

Programme for Government

Commitments for Children & Young People



Introduction

On 15 June 2020, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party published 'A Programme for Government – Our Shared Future'.

The commitments to Children and Young People below are extracts from the Programme for Government of key commitments relating to children and young people. You can read the full document [here](#).

Note: As the information is sourced from an external party, we do not accept responsibility for its content. Please note this document is a summary only and should not be taken to be a complete representation of the Programme for Government.

Transport

- Dramatically increase the number of children walking and cycling to primary and secondary school by mandating the Department of Transport to work with schools across Ireland, local authorities, the Green Schools programme and local initiatives, including Cycle Bus and School Streets.
- Ramp up the Cycle Right programme to ensure that all children are offered cycling training in primary school.

Healthcare

- Extend free GP care to more children
- Abolish in-patient hospital charges for children
- Extend free dental care to more children
- Introduce baby boxes for all new parents
- Open the National Children's Hospital
- Work with key stakeholders to introduce a Public Health Obesity Act, including examining restrictions on promotion and advertising aimed at children.
- Introduce planning restrictions on outlets selling high calorie 'junk-food' and beverages adjacent to schools.
- Extend the oral health promotion programme to reach all children in primary schools.
- Work to encourage increased participation in Physical Education in primary and secondary education.

- Encourage close collaboration between the Departments of Education, Health and Sport and sporting organisations to encourage and enable physical activity amongst children, in particular at primary school.
- Continue to support the National Vaccine Alliance in promoting the uptake of childhood vaccines and reducing vaccine hesitancy.
- Examine the inclusion of chicken pox vaccine in the children's immunisation schedule.
- Increase resources for the Children's Palliative Care Programme. This will be supported by consultants with a special interest in children's palliative care and children's outreach nurses to coordinate care for children with life-limiting conditions and their families.
- Publish a new Palliative Care Policy for Adults by mid-2021 to update the 2001 policy. This will reflect the many developments in end-of life care and international best practice and better interact with children's palliative care.

Mental Health

- Work to end the admission of children to adult psychiatric units by increasing in-patient beds, as well as examining the model of assigning these beds.
- Continue to resource the national roll out of the model care for Specialist Perinatal Mental Health, with the expansion of mental health supports to be made available to both parents and parents of adopted children.
- Implement the Pathfinder inter-departmental unit on youth mental health
- Complete the update of the 2001 Mental Health Act, including amendments to allow young people, aged 16-17 years old, the right to consent to treatment for their mental health.

Young People & Rural Ireland

- Establish a Rural Youth Assembly as part of a National Youth Assembly to allow young people in rural Ireland identify and influence policy issues that impact on them and their future.
- Seek to increase funding for the national network of Comhairle na nÓg.
- Encourage young people to participate in community development initiatives through special awards for youth-led involvement e.g. Tidy Towns Youth Award.

- Establish a national network of Teen Sheds similar to Mens' Sheds.
- Commission research using the ESRI's Growing up in Ireland on outcomes for children and young people in rural Ireland.
- Support the work of Young Social Innovators to assist young people to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath in Ireland, to address issues facing their communities and the country as a whole, and to harness their energy, skills and talent.
- Expand access to social innovation programmes to all post primary schools.

Social Protection

- Work across government to address food poverty in children and ensure no child goes hungry.
- Act to reform our child maintenance system and address key issues such as calculation, facilitation and enforcement, guided by international best practice and in light of the findings of the Murphy review.

Direct Provision

The document states that the new government will be "Committed to ending the Direct Provision system and will replace it with a new International Protection accommodation policy centred on a not-for-profit approach"

- Publish a White Paper by the end of 2020, informed by the recommendations of the Expert Group, which will set out how this new system will be structured and the steps to achieving it.
- In the short term, act on interim recommendations from the Chair of the Expert Group to improve conditions for asylum seekers currently living in the system. This includes vulnerability assessments, the right to work, the ability to apply for drivers' licences and bank accounts, an independent inspection process, measures to reduce the length of time in processing decisions, mental health services and the training of managers of Direct Provision Centres.

