



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

DEIS Plus Scheme and Implementation Plan



Dream Empower Inspire Succeed

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Minister's Foreword

As Minister for Education and Youth, I am delighted to bring forward the first-ever DEIS Plus scheme, a key commitment of this Government to tackle educational disadvantage.

I am committed to ensuring that our education system enables every child and young person to realise their potential. The DEIS Plus scheme represents an enhanced and intensified application of the DEIS programme for schools with the highest concentration of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage, providing strengthened and sustained supports to school communities.

The scheme draws on the strong foundations of previous DEIS plans (2006 and 2017) and reflects a renewed commitment to achieving improved educational outcomes through targeted and proportionate support for schools in which a high concentration of students have the greatest levels of support need.

Every child has talent and potential. Education plays a vital role in supporting children and young people to develop, thrive and achieve positive outcomes across their lives. Children and young people in schools in the DEIS Plus scheme will now benefit from additional and tailored provision to help nurture their talent and potential and to support their educational journey. DEIS Plus recognises the importance of providing enhanced, targeted and evidence-informed supports to strengthen engagement, promote wellbeing and support positive educational pathways.

This document sets out a clear and ambitious direction for DEIS Plus in the years ahead. It outlines targeted actions to strengthen teaching and learning, support student wellbeing and deepen engagement with families and communities as a whole.

Informed by collaboration with principals, teachers, the home-school-community liaison team, the school completion programme team, parents and children and young people, the document reflects lived experience and is focused on delivering meaningful and sustainable impact at school level.

The success of the DEIS programme to date demonstrates the impact of sustained investment and the whole-school and community approach to supporting educational inclusion.

Progress in areas such as attendance, retention, attainment and progression provides a strong and encouraging foundation for the introduction of DEIS Plus.

By building on this evidence base, DEIS Plus seeks to further narrow persistent educational gaps and ensure that children and young people can achieve their full potential, regardless of background or circumstance.

It is a key priority for me to work in partnership across the education sector to tackle educational disadvantage in all its forms and to promote inclusive school environments where every child and young person feels a sense of belonging, is valued and is supported to succeed.

DEIS Plus is an important part of this ambition and will support school communities to deliver high-quality, responsive education, foster a strong sense of belonging and enable children and young people to progress with confidence, ambition and a clear sense of purpose. Through this work, DEIS Plus will also help children and young people to build foundations for healthy, secure and fulfilling lives into the future.

Hildegard Naughton
Minister for Education and Youth, T.D



Secretary General's Foreword

Education is widely recognised as one of the most powerful means through which individuals, families and communities can realise their potential. Through the DEIS Framework, sustained and targeted action over many years has supported progress in reducing the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on educational outcomes. DEIS Plus represents an ambitious extension of this work, providing enhanced and proportionate supports to schools serving communities with the highest concentrations of educational disadvantage. It sets out a clear and purposeful direction for continued improvement, informed by evidence, professional expertise and the voices of those working and learning within DEIS school communities.

Education plays a critical role in enabling progress for individuals, families and communities, and in shaping more equitable social outcomes over time. DEIS Plus reflects an ambition to accelerate that progress by strengthening the capacity of schools to support learning, wellbeing and aspiration where it matters most. The scheme places a strong emphasis on high-quality teaching and learning, effective leadership and purposeful collaboration with families, communities and support services. It is underpinned by a clear focus on sustained improvement, recognising that meaningful change is achieved through consistent effort and long-term investment.

Ensuring coherence across policy, practice and provision is essential to achieving sustained progress in addressing educational disadvantage. DEIS Plus recognises that the effects of poverty and social inequality evolve over time and that effective responses must be evidence informed, proportionate and capable of adapting to changing needs and contexts. Through strengthened use of data, ongoing evaluation and close collaboration across government and the wider education sector, DEIS Plus supports a more integrated and responsive approach. In doing so, it seeks to ensure that targeted supports contribute to improved educational experiences and to positive long-term impacts for children, young people and their communities.

Looking ahead, DEIS Plus is firmly focused on delivering meaningful progress over the coming years, informed by evidence and by the practical experience of what supports effective practice in schools. The scheme is designed to enhance student experiences, strengthen the wellbeing of school communities and support positive educational pathways for children and young people in schools in the DEIS Plus scheme. I wish to acknowledge the continued commitment and professionalism of school leaders, teachers, support staff and partner organisations whose work is critical to the delivery of DEIS. Their expertise and dedication are central to the ongoing development of a more inclusive and responsive education system, and DEIS Plus is intended to support and reinforce this work.

Bernie McNally
Secretary General
Department of Education and Youth



Our vision for DEIS Plus

The vision for the DEIS Plus scheme is to address educational disadvantage so that every child and young person can dream without limits, is empowered to grow, is inspired to learn and is supported to succeed.

DREAM

Children and young people are encouraged to dream big and be ambitious, to realise a future filled with potential pathways of achievement and opportunity – whether that means completing school, achieving high grades, continuing into further and higher education, entering the world of work, or contributing to their community. Teachers, school leaders and the wider school community create a culture of high expectations and belief in what is possible. They show every child and young person that their dreams matter.

'I like a teacher that will help drive you and get the ambition you want'

From the children and young people consultations

EMPOWER

Empowerment means giving children and young people the tools, confidence and encouragement to make choices, use their voices and take ownership of their learning. When children and young people feel empowered, they become active participants in shaping their own futures and in making a difference in their communities.

'There is a 'good atmosphere' in school where the staff are 'open and trusting' ...'You can come from any background and you will be welcomed, your voice will be heard and your opinions will be validated'

From the children and young people consultations

INSPIRE

Inspiring teachers, school leaders, parents and peers help children and young people stay motivated and engaged. They share stories of effort, resilience and success. They create exciting and relevant learning experiences, and build a sense of optimism, expectation and purpose that helps every child and young person aim higher.

'I want to do teaching and English is my favourite subject. I just want to be an English teacher, just like my English teacher'

From the children and young people consultations

SUCCEED

Success looks different for every child and young person. With the right support and encouragement, every child and young person can take pride in their progress and achievements – whether that's through academic attainment, mastering a new skill, overcoming a challenge, or achieving a personal goal. Every step forward, big or small, shows that with opportunity and support, every child and young person can succeed.

