

Green Party General Election Manifesto 2024:
Towards 2030: A Decade of Change Volume II

Law

- **The Courts and the Judiciary**
 - Expedite the development of a new family court and incorporate the Guardian ad Litem service within it.
- **Integration**
 - Currently immediate family reunification is only open to workers who come here on Critical Skills Permits. We propose to end this discriminatory practice by extending immediate family reunification rights to all General Employment Permit (GEP) holders in full time employment
- **Political Reform**
 - Require all political parties to provide training on child protection.
 - Lower the voting age to 16.

Education

- **Availability**
 - Place a legal obligation on primary schools, regardless of patronage, to make rooms available for after-school care, and provide the necessary support to facilitate this.
- **A Well-Resourced, Modern Education System**
 - Increase capital investment for the Department of Education to provide for new primary and secondary schools, and new ASD/special education classes attached to mainstream schools.
 - Create a capital funding stream for older primary and secondary schools to refurbish or rebuild these as modern and climate efficient buildings.
 - Reform the model for assessing demand for new schools, by reforming the Forward Planning Unit in the Department of Education.
 - Increase the number of multid denominational schools and Gaelcholáistí. Reform and revitalise the process of transferring viable schools to Community National Schools.
 - Amend legislation to require schools to ask parents to opt-in to religious instruction, ensuring that families do not feel pressured to opt-out.
 - Immediately establish a Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Education, centring the views of both children and adults in education, as well as their teachers.
 - Establish centralised application processes for secondary schools in each regional city and for special schooling in each school district.
 - Phase out the use of homework in primary schools.
 - Publish, as a priority, a separate policy for the Irish language in the education system to bring teaching in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and to double the number of students learning through Irish.
 - Address the shortage of teachers by making the profession an attractive option for those considering it as a career and for those returning from abroad, including by examining salary scales.

- Introduce incremental credit for teachers who temporarily moved abroad to teach in private secondary schools outside the EU.
- Provide funding for a Deputy Principal in all DEIS schools with over 600 pupils, and three quarters of a Deputy Principal position in smaller DEIS schools. We will provide for increases in middle leadership teams in schools
- **Affordable, Green Schooling**
 - Continued rollout of free solar panels for schools.
 - Transferring responsibility for school transport from the Department of Education to the Department of Transport. We will merge the school transport scheme with the public bus network. In rural areas, we will give every primary school child living at least 1km from their school, and every secondary school child living at least 2km from their school, a seat on a bus. We will also raise the maximum age of school bus drivers beyond 70 to prevent service disruptions caused by labour shortages.
 - The establishment of a new biodiversity scheme for schools to implement nature-friendly measures on their campuses.
 - A pilot ‘forest school’ – a model of schooling for young children which has proven to be successful in Scandinavia.
- **Wellbeing in Schools**
 - Introduce social cohesion and inclusion programmes in all schools to address racism and discrimination, while increasing children’s sense of belonging and cultural connection.
 - Building on pilot schemes initiated by this Government, ensure that every child has access to mental health supports by developing and expanding mental health teams that work across several schools.
 - Provide well-being training for schools and run a public awareness campaign aimed at parents about online dangers for children.
 - Proceed with the new Government policy on restricting the use of mobile phones in schools
 - Support the implementation of the new SPHE curriculum, covering issues such as mental health, breastfeeding, consent, and sexuality.
 - Implement the Action Plan on Bullying, introducing much stronger policies on tackling bullying, including cyberbullying.
- **Access to Education for Every Child**
 - Ensure better planning of the need for ASD/special education classes at primary and secondary level and for special schools. We will remove any barriers between state bodies and agencies that act as a barrier to this.
 - Fund an SNA in every classroom with a child who has additional needs.
 - Complete the review of the Education for Persons with a Special Educational Needs Act 2004.
 - Improve the provision of special education training within teacher training courses at both primary and secondary level and increase places on specialist courses.
 - Enhance the ability of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to directly support teachers working in special schools and ASD/special education classes.