- Implement the measures identified by the Expert Group to ensure that international protection applications are dealt with and brought to finality as quickly as possible, while always ensuring fair procedure and a human rights based approach.
- Develop new models of community engagement to ensure that the establishment of new accommodation is done in an inclusive and welcoming fashion.
- Commit to an annualised capital and current investment programme to action these measures.

LGBTI+ Young People

- Implement the National LGBTI+ and the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy to create a safe, supportive and more inclusive Ireland.
- Legislate to ban conversion therapy.
- Create and implement a general health policy for Trans people based on a best practice model for care in line with the World Professional Association of Transgender Healthcare (WPATH) and deliver a framework for the development of National Gender Clinics and Multidisciplinary Teams for children and adults.
- Remove the need for a person aged 16 and 17 years to have two specialist reports before they can apply for legal gender recognition, by providing for self-declaration, with parental consent and by making mediation available on a voluntary basis. These improvements will include the provision of a gender recognition certificate providing proof of change of name as well as gender. Make any necessary changes to the law to allow legal name change be part of the gender recognition process.
- Commence research to examine arrangements for under children under 16.

Travellers & Roma Children

- Undertake an independent assessment of the pilot projects aimed at retaining Traveller and Roma children in education.
- Implement a National Traveller Health Action Plan

Disability

- Fully complete the establishment of the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (0- 18 years) Network Teams.
- Reduce and provide a pathway to eliminate the practice of accommodating young people with serious disabilities in nursing homes.
- Expand and enhance the in-school speech and language pilots to improve the delivery of therapies in schools.
- Ensure students with additional needs get the right assistance, at the right time, building on the learnings from the pilot currently underway and subject to further consultation.
- Further intensive transitional support packages for children and young people in residential and respite care with complex/high support needs.
- Implement a programme of awareness-raising to provide a better information resource for children and parents about available supports.

Children & Family Support

- Extend paid parental leave for parents to allow them spend more time with their baby in their first year.
- Implement the First 5 strategy for babies, young children and their families which recommends the examination of new funding models for childcare and also outlines new poverty prevention measures.
- Enable increased remote, flexible and hub working arrangements to support families in their parenting and childcare choices while also supporting enterprise. We will support higher participation of women in the workplace, less commuting and greater regional balance. Such changes will give long term resilience to our economy and society. We will work with the childcare sector to introduce more flexibility in childcare settings.
- Fully implement the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) that helps children with additional needs access early education and care settings.
- Expand and enhance the in-school speech and language and occupational therapist pilot, given its success.
- Support the ongoing development of fostering services across the country.

- Expand the successful in-house model of therapeutic services and support to vulnerable children and carers in Tusla Dublin North Central to other areas.
- Continue to invest in community and voluntary family support services and youth work recognising their value in preventing harm and in responding to the needs of vulnerable families.
- Expand access to parenting support programmes that have been proven to be effective.
- Fully implement Tusla's Action Plan on the Recommendations of the HIQA Statutory Investigation into Tusla's Management of Referrals (June 2018).
- Ask the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection to review how children's rights and best interests can be protected in the context of the recognition of parentage in cases of assisted human reproduction and surrogacy.
- Continue funding for the Child Care Law Reporting Project. We will publish and implement a successor to Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People and will develop mechanisms, through a new youth strategy, for the voice and views of young people to be part of decision-making at community, county and national levels.

Early Years Education & Childcare Provision

- Establish an agency, Childcare Ireland , to assist in the expansion of high quality childcare, spearheading leadership, best practice and innovation and professional development in community and private settings. It will also be tasked with developing career paths for childcare staff. Childcare Ireland will be responsible for expanding Siolta.
- Continue to invest in the National Childcare Scheme reducing costs for parents and introduce greater parental choice and flexibility.
- Reform the childcare system to create one that brings together the best of community and private childcare provision, focused on children's rights, quality outcomes, reducing inequalities, supports staff retention as well as substantially reducing costs to parents. We will do so in consultation with providers, staff and parents.
- Ensure sustainability within the Early Learning and Care and School Age Care sector by fast-tracking the work of the Expert Group considering a new funding model.
- Examine the approach of other European countries to set a cap on parental fees irrespective of income. A policy, legal and economic analysis will be concluded and published in 2020.

