



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

DEIS Strategy to 2035

Ten-Year Strategy to Address
Educational Disadvantage



Dream Empower Inspire Succeed

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Minister's Foreword

As Minister for Education and Youth, I am determined to deliver a world-class education system where all children and young people, as well as those in the wider education community, feel valued, recognised, supported and empowered.

My department and I share an ambition to reduce educational disadvantage and promote equity across all schools, building on the work done to date through successive DEIS plans (2006 and 2017).

Poverty and social exclusion can impact children and young people's lives in a multiplicity of ways. Studies show that children and young people living in poverty are more likely to be exposed to physical and social environments that are unfavourable to many aspects of their development.

Education has the potential to break the cycle of disadvantage and create opportunities for better jobs, pay, and security in the future.

Education also impacts a range of other life outcomes, for example health and happiness. We know that the level of educational attainment a person gains can shape the future of their life. This demonstrates the importance of the targeted resources which are available through the DEIS programme.

The success of the DEIS programme is clear. Since its introduction the gap in retention rates between DEIS and non-DEIS schools has halved, and progression rates for DEIS students have also risen.

Ireland has an education system that consistently outperforms many other OECD countries but also exhibits relative socio-economic fairness. Through this new strategy we will build on these successes and continue to strive for an education system that is fair and accessible to all.

This strategy sets out the direction for the years ahead, with ambitious objectives that will help empower all children to succeed. It aims to ensure that all students are encouraged to be ambitious and are nurtured and supported to reach their full potential.

It has been developed through collaboration with principals, teachers, the Home School Community Liaison team, the School Completion programme team, parents and children and young people. This diverse engagement ensures that the strategy reflects lived experiences and ensures that the objectives outlined are designed to deliver greatest impact.

Government, my department and I will continue to work to tackle all forms of disadvantage in education and promote inclusivity, allowing all children to feel a sense of belonging, to be valued and to be empowered on their education journey.

This strategy is crucial to achieving this goal and will support school communities to create an environment where students feel supported and encouraged to progress in their chosen path.

Hildegard Naughton TD
Minister for Education and Youth



Secretary General's Foreword

Education has long been recognised as one of the most powerful means through which individuals, families and communities can realise their potential. The DEIS programme has, over many years, played a central role in ensuring that this potential is not constrained by socio-economic circumstance. This new strategy builds on that strong foundation, setting out a clear and purposeful direction for the years ahead, informed by evidence, experience and the voices of those working and learning within our schools.

The challenges facing children and young people are increasingly complex, shaped by social change, economic uncertainty and evolving expectations of the education system. In this context, DEIS remains a vital framework for targeted, responsive and sustained support. This strategy reflects a deep commitment to high-quality teaching and learning, strong leadership, and meaningful partnerships between schools, families, communities and support services. It recognises that lasting change is achieved not through isolated initiatives, but through consistent focus, shared responsibility and long-term investment.

This strategy also reflects a renewed emphasis on coherence across policy, practice and provision. It acknowledges that educational disadvantage is not static, and that our responses must be 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 will continue to evolve as a living framework. In doing so, it aims to ensure that supports are well-targeted, proportionate and capable of delivering meaningful and sustained improvement in the lives of children and young people.

Crucially, this strategy looks to the future while remaining grounded in what we know works. It seeks to strengthen outcomes for children and young people, support the wellbeing of school communities, and ensure that every child and young person is afforded the opportunity to thrive. I would like to acknowledge the dedication of school leaders, teachers, support staff and partners whose work underpins DEIS every day. Their professionalism and determination continue to shape a more inclusive and responsive education system, and this strategy is designed to support them in that endeavour.

Bernie Mc Nally
Secretary General
Department of Education and Youth



Vision Statement and Core Values

Our Vision for DEIS Strategy to 2035

The vision for the DEIS Strategy to 2035 is to address 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.

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

What the DEIS Strategy to 2035 means

For Children and Young People

This strategy focuses on positive learning outcomes for all children and young people experiencing educational disadvantage, supporting them to break through barriers, surpass their own educational expectations and reach the highest levels of educational attainment. Children and young people:

- feel valued, respected and experience a sense of belonging.
- gain greater confidence in their learning and barriers to achievement are addressed.
- are supported to stay in education and succeed at key transitions.
- are supported to reach their potential.

For Schools

Through this strategy, the Department of Education and Youth will continue to support schools and those who work in them to address educational disadvantage and promote inclusion. The strategy moves to a more flexible model for DEIS, meaning that over time schools will get the resources that reflect their level of need at a particular time, to better reflect the ever-changing nature of our schools.

- Schools are inclusive, welcoming places where every child and young person is valued and supported.
- High-quality teaching, strong leadership and positive relationships are prioritised.
- Attendance, engagement, participation and progression are actively promoted.
- Schools are empowered to respond to needs within their own context.

