

## **THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN IRELAND**

Education in Ireland is compulsory from age 6 to 16 or until students have completed three years of second level (post-primary) education. While there is no national provision for pre-schooling in Ireland, first level schools (primary schools) accept children on or after their fourth birthday. The typical first level school enrolls pupils by age into eight year-groups or classes, ranging from junior infants to sixth class. The vast majority of schools are State funded, privately owned "all-through" schools, catering for pupils from 4 to 12 years of age. The curriculum followed is a child-centred one and it allows for flexibility in timetabling and teaching methods.

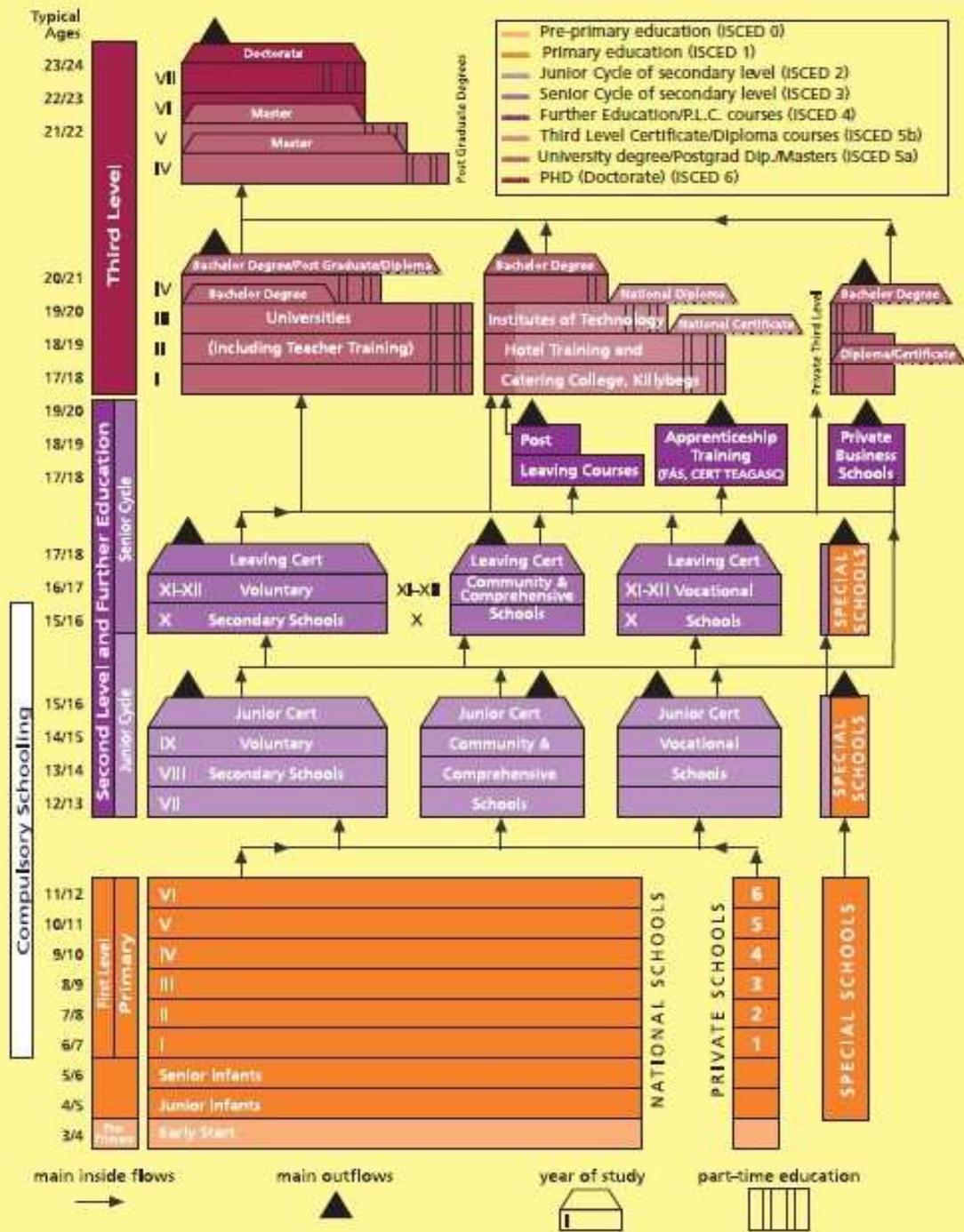
The great majority of pupils transfer to second level school when they have completed the full first level course – generally at about 12 years of age. For registration in a second level school, students must be aged 12 on 1<sup>st</sup> of January in the first year of attendance.