'If you are happier in school you will probably do well because you will be more positive and you will do your work better.'

From the children and young people consultations

Values

The DEIS Strategy and its implementation plan are guided by a set of core values which will help direct decision making and prioritisation over the life of the strategy. Where there is a reference to 'we' or 'the department' it refers to the Department of Education and Youth, working in partnership with stakeholders.

Child and young person-centred

Children and young people are at the heart of the DEIS strategy. Their voices have been central to its development and we will continue to support and encourage their meaningful involvement in decision-making that impacts them. We will also hold and communicate high expectations for learning and success for all children and young people.

Collaborative

The DEIS strategy has been developed through a collaborative process and will be implemented and evaluated in collaboration with children and young people, school leaders and teachers, education partners, support agencies, advocacy bodies for children and young people, academics and officials across the department and other government departments.

Equitable and accessible

The DEIS strategy recognises education as a human right and promotes equity in all schools, focusing particularly on supporting children and young people experiencing educational disadvantage, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, children and young people experiencing homelessness, and those from Traveller, Roma and migrant communities.

Positive outcomes and improvement focus

Education is the key to breaking cycles of disadvantage. Through the delivery of the DEIS strategy, we commit to improving educational outcomes and experiences for children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage to give them the opportunity to achieve their full potential. In order to do this we will support our schools to use a wide range of evidence and data to ensure the actions they take lead to meaningful improvements for children and young people.

Accountable

The Department of Education and Youth is responsible for advancing the implementation of the strategy. The department commits to the development, review and evaluation of the DEIS strategy. A monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to track progress.

Introduction

Ireland's education system promotes inclusion, equity and opportunity for all children and young people across almost 4,000 schools in the free education scheme. The DEIS programme is the Department of Education and Youth's key policy response to address educational disadvantage. The programme provides additional resources to support almost 1,200 schools, building on the universal supports available to all schools.

Since its introduction 20 years ago, the DEIS programme has helped more children and young people to stay in school, to participate in senior cycle and to achieve a Leaving Certificate, narrowing the gap with their peers in schools not in the programme. The DEIS programme's success is evident internationally. Ireland is surpassing its European peers in international assessments and has an early school leaving rate far below the European average.

Despite these successes, gaps in attainment levels, attendance and other key indicators persist between schools in the DEIS programme and those not in the programme. The new DEIS Strategy to 2035 and DEIS Plus scheme have been developed to address these gaps by tackling educational disadvantage in all schools so that every child and young person can dream without limits, is empowered to grow, is inspired to learn and is supported to succeed.



DEIS Strategy to 2035

The new DEIS Strategy to 2035 builds on the success of the DEIS programme in our schools. The DEIS programme remains the government's primary policy for addressing educational disadvantage at school level and forms part of the cross-government approach to reducing child poverty and promoting social cohesion and inclusion. DEIS provides additional supports to schools to ensure children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage have an equitable opportunity to achieve their potential through education. While the DEIS Strategy to 2035 continues to focus on schools with high concentrations of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage, it also recognises that there are students at risk of educational disadvantage in all schools.

A small number of schools have very high concentrations of children and young people who experience intergenerational poverty and deprivation. This places greater demands on resources in these schools as they address barriers to children and young people's attendance, participation, engagement and retention. This means children and young people in these schools are less likely to achieve their potential. Significant gaps remain in numeracy, literacy and Leaving Certificate completion, particularly between schools with the highest concentrations of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage and schools outside the DEIS programme. The DEIS Plus scheme has been developed specifically to address these challenges.





Rationale

The DEIS Plus scheme aims to empower children and young people affected by intergenerational poverty and disadvantage to succeed in school and progress to fulfilling adult lives, creating positive impacts for future generations. It seeks to improve school attendance, promote participation and engagement in learning and foster social interaction. A core aim is to support young people to complete post-primary education and achieve the Leaving Certificate, finding appropriate pathways to further education and training, higher education, apprenticeships or to the world of work.

Education to break the cycle: A 2022 ESRI study on intergenerational poverty found that higher educational attainment significantly reduces the risk of poverty in adulthood, even for those who experienced childhood disadvantage.¹ Adults whose parents completed third level education are far less likely to experience poverty than those whose parents only completed lower secondary education. Addressing inequalities in educational opportunities is, therefore, critical to breaking the cycle of poverty. The ESRI highlights the importance of additional supports for the most disadvantaged children and the schools they attend, and measures to improve equity of access to third level education. Educational attainment and employment rates are positively correlated, as evidenced in a 2024 Central Statistics Office (CSO) study, reinforcing the importance of education as a key pathway out of poverty.²

A substantial body of evidence indicates that child poverty is associated with poorer physical and developmental health, behavioural outcomes and even reduced life expectancy, with impacts that can last into adulthood.³ Education and school-based interventions play an important role in mitigating these risks.

Greater social inequality: Since the DEIS programme began in 2006, social inequality has become more concentrated, making disadvantage more complex. CSO Census data and the HP Deprivation Index show that, despite nationwide improvements in deprivation measures, the gap between Ireland's most disadvantaged areas and the national average has widened. Nearly 200,000 people now live in very or extremely disadvantaged areas, increasing from 143,000 in 2016.

Analysis of the Primary Online Database (POD) indicates that 80% of children and young people living in extreme deprivation, as defined by the HP Deprivation Index, are enrolled in 14.5% of our schools, primarily located in urban areas, where poverty-related challenges such as hunger, substance abuse, domestic abuse, parental incarceration, eviction and homelessness are most acute.

Trauma and adverse childhood experiences: Intergenerational poverty and disadvantage can also increase the risk of trauma and adverse childhood experiences. A selection of schools consulted during the design of the DEIS Plus scheme reported that, in schools with a high concentration of children at risk of educational disadvantage, approximately half of children had experienced a traumatic event or an adverse childhood experience. While not all children experience trauma, some may face adversity related to poverty, discrimination or instability in their home life, and the impact of these issues is compounded in schools where there is a high concentration of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage.