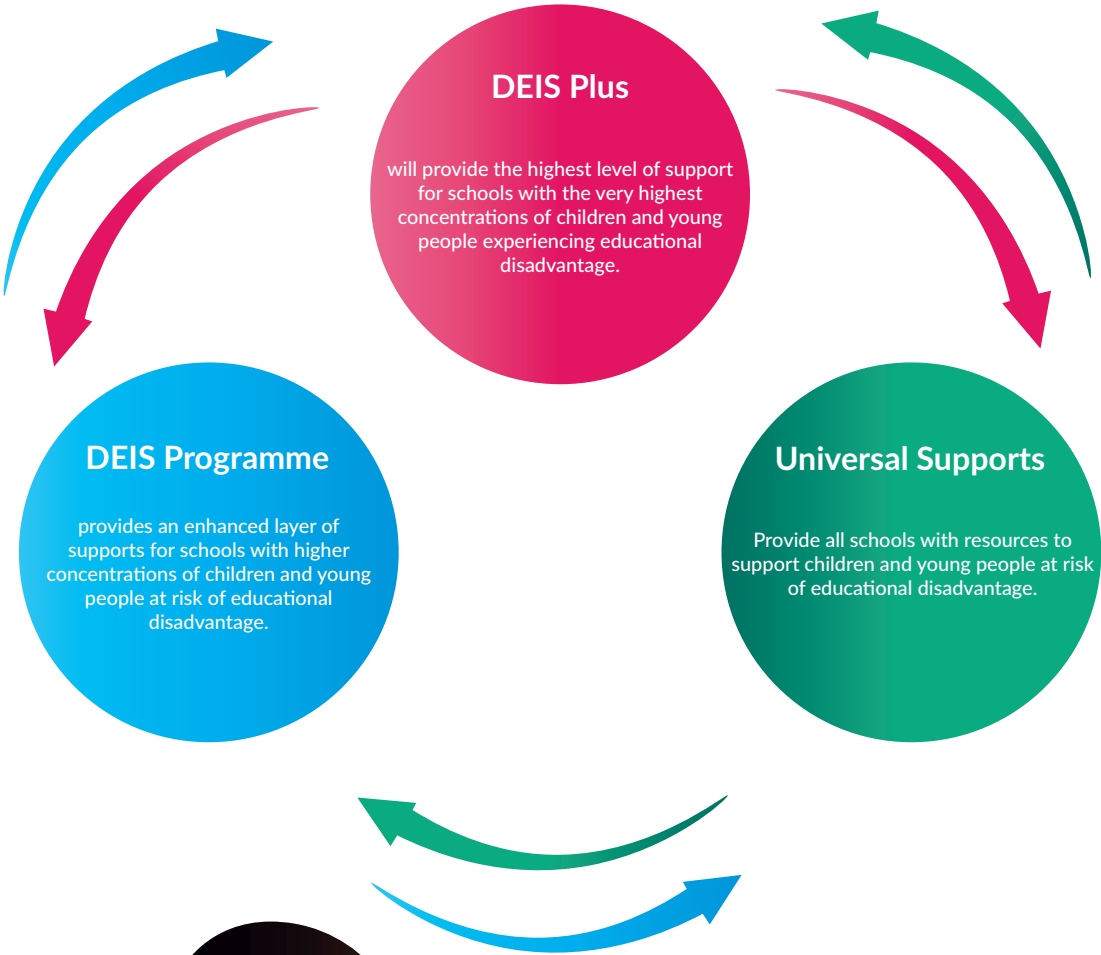
For Policy

This strategy recognises that education is the key to breaking the cycle of disadvantage, creating opportunities and ensuring security for the future. It introduces a long-term, whole-system approach to addressing educational disadvantage in all schools. As a result:

- Equity and inclusion are embedded across policy and practice.
- The Department of Education and Youth will coordinate across its own units and collaborate with other departments to deliver cohesive, coherent policies and supports to schools to address educational disadvantage.
- Policy decisions are informed by evidence, data and lived experience.
- Supports are flexible, targeted, coordinated and sustained over time.

What the DEIS Strategy to 2035 looks like

This vision for DEIS will be implemented at school-level through a continuum of support:



DEIS Values

This 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 this strategy. Their voices have been central to its development and the department 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

Education is the key to breaking cycles of disadvantage. Through the delivery of the 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 this strategy. A monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed with the ESRI to track progress.

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About this Strategy



About this strategy

Background

DEIS stands for 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools'. 'Deis' is also the Irish word for opportunity.

The DEIS programme is currently the main Government policy for addressing concentrated educational disadvantage at school level. It has been in place since 2006 and continues to provide a targeted range of supports to schools in the programme. The DEIS programme targets additional resources where they are most needed, in schools with the highest concentration of children and young people experiencing educational disadvantage.

Ireland's DEIS Programme is internationally recognised for its holistic approach to addressing educational disadvantage. The DEIS programme has seen schools and students make great gains in its 20 years of existence. The OECD review 2024 cited the relatively equitable education system in Ireland as a strength. The gap in retention rates of students between DEIS and non-DEIS post-primary schools has almost halved, from 16.8 percentage points to 8.7 percentage points. This means that more children and young people, and particularly those in DEIS schools are staying in school for longer and more young people are participating in senior cycle and sitting the Leaving Certificate.

Although gaps in standardised assessments for science, reading and maths persist and early school leaving continues to occur, Ireland is surpassing its European peers in this regard. Our children and young people are consistently scoring well in international tests for science, reading and maths and our early school leaving rate is far below the European average. In the OECD's 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessment, students in Ireland scored higher than the OECD average in science, reading, and mathematics. In the same assessment, students from higher-income backgrounds scored better overall. However, out of 85 participating countries, Ireland had the sixth-smallest gap between the scores of students from higher and lower-income backgrounds. Children and young people in schools in the DEIS programme are doing better than most of their counterparts across the OECD.

This suggests that, when provided with the right tools and support, children and young people in Ireland can thrive, highlighting the positive impact and direction of the DEIS programme.





Rationale for this strategy

Ireland and its school communities have changed significantly since schools were first supported under the DEIS programme in 2006.

Ireland's population in 2026 is over 5.1 million people, the highest since 1851, reflecting sustained population growth and significant inward migration. Today, 12.4% of the regularly resident population are non-Irish nationals, and more than 200 languages are spoken across Irish schools. This increasing diversity enriches school life and contributes to a more dynamic learning environment. It also requires enhanced focus on inclusion and building the capacity of schools to meet a wider range of cultural, social and emotional and educational needs.

Alongside population growth, social inequality has become more concentrated. The 2022 HP Deprivation Index shows a widening deprivation gap, with the number of very or extremely disadvantaged small areas rising from 576 in 2016 to 751 in 2022, affecting almost 196,000 people. These developments underscore the growing complexity of disadvantage in Ireland and the importance of a long-term, evidence-driven strategy to support the children and young people most affected.¹

A 2022 ESRI study on intergenerational poverty demonstrates that higher educational attainment significantly reduces the risk of poverty in adulthood, even when childhood disadvantage is present. Adults whose parents had third-level education are far less likely to experience poverty than those whose parents had only lower secondary education. Addressing inequalities in educational opportunities is therefore a key driver in breaking the cycle of poverty. The ESRI highlights the importance of access to high-quality early education, additional supports for the most disadvantaged schools and children, and measures to ensure greater equity of access to third-level education.

Further insights from the *Children's School Lives* (CSL) study (Devine et al., 2024a; 2024b; 2025) reinforce the need for an updated DEIS strategy. CSL Reports 8a–8c provide rich qualitative evidence on how class, gender, ethnicity and migration shape children's everyday experiences of school. While many children describe positive relationships and strong engagement, the reports also highlight persistent disparities in wellbeing, academic confidence, and participation. The CSL data show that children experiencing disadvantage are more likely to express fear, insecurity, and worry about their family's economic circumstances. These expressions reflect more than material hardship; they point to deeper feelings of uncertainty and instability that affect children's readiness to learn. The CSL findings also demonstrate that emotional, social, and relational aspects of school life—such as belonging, confidence, and security—influence children's experiences deeply, aligning with international evidence that disadvantage manifests in more than academic outcomes.

At a system level, the OECD Education for Inclusive Societies Project on *Resourcing Schools to Address Educational Disadvantage* highlights that Ireland performs strongly in reading, mathematics, and science, and has high levels of equity across primary and post-primary education. Ireland's socio-economic gap in educational attainment is narrower than the OECD average, and our system performs well in terms of fairness and inclusion. However, despite these strengths, differences in experiences and outcomes remain for many children and young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and from the Traveller and Roma communities. While positive progress has been made, disparities between schools in the DEIS programme and those outside the programme continue to exist.

