

More detailed information on the Department's business activities can be found on this website along with the most recent [Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 - Department of Education and Skills Strategy Statement](#)

Submissions are invited from interested parties to assist the Department in defining its strategic vision for the next three years. Please use the form below to give us your feedback under the goals. **No personal data is collected during this survey.**

We would like to thank you in advance for your feedback, which will be used to help us develop the Strategy Statement 2019-2021.

You can submit feedback until the close of business on **Tuesday 18th December, 2018**

Corporate Services

Department of Education and Skills

Strategy Statement 2019-2021

What areas should the Department of Education and Skills focus on, under the goals below, in order to deploy its resources to have the greatest impact for learners over the next three years?

1. Improve the learning experience and the success of learners

In IPPN's view, Objective 1.1 of the Action Plan - *Improve services and resources to promote wellbeing in our school communities to support success in school and life* – is the most crucial aspect of this goal. We are encouraging all school leaders to embrace the idea that developing a culture of wellbeing across the school community is not necessarily additional work, yet it does require time, commitment and for it to be prioritised.

In order to develop a holistic approach to wellbeing, it is essential that the focus be on having better conversations and developing better relationships across the whole school community. Perhaps this could be a focus of work for the DES Inspectorate and PDST in the period 2019-2021 - to support and encourage schools in their efforts in this regard, with whole-school training, guidance and other supports. Furthermore, where there are specific wellbeing-related issues among pupils and staff, the resources need to be deployed to offer support to the individual to help them to overcome the particular challenges – e.g. NEPS psychologists, employee assistance programme and other resources.

In relation to Objective 1.4: *Improve the transition of learners at critical stages in the education and training system*, IPPN would like to see further development of the transition from pre-school to primary, as well as the transition to post-primary, to smooth the path for pupils and to ensure this is done consistently well across schools.

Objective 1.5: *Increase the use of ICT in teaching, learning and assessment so that learners are equipped with the necessary skills to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing learning environment* – this is an area that needs additional focus. Most schools have a significant ICT infrastructure yet multi-annual funding to keep it functioning has not been provided. Grants are offered in a piecemeal fashion and IT expertise and resources are not provided to

schools in a consistent manner. Furthermore, ICT training needs to be prioritised in teacher training colleges and in in-service.

2. Improve the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs

Objective 2.1: Improve the learning experience and learning outcomes for learners impacted by disadvantage. In IPPN's view, the focus here needs to be on continuing the excellent work being done in schools supporting those in disadvantaged settings and in providing the same sorts of supports available in DEIS schools to those schools not categorised as DEIS but with significant numbers of pupils from a disadvantaged background. Only in this way can the playing field be truly levelled for all.

Objective 2.2: Target policies and supports for learners with special education needs to support their participation and progression across the continuum of education. The proposed new model for allocating Special Education teachers to schools should improve the equity of provision across schools. If these pupils, and their classmates, are to fully participate in their education, these resources must be prioritised for staffing.

IPPN fully supports the view that a dependency on resources for individual pupils beyond the point that they are needed should be avoided and would seek further opportunities to promote independence where appropriate.

Focus needs to be placed on ensuring that those with the resources to acquire assessments are not prioritised over those that do not have the resources. Equity is crucial.

3. Help those delivering education services to continually improve

In relation to Objective 3.2: *Develop the continuum of teacher education to equip teachers with the right skills for 21st century teaching and learning and improve school leadership* – IPPN would like to see further support and resources for, and development of, the continuum of support for middle leaders and school leaders, particularly those with 6+ years of experience. The Centre for School Leadership is doing superb work in this area but needs to be allowed to review and embed the existing models of professional learning before proceeding with new areas.

A key area of focus needs to be the preparation for and selection of school leaders, to ensure that teachers understand the complexity of the role and that selection panels know what attributes are required of school leaders, and what constitutes sufficient preparation and qualification for the role.