¹ Curristan, S., Maître, B., and Russell, H. (2022). Intergenerational poverty in Ireland, ESRI Research Series 150, Dublin: ESRI, doi.org/10.26504/rs150

² CSO. (2024, November 13). Educational Attainment Thematic Report 2024 - Central Statistics Office. www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-eda/educationalattainmentthematicreport2024/

³ Redd, Z., Thomson, D., & Moore, K.A. (2024). Poverty matters for children's well-being, but good policy can help. *Child Trends*. DOI: 10.56417/3401c1202m

Educational outcomes and concentrated disadvantage: In schools with higher concentrations of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage, students face greater attendance, retention, academic and behavioural challenges.

National assessments highlight these disparities. The National Assessment of Numeracy and English Reading (NAMER) 2021 and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 found significant achievement gaps in literacy and numeracy, especially between Urban Band 1 and Urban Band 2. The average NAMER reading scores of second-class primary pupils were significantly higher in schools not in the DEIS programme, with the greatest gap between Urban Band 1 and Urban Band 2 schools. In Urban Band 1 schools, 12.9% of pupils were 'very low achievers' in reading, compared with 7.1% in Urban Band 2 schools and 5% in urban schools not in the DEIS programme.

This pattern is also evident in mathematics. There was a pronounced achievement gap between Urban Band 1 schools and Urban Band 2 schools, with a less significant gap between Urban Band 2 and urban schools not in the DEIS programme. Rural DEIS schools perform comparably to schools not in the DEIS programme. Further, the Educational Research Centre's Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2011–2023 report found children and young people attending primary and post-primary schools in the DEIS programme less ready for instruction in mathematics and science, highlighting the need for targeted support.⁴

Positive outcomes of targeted support: Improvement in learning outcomes over the years shows that, provided with the right tools and supports, children and young people in all schools can thrive, highlighting the positive impact and direction of the DEIS programme. Engaging children and young people in education will result in both positive short-term and long-term benefits for individuals as well as society.

Research consistently shows that higher educational attainment is linked to better health, higher employment rates, greater confidence and wellbeing, and more cohesive, connected communities. These are outcomes that also contribute to Ireland's overall economic and social wellbeing. Education is a powerful tool for reducing inequality, lifting people out of poverty and shaping the citizens of tomorrow. Investing in resources and supports for children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage strengthens both social and economic outcomes, helping to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.

⁴ Pitsia, V., McHugh, G., Denner, S., & Clerkin, A. (2025, July 30). *Continuity and change in Ireland's schools and classrooms: TIMSS 2011–2023 – Educational Research Centre – Foras Taighde ar Oideachas*. www.erc.ie/2025/07/30/continuity-and-change-in-irelands-schools-and-classrooms-timss-2011-2023/



Policy context

The DEIS Plus scheme sits within a wider national, European and international policy framework that promotes inclusion, equity and opportunity for all children and young people. It builds on existing strengths within the Irish education system and brings an enhanced focus on breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and disadvantage through education.

The DEIS Plus scheme aligns with existing strategies and policies of the Department of Education and Youth (DEY), along with the work of its agencies and partners, and forms part of the cross-government approach to supporting the educational progression of children and young people impacted by intergenerational poverty and disadvantage. This begins with Equal Start in early learning and childcare and school-age childcare settings, continues through the DEIS programme and the DEIS Strategy to 2035 in primary and post-primary schools, and extends to the National Access Plan (NAP) 2022-2028 in further and higher education.

The scheme also supports the achievement of the cross-government target to reduce child poverty and aligns with the state's overall approach to improve social inclusion and reduce poverty. It is consistent with the Public Sector Duty and the DEY's legal obligation under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by policies and plans.

The DEIS Plus scheme further supports Ireland's commitments under international and European frameworks, including Sustainable Development Goal 4, the European Pillar of Human Rights and the EU Child Guarantee, which promote inclusive and equitable education. The scheme is informed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Education for Inclusive Societies Project report titled Resourcing Schools to Address Educational Disadvantage, which recognised Ireland's strong performance and high levels of fairness across its education system while also highlighting the need for a sustained focus on children and young people facing barriers to participation.

Objectives of the DEIS Plus scheme

The main objective of the DEIS Plus scheme is to empower children and young people through improved educational attainment to break the cycle of disadvantage.

DEIS Plus builds on the existing DEIS policy framework by providing a more targeted, coordinated and evidence-informed set of supports in schools with the highest concentrations of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage.

The objectives of DEIS Plus are to:

- Enhance attendance, engagement and participation in learning.
- Strengthen wellbeing and trauma-informed supports for children and young people and families.
- Build leadership and staff capacity to implement evidence-based practices, manage need and promote a culture of continuous school improvement.
- Improve equity of access to resources and opportunities, ensuring that children and young people in the most disadvantaged communities can benefit from a wide range of academic subjects, supports and opportunities.
- Strengthen interagency coordination between education, youth, health and community services so that supports are more accessible and effective for schools and families.
- Improve transitions and progression pathways, including enhanced guidance and transition planning, and foster stronger links to further and higher education, industry and employment.
- Support more consistent and effective use of data and evidence, enabling schools to monitor progress and identify emerging support needs.
- Reduce long-term educational disadvantage by addressing the root causes of disengagement and low attainment through targeted and sustained intervention.





Development of the DEIS Plus scheme

The need for a DEIS Plus scheme emerged from ESRI research, an OECD evaluation of resources allocated to address educational disadvantage and consultation with key stakeholders.

The scheme was co-designed using a human-centred design approach, grounded in direct engagement with children and young people, school leaders and those working in schools with high concentrations of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage. The Department of Education and Youth worked with a DEIS Plus design advisory group to identify support needs, brainstorm ideas to meet those support needs and develop ideas into practical measures for inclusion in the scheme.

Extensive consultations were carried out with school communities, including children and young people, principals, deputy principals, teachers, home-school-community liaison (HSCL) coordinators, school completion programme (SCP) coordinators and project workers, education partners and parents.

Consultation reports are available on <https://www.gov.ie/DEIS>

Governance and expertise were also provided through the wider DEIS governance and consultation structures including the programme steering group, the DEIS technical working group, the monitoring and evaluation group, the interdepartmental working group on addressing educational disadvantage and the DEIS advisory group.

For more detail on the design process, <https://www.gov.ie/DEIS>

DEIS Plus identification model

Schools to be included in the DEIS Plus scheme are urban schools with consistently high concentrations of children and young people at very high risk of educational disadvantage.

