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An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Briefing for Committee of Public Accounts

Planning and Building Unit Overview 2026

April 2026



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Introduction

The Committee of Public Accounts has decided to focus on the Department of Education and Youth's capital programme for its meeting on April 16, 2026. The Planning and Building Unit (PBU) is a Division of the Department of Education and Youth, based in Tullamore, Co. Offaly. There are circa 250 team members comprising Professional & Technical and administrative staff under the leadership of the Head of the Planning and Building Unit, Hubert Loftus, Assistant Secretary General. The Division has responsibility for the Department's capital programme, including a range of planning and delivery functions and associated work streams, each led by a Principal Officer or Technical Manager. A PBU reform programme has resulted in many strategic initiatives being put in place over recent years to strengthen forward planning and delivery functions. An overview of the PBU is shown below.

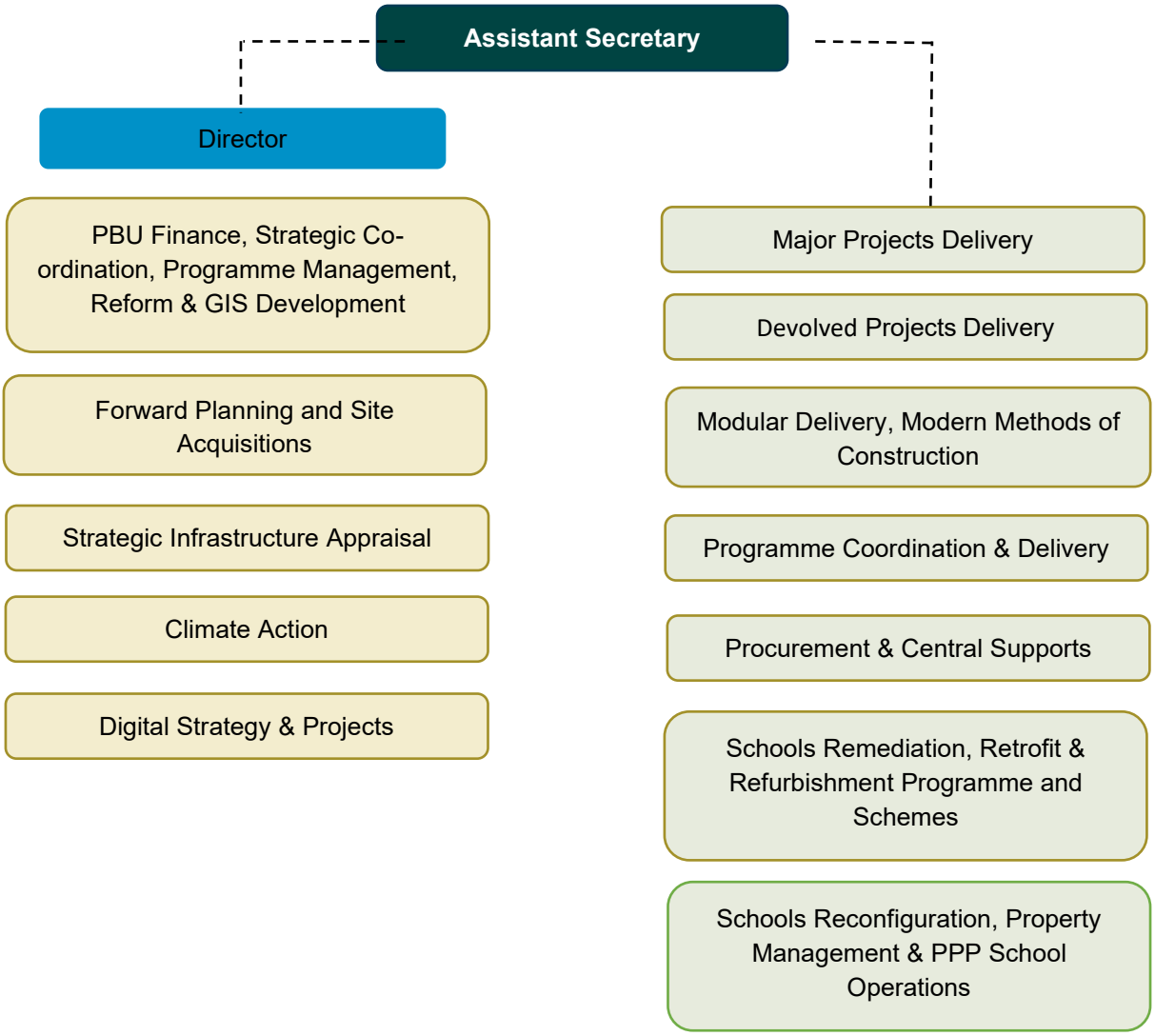

Figure 1 - PBU Organisation Chart

National Context

There are approximately **4,000 schools** across the country with almost **1 million children and young people** enrolled. At a national level, primary school enrolments are declining, while overall post-primary enrolments are expected to peak in the current school year (with First Year enrolments now starting to reduce). There has been a very significant increase in the requirement for provision for children with special education needs in recent years.