Objective 3.3: *Improve quality, promote excellence and innovation, and increase autonomy for schools*. In relation to this objective, and indeed the overall goal, IPPN strongly holds the view that the system needs to allow teachers and school leaders time to embed all of the change that has been expected of them over the past decade. This will allow schools to focus, in a systematic way - based on the school self-evaluation process - on how their

classrooms and their schools can improve over time by prioritising what is important in the particular school context, by allowing time to implement each proposed improvement over an agreed period of time and allowing further time for practice and procedures to be fully embedded before proceeding to the next priority.

Schools by their nature strive to continuously improve. With guidance and support from the DES Inspectorate and other agencies such as NCCA and PDST, they can be encouraged to fully embrace their autonomy to improve the school and its outcomes in a sustainable way. IPPN has repeatedly called for a Calendar of Reform, whereby improvements identified by the DES and its agencies are prioritised, communicated and resourced appropriately, allowing schools the autonomy to agree a schedule of change in line with their own school improvement plans.

4. Build stronger bridges between education and the wider community

The objective that resonates most with school leaders in relation to this goal is Objective 4.1: *Increase opportunities for schools to support their local communities through the utilisation of school buildings and facilities out of hours.* IPPN has been involved in the working group looking at how this can be done most effectively.

A number of issues need to be worked through in order to enable schools to offer the support to their local communities as envisaged, including what needs to be put in place in terms of contracts, fees, roles and responsibilities in making the building available for external parties, legal and insurance implications, among other items. Chief among them is who is responsible for managing all this additional work. IPPN believes strongly that the school leader cannot and should not be expected to lead, manage or do this work. It may be useful to look at the experience of the many Fingal initiatives in this area that highlight shared management structures supported by the local council in order to ensure success.

5. Improve national planning and support services

Objective 5.1: Strengthen strategic oversight and focus on delivery for results

Many schools have very positive engagement with their inspectors, and can approach them for advice and support in a co-professional model of collaboration. However, some schools have reported negative experiences in the tone and manner of individual inspectors. Given the enormous amount of change schools have been expected to absorb in recent years, this approach is unhelpful in terms of achieving better outcomes for children.

Objective 5.2. Deliver appropriate infrastructure for learning environments

Capitation grants and minor works grants need to be increased significantly to enable schools to maintain the type of environments conducive to learning for all pupils. All classrooms should have a minimum standard of furniture, equipment, space and storage. Likewise, staff should have adequate accommodation for breaks and meetings. New school buildings tend to be of a very high specification and the envy of surrounding schools. Older schools need to be provided with sufficient funding to replace inefficient heating systems, windows, flooring and maintain the existing infrastructure and, where possible, to ensure

that all schools have, at a minimum, fully-functioning ICT infrastructure, security systems, general purpose rooms for assembly, PE and other activities, among other infrastructure.

Objective 5.3: Improve the quality of the national support services and shared services

IPPN's priority here is the provision by the DES and its agencies of adequate supports to enable schools to lead and manage teaching and learning effectively. Some management bodies have centralised legal, financial, HR and IT support to schools, taking a huge burden off school leaders' shoulders. This model needs to be put in place for all schools, regardless of patron or model, and it needs to be of a sufficiently high standard that schools can rely on the advice and support provided.

Any Other Comments:

IPPN's view is that the number of priorities that require school input needs to considerably reduce. IPPN is involved in the Primary Education Forum and will put forward suggestions for initiatives and programmes that should be postponed or deprioritised, at least for a time, until schools have had time to embed the change introduced in recent years. Support from the Inspectorate, the DES and others is crucial in empowering schools to continuously improve, but such improvement needs to be driven by the schools themselves rather than by external parties.

Are you a: (this is a required field)

Learner Parent Teacher **Organisation** Other

If you chose Organisation please state the name of your organisation:

Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN)

Freedom of Information

Please note that submissions will be subject to the Freedom of Information Acts (details available at <http://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/FOI/>).