The second level education sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. While each category of school evolved from a distinctive historical context, and have different ownership and management structures, they have a great deal in common. They are largely State funded and follow the same State prescribed curriculum and take the same State public examinations. The second level school (secondary school) span is predominantly a six-year cycle, taken by ages 12 to 18. The terminology of "lower secondary" and "upper secondary" is not used in Ireland, but the terms "Junior Cycle" and "Senior Cycle" are commonly used. Apart from internal school tests, there are two key public examinations taken by students – the Junior Certificate (age 15/16) and the Leaving Certificate (age 17/18). These are external examinations set by the State Examinations Commission. A great deal of public attention is focused on the Leaving Certificate Examination as entry to third level education is closely linked to the results achieved by students at this examination.

Third level education in Ireland is provided mainly by universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education. In addition, a number of other third level institutions provide specialist education in a number of professions such as medicine and law. Most third level education institutions are supported very substantially by the State. For young people and adults who have left education early or without adequate qualifications, second-chance and

alternative programmes are available. Adult, further and community education all have a role to play in providing second-chance education opportunities, addressing skills needs and promoting equality and social inclusion.

# Education System in Ireland



## **EDUCATION CENTRES**

The “Education Centre” is a particular arrangement that exists within the Irish Education system. They are similar to Regional Centres or Library boards that exist in other EU countries. The principal activity of Education Centres is to organize the delivery of national programmes of teacher professional development on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. Centres also arrange a varied local programme of activities for teachers and educators in general.

The **ATECI** is the umbrella organisation of the 21 full-time and 9 part-time Education Centres in Ireland. It represents the interest of the network as a whole including both part-time and full-time Directors, staff and management committees of all centres.

The executive of the Association meets six times a year but we have organised the network into a series of six regional groups. The regional groupings meet separately and work very closely together initiating collaborative projects which are often piloted and then shared with the network in general.

The association has a remit:

- (a) to act for and on behalf of member centres on all matters of policy as agreed by centres at AGM or EGM
- (b) to raise the profile of Centres
- (c) to be a partner at national level in the formulation of education policy
- (d) to provide advice and support to Committees of Management and Directors of Centres.

### **Clare Education Centre**

Clare Education Centre, formerly known as Ennis Teachers' Centre, has, since 1972, supported the in-service needs of Clare teachers. Since August 2000, the Centre has been located in a new purpose-built complex on the Kilrush Road, Ennis. In addition to the functions noted above Clare Education Centre has, in recent years, been involved in Intercultural Projects with Centres in European Union countries. The current RECIPE project looks at how the work of Local/Regional Education Centres can assist schools in addressing the issue of dropout. In the context of Clare Education Centre, RECIPE will investigate, how a range of interventions at Primary school level have assisted schools in creating a more meaningful and engaging curriculum. The investigation will hope to show that effective and innovative work at local level can support national initiatives preventing dropout and in fact inform national and international policy by addressing each school in its particular context.

## **IRELAND - THE PICTURE OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING**

Data on early school leaving in Ireland was difficult to ascertain up to recently due to lack of data availability and inconsistent data coverage of PPSNs (Personal Public Service Numbers) on the datasets that were available. Some data however, is available. Table 1.1 and 1.2 below

provide time-series figures on the number of Early Leavers from 2001/2002 to 2009/2010. The number of Early Leavers has decreased from 11,498 pupils, who were enrolled in the 2001/2002 academic year but not enrolled one year later in the 2002/2003 academic year, to 7,713 who left between enrolment in 2009/2010 and 2010/2011

**Table 1.1: Number of Early Leavers - 2001/2002 to 2009/2010**

Enrolled in	but not in	Early Leavers
2001/2002	2002/2003	11,498
2002/2003	2003/2004	10,278
2003/2004	2004/2005	10,313
2004/2005	2005/2006	10,249
2005/2006	2006/2007	10,158
2006/2007	2007/2008	10,299
2007/2008	2008/2009	9,085
2008/2009	2009/2010	8,047
2009/2010	2010/2011	7,713

