

## **Opening Statement by the Minister for Education**

### **Select Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**

**31 January 2024**

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#### **Vote 26 – Revised Estimate 2024**

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#### *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 2024. I am accompanied today by officials from my Department.

These Estimates set out the allocations for the Department of Education under Vote 26. This includes funding for all of the services normally provided by my Department. Additional allocations are also included to fund measures to address some of the impacts Covid has had on pupils and the education sector's response to the Ukraine crisis and the increased Cost of Living. A significant capital allocation is also included.

#### Overall allocation

The Revised Estimate for Vote 26 provides for a net allocation of €10.466 Billion. This is a gross allocation of €10.853 Billion reduced by Appropriations-in-Aid of some €386 million.

The gross allocation has increased by €828 million on the original 2023 gross expenditure allocations.

The gross allocation includes €230 million of financial supports for Ukraine, Cost of Living and Covid related measures. Our continued response to the Ukrainian crisis will be based on the number of additional pupils who have

entered our education system in the last two years, and the number that will enter the system during the course of 2024.

Excluding the Ukraine, Cost of Living and Covid related funding, this increase in core funding in 2024 is €688 million or 6.9 per cent over 2023. Of this increase, some €333 million relates to increases in public sector pay and pension rates, including some provisional funding for the pay deals currently being negotiated.

My department spends over €8.6 Billion on pay and pensions. This represents some 80% of the expenditure allocation. Almost 107,000 public servants and 46,700 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 2024

In Budget 2024, I secured a significant allocation for primary, post primary and special needs education for the 2024/25 school year. This included important measures such as:

- the expansion of the provision of free school books and classroom resources to include junior cycle pupils at post primary level;
- increased capitation funding for day to day running costs of our schools;
- continued investment in school transport;
- almost 2,000 new special needs assistants and special educational needs teachers, extra supports for special schools; and
- the provision for actions to assist teacher supply and middle management supports in schools.
- The continued provision of the Enhanced Summer Programme with an overall allocation of €40 million.

The Budget also provides important additional funding for curricular and assessment reforms to progress our plans for Senior Cycle Redevelopment, wellbeing and Active Schools programmes which are rooted in the delivery of a modern, inclusive education system that puts the student at the centre of the learning process.

The expansion of the provision of free schoolbooks and classroom resources to junior cycle pupils at post primary level for the upcoming school year 2024/25 will benefit some 212,000 pupils. This will add to the 558,000 children in primary and special schools who are already benefiting from this initiative in the current school year. This is an important further step in providing support to households in meeting cost of living pressures.

Extra funding is also being provided to primary and post-primary schools to deal with challenges they face in meeting day to day running costs. A total of €21m in full year costs is being provided for a permanent restoration of funding for the running costs of schools, bringing the basic rate of capitation to €200 per student in primary schools and to €345 in post primary schools.

The 2024 funding allocation makes the biggest-ever commitment to students with special educational needs and their families. We are building on the progress already made on additional classes, teachers and supports. With an additional 744 teachers for Special Education, and 1,216 additional SNAs coming on stream during 2024, for the first time ever we will have over 20,000 teachers and over 21,000 SNAs working in the area of special education. There is also additional supports being provided specifically for special schools.

I am proud to have secured such significant investments in our education system, furthering the work of recent years in reducing class sizes, reducing costs for families, tackling disadvantage and supporting the achievement of all our students.

### Ukraine

There is additional ring-fenced funding of €120 million to meet the costs of the education sector's response to the crisis in Ukraine. This provides for the cost of hiring additional teachers and other supports across the education sector. There are now over 18,000 students from Ukraine enrolled in our schools and this number is continuing to increase.

### Cost of Living

Cost of Living funding of €75 million is being provided to allow for the continuation of reduced school transport fees and a waiver of State examination entry fees along with provision for further social inclusion and teacher supply actions.

This is in addition to Cost of Living financial supports of €150 million provided previously to meet the additional running costs of schools arising in 2022, 2023 and into 2024.

#### Capital allocation

Under Project Ireland 2040, the education sector will receive a total of approximately €4.4 billion in capital investment over the period 2021-2025. This significant investment will 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 €940 million for 2024 will facilitate the continued delivery of school building projects and other measures.

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. I am happy to address any queries members may have.

Thank you.