



IPPN Submission to the National Conversation on Education

February 2026

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Vision and Purpose – Key Themes and Questions

The primary objective of the National Conversation should be to achieve consensus, across all stakeholders, as to what constitutes the purpose of education. If there is clarity about what we want our children to experience and what will be of greatest benefit to them and to society in general, then questions around how our education system is designed and resourced will be more easily addressed.

Prompt questions might include

- What is the purpose of an education?
- To what do we aspire for our children in Ireland?
- Are schools about more than teaching and learning?
- How can we ensure that children develop the skills, competencies and dispositions that will equip them to become active citizens in 21st Century Ireland?
- How should schools be organised and structured - by location/gender/ideology/faith?
- How should children with additional needs be supported to fully engage with their education to achieve their full potential? Much of the research suggests that more teachers would be more impactful than more SNAs.
- How should learning environments look and feel?
- How can the quality of education best be ascertained and assured?
- How can we better prepare professionals to deliver on these expectations?
- How should transitions between sectors work to ensure the focus is on the child from end to end?
- Who is responsible for agreeing the change agenda?
- Who is responsible for implementing the change agenda and allocating resources?
- How will resource implications be dealt with – managing expectations re. vision vs implementation?
- What is working well currently, so that we can ensure it's not lost?

Skills and Values

- What skills and values do we want to promote through the education system?
- How can that be achieved alongside parental expectations, rights and responsibilities?
- How can trust, respect and professionalism be manifested within education?

Voices that need to be heard

- Children and young adults. Learnings from organisations that have consulted and engaged with children would be an important input to the Conversation, given the age range is from age 2-3 years at early years to 18 years.
- Parents and guardians
- Teachers and other staff at all levels of the education system
- School leaders
- School management
- Those from the margins – migrant community including those in Direct Provision, socio-economic disadvantage, special needs, Traveller/Roma, the homeless, young offenders, children in dysfunctional families
- Community development groups including those involved in the Arts, sports, hobbies
- Explore good models of engagement e.g. BEACONS, 1916 commemorations, NCCA, the use of focus groups, story-telling, video and oral inputs as well as text-based.
- Facilitation and translation support where needed to reach all stakeholder groups.

Relevant Publications and Research

1. UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2024 - [Link](#)
2. IPPN Sustainable Leadership Research Report 2022 - [Link](#)
3. Deakin University – Health & Wellbeing of Irish School Leaders – 2024 – [Link](#)

Supports to the Secretariat

IPPN proposes that experts in the following fields be appointed to support the work of the Convention:

- Curriculum development – NCCA, Oide
- Special educational needs – NCSE, NABMSE
- Education psychology - NEPS
- Children’s rights - OCO
- Parental rights and responsibilities – NPC
- School leadership – IPPN, NAPD, Oide
- School governance – Patron/Management bodies
- School funding – DE, FSSU, Management bodies
- Teacher Education/Pedagogy – INTO, NCCA, Oide
 - a. Early years education
 - b. Primary education
 - c. Post-primary education
 - d. Third level education, including further and higher education
- Education-related legislation e.g. Mason Hayes Curran (MHC), Eversheds.

Online National Conversation Survey – IPPN Responses

National Conversation Survey

Section 1 - Your experience of education today

Think about children or young people in your life or community. What parts of the Irish education system are working well for them in your opinion?*
(Choose up to 3 things you've seen working well. Select 'Other' to type in an option that isn't listed)

<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion of children with additional needs in mainstream school settings	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of technology in schools	<input type="checkbox"/> The exam system
<input type="checkbox"/> Access to supports for children with additional needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Development of life skills	<input type="checkbox"/> The subjects and topics children and young people learn
<input type="checkbox"/> Preparing children and young people for work	<input type="checkbox"/> Help with financial costs like books and meals	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical activity and sports
<input type="checkbox"/> Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/> Provision of school transport	<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching and learning of languages apart from English and Irish
<input type="checkbox"/> Irish language teaching and learning	<input type="checkbox"/> Help for children and young people's wellbeing and mental health	<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers and school staff
<input type="checkbox"/> Music and the arts		
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		

1. Teachers and school staff
2. Inclusion of children with additional needs in mainstream
3. Subjects and topics

National Conversation Survey

Section 1 - Your experience of education today

What things make it harder for children and young people to take part in and do well in education today?*

(Choose up to 3 challenges you've noticed or experienced. Select 'Other' to type in an option that isn't listed)

<input type="checkbox"/> Class sizes	<input type="checkbox"/> Children and young people feeling excluded or different in school	<input type="checkbox"/> Low school attendance
<input type="checkbox"/> Children and young people feeling anxious, lonely, or disengaged	<input type="checkbox"/> The amount of content in the curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/> There is a mismatch between schoolwork and real-life skills
<input type="checkbox"/> The cost of education-related expenses	<input type="checkbox"/> The level of communication with parents and guardians about a child's progress	<input type="checkbox"/> The level of support for children and young people with additional learning needs
<input type="checkbox"/> Availability of mental health supports	<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on exams or points	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		

1. Children feeling anxious, lonely or disengaged
2. Level of support for children with additional needs
3. Other - Leadership time to focus on teaching, learning and other child-centred priorities

Section 1 - Your experience of education today

People see the purpose of education in different ways. Thinking about education in Ireland today, how much emphasis do you think is currently placed on each of the following

Please rate each one individually.

