senior leaders across patron and management bodies, supporting strategic engagement with the future development of Catholic education. In summary, these initiatives support the formation of individual leaders, the development of senior leadership teams, and the strengthening of system-level leadership capacity across the voluntary secondary school sector.

Assessment

Over the period of the Strategic Development Plan, JMB has played a significant role in supporting and shaping denominational education across the voluntary secondary school sector, reflecting the diversity of patron traditions and ensuring that ethos remains a central and dynamic feature of school life.

The progression from research and engagement to structured system development, particularly through the work of the Croí Committee, has strengthened the coherence and sustainability of Catholic education. Collaboration with the Roche Center for Catholic education at Boston College provides a unique opportunity to support leadership development at all levels through the provision of academically rigorous and spiritually nourishing formation and professional development programming. The Roche Center's commitment to Ireland in the coming years will also provide opportunities for other international studies and collaboration. In October 2026, The Roche Center at BC Ireland will host a group of 20 visiting system leaders from across Australia as part of a study tour with Australian Catholic University (ACU). The experience will provide an opportunity for stimulating discussion of governance in education. The Roche Center has recently applied for funding to do a comparative study of systems of governance in the US and Ireland and there are possibilities for these two initiatives to overlap and lead to a deeper international study.

Looking ahead, the ongoing evolution of the Irish education system, including demographic change, policy reform and the reconfiguration of school provision, will require sustained engagement, collaboration, leadership, research and investment in the period ahead. In this context, the ongoing development of leadership formation, system alignment and support for school communities will remain central to sustaining and strengthening denominational education. This includes a continued focus on an integrated approach to leadership formation, supporting school leaders in developing a deep and applied understanding of ethos across all aspects of school life, and in embedding this understanding in leadership, teaching, learning and organisational practice. Investment in this area will remain a core priority for SSS, recognising its importance in enhancing the wellbeing and outcomes for students and staff within school communities.

Strategic Goal 2:

Role as a Recognised School Management Body

Strategic Intent

To represent and advocate on behalf of all schools in the voluntary secondary sector and to develop strategic relationships that support and influence education policy.

This strategic intent is realised through clarity of role and service provision, evidence-informed advocacy, the development of our professional learning remit, and structured engagement with stakeholders at national and international level.

Over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan, the Secretariat of Secondary Schools (SSS), through its JMB division, has strengthened its role as a recognised school management body within an evolving and increasingly complex educational policy environment. This has involved structured engagement with member schools and clarity in its role and service provision, sustained collaboration with government departments and other management bodies, and a focus on ensuring that the voice and experience of voluntary secondary schools are reflected in policy development and implementation. This is evidenced in a number of developments in recent education budgets and policy measures, including enhancements in senior leadership capacity and the provision of additional middle leadership posts to support the implementation of Senior Cycle redevelopment, the introduction of dedicated provision for SEN coordination, additional administrative supports for the schoolbook scheme, enhanced examination aide supports, strengthened supports for schools serving disadvantaged communities, increased and more stable capitation funding, the introduction of a recurring annual ICT grant, and additional financial supports to schools in response to cost-of-living pressures.

2.1 Establishing Clarity of Role and Service

JMB has strengthened clarity in relation to its role as a recognised school management body through the development and implementation of a formal Service Level Agreement (SLA) for schools accessing its services.

This agreement provides a clear and structured articulation of the scope of the organisation's functions, the services provided, and the respective responsibilities of both SSS and schools. Grounded in the mission, vision and values of SSS, it establishes a consistent framework through which the organisation supports voluntary secondary schools in the areas of governance, leadership and operational practice.

The SLA sets out the range of supports available across key areas, including school management and leadership advisory services, research and policy development, professional learning and building, procurement and financial support services. It also clarifies the basis on which services are delivered, including expectations in relation to cooperation, information-sharing and professional engagement.



This work has supported a more consistent and transparent understanding of the role of JMB and the nature of its service provision across the sector. It has also strengthened the basis for engagement between JMB and schools as a structured partnership, underpinned by shared responsibility and a common commitment to effective school management.

The development of the Strategic Development Plan 2022–2025, in collaboration with member schools, has further supported clarity in relation to the role and priorities of SSS as a recognised school management body. This process enabled the articulation of organisational priorities grounded in the experience and needs of schools, informing both the scope of service provision and the identification of key areas for support and guidance. Building on this, the ongoing development of the Statement of Strategy 2026–2030 reflects a continued process of structured engagement with schools, ensuring that the role and service of JMB remain responsive to the evolving context of the voluntary secondary sector.

2.2 Advocating for All Voluntary Secondary Schools

The Joint Managerial Body (JMB) has strengthened its role as a representative and advocacy body for all voluntary secondary schools through a sustained approach to policy development, engagement and influence.

JMB articulates the priorities of the voluntary secondary sector through the publication of annual pre-budget submissions and participation in joint submissions with other management bodies. These submissions represent the primary public expression of JMB policy positions and are informed by structured engagement with member schools, system-level analysis and relevant academic research at both national and international level. They provide a coherent and evidence-based platform for advocacy across a number of key areas, including the strengthening of senior leadership capacity, the development of middle leadership and coordination structures, the provision of sustainable and equitable school funding, the resourcing of inclusive education and SEN provision, including dedicated SEN coordination time, and the capacity of schools to lead curriculum development and respond effectively to the increasing organisational and governance complexity of school life.

This advocacy is further supported through the commissioning of research on the funding of voluntary secondary schools, designed to reflect the diversity of the sector, including fee-charging schools across different faith traditions, DEIS schools and schools serving disadvantaged communities, new and developing schools, and schools serving a wide range of local and regional contexts. This ensures that policy positions are grounded in evidence and reflect the varied realities of schools.

Priorities advanced through this work are reflected in a number of developments in recent education budgets and policy measures, including enhancements to senior leadership capacity and deputy principal provision, the introduction of dedicated time to support SEN coordination, targeted supports for schools in disadvantaged contexts, and a growing policy emphasis on supporting schools in the implementation of curriculum change and inclusive education. This is also evidenced in the provision of additional financial supports to schools, including measures introduced in response to cost-of-living pressures,

the strengthening and now permanent enhancement of capitation funding, and the establishment of an annual ICT grant, following a period in which no such dedicated funding was available. These developments align with the key priorities consistently advanced by JMB and demonstrate the contribution of sustained, evidence-informed advocacy in shaping policy direction and supporting system development.

2.3 A Dedicated Professional Development Remit

JMB has further developed and expanded its professional learning provision over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan, building on an established and valued programme of supports. Professional learning has consistently supported key areas of school leadership and management, including recruitment and appointment processes, teacher allocation, governance, and compliance-related requirements. Over time, this provision has been strengthened and further developed to reflect the evolving demands on school leadership.

This development is reflected in the establishment of more explicitly structured and sequenced programmes for school leaders, including multi-phase professional learning programmes for newly appointed principals and deputy principals, building on an established range of recurring supports such as board of management training, interview competencies, teacher allocation processes, financial governance and Education Law. These core elements have been sustained and further developed, providing a consistent foundation of support for schools across the sector.

A key feature of this approach is the use of established annual engagement points, including Teacher Allocation Seminars and Education Law Day, as platforms for targeted additional professional learning opportunities in response to emerging policy and operational priorities. This has included focused inputs on areas such as the utilisation of Special Education Teaching (SET) hours and data protection, ensuring that school leaders are supported in addressing complex and evolving requirements in a timely and practical manner.

A further strand of this work has focused on supporting schools in areas of governance, compliance and risk. This has included the development and delivery of a dedicated webinar to support schools in relation to vetting processes and vetting-related queries. In addition, JMB is currently developing a child protection webinar for boards of management to support their oversight role in relation to child protection procedures, which will complement the in-person child protection training delivered to chairpersons of boards of management. These initiatives reflect a targeted approach to professional learning in areas of critical importance to school governance, ensuring that boards and school leaders are supported in fulfilling their statutory and oversight responsibilities.

A further key dimension of this provision is the use of the annual JMB Education Conference, the AMCSS/JMB Annual Conference, and the annual DEIS Seminar as strategic platforms for professional learning, leadership development and sector-wide engagement. These events provide opportunities for engagement with keynote speakers and expert practitioners at national and international level, alongside structured workshops focused



on emerging priorities within the education system. This is evidenced, for example, in the focus on artificial intelligence in education at the recent AMCSS/JMB Annual Conference, including input from Professor Mike Perkins, which led to sustained engagement with a pilot initiative across a number of schools. This initiative involves teachers within the network trialling Professor Perkins' AI Assessment Scale, which supports learning and teaching through the ethical and practical integration of AI. The work is now being further developed and evaluated as part of an international research collaboration.

In addition, a pilot initiative in Region 1, developed in collaboration with Frances Moss, Director of Drumcondra Education Centre and Finn O'Murchú, former Head of School, Post-Primary, at MIC Thurles, is supporting a group of Region 1 school leaders in developing a professional learning programme aimed at strengthening the leadership and management of middle leadership teams in our schools. On completion, the programme will be offered to school leaders nationwide through the Education Centre network in the 2026 - 2027 academic year. This initiative aims to address the cultural, organisational and professional challenges associated with middle leadership, including those arising from Circular 0003/2018. It will support schools in developing effective approaches to recruitment, review, and the ongoing development of leadership capacity. The initiative is also designed to support the development of a sustainable community of practice at regional level, enabling ongoing collaboration and shared learning among school leaders.

In parallel, JMB has extended its provision to address emerging system priorities. This includes participation in a cross-sectoral provision mapping initiative (RISE) with ETBI, ACCS, Mary Immaculate College and the NCSE. Provision mapping aims to enhance educational experiences for all students, especially those with diverse needs, by bridging policy, practice and research. It adopts a whole-system, collaborative model that leverages the expertise of teachers, leaders, researchers and stakeholders across the education system and school networks. It offers a structured professional learning programme that supports schools in evaluating their educational provision for all students and in identifying areas for development specific to their local context. The strategy has supported participating schools in bringing clarity and cohesion to their existing work and in aligning key policy initiatives and frameworks within the system.

In this context, RISE represents an important development in supporting schools to align curriculum, SEN provision and whole-school policy frameworks in a coherent and integrated manner. As the pilot reaches conclusion in 2026, consideration will be given to how this initiative may be further developed and scaled to support a wider cohort of schools

Broader system priorities, including DEIS, inclusive education and curriculum implementation, are addressed through the JMB Education Conference and the AMCSS/JMB Annual Conferences, where they are explored through keynote inputs and structured workshops. This reflects a differentiated approach to professional learning, whereby immediate operational priorities are addressed through the annual calendar, while more complex and system-wide issues are engaged with through strategic conference platforms and developed as pilot projects for sustained engagement with schools over time.

Collectively, these initiatives reflect the emergence of a more structured and coherent approach to leadership development and professional learning across the organisation. The Boston College Ireland programmes, the Region 1 pilot on leading and managing middle leadership teams, and the RISE provision mapping programme represent complementary strands of this work.

While differing in focus, each initiative is grounded in a common objective: to support schools in strengthening leadership capacity, aligning policy and practice, and responding effectively to the increasing complexity of learning, teaching, assessment, governance and inclusion. Collectively, they demonstrate a shift towards sustained, practice-based professional learning that is closely aligned with system priorities and responsive to the needs of schools.

This evolving suite of initiatives provides a strong foundation for the further development of a coherent, organisation-wide approach to leadership and professional learning in the next phase of strategic development.

This work is closely aligned with the advocacy priorities advanced by JMB, particularly in relation to strengthening senior and middle leadership capacity, supporting the implementation of curriculum reform, and enabling schools to respond effectively to the requirements of inclusive education and SEN provision and the requirements of senior cycle redevelopment. In this context, professional learning is positioned as a key enabler of system-wide change, supporting schools not only in understanding policy requirements, but in implementing them in a coherent and sustainable manner.

Through this sustained and structured approach, JMB has developed a comprehensive professional learning framework that supports leadership development, strengthens governance and organisational capacity, and contributes to the effective functioning of voluntary secondary schools within an increasingly complex educational environment.

2.4 Developing Purposeful Relationships

JMB has strengthened its engagement with the Department of Education and Youth, national agencies and education partners through a structured and purposeful approach to relationship development, supporting both policy development and effective implementation across the education system.

A key dimension of this work is the structured engagement of JMB in national policy development processes, particularly in relation to curriculum reform. JMB is represented on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Council, on subject development groups, on the Senior Cycle and Junior Cycle Boards, and within the Senior Cycle Partners Forum. Through this engagement, JMB contributes directly to the development and refinement of curriculum policy, ensuring that the perspectives and experience of school management are reflected in national developments.

This work is further supported through sustained collaboration with other management bodies, including ETBI, ACCS and NAPD, in engagement with the Department of



Education and Youth. This includes participation in key national structures supporting the implementation of Senior Cycle redevelopment, including the Senior Cycle Redevelopment Programme Board, which provides strategic oversight of implementation, including risk management and alignment across agencies such as the NCCA, the State Examinations Commission and Oide. JMB also engages with the Programme Delivery Office, which is responsible for the day-to-day coordination of implementation, including programme management, timelines, reporting, and the roll-out of measures and communications. In addition, JMB participates in the Senior Cycle Partners Forum as a system-level engagement structure, supporting ongoing dialogue between management bodies, teacher unions and agencies in relation to the implementation of reform.

JMB has also facilitated structured engagement across the education system, including the organisation of a panel discussion involving the Department of Education and Youth, the NCCA, Oide and the ISSU, focused on the implications of Senior Cycle redevelopment for school leaders. This reflects a broader role in supporting dialogue and shared understanding across policy, practice and stakeholder perspectives.

JMB also contributes to a range of national policy development and review processes relating to the regulatory and operational frameworks within which schools operate. This includes representation on the Teaching Council, engagement with the Inspectorate on the review of School Self-Evaluation guidelines, and participation in the ongoing review and consolidation of teacher recruitment circulars. It also includes representation on review and policy development groups in areas such as the development of Bí Cineálta bullying prevention procedures, the revision of Code of Behaviour guidelines, and the ongoing review of child protection procedures. In addition, JMB plays a central role in representing school management in industrial relations structures, including the Teacher Conciliation Council, where it engages on matters relating to the terms and conditions of teachers. Through this work, JMB ensures that the perspectives of school management are reflected in the development of policies that have direct implications for school practice, student wellbeing and governance.

JMB is also represented on national workforce planning structures, including the Teacher Workforce Development Strategic Planning Group, and engages regularly with senior officials in the Department of Education and Youth, including the Assistant Secretary General and Principal Officers in the Schools, Social Inclusion and Youth Division. This engagement is complemented by regular engagement with the Minister for Education and Youth and the Minister's policy advisors, ensuring that the perspectives of school management are reflected at political level. JMB also maintains ongoing engagement with Oide, currently focused on supporting the implementation of Senior Cycle Redevelopment, and works collaboratively to ensure that professional learning and system supports are aligned with the needs of schools. Through these engagements, JMB advocates on behalf of schools in relation to school governance, teacher allocations, funding and the operation of social inclusion measures within the system. JMB also maintains regular engagement with the State Examinations Commission and the Inspectorate, representing the experience

of schools in their interactions with these statutory agencies and contributing to the ongoing review and development of policy and practice in these areas.

In relation to inclusive education and special educational needs, JMB maintains sustained and multi-layered engagement with the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and other relevant structures. This includes regular engagement with the NCSE, representation on the NCSE Council and NCSE Forum, and the facilitation of ongoing dialogue between the NCSE and the JMB SEN Advisory Group. JMB also draws on its expertise in supporting professional learning for school leaders in inclusive and special education, contributing to the alignment of policy development with school-level practice. JMB is also actively engaged in national structures relating to the development of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) workforce, including representation on SNA workforce development groups and the SNA Industrial Relations Forum, where it engages in structured negotiation with SNA representative unions. In addition, JMB engages regularly with the Planning and Building Unit of the Department of Education and Youth to represent the accommodation needs of schools in supporting inclusive education, ensuring that the physical infrastructure requirements associated with inclusion are reflected in planning and development processes at national level.

2.5 Growing Relationships Internationally

JMB has developed its engagement with international educational partners as part of a broader strategy to support leadership development, system learning and the integration of research-informed practice within the voluntary secondary sector.