- Working with the HSE, ensure that additional therapeutic interventions supporting education and health outcomes are provided by children’s disability network teams onsite in all special schools.
- **Walking and Cycling**
 - Expand the Safe Routes to School programme and, subject to a feasibility study, implement zero-emission zones around schools and childcare facilities.
- **Ending Violence Against Women and Girls**
 - We will ensure that the revised SPHE curriculum for the Junior Cycle is taught appropriately and effectively across all second-level schools in the country. We will expedite the revision of the SPHE curriculum for Senior Cycle to ensure that age-appropriate education about healthy relationships is available to all students.
 - We also need to ensure that what is taught in the classroom makes it out into the corridor – we will work with schools so that their policies are fit for purpose to prevent harmful attitudes and behaviours in schools

Social Protection/ Welfare

- **Progressive Budgets**
 - Increase social welfare payments in line with earnings and inflation.
 - Work to merge the Working Family Payment and the Increase for a Qualified Child Payment into a single anti-child-poverty payment, to be made available alongside Child Benefit. Eligibility for this payment will be based on household income, not employment status.
 - Reform the social welfare system so that eligibility for social assistance payments is determined by income, not by employment status, guaranteeing a basic income for everyone.
 - Over the term of Government, increase the Home Carer’s Tax Credit to €4,000 and make it available to unmarried but cohabiting parents.
 - Recognising the challenges faced by people with disabilities and the value of care in Irish society, prioritise increases to Disability Allowance and Carer’s Allowance in annual budget negotiations. This will include introducing a new €50 weekly cost-of-disability payment.
 - Provide an annual payment of €3,800 for every parent of a child with a severe disability, by replacing the existing Incapacitated Child Tax Credit with a refundable Child and Adolescent Disability Tax Credit.
 - Make the annual Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance of up to €285 per child available to all households with children.
 - Reform the operation of the Social Welfare Appeals Office, including increasing the publication of important decisions to promote transparency, and consider whether it would be better established as an independent body outside the Department of Social Protection.
- **Maternity, Paternity and Parent’s Leave**
 - Increase maternity leave from 26 weeks to 28 weeks
 - Increase paternity leave from 2 weeks to 4 weeks
 - Increase parents leave from 9 weeks to 10 weeks per parent.

- Provide for a 50% top up of parents leave for those leading one-parent families.
- Increase maternity, paternity and parent's benefit by €40 per week.
- **Tackling Energy Poverty**
 - Provide 100% grants to low-income households at risk of energy poverty for the installation of rooftop solar panels.
 - Building on the remarkably successful pilot Warmth and Wellbeing Scheme, enable healthcare professionals across the country to designate households for free energy-efficiency upgrades on health grounds.
 - Establish a Community Energy Advice Service in every local authority, to assist households in applying for SEAI grants and to ensure those at risk of energy poverty are prioritised for retrofitting.
 - Update the SEAI's mandate to focus on supporting those most at risk of energy poverty.
 - Work with the Commission for Regulation of Utilities to ensure they provide advice on the best energy tariffs for households at risk of energy poverty
- **A New National Means Testing Agency**
 - We will establish a centralised means-testing agency to determine eligibility for supports across a range of sectors, including social protection, housing assistance payments, medical and GP visit cards, the National Childcare Scheme, cost rental housing, the Warmer Homes Scheme, SUSI grants for students, and legal aid. In our view, this would deliver four distinct benefits. First, it would simplify the process for people seeking to access public services. Second, it would allow for better targeting of grants and social assistance payments. Third, it would inform future policy development by fostering joined-up thinking in the design of means-tested policies. Finally, it would achieve significant administrative savings, freeing up resources within the public service for more pressing tasks.
- **Care Leavers**
 - Ensure that Tusla's aftercare budget is ring-fenced within its wider alternative care budget.
 - Raise eligibility for aftercare supports to all care-leavers under the age of 23.
 - Reform social housing capital supports like the Capital Assistance Scheme to make them more attractive for Approved Housing Bodies to build housing for care leavers
- **Care and Carers**
 - Building on the basic income for artists trial, bring in a non-means-tested basic income for all carers.
 - Publish an updated National Carers Strategy to provide clarity on the Government's approach to carers across departments.
 - Fund the Carers' Guarantee, implementing a statutory right to the home support scheme and to respite care and improving the coordination of healthcare employment and support services.
 - Further expand respite provision and develop greater alternative respite options.
 - Reinstate a 'young carers programme' for those under the age of 18 who care for elderly family members and family members with disabilities.
 - Extend the Public Service EV grant to low-paid, car-dependent workers, such as home support providers.