¹ <https://www.pobal.ie/pobal-hp-deprivation-index/>

Against this backdrop, the new DEIS Strategy to 2035 sets a long-term plan to:

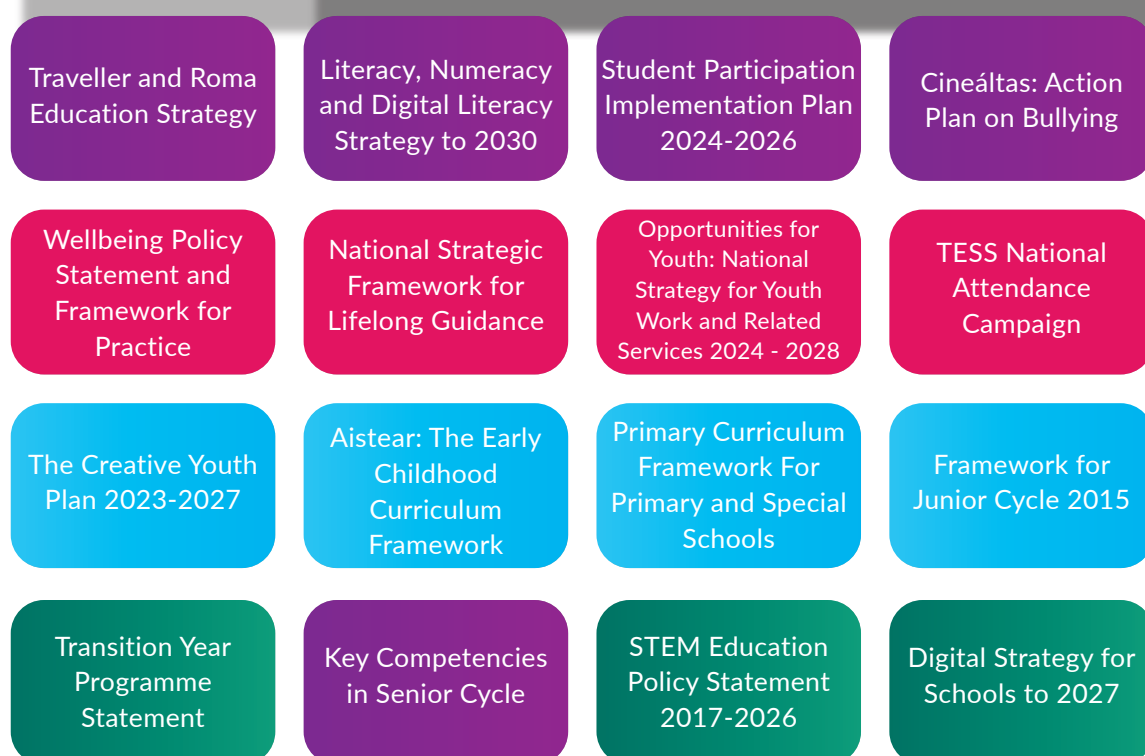
- **build on two decades of progress**, strengthening what works and addressing gaps identified through research and evaluation.
- **respond to a changing Ireland**, ensuring that DEIS reflects the diversity, support needs, and realities of today's school communities.
- **tackle persistent inequalities**, so that every child and young person can learn, participate and thrive in school.
- **focus on fairness and inclusion**, embedding these principles in every aspect of school policy, practice and support.
- **use evidence to drive improvement**, ensuring that data, research and school experience shape how resources and teaching and learning supports are targeted for the greatest impact.
- **Address educational disadvantage in all schools**, working to ensure that any child or young person experiencing educational disadvantage is supported through their education journey.

Policy Context

The DEIS Strategy to 2035 sits within a wider national and international policy framework that promotes inclusion, equity and opportunity for all children and young people. The strategy builds on existing strengths within the Irish education systems and reinforces Ireland's commitment to equity and inclusion across all levels of learning.

National Policy Context

The DEIS Strategy to 2035 aligns closely with existing strategies and policies of the Department of Education and Youth, along with the work of its agencies and partners.



The DEIS Strategy forms part of the cross-government approach to supporting the progress of children and young people experiencing educational disadvantage. This begins with Equal Start in early learning and care and school-age childcare settings, continues through the DEIS programme in schools, and extends to the National Access Plan 2022-2028 in further and higher education.

The strategy will also support the work to achieve the cross-government targets to reduce child poverty and align with the state's overall approach to improve social inclusion and reduce poverty across all groups, as well as at a national level. It will align with government approaches to support children and young people experiencing homelessness, residing in international protection and fleeing war, living with a disability, caring for others or who are living in care. The strategy will align with our Public Sector Duty and 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 their policies and plans.

Together, these policies create a joined-up continuum of support, ensuring that every child and young person has the opportunity to learn, participate, and succeed at each stage of their educational journey.

International Policy Context

The DEIS Strategy to 2035 supports Ireland's commitments under international and European frameworks that promote inclusive and equitable education.

This strategy builds on these insights to further strengthen targeted supports and ensure that resources are used effectively to promote equity and inclusion.

Under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), Ireland is committed to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Within the European Union, the strategy aligns with the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Education Area, the EU Child Guarantee and the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success, all of which emphasise access to quality education, inclusion and support for all children and young people, particularly those at risk of disadvantage.

The DEIS Strategy draws directly on findings and recommendations from the OECD Education for Inclusive Societies Project report on *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 continued focus on children and young people who face barriers to participation.

Through these frameworks, Ireland reaffirms its commitment to equity, inclusion and opportunity in education, ensuring that DEIS continues to evolve in line with international best practice and global education goals.

How it is informed – Shaping the Strategy

The DEIS Strategy to 2035 builds on the successes of the previous DEIS programme. This strategy aims to implement a new system-wide approach, informed by the availability of new data and by the research, evaluation, review and consultation that has taken place over the life of the DEIS programme.

The strategy is informed by people within our school communities, in particular, consultations with principals, deputy principals, teachers, Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) coordinators, School Completion Programme (SCP) coordinators and project workers, education partners/stakeholders, parents and children and young people. The consultation reports are available on gov.ie.

The DEIS Strategy to 2035 is also informed by:

- a programme steering group that oversees the development and implementation of the strategy
- a DEIS technical group that develops the department's data on educational disadvantage at school level
- a monitoring and evaluation group that oversees the development of a new monitoring and evaluation framework

A goal of this DEIS strategy is to bring the relevant services together to fully support children and young people experiencing educational disadvantage. This has been supported through the establishment of an interdepartmental working group on educational disadvantage that has informed the development of this strategy and will help progress its implementation.