The DEIS technical working group, with expertise from across the Department of Education and Youth, the Educational Research Centre and Pobal, has developed a DEIS Plus identification model, which builds on the refined DEIS identification model used to extend the DEIS programme in 2022.⁵

As in 2022, the identification model is underpinned by a range of administrative data on every child and young person enrolled in primary and post-primary school. This data includes:

- The Pobal HP Deprivation Index for the small area in which the child or young person lives, obtained through the child's or young person's address data on the DEY Primary Online Database (POD) or the Post-Primary Online Database (PPOD).
- The child's or young person's ethnicity if provided on POD or PPOD.
- If the child's or young person's address on POD or PPOD matches an address of State-funded homeless accommodation.
- If the child's or young person's address on POD or PPOD matches an address of an International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) or Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre (EROC).

The DEIS Plus identification model includes the addition of a modified DEIS Plus index. This was developed by the department's statistics unit to support the identification of schools for DEIS Plus. The modified DEIS Plus index places greater weight on lone parenthood and unemployment, which have been widely identified as keys factors in persistent and intergenerational disadvantage.

Children and young people from 'very disadvantaged' or 'extremely disadvantaged areas' (HP score ≤ -20 under either Pobal HP Deprivation Index or modified DEIS Plus index), residing in State-funded emergency accommodation, residing in IPAS or EROC accommodation or identifying as Traveller or Roma are designated priority cohorts within the model.

For the purposes of identifying schools for inclusion in the DEIS Plus scheme, only urban schools are considered. Evidence shows that concentrated intergenerational disadvantage has a more pronounced impact on educational outcomes for schools in these settings.

The model is applied to the past three years' enrolments for all urban DEIS schools. Schools to be included in the DEIS Plus scheme are those that have:

- A three-year average score that is significantly more disadvantaged than the average under the identification model **and**
- A high proportion of students from 'very disadvantaged' or 'extremely disadvantaged' areas (HP score ≤ -20).

Schools may meet these criteria using either the HP Deprivation Index or the modified DEIS Plus index.

⁵ <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/the-refined-deis-identification-model.pdf>

In order to ensure the DEIS Plus scheme realises its core objective to empower children and young people through improved educational attainment to break the cycle of disadvantage, schools that did not meet all of the initial criteria but are situated on the same campus with a clear link (for example, girls and boys or junior and senior) or are within 750m of a school in the DEIS Plus scheme and are of a similar disadvantage level are included in the scheme.

The DEIS Plus identification model uses the most up-to-date data available, balancing the need to profile student disadvantage, while respecting the right to privacy of the individuals concerned.

The department is working in conjunction with other government departments and aegis bodies on a project led by the CSO to further develop more granular household level data over the coming years. This will provide a level of assurance of DEIS profiles, and potentially allow for the identification of households in need despite being physically located in more affluent areas. It has yet to be determined the level of granularity that will be possible in this regard.

Schools will be reassessed periodically as data sources and techniques are updated and advanced, and demographics change. Transitions into and out of the scheme will be carefully managed.

There will be an appeals process for schools that believe they can improve the accuracy of their POD or PPOD data. After updating this data, schools will be reassessed for inclusion in the scheme.



Implementation of the DEIS Plus scheme

School leadership and school communities are central to the successful delivery of the scheme. Resourced and supported by the Department of Education and Youth, schools will implement DEIS Plus measures, drawing on their professional expertise, knowledge, data and evidence to:

- Prioritise the children and young people who are most in need of support.
- Select appropriate universal and targeted strategies and actions, including teaching and learning strategies, to bring about improvements in outcomes and experiences.
- Monitor the success of the universal and targeted strategies and actions at regular intervals and amend based on the outcomes of the monitoring process.

This scheme is not one-size-fits-all, and schools are best placed to deliver effective supports.

Schools in the scheme will be facilitated to collaborate through clusters and networks, sharing knowledge, learning and best practices, and supporting each other to effectively implement the scheme.

The implementation of the DEIS Plus scheme will be led and supported by a dedicated programme management team within the Department of Education and Youth. The team will have responsibility for overseeing delivery of the scheme, supporting coordination across the system and ensuring that implementation is aligned with the objectives of DEIS Plus.

The programme management team will work closely with a team of key education partners from Oide, the Inspectorate and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), to support schools and ensure that implementation is informed by both system level priorities and school level experience. As part of this approach, members of this team will be assigned clusters of schools in the scheme, supporting consistent engagement and shared learning.

Direct engagement with schools will be a core feature of implementation. There will be structured engagement with the DEIS Plus design advisory group, which will be retained, and a newly established DEIS Plus children and young persons advisory group. The programme management team will engage regularly with schools in the DEIS Plus scheme to support planning and delivery. This will ensure that the implementation of the DEIS Plus scheme will be carried out with the schools and children and young people in the scheme.

DEIS Plus will be implemented in collaboration with other government departments and agencies. The work will be supported by structures including the interdepartmental working group on addressing educational disadvantage to strengthen alignment of supports across sectors.

Throughout the implementation of the scheme, ongoing monitoring, assessment and evaluation will ensure the fair and effective allocation of resources while maintaining the flexibility to respond to specific support needs and direct funding to where it is needed most.

Area-based school clusters

In tandem with the allocation of additional resources to schools selected for inclusion in DEIS Plus, the scheme will promote:

- Improved integration of community-based services and area-based initiatives with schools.
- Collaboration between schools, third level institutions, community-based services and industry to tackle area-specific issues.

To achieve this, the department will establish area-based school clusters. These clusters will mainly include schools that have been identified for inclusion in DEIS Plus but potentially may also include other schools in the cluster area that support children impacted by intergenerational poverty and disadvantage. One of the aims of these clusters is to promote a collaborative approach to support children and young people who move from a primary school that is in the DEIS Plus scheme to a post-primary school that is not.

The clusters will be formed using data held by the department and local knowledge of the department's Inspectorate and agencies.

In addition to the clusters, a network will be established for schools in the scheme to support each other, share learning and best practices, and serve as a forum for professional learning opportunities for school leaders, teachers and others involved in delivering the scheme.