A key dimension of this work is the sourcing and engagement of international speakers and experts through the JMB Education Conference and the AMCSS/JMB Annual Conference. These engagements provide school leaders with access to contemporary international research, practice and thinking in areas of emerging importance, supporting reflection, professional dialogue and the consideration of how international developments may inform practice within the Irish context.

In a number of instances, this engagement has led to sustained collaboration beyond the initial conference setting. This includes, for example, the development of an ongoing relationship with Boston College, supporting leadership formation and professional learning, and engagement with international experts such as Professor Mike Perkins in the area of artificial intelligence in education. This engagement has led to the piloting of AI-supported assessment tools across a number of schools, with this work now being further developed and evaluated as part of an international research collaboration.

Through this approach, JMB ensures that international engagement is purposeful and aligned with system priorities, contributing to leadership development, supporting innovation in practice, and enabling schools to engage with emerging global developments in a structured and contextually relevant manner, while maintaining a clear focus on the applicability of international learning to the Irish education system.



Assessment

Over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan, JMB has strengthened its role as a recognised school management body through a structured approach to policy development, advocacy and system engagement on behalf of voluntary secondary schools. This has been achieved through the articulation of clear policy positions, sustained and evidence-informed advocacy, the expansion of professional learning provision, and structured engagement with government, national agencies and education partners at multiple levels within the system. These elements support the effective functioning of schools within an increasingly complex environment, while ensuring that the experience and expertise of school management inform policy development and implementation.

This work has strengthened the capacity of JMB to represent the interests of voluntary secondary schools and to contribute in a sustained and substantive manner to the development, implementation and review of policy across a wide range of areas. It has also reinforced its role as a key intermediary between policy and practice, supporting schools in navigating change and contributing to the ongoing development of the education system.

In this context, the continued evolution of the education system, including the implementation of Senior Cycle Redevelopment, the expansion of inclusive education, increasing workforce and governance complexity, and the need to respond to emerging challenges such as technological change, will require sustained and strategic engagement in the period ahead.

In this context, the continued development of JMB's advocacy, professional learning and system engagement functions will remain critical. Equally, the translation of these policy developments and system priorities into effective practice within schools places increasing demands on school leadership and governance structures. This, in turn, underscores the importance of a strong, responsive and integrated advisory and support service to enable schools to implement policy, manage complexity and sustain effective organisational practice.

Strategic Goal 3:

Management, Compliance and Advisory Services

Strategic Intent

To provide information, advice, support, professional development and training to all voluntary secondary schools in a manner that is responsive, authoritative and aligned to the operational realities of school leadership and governance.

Over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan 2022–2025, the Secretariat of Secondary Schools (SSS), through its JMB division, has significantly strengthened and expanded its provision of management, compliance and advisory services. This work has been characterised by a substantial increase in the scale, complexity and intensity of engagement with schools, reflecting the evolving and increasingly demanding context of school leadership, governance and system implementation.

This has included the provision of direct, real-time advisory support to school leaders and boards of management, the development of structured governance and compliance resources, the expansion of specialist operational support services, and the continued strengthening of organisational capacity to respond to emerging needs.

Increasingly, this work reflects, not only the provision of advisory services, but the operation of an integrated support system encompassing generalist and specialist expertise across governance, HR/IR, financial management, procurement, buildings, safeguarding, and curriculum and inclusion. This system plays a critical role in enabling schools to navigate complex regulatory, organisational and educational demands in a coherent, informed and sustainable manner.

This strategic intent is realised through a coordinated and increasingly integrated suite of advisory, guidance and operational support services. These include direct engagement with school leadership and boards of management, the provision of practical guidance and policy resources, structured professional learning and briefing supports, and specialist services across key operational domains.

Together, these supports form a coherent service framework that enables schools to manage complex regulatory, organisational and educational demands in a consistent, informed and effective manner, while also supporting system-level alignment between policy, practice and leadership.

3.1 Providing a Comprehensive Range of Relevant Services

The JMB advisory team provides direct, responsive and expert support to principals, deputy principals and boards of management in managing the governance and operational responsibilities of schools, drawing on both generalist and specialist expertise across key advisory areas. This includes advisory support in relation to governance and management

of schools, disciplinary procedures, complaints processes, employment and contractual matters, child protection, data protection, procurement, financial management, admissions, Garda vetting, SEN provision, school buildings and student-related matters.

This integrated work is evidenced by a high level of direct engagement with schools, with the JMB division recording 5,921 advisory interactions during the 2025 calendar year across a range of communication channels. The comparative figure for 2022, (adjusted to exclude COVID-related interactions), was 5,006. This represents an increase of 18.28% in advisory engagements with schools over the period.

Analysis of this engagement indicates that the largest single category of advisory activity relates to the organisation, allocation and management of Posts of Responsibility and middle leadership structures, reflecting the growing complexity of leadership and line management arrangements within schools. The overall profile of interactions demonstrates a strong concentration of activity across a wide range of areas, highlighting the increasingly complex and regulated environment in which schools operate.

The changing nature and increasing complexity of advisory demand is further illustrated by the pattern of interactions across key query categories, as set out in Table 1 below:

Query	2022	2025	% Variance
BOM	13	243	+1769%
Contracts	117	420	+359%
Croke Park Hours	33	104	+215%
Staff issues including Dignity in the Workplace, Bullying, Harassment/ Sexual Harassment in the Workplace and Sick Leave issues	367	689	+88%
Staffing: including Recruitment, Appointments of Teacher, Principals and Deputy Principals, Contracts, Allocations, Redeployment	718	922	+28%
SNAs	74	136	+184%
Admissions	97	126	+30%
SEN and Curriculum	111	162	+46%
Student issues including bullying/harassment	204	355	+74%
Suspensions Expulsions	51	181	+255%

The data demonstrates very significant growth in areas associated with governance, appointments, compliance and formal procedures, including board of management queries, contracts, suspensions and expulsions, and HR-related matters. This reflects the increasing regulatory and procedural complexity of school management and the growing reliance on structured advisory support in navigating these areas. Overall, the pattern of interactions indicates a strong concentration of advisory demand across a number of key thematic areas:

Leadership and organisational structures: including Posts of Responsibility, middle leadership arrangements and the allocation and organisation of leadership responsibilities within schools

Staffing and HR/IR matters: including teacher allocation, recruitment, contracts, redeployment, terms and conditions, dignity in the workplace issues, bullying in the workplace issues, and the management of formal grievance and disciplinary processes

Governance and compliance: including board of management queries, Garda vetting, data protection (GDPR), inspections, and adherence to statutory and regulatory requirements

Student management and safeguarding: including child protection, admissions, code of behaviour, and disciplinary processes such as suspensions and expulsions

Curriculum and inclusion: including SEN provision and curriculum-related queries, which is further reflected in the development of provision-mapping approaches, such as the RISE pilot programme, which support schools in aligning SEN provision, curriculum and whole-school policy frameworks in a structured and coherent way.

A significant proportion of advisory engagement relates to complex staff relations and disciplinary matters, including the management of formal grievance and disciplinary procedures. In many instances, this involves sustained engagement with school leadership and boards of management in navigating sensitive and high-stakes situations, including those in which school leaders themselves are directly involved. This further reflects the increasing complexity of the leadership role and the critical importance of access to timely, expert advisory support for both senior leadership teams and chairpersons of boards of management.

Notably, recorded interactions do not fully capture the depth and intensity of this work. A significant proportion of advisory engagement involves sustained case-based support over extended periods. Individual matters frequently require multiple engagements over days or weeks, as school leaders and boards of management are supported through complex procedural, legal, HR and governance requirements. As such, the volume of recorded interactions represents only one dimension of the service, with the underlying workload reflecting a high level of ongoing, iterative engagement in often sensitive and high-stakes situations.

The scale and complexity of this advisory engagement is further reflected in the work of the Financial Support Services Unit (FSSU), which provides specialist support to schools in the area of financial governance and compliance. In 2025, the FSSU recorded 5,006 support queries from voluntary secondary schools, across areas including accounting systems, payroll, VAT and RCT compliance, grants, budgeting and cashflow management.

This volume of engagement, comparable in scale to the core advisory service, highlights both the centrality and the complexity of financial management within schools. It also reflects the extent to which schools rely on structured, specialist support in navigating increasingly complex financial, regulatory and reporting requirements.



In addition to direct advisory support, the work of the FSSU includes the development of national financial guidelines, the provision of training and templates, and the operation of systems for the submission and analysis of school financial data. Taken together, this represents a comprehensive and system-level support infrastructure for financial governance within the voluntary secondary sector.

When considered together, the volume of advisory interactions across generalist and specialist services points to a significant and sustained level of demand for support across all dimensions of school governance and operation. This level of demand highlights the central role of JMB as a system support structure for school leadership and governance and underscores the importance of continued investment in organisational capacity to sustain and develop this work.

This integrated advisory service is extended through the systematic development and dissemination of guidance materials, including policy templates, financial management templates, governance supports and interpretative guidance on Department of Education and Youth circulars and regulatory requirements. Regular communication with schools through bulletins and advisory updates forms a core component of this work, enabling the timely dissemination of guidance and supporting consistency of practice across schools. This dimension of the service is developed further in section 3.3.

3.2 Aligning Human Resources to Service Plan

JMB has strengthened its organisational capacity to meet the evolving and increasingly complex needs of schools through the strategic alignment and development of staffing across its advisory and specialist service areas.

The JMB advisory team operates as part of a coordinated system, incorporating the School Management Advisory (SMA) team as a central component and drawing on both generalist and specialist expertise to provide a coherent and responsive service to schools. This integrated model is supported by a range of established specialist units, including the Financial Services Support Unit (FSSU), the Schools Procurement Unit (SPU), the Buildings Advisory Service, and dedicated advisory supports in areas such as data protection, child protection and Garda vetting.

While these structures were in place prior to the current Strategic Development Plan, they have been further developed, enhanced and more closely integrated over its lifetime, strengthening their capacity to respond to the evolving and increasingly complex needs of schools.

The scale, intensity and complexity of advisory engagement, as evidenced by the volume of interactions and the prevalence of sustained case-based work outlined in section 3.1, has directly informed the continued development and alignment of these structures. Ongoing investment in staffing, professional development and supporting systems has enhanced the capacity of JMB to respond to increased demand, provide timely and consistent advice, and maintain a high standard of service delivery across all areas. This integrated and evolving organisational model reflects a deliberate shift towards a system-based approach

to service delivery, ensuring that JMB is positioned to respond effectively to sustained demand, increasing complexity, and the need for coordinated support across multiple domains of school leadership and operation.

3.3 Supporting Schools in Operational Implementation and Compliance

JMB provides a structured programme of support designed to enable school leaders and boards of management to implement policy, fulfil statutory obligations and manage key operational processes effectively. In this context, JMB operates as a key intermediary between policy and practice, supporting schools in interpreting, implementing and embedding policy requirements within their local contexts, and contributing to system coherence and consistency of practice across the sector.

This provision is delivered through a combination of targeted training events and the systematic dissemination of guidance and updates to schools. A key component of this work is the regular issuance of bulletins and advisory communications, which provide timely interpretation of Department of Education and Youth circulars, legislative requirements and emerging operational issues.

This work is evidenced by the sustained issuance of bulletins and advisory updates throughout the academic year. Bulletin activity reflects both periods of intensified system change and the need to support schools in responding to emerging and, at times, critical situations, with 90 bulletins issued in 2021/22, 57 in 2022/23, 37 in 2023/24, 44 in 2024/25 and 37 issued to date in the current academic year. This pattern demonstrates a responsive and adaptive approach, with higher volumes aligned to periods of significant policy development and crisis management, alongside a continued steady flow of guidance to support schools in managing ongoing operational and compliance requirements.

This work also includes the development and dissemination of JMB-authored policy templates and guidance materials to support schools in meeting their statutory and operational responsibilities. These include, for example, templates and guidance in areas such as dignity in the workplace, vetting procedures, financial governance, procurement and data protection (CCTV). The School Management Advisory (SMA) team manage, maintain, update and develop the organisation's website www.JMB.ie. This website offers information and links to services provided by JMB, information on JMB regional structures, links to bulletins, information on training events and presentations, JMB publications and a repository of documents on recruitment, school governance, middle leadership and management, health and safety, child protection, Garda vetting and school buildings.

In parallel, JMB has supported schools through advisory engagement and national representation in the implementation of Department of Education and Youth frameworks in areas such as child protection, code of behaviour, Bí Cinealta procedures, data protection, schoolbooks scheme and the reconfiguration of Croke Park Hours. Together, these supports ensure that schools are not only informed of policy requirements but are equipped with the practical tools and guidance necessary to implement them effectively within their local contexts.



Through these measures, JMB has strengthened its capacity to respond to the evolving needs of schools. However, the scale and complexity of advisory engagement, together with emerging needs identified through structured engagement with practice, indicate the need for a further phase of development focused on expanding capacity, deepening specialisation in key areas, and strengthening the alignment between advisory services, professional learning and system priorities.

3.4 Enhancing the SSS Management Advisory Service

JMB has continued to enhance its management advisory services through structured engagement with schools and ongoing review of the supports provided, ensuring alignment with the evolving needs of school leadership and governance.

This has included targeted engagement with key stakeholders within the sector, to identify areas requiring additional support. In particular, consultation with chairpersons of boards of management, discussion at JMB Council meetings, and evaluations of professional learning events, has informed the development and refinement of governance and advisory supports. More recent engagement with deputy principals, undertaken as part of the development of the Statement of Strategy 2026–2030, has also identified emerging needs and the demand for the development of additional supports targeted at this cohort.

The scale and nature of advisory engagement, as outlined in section 3.1, has further informed the ongoing development of services across key areas including HR/IR, governance, safeguarding, school buildings, data protection, procurement and financial management, ensuring that supports remain responsive to the practical and operational challenges experienced by schools.

While there has been some increase in staffing over the period of the Strategic Development Plan, the primary response has been the restructuring and alignment of existing resources to support a more integrated advisory service. This has enabled JMB to respond more effectively to demand. However, the scale and complexity of advisory engagement, together with emerging needs identified through engagement with JMB Council, boards of management and deputy principals, indicate that further enhancement of staffing capacity will be required in the next phase of strategic planning.

In parallel, JMB has continued to engage with schools in identifying professional learning requirements and in shaping the provision of training and supports. Recognition of the significant role of voluntary leadership within the sector has also informed the provision of supports for boards of management, including chairpersons and regional leadership structures.

Through these measures, JMB has strengthened its capacity to respond to the evolving needs of schools, ensuring that its advisory and support services are informed by engagement with practice, are responsive to demand and aligned with the strategic priorities of the organisation. In this context, supporting volunteer leadership, particularly chairpersons of boards of management, is recognised as a critical element of system

capacity, requiring ongoing development of targeted supports that extend beyond compliance to encompass leadership of teaching, learning, assessment and equity within schools.

3.5 Supporting the Agency of Volunteers

SSS recognises and affirms the significant contribution of volunteer leadership across both the organisation and the voluntary secondary school sector, including the role of boards of management and their chairpersons in the governance of schools, as well as the contribution of volunteers within SSS structures.

Within SSS, volunteer leadership is reflected in the work of the Board of Directors, JMB and AMCSS Councils, regional steering committees and national advisory groups in the areas of curriculum, DEIS, ICT and SEN. These structures support engagement with policy development, provide practitioner insight, and contribute to the development and delivery of services to schools and the formation of JMB advocacy policy. SSS supports the effective functioning of these groups through the provision of organisational, advisory and administrative support, enabling their work to be coordinated, informed and aligned with the strategic priorities of the organisation.

Over the period of the Strategic Development Plan, SSS has supported volunteer leadership at school level through targeted advisory, training and governance supports, enabling boards of management and chairpersons to fulfil their responsibilities in an increasingly complex regulatory and operational environment.

JMB has also sought to better understand the scope and scale of volunteer activity, including through engagement with Council and advisory groups, and through a survey of chairpersons of boards of management. This has informed the development of supports tailored to the needs of volunteer leaders, particularly in areas such as governance, compliance, safeguarding and financial oversight.

In addition, SSS has supported regional leadership structures and the work of AMCSS regions, recognising their role in facilitating communication, peer support and leadership development.

Through these measures, SSS has strengthened its support for volunteer leadership, ensuring that those undertaking governance and leadership roles are appropriately supported and equipped to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

3.6 Monitoring of Service Recipient Satisfaction

SSS has continued to monitor the suitability, efficiency and effectiveness of its services through periodic engagement with schools and the gathering of feedback from school leaders and boards of management.