2,289 additional special classes have been sanctioned since 2020, including 387 classes (as of 20th March) sanctioned for 2026/2027 school year. **16 new special schools** have been established with a further 4 due to open for the 2026/2027 school year.

The standard approach, where possible, is for special classes and special schools to be established through the re-purposing of existing accommodation. Department Circular 80/2024 set out streamlined arrangements for same.

The Department of Education and Youth has a strong track record of delivery and in fully utilising capital allocations. As part of our forward planning, since 2020, over **€7.5 billion** has been invested to increase capacity and upgrade school facilities nationwide, supporting almost one million students and more than 100,000 staff. This investment has delivered over **1,400**[1] **completed school building projects** across the country.

This includes:

- provision of over **109,000 new and modernised school places**
- **83 new school buildings** which have transformed the accommodation facilities for these school communities.
- Strong delivery on key priorities which included **332 science laboratories delivered under Large Scale/Additional School Accommodation & Summer Works Scheme programmes**, **86 General Purpose Rooms** in primary schools and **39 PE Halls** in post-primary schools

Since 2020, 425 new and modernised classrooms have been delivered in Special Schools and a further 1,350 SEN classrooms delivered in mainstream schools through project rollout and repurposing of existing capacity. In addition:

- **Repurposing and optimisation of existing accommodation capacity** across the school estate has been a key enabler of timely, local provision of special class capacity. Circa 80% of new special classes for 2025/26 school year are being facilitated in repurposed classroom accommodation

[1] All School Building Programme statistics used in this document are valid as at 28th February 2026.

- Under the **Pathfinder Deep Energy Retrofit Programme**, over 70 school projects have been successfully completed to date, delivering comprehensive energy upgrades across the education estate.

- As part of the **Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Programme**, 3,334 schools have been approved to progress to the tender stage to apply for funding for the installation of roof-mounted Solar PV systems, supporting the transition to clean, renewable energy generation across the education estate. As of end January 2026, of the 3,334 approved schools, 3,102 had received funding approval, and 2,548 had confirmed completion of their installations.

- Over €1 billion has been invested in the school estate to support ongoing **maintenance and improvement works** across a range of programmes, including the Minor Works Grant, Emergency Works Scheme, Summer Works Scheme and the Furniture and Equipment Scheme. Since 2020, over 4,000 small scale school improvement and upgrade projects completed under the Emergency Works Scheme (EWS) & Summer Works Scheme (SWS)

- €170m distributed in grant funding for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) issued to all recognised primary and post-primary schools.

NDP Sectoral Investment Plan

In July 2025, the Government announced a capital allocation of **€7.55 billion** for the Department of Education and Youth for the period 2026-2030 under the National Development Plan. As part of this NDP allocation, the Department will place a strong emphasis on provision for children with special educational needs, with a particular focus on meeting annual school place needs. In relation to project rollout for Large-Scale projects and Additional School Accommodation scheme projects, the approach will be to continue to **maximise the capacity of the existing school estate** as much as possible in the first instance and provide **necessary additional capacity through targeted and prioritised project rollout** over the course of 2026 to 2030 period to meet the most urgent and critical needs.

The NDP Sectoral Investment Plan for the Education and Youth sector and the first tranche of projects to progress to construction were published in January 2026 and these are available on the Department's website at https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-education/services/school-building-and-design/ This NDP Sectoral Investment Plan will optimise outputs from the NDP allocations, with a strong focus on maximising existing school capacity, progressing priority projects where local capacity across schools in the area is insufficient, and ensuring delivery that is affordable, offers value for money, and meets functional needs.