Monitoring, reporting and evaluation

Monitoring, reporting and evaluation will play an important role in supporting the effective implementation of the DEIS Plus scheme. Together, these processes will help ensure that actions are delivered as intended, that progress is visible and transparent and that learning from implementation is used to strengthen the scheme over time.

Monitoring and reporting

The implementation of DEIS Plus will be monitored through a structured approach that builds on existing DEIS planning and reporting arrangements. Progress will be reported on an ongoing basis to the DEIS programme steering group, which will report to the DEIS Programme Board, ensuring clear lines of oversight and accountability as well as alignment with the DEIS Strategy to 2035. The Department of Education and Youth will publish annual progress reports which will track the delivery of the actions set out in the DEIS Plus implementation plan. These reports will provide a system-level overview of progress, highlight emerging learning and help identify areas where additional focus or adjustment may be required.

Implementation plans will be reviewed and updated every three years to reflect experience from delivery, learning from reviews and developments within the wider system. This approach will allow the department to build on what is working well, respond to challenges as they arise and refine actions where needed.

At school level, monitoring will continue to be anchored in existing DEIS planning and self-evaluation processes. All schools in the DEIS Plus scheme have a school improvement plan that is specifically designed to bring about improved outcomes and experiences for the children and young people in the school. Schools will be supported to ensure that their plan contains targets and actions under each of main DEIS themes: literacy, numeracy, attendance, retention, transitions, partnership with parents and others, and examination attainment. The plan will clearly identify the children and young people prioritised for additional support, targets for improvement and agreed actions that will achieve the desired outcomes.

Strengthening leadership and teacher professional learning will also support these effective monitoring and reporting approaches. Schools with the capacity to engage in reflective planning, make use of available data and review the impact of actions taken are better placed to understand what is making a difference for children and young people and to adapt approaches over time.

Targeted support from Oide and the Inspectorate will be an important part of this process. Oide will work with schools to support high quality planning, implementation and use of evidence, and promote the sharing of good practice through professional learning and communities of practice. The Inspectorate will continue to support schools through School Self Evaluation (SSE) visits and evaluation activity, providing external feedback on planning, implementation and progress. Together these supports will help ensure that monitoring and reporting are embedded in school improvement work rather than treated as additional requirements.

Evaluation

The outcomes of DEIS Plus will be reviewed on an ongoing basis under a new DEIS Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, currently being developed by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). This framework will provide a structured mechanism to consider whether the current DEIS themes, actions and supports remain appropriate and effective, or whether adjustments are required as the scheme develops. This approach will enhance transparency, support evidence-based decision-making and help identify which interventions are delivering the greatest improvements in learning outcomes. This work will include:

- The identification of relevant data available at system and school level to inform evaluation of DEIS Plus.
- The development of baseline indicators against which progress and impact can be assessed for children and young people, schools/school communities and the wider system.
- The identification of additional indicators that could be developed over time, subject to improvements in data availability, storage and shareability.
- Arrangements for regular measurement against agreed baselines, enabling the department and the wider education system to track progress, review implementation and identify emerging successes, challenges and opportunities on an ongoing basis without comparing schools.
- The development of processes to strengthen alignment between school level and system-level data, allowing school level evidence to be used more effectively in assessing impact.

Drawing on the ESRI's experience in evaluating education and social policy initiatives, this approach is intended to support formative evaluations, to inform ongoing improvement during implementation, and summative evaluations, to assess overall impact at key stages. DEIS Plus will be implemented on a multi-annual basis, with a structured review of the scheme after three years to assess progress and impact and inform decisions on future direction and the next implementation plan.

Monitoring and evaluation of DEIS Plus will also be informed by stakeholder engagement and direct engagement with schools and with children and young people. Structured engagement with the DEIS Plus children and young persons advisory group will ensure that the perspectives of children and young people inform understanding of impact, particularly in relation to wellbeing, engagement and participation.

By combining strong school-level planning, targeted system supports and ongoing evaluation, the department aims to ensure the DEIS Plus scheme remains focussed on addressing educational disadvantage effectively and continues to evolve in response to evidence and experience over time.