**This strategy is informed
by those within our
school communities.**



Working in partnership with our stakeholders is a key element of this strategy and its implementation. This has been supported by two main groups:

- a DEIS advisory group that includes stakeholders from the education partners, advocacy groups and academia and advised on the development and implementation of the strategy.
- a DEIS Plus design advisory group that included school leaders, HSCL coordinators and SCP coordinators and informed a student-centred design approach for the DEIS Plus scheme.

Structure for implementation and reporting

This document is the ten-year DEIS strategy, setting out the vision, values and aims for tackling educational disadvantage in all schools over the next decade. It is intended that over the lifetime of the strategy there will be three implementation plans. The first has been published alongside this strategy document and covers 2026-2028. Two further implementation plans will follow covering 2029-2031 and 2032-2034. 2035 will serve as a final review and redevelopment year.

Annual progress reports will be published to track the delivery of actions. A key action under the strategy is the development and implementation of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to track and measure the impact of the implementation of the new DEIS Strategy. This framework will build on what we currently use to measure outcomes and impacts, such as literacy and numeracy results, attendance, attainment, and retention data.

The first implementation plan provides the outcomes and objectives under each of the five pillars and will contribute towards the achievement of progress under all DEIS themes.

The focus of subsequent implementation plans will be to build and extend on the work and learnings of the first implementation plan, to scale initiatives that work and to incorporate new initiatives as appropriate.

3

DEIS
Themes



DEIS Themes

Schools are guided in their planning and reporting process by the seven DEIS themes. Consultation and research indicate that these themes are effective as a means of monitoring DEIS outcomes and therefore, progress will continue to be measured in this way under the new DEIS Strategy.

However, as we continue to monitor and evaluate progress over the lifetime of this strategy, the themes will be kept under review with schools and other key stakeholders, to ensure their continued relevance.

This aligns with the school-level approach to DEIS action planning and self-evaluation. Schools outside the DEIS programme do not currently use these themes but are required to include context-specific school priorities related to teaching, learning, equity and inclusion. The monitoring and evaluation process will be supported by the DEY Inspectorate.

The seven DEIS themes are interlinked, meaning progress under one will have a positive impact on others, with the aim to improve outcomes for children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage. All themes are reflected in each of the five pillars in the DEIS Strategy to 2035.



Theme 1: Attendance

Regular attendance in school is essential for all children and young people, not just for academic attainment, but for wellbeing, social development and long-term life outcomes. Missing school days has a huge impact on children and young people engaging with and staying in school. Children and young people attending schools in the DEIS programme are missing more school days than those not in the DEIS programme. This has an overall impact on teaching and learning outcomes within the school.

- 35.54% of students in primary schools in the DEIS programme have been absent 20 days or more in a year, compared to 19.49% in other schools (2023/2024 school year)
- 28.3% of students in the post-primary schools in the DEIS programme have been absent for 20 days or more in a year compared to 18.6% in non-DEIS schools (2023/2024 school year)

Under the DEIS Strategy to 2035, we aim to make continued annual improvement on school attendance levels. To achieve this, the department aims to encourage all involved in supporting school attendance to see attendance as centrally linked to

- school climate and environment
- the extent to which children and young people feel welcome and included in their school
- the extent to which children and young people find classroom experience engaging, interesting, relevant and experience success in their learning
- the quality of the links between home and school.



Theme 2: Retention

Retention means children and young people staying in the school system to senior cycle and completing the Leaving Certificate. Students attending schools in the DEIS programme are less likely to complete school to Leaving Certificate level when compared to those in non-DEIS schools.

Importantly, each stage of the educational pathway (early years, primary and post-primary) has an important role in supporting retention and preventing early school leaving. Retention involves acknowledging that the predictors of early school leaving may be evident early on the educational pathway. These predictors include lack of engagement in challenging learning activities, poor attendance and punctuality, and limited home-school engagement.

Since the introduction of DEIS in 2006 retention rates to Leaving Certificate have risen from 68.2% to 83.4% (2017 entry cohort). Also, the gap in retention rate between DEIS and non-DEIS schools has reduced from 16.8 to 8.7 percentage points.

This strategy aims to continue to increase the number of young people completing the Leaving Certificate in schools in the DEIS programme.



Theme 3: Attainment at post-primary

Young people in schools in the DEIS programme have lower attainment outcomes than those in non-DEIS schools. They are less likely to take higher level subjects to Leaving Certificate level, particularly in mathematics and are more likely to obtain exemptions for subjects including Irish and foreign languages.

The impact of this is reduced opportunities to progress to higher education and future employment.

Young people who have attended schools in the DEIS programme are also underrepresented in STEM careers. We will continue to link with industry, including through programmes like the STEM Passport and PTech, ensuring that there are open pathways to all children and young people for future progression.

This strategy aims to increase the attainment levels of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage, particularly in taking higher level subjects and engaging with Irish, foreign languages and STEM subjects to maximise progression opportunities.

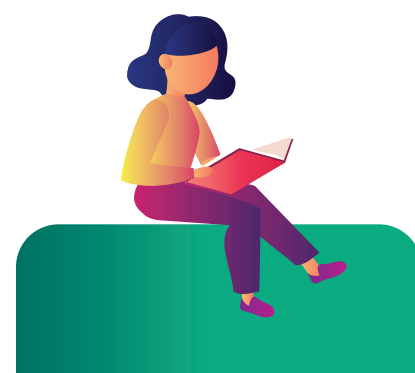
Theme 4: Supporting Transitions

Smooth and supported transitions through the education system, from early years to primary, primary to post-primary, and on to further and higher education and the world of work, are key to improving educational outcomes. Positive transitions at each stage reduce the potential for early school leaving.

The gap in transfer from post-primary to higher education between DEIS and non-DEIS schools narrowed in 2023 to 24.9%, down from the previous peak in 2022 of 27.6%. We aim to continue to address this gap, to ensure that all children and young people have equal opportunities to reach their full potential and progress to higher education.

Students from post-primary schools in the DEIS programme are less likely to enter and to stay in higher education, with only 45.8% progressing to higher education in 2023, compared to 70.7% from other schools.

This strategy aims to improve transitions at every stage of the education journey.



Theme 5: Literacy outcomes

Literacy refers to a broad range of skills. It includes the ability to use and understand spoken language, print, writing and digital media². Literacy also includes reading for enjoyment and with critical understanding, expressing ideas clearly and accurately and exploring and creating a variety of texts, including multi-modal texts.³ Literacy is a gateway skill for all learning, as good literacy skills facilitate learning across all areas.