Key points of the plan include:

- The completion of projects currently at construction which will deliver circa 30,000 additional and modernised school places. At any given time, there are circa 260 to 300 projects under construction.
- The roll out of 105 projects to progress to tender or construction over the course of 2026 and 2027 totalling over €1.6bn investment. These projects will deliver 27,000 additional and modernised school places. A list of these projects was published alongside the Sectoral Investment Plan providing good clarity for all schools on what we will be progressing over the next couple of years.
- Investment under the plan will also involve the delivery of the recently announced first tranche of 297 projects under the Climate Action Summer Works Scheme

Project Rollout

Of the total €7.55 billion investment, it is envisaged that circa. €5 billion will be used for project rollout to support the delivery and modernisation of school buildings. This project rollout will continue on a prioritised basis to meet the most urgent needs in terms of provision of additional capacity and modernisation of existing facilities. In this regard, a list of the 105 school building projects in the first tranche to proceed to construction or tender over 2026 and 2027 was published alongside the Sectoral Investment Plan. These projects were

prioritised with a strong focus on maximising existing capacity and prioritising project rollout to meet the most urgent needs particularly to support special education needs provision.

The 105 projects include:

- 45 projects that were already at tender stage (Stage 3)
- 35 projects that currently have planning permission and were at pre-tender stage (Stage 2b)
- 25 projects being delivered through the modular accommodation programme to support additional special educational needs provision (this number is expected to grow as more SEN classrooms are sanctioned)

A department-led prioritisation process will continue over the course of 2026 and 2027 to assess and evaluate the progression of individual projects through the design pipeline. This process will involve engagement with key stakeholders and individual schools and will ultimately inform the next tranches of programme rollout to tender. The department-led Energy and Condition Survey of the school estate, which will be finalised later in 2026, will provide an additional evidence base for assessing priorities.

Based on this ongoing process, some projects may be added to the list over the course of 2026 and 2027 having regard to their prioritisation and urgency of need and taking account also of the ongoing ability to progress them to tender and construction within the parameters of overall funding. Where appropriate, the Department will also assess opportunities to undertake advance enabling works for the most urgent and complex projects to facilitate a smooth progression to construction in 2028 and beyond.

Any interim accommodation requirements will continue to be assessed and considered by the Department on a case-by-case basis to determine the prioritised needs and approach for addressing same.

School Maintenance

The Sectoral Investment Plan additionally sets out the Department's goal to take a proactive and strategic approach to school maintenance, ensuring the long-term sustainability and functionality of the school estate. This involves developing robust structures, processes, and supports that enable schools to plan and manage maintenance effectively. By strengthening maintenance planning, investing in preventative measures, and promoting best practice across the sector, the Department aims to protect the value of the school estate and provide safe, modern, and energy-efficient learning environments for students and staff.

The Department's REPowerEU Energy & Condition Survey, which is collecting detailed data on the age, size, and condition of every school block across the entire school estate, will inform this strategic approach to maintenance, repair and refurbishment. The data will support the identification of the scale of the requirement for substantial refurbishment across a cohort of end-of-life schools that have exceeded their design lifespan.

As part of the Department's strategy to strengthen maintenance across the school estate, initial preparatory work and consultations will commence in 2026 to review and enhance the Minor Works Grant at primary level and to extend a similar grant to post-primary schools. These improvements, planned for implementation from 2029 onwards, will help facilitate a sustainable approach to supporting ongoing maintenance needs across all schools. Existing schemes to support minor and more significant maintenance works will also be continued. The rollout of the Department's Climate Action Summer Works Scheme, in particular, is a key part of supporting a good maintenance regime and delivering on the climate agenda across the school estate.

How We Plan

Demographic Analysis

The Forward Planning function within the Planning and Building Unit provides demographic projections on the future demand for school places. This aids in shaping national planning policies, regional and local development plans, and determining when and where to expand school capacity. Demographic projections utilise various data sources, such as current enrolment figures, child benefit records, census information, residential development data, and migration patterns, among others.