- Examine options to increase flexibility within centre-based care as well as options to accelerate access to subsidies for non-relative childminders, a report to be published by year end.
- Continue to support the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme for three to five year olds, and if resources allow, to increase the scope of the scheme.
- Increase the range of after-school services in schools or community hubs to offer a range of education and family-focused measures.
- Support the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee in the childcare sector and the drawing up of an Employment Regulation Order, which would determine minimum rates of pay for childcare workers, as well as terms and conditions of employment.
- Pilot a new apprenticeship model for early years professionals.
- Streamline regulatory requirements whilst continuing to improve quality.
- Ensure a transparent inspection reporting structure for parents and guardians.

Court Reform

- Enact a Family Court Bill to create a new dedicated Family Court within the existing court structure and provide for court procedures that support a less adversarial resolution of disputes.
- Build a new Family Law Court building in Dublin and ensure that court facilities across the country are suitable for family law hearings so these hearings can be held separately from other cases.

Crime

- Examine increasing the age limit for the application of the Garda Youth Diversion Programme to 24 years old.
- Criminalise adults who groom children to commit crimes.
- Extend the pilot schemes of the Joint Agency Response to Crime to more areas to target prolific repeat and vulnerable offenders aged 16 -21.

Online Safety

- Require online platforms to set out the steps they will take to keep their users safe online and to build safety into the design of their platforms.
- Ensure new Online Safety Codes can combat cyber bullying material and material promoting eating disorders, self-harm and suicide.
- Promote positive digital citizenship among children and young people, in conjunction with Webwise and other educational partners, schools, as well as the Ombudsman for Children.
- Develop a research programme led by internationally recognised experts to review the existing and developing literature in relation to (a) the consequences, benefits and potential harms to society and children specifically of digital activity and (b) the concept of duty of care and the public interest in the design of online platforms.

Standard of Education

- Establish a Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education at primary and second level. Develop and embed a Digital Education Strategy, where teachers and students are supported in providing and learning from on-line resources and ensuring that digital literacy forms a part of the primary and post-primary curriculum.
- Use the Digital Education Strategy to engage pupils and students in structuring and shaping their own learning experience and engagement.
- Ensure all graduating teachers maintain high levels of pedagogical and content knowledge in order to provide excellence in teaching and learning experiences for all students.
- Continue to review and reform the post primary curriculums, prioritising elements such as critical thinking, problem solving and continuous assessment so that they feature more centrally.
- Establish a new Education Research and Policy Section within the Department tasked with ensuring that education policy development in Ireland is informed by a strong evidence base, is outcomes focused, and cognisant of best international practices.
- Develop inclusive and age appropriate RSE and SPHE curricula across primary and post-primary levels, including an inclusive programme on LGBTI+ relationships and making appropriate legislative changes if necessary.
- Review the provision, content and delivery of teacher education and professional development, ensuring that the teacher community and professional dialogue is at the heart of teacher learning.
- Establish a new Primary School Healthy Eating education programme.

- Develop a new modern languages in Primary School Initiative. Implement a strategy to support gifted and talented students at both Primary and Post-primary levels
- Seek to increase the capitation grant with a view to reducing the reliance on voluntary contributions made to schools.
- Seek to make further progress in reducing pupil teacher ratios in primary schools.
- Provide greater integration of the advisory service of the Schools' Inspectorate with supports such as continuous professional development (CPD), leadership development and specialist support services (e.g. NEPS, NCSE).
- Develop innovative measures to support school leadership and the quality of teaching, informed by data and a focus on student learning and potential.
- Conduct a comprehensive audit and inventory of all school buildings, infrastructure and facilities in the State, and the creation of a database of all school admissions policies.
- Examine a targeted government scholarship scheme to focus on encouraging graduates into subject areas where there is a shortage of post-primary teachers in the profession.
- Place the Minor Works Grant on a permanent footing for schools.
- Continue to recognise the importance of small schools to communities across Ireland.
- Develop Technical Support Service Teams, which will enable innovation in schools and clusters of schools.
- Deliver a programme to build and modernise PE and school sport facilities.
- Commit to a comprehensive review of school forward planning policy, recognising particularly the need for adequate supports for children with special educational needs, and the need to sustain green planning and green construction for schools in the future.
- Expand the Energy Efficiency Upgrade Pilot Programme for Schools.
- Increase funding to the Digital, STEM and Creative and other School Excellence Funds.