Children and young people in schools in the DEIS programme, and those at risk of educational disadvantage in all schools, are more likely to have poorer literacy and digital literacy skills than their peers in non-DEIS schools.

The National Assessment of Numeracy and English Reading (NAMER) 2021 and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 both reported a significant achievement gap between DEIS Urban Band 1 schools and DEIS Urban Band 2 schools and non-DEIS schools that showed no significant improvement from the previous assessments. NAMER 2021 noted that in the DEIS Urban Band 1 schools sampled, 12.9% of children were very low achievers in English reading. PIRLS 2021 also found that children in the lowest socioeconomic status quartile achieved substantially lower mean scores than pupils with higher socioeconomic status – overall and on all PIRLS subscales.

These large-scale national and international assessments will be complemented by the review of standardised testing outcomes to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement.

This strategy aims to improve the performance of all children and young people in the national and international assessment. It aims to minimise the gap in attainment between DEIS and non-DEIS schools and improve the performance of children and young people in DEIS schools in national and international assessments for literacy.



² Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020, Department of Education and Skills, 2011

³ Framework for Junior Cycle, Department of Education and Skills, 2015

Theme 6: Numeracy outcomes

Numeracy also refers to a broad range of skills and is another gateway skill for learning. Numeracy is much more than the ability to use numbers. It involves the ability to think and communicate quantitatively, to make sense of data, to have a spatial awareness and to understand patterns and sequences. It also includes the skills of measuring accurately, estimating, predicting and calculating, and the ability to recognise situations where mathematical reasoning can be applied to solve problems.

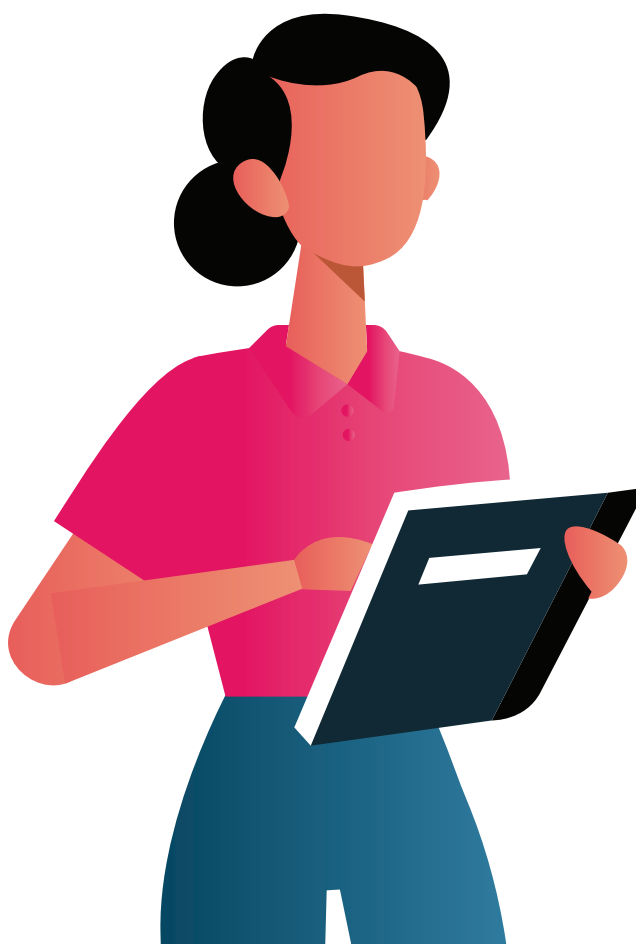
Children and young people in schools in the DEIS programme, and those at risk of educational disadvantage in all schools, are more likely to have poorer numeracy skills than their peers in non-DEIS schools.

In the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2023, children and young people in both Urban Band 1 and Urban Band 2 schools at primary level, and in DEIS post-primary schools received significantly lower scores than those in non-DEIS schools. This was mirrored in NAMER 2021, which noted that 16.7% of children and young people in the Urban Band 1 schools sampled were categorised as very low achievers in mathematics.

In PISA 2022, Ireland showed a smaller performance gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children and young people compared with the OECD average. However, in mathematics, children and young people attending schools in the DEIS programme had a significantly lower (-35.6 points) mean score than those attending non-DEIS schools.

These large-scale national and international assessments will be complemented by the review of standardised testing outcomes to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement.

This strategy aims to improve the performance of all children and young people in the national and international assessment. It aims to minimise the gap in attainment between DEIS and non-DEIS schools and improve the performance of children and young people in DEIS schools in national and international assessments for numeracy.



Theme 7: Parental and community engagement

Partnership with parents involves parents and teachers working together to share knowledge, to understand children's interests and abilities and to discover how best to support their learning.

The parents of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage are more likely to have poorer educational outcomes themselves. Often parents who experience disadvantage, including Traveller and Roma parents, have had poor experiences of the education system which can impact their ability to engage with and support their child's learning. Compared with students in schools outside the DEIS programme, students in schools in the DEIS programme had significantly lower scores on the index⁴ of parental support for learning at home. Building strong relationships with families is key to fostering trust, support, and active participation in their children's education.

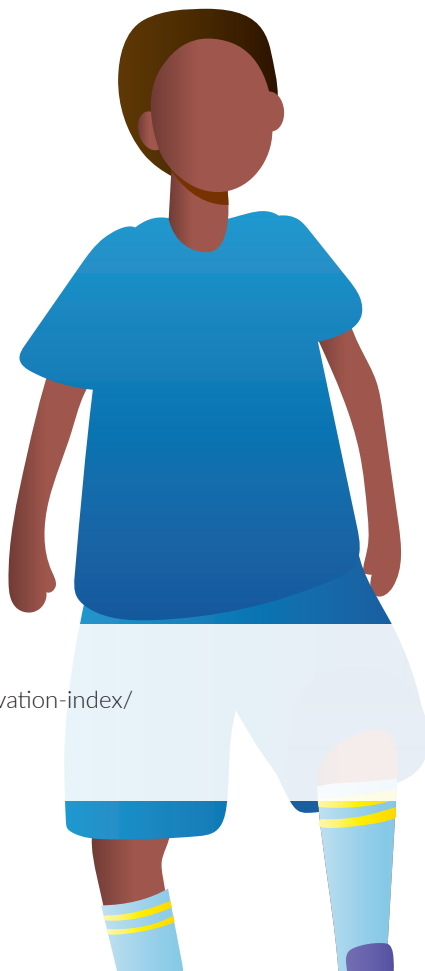
Partnerships with other stakeholders in the school community will help to forge connections with local organisations and industry that offer support and opportunities for children and young people to explore their interests, access mentoring and prepare for the world of work.