This has included structured approaches to capturing feedback, including the conduct of a customer satisfaction survey and engagement with boards of management, including a



survey of chairpersons, as well as insights derived from ongoing advisory interactions with schools, JMB council and JMB National Advisory Groups. These processes have provided valuable information on the experience of service users and have informed the ongoing development and refinement of services.

Through these measures, JMB has strengthened its capacity to evaluate and continuously improve its services, ensuring that they remain responsive to need, informed by practice, and aligned with the organisation's strategic and system leadership role.

Assessment

Over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan, SSS, through its JMB division, has significantly strengthened its management, compliance and advisory services, reflected in both the scale and complexity of engagement with schools. The volume of advisory interactions across both generalist and specialist services, including the Financial Support Services Unit, points to a sustained and increasing demand for support across all dimensions of school governance, leadership and operation. This level of engagement positions JMB, not only as a provider of advisory services, but as a central support structure within the system, enabling schools to manage increasing complexity and supporting alignment between policy, leadership and practice.

A defining feature of this work has been the shift from transactional advisory support to sustained, case-based engagement with individual schools in complex and often high-stakes situations, particularly in areas such as HR/IR, governance and compliance. This reflects the evolving nature of school leadership, characterised by increasing regulatory requirements, organisational complexity and the need for structured and integrated support systems.

Structured engagement with practice has been central to informing service development. Feedback from chairpersons of boards of management, including through the Chairs Survey, together with engagement with JMB Council and school leaders, has provided clear insight into emerging needs. In particular, chairpersons have identified a growing requirement for support, not only in governance and compliance, but also in leading teaching, learning, assessment and equity within schools.

In parallel, the pattern of advisory interactions, including increased engagement in areas of curriculum and SEN, points to a growing demand for more structured and specialist supports in these areas. This aligns with broader system developments in inclusive education and curriculum reform and highlights the need to further develop and extend supports to schools. In this context, initiatives such as the RISE provision mapping programme, provide a strong foundation for supporting schools in aligning curriculum, SEN provision and whole-school policy frameworks in a coherent and context-specific manner, and may be further developed and extended to support a wider cohort of schools.

The strong engagement with leadership development and professional learning initiatives further highlights the need to support leadership capacity at multiple levels within schools. In particular, the Boston College Ireland programmes, the Region 1 pilot on leading and

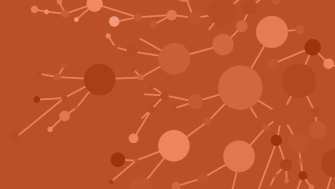
managing middle leadership teams, and the RISE provision-mapping programme represent an emerging and coherent suite of practice-based supports aligned to system priorities. These initiatives demonstrate the value of sustained, structured professional learning in supporting schools to lead teaching and learning, strengthen organisational coherence, and respond effectively to the demands of inclusive education and curriculum reform.

In the context of the development of the Statement of Strategy 2026–2030, there is a clear opportunity to further develop and consolidate this work as a strategic priority for the organisation. This will involve progression from individual pilot initiatives to a more structured and scalable model of leadership and professional learning, aligned with the needs of schools and the priorities of the education system. This will include a number of interrelated developments including:

- Structured supports for chairpersons of boards of management, particularly in relation to governance, leadership of teaching and learning, and oversight of equity and inclusion
- A defined suite of supports for deputy principals, reflecting their central and evolving role in school leadership and operational management
- The expansion of supports in the areas of curriculum and SEN, including consideration of how existing initiatives such as RISE may be further developed and scaled
- The continued development and updating of policy templates and governance resources to support schools in meeting increasing statutory and regulatory requirements in a consistent and practical manner
- The development of a coherent and scalable framework for leadership development and professional learning, building on existing initiatives such as the Boston College Ireland programmes, the Region 1 pilot and the RISE provision -mapping programme

These developments need to be supported by continued investment in professional learning and leadership development, strengthening the alignment between advisory support, professional learning and system priorities.

At the same time, the scale, intensity and complexity of demand across advisory and specialist services indicates that further development of organisational capacity will be required to sustain and strengthen this service in the period ahead, particularly in supporting schools to lead teaching, learning, assessment and equity, and in ensuring effective implementation of policy across the voluntary secondary sector.



Strategic Goal 4: Promoting Educational Research and Development

Strategic Intent

To generate, use and share knowledge and research in support of the educational development aims of the voluntary secondary sector.

JMB adopts an evidence-informed approach, positioning research, system evidence and practitioner insight as a strategic resource for policy engagement, leadership support and system-level learning. This is reflected in the integration of national and international research, system-level data and structured engagement with schools to underpin advocacy, service development and policy formation.

This strategic intent is realised through a structured and increasingly integrated approach encompassing the generation and commissioning of research, sustained engagement with policy processes, and the promotion of practitioner-led inquiry. A central dimension of this work is the use of research and evidence, including national and international studies and system-level data, to inform JMB advocacy and submissions to the Department of Education and Youth, including pre-budget submissions and wider policy engagement.

Together, these elements position research as a strategic resource within JMB, informing organisational decision-making, strengthening advocacy, and contributing to national policy discourse, while also supporting a deeper system-level understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing schools.

Over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan 2022–2025, the Secretariat of Secondary Schools (SSS), through its JMB division and the Education, Research and Development function, has strengthened its role in embedding this research-informed approach across its work. This reflects a progression to a strategic and integrated role, in which research, evidence and practitioner insight are mobilised to inform organisational priorities, underpin advocacy and contribute to how JMB and the education system understand, respond to, and improve practice and policy. This is evidenced through the commissioning of high-quality research, the systematic use of evidence in policy engagement, the promotion of leader-practitioner research, and the development of more structured approaches to data gathering and analysis across the organisation. It has also informed the development and evolution of JMB professional development programmes over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan, as outlined in Goals 1 and 3.

4.1 Research to Inform Policy and Practice

A central feature of this work has been the commissioning and advancement of major research studies to inform both organisational strategy and national policy engagement. In particular, the Economic and Social Research Institute report 'Embracing Diversity in All Its

Forms': The Voluntary Secondary Sector in Irish Education (Eamonn Carroll, Selina McCoy and Keyu Ye, 2024) provides a comprehensive, mixed-method examination of the voluntary secondary sector, encompassing school diversity and ethos, student experience and wellbeing, teaching and learning, and the structural and organisational challenges facing schools. This research has provided a robust and independent evidence base to inform JMB advocacy and engagement with the Department of Education and Youth.

The findings of this research have directly informed JMB policy positions in a number of key areas. In particular, the identification of the excessive and wide-reaching demands placed on school leaders, and the inadequacy of existing supports, has underpinned JMB advocacy for enhanced senior leadership capacity, including the provision of additional deputy principal posts, to support curriculum leadership and the implementation of ongoing system reform.

The research also highlights the increasing complexity of student need and the experience of students within schools. In particular, it points to concerns among students regarding the extent to which their special education needs are being met, alongside a preference for more individualised and small-group supports, and broader challenges for schools in providing appropriate SEN provision. This evidence, together with policy advice from the National Council for Special Education on inclusive education, has informed JMB engagement in relation to the provision of dedicated time for SEN coordination and the need to strengthen the capacity of senior leadership teams to collaborate with and lead the work of the SEN core team, the SENCO and teaching staff in planning, aligning and implementing a coherent whole-school approach to inclusive special education.

Central to this approach is the role of the JMB National Advisory Groups across key areas such as curriculum, DEIS, ICT and SEN, which provide a structured interface between policy, research and practice. These groups support the systematic capture of practitioner insight and ensure that the lived experience of schools informs both organisational learning and national policy engagement.

Overall, this work reflects a progression to a more strategic model of research activity, in which the commissioning, use and application of research are integrated within the broader work of the organisation. These elements position research as a core organisational function, connecting school practice, leadership experience and system-level policy, and supporting evidence-informed advocacy, leadership development and the ongoing development of the voluntary secondary school sector.

This evidence-informed approach was also reflected in a major survey undertaken by JMB in April 2025 on Senior Cycle Redevelopment. The survey provided important insight into school leaders' perspectives on the pace, coherence and resourcing requirements of reform, and informed JMB engagement with the Department of Education and Youth and other system leaders, as well as the organisation's own provision of supports, including professional learning and advisory services. The survey, which had a very high response rate, also provided further evidence of the need for enhanced senior leadership capacity within schools to support the effective leadership of learning and organisational change in



the context of ongoing reform. While school leaders demonstrated a strong openness to change and a clear commitment to innovation, the findings highlighted the extent to which existing resource constraints impact on the implementation of reform at school level.

4.2 Prioritising Principal and Deputy Principal Wellbeing

JMB has prioritised research into the workload and wellbeing of school leaders, recognising leadership sustainability as a critical factor in the effective functioning of schools. This has included both direct engagement with school leaders and the commissioning of research to examine the extent and impact of workload pressures on principals and deputy principals.

A key development in this area has been the commissioning of research into peer-support structures, including the evaluation of Regional Balint Groups in collaboration with Maynooth University. This research examines the role of structured professional support in enhancing reflective practice, strengthening professional resilience and supporting leadership sustainability in the context of increasing system demands.

This work positions leadership wellbeing as a system-level issue requiring structured and evidence-informed responses and informs the development of sustainable leadership support frameworks within the voluntary secondary sector.

4.3 Researching Faith Education and Policy

SSS has carried out and supported research examining the value of Catholic education and the impact of policy developments on denominational education. This has included the further development of the Genesis research programme and structured engagement with school leaders and stakeholders.

This work has been aligned with broader system developments, including engagement with the Croí process and ongoing collaboration with the Catholic Education Partnership and the Association of Patrons and Trustees of Catholic Schools. In this context, research has informed the articulation of a contemporary understanding of Catholic education and supported the development of governance and leadership approaches aligned with that vision.

In this context, research supports, not only reflection on ethos, but the ongoing development of denominational education as a coherent and aligned system.

4.4 An Evidence Base for Funding Equalisation

JMB has sought to develop and utilise research as a basis for advocacy in relation to school funding, including engagement with the Economic and Social Research Institute study examining aspects of funding and resource allocation within the voluntary secondary sector. While this work has provided valuable insight, it has also highlighted limitations in the availability of system-level data, with analysis in this area constrained by the absence of comprehensive data on school funding across sectors.

In particular, findings from the ESRI research point to the experience and perceptions of school leaders in relation to funding pressures, rather than a fully data-driven comparative analysis of funding arrangements. This has reinforced the need for more detailed and transparent system-level data to support robust evaluation of funding equity.

In parallel, JMB has engaged with trust bodies to examine school-level funding positions, including analysis of income and expenditure across a sample of schools. This work indicates that parental contributions represent a critical component of school funding, with a significant proportion of schools operating at a deficit in the absence of such contributions. This further highlights the extent to which current funding arrangements rely on locally generated income and underscores the need for a more comprehensive and equitable funding model.

In this context, JMB has continued to advocate for a more comprehensive analysis of school funding in engagement with the Department of Education and Youth. This includes consideration of the operation of the per capita funding model and the extent to which it reflects the needs of schools of different sizes and contexts. It also includes the need to examine the underlying costs associated with the management and operation of schools, including how these relate to scale, infrastructure and organisational complexity.

Through this work, research functions not only as a support for advocacy, but as an identified area for further development, with a clear requirement for more robust data and analysis to underpin future policy engagement on funding equity.

4.5 Supporting Leader-Practitioner Research

JMB has supported the development of leader-practitioner research within the voluntary secondary sector, recognising its value in strengthening professional learning and supporting system improvement. This has been achieved through the provision of research bursaries to principals and deputy principals, supporting inquiry into areas such as leadership, inclusion, curriculum and wellbeing.

This work strengthens the connection between research and practice, ensuring that the experience and expertise of school leaders contribute directly to organisational learning and system development.



Assessment

Over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan, JMB has strengthened its role in promoting educational research and development, with a clear progression towards a more strategic and integrated use of research across the organisation. Research now informs advocacy, supports leadership development, and contributes to how JMB and the education system as a whole understands, responds to and improves practice and policy.

A defining feature of this work has been the alignment of research activity with organisational priorities and its application in policy engagement. The commissioning of significant studies, including the ESRI research on the voluntary secondary sector, together with the use of system evidence and practitioner insight, has supported a more evidence-informed approach to advocacy, particularly in areas such as leadership capacity, inclusive education and system reform. This has been complemented by organisation-led research and structured engagement with schools. This includes a survey of chairpersons of Boards of Management to identify support needs, which has informed the development of targeted supports for chairs. It also includes a major survey of school leaders in April 2025 in relation to their readiness to lead Senior Cycle Redevelopment, which has informed JMB policy engagement and the development of professional learning and advisory supports in this area. The development of structured mechanisms for capturing practitioner insight, including through National Advisory Groups and leader-practitioner research, has further strengthened the connection between research, policy and practice.

At the same time, this work has highlighted limitations in the availability of system-level data in certain areas, most notably in relation to school funding. While research and engagement have provided valuable insight into the experience of schools, including the reliance on locally generated income, the absence of comprehensive and transparent data across sectors has constrained the development of a fully evidence-based analysis of funding equity. This has informed ongoing JMB engagement with the Department of Education and Youth, including advocacy for a more detailed examination of funding models and the costs associated with the operation of schools of different sizes and contexts.

The continued development of this work will require a more systematic embedding of research within organisational practice, ensuring that findings consistently inform guidance, professional learning and advisory supports. In addition, the increasing complexity of the education system, including curriculum reform, inclusive education and leadership demands, underscores the need for ongoing investment in research capacity and the development of targeted, policy-relevant research.

In this context, there is a clear opportunity in the next phase of strategic development to further embed research as a core organisational function, strengthening its role in supporting evidence-informed advocacy, leadership development and the sustainable development of the voluntary secondary school sector.

Goal 5:

Organisational Effectiveness and Governance

Strategic Intent

To ensure the effective governance and organisational capacity of the Secretariat of Secondary Schools through the development of its structures, systems and people, enabling the organisation to deliver high-quality services, support schools effectively and respond to an evolving educational landscape.

5.1 Operational Structure Meets Service Function

Over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan, SSS has undertaken a sustained process of organisational development to align its internal operational structure with an efficient and effective service model aligned with its key strategic objectives. This has involved, not only the continued expansion of services, but a more deliberate effort to ensure that structures, roles and systems across the organisation are configured to support coherence of activity and responsiveness to the needs of schools.

A significant development in this regard was the restructuring of the organisation to support a more integrated and strategic model of leadership and service delivery, including the establishment and operation of the Senior Leadership Team. This has strengthened coordination across the Secretariat's core functions and has supported a more deliberate alignment between strategic planning, operational delivery and organisational development. The annual reports also point to the way in which this restructuring has enabled cross-team collaboration in areas such as support for newly appointed principals, implementation of strategic priorities and regional development.

This work has been supported by targeted recruitment to meet expanding service demands and to strengthen specialist capacity across the organisation. In 2023/2024, positions including a HR/IR and Employment Law Advisor, a School Management Advisor, an Accountant, two Procurement Officers, two Accounting Technicians, a Clerical Officer, a Vetting Clerk and an Office Administrator were filled, while in 2024/2025 further recruitment included an Assistant General Secretary, two Building Advisors and two Accounting Technicians. This reflects a clear effort to align staffing structures with the growing scale and complexity of the organisation's service model.

Operational effectiveness has also been strengthened through the development of organisational systems and processes. The increased use of digital tools and platforms, the continuing digitisation of records, and the introduction of a Service Level Agreement for schools have supported greater clarity, accountability and consistency in service delivery. In addition, the introduction of an online Garda Vetting Portal has reduced reliance on paper-based processes and has streamlined the vetting process for schools, contributing to a



more efficient and responsive service. These developments have helped to formalise the relationship between the Secretariat and schools and to ensure that operational practice is more clearly aligned with organisational purpose and service expectations.

The development of the AMCSS regional structure has formed an important part of this alignment of structure and function. Training and engagement with regional steering committees, the election and induction of the new Council of AMCSS, the launch of a regional section on the members' area of the website, and the incorporation of regional updates into Council agendas have all strengthened the connection between local, regional and national levels of the organisation. This has improved internal communication, informed advocacy and enhanced the organisation's responsiveness to issues emerging from practice.

Overall, these developments demonstrate a clear progression towards a more coherent and strategically aligned organisational structure, in which internal roles, systems and processes are increasingly configured to support the effective delivery of services and the achievement of the Secretariat's wider strategic objectives.