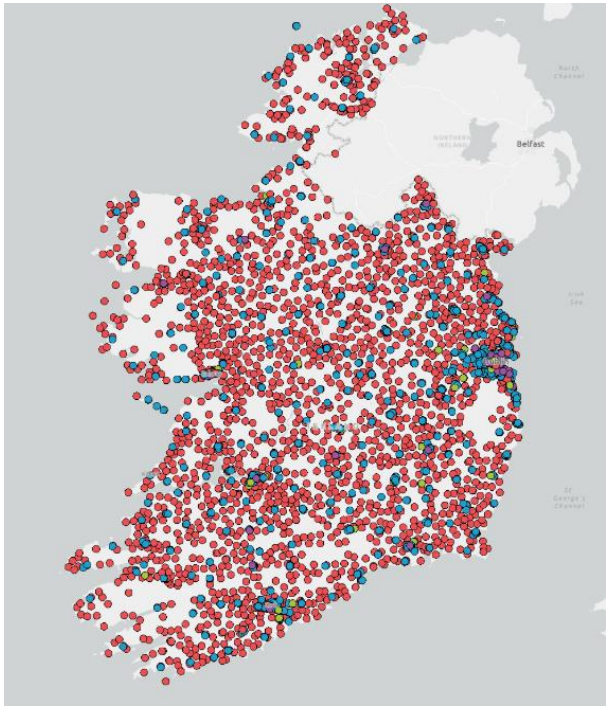

Figure 2 - GIS map of all schools

Projections are provided at School Planning Area level (314 areas in total) and at a more granular settlement level in urban areas with higher residential construction activity and population growth. The Department of Education and Youth is regarded as a leader within the public service in relation to our evidence based forward planning processes with the utilisation of a Geographic Information System (GIS). A GIS map showing the geolocations of all schools is included.

Overall demographic trends indicate a decreasing demand at primary level nationally, while the demand at post primary level is estimated to have peaked in 2025-, and first-year enrolments have already begun to decline. Nevertheless, there is significant local and regional variation. For example, new residential developments, such as in counties around Dublin, can drive a level of demand for school places that runs significantly higher than overall national trends.

Localised demographic data underpins all capital investment decisions around additional school capacity requirements, taking account of specific local population projections, current and planned residential development activity, and available capacity across schools in that area. This data is represented across a range of dashboards on the PBU's GIS:

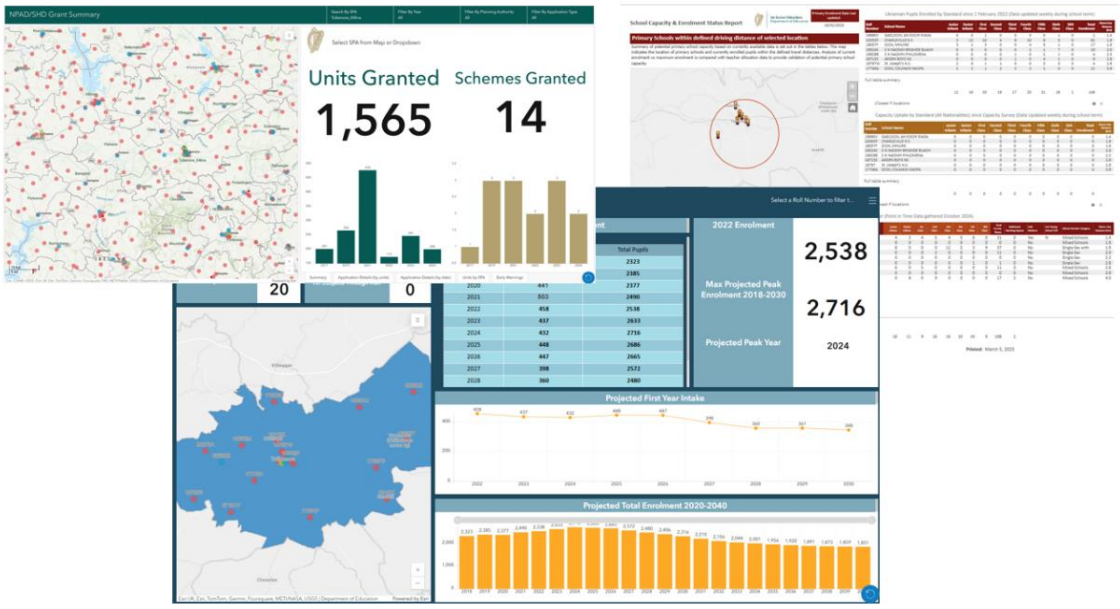

Figure 4 - Sample GIS Planning Dashboards

School Places

Notwithstanding robust forward planning, pressure on existing capacity in a local area can be driven by one or more of the following factors:

- Overall population growth exceeding what was projected in the NPF
- Interim pressures pending the completion of a planned building project
- Age profile/family-makeup of the additional population – more families with school age children moving into an area than was initially anticipated

As part of its programme management, the Department identifies these areas by reference to demographic analysis, capacity information, data on applications for admissions shared by schools, and engagement with schools, patrons, and management bodies. In recent times, in the vast majority of cases, mainstream school place requirements can be managed within existing accommodation; however, solutions such as the provision of modular accommodation are put in place where necessary.