This strategy aims to increase engagement between schools and families, as well as promoting greater engagement between schools in the DEIS programme and the support needs in their communities.

Three integrated themes

Three additional DEIS themes: Leadership, Teacher Professional Learning and Wellbeing are integrated across the main seven themes and are critical to the achievement of successful outcomes.

We aim to strengthen and support leadership, teacher professional learning and to promote positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes through this strategy.



⁴ <https://www.pobal.ie/pobal-hp-deprivation-index/>

4

DEIS Pillars and Strategic Outcomes



Section 4

DEIS Pillars and Strategic Outcomes





Pillar 1

Empowering children and young people impacted by intergenerational poverty and disadvantage to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage through improved educational outcomes

Outcomes

Children and young people who are impacted by intergenerational poverty and disadvantage will be empowered to succeed in school and progress to meaningful career paths, initiating positive impacts for future generations.

While significant progress has been made in improving the educational outcomes of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage more needs to be done to tackle educational disadvantage and equip children and young people to succeed.

Further support is particularly required in schools where there is a very high concentration of children and young people impacted by intergenerational poverty and disadvantage. In response to this, a new DEIS plus scheme is being introduced. DEIS Plus aims to support schools with the highest concentrations of students at risk of educational disadvantage, through addressing the barriers that result from intergenerational poverty and disadvantage, building connections with families and the community and providing school staff the time to be a positive influence for a brighter future. This scheme will provide additional support to schools to improve educational outcomes and help to achieve our goal of moving more children out of poverty and giving them the future they deserve.



Strategic objective 1.1 Implement the DEIS Plus scheme to support schools with the highest concentrations of children and young people impacted by intergenerational poverty and disadvantage.

The DEY will implement the DEIS Plus scheme in collaboration with other government departments and agencies. Ongoing monitoring, assessment and evaluation will ensure that resources are allocated fairly, effectively, and with the agility needed to respond to specific support needs and direct funding to where it is needed most.

See details of the DEIS Plus Scheme, online at www.gov.ie/DEIS

Strategic objective 1.2 Support children and young people who are impacted by acute disadvantage in all schools.

The objective data used by the department identifies that there are children and young people impacted by intergenerational disadvantage in schools that are not in the DEIS programme. There are also children and young people in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools, who are experiencing homelessness, residing in international protection, Tusla residential care and experiencing other forms of disadvantage. Using objective data to inform resource allocation, elements of the DEIS programme will be expanded to support students most at risk of educational disadvantage attending schools that are not in the DEIS programme. Existing schemes and projects will be evaluated and their potential to be extended to more students in schools outside of DEIS will be assessed.



Spotlight on schools

A school and Community Wellbeing Project

Family Support Worker

As a family support worker within the wellbeing programme, and as a past pupil of the school, my role is grounded in the belief that empowerment begins with being seen, heard and believed in. Having once walked these same corridors as a child, I understand the lasting impact a supportive school community can have in shaping futures and expanding what feels possible.

In this instance, a parent came to the school feeling overwhelmed and unsure how to access mental health support. Through trust built over time, we created a space where she felt safe enough to share her story. Together, we identified supports that would empower her to move forward, and she was supported to access psychotherapy through the programme.

At the same time, her child participated in a parent and child music therapy dyad, offering a nurturing space for connection, co-regulation and emotional expression. Support was intentionally layered, recognising that empowerment is not one dimensional and that children flourish when the adults around them are supported too. By strengthening the parent's wellbeing alongside the child's emotional development, this integrated approach-built confidence, restored a sense of agency and supported re-engagement with education. This is how cycles begin to shift, when families are empowered not just to cope, but to believe in new possibilities for their future.

Parent Perspective

When I first came to the school, I felt stuck and uncertain about how to support my child. I knew I wanted more for both of us, but I was not sure where to begin. From the moment I reached out, I felt welcomed, respected and never judged, and that gave me the courage to accept help.

Being supported to access psychotherapy through the school's wellbeing programme was transformative. For the first time, I felt truly listened to, and slowly I began to understand my own journey. With that understanding came confidence, and with confidence came a growing sense that my future could look different.

Taking part in the parent and child music therapy sessions helped me reconnect with my child in a calm and positive way. As our relationship strengthened, I began to see how caring for my own wellbeing was empowering not only me, but my child too.

With the encouragement of the school, I found the confidence to return to education, something I once believed was beyond my reach. Today as I walk the corridors of a third level institution, I feel empowered to build a different future for my family. My child now sees opportunity where I once saw limitation, and that belief is already helping to break the cycle for the next generation.





Pillar 2

Pillar 2

Identifying need, allocating resources and evaluating impact

Outcome

The development of policy and the resourcing of schools to tackle educational disadvantage are informed, monitored and evaluated using the most relevant, accurate data available.

For policy to be effective, it must be informed by the most accurate and relevant data possible. School demographics change over time; therefore, the data needs to be regularly reassessed to appropriately align the level of resources provided to schools with their level of need. Accurate and up-to-date data will also aid in timely policy responses should new issues emerge.

Strategic objective 2.1 Continue to enhance the accuracy and relevance of the data used to inform policy, including the targeted resourcing of schools, to tackle educational disadvantage.

The DEY will work with education stakeholders and colleagues across government departments and agencies to continue to enhance and refine the data that will inform our policy development and resource allocation decisions. This will lead to fairer and more effective allocations, ensuring that schools have the resources they need to provide additional support to the children who most need it.

Strategic objective 2.2 Develop an agile resource allocation model to support children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage in all primary and post-primary schools.

The DEY will develop an agile resource allocation model that can respond to changing needs and deliver timely, targeted assistance to schools when and where it is needed most.

Strategic objective 2.3 Develop, publish and implement a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

The DEY will develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to track the implementation and impact of this strategy. This framework will improve transparency and determine which actions are having the greatest impact in terms of delivering better learning outcomes for children and young people. Annual progress reports will be published to track delivery against objectives.

Spotlight on schools

Principal, DEIS post-primary school

In our school we pride ourselves on the excellent rapport we've cultivated with our students and parents. This trust-driven relationship is a cornerstone of our DEIS Plan, enabling us to gather rich qualitative data that goes beyond numbers. Our vision is realised through that rapport. Our students feel safe sharing their experiences, aspirations and challenges and this helps us tailor supports that truly meet their needs. As an inspector commented "A real stand out is, teachers know their students very well. They know how to provide an agile response to students' wellbeing and their educational needs so as to optimise educational outcomes".

We constantly strive to develop and sustain strong parental partnerships with regular, empathetic engagement ensuring that parent voice and insights are central in identifying need, allocating resources and evaluating impact. Through surveys, focus groups and one-to-one check-ins, we capture very valuable nuanced feedback on what works, what does not work and how we can improve.

