

**Select Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research,
Innovation and Science, 10 February 2022**

Vote 26 Department of Education – Revised Estimate 2022

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

A Chathaoirligh agus a Bhaill den Choiste (Chair, members of the Committee,)

I thank the Committee for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today and for the Committee's consideration of my Department's Revised Estimate for 2022. I am accompanied today by Minister of State Josepha Madigan who has responsibility for Special Education and by officials from my Department.

I will begin with a brief overview of the Revised Estimates for my Department for 2022.

These Estimates set out the approved allocations for the Department which include funding for all of the services normally provided or supported by it. An allocation is included to meet ongoing costs associated with the safe operation of our schools in a Covid related environment. A significant capital allocation is also included.

Overall allocation

The Revised Estimate for Vote 26 provides for a net allocation of €8.964 Billion representing a gross allocation of €9.283 Billion reduced by Appropriations-in-Aid of some €0.32 Billion, which is an increase of some €322 million on the original 2021 gross expenditure allocations. This includes €138 million of financial supports for Covid related measures. Other such funding will be made available from the Government's central Covid Contingency Reserve as required during the year, based on the latest public health advice available. Excluding the Covid related funding, this represents almost half a Billion of an increase in 2022 for permanent expenditure measures.

As the Committee members will recall, a significant proportion of the funding allocated to Vote 26 will be expended on gross pay and pensions with sums amounting to over €7 Billion included in the Vote for these purposes. This represents some 80% of the expenditure allocation. Some 96,700 public servants and 44,500 public service pensioners are paid out of these funds. Other significant expenditure areas include capital infrastructure, school transport, capitation grants to schools and grants to other organisations and agencies.

Budget 2022

In Budget 2022 Minister Madigan and I secured a significant allocation for primary, post primary and special needs education, including important measures such as securing funding for the recruitment of almost 3,200 new teachers and special needs assistants, the largest-ever expansion of the DEIS programme to tackle disadvantage and achieving the historically low 24:1 staffing schedule at primary level.

An additional allocation of €18 million was secured for the DEIS programme which will equate to a full year allocation of €32 million. This will enable an expansion in 2022 of the programme to further schools and result in an increase of over 20 per cent in funding for the programme. Continuing to deliver on the commitment in the Programme for Government, funding will be provided for an additional 350 teachers (which is inclusive of the DEIS staffing improvement), to reduce school staffing schedules by 1 point for all primary schools.

This Government is continuing to invest in special education. In 2022 over €2 billion in funding will be provided, representing over a quarter of the Department's entire current expenditure budget.

Almost 1,200 additional special needs assistants (SNAs) posts will be allocated, bringing the total number of SNAs in our schools to over 19,000 in 2022. This will support the roll out of the new School Inclusion Model, which will ensure students with additional needs get the right supports at the right time, as well as supporting the new special class places.

An additional 980 special education teacher posts will be provided. These will cover both mainstream classes in new and expanding schools and the opening of new special classes.

These investment measures under Budget 2022 will be hugely important in tackling disadvantage and supporting children and young people with special educational needs in our education system.

The Budget also included a number of other initiatives including once-off funding of €20 million to be provided for books, audio books and other reading materials to increase the literacy tools and supports available to children in schools. Additional capitation funding was allocated to voluntary secondary schools in the free education scheme, to rectify historical inconsistencies in capitation funding at post-primary level. Additional guidance teacher supports and release days for school leaders will be maintained while €30 million has been allocated to increase investment in the school transport scheme.

Covid-19

Significant funding has been provided to schools since 2020 to help them address the challenges posed by Covid. This funding sustained school re-openings by providing for the replacement of teachers and non-teaching staff unable to attend for work due to Covid-19, additional release days for principals and deputy principals at primary level, and enhanced cleaning regimes, PPE equipment and wellbeing supports.

These Revised Estimates continue those supports into 2022 with some €138 million being allocated. As before, it is available to meet substitution and supervision costs, cleaning costs, sanitiser, and PPE.

I am acutely conscious of the impact Covid has had on our most vulnerable students. Late last year we announced details of the CLASS programme which is providing additional supports and teaching to those most negatively impacted throughout the pandemic. This programme commenced last October and will continue into 2022.

Capital allocation

I will conclude with reference to the Department's ongoing capital investment programme.

Under Project Ireland 2040, the education sector will receive a total of approximately €4.4 billion capital investment over the period 2021-2025. This significant investment allows us to move forward with certainty on our ambitious plans to deliver high quality building projects, with a real focus on sustainability, for school communities across Ireland. Capital planning and budgeting is undertaken on a multi-annual basis. The allocation of €792m for 2022 will facilitate a continued strong rollout of school building projects and other measures including the €20 million capital grant for literacy resources to be paid to schools this year along with funding of €65 million for the approval of 497 projects under the 2022 Summer Works Scheme to improve and upgrade existing school buildings.

That is just a flavour of the issues that are reflected in these Estimates and I hope I have been of assistance to the Committee. Both Minister of State Madigan and I are happy to address and queries members may have.

Thank you.