Cost of Education

- Enact the Student and Parent Charter Bill.
- Commence a free schoolbooks scheme pilot in September 2020 and, if successful review of that pilot, expand the scheme to schools nationwide as resources allow.
- Emphasise the rental and reuse of books to schools and discourage the use of workbooks.
- Provide clear guidelines to schools on cost effective and sustainable practices to decrease the costs for families in relation to school books, uniforms, IT and sport equipment.

Inclusive Education

- Support continued investment in our Special Needs Assistants.
- Ensure students get the right assistance at the right time building on the learnings from the pilot currently underway and subject to further consultation.
- Ensure each child with a special educational need has an appropriate school place in line with their constitutional right.
- Further progress the move towards a needs-based, responsive set of state supports for students with special educational needs and expand early intervention teams in schools over the next five years.
- Complete the new DEIS identification model ensuring the extension of DEIS status to schools that are identified as being suitable.
- Provide additional supports for students who are homeless, resident in family hubs, or in direct provision. Further develop access programmes to Higher and Further Education for students from disadvantaged groups, including members of the Traveller Community, those in direct provision and those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged.
- Ensure resourcing for students who do not speak English as a first language.
- Improve access to supports for positive mental health in schools.
- Update the National Anti-Bullying Plan to include gender identity bullying.
- Continue to review and expand the roll out of the new Hot School Meals initiative.
- Publish a new literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategy to support learners.
- Introduce a positive action programme to overcome barriers and increase the number of teachers from our migrant communities, in conjunction with the Teaching Council and further education authorities.
- Ensure robust data collection on the use of reduced timetables.

- Ensure that reduced timetables are only used in a manner that is limited, appropriate and absolutely necessary in line with the Department of Education's rules.
- Publish an evidence-based national policy on Initial Teacher Education encouraging further access to teaching from people from minority backgrounds.

Choice in Education

- Achieve the target of at least 400 multi-denominational primary schools by 2030 to improve parental choice.
- Expand and prioritise the transfer of viable schools to Community National Schools.
- Ensure a curriculum of multiple religious beliefs and ethics is taught as a national curriculum of tolerance and values in all primary schools.
- Work with communities to ensure the provision of clear, non-partisan information on the preparation for, and the consequences of, the divestment process and to respond to queries raised

Irish Language & Culture in Education

- Continue to review and reform the teaching and learning of Irish, and increase the emphasis on spoken Irish in the classroom.
- Work towards doubling the number of young people currently in Irish medium schools.
- Provide a comprehensive policy for the Irish language from pre-primary education to teacher education for all schools.
- Increase supports to An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoilfochta.
- Provide Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcoláiste where there is strong demand.
- Establish and fund an Irish language education School Excellence Fund.
- Task the NCCA to develop an Irish Cultural Studies Junior Cycle level 2 short course which values the heritage, language, nature, biodiversity and culture, including Traveller culture and history, of Ireland and history of the Irish Language in the global landscape.
- Expand the programme in which PE is taught through Irish to every primary school and continue to increase the number of post-primary schools in this programme.

Participation

- Ensure a comprehensive national consultation with young people as to how better their voice can be heard and the issues that they want their Government to focus on for their future. We will develop a new National Strategy on Children and Young people's Participation in Decision-making 2021-2025.
- Increase funding to political parties to support youth, gender and diversity programmes.
- Examine the Scottish experience of reducing the voting age to 17 in order to draw conclusions.
- Establish a Youth Assembly, with various modules including ones for rural and urban young people. This Youth Assembly will consider issues of importance to young people and their future such as climate action, digitalisation, social media and communications, mental health and wellbeing.

Housing

- Develop a National Youth Homelessness Strategy.
- Ensure Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) levels are adequate to support vulnerable households while we increase the supply of social housing.

Immigration & Integration

- Create new pathways for long-term undocumented people and their dependents meeting specified criteria to regularise their status within 18 months of the formation of the Government, bearing in mind European Union and Common Travel Area commitments.
- Publish a new national action plan against racism.
- Develop and implement a new Migrant Integration Strategy.
- Enact legislation that encompasses relevant EU measures and the UN Protocol against the smuggling and trafficking of migrants.