We have developed a strong culture of learning and improvement in our school and all staff constantly upskill and share best practice with peers. We ensure that teachers are given a platform to do this, thus ensuring a wide range of highly effective whole-school wellbeing, teaching and learning strategies are not just implemented throughout the school but are impacting positively on students' experiences and outcomes. We constantly upskill on tracking key metrics, gathering feedback and reviewing interventions so that we provide highly individualised targeted support in a timely manner to our young people with identified needs.

We prioritise the integration of the DEY frameworks such as DEIS, Wellbeing, Looking at Our School, Student Voice and Provision Mapping and this integrated approach impacts in every aspect of school life in a powerful way to bring about exemplary learner experiences and learner outcomes for students. These frameworks have facilitated us in the development of robust structures, a rigorous approach to gathering, analysing and reviewing data, meaningful inclusion of parent and student voice and the implementation of systematic whole school approaches in a pre-emptive and timely manner.

In our school we are more than educators, we pride ourselves on being a supportive professional team and custodians of a living ethos shaped by the values of excellence in education, equity, care, community and respect.

DEIS Action Planning in our school is central to that ethos and fuels our efforts to create a supportive, inclusive environment where every student is supported to think and grow and to develop versatile skills that prepare them to play a positive, productive role in their communities. We aim to embed the belief that education can be transformative, it is a force that can change lives and shape futures.

Identifying student needs, allocating resources effectively and evaluating impact is at the heart of fostering equity and opportunity for our diverse student population. In our school it is not just about the data, it's about relationships and that is what makes the difference.





Pillar 3

The school in partnership with parents and the community

Outcome

Stronger partnerships between schools, families and communities which support more inclusive opportunities for children and young people, reduce barriers to participation, and improve access to coordinated, integrated services.

Schools play a vital role at the heart of their communities. Meaningful partnership between schools, families, government agencies, local organisations and industry is essential to ensuring every child and young person is empowered to access opportunities and succeed through education. By working collaboratively with the wider community, schools become inclusive environments that recognise and respond to the diverse needs, backgrounds and interests of all children and young people.

Strategic Objective 3.1 Strengthen partnerships between schools, families and the community

The DEY will develop and expand effective partnership approaches by evaluating existing initiatives, supporting and strengthening home-school links and promoting wider community engagement.

Strategic Objective 3.2 Continue to support schools and progress a reduction in the cost of education

The DEY will work to reduce the financial burden on families by reviewing cost-related policies and improving funding structures to minimise the financial barriers to equal participation and progression in education, including a focus on books, uniforms, transport and meals.

Strategic Objective 3.3 Improve collaboration between government departments and agencies and better integration of services to tackle educational disadvantage

The DEY will drive stronger cross-government collaboration to address educational disadvantage and tackle child poverty through better coordination, shared data, and aligned strategies. By promoting integrated, cross-sector initiatives, the DEY will deliver more consistent and effective support for children and young people

Spotlight on schools

Food Without Borders – A school and community project

HSCL experience:

This project from TESS for me as a HSCL is about more than recipes, it was about connection. I invited one parent to share her journey from Venezuela to Ireland and the story behind her mum's arepas. From that first conversation to seeing her recipe in print, it showed the power of partnership. This project strengthened relationships, celebrated culture, and reminded us that when parents feel included, the whole school community shines.

The launch of the cookbook at TU Dublin was a proud moment for our school community. We were invited to speak about the journey behind the cookbook, sharing how a simple idea grew into a celebration of culture, connection, and partnership. Standing on that stage, showcasing our school's commitment to inclusion and parent involvement, reaffirmed something vital for me, when parents are actively engaged in their child's education, it builds trust, deepens relationships, and enriches the learning experience for everyone.

Parent experience:

When I was asked to share my story for the cookbook, I felt honoured. Moving from Venezuela to Ireland was a big change, and food helped me feel at home. My mum's arepas recipe is full of memories and bringing it to life again was emotional. It felt like having her with me. Through parent courses, I've built friendships and stronger connections with other parents, and this project made me feel truly part of the school community.

Attending the Food Without Borders launch in Dublin was such a lovely day. Walking into the venue and seeing the cookbook displayed felt amazing, my mum's arepas recipe was there for everyone to enjoy. It wasn't just a book that I got to take home, it was a celebration of my culture and my childhood memories. Meeting other parents, sharing stories, and feeling the pride of contributing to something so meaningful made me feel truly connected and valued. I even got to do an interview for the radio!





Pillar 4

Attending, enjoying and participating in school

Outcome

School attendance improves among children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage across all schools, driven by inclusive, high-quality learning environments that foster enjoyment, belonging, wellbeing, social development and academic achievement for every child and young person.

Our goal is to cultivate active engagement, participation and enjoyment in learning. We want to ensure that each child and young person is appropriately challenged in school and experiences success in their learning. Ultimately, we want to support all children and young people to progress to the next stage in their educational journey and ultimately to play a meaningful role in society. It is important that schools are inclusive and welcoming environment for children and young people, and their families. Building strong, trusting relationships with families is essential to fostering collaboration, support, and shared responsibility for each child and young person's educational journey.

Strategic Objective 4.1 Increase school attendance levels of children and young people in all schools, but in particular, for children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage.

Regular attendance is essential for children and young people to succeed through education. When children and young people miss school, they lose valuable learning opportunities. The DEY and TESS will continue to work with children and young people, parents, education stakeholders, and colleagues across government departments and agencies to monitor and assess attendance trends and strengthen initiatives to improve school attendance.

Strategic Objective 4.2 Support school leaders, teachers, and school staff to inspire children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage, to set high expectations for their future and to achieve success through education.

School staff have a powerful and inspiring influence on the lives of children and young people. They encourage high aspirations and empower children and young people to be ambitious and positive about their future. The DEY will work with school staff to promote participation in targeted professional learning and communities of practice that deepen understanding of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of children and young people and empower them to create inclusive environments that promote engagement and success.

Strategic Objective 4.3 Support the mental health and wellbeing needs of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage.

Informed by the implementation of the *Wellbeing Framework for Practice* in schools and of recent pilot programmes, the DEY in partnership with relevant government departments and agencies, will support schools to promote wellbeing and support the mental health of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage. Supporting their mental health and wellbeing enables children and young people to benefit from high-quality teaching and to achieve educational success.



Spotlight on schools

Principal, Urban DEIS band 1 primary school

Our approach to tackling attendance issues is founded on the belief that a school must first be a nurturing, supportive environment where every child feels they belong. While we are encouraged by a 4% increase in our attendance figures over the last two years, we see this not as a final achievement, but as a steady reflection of a deepening partnership between our staff, our families, and the wider community.