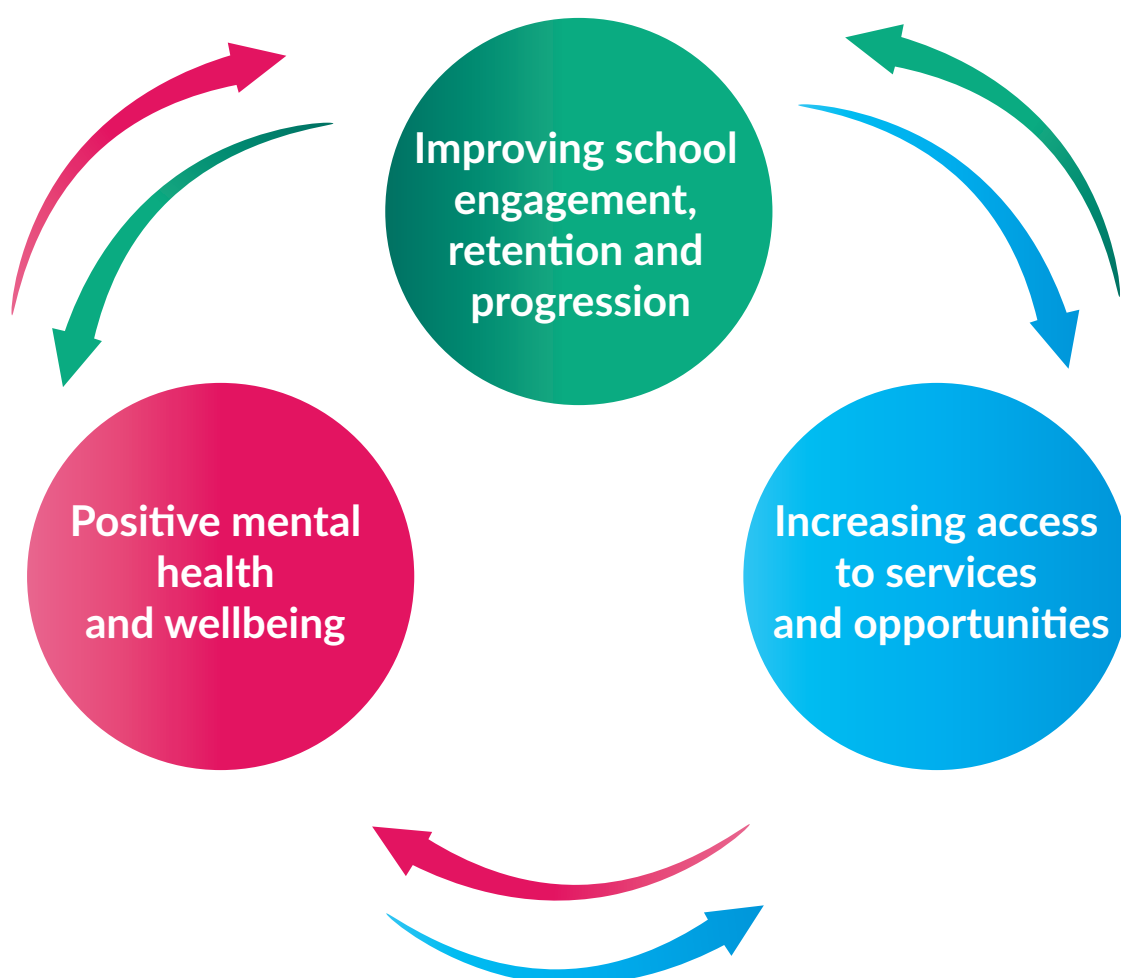
Key features of the DEIS Plus scheme

The development of the DEIS Plus scheme involved a human-centred design process which included the participation of a DEIS Plus design advisory group and was informed by the views and experiences of children and young people, principals and school staff working in schools with very high concentrations of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage.

The scheme focuses on setting high expectations, empowering children and young people to achieve their potential through high-quality and inclusive teaching and learning, alongside a strong emphasis on overall wellbeing, personal growth, happiness and the ability to lead fulfilling adult lives.

Equity of opportunity is at the heart of the scheme. Children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage must have access to the same opportunities as their peers. To achieve this, schools in the scheme will be provided with extra supports and resources designed to help them overcome barriers and obstacles, and encourage them to attend, participate and achieve in school.

Three priority areas to target have been identified:



Positive mental health and wellbeing

Students in schools with higher concentrations of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage are more likely to have experienced adversity or trauma. These children and young people are strong and resilient but often bear burdens that affect how they engage in school. For them, school is a place of safety, stability and belonging.

To support these children and young people to achieve through education, we must understand the wider circumstances that influence their wellbeing and ability to learn.

The DEIS Plus scheme places a cornerstone emphasis on nurturing and trauma-informed practices. It recognises that compounded intergenerational disadvantage is caused by a unique set of circumstances, the effects of which can lead to attendance issues, poor engagement, unrealised education outcomes and missed learning opportunities.

A key feature of the DEIS Plus scheme will be a positive mental health and wellbeing initiative that will provide a continuum of support for children and young people. This initiative will include:

- A positive mental health and wellbeing coordinator. This will provide a dedicated teacher post to each school in the DEIS Plus scheme, to lead the school's approach to wellbeing, fostering a whole-school nurturing environment and culture, working in tandem with school and community supports.
- Access to the support of an education wellbeing practitioner in primary schools in the DEIS Plus scheme with an extension to post-primary schools over time. The education wellbeing practitioners will work under the direction and supervision of NEPS psychologists and in collaboration with teachers in the school in supporting the whole-school approach to wellbeing promotion.
- The extension of strand 1 of the Counselling in Primary Schools Pilot to additional schools in DEIS Plus. This initiative aims to provide one-to-one counselling to support small numbers of children presenting with mild to moderate mental health difficulties and not currently attending Health Service Executive (HSE) or Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) services. It does not replace those services.
- Increased NEPS support for all schools in the DEIS Plus scheme to support schools through critical incidences, whole-school training and support the work of the education wellbeing practitioners and positive mental health and wellbeing coordinators.
- Training will be provided for all school staff to understand the circumstances and underlying causes of intergenerational disadvantage, enhancing their capacity to respond and developing their confidence to engage with and support children and young people.

A joint working group will be established between the Department of Education and Youth and the Department of Health to examine potential to better integrate services at a local level and support improved physical and mental health and wellbeing in schools in the DEIS Plus scheme. Schools in DEIS Plus will continue to retain the right to obtain services outside of those provided in the scheme.

The positive mental health and wellbeing initiative is a new approach to supporting students' mental health and wellbeing. Its implementation will be informed by the voices of children and young people, ensuring that the supports are relevant to the lived experiences of those most affected by adversity. It will also be closely monitored and evaluated throughout its implementation, with adjustments made as required.

Improving school engagement, retention and progression

Children and young people who experience disadvantage miss more school days than their peers. Missed school days result in educational loss and a reduced opportunities for social engagement and friendship, which can lead to a degree of isolation. Retention and progression rates are lower in schools with the highest concentrations of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage. Children and young people in these schools have a higher risk of early school leaving and not progressing to Leaving Certificate or further or higher education, ultimately impacting their ability to live fulfilling adult lives. Absenteeism can be caused by external factors such as a student's family situation, their health and wellbeing, bullying or other issues at school, as well as structural issues with the education system and a student's ability to access the curriculum.

Measures will include:

- Ensuring each school in the DEIS Plus scheme will have access to a full home-school-community liaison coordinator (HSCL) post and increasing the number of community link workers to support the engagement between families and schools, to encourage attendance and improve the connection to services in the community.
- Providing an enhanced allocation of administrative deputy principal roles and increasing leadership support to enable schools to provide a nurturing environment, support high-quality inclusive teaching and learning, and address attendance issues.
- Providing all schools in the DEIS Plus scheme with funding to have a breakfast club to combat food insecurity in homes and to ensure that children and young people come to class ready to learn.
- Providing free period products where required to ensure dignity and participation in school.
- Aligning the DEIS grant allocation to the most recent available data, increasing the allocation to all schools in the scheme. This will provide a stable funding stream and expand access to opportunities and experiences that could not previously be funded.
- Increasing guidance support, including a pilot project introducing whole-school guidance provision at primary level.
- Enhancing supports to increase participation in transition year and supporting access to work placements through engagement with industry.