However, it is important to note that school place pressures are not typically driven by lack of capacity in an area. At post-primary level (where there is most demographic pressure) there were unfilled first year places in every county and in 83% of School Planning Areas in the 2024/25 school year. For example, across County Dublin, 38 of the 40 School Planning Areas had unfilled first year places. In County Kildare, the only School Planning Areas without remaining first year places for 2024/25 were Kilcullen and Monasterevin, both of which draw students from outside their local area.

School place pressures are most typically driven by school of choice factors, which can include a draw of students from outside the local area. A key element of ensuring that existing school capacity is maximised is to consider the extent to which schools' admissions policies are best prioritising local school place needs, including for local children with special education needs.

Duplications of applications for school places can also generate additional pressure by causing lengthy waiting lists; however, it is important for families to apply to multiple schools when their preferred school(s) are in high demand.

In line with Programme for Government commitments, the Department is working towards a nationwide common application system to streamline the admissions process for schools. As a first step, a pilot online single application system "Apply to School" was launched for admission to first year and special classes at post-primary schools in five towns (Athenry, Celbridge, Clonakilty, Greystones and Tullamore/Killina) for 2026/27. This pilot has had a positive impact to date and learnings will inform refinements and adjustments to the system for the 2027/28 admissions process. Work to advance the technical development, stakeholder engagement and legislative change required for a nationwide common application system is continuing.

School Capacity

The requirement for school places must be considered in the context of available capacity across schools in the relevant area. This is important in the context of maximising the outputs from available NDP funding and also to inform a balanced approach to enrolments that supports all schools in an equitable way.

At primary level nationally, enrolments are projected to decline significantly over the coming decade. This will vary at local level and some areas where there is very substantial housing development will experience growth. In many areas, however, schools will experience drops in enrolment and this has already had an impact on some locations. It is important that this existing and oncoming capacity is utilised appropriately to meet school place needs across the relevant area.

At post-primary level, national enrolments are expected to begin to decline from 2026, though first year enrolments have already been reducing in recent years. School capacity at post-primary level is more complex, given subject choices and timetabling options, however good management can achieve high efficiency in the use of school accommodation. Given the increasing requirements for special education provision, it is important that all schools make best use of available accommodation, and the Department is working closely with schools, patrons and management bodies to support this.

The SEN Repurposing Scheme has been successful in ensuring that spare capacity at primary and post-primary schools is maximised, with 80% of new special classes for 2025/26 being established in repurposed classroom accommodation.

Strategic Initiatives

Some of the strategic initiatives put in place to support forward planning include:

- Strong emphasis on **maximising existing capacity** and sharing best practice on how this can be achieved, particularly at post-primary level through, for example staggered breaks and good timetabling to maximise room utilisation
- Streamlining arrangements for **re-purposing existing accommodation** to facilitate establishment of special classes
- **Digital enhancement** to the Department's Post-Primary On-line Database which enables schools to identify duplicate enrolments in "real time" (described by some schools as a "game-changer" in terms of efficiency of managing the admissions process). This supports existing data sharing arrangements in place to manage enrolment pressures and will ultimately be captured as part of common application systems as envisaged in the Programme for Government.
- Continuing to build and expand the range of data sources in the Department's **Geographic Information System**
- Close collaboration with the Department of Housing and Local Authorities to ensure strong **linkages between residential rollout and associated school place requirements** are factored in at regional and local level.
- Good communication with schools around strategic capacity planning for both mainstream and SEN provision. Further information is available online: Strategic Capacity Planning for 2025 and future years

How We Deliver

Overview

The Department's school building programme is delivered through a range of procurement strategies, which are tailored to the scale and complexity of our projects and programmes. This strategic procurement approach also allows us to access a diversity of contractors and consultants. Our approach has allowed us to maintain a strong and consistent delivery, even through recent Brexit, Covid and Ukraine war related turbulence in the construction sector.

At the outset it is important to state that the Department puts a strong emphasis on achieving value for money and our focus is on delivering good quality functional accommodation for schools based on our comprehensive suite of standard designs, specifications and design team procedures. This includes standard room layouts and standardised floor area limits that are applied to set the parameters for projects. The Department's suite of school design guidance is the most comprehensive guidance of its kind across the public sector. This approach facilitates consistency for Design Teams and contractors involved in project delivery and is particularly well suited to the strong rollout of our Modular Accommodation Programme.