Our strategy balances systematic monitoring, the removal of barriers and the never-ending work of making our school the most nurturing and caring school it can be. Our school attendance team (SAT) meets weekly to review data, plan actions and coordinate support. This team is truly collaborative and includes members of the senior management team, our nurture teacher and our City Connects coordinator, whose work in providing enriching activities and building family connections is vital.

We also think it is very important to encourage accountability in parents and guardians, so we send 'nudge' letters home at 5, 10, 15 and 20 days absent, while the SAT make regular phone calls to target families, whose attendance is concerning.

To keep energy high around attendance, we let classes know their own particular attendance statistics and try to encourage competition between them. We run various whole-school initiatives throughout the year too where class prizes are won. This healthy competition builds a collective sense of responsibility. This is furthered by our Student Council, who visit classrooms and speak at assemblies to champion the importance of being present.

Through the Anseo pilot, we are also introducing more bespoke supports, such as "Check-in, Check-out" and mentoring programmes for marginalised groups. These initiatives run alongside the essential work of our Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinator, who builds trust through home visits and works tirelessly to support target families. By making attendance both a visible priority and a celebrated part of school life, we are fostering a culture where everyone knows that everyday counts, and every child is missed when they are not here.





Pillar 5

Learning, developing and progressing

Outcome

Children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage have access to high-quality, inclusive learning. They receive targeted support to improve outcomes in a range of subject areas and are empowered to progress and achieve success at every stage of their education.

Setting high expectations and ensuring children and young people are suitably challenged in their learning is central to tackling educational disadvantage. Strengthening teaching and learning is key to support effective development and progression. This includes promoting high-quality learning experiences in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, and embedding inclusive, evidence-informed practices across all schools. It also includes identifying ambitious pathways for children and young people to progress onto apprenticeships, further and higher education and fulfilling careers.

Strategic Objective 5.1 Improve the educational outcomes in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy for children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage.

The DEY will provide strategic oversight and guidance to schools, allocate targeted resources, and monitor outcomes to ensure interventions effectively improve the learning outcomes for children at risk of educational disadvantage. It will also support access to professional learning for teachers and promote the implementation of evidence-informed practices in schools to provide high-quality, inclusive learning experiences in literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy.

Strategic Objective 5.2 Continue to incorporate the perspectives and lived experiences of children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage in the development and implementation of policy.

The DEY will actively incorporate the perspectives and lived experiences of children and young people into policy development and review. This will involve engaging with children and young people, consulting key stakeholders, and ensuring that policy decisions are responsive to the diverse contexts that influence learning, development, and progression.

Strategic Objective 5.3 Increase collaboration with further and higher education institutions and industry to provide children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage with equal access to pathways that enable them to progress, achieve and gain the skills for a brighter future.

The DEY will collaborate with education and industry partners to remove barriers and promote access to further and higher education and sustainable employment particularly for young people at risk of educational disadvantage. It will also develop and support targeted initiatives that enable children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage to reach their full potential.

Over the lifetime of the DEIS Strategy to 2035, progress will be supported through a series of phased implementation plans and monitored through regular reporting to ensure transparency and accountability. The first implementation plan, to be read in conjunction with this strategy, is available online at www.gov.ie/DEIS.



Spotlight on schools

Principal, DEIS post-primary school

In our school, we pride ourselves on creating a positive, inclusive and structured learning environment where all students are supported to achieve their full individual potential both inside and outside of the classroom. This is reflected in our DEIS inspection findings which noted that “a shared understanding of effective and manageable teaching and learning practices was achieved as an outcome of DEIS action planning for improvement.” High quality teaching and learning is central to our work and underpins all aspects of school life.

Our goal to attain good quality learning outcomes is realised through purposeful DEIS action planning that guides whole-school improvement and ensures consistency in teaching, learning and assessment. During our recent DEIS inspection, inspectors reported that “the implementation of whole-school teaching practices was purposefully planned and used as a strategy for improving learning outcomes across the DEIS themes.” Agreed practices, including “DEIS doorway habits, lesson starters and teaching strategies,” are implemented across our classrooms to improve areas like attendance, retention and punctuality, literacy and numeracy as well as teaching, learning and opportunity.

Over time, we have developed an incredibly strong culture of positive relationships for learning. Through our clearly stated classroom guidelines, our teachers greet each student at their door to ensure that all children are “warmly welcomed to class and experience a positive and affirming atmosphere that is conducive to attendance and to engagement.” Very good relationships for learning are clearly evident throughout our school, and during our inspection it was noted that students “responded very well to the continuous emphasis on positive relationships and to their teachers’ expectations for engagement and productive work.”

Our motto here is “Care, Courage, and Support”. Through this, students are helped to feel confident, supported and motivated in their learning. They are thought to understand learning routines and expectations, and it was noted that they “had their copybooks, homework and materials ready on their desks from the start of lessons.” Students “stayed on task throughout their lessons, committing to all activities given to them and answering teacher questions.” Inspectors again noted how students demonstrated “good outcomes in their participation in class and their understanding of key concepts,” as well as good capacity for key skills, including “working together” and strong digital literacy skills.

We prioritise high-quality learning experiences that actively engage students and promote deep understanding. During our inspection, it was found that learning was best when “students engaged in collaborative activities and teachers set students up for learning through a task that required students to talk productively on the topic, to think critically, to demonstrate the skill being learned or to research aspects of a concept.” These approaches “built a solid foundation for understanding and enhanced their engagement for teacher exposition.” Inspectors found that teachers scaffold learning effectively through “manageable notes and activities,” which students reported they appreciate.

Our school is about clarity, consistency and high expectations. Teachers were “clear about what students needed to know by the end of the lesson,” and used “learning intentions and success criteria to support students in making progress.” Students experienced a motivating variety of assessments including “worksheets, quizzes, homework and tests,” and received “affirming verbal feedback from teachers on their work.”

We have developed a strong learning environment where classrooms support motivation, literacy and student pride. Inspectors found that “classroom environments were very well developed to support students’ motivation for the subject and their literacy and to display their work.” Staff reported that “ongoing school improvement has led to smoother lessons and better day-to-day learning.”

Through consistent whole-school practices, strong relationships and a clear focus on effective teaching and learning, our school continues to attain and sustain good-quality practices that support positive outcomes for all students.

5

Glossary of Abbreviations



Glossary of Abbreviations

CSL	Children's School Lives
DEIS	Delivery Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DEY	Department of Education and Youth
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EU	European Union
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
NAMER	National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIRLS	Progress in International and Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SAT	School Attendance Team
SCP	School Completion Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics
TESS	Tusla Education Support Service
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study



Dream Empower Inspire Succeed