5.2 Providing for Effective Corporate Functioning

Over the lifetime of the Strategic Development Plan, SSS has strengthened its corporate and human resource functions to support the effective operation of the organisation and the delivery of its expanding range of services. This has involved the development of structured systems for organisational administration, human resource management and staff support, ensuring that corporate functions are aligned with organisational priorities and service requirements.

A central feature of this work has been the development of a more strategic approach to recruitment and staff deployment. Targeted recruitment across a range of roles, including advisory, finance, procurement, vetting and administrative functions, has enabled the organisation to build the capacity required to support schools in an increasingly complex policy and operational environment. This has ensured that specialist expertise is available across key areas of service delivery and that the organisation is appropriately resourced to meet demand.

This has been complemented by a sustained focus on staff development and organisational learning. Staff have engaged in a range of professional learning programmes in areas such as governance, communication, mediation, performance management, change management and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence. The securing of a funding arrangement to support staff development has further enabled this work, contributing to the development of a skilled and adaptable workforce capable of supporting the evolving needs of the sector.

Corporate functioning has also been strengthened through the development and refinement of organisational systems, policies and procedures. This includes the ongoing review and updating of policies to ensure compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements,

the implementation of effective health and safety procedures, and the maintenance of strong financial management systems and internal controls. An Internal Financial Controls Audit, conducted in line with the Charities Regulatory Authority guidelines, has further strengthened financial oversight and accountability within the organisation.

In addition, the development of a Service Level Agreement for schools represents a significant advancement in corporate functioning, providing clarity in relation to roles, responsibilities and expectations, and supporting effective communication and engagement between the Secretariat and its member schools. This has contributed to a more structured and transparent approach to service delivery, reinforcing the organisation's commitment to quality and accountability.

5.3 Monitoring our Governance

SSS has strengthened its approach to governance through a structured and ongoing process of monitoring, evaluation and compliance, focused on the effective functioning of its organisational governance structures. This has ensured that the Board of Directors and associated governance processes operate in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Regulatory Authority and other relevant legislative and regulatory frameworks.

A central element of this work has been the systematic review of governance practices by the Board of Directors. The Board has operated in line with the Charities Governance Code, supported by regular meetings, formal reporting structures and the oversight of strategic, financial and operational matters. Compliance with CRA obligations has been actively monitored, including the preparation of required compliance reports and the identification of areas for further development across the core principles of governance, including accountability, transparency, integrity and effective oversight.

This work has been supported by the development and implementation of key governance instruments and controls. The preparation and circulation of a comprehensive Directors' Handbook has strengthened clarity in relation to roles, responsibilities and fiduciary duties, while the completion of internal financial controls audits has enhanced systems of financial management, risk oversight and compliance reporting. The ongoing review and updating of organisational policies have further ensured alignment with evolving legislative requirements and best practice standards. Structured Board processes have also supported the evaluation of governance, including a formal assessment of Board effectiveness in line with the Charities Governance Code. This included consideration of the effectiveness of the Board as a whole, together with the contribution of individual office holders and trustees, and informed the identification of areas for further development across the organisation's governance framework.

5.4 A Contemporary Communications Strategy

SSS has taken steps to strengthen its communication structures, with a particular focus on improving engagement with member schools and ensuring that key organisational messages are shared in a more structured and accessible way. This has included extending



communication processes to ensure that deputy principals are included alongside principals and chairpersons of boards of management, recognising their role in school leadership and the implementation of policy and organisational change.

A central element of this work has been the development of the AMCSS regional structure as a key component of the organisation's communication framework. Structured engagement with regional steering committees, together with the formal incorporation of regional updates into Council agendas, has strengthened two-way communication between schools and the organisation. This has ensured that issues arising at local level are captured more systematically and reflected in organisational planning and national advocacy, while also supporting the dissemination of information to schools.

Communication processes have also been supported through the development of organisational platforms, including enhancements to the JMB website and the provision of dedicated sections for AMCSS regions and organisational information. These developments have improved accessibility to information and supported greater transparency in relation to organisational structures and activity.

While further development is required to establish a more comprehensive communications strategy, these developments represent a clear step towards a more structured and effective approach to organisational communication.

Assessment

SSS has made significant progress in strengthening its organisational effectiveness and governance, with a clear shift towards a more structured, integrated and professionally supported organisation. This is reflected in the alignment of internal structures with service delivery, the development of corporate and human resource functions, and the strengthening of governance systems and processes.

A defining feature of this work has been the deliberate alignment of organisational capacity with the expanding scope and complexity of services provided to schools. Targeted recruitment, the establishment of a Senior Leadership Team, and the development of internal systems and processes have enabled a more coordinated and responsive approach to organisational management. This has supported greater coherence across functions and strengthened the organisation's ability to deliver services in a consistent and effective manner.

Progress is also evident in the strengthening of corporate functioning, including the development of structured approaches to human resource management, staff development and organisational administration. Investment in staff capacity, together with the implementation of systems such as the Service Level Agreement and the increased use of digital platforms, has enhanced operational effectiveness and supported a more formalised and transparent approach to service delivery.

Governance structures have been strengthened through a systematic focus on compliance, oversight and continuous improvement. The work of the Board of Directors, supported

by internal audit processes, compliance reporting and the development of governance instruments such as the Directors' Handbook, reflects a clear commitment to operating in line with the Charities Governance Code and to maintaining high standards of accountability and effectiveness.

At the same time, the development of communication structures, including the strengthening of regional engagement and the inclusion of deputy principals in communication processes, has supported improved organisational connectivity and responsiveness. While further work is required to develop a more comprehensive and fully articulated communications strategy, these developments represent important progress in ensuring that information flows effectively across the organisation and between the Secretariat and its member schools.

The continued development of this goal will require ongoing attention to the alignment of organisational structures with service demands, further investment in staff capacity and systems, and the continued strengthening of governance and communication processes. In particular, there is an opportunity to build on the progress made to develop a more fully integrated organisational model, supported by enhanced digital infrastructure and more systematic approaches to communication and planning.

Conclusion

The work outlined across the five strategic goals demonstrates the extent to which the organisation has strengthened its capacity, coherence and effectiveness over the period of the Strategic Development Plan 2022–2025. Across all areas of activity, there has been a clear alignment between advocacy, advisory support, professional learning, research and organisational development, enabling a more integrated and responsive approach to supporting schools.

This progress has taken place in a context of significant and ongoing change, with increasing demands on school leadership, governance and system capacity. The experience of this period has reinforced the importance of strong leadership, evidence-informed policy engagement, and the provision of structured and sustained support to schools.

The Statement of Strategy 2026–2030 provides the framework for the next phase of this work. It builds on the progress achieved to date and sets out a clear direction for the continued development of the organisation, with a focus on leadership, service, research and organisational capacity, and on supporting schools to respond to more demanding environment and evolving educational environment, while strengthening the capacity of the organisation to lead, support and shape the continued development of the voluntary secondary school sector.



Education Report

Education Report

AMCSS/JMB 39th Annual Conference 2026

Introduction

This AMCSS/JMB Annual Education Report tracks eight key areas of contemporary policy development and points to the Secretariat's ongoing educational, research, and development activities on behalf of our members.

1. Sustainable Leadership and Management in Our Schools

In our Pre-Budget Submissions of 2025 and 2026, JMB set out an unarguable case for the enhancement of leadership capacity in the face of overwhelming, concurrent policy change in both curricular and special education demands. Our position is widely supported by other relevant stakeholders and is acknowledged as reasonable and appropriate in conversations with high level Department officials.

In summary, our contention is that in light of evolving policy around inclusion and curriculum, the required systems-level knowledge, delegated authority, year-round availability, and agency within schools can best be mediated at deputy principal level.

Deploying a cut-and-paste exercise in successive budgets, the Department assigned derisory additional funding to enhancing its school leadership allocation, amounting to just €4m of its 2025 overall budget of €11,800,000,000 and even less for 2026, allocating only €3m from an increased education vote of €13,075,000,000:

'As part of Budget 2025, funding of €4 million will be made available to provide 1,000 additional posts of responsibility in the school system for the 2025/26 school year. This is in recognition that school leadership and management play a key role in improving educational outcomes by creating a positive school climate and environment as well as motivating and empowering educators and learners within their school communities'¹

'As part of Budget 2026, funding of €3 million will be made available to provide for enhanced School Leadership with additional deputy principals in primary and post primary schools for the 2026/27 school year. This is a recognition that school leadership and management play a key role in improving educational outcomes by creating a positive school climate and environment as well as motivating and empowering educators and learners within their school communities'²

1 <https://assets.gov.ie/306585/d14f1663-d3c5-4647-b67f-739ab208ac3b.pdf>

2 https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/9d9ef4d9/Dept_of_Education_and_Youth_-_Main_Features_Budget_2026.pdf



The only encouraging signal has been a move from funding additional posts of responsibility to additional deputy principals, an argument JMB has been making for some years, and will have to re-make in next year's submission. If €3m across 4,000 schools represents a 'recognition of the key role school leadership and management plays', we still have much work to do to convince policymakers and politicians that their rhetoric and resourcing do not match.

We will continue to make our case in the strongest terms and urge our new Minister and Government to reconsider this essential investment.

Activities

- Continuing communication with the Department and others on the workload of principals in contemporary voluntary secondary schools
- Development of submissions establishing a clear rationale for enhanced senior leadership capacity
- Engaging with our colleague management bodies, ETBI and ACCS, on the development of shared positions and joint submissions on senior leadership capacity enhancement
- Advocacy for greater coherence of policy implementation across the range of demand areas impacting on schools
- Ongoing advice and support for senior and middle management systems in schools
- Roll-out of peer support 'Balint' groups across the network of voluntary secondary school principals and carrying out research on its impact
- Leadership training and development opportunities for principals, deputy principals and boards of management
- Engagement with Oide relating to leadership-for-learning amongst principals and deputy principals
- Continued awarding of research bursaries for voluntary secondary principals and deputy principals

2. Curriculum and Assessment Matters

Renewal of Junior and Senior Cycle

Michael Fullan's maxim that 'effective educators attack incoherence' presents a system-level challenge to both the political and policy spheres, particularly in terms of the dynamics of change-management, pacing, alignment with other policy rollout, and the enhancement of senior leadership capacity to implement it all.

Pressure on principals to erode tuition time to provide teacher release for professional learning, textbook changes, timetabling pressures on an already overcrowded curriculum and its option lines, communication with students and parents, and guidance demands are being compounded this year by the impact of Additional Assessment Components (AACs) across a range of Leaving Certificate sciences and other subjects.

In terms of immediate and ongoing practical implications for school leaders, the following school-level challenges will require to be supported at system and policy levels:

Ongoing leadership, guidance, and planning will be required to unpack the professional learning delivered by Oide in order to embed deep change at school level or we risk superficial, transactional reform as opposed to the intended cultural and pedagogical transformation of teaching and learning. “The leadership practices that have the greatest impact on student outcomes are those that involve leaders working directly with teachers on teaching and learning.” Viviane Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe (2008).

Research consistently shows that while school leadership is a key influence on student outcomes, its impact depends on leaders having meaningful opportunities to engage with teachers around teaching and learning.

Review and reform of each school’s Transition Year Programme in line with the new Programme Statement expands the range of demands placed on middle and senior school leaders. Specifically, principals have consistently identified Programme Coordination as a key limiting factor in terms of review and renewal of their TY provision. The current model of programme coordinator post of responsibility no longer meets the demands of significantly expanding access to Community, Life and Work Studies (formerly LCVP), and programme flexibility within LCA in relation to Maths and MFL.

Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes at Senior Cycle demand absolute policy clarity and teacher union agreement in terms of implementation. Notwithstanding the intrinsic value of introducing L2LPs at senior cycle, the key backing conditions required to ensure success and appropriateness will include school level autonomy and flexibility, ring-fenced planning and coordination time, specialised external professional advice, and appropriate and ongoing professional learning for the teachers, leaders and special needs assistants concerned. Furthermore, the integration of students following L2LPs into some mainstream classes will be complex and require appropriate levels of leadership to enact appropriately.

Social, Personal, and Health Education carries with it a range of opportunities and challenges. Chief among the challenges at senior cycle in particular are the need to establish a new degree of confidence amongst teachers of SPHE in the face of a shifting and dynamic background of social developments impacting on the lives of young people; high calibre professional learning opportunities for teachers, current and potential; policy level guidance on managing an increasing number of withdrawals from the subject by parents and by students over 18 years; a revised set of guidelines and templates to support schools in reviewing and updating their RSE policies; and a level of SPHE coordination time in which teachers and senior leaders can plan for, and monitor, SPHE implementation across the school.

In light of such demands, the capacity for overwhelm at system and human levels are obvious, and JMB once again reiterates its call for significant enhancement of senior leadership capacity in order to mitigate such an avoidable outcome and to be available to parents as they accompany their children on this high-stakes journey.

JMB is highly active on all aspects of curricular change and implementation as are our NCCA



Development Group representatives and Council and Board members. At the highest levels we are bringing the voluntary secondary school leadership perspectives and voice to bear on developments across all the arenas of consultation and engagement. We will continue to maintain close contact with our schools as these developments proceed and remain particularly cognisant of the messages contained in the 2024 ESRI report on curriculum and assessment concerns in our schools.

Teacher Supply

A raft of actions is currently being undertaken by the Department and its agencies, each aimed at addressing one or more aspects of the current crisis in teacher supply. JMB is highly active in each of these areas and fully engages with the Department, the Teaching Council and others in exploring solutions.

Notwithstanding these actions, pipeline factors will always remain a challenge and the Department's ever-improving data on the post-primary teaching workforce continues to support evidence-informed decision making. However, a key bottleneck in the throughput of initial teachers lies in the two-year post-graduate model of teacher education. This two-year PME requirement emerged following an adverse PISA outcome in 2009 and has never been subsequently reviewed or audited in terms of effectiveness.

JMB is thus proposing an independent review of the current PME model. Whether or not such an evaluation leads to a return to a one-year post-graduate model of ITE, we need to determine the scope for a more fit-for-purpose placement, or 'apprenticeship' model in terms of depth, rather than breadth, of in-school experience in the programme's second year, as well as cost mitigation by remunerating student teachers on placement as in nursing and other professional development programmes.

Ultimately, however, one of the most commonly cited reasons for teachers not accepting, or remaining in, teaching positions is the difficulty in sourcing and/or affording accommodation, particularly in our cities. Creative ways of prioritising both education and medical personnel for housing must be found and JMB will be happy to engage with the Department on such possibilities.

Activities:

- Collaboration with the Sectoral Teacher Supply Forum
- Membership of the Teacher Supply Data Working Group
- Participation in plenary teacher supply events and promoting data-gathering across schools
- Regular and frequent engagement with the Department's Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit
- Active participation in the Senior Cycle Forum
- NCCA liaison at the highest levels with JMB representation on Council, Board for Junior Cycle, Board for Senior Cycle, Subject Development Groups, and consultation events

- Close involvement with NCCA on their review of subject components across all sectors
- Training provided to newly appointed JMB representatives on NCCA subject development groups (Tranche 4).
- Opportunity for current representatives (T1-T3) to share their experiences at the JMB National Curriculum Advisory Group.
- Designed and published a research report on Leading Senior Cycle Redevelopment based on survey feedback from JMB schools, informing advocacy and system engagement.
- Close liaison with Churches and Trusts regarding RSE and school ethos
- Membership of an education advisory panel with *BelongTo* and advising schools on supporting transgender students
- Responding to school questions relating to RSE, ethos and LGBTI developments
- Submissions and meeting contributions on issues of key importance to curricular policy implementation
- Policy-practice dialogue via the JMB National Curriculum Advisory Group
- Meetings with Oide on the roll-out of Teacher Professional Learning
- Gathered extensive feedback from the JMB Regions and Advisory Groups on issues relating to the State Examinations Commission, leading to advocacy in relation to a wide range of issues including the RACE process, special centres, exam aide resourcing, SEC portal, AI/AAC integrity issues and technical resourcing issues relating to the uploading of AAC files.

3. Guidance Counselling and Psychotherapy Services

Ireland is playing catch-up in the area of addressing adverse childhood experiences when compared to many European countries and the wider international community, and current provision for such needs here is wholly inadequate.