Figure 5 - Gaelcholáiste Luimní

The delivery programmes can be broadly divided into:

- Large Scale projects (new school buildings, large-scale extensions and refurbishments)
- Additional School Accommodation (ASA) scheme (expansion of capacity on existing school sites, both traditional and modular programmes)
- Climate-focused programmes
- Schemes and grants to upgrade and maintain existing buildings, including the Minor Works Grant
- Other related programmes such as site acquisitions

Integrated delivery teams in the PBU include both professional and technical, and administrative/project management staff. These teams support and oversee the delivery of an approved project from project brief stage, through the various stages of architectural planning, and ultimately to tender, construction and completion.

The Department has a strong reliance on devolved delivery arrangements through a diversity of partners including the National Development Finance Agency (NDFA) and Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and has put supports in place to bolster the capacity of partner organisations, including Buildings Officers and Project Managers.

Stages of Project Delivery

There are 5 core stages involved in the delivery of a school building project. These stages are reflective of the Capital Works Management Framework and the Government's Infrastructure Guidelines. The stages range from Preliminary Design right through to completion and handover. The Department's Design Team Procedures set out the requirements to be followed at each stage in the process.

The Department's Planning & Building Unit employs a rigorous and structured approach to permitting a project to move from one stage to the next. This includes robust interrogation of project scope, design and cost by Department delivery teams at each stage.

In accordance with the Infrastructure Guidelines, a project approval constitutes **approval to move to the next stage** and not overall project approval.

The stages are as follows:

Stage 1 – Preliminary Design includes reviewing all information provided as part of the Project Brief. It also involves establishing and analysing all site factors and constraints which may impact on the project's viability.

Stage 2 - Design (which is divided into Stage 2a - Developed Sketch Scheme and Stage 2b - Detailed Design).



Figure 6 - Scoil Naomh Éanna, Galway

- **Stage 2a** includes development of the design and accurately cost planning the option agreed with the Client. This stage brings the project to the point of lodging for statutory approvals.
- **Stage 2b** includes obtaining all statutory approvals, preparing a set of fully detailed Tender documents, and preparing an accurate pre-tender cost plan. During the planning application, Requests for Further Information (RFI) from the Local Authority and possible third party appeals to An Bord Pleanála can considerably lengthen the process.

Stage 3 - Tender Action, Evaluation and Award. On the completion of the examination of tenders, written authorisation of the Department must be obtained before issuing Letter of Intent and Letter of Acceptance. Once all the contract pre-conditions in the letter of intent have been met and the Department has given written authorisation to procced to Contract, a letter of Acceptance can be issued. This forms the contract and is the date for the calculation of the Contract period.

Stage 4 – Construction. All members of the Design Team are collectively responsible for the effective management of the project in order to achieve its completion on time and within budget.

Stage 5 - Handover of Works and Final Account. The Design team individually and collectively are required to effectively manage the Project, and with the co-operation of the Contractor achieve a satisfactory standard of Construction and achieve Substantial Completion of all elements of the Projects by the Contract Section/Phase handover dates and overall Contract Completion Date.

Stages are the same for Additional School Accommodation (ASA) projects and Large-Scale projects. However, depending on the size and scale of the project there may be fewer interactions with the Department for ASA than with the large-scale projects.

Schemes

The Planning and Building Unit additionally supports schools with small-scale works and maintenance via mechanisms such as SEN Repurposing, Minor Works Grant, Summer Works Scheme, and the Emergency Works Scheme. The Emergency Works Scheme facilitates urgent works to schools that need resources as a result of an emergency situation.

Modern Methods of Construction

Modern methods of construction (MMC) are an increasingly important feature of the construction landscape in Ireland. The focus on MMC in developing modern and sustainable infrastructure reflects a direction of travel by Government generally. The Department of Education and Youth's modular programme for accelerated delivery of school places, including for Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision is part of this.

MMC can help boost productivity and efficiency of school accommodation delivery and increase the environmental sustainability of additional school accommodation. The ability to build offsite minimises the risk posed by construction activity in a live school environment, while factory precision and strict quality control processes help deliver consistently robust buildings which are easy to manage and maintain.

Today's modular buildings represent a significant improvement from earlier forms of prefabricated construction. Since 31 December 2018, all new buildings, including modular buildings, are required to meet the Near Zero Energy Building (NZEB) standard, which ensures high levels of energy efficiency, thermal performance and sustainability. Internal walls of modular units must be robust, durable and have a fire safe finish. External walls must be robust, durable and impact resistant, as well as having low maintenance and weather resistant properties.

The feedback from schools with experience of modular accommodation procured over the past three years has generally been very positive. Schools point to the key features of the accommodation being similar to a traditional (block) structure and value the reduced disruption due to the unit being manufactured off site.