	Too Little	Just Right	Too Much	Don't Know
Preparing children and young people to be active participants in society and democracy*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching literacy and numeracy*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping children and young people prepare for work*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing children and young people as independent and confident individuals*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching Irish*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping children and young people prepare for the future*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching children and young people to care for others*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping children and young people understand and connect with other people*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promoting physical development, sport and healthy lifestyles*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Giving children and young people an understanding of beliefs and worldviews*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching students how to live responsibly and protect the planet*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping children and young people to appreciate music, art and literature*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping children and young people develop financial skills*	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Active participants – Just Right
- Literacy and numeracy – Just Right
- Prep for work – Don't know
- Independence & confidence – Too little
- Irish – Just Right
- Prep for future - Don't know
- Care for others – Just Right
- Understanding and connection – Just Right
- Health and fitness - Too little
- Beliefs and worldviews - Just Right
- Protect the planet – Just Right
- Music, art, literature – Too little
- Financial skills – Don't know

Section 2 - What change you are seeing

What are the biggest changes you have noticed in education for children and young people?*

(Choose up to 3. Select "I don't know" if none apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Children and young people think and talk about their learning more	<input type="checkbox"/> Children are developing more confidence to express their views	<input type="checkbox"/> Children and young people have more complex learning needs
<input type="checkbox"/> Children and young people feel a stronger sense of belonging in school	<input type="checkbox"/> Social media and technology are negatively affecting how children and young people learn and interact	<input type="checkbox"/> The materials that are covered in school are less relevant to life outside school
<input type="checkbox"/> More children are experiencing anxiety, stress, or low wellbeing	<input type="checkbox"/> Technology is helping children and young people learn in more engaging ways	<input type="checkbox"/> There is more pressure to succeed academically
<input type="checkbox"/> I don't know		
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		

1. Stronger sense of belonging in school
2. More children experiencing anxiety, stress and low wellbeing
3. More complex learning needs

Section 2 - What change you are seeing

Have you noticed any changes in what parents and guardians expect from the education system?*

(Choose up to 3. Select "I don't know" if none apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Parents and guardians would like their children to have more challenging learning activities in schools	<input type="checkbox"/> I don't know	<input type="checkbox"/> Parents and guardians want help understanding and supporting their child's learning
<input type="checkbox"/> Parents and guardians want to be more active partners in their child's learning	<input type="checkbox"/> More support is wanted in the provision of early childcare services	<input type="checkbox"/> Parents and guardians want more supports before and after school hours
<input type="checkbox"/> Parents and guardians expect more choice on the type of school their child can attend	<input type="checkbox"/> Parents and guardians would like their child to experience a greater connection to schools	<input type="checkbox"/> Parents and guardians expect more support with the cost of education expenses
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		

1. Help understanding and supporting their child's learning
2. Before and after school supports
3. Other - Adequate staffing and resourcing to support children with additional needs

Section 2 - What change you are seeing

Have you noticed any changes for teachers and schools?*

(Choose up to 3. Select "I don't know" if none apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Schools are increasing focus on student wellbeing and emotional development	<input type="checkbox"/> There is increasing diversity within school communities	<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers are adopting more innovative and creative learning approaches
<input type="checkbox"/> Technology and artificial intelligence are playing a larger role in teaching and learning	<input type="checkbox"/> I don't know	<input type="checkbox"/> School leaders and principals are expected to take on more responsibilities
<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers and schools are expected to support a wider range of student needs and abilities	<input type="checkbox"/> Teachers are expected to take on more responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/> School staff are communicating more with parents and guardians about students' learning
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		

1. School leaders and principals expected to take on more responsibilities
2. Teachers and schools are expected to support a wider range of student needs and abilities
3. Schools are increasing focus on student wellbeing and emotional development

Section 3 - Your hopes for the future

Think about a child or young person in your life. What do you hope school and learning will be like in Ireland in 2040?

Tell us, in a few sentences, what you would like education in the future to look like.

1000 

Keep this future vision you just described in mind. How does education need to evolve to support children and young people to shape their own futures, contribute to their communities, and thrive in a changing world?"

(Choose up to three options that feel most important to you.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Improving access to high-quality special education and individual supports	<input type="checkbox"/> Making transitions between school, college, and work easier and better supported	<input type="checkbox"/> Preparing young people for changes in technology and AI
<input type="checkbox"/> More education support for children in their early years (from birth until school entry)	<input type="checkbox"/> Better mental health and wellbeing supports	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased recognition given to achievements beyond examination results
<input type="checkbox"/> Investing in a strong, skilled, and well-supported teaching workforce	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeting extra supports to learners and communities facing disadvantage	<input type="checkbox"/> Stronger partnerships between schools and local community services
<input type="checkbox"/> Stronger links between schools, colleges and employers		
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		

IPPN hopes that all children attending Irish primary schools in 2040 are thriving in school – emotionally, physically, mentally and academically.

Impactful school leadership transforms the lives of children by enhancing their experience of school, the culture of learning, the quality of education, and its outcomes. All evidence confirms that school leadership is a key determinant of improved outcomes for children and school communities.

As, the quality of a child’s experience in primary school is deeply shaped by the leadership of their school, by 2040 the vision and hope is that every school leader is empowered and supported to help all children thrive, and that all schools and their leaders have the time, support, resources and structures to enable this to happen.

How does education need to evolve, up to 3 answers:

1. Improved access to high-quality special education and supports
2. Investing in strong, skilled and well-supported teaching workforce
3. Other - Investing in school leadership so that leaders can focus on leading teaching and learning rather than on administration and other tasks that take them away from their core purpose

Are you responding as an individual, or on behalf of an organisation or group?*

As an individual On behalf of an organisation or group

Please tell us the name of the organisation or group*

How many people contributed to this submission?*

1 2 - 5 6 - 10 11 - 20 20+

IPPN – The Network for Irish Primary Principals and Deputy Principals

2-5 people