Specifically:

- The need to meet the complexity of emotional needs is not addressed by NEPS or generic pre-packaged wellbeing programmes, as neither provide, or are suitable to provide, ongoing individual therapeutic supports for trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences
- The National Wellbeing in Schools Policy 2018 of a teacher as '*One good adult*' is no substitute for qualified emotional counsellors/therapists.
- NEPS cannot, and does not, provide sustained one-to-one emotional counselling support
- Career Guidance Counsellors' remit is not for trauma and adverse childhood experience
- Wellbeing programmes and 'trauma-informed schools' are at the universal level and are no substitute for one-to-one counselling in students for whom such intervention is indicated
- A teacher can offer support as mental health promotion and stress prevention, but is not a therapist

School-based emotional Counsellors/Psychotherapists providing one-to-one supports for students are a routine feature of many education systems internationally. Ireland is radically out



of step with many European countries who provide these services in schools. Already, by 2017, school-based emotional counselling is well established in 62 countries internationally, mandatory in 39 countries, with a further seven countries in the process of developing such services.

Meanwhile, as schools are still below the pre financial crisis allocation, JMB continues to seek a meaningful increase in provision for guidance and counselling in the face of a generation of students with unprecedented needs in terms of learning and metacognitive skills loss, complex career-plan support needs, as well as the ongoing challenges of traumatised, frequently relocated, refugee children and an emerging senior cycle demanding significant guidance counselling in terms of expanded course choices and progression routes. Our guidance counsellors are attempting to provide their other core services in the context of the pressures of the CAO system, exponentially expanded college choices, the drive to promote apprenticeships and other further education options, an ever-increasingly complex college entry system with the addition of various access schemes such as HEAR and DARE, RACE applications, scholarship programmes, study abroad, scholarship applications

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

Activities

- Advocating for the expansion into post primary of the Pilot Scheme for Student Emotional Therapeutic Supports
- Meetings with the Department's Guidance Section on current developments, policy, and best practice. See [National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance: Strategic Action Plan \(2024-2030\) - January 2026 Progress Report](#).
- Advocating for enhanced Guidance Counselling allocation to schools
- Liaising with the Department and the Inspectorate on teacher supply concerns in relation to the recruitment of guidance counsellors
- Submissions to, and participation in, the National Policy Group for Lifelong Guidance
- Consulting with the Department on confidentiality and consent policy relating to guidance and counselling provision in schools
- Continued development of supports and advice for schools on whole-school guidance provision
- Responding to school queries on guidance and counselling provision

4. Special and Additional Educational Needs

In our sector, voluntary secondary schools are already extraordinarily inclusive, innovative, professionally committed and welcoming communities, building on strong ethical and, indeed, spiritual foundations when it comes to living out each school's expressed ethos. That said, the successful achievement of our national ambitions around inclusion cannot be realised until the capacity bottlenecks at school level are eliminated. The top four limiting factors are:

1. School Leadership and Management Capacity

It is crystal clear that the time for empowered, enabled, resourced, and liberated school leadership has come. It is no longer acceptable that a school principal remains overwhelmed by administrative and other non-core workloads (such as administering the free book scheme, management of cleaners, buildings maintenance etc.) to the detriment of her or his key role as the leader of learning. We have relied on a single person at the neck of that responsibility hourglass for far too long. Schools need a unitary leader, but to exercise the type of transformational leadership demanded of them, fit-for-purpose senior leadership tier is essential if a fit-for-purpose school organisation is to be created, with appropriate line management, reporting structures, communication pathways etc.

2. Special Education Teacher Capacity

To enhance their effectiveness and, indeed, status across the school and system, SETs require their workloads to be manageable, their professional learning and qualifications to be State funded and accredited, their capacity to work as effective teams developed, and their identity recognised by the Teaching Council. SNAs equally require a well-structured and State funded model of professional learning, particularly as their role evolves in the post-primary setting.

3. Special Educational Needs Coordination Capacity

As a matter of urgency, government must make distinct provision for SEN coordination time. JMB has repeatedly asserted the need for dedicated special needs coordination, planning, tracking, consultation and reporting in every school, and this position is supported by the NCSE. The coordination demands are increasing year on year, with additional responsibilities since 2017 set out in a joint submission by the three post-primary management bodies in 2024. To meet such an expansion in responsibility, we are seeking an additional 10 per cent allocation of ring-fenced hours calculated on the basis of the school's SET allocation as set out in Circular 03/2024 for SEN leadership and coordination.



4. Infrastructural Capacity

Many voluntary secondary schools have been serving their communities for more than 100 years. Many were built or extended with limited or no State assistance and are now in need of major refurbishment and extensions. In this context, the Department, and government as a whole, must address the following three roadblocks facing both system and school in terms of creating accommodation for special classes:

- 1. National Budgetary Limitation with a need to engage more effectively with DP&ER*
- 2. Lack of Availability of Modular Accommodation*
- 3. Complex Project Management and Grant Access*

Meanwhile, we reiterate our contention that the systems-level knowledge, authority, and agency at school level can best be mediated by a deputy principal rather than a dispersed allocation of SENCO hours, or undefined posts of responsibility. We will continue to make this case on behalf of our schools and look forward to engaging with the new Minister on this critical investment.

5. 'RISE'- Realising Inclusive Special Education (Provision Mapping)

The planning for a cross-sectoral pilot of provision mapping, now known as 'RISE'- Realising Inclusive Special Education - commenced in April 2024. This collaboration involves the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), the Joint Managerial Body (JMB), and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI).

This collaborative initiative is aimed at enhancing inclusive special education through provision mapping in post-primary schools. Ten schools (five JMB and five ACCS) are participating and are supported by Cork ETB and Laois and Offaly ETB Inclusion Coordinators together with NCSE Advisors.

Key activities and structures of the programme include:

- The establishment of a steering and working group to guide implementation.
- A professional learning programme delivered via workshops, school visits, and communities of practice.
- Data collection in participating schools through surveys of parents, staff and students and ongoing collaborative staff workshops.

A heartfelt thanks is extended to the principals, inclusion leads, and staff teams of the ten participating schools (five JMB and five ACCS) whose commitment to inclusive education and willingness to engage in reflective practice have been central to the pilot's progress.

The pilot programme is mid-way through its initial cycle and demonstrates strong commitment to inclusive education, with participants expressing appreciation and a keen readiness to continue. Sustained collaboration, strategic planning, and responsive support structures are key to its future success. The steering committee is actively researching how best this programme can be developed following the conclusion of its pilot phase.

Activities

- Liaison and consultations with NCSE and the Department on the rollout of special classes
- Advice and support for schools establishing special classes
- Provision of a dedicated, one-day JMB seminar on Special Class Provision
- Consultation with Special Education Section on SET allocations processes
- Ongoing communication with NCSE and the Department across the three PP sectors, via the Management Representative Group
- JMB representation on the NCSE National Council and its Consultative Forum
- JMB representation on the EPSEN Review Working Group
- Engagement between our JMB National SEN Advisory Group and a range of policymakers
- Sector-wide data gathering from schools to inform policy stances on SNA allocation and deployment
- JMB representation and activity across all streams of the Department's SNA Workforce Development Plan
- Liaison with SEC on developments relating to RACE supports
- Close monitoring of the Assessment of Need process in post-primary schools
- Ongoing policy-practice discussions with our JMB National SEN Advisory Group
- Attendance at national & international conferences on Inclusive Education Practice and Provision
- Engaging directly with NCSE leadership (CEO-level) on special class planning and placement demand, admissions/transitions, SENO recruitment, inclusive practice guidance and the development of education therapy supports.
- Representing member schools in the ongoing review of the Bí Cineálta Procedures, including input into parent training content and national survey development.
- Participating in the RISE Provision Mapping Pilot Programme - supporting evidence-informed inclusive practice across participating schools.
- Engaging with and supporting schools following the Inspectorate's May 2025 review of admissions policies for special classes, including advocacy on fair and lawful admissions practice and guidance for schools under increasing placement pressure.
- Producing practical senior cycle timetabling models illustrating challenge and the scheduling impact of SPHE, PE, RE, Guidance and new senior cycle requirements.
- Tracking and engaging with Ireland's participation in the EASNIE/OECD inclusive education project ("Inclusive and Special Education – Same or Different?"), supporting system learning on inclusive provision in mainstream settings.



5. Developing and Expanding the DEIS Programme

The Department's commitment to tackling educational disadvantage translates into two important actions this year:

- The introduction of a DEIS-Plus scheme, aligning with the Programme for Government commitment to support schools with the highest levels of disadvantage and
- The publication of a new DEIS plan

JMB is continuing to engage at the highest level with these developments and will press for actions around the most significant challenges facing management in schools within the DEIS Programme.

In terms of planning, schools find that baseline and subsequent data gathering exercises on literacy, numeracy, attendance, retention, progression etc. to be insightful and helpful. The proposal that significant and sustained improvements on these multiple fronts can continue to be achieved with limited resources (personnel, money, and time) as well as lack of relevant TPL have been identified as barriers to progress. School leaders know that you can't teach a child anything if they are not at school and they therefore pay significant attention to school climate as the key lever in retention – universally acknowledged as a key function of senior leadership teams.

The impact of policy and initiative overload on schools within the DEIS programme is but one of a number of challenges facing school management in such settings. 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, and particularly in relation to unsatisfactory student attendance patterns.

As an immediate measure, therefore, JMB is calling on the Department to provide for enhanced deputy principal allocations with a differential ratio allowing for whole, not a fraction, of DPs in schools of over 150 students within the DEIS Programme.

Activities

- Advocacy for enhancement of senior management resources in DEIS schools
- Advocating for the provision of parallel supports for schools not in the programme but with significant numbers of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds
- Annual JMB DEIS seminar with presentations on policy, practice, and programmes, including NCSE Relate, BÍ Cineálta whole-school implementation, Global Citizenship Education, and school-led practice-sharing ("Ideas Worth Stealing")
- Sharing of good practice on social inclusion initiatives amongst JMB schools
- Ongoing and frequent meetings with TUSLA, DE Social Inclusion Unit on specific programmes, such as SCP and HSCL, within the DEIS programme
- Consultation on the process to identify new schools for inclusion in the programme
- Research on key support needs of DEIS schools to inform submissions
- Engagement of the JMB National DEIS Advisory Group with key policymakers and developments
- Promoted and disseminated NCSE Relate (regulation-first, relationship-based approach) to support schools responding to behaviours of concern.

6. Technological Expansion in Schools

The core technology demands on schools require a stable and predictable resource-base on which to build and school leaders have recently become highly risk-averse around their capacity to enter into even essential ICT spending commitments in light of the non-payment of the ICT grant in 2023.

While we have now received commitments on annual funding for the term of the current National Digital Strategy, investment must concentrate on ensuring schools' technologies are trustworthy and well-maintained. A successful school-system partnership will be characterised by key tasks including:

- 1. Invest:** Put relevant and adequate technologies in place. This must be centrally funded but spending locally determined
- 2. Facilitate:** Provide every school with time for ICT coordination tasks
- 3. Motivate:** Empower teachers. This must also be resourced in terms of digital champions and teacher-release
- 4. Plan:** Locate the school on a continuum of digital maturity and set jointly developed, achievable targets for progression
- 5. Focus:** Begin to consider how technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, can be successfully integrated into the emerging Framework for Senior Cycle
- 6. Monitor and Evaluate:** Celebrate successes and address deficiencies

Generative Artificial Intelligence

Generative AI has emerged as a significant development impacting teaching, learning, assessment, and school leadership. While it presents opportunities to enhance classroom practice, support differentiation, and improve administrative efficiency, it also raises immediate challenges relating to academic integrity, authenticity of student work, equity of access, data protection, and alignment with school ethos and policy. Throughout 2025, JMB engaged actively with the Department, Oide, the SEC and our ICT Advisory Group to support school leaders in navigating this evolving landscape, with a particular focus on the implications for Additional Assessment Components and the development of appropriate guidance and professional learning. Specifically, through the ICT Advisory Group, a pilot project on the use of the AI Assessment Scale (as presented by Dr Mike Perkins) has been commenced with c. 30 teachers involved in trialling strategies within their classrooms.

Activities:

- Consultations on curricular developments in newly developing subjects, digital studies, and applications
- Engagement around the emerging impact of artificial intelligence in schools
- Engagement with SEC on technological developments including the piloting of digital files for aural assessments



- Data protection updates relating to IT in schools
- Close liaison with Oide: Technology in Education on a range of developments
- Participation on consultation structures relating to the implementation of the current National Digital Strategy for Schools
- Meetings with key IT providers to schools
- Ongoing policy-practice dialogue with our JMB National ICT Advisory Group
- AI Assessment Scale Pilot Project
- Participation in the Oide Stakeholders' Forum on AI and the DEY's Future Proof Education.
- Dissemination of DEY/SEC guidance on AI.

7. JMB Representation on National and State Bodies in Education

Teaching Council

Vetting Arrangements

All teachers are legally required to be vetted by the National Vetting Bureau, and it is the role of the Teaching Council to administer vetting for teachers in Ireland.

From 7th July 2025, the National Vetting Bureau (NVB), introduced additional child protection checks with the other EU member states and the UK, in line with the EU Directive 2011/93/EU, to strengthen the protection of children. These additional checks affect those who have resided in another EU state or the UK and resulted in a longer lead-in period for the affected teachers.

Curricular Subject Requirements

As the regulator of the teaching profession in Ireland, the Council ensures that teachers meet the necessary qualification, standards, competencies, and character requirements for registration.

In October 2025, the Teaching Council announced the addition of two new subjects to the Curricular Subject Requirements (Post-primary), and clarifications to certain existing subjects, to come into effect for those applying for registration on or after 5 January 2026.

The two new subjects are Climate Action and Sustainable Development, and Drama, Film and Theatre Studies.

In addition to the new subjects, clarifications have also been made to the requirements for the subjects of Physical Education, Politics & Society, Music, and Art.

Research

In December 2025, The Department of Education and Youth and the Teaching Council launched a longitudinal research study on teaching in Ireland: *Teachers' Professional Journeys: The First Decade*.

The research will be conducted by the UL, the ESRI and Mary Immaculate College (MIC), under the leadership of Professor Paul Conway, UL, Professor Emer Smyth, ESRI and Professor Aisling Leavy, MIC. It will encompass all primary, post-primary and further education teacher graduates from the classes of 2019, 2022 and 2026, as well as other key stakeholders.

Running to 2030, this is a significant study that will inform and shape policy in a range of areas including initial teacher education, induction into the profession and early professional development.

NCCA Council and Boards

- Raymond McHugh – Chairperson NCCA Board for Senior Cycle, Vice Chairperson NCCA Council.
- Colm Keher – JMB Representative NCCA Board for Senior Cycle
- Fionnghuala King – JMB Representative NCCA Council
- Catherine Moynihan – JMB Representative NCCA Board for Junior Cycle

Junior Cycle

Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages

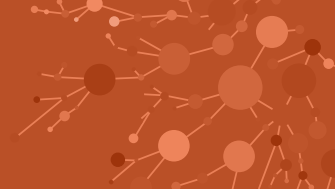
A revised specification for Junior Cycle Modern Foreign Languages will be introduced in schools for incoming 1st year students in September 2026. This follows an 'early insights review' by the NCCA in 2023 that identified many strengths and some challenges in the existing MFL specification. Junior Cycle strands, elements and learning outcomes have been reviewed and updated within the revised specification to reflect the recommendations.

The order of CBAs has been reversed, with 'CBA 1: Examples from my Student Language Portfolio' to be assessed in 2nd year and 'CBA 2: Oral Communication Task' to be assessed in 3rd year.

Revised assessment guidelines and portfolio guidelines will be published ahead of the specification being introduced in schools. Once introduced, additional examples of student work will also be developed.

Learning and teaching about Traveller culture and history

The NCCA has collaborated on the creation of a short film capturing the perspectives of teachers, students, and school leaders on teaching of Traveller culture and history. It provides practical guidance on how to effectively use the NCCA's Traveller Culture and History Research Report and in fostering greater understanding and inclusion within school communities.



Report on early enactment of J.C. Coding and Digital Media Literacy short courses

This report presents an overview of the review of the Short Courses in Coding and Digital Media Literacy, followed by a summary of the findings. The report concluded with key insights and proposed responses for each short course, based on the findings from the review and presents a summary of insights gained to support the continued implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle.

NCSE

JMB has representation on both the Council of NCSE (Dr Michael Redmond) and its Consultative Forum (Ms Catherine Moynihan). Key areas of work include:

Special class and special school placements

Continuing expansion in the demand for placements in special settings had led to annual increases in budget allocation and increased tranches of special class set-ups, which requires extensive data-gathering, consultation with schools and patrons, as well as management of both media and political expectations.