> **"The building very much exceeded our expectations. We are very happy with the teaching environment. The quality is as good as a traditional building, and the insulation is second to none. The building was manufactured offsite and siteworks and delivery were completed within a short period." - Brian Cronin, Principal, St. Patrick's College, Cork.**

Further information on the Modern Methods of Construction in the school sector is available on the Department's website: Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) Introductory guide for schools,

Some images of a recently completed modular accommodation project at a Special School:



Figure 7 - Front view Modular Accommodation at St. Anne's Special School, Clare



Figure 8 - Rear view Modular Accommodation at St. Anne's Special School, Clare

Supports for Schools for Capital Delivery

Professional Supports

The Department is very cognisant of the work involved in managing capital projects of various scales and for this reason has made a range of supports available to schools. These supports include:

- Professional **consultants** on all projects to guide, advise and support schools.
- Implementation of the **modular programme** using external professional **Project Management (PM) support**
- Streamlined approach to **SEN repurposing** which allows greater flexibility to schools which are opening SEN classes for 2025/26 school year and beyond
- Extensive suite of **School Design Guidance and Design Team Procedures** so that there is full clarity for consultants/design teams on standards to be achieved.
- A wide range of consultant and contractor **procurement frameworks** in place to support project delivery and ease workload for schools and delivery partners on procurement process.
- **Funding of Buildings Officers and PM supports in partner organisations** (e.g., ETBs) to support project delivery.
- Increased use of **programmatic approach** for larger, complex projects – e.g., Department and NDFA D&B programmes, ADAPT programme (these programmes involve external PM support to help drive Design Teams and monitor progress across the programme)
- Enhanced measures in place to support a strengthened focus on quality assurance
- Professional oversight and support from the **Department's Professional & Technical team**
- **Nominated point of contact** within the Planning and Building Unit for the planning and delivery stage of each project

Communications

Each school has a **nominated point of contact** within the Planning and Building Unit for the planning and delivery stage of each project. This provides the school with a direct link for updates and queries. The current status of all projects is also published online at gov.ie.

All (other than the very smallest) building projects to be delivered by a school will involve the support of a professional consultant or design team. The consultant is procured in the first instance and then guides the school through the project planning and delivery stages. This consultant or design team is required to provide the project client (typically the school's Board of Management) with **monthly updates** on the project.

Innovative digital solutions are increasingly used by the Planning and Building Unit for communication purposes, such as the award-winning School Hub which was developed and implemented for the rollout of the Schools PV Programme. Online platforms are utilised for project management, our GIS supports programme management and communication, and a bespoke application was developed to facilitate the School Energy Profile Inventory (more information under Climate below). The PBU continues to innovate and develop its digital strategy to support the capital programme and communications with schools and stakeholders.

Some of the wider and more **strategic communications** with stakeholders include the following:

- Publication of status updates on all projects on the Gov.ie website.
- Education Buildings Ireland Conference held bi-annually (most recently in November 2024)
- Development of linkages with our counterparts in our neighbouring and other jurisdictions to share learnings and experience
- Linkages with professional bodies and CIF as part of market engagement to maximise interest in design and delivery of school building programme.
- Regular engagement with school patrons and management bodies.

Climate Action

The Department of Education and Youth and school sector has an important multidimensional role to play in responding to the climate challenge. Climate action priorities range from the need to reduce emissions from school buildings to promotion of sustainable and active travel to the central role of schools in promoting climate literacy and climate action.

Under the Climate Action Plan, the school sector must reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030 and achieve net zero by 2050. The Department's approach is guided by a School Sector Technical Climate Action Roadmap which was published in 2023 and updated in 2024, and which sets out the strategies to be implemented to achieve these challenging targets. There are a number of core strategies outlined in the Roadmap, including the expansion of the DOE/SEAI Energy Retrofit Pathfinder Programme, and a targeted biomass programme. Some other key current initiatives are:

Schools PV Programme



Funded under the Climate Action Fund, the rollout of this programme is providing all schools with 6kW of rooftop solar panels. First phase of the programme was launched in November 2023 and the second phase, extending to all eligible schools, was launched in November 2024. Since the launch of the programme, more than 3,334 schools have been approved to progress to tender for installation of PV panels. Of those, more than 3,102 schools were approved for funding. To date, over 2,548 schools have confirmed that their Solar PV installations have been completed.