- Support parity of pay between Section 38 and Section 39 workers.

Online Safety

- Build on the robust protections of the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act, introduced by the Green Party in Government, by continuing to be agile in updating our laws to protect children from harm online
- Rolling out the Cyberwise programme across all schools to educate children about online risks.
- Encouraging girls and children from minority backgrounds to pursue a career in cyber-security.

Early Years/Childcare

- **A New Public Model**
 - Guaranteeing access to early years education for every child, regardless of where they live. We will give every child a legal right to early years education by placing access to two years of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) on a statutory footing.
 - Directing the state to provide early years education and care directly. Under this model, the state will work alongside existing private providers, focusing initially on filling critical gaps in provision across the country. New publicly delivered services will provide ECCE along with fulltime, part-time, and after-school care.
 - Ensuring that early years professionals are valued and recognised for their extraordinary work through a process to increase pay and improve working conditions
- **Supporting Parents- Quality, Affordability, Choice**
 - Expand the Equal Start programme introduced by Minister O’Gorman, delivering early years support to children experiencing disadvantage, including Traveller and Roma children, and children from refugee backgrounds.
 - Increase hours under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) to ensure all children with disabilities can access early years education
 - We will introduce a single national fee structure for public and private providers, guaranteeing fees at low, accessible levels set by the state
 - We will build on the success of the National Childcare Scheme, ensuring that the state increases its financial assistance to parents – through both universal and income-assessed supports.
 - Through these combined measures, we will ensure that:
 - Early years education and care will be provided free of charge to families on lower incomes.
 - Beyond this, families will be charged no more than €200 per child, per month. This will be implemented through phased reductions, commensurate with increased year-on-year investment.
 - We will reintroduce a mid-year access point to ECCE to ensure that all children can benefit from a full two years of the programme.
 - We will work with childminders to implement the Childminding Action Plan in a way that increases the number of registered childminders and allows parents using their services to benefit from the National Childcare Scheme.

- **Availability**
 - Support the delivery of a public model of early years education and care by mandating and resourcing the national network of Education and Training Boards to develop childcare facilities.
 - Increase capital funding for early learning and childcare to support private, community, and public operators. This will include a new start-up fund for early years services to get off the ground.
 - Ensure that existing regulations requiring the development of childcare facilities in housing developments are enforced.
- **Supporting Our Early Years Professionals**
 - Enhance pay and improve working conditions for early years professionals and advance the process of aligning their pay scales to other state educators.
 - Continue to increase provision for Core Funding, copper fastening the state's role as the primary funder of early years education.
 - Ensure the current process to simplify the administrative burden on providers is completed and that recommendations are implemented.
- **Caring for the Most Vulnerable Children**
 - Extend the pilot Barnahus model of care nationwide.
 - Progressively increase capital provision to implement the Tusla Estates Plan, delivering Tusla-owned residential capacity at greater scale and reducing reliance on third-party professional care arrangements.
 - Implement the Review of Special Care with a view to hiring more therapists and providing the necessary capital for new special care facilities.
 - Further support measures to increase the number of social workers, examining pay and conditions.
 - Provide long-term foster carers with access to pension entitlements to recognise the key role their care plays for vulnerable children