Development of an Education Therapy Service

This groundbreaking development will see OTs and SLTs, in particular, being linked to a cluster of schools, providing levels of service not seen before in our system.

SNA Allocations

Ongoing expansion in the numbers of SNA personnel, along with the emerging SNA Review of roles, terms and conditions, sees NCSE at the forefront of service delivery and supporting schools with their deployment of this resource.

AON

Assessment of Need reports produced by the HSE to determine levels of intervention now require an educational need element which must be produced by schools. Though dominated by demand at early childhood and primary settings, post-primary schools have also been supported by NCSE when such a request is made of them.

School Advisory Service

NCSE's Inclusion and Education Support Service comprises four delivery units offering an increasingly wide range of supports to schools:

1. Behaviour, Wellbeing & Autism Team
2. Education and Curriculum Inclusion Team
3. Sensory Inclusion Team
4. Professional Learning & Development Inclusion Team

NCSE Data Strategy, Communications, and Website Developments

NCSE is currently developing an integrated real-time data capture system which will support accurate placement and gap analysis, as well as continuing to improve its communications strategy across all stakeholders and media, including an imminent upgrade of its website.

Recruitment

NCSE continues its rapid rate of expansion, with ongoing recruitment of personnel at all grades and areas of expertise. Schools should see improvements in access to their SENO service as well as regional supports and, soon, enhanced school-level therapeutic services.

8. Inspectorate

The Inspectorate continues to evolve its engagement with schools with the review of existing inspections and the introduction of new forms of inspection. Conscious of additional burdens on our school leaders, JMB has engaged with the Inspectorate, both in terms of its own consultations with school leaders and in terms of special meetings with its leadership team.

Activities

- Support for school leaders through the inspection process, including professional learning opportunities.
- Dissemination of publications from the Inspectorate, providing advice and guidance.
- Introductory meeting with Chief Inspector/Deputy Chief Inspector.
- Meeting with Chief Inspector, with issues raised including inspection responsiveness to school needs, impact on school leaders' stress, SSE workload, ethos/characteristic spirit in reporting, documentation duplication/PPOD, advisory visits.
- Engaging with the Inspectorate on SSE redevelopment and evolving inspection models (Child Protection, DEIS, SEN, Wellbeing), representing school leader feedback and supporting system-level improvements.



Date for your Diary!

This year, our JMB Education Conference is themed:

LEADING AS LEARNING

CURRICULUM > COLLABORATION > COHERENCE

and will take place on **Friday 18th September 2026**
at the **Croke Park Conference Centre**.

As well as a range of workshops on key aspects of our leadership for learning roles, the conference will open with insights from our keynote speaker, **Professor Graham Donaldson**.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Colm Keher
Catherine Moynihan
Michael Redmond

JMB Research & Development Unit



School Management Advisory Report



School Management Advisory Report

AMCSS/JMB 39th Annual Conference 2026

School Management Advisory Report 2025

The School Management Advisory Service continued to provide comprehensive support to schools throughout 2025 across a wide range of areas. The service operates as a central point of contact for principals, deputy principals and boards of management, supporting schools in responding to both ongoing and emerging challenges within an evolving policy environment.

The work of the service reflects the increasing complexity of school management, with a sustained level of engagement required to support schools in interpreting and implementing policy developments, managing operational demands and addressing issues arising at school level.

Advisory Support to Schools

Throughout 2025, schools engaged extensively with the advisory service across a broad range of areas. These included posts of responsibility, HR/IR matters, governance, staffing, contracts, child protection, data protection, special education needs, school planning admissions, and student discipline,

There was a significant increase in the number of calls relating to posts of responsibility, governance issues, staffing, contracts, Croke Park Hours, dignity in the workplace, SNAs, SEN, curriculum, and student-related issues, including bullying, harassment, suspensions, and expulsions.

A notable feature of the year has been the continued demand for support in complex and often time-sensitive matters, including disciplinary processes, governance issues and employment-related processes. This work frequently involves sustained engagement with individual schools over extended periods.

Schools also sought support in relation to the implementation of new and revised policies, including admissions policies, revised child protection procedures, anti-bullying procedures, and dignity at work policies. Guidance was provided to ensure alignment with legislative requirements and Departmental circulars.



Policy Implementation and System Developments

A significant focus of advisory work in 2025 related to supporting schools in implementing system-wide policy developments.

Senior Cycle Redevelopment support measures have been a major area of engagement, particularly in relation to the operation of Croke Park Hours and the implications for school organisation and management at local level. Schools required ongoing guidance in managing the balance between whole-school and other-than-whole-school activities, and in ensuring that appropriate processes were in place for recording, verification and alignment with Departmental requirements.

In parallel, changes to employment conditions have required sustained advisory support. In

particular, the reduction in the qualification period for eligibility for a Contract of Indefinite Duration has significant implications for staffing arrangements and workforce planning.

Further advisory support was provided in relation to a range of circulars and contractual developments affecting school staff, including those relating to Special Needs Assistants, school secretaries and caretakers. These developments, together with periods of industrial action involving FORSA, required advisory supports to schools to manage operational continuity while ensuring compliance with evolving employment frameworks.

School Funding and Operational Issues

School funding remained a central issue throughout 2025. Schools continued to raise concerns regarding the adequacy, timing and predictability of funding streams, particularly in relation to ICT, capitation and scheme-based supports.

Budget 2026 included a number of measures relevant to the management and leadership of post-primary schools, including developments in relation to DEIS Plus, leadership supports and ICT funding.

In particular, the standardisation of ICT grant funding within the annual grants cycle represents a positive development in addressing concerns regarding unpredictability and supporting more effective planning at school level.

Schools also required support in managing the operational and administrative aspects of major initiatives, including the schoolbooks scheme. The implementation of procurement requirements required detailed guidance and ongoing support.

In addition, schools continued to face pressures arising from increased operational costs, including energy, insurance and compliance-related expenditure.

Inclusion and Student Support

Supporting schools in meeting the needs of students with special education needs remained a significant area of work in 2025. Advisory support was provided in relation to the establishment and operation of special classes, the deployment of special education resources, the HR IR issues associated with provision of special classes and the implementation of relevant circulars and guidelines.

Schools reported increasing demands associated with processes such as RACE

applications, assessment of need and the coordination of supports for individual students. The need for additional resources, including therapeutic supports and coordination time, was raised by schools in their engagement with the advisory service.

Attendance and student wellbeing also emerged as areas of concern, with schools engaging with evolving policy responses and seeking practical supports.

Governance

Governance supports continued to be central to the work of the advisory service. Schools were supported in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities in the operation of boards of management.

Developments in relation to information-sharing initiatives, including Operation Encompass, were communicated to schools,

with guidance provided on the implications for school practice and safeguarding supports.

Admissions policies were also reviewed, particularly in relation to provisions concerning health and safety, with schools advised to ensure alignment with legislative requirements and patron guidance.

Professional Development and Support

A comprehensive programme of professional development was delivered in 2025 to support school leaders and boards of management. This included professional learning programmes for newly appointed principals

and deputy principals, Education Law Day, child protection training, training in recruitment and appointment procedures, and allocations seminars.

Engagement with System Stakeholders

The advisory service continued to engage with the Department of Education and Youth and other system stakeholders on policy/circular developments and the impact on schools. This

included engagement on funding, inclusion, curriculum developments and staff leave and terms and conditions and workforce planning.



Conclusion

The work of the School Management Advisory service in 2025 reflects the breadth and complexity of issues facing schools and the sustained level of support required across all areas of school management.

The continued demand for advisory support highlights the importance of providing clear, timely and practical guidance to schools in navigating an increasingly complex policy and operational environment.

The experience of 2025 will inform the ongoing development of the service, with a continued focus on supporting school leadership, strengthening governance and ensuring that schools are equipped to meet the evolving needs of their communities.

Christine West, on behalf of the SMA team.
April 2026



Financial Services Support Unit (FSSU) Report

Financial Services Support Unit (FSSU) Report

AMCSS/JMB 39th Annual Conference 2026

Executive Summary

The Financial Support Services Unit was established under Department of Education & Skills circular M36/05. In the school year 2018/2019, the Department expanded the remit of the unit to include the Primary (DES Circular 60/2017) and Community & Comprehensive (DES Circular 02/2018) sectors. Objectives for the FSSU were set out in these circulars. This report outlines the founding objectives of the unit and the activities undertaken by the unit over the past year to adhere to and reach these objectives.

1. Provision of advice and support to schools on financial governance matters including compliance with the requirements of the circulars:

The unit issued the following Financial Guidelines in 2025 to support school management in good financial practice:

Financial Guidelines Voluntary Secondary Schools (January 2025 – December 2025)		
No.	Title	Date
21-2024/2025	Additional Superannuation Contribution (ASC) (<i>Fee Charging Schools Only</i>)	13/01/25
22-2024/2025	Revenue Enhanced Reporting Requirements (ERR)	16/01/25
24-2024/2025	Approval and Procedures for Use of a School Credit Card	06/02/25
25-2024/2025	Travel and Subsistence Expenses for Members of Board of Management, School Principals and other School Personnel	28/02/25
26-2024/2025	Payments to Members of Selection Committees	28/02/25
30-2024/2025	Revised Rates of Pay for Bus Escorts	04/03/25
31-2024/2025	Grants payable to Non-Fee Charging Voluntary Secondary Schools School Year 2025/2026	05/03/25
32-2024/2025	Free Schoolbooks Scheme Grant and Administration Support Grant 2025/2026	24/03/25



Financial Guidelines Voluntary Secondary Schools (January 2025 – December 2025)		
No.	Title	Date
33-2024/2025	Electronic Banking	12/03/25
35-2024/2025	VAT Compensation Scheme for Charities	09/04/25
36-2024/2025	Additional Resources and Payment Arrangements for School Appointed Personnel for State Examinations 2025	30/04/25
37-2024/2025	The Importance of Budgeting for the School Year 2025/2026	06/05/25
38-2024/2025	Summer Programme 2025	14/05/25
39-2024/2025	Department of Education ICT Grant 2024/2025	09/06/25
40-2024/2025	Special Class Grants	12/06/25
41-2024/2025	Funding Scheme for Secure Mobile Phone Storage Solutions	19/06/25
01-2025/2026	Revised Rates of Pay for Bus Escorts	30/07/25
03-2025/2026	Important Dates for the School Year 2025/2026	19/08/25
05-2025/2026	Financial Year-End 2024/2025	26/08/25
06-2025/2026	Annual VAT Return of Trading Details (RTD) for the Year Ending 31st August 2025	01/09/25
07-2025/2026	Accounting for Free Schoolbooks Scheme Grant, Administration Support Grant and Science Implementation Grant School Year 2025/2026	03/09/25
08-2025/2026	Update to FSSU Chart of Accounts – Applicable from September 1st 2025	08/09/25
09-2025/2026	Accountants/Auditors Guideline for Preparation and Submission of Annual School Accounts for the year end 31st August 2025	10/09/25
10-2025/2026	Repeat of Leaving Certificate Course Fees	15/09/25
11-2025/2026	School Tours – Complying with Regulations and Requirements	29/09/25
12-2025/2026	Supervision and Substitution Scheme - School Year 2025/2026	06/10/25
13-2025/2026	Charities Regulator Requirements for Schools	15/10/25
15-2025/2026	Information on Auto-Enrolment (MyFutureFund For Boards of Management as Employers)	24/11/25
16-2025/2026	Public Holidays 2026	26/11/25
17-2025/2026	Summary of Interim Arrangements for the Payment of Ancillary-Related Grants (September to December 2025)	01/12/25
18-2025/2026	MyFutureFund Portal – Employer Registration Now Open	08/12/25
19-2025/2026	Government Budget Summary 2026	10/12/25
20-2025/2026	Revenue Enhanced Reporting Requirements (ERR)	15/12/25

Training: Financial Update and School Budget 2025/2026 webinar was held in March 2025 to assist school management in developing a budget, ensuring good financial management and compliance with the Articles of Management and the Education Act 1998.

The Unit continues to update the Financial Internal Controls Manual which covers all aspects of financial governance and provides useful sample policies and templates.

Working with the Department of Social Protection, a webinar for boards of management was held in February 2025 providing boards with information on their obligations for auto enrolment. Further guidance on this area continues to be issued by the FSSU.

Training Voluntary Secondary Schools (January 2025 – December 2025)	
No.	Title
1	Finance Sub-Committee Training
2	Newly Appointed Principals Training (February and October)
3	Pension Auto-Enrolment
4	Board of Management Training
5	Sage 50 Training - BOM Monthly Reports
6	Sage 50 Training - Using control accounts to record payroll costs
7	Sage 50 Training - Income in advance and the online clearing account
8	Sage 50 Training - Focus on Users new to updating the August Year end accounts
9	Sage 50 Training - Year End Preparation
10	Sage 50 Training - Moving on with the new financial year 25/26
11	School Administration Personnel Training
12	New Principal Training
13	New Secretary Training



Support queries: Queries from stakeholders are received and dealt with by telephone call, email and remote access sessions.

Support is provided from 9am until 7pm Monday to Thursday and until 5pm on Friday. Hours of operation facilitate board members that may not be able to contact the Unit during their working day.

The table itemises the number of support queries from the VSS sector by subject with throughout 2025:

VSS Sector		
No.	Title	Queries
1	FSSU supported accounting packages	2,087
2	Payroll	736
3	RCT/VAT	422
4	Calls from External Accountants	62
5	Banking	63
6	CRA	20
7	BOM Monthly Reporting	70
8	Budgets	189
9	School Tours	14
10	Grants	318
11	Other	817
12	Selection Committee Payments	15
13	Travel & Subsistence	41
14	Fundraising	14
15	OLCS	5
16	Cashflow	133
	Total	5,006

2. Development of templates for use by schools in relation to financial matters, including a standardised national template for annual school accounts

The unit has devised budget templates, board of management reporting templates and practical sample forms and spreadsheets. These templates are consistently revised to enhance effectiveness.

The monthly template reports tie into the year-end reporting format.

Budget Templates – templates and training in budgets is updated every year to include changes to funding

Additional Templates (Fixed Assets, Petty Cash etc) – through requests and feedback we are aware of what schools needs and we develop templates and calculators to support schools in recording financial information

Development of templates functionality – one of our Team leads the modification and testing of developments ensuring functionality of templates is robust

Covid-19 Refund Calculator – we encourage schools to use this to ensure unspent funds are returned to the DEY

Annual Leave for School Secretaries Calculator – this was very useful for schools when dealing with the transition from school paid to DEY paid secretaries

Cashflow template – we have developed a cashflow process and training video for the preparation of cashflow statements for the many schools in a challenging cashflow situation

The Unit has developed checklist and guidance for schools that amalgamating, opening or closing and this information is made available to the relevant schools

3. Acting as a central repository for receipt of annual school accounts prepared by an external accountant/auditor registered with a recognised accountancy body in the State.

The unit has developed an online secure cloud system for the submission of school financial data. This data is uploaded by the school's external financial accountant/auditor. This allows the unit to receive timely, accurate data that allows comparisons and research. The online submission incorporates the ability to fulfil the financial obligations of the board to the Central Statistics Office and the requirements of the Charities Regulator.

4. Carrying out such audits as may be required.

A number of requests have been received from the Department of Education and Youth to carry out audits on specific areas in schools.

5. Preparation of an annual report for the Department of Education and Youth.

An annual report is prepared and submitted to the Department of Education and Youth.



6. Liaison with the Department in relation to financial matters pertaining to schools.

When issues of a financial nature arise that affect schools, the unit will liaise with the Department.

The unit continues to provide advice and support to our schools through the following mechanisms:

- A. Financial Internal Controls Review
- B. Telephone and online support from the unit on all aspects of financial management
- C. Free support on the computerised accounts package, Sage 50, is available to all voluntary secondary schools
- D. One-to-one training for new principals, boards of management and finance committees

Other activities:

1. Communication with Interest Groups and Regulatory Bodies
 - Liaison with the Charities Regulatory Authority in relation to requirements contained in Charities Act 2009 – the CRA joined relevant webinars to emphasise the importance of filing the annual return in June each year.
 - Liaison with the Department of Social Protection in relation to Pension Auto Enrolment – the Unit worked with the DSP to ensure that boards of management are communicated with and informed of their obligations of the scheme.
2. Ongoing upgrading and maintenance of www.FSSU.ie – the website is a huge source of information and is kept up to date and reviewed by the Team. Our most important communications tool, the website continues to be updated and developed to accommodate online bookings for events and general communication with schools. All information produced by the FSSU is available on the website.
3. Ongoing upgrading and maintenance of CRM and portal – the CRM system houses our activities and facilitates the portal for the annual submission of accounts.