Building on measures that work, these additional supports aim to develop a school environment that supports attendance, engagement and participation, where schools work with families to set high expectations and provide children and young people with opportunities to achieve their potential and access brighter futures in higher and further education and the world of work.

Increasing access to services and opportunities

Children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage often have varied support needs that require targeted and individualised services. While many communities have a range of services available in the community, it can be difficult to integrate these services to best meet the needs of children and young people. Interdepartmental collaboration will facilitate the integration of services at local level to improve access to local services. This will allow for greater opportunities for children and young people to pursue and develop their interests and engage with local groups, clubs and industry.

Measures to promote greater interagency engagement and collaboration include:

- The further roll-out of the City Connects programme to more sites, serving more schools in the scheme. This programme matches children and young people in participating schools with a comprehensive set of services and enrichments based on their strengths, interests and support needs.
- Increased funding for UBU Your Place Your Space youth services near post-primary schools in the DEIS Plus scheme to increase engagement with young people.
- The development of local area clusters to promote collaboration between schools and local services.
- Increased engagement with third level institutions and industry for increased opportunities for work experience, potential to collaborate on projects and opportunities for research.
- The establishment of an innovation fund for schools to engage with each other and local services and industry, to develop bespoke responses that meet local needs.
- The prioritisation of schools in the DEIS Plus scheme for access to speech and language and occupational therapies in phase 2 of the roll-out of the Education Therapy Service.

The success of the DEIS Plus scheme will require a whole-of-community approach, involving local services and industry, and collaboration across government departments and agencies. The interdepartmental working group on addressing educational disadvantage will identify opportunities for collaboration and support the implementation of the above measures. These measures aim to ensure more coordinated, accessible and effective supports across all bodies providing them, for children and young people experiencing the highest levels of deprivation to break the cycle of disadvantage.



DEIS Plus Implementation Plan 2026 to 2028

This section outlines the three-year DEIS Plus scheme implementation plan 2026-2028. It sets out the actions to be undertaken to commence implementing the vision and ambitions of the DEIS Plus scheme.

It is intended that, over the lifetime of the scheme, there will be a series of implementation plans. This is the first, covering 2026-2028. Two further implementation plans will follow, covering 2029-2031 and 2032-2034. A final review will be carried out in 2035, and it will serve as a redevelopment year.

Annual progress reports will be published to track the delivery of actions in the implementation plan. Overall progress will be reviewed at the end of the three-year period in preparation for the next implementation plan.

This first implementation plan provides a set of actions to be achieved. The focus of subsequent implementation plans will be determined by the outcomes achieved through this first plan.

Positive mental health and wellbeing				
	Action	Lead Dept(s)	Support Dept(s)	Timeline – action to be completed by
	Introduce a DEIS Plus positive mental health and wellbeing initiative in schools to foster a whole-school nurturing environment and culture, and support children and young people impacted by adversity and intergenerational trauma. Measures will be taken to ensure this supplements and does not duplicate existing mental health services available for children and young people. This initiative will include:			
1.1	To ensure schools can respond appropriately to the needs of children who have experienced trauma or adversity, every school in the DEIS Plus scheme will be allocated a dedicated teacher post to coordinate a whole-school approach to supporting wellbeing and mental health. A teacher will be assigned full-time to the coordinator role, for a maximum of five years, to lead on the implementation of a whole-school approach to positive mental health and wellbeing and engage with children and young people on a one-to-one or group basis as required. This role will have responsibility for coordinating supports in school and the community to build whole-school capacity, strengthen universal prevention and provide targeted support where it is needed. Training will be provided for the teacher who is assigned to this role.	DEY		Q3 2026

Positive mental health and wellbeing				
	Action	Lead Dept(s)	Support Dept(s)	Timeline – action to be completed by
1.2	Commence training for all school staff for the development of a whole-school approach to building a nurturing, trauma-informed environment where all school staff understand the unique support needs of children and young people impacted by adversity and have the confidence and competence to engage and support children and young people when needed.	DEY		Q4 2026
1.3	Commence the introduction of education wellbeing practitioner posts into primary schools in the DEIS Plus scheme (and scope the potential to extend to post-primary schools in the DEIS plus scheme). Education wellbeing practitioners will work under the direction and supervision of NEPS psychologists and in collaboration with wellbeing coordinators and teachers in the school to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthen whole-school preventative approaches to promoting wellbeing and mental health. provide psycho-educational support for parents, school staff and children. provide prevention and early intervention to children to prevent and address mild or emerging wellbeing needs 	DEY		Q4 2026
1.4	Commence the extension of strand 1 of the Counselling Pilot in Primary Schools to further primary schools in the DEIS Plus scheme. This will provide additional primary schools in the scheme with access to short term blocks of one-to-one counselling to support small numbers of children presenting with mild to moderate mental health difficulties and not currently attending HSE or CAMHS services.	DEY		Q4 2026
1.5	Provide increased access to NEPS through the allocation of five additional educational psychologist posts specifically for DEIS Plus.	DEY		Q3 2026

Positive mental health and wellbeing				
	Action	Lead Dept(s)	Support Dept(s)	Timeline – action to be completed by
1.6	Establish a DEY and Department of Health working group that will work to support the promotion and delivery of wellbeing and mental health supports to children and young people in schools in the DEIS Plus scheme. Facilitating preventive health interventions at school improves uptake and health outcomes, these can be wide ranging and may include physical activity, immunisations, health promotion - such as dental care.	DEY, DH		Q3 2026
1.7	Schools in the DEIS Plus scheme will be included for prioritisation in the expansion of the Education Therapy Service when the service is implemented in mainstream schools to provide access to speech and language therapy and occupational therapy in schools. Measures will be taken to ensure that this supplements and does not duplicate services currently available through the children's disability network team (CDNT) or health services.	DEY		2028