Health

- **Acute Healthcare**
 - Deliver on the commitment that no child should be on the scoliosis waiting list for more than four months and create a multiyear action plan for urgent and continues care for patients.
 - We will develop, fund, and implement a new national policy on palliative care for children with life-limiting conditions.
- **Primary Care**
 - Expand the GP visit card to all children under the age of 11.
 - Legislate to protect patients against illegal dentistry and expand access to publicly provided orthodontic treatment for children.
 - Optimise supports to GPs in growing new practices by establishing a regionally focused taskforce to consider registration waiting times for GP services. We will support expansion of the public health service, including recruitment of public health nurses
- **Vindicating the Rights of People with Disabilities**

- Review the Disability Act 2005, with a focus on the assessment of need process to streamline access to health and education supports, and to incorporate disabilities that are not currently recognised such foetal alcohol syndrome and severe ADHD (with comorbidities).
- Implement the new National Disability Strategy and ensure through the Cabinet Subcommittee on Children and Disability that all Government departments are fully implementing assigned actions under the mainstreaming approach adopted in the strategy.
- Implement a ten-year workforce strategy for disability, indicating the number of health and social care professionals needed across the disability sector. We will work with higher and further education institutes to additionally increase the number of places in courses for each of these professions. We will recognise and incorporate the role of assistant therapist grades.
- Increase funding by 25% in the first year and by 15% in every subsequent year for community-based disability services in line with the Action Plan for Disability Services.
- Establish a Disability Information and Support Centre in every Community Health Organisation as a one-stop-shop for people with disabilities and their families seeking to engage with public services. The centre will provide support and information relating to education, healthcare, respite, social protection and therapeutic services.
- Review the Long-Term Illness Scheme.
- We will put the Autism Innovation Strategy on statutory footing, incorporating recommendations from the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Autism's report and the Same Chance report.
- Ensure that the HSE, private service providers and the Department of Education collate all relevant data on autism. We will request that the CSO include a question on autism in the next census.
- End the situation whereby children with dual diagnoses who experience both mental health issues and have a disability such as autism are denied access to mental health services.
- **Mental Health**
 - Appoint a national mental health champion within the HSE.
 - Invest heavily in suicide and self-harm prevention services.
 - Implement the recommendations of the Independent Review of the Provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
 - Pass an amended version of the Mental Health Bill.
 - Collaborate with schools to identify long-term and undiagnosed conditions.
 - Ensure HSE regional authorities' staffing and capital investment plans are aligned with national mental health policies.
 - Support NGOs such as Jigsaw that take an early intervention approach to mental health services.
 - Fund additional trainee psychological posts across professional doctoral programmes to meet current and future demand for experienced professionals in our health services.
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- Support NGOs such as Jigsaw that take an early intervention approach to mental health services.
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- **Loneliness**
 - Focus on the groups most affected by loneliness – the young and the elderly – by supporting mental health teams in schools and services such as ALONE

Other

- **Youth**
 - Progressively increase funding to both the UBU: Your Place Your Space and Youth Services Grant Scheme, ensuring the latter is expanded nationwide.
 - Establish a mechanism that links salary funding for youth organisations with public sector pay rates.
 - Create a capital fund for new youth services, taking opportunities to co-locate services with other community infrastructure where possible.
 - Increase funding for youth work services and strengthen youth representation in government decision-making.
 - Develop an updated national play policy with particular focus on creating inclusive play spaces for girls and children with disabilities.
 - Develop more play and hang out spaces for teenagers, who are often underserved.
- **Sport for All**
 - Prioritise the participation of women and girls in sport through targeted investment and by supporting media coverage for women's sports. We will bridge the participation gap for women in sport, ensuring equal participation by 2027.
- **An Garda Síochána**
 - Expand the Garda Youth Diversion Programmes to include those aged 18-24.