Louise McNamara, Director,
Financial Support Services Unit
January 2026



Schools Procurement Unit (SPU) Report



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Schools Procurement Unit (SPU) Report

AMCSS/JMB 39th Annual Conference 2026

Annual Report on Operational Activities in 2025

SPU 2024 Statistics

A total 15657 activities are recorded in the CRM for Q1 – Q4 in 2024. This figure reflects all activities (excluding internal comms) across a total of 53 different categories, including team interaction with stakeholders and resultant team outputs.

The top 10 categories consolidated in the table below, account for 11568 of the overall figure for recorded activities, and represents almost 74% of all activities during this period.

Table 1 - Summary of Top 10 Activities by (combined) Category

All Activity (Emails & Documents) 2025	Total
School Meals Scheme	7533
School Books Scheme	3935
Utilities Electricity	699
T4 Equipment	1672
Utilities Natural Gas	304
Staff Training	315
Confirmation - Person added	258
Science Laboratory Equipment	121
Loose Furniture	231
ICT Professional Services (SPU)	345

Table 2 - School-based Procurement Projects (RFQ/RFT) initiated in 2025

All Projects 2025	CFT	RFQ	Negotiated Procedure	Other	Total
Art & Craft	2	17			19
Catering Services	1				1
Catering Services - Concession	1		1		2
Dress Design		5		1	6
Facilities Management & Maintenance					1
Furniture	1	1		5	8
Home Economics	2	4		12	16
ICT Hardware		1			1
Kitchenette				1	1
Music & Drama		11			11
Physical Education	11	11			22
School Meals Scheme	31	3			34
Science Laboratory	1			3	4
T4 Subjects	37	10		1	48
Transports					1
Total	87	64	1	23	175

SPU Activities in 2025

The SPU continues to refine its service delivery model to provide the required supports to schools. Telephone support and virtual meetings are the core business of the SPU. Procurement Officers provided the tailored support to school leaders and school admin personnel as required.

School Meals

A new suite of tender templates for Hot Meals for Primary Schools was developed by the Department of Education and Youth and other stakeholders (Department of Social Protection, FSAI, HSE and others) to ensure adherence to existing building regulations, food safety regulations and procurement legislation. The documents were released in August 2025 and a series of webinars were delivered to support primary schools in this area. The SPU produced comprehensive step-by-step guidance to enable all schools to successfully complete their procurement process for Hot Meals.

A suite of tender templates for Cold Lunches and Afterschool Club for Primary Schools was developed by the Department of Education and Youth and other stakeholders (Department of Social Protection, FSAI, HSE and others) to adhere to existing building regulations, food safety regulations and procurement legislation. The documents were released in December 2025. The SPU produced comprehensive step-by-step guidance to enable all schools to successfully complete their procurement process for Cold Lunches and Afterschool Club.

School Books

A Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) was implemented to support the delivery of the Junior Cycle Schoolbook Scheme. A series of webinars was delivered to support the delivery of the Junior Cycle Schoolbook Scheme.

Professional Learning Events

Members of the team delivered presentations at regional meetings. In May 2025, the Procurement Support for Schools and Education Centres workshop was delivered at Sligo Education Centre. In addition, a procurement session was delivered this year as part of the professional learning programme for newly appointed principals and deputy principals.

Conclusion

In 2025, the SPU sustained a high level of engagement with schools in the primary and post-primary sectors, progressing a range of supports to strengthen procurement practice, compliance and value for money. Looking ahead, the unit's priorities include broadening and standardising professional learning provision, further developing practical guidance and procurement templates, and strengthening collaboration with key stakeholders to support consistent implementation across schools. The SPU will also focus on enhancing its service delivery model and internal capability, so that it can respond efficiently to emerging needs and evolving procurement requirements.

Schools Procurement Unit
April 2026



Data Protection Report

Data Protection Report

AMCSS/JMB 39th Annual Conference 2026

Advice on the handling of *data subject access requests* (DSARs) remains the most common reason for schools to make contact with the JMB data protection advisory service, accounting for one third of all queries received during 2025. Similar to the pattern of previous years, the next most common query categories related to *data sharing* (17%) and *data breach handling* (13%).

The full categorisation of queries raised during 2025 was as follows:

DSARs	34%
Data sharing	17%
Breach handling	13%
CCTV	8%
Lawful basis	7%
DPC contact	7%
Retention	6%
General rights	3%
AI, AUP, IT, risk	2%
Social media	1%
Policy	1%
Recording of meetings	1%

The Data Protection Commission's *Toolkit for Schools* contains, inter alia, a helpful checklist on how to respond to a Data Subject Access Request (DSAR). JMB strongly recommends that educational users familiarise themselves with the contents of the Toolkit, originally published December 2024, as it has proven itself to be an excellent resource for schools.

Schools frequently seek advice on issues relating to the sharing of information with other data controllers, such as the Teaching Council, An Garda Síochána, Tusla, the HSE etc. In this regard, January 2025 saw an important change, with new regulations providing a statutory basis for data sharing in relation to the school vaccination programme. As with any data sharing exercise, schools need to exercise care and adhere carefully to the relevant regulation. The Department of Education and Youth has published helpful guidance, including a template letter for schools to use to inform parents of the requirement that specified personal data relating to students and parents/guardians is shared on request with the HSE.

While human error remains the most regular cause of data breaches in schools, a number of "bad actor" attacks on school network systems have also been evident. These are very often a consequence of a staff member falling victim to an email phishing attack through clicking on an unsafe link or attachment. In such circumstances, reports need to be lodged with both the Data Protection Commission and An Garda Síochána. Fortunately, schools have generally identified and dealt with the vast majority of these issues without serious consequence, although



some higher education bodies have suffered significant damage, including financial losses through false invoicing. These breaches highlight the need for schools to ensure that any and all access to staff accounts has appropriate controls in place, most particularly the use of two factor authentication.

The past year has seen an increase in the number of schools seeking advice on receipt of correspondence from the Data Protection Commission (DPC). The DPC has an obligation to examine issues that are brought to its attention and consequently, on receipt of a complaint, may make contact with individual schools. For example, complaints can arise because a data subject is not satisfied with the school's response to an access request or possibly because someone may have raised a query about the school's use of CCTV. While these contacts and investigations are always rigorous, reflecting their statutory status, there are two sides to every story and interaction with the DPC provides the school with an opportunity to clarify their perspective on an issue. This is where good accountability practices by schools, such as documenting the scope of the searches undertaken in response to a DSAR, is important, as contact from the DPC may not arise until six months or more after the school originally responded to the data subject. Good accountability practices also demand keeping data protection policies and privacy notices up to date. In this regard, a new JMB template CCTV policy was published in January 2025.

The Data Protection Commission were invited to present at the JMB's Annual Law Day in December and used the event to address the data protection queries that most frequently arise for schools, as well as touching on some novel issues arising through the deployment of AI in schools. The importance that the DPC attached to the JMB forum was reflected in the fact that four members of the Data Protection Commission's team attended and presented during the afternoon session.

Cyril Drury
March 2026



Building Advisory Report

Like

Building Advisory Report

AMCSS/JMB 39th Annual Conference 2026

The JMB School Buildings Advisory Service was established in June 2014 with the primary aim of supporting principals and boards of management as they navigate the practical challenges of managing building projects. As the service expanded, the Department of Education and Youth agreed in late 2021 to provide funding for two additional School Building Officers. This enabled the appointment of Mr Tom Shannon and Mr Michael Cregan who joined the advisory team in April 2022. Further recognising the ongoing need for additional support in this area, the Department approved funding for two further Building Officers in November 2024 leading to the appointment of Mr Mike O'Hara and Mr Rory Hoban in January 2025. While the service was initially designed to assist voluntary secondary schools, it is now also available to primary schools.

The service comprises the following:

1. Supporting principals and boards of management with the appointment of design teams including:

- advertising on eTenders, assisting with the assessment of tenders and drafting the appointment documentation.
- Facilitating the first meeting of each new design team.
- Assisting 380 schools with the appointment of design teams since 2019.

2. Facilitating the progress of building projects through the design process

- This involves working with school boards of management, design teams and Department officials, dealing with issues and delays as they arise. This has now become a significant part of the JMB service.

3. Supporting the provision of SEN accommodation

This has been a priority for the Department of Education & Youth during the past three years. JMB supports schools:

- where existing accommodation is being re-purposed. The JMB Building Officers visited numerous schools during 2025 in order to assist schools with the identification of suitable rooms for re-purposing. The Building Officers also assisted many schools with the preparation of the application for the €70,000 re-purposing grant



- where an application for Additional Accommodation is required due to the extent of the work required to provide for the special class within the school
- where modular accommodation is being provided.

4. Supporting the delivery of Smaller Type 1 Projects

JMB continues to informally assist many schools that have been approved for additional accommodation valued at less than €1 million (Type 1 projects).

5. Acting as Project Executive

JMB has been acting as Project Executive for two major capital projects, Coláiste an Phiarsaigh in Glanmire, Co Cork and St Brendan's College in Killarney. Both projects are progressing well. In late 2025, JMB was appointed as Project Executive for two new projects, the first for the construction of a new primary school building in Kilmovee, Co Mayo and the other for a major project in Longford which will provide for the amalgamation of Meánscoil Mhuire and St Mel's College.

In addition, JMB is actively supporting four other major projects where the local board of management is the client.

6. Visiting schools and advising on the possibilities for future development

The needs of schools differ. The visits are aimed at assisting school management to identify the physical needs of the school, often in the context of a review of its curricular provision.

7. Supporting schools to apply for funding

a. Emergency Works

JMB continues to assist schools with applications for the Emergency Works Scheme and with the appointment of consultants where grant-aid is approved.

b. Climate Action Summer Works Scheme 2025-6

A new Climate Action Summer Works Scheme was announced in March 2025 and JMB assisted numerous boards of management with their applications for the scheme. Later in the year, school boards were assisted with the appointment of consultants in those schools that were listed in the first tranche of approved projects in November 2025. This work will continue into 2026.

c. PE Halls and Retrofit Programme

JMB continues to advocate for a PE Hall Programme which will ensure that all students be given access to proper Physical Education facilities. Similarly, JMB continues to press for a nationwide retrofit programme for all our schools.

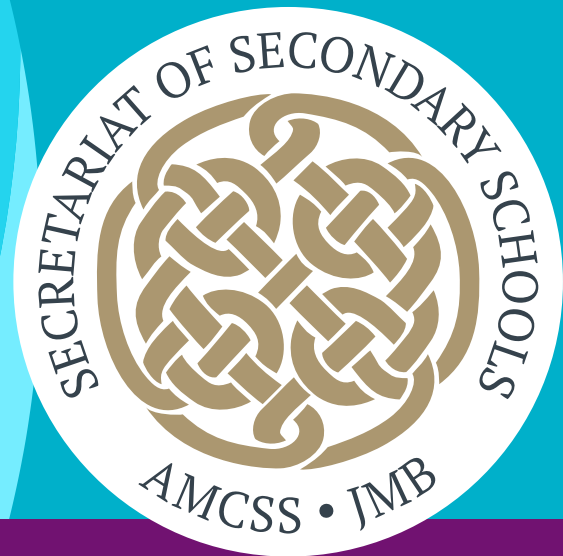
8. Collaborating with the Building and Planning Unit (DEY)

Meetings with senior officials continued during the year, with meetings now held every quarter. Informal contact continues on a weekly basis with officials in the Schools Capital Appraisal Section, the Devolved Section and the School Remediation Section. This ongoing dialogue is greatly appreciated by JMB.

The Buildings Advisory Team note that it has been a pleasure to assist so many schools over the past year. The unwavering commitment and determination of school management to enhance and modernise school facilities for the benefit of both students and staff is to be highly commended. The team acknowledges the support of the General Secretary, Deirdre Matthews, and also that of the President and Council, the board of the Secretariat and the staff of Emmet House.

Michael Cregan
Tom Shannon
Rory Hoban
Mike O'Hara
Noel Merrick

April 2026



Corporate Services Report

Corporate Services Report

AMCSS/JMB 39th Annual Conference 2026

Corporate Services is an internal resource dedicated to enhancing the service provided by the Secretariat of Secondary Schools to school leaders and boards of management. Ensuring compliance with effective governance is an integral part of this work, which involves adhering to the standards set out in the Charities Governance Code and best practice guidelines. This includes supporting the implementation of the Strategic Development Plan 2022-2025, overseeing organisational administration, coordinating human resource management, supporting the development of the AMCSS regional structure and assisting the Board of Directors in the effective discharge of its governance and oversight responsibilities.

Strategic Development Plan 2022- 2025

The Secretariat of Secondary Schools remains firmly committed to the provision of a high-quality, professional and reliable service to school leaders, underpinned by principles of responsiveness, consistency and accountability. The organisation prioritises addressing emerging needs and the ongoing development of leadership capacity across the voluntary secondary sector. The delivery of high-quality professional learning opportunities for school leaders and boards of management is central to the work of the Secretariat. In excess of one hundred newly appointed school leaders attended the five-day residential JMB professional learning programme in 2025. In addition, a detailed examination of curriculum planning and teacher allocations took place with newly appointed principals during a daylong session in January. The programme continues to be endorsed by Oide following a mid-term review this year.

A range of professional learning opportunities

were offered throughout the year, including the allocations seminars, DEIS seminar, interview competency training, Education Law Day, board of management training and the opening of new special classes session in January 2025. Two successful conferences took place in 2025: the AMCSS/JMB Annual Conference in April and the Education Conference in Croke Park in September. The events were well attended and feedback from participants was very positive.

JMB advisors and members of the senior leadership team provided on-site support visits for all newly appointed principals. These visits were warmly received by newly appointed principals who engaged in professional learning conversations on a wide range of issues, including managing staff relations, child protection and vetting, work-life balance, teacher allocation and deployment of staff, student recruitment, GDPR, health & safety, school buildings, developing middle leadership teams, student councils, parent councils, anti-



bullying and curriculum review. The initiative provided targeted support to early career stage school principals.

Support for the AMCSS regional structure and the ISA is identified as a key objective in the Strategic Development Plan 2022 – 2025. Members of the senior leadership team visited each of the ten AMCSS regions and the ISA in September/October 2025. Further attendance by executive staff was facilitated as requested. The regional section on the members’ area of the JMB website hosts the Council Reports

and it provides details of regional meetings. Region 2 (south Dublin) played a pivotal role in the preparation of the 2025 Annual Conference.

Strong connections with the regions and the ISA are maintained and further developed through regional representation on the Council of AMCSS and the Council of JMB. Regional reports are considered at all Council meetings and a formal response is provided. The matters raised continue to inform and shape the advocacy work undertaken by JMB.

Governance and Compliance

The Secretariat of Secondary Schools is governed by a committed and conscientious Board of Directors, whose members discharge their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the SSS Constitution and Internal Regulations, the Code of Governance issued by the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA), all relevant legislative requirements and best practice guidelines. The Board is supported in the execution of its governance and oversight functions through dedicated executive assistance provided by the Assistant General Secretary (Corporate Services). Meetings of the Board of Directors took place on:

13th January 2025
3rd March 2025
3rd April 2025
6th June 2025
18th August 2025
10th November 2025

Two structured surveys were undertaken during the year to inform evidence-based service planning and continuous improvement. These comprised the Service User Satisfaction

Survey, which gathered feedback from service users on their experience of the Secretariat’s provision, and the Chairperson Survey, which was undertaken to develop a comprehensive profile of the experiences, backgrounds, and support requirements of chairpersons of boards of management within the voluntary secondary sector.

Findings from the Service User Satisfaction Survey present a highly favourable evaluation of the services delivered by the Secretariat of Secondary Schools. Specifically, 89% of respondents reported that they were either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with the overall standard of service received, encompassing key dimensions such as service quality, accessibility, and overall effectiveness. By comparison, reported dissatisfaction was negligible, with fewer than 2% of participants indicating dissatisfaction at any level. The remaining 9% of respondents expressed a neutral view, stating that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Many respondents value the accessibility and expertise of staff, as well as the practical resources and timely advice offered. However, some feedback points to a need for stronger advocacy to address

increasing administrative workloads on school leaders. The need for enhanced resources for specific roles such as deputy principals and chairpersons was also highlighted in the survey results.