Improving school engagement, retention and progression				
	Action	Lead Dept(s)	Support Dept(s)	Timeline – action to be completed by
2.1	Ensure that all primary schools in DEIS Plus are allocated an administrative principal.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.2	Reduce the threshold for the allocation of administrative deputy principals for primary schools in DEIS Plus to 251 pupils.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.3	Provide two release days for deputy principals in all primary schools in DEIS Plus with between 151 and 250 pupils, and one release day for those in schools with 150 pupils or fewer			Q3 2026
2.4	Ensure that each post-primary school in DEIS Plus has its own full-time administrative deputy principal.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.5	Reduce the threshold for a second administrative deputy principal for post-primary schools in DEIS Plus to 450 students.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.6	Establish a DEIS Plus principal mentorship programme to provide ongoing support, guidance and opportunities for principals to discuss their experiences.	DEY		2027
2.7	Ensure that each school in the DEIS Plus scheme has its own full-time home-school-community liaison (HSCL) coordinator post.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.8	Provide a mentoring programme for all HSCL coordinators in the DEIS Plus scheme to support them in the role. This will also include additional support for managing the transition between HSCL assignments.	DEY		2027
2.9	Improve the allocation of whole-school guidance provision in post-primary schools in the DEIS Plus scheme to a ratio of 22 hours to 200 students.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.10	Introduce a pilot project to provide whole-school guidance provision for primary schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.11	Allocate five additional DEY inspectors to work with schools in the DEIS Plus scheme to support the effective planning and utilisation of resources and aid schools in measuring the impact of resources and initiatives.	DEY		Q3 2026

Improving school engagement, retention and progression				
	Action	Lead Dept(s)	Support Dept(s)	Timeline – action to be completed by
2.12	Allocate Oide professional learning leaders to support the provision of professional learning relevant to the needs of schools in the scheme and to support communities of practice for schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.13	Align the allocation of the DEIS grant to the most up-to-date data and the weighted approach under the refined DEIS identification model. This will allocate a greater weighting to children and young people impacted by intergenerational disadvantage, residing in international protection or emergency homeless accommodation and Traveller and Roma children and young people within the allocation of the DEIS grant, resulting in an increase for schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.14	Increase the capitation allocation for primary schools that have an enhanced staffing schedule under the DEIS programme. This includes primary schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.15	Provide funding for all schools in the DEIS Plus scheme to support breakfast clubs.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.16	Working with post-primary schools in the DEIS Plus scheme, introduce measures to support those schools to provide a more meaningful transition year experience, including work experience.	DEY		2027
2.17	Explore the extension of industry-driven initiatives that include work placements and learning opportunities to all post-primary schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DEY	DFHERIS, DETE	2027
2.18	Provide funding to enhance library provision in post-primary schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DEY		2027
2.19	Begin the roll-out of free period products to schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DEY		Q3 2026
2.20	Commence the roll-out of access to Anseo to all schools in the DEIS Plus scheme. Anseo is the evidence-based framework to help schools analyse and respond to attendance data in order to support better attendance at school.	DEY		Q3 2026

Increasing access to services and opportunities				
	Action	Lead Dept(s)	Support Dept(s)	Timeline – action to be completed by
3.1	Progress the roll-out of the City Connects service to two additional sites.	DEY		2027
3.2	Increase funding for the UBU Your Place Your Space scheme to provide youth services for young people attending schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DEY		Q3 2026
3.3	Continue and expand the Summer Holiday Meals Pilot Programme, which provides young people attending UBU Your Place Your Space youth services with a hot meal during the post-primary school holidays. Evaluate the programme and determine a plan for future roll-out.	DEY		Q3 2026
3.4	Engage with sporting organisations to work with schools in the DEIS Plus scheme to develop skills and promote physical activity.	DEY, DCCS		Q3 2026
3.5	Under Healthy Ireland and Healthy Communities programmes, work with the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, to establish and begin implementation of a work programme to support improved health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people attending schools in the DEIS Plus scheme and their families, by identifying and progressing collaborative community-based projects and initiatives that link healthy eating to food provenance by engaging in horticulture, cooking with fresh produce and visiting farms.	DEY, DH, DAFM		2028
3.6	Work with the Department of Health to establish and begin implementation of a work programme to support increased access to services and promote increased health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people attending schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DEY, DH		2028
3.7	Increase the numbers of community link workers to support schools in the DEIS Plus scheme to engage with minority groups and communities and increase participation in and progression through education.	DEY		Q3 2026
3.8	Increase funding for school completion projects that support children and young people who attend schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DEY		2027

Increasing access to services and opportunities				
	Action	Lead Dept(s)	Support Dept(s)	Timeline – action to be completed by
3.9	Undertake actions to improve uptake in Early Childhood Care and Education programmes and other forms of pre-school, supported by actions under the Equal Start model, by children in communities around schools in the DEIS Plus scheme.	DCDE	DEY	2028
3.10	Pilot a home visiting service approach in communities around schools in the DEIS Plus scheme, targeted at supporting children and families to be ready to begin primary school.	DCDE	DEY	Q3 2026
3.11	Develop and begin implementation of a work programme to promote greater partnership between schools in the DEIS Plus scheme and early learning and childcare settings, Children’s and Young People’s Services Committees, Local Community Development Committees and Local Community Safety Partnerships/Youth Diversion Projects and other local area-based projects.	DCDE, DEY, DJHAM		2028
3.12	Engage with third level institutions in the same region as schools in the DEIS Plus scheme to develop a proposal that provides opportunities for collaboration, placements and informing students and their families of pathways for progression.	DEY, DFHERIS		Q4 2026
3.13	Establish a DEIS Plus innovation and collaboration fund to support schools to work together with community services, industry, early years settings and third level institutions to trial innovative solutions to problems that are relevant to their school community.	DEY		2027

Glossary of abbreviations

Acronyms

CDNT	Children's Disability Network Team
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCCS	Department of Culture, Communications and Sport
DCDE	Department of Children, Disability and Equality
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DEY	Department of Education and Youth
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DH	Department of Health
DJHAM	Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration
DRCDG	Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht
EROC	Emergency Reception and Orientation Centre
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
IPAS	International Protection Accommodation Centre
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
NAMER	National Assessment of Numeracy and English Reading
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
POD	Primary Online Database
PPOD	Post-Primary Online Database
SCP	School Completion Programme
SSE	School self-evaluation
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

Terms

Anseo	An evidence-based framework to help schools analyse and respond to attendance data.
Oide	A support service for teachers and school leaders, funded by the Department of Education and Youth.
UBU	Your Place Your Space provides out of school supports to young people.

Notes



Dream Empower Inspire Succeed