Figure 9 - Castletown NS Donegal Schools PV Programme

School Energy and Condition Profile Inventory

The School Energy and Condition Profile Inventory is establishing both the energy baseline and condition of the school estate to facilitate analysis of investment options. Phase 1 of the energy inventory profile (which comprised all schools across five counties) is complete and the Department of Education and Youth was approved funding for the final phase from

REPower EU[2]. The development of this energy and condition profile involves energy assessors conducting school visits to gather focused information on energy use, building types, age, and size along with an overview of general fabric and energy aspects of electrical and mechanical systems across each block of accommodation at every school in the country. This is an innovative approach utilising a new survey tool on the Department's Geographic Information System. School visits will be complete in the coming months. Robust quality assurance and analysis will be conducted over the course of 2026. As part of this, technical calculations will determine a School Energy and Carbon Estimated Rating (SEACER) which is a bespoke rating developed specifically for the school sector by the Department of Education and Youth.

The completion of the energy inventory profile of all schools to establish the energy base line of the school estate, is a prerequisite to identifying and target decarbonisation and energy efficiency investment and will facilitate strategic decision-making by the Department on priorities for future capital investment in schools. Critically, it will also provide an additional evidence-base to inform the prioritisation of projects for progression to construction.

Climate Action Summer Works Scheme

The current multi-annual Climate Action Summer Works Scheme for schools opened in 2025 with the first tranche of project approvals announced in November 2025. Previously named the Summer Works Scheme, it now has a strong climate dimension and enables schools to undertake small and medium scale maintenance and improvement works such as insulation, LED lighting, the provision of EV chargers and bike racks, as well as the traditional maintenance work associated with this scheme.

The Scheme also provides an important opportunity for post-primary schools to undertake refurbishment, and improvement works to their science laboratories. Another change to the Scheme is that funding approvals in any given year will involve a spread of categories rather than the traditional approach of a single category at a time, helping schools to obtain value for money.

The Scheme will facilitate multi-annual funding for schools, which is in line with the Programme for Government commitment to ensure that the Scheme operates every year to

[2] REPower EU is the EU's plan to rapidly reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels following the war in Ukraine, boost the independence and security of the Union's energy supply and accelerate the green transition. It aims to fast forward the clean transition and joining forces to achieve a more resilient energy system and a true Energy Union. REPower EU is financed via the National Recovery and Resilience Facility (NRRF).

ensure good maintenance of school buildings. The next tranche of projects approved to proceed will be announced in October 2026.

Legal arrangements to protect State investments in the school estate

Over recent years, there has been significant progress on the implementation of enhanced legal agreements with patron bodies to protect state investments in the school estate. This has involved extensive engagement with patron body representatives and with the CSSO.

Minister-owned sites

One category of enhanced legal agreement relates to schools built on Minster-owned sites. There are currently 390 schools in this category and all of these schools (as well as future schools built on Minister-owned sites) will be subject to a new school lease.

The current position is that all 390 new school lease instructions are with the CSSO and are being actioned with the relevant legal representatives of the patrons. To date, 47 leases have been signed. It is expected that all of the remainder will be signed over the course of 2026.

It is also worth noting that the Minister's interest is protected on 51% of schools on Minister-owned sites through existing legal arrangements and roll-out to date of the new school lease. However, it is the Department's intention to move all relevant schools on to the standard new school lease format over the course of 2026.

Patron-owned sites

A further category of enhanced legal agreement relates to schools built on patron-owned sites. The new form of legal agreement to be implemented for this category of schools is a deed of covenant and charge. The approach is to prioritise rollout of the new deed of covenant and charge to schools that have projects over €5 million. A sample diocese will also be prioritised. This covers 160 schools. The details and deed instructions of these 160 schools have been provided to the CSSO. The CSSO in turn has processed these and issued deeds to the legal representatives of the relevant patrons for execution. It is expected that most of these will be signed by the end of 2026.

In relation to the remaining 206 schools that have projects between €1 million and €5 million, the details and the deed instructions have also been provided by the department to the CSSO. The CSSO expect to have these processed and issued to the legal representatives of the patrons during Q2 2026. It is expected that these will then be signed as quickly as possible after the prioritised cohort of projects over €5 million have been completed.

The new Deed of Covenant and Charge will replace any existing charging leases in place on patron-owned properties.

Information for Oireachtas Members

Further information on the school building programme, including up to date information on the status of current school building projects is available at gov.ie: Building works for the construction, extension and refurbishment of schools

Any queries or correspondence from Oireachtas members should be channeled through the Minister's Office using the dedicated email address for Oireachtas members: **oireachtasqueries@education.gov.ie**