Insights from the Chairperson Survey suggest that chairpersons are committed to their roles, value structured support and training and face ongoing challenges related to workload and governance complexity. The findings highlight a need for ongoing support for boards of management and confirm that targeted professional learning for chairpersons is required.

The Secretariat of Secondary Schools remains committed to embedding a culture of continuous improvement and will respond to the needs identified in the survey data. Collaboration, consultation, effective communication and sustained engagement with school leaders and boards of management will continue to underpin the work of the Secretariat of Secondary Schools, thereby ensuring the delivery of a consistently high-quality and effective service to members in 2026.

April 2026

CYBERBULL



Child Protection Report

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Child Protection Report

AMCSS/JMB 39th Annual Conference 2026

Child Protection and Safeguarding

The Department of Education and Youth issued Circular 0041/2025 in May 2025, to accompany the publication of the new Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025. The procedures superseded the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2023. Boards of Management are required to adopt the new procedures before the end of this calendar year.

A significant part of the rollout of the new procedures was the provision of training. The DEY mandated Oide to provide training for school personnel, including DLPs and DDLPs. The management bodies were mandated to provide training for boards of management. Schools were advised to adopt the new procedures after DLPs, DDLPs and boards had been trained.

Oide provided in-person training for Designated Liaison Persons (DLPs) and Deputy Designated Liaison Persons (DDLPs). They also provided in-person training for all school personnel. JMB reminds boards that these training sessions for school personnel was intended to encompass all school personnel, including ancillary staff and persons working on a voluntary basis in schools.

In providing training for boards of management and recognising the key role played by chairpersons of our boards, JMB decided to prioritise training for board chairpersons, in advance of training for all board members. In-person training for chairpersons was provided at 6 venues across the country. Additionally, in-person training was provided for chairpersons of schools with boarding facilities, in recognition of the additional challenges in those schools.

We were very pleased that so many of our chairpersons took the trouble to attend the training, with many having had to travel considerable distances. The feedback was very positive.

JMB has recorded a suite of webinars which provide training for all board members. The modules range in length from 10 minutes to 40 minutes, approximately. The intention is that, before the final board meeting of 2026, all board members will have completed training and all boards will have adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025.

The DEY also published three Booklets to accompany the 2025 procedures. These are a Child Protection Case File Booklet, a Child Protection Safeguarding Booklet and a Child Protection Oversight Booklet. Each booklet provides templates which, if used by DLPs, will ensure that the school is compliant with the procedures. While the safeguarding templates CSS 1, CSS 2, CSS 3 and CSS 4 (b) are mandatory, JMB strongly recommends that the additional safeguarding templates CSS 5, 6, 7 and 8, while optional, should always be used. Likewise, the optional templates provided in the Case File Booklet and in the Oversight Booklet should always be used.



The most up-to-date guidance on the use of the templates was provided in Bulletin 23 of 2025/26:

Child Protection Procedures 2025: Use of Templates

*The Inspectorate has provided clarification on the use of Child Protection materials as set out below. Confirmation that any new requirements of the 2025 procedures, which were not in the previous procedures, will not be inspected until a school has formally adopted the 2025 procedures has also been provided. **The following documents require formal adoption of the 2025 procedures. Therefore, schools must not use the following ahead of adopting the 2025 procedures in their school:***

- *CSS 1 Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment*
- *CSS 2 Review of the Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment and associated review documents*
- *CSS 3 Notification Regarding the board of management's Review of the Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment*
- *CSS 5, 6 and 7*
- *CPOR 1 Child Protection Oversight Report*
- *CPF 7 Advice for Communicating with Parents*

Many of the templates provided in the support booklets for Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2025 can be used in advance of adopting the 2025 procedures, such as:

- *CPF 1 Child protection case file cover page*
- *CPF 2 Record of how the child protection concern came to the attention of the Designated Liaison Person (DLP)*
- *CPF 3 Record of DLP's phone call seeking the advice of Tusla.*
- *CPF 4 Statement from DLP to a member of school personnel as to the reasons why a report has not been made to Tusla.*
- *CPF 5 Record of DLP informing or not informing the parent that a report has been submitted to Tusla.*
- *CPF 6 Signed record indicating that all redacted documents presented to the board of management are accounted for following the Child Protection Oversight Report*
- *CPF 8 Master list of child protection case files*
- *CSS 4 (b) student-friendly child safeguarding statement*
- *CSS 8 Record of Child Protection Training*
- *CPOR 2 Record of documents provided to the board as part of the CPOR*

Child Protection Report

Training was provided by Gerry McCaul and Jack Cleary. The entire project was managed by Patrica Higgins, Assistant General Secretary.

More generally, in relation to child protection concerns, DLPs, and chairpersons acting as DLP, are encouraged to contact JMB without delay when child protection concerns arise. Delay in doing so can result in avoidable complications. This is especially important where a concern relates to a member of school personnel. A small number of newly appointed DLPs have had to address concerns of this nature this year and JMB has been able to provide timely assistance and advice.

Jack Cleary,
April 2026



Garda Vetting Report

Garda Vetting Report

AMCSS/JMB 39th Annual Conference 2026

In July 2025, the National Vetting Bureau (NVB), introduced additional child protection checks, in line with the EU Directive 2011/93/EU, to strengthen the protection of children. These additional checks apply to applicants who have resided in another EU state or the UK. While these additional checks strengthen child protection in the public interest, they have led to increased vetting application turnaround timelines for those who have resided in another EU state or in the UK.

Timelines vary for each application as it depends on the necessary searches that the NVB must carry out as part of the process. Schools are advised to allow for up to an additional ten working days for applications requiring checks with EU countries. For applications requiring checks with the UK, an additional twenty working days is required. The NVB has advised that these timelines are in line with established EU/UK policy and are outside the control of the Garda NVB.

The JMB published *JMB Vetting Procedures for Schools 2026*, which outlines changes to vetting regulations and provides an updated step-by-step guide to the vetting process via the JMB Vetting Portal. School personnel are reminded to follow the steps set out in the guide when processing vetting applications. In particular, the discontinuance of the 100-Point System and the requirement for in-person identity validation should be noted.

To assist with upskilling school personnel working in the area of vetting, the JMB delivered a training webinar on Vetting Procedures for Schools and National Vetting Bureau Compliance Audits in January 2026. Personnel working in the area of vetting in schools were invited to attend this webinar. The session explored the fundamental principles of vetting and outlined the steps required to ensure full compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements. The changes introduced by the National Vetting Bureau including the requirement for in-person verification of identity documentation were outlined and the presentation was followed by a Q & A session. All attendees received a Certificate of Training (NVB5 form).

The vetting section of the JMB website was updated this year. The revised section includes a link to the Vetting Procedures Webinar, a set of Frequently Asked Questions and an updated Vetting Policy Template. In addition, copies of relevant forms have been published and can be accessed on the website.

The NVB has conducted a number of compliance checks on schools and education centres during 2025. Schools are reminded that they should retain identity documents and validation forms in hard copy for six months (after which the documents can be converted to soft copy). The documentation should be retained for the duration of engagement by active individuals. The documentation should be destroyed in line with the school's GDPR retention periods for inactive individuals.



The NVB also carried out a compliance audit at the JMB. Eight schools were requested to provide relevant documentation and the documents supplied were deemed compliant with vetting regulations.

The National Garda Vetting Bureau requires JMB to conduct compliance checks and to verify that schools and education centres have an accountable and auditable vetting process in place. To comply with this obligation JMB will conduct compliance checks on a random selection of schools and education centres each year. Selected schools and education centres will be required to provide confirmation of identity, proof of address documentation and completed Validation forms for identified vetting subjects.

Queries in relation to the vetting process should be directed to evetting@jmb.ie

Reporting Period

January 2025 - December 2025



Reporting Period

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Reporting Period

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AMCSS/JMB 39th Annual Conference 2026

JMB Bulletins January 2025 - December 2025

- Bulletin 18** Weather Warning
- Bulletin 19** Protecting school property during freezing weather conditions
- Bulletin 20** Composite
1. Job-Sharing
 2. Career Breaks
 3. Secondments
- Bulletin 21** Status Red Alert: Schools in Status Red Areas to close
- Bulletin 22** Status Red Weather Warning - UPDATE
- Bulletin 23** Composite
1. New Data Protection Toolkit for Schools
 2. Template CCTV Policy
 3. Invitation to provide feedback to the DPC
- Bulletin 24** LCA Amendments to the Social Education LCA Module Descriptor
- Bulletin 25** Forward Planning for Special Education Provision – Special Classes
- Bulletin 26** New JMB Online Vetting Portal
- Bulletin 27** Evaluation of the Promotion of Wellbeing by the Inspectorate
- Bulletin 28** Composite
1. Post-Primary Guidance - Consultation
 2. Department of Education – Customer Service Survey
- Bulletin 29** Composite
1. Oide Training – Leading Senior Cycle Development
 2. Senior Cycle Pathways/Tranche 4&5 Consultation
- Bulletin 30** Review of a Redeployment

Bulletin 31

1. Senior Cycle Redevelopment – JMB Survey
2. SNA National Training Programme
3. Review of Enrolment in a Special Class-Circular 0023/2025 – issued on 20th March 2025
4. Senior Cycle Pathways – NCCA Pilot/Consultation – Deadline Extension
5. Professional Learning Calendar 2025 -2026

Bulletin 32

Climate Action Summer Works Scheme (CASWS)

Bulletin 33

Updated arrangements in relation to the filling of posts of responsibility

Bulletin 34

Compliance Check Review and Energy Inventory of schools

Bulletin 35

Senior Cycle Survey

Bulletin 36

Composite

1. Brief Croke Park hours survey
2. Senior Cycle Redevelopment Survey

Bulletin 37

Senior Cycle Reform

Bulletin 38

Composite

1. Senior Cycle Reform: Potential implications for school calendar
2. Panels for Acting Posts of Responsibility
3. Allianz announced as the new top sponsor and partner of the Olympic Federation of Ireland (OFI) and Paralympics Ireland

Bulletin 39

Update on the School Book Scheme 2025 – DPS Procurement Process (Stages 3 and 4) and DPS downtime

Bulletin 40

Composite

1. Redeployment
2. Termination of Fixed Term Contracts and Recruitment

Bulletin 41

Composite

1. Supports to Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection for Academic Year 2025/2026
2. The Role of Special Needs Assistants: Report on Focus Groups with Teachers
3. Inspectorate Report: Supporting all children and young people to access and appropriate education, May 2025
4. Oide SSE Step by Step Programme

Bulletin 42

Climate Action Summer Works Scheme (CASWS)

Bulletin 43

How should I brief the newly appointed principal?

Bulletin 44

1. ESB Critical Storm Response Information for Schools
2. Senior Cycle Reform: Implications for the School Calendar
3. Child Protection Procedures for Schools 2025
4. Teacher Upskilling Programme - Professional Diploma in Politics & Society

New School Year 2025

- Bulletin 01** Composite
1. Temporary changes to the Job-Sharing Scheme for Registered Teachers employed in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools - 2025/26 School Year
 2. Temporary changes to the Career Break Scheme for Registered Teachers employed in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools - 2025/26 School Year
 3. Teacher Extension Scheme 2025/26 School Year
- Bulletin 02** Boards of Management
- Bulletin 03** JMB Teacher Supply Survey 2025
- Bulletin 04** Guidance for schools on Fórsa Industrial Action
- Bulletin 05** Senior Cycle Redevelopment Bulletin – August 2025
- Bulletin 06** JMB Representatives to NCCA Senior Cycle Development Groups
- Bulletin 07** Anti-Bullying Policy / Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy
- Bulletin 08** Revised Vetting Procedures
- Bulletin 09** Fórsa Industrial Action Update and Survey
- Bulletin 10** Ongoing FÓRSA Industrial Action
- Bulletin 11** JMB ACCS Press Release re Fórsa Action
- Bulletin 12** Panels for Middle Leader Acting Posts of Responsibility
- Bulletin 13** Composite
1. JMB Research Bursaries
 2. Tranche 2 Leaving Certificate Subject Specifications
 3. Oide – Supports for Digital Learning Leaders
- Bulletin 14** Amendment to Section 4 of Circular Letter 0003/2018
- Bulletin 15** DEY Requirement for Opening Special Classes in 2026/2027
- Bulletin 16** VACANCY - Director, School Procurement Unit
- Bulletin 17** Composite
1. Neart Regional Conferences
 2. JMB Education Conference
- Bulletin 18** Senior Cycle Redevelopment (SCR) Implementation Support Measures
- Bulletin 19** JMB Balint Group Updates
- Bulletin 20** Climate Action Summer Works Scheme

Bulletin 21

Composite

1. Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Coursework for State Examinations
2. Guidelines on Artificial Intelligence in Schools – Department of Education and Youth
3. JMB Pilot Study – AI Assessment Scale
4. State Examinations – Grading, Assessment and Curricular Adjustments – JC & LC
5. Senior Cycle Level 1/Level 2 Learning Programmes.
6. JMB Seminar: Special Class Provision and Practice
7. Inspectorate
8. Education Related Department Publications and Circulars

Bulletin 22

Composite

1. JMB Survey – Identifying Professional Learning Needs for Inclusive and Special Education.
2. NCCA Subject Development Group – Senior Cycle Economics.
3. Use of AI – University of Limerick Study – SEC

Bulletin 23

Composite

1. Child Protection Procedures 2025
2. Middle Leadership and Management – Triennial Review
3. Gender Pay Gap Reporting
4. ICT Grant Funding

AMCSS Information Notes

Information Note 04	APTCS Board of Management Training Tuesday 21st January 2025
Information Note 05	APTCS Advert for CEO
Information Note 06	Le Chéile Advert for CEO
Information Note 07	APTCS and Elphin Diocese Annual Gathering
Information Note 08	APTCS Advert for three positions - Bi Cinealtas
Information Note 09	APTCS Advert for Forward Planning Officer
Information Note 10	Upcoming Conference on Catholic Education
Information Note 01	Exclusive professional development opportunity with Boston College Ireland
Information Note 02	Resources for the month of the Holy Souls 2025

FSSU Guidelines January 2025 - December 2025

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Financial Guideline 22	Revenue Enhanced Reporting Requirements (ERR)
Financial Guideline 24	Approval and Procedures for Use of a School Credit Card
Financial Guideline 25	Travel and Subsistence Expenses
Financial Guideline 26	Payments to Members of Selection Committees
Financial Guideline 30	Revised Rates of Pay for Bus Escorts
Financial Guideline 31	VSS School Grants 2025/26
Financial Guideline 32	Free Schoolbooks Scheme Grant and Administration Support Grant 2025-26
Financial Guideline 33	Electronic Banking
Financial Guideline 35	VAT Compensation Scheme for Charities
Financial Guideline 36	Payments to Exam Personnel 2025
Financial Guideline 37	Importance of Budgeting - School Year 25/26
Financial Guideline 38	Summer Programme 2025
Financial Guideline 39	ICT Grant 2024/25
Financial Guideline 40	Special Class Grants
Financial Guideline 41	Funding Scheme for Secure Mobile Phone Storage Solutions

New School Year 2025

Financial Guideline 01	Revised Rates of Pay for Bus Escorts
Financial Guideline 03	Important Dates for 2025/2026 School Year
Financial Guideline 05	Financial Year End 2024/2025 in Sage 50
Financial Guideline 06	Annual VAT Return of Trading Details (RTD) for the Year Ending 31st August 2025
Financial Guideline 07	Accounting for Free Schoolbooks Scheme and Science Implementation Grants
Financial Guideline 08	Chart of Accounts Update from 1st Sept 2025
Financial Guideline 09	External Accountants/Auditors Guideline 2025
Financial Guideline 10	Repeat of Leaving Certificate Course Fees
Financial Guideline 11	School Tours - Complying with Regulations and Requirements
Financial Guideline 12	Supervision and Substitution Scheme - School Year 2025/26
Financial Guideline 13	Charities Regulator Requirements for Schools

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Information on Auto-Enrolment

Public Holidays 2025/26

Payment of Ancillary-Related Grant Funding

My Future Fund Portal Employer Registration Now Open

Government Budget Summary 2026

Revenue Enhanced Reporting Requirements (ERR)