**Table 1.2: Number of Early Leavers Classified by Sex, 2001/2002 to 2009/2010**

Enrolled in	but not in	Males	Females	Total Males*	Total Females*
2003/2004	2004/2005	4,121	6,192	155,217	153,082
2004/2005	2005/2006	4,125	6,124	154,118	151,649
2005/2006	2006/2007	4,216	5,942	152,370	150,636
2006/2007	2007/2008	4,597	5,702	152,113	151,382
2007/2008	2008/2009	4,170	4,915	152,288	152,826
2008/2009	2009/2010	3,857	4,190	153,269	154,649
2009/2010	2010/2011	3,690	4,023	154,722	157,433

\*Includes pupils in final year of senior cycle

To coordinate and to be able to provide coherent measurable drop-out rates this year (2013) a series of reports were produced by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) which tracks a cohort of school leavers one year after they leave school. Following the publication of the National Statistics Board report entitled ‘The Irish Statistics System: The Way Forward and Joined up Government Needs Joined up Data’ in December 2011, the Department of Education and Skills took the initiative to explore the potential of data matching to fill current data gaps. The tracking was carried out using data matching and was also supplemented with estimations of other destinations for which individualised data was not available.

These reports are based on a detailed analysis of the records held in the Department on students who were enrolled in DES-aided post-primary schools (on the Post-Primary Pupils Database), focusing on those pupils who were enrolled in post-primary schools in one academic year but not enrolled in one of these schools one year later. These pupils, using a unique personal identifier (a protected identifier key based on the Personal Public Service

Number (PPSN)), were tracked to other data sources that were available at the time. The cohort of pupils dealt with in the report “Early leavers-what’s next” was enrolled in the 2009/2010 academic year and are termed ‘Early Leavers’. This report focussed on the 7,713 pupils out of 257,060 students who left school before enrolling in their final year of DES-aided post-primary schools. Schools in these areas come under the aegis of DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). These areas have double the dropout rates of non-DEIS designated areas.

A key finding of the research shows more females consistently exit the second level system earlier than males. This contradicts the long held view that early school leaving is predominantly a male problem. Tables 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 illustrate the current picture of early school leaving in Ireland, where they go and gender differences.

**Table 1.3: Number of Pupils Enrolled in Second-Level Schools Aided by the Department of Education and Skills 2009/2010 and Number of Which not Enrolled 2010/2011 (Excludes Those Enrolled in Final Year of Senior Cycle)**

	Enrolled in 2009/2010	<i>Of Which not Enrolled in 2010/2011 i.e. Early Leavers</i>
	<b>30th Sep 2009</b>	<b>30th Sep 2010</b>
<b>Junior Cycle</b>		
Junior Cert. Year 1	55,547	582
Junior Cert. Year 2	53,755	771
Junior Cert. Year 3	52,702	1,445
Junior Cert. School Programme Year 1	3,688	77
Junior Cert. School Programme Year 2	3,619	143
Junior Cert. School Programme Year 3	3,333	332
<b>Senior Cycle</b>		
Transition Year Programme	28,635	1,064
Leaving Cert. Year 1	32,534	1,996
Leaving Cert. Applied Year 1	3,642	505
Leaving Cert. Vocational Programme Year 1	19,605	798
<b>Total*</b>	257,060	7,713

\*Differs slightly from the published figures due to improvements in data quality.

\*Excludes pupils enrolled in the final year of senior cycle.

**Table 1.4: Early Leavers - Classified by Destination in 2010**

		% of Cohort
Number		
Total Cohort	7,713	100.0
<i>Of which enrolled in</i>		
Post-Leaving Cert Course (PLC)	114	1.5

FÁS Course 2010	473	6.1
<i>Of those remaining</i>		
Social Welfare Activity on 31st December 2010	511	6.6
<i>Of those with no social welfare activity on 31st December 2010</i>		
Employment Activity During 2010	469	6.1
Outward Migration up to June 2010	120	1.6
Enrolled in Education or Training Outside of the State	1,070	13.9
<i>Estimates for</i>		
Youthreach*	1,941	25.2
Enrolled in Private Educational Institutions*	1,711	22.2
Other (includes emigration, seasonal employment abroad and all other categories)	1,304	16.9

\* See Background Notes.

**Gender Differences in Destinations? Table 1.5: Early Leavers - Classified by Sex and Destination in 2010**

	Male	%	Female	%
Total Cohort	3,690	100.0	4,023	100.0
<i>Of which enrolled in</i>				
Post-Leaving Cert. Course (PLC)	73	2.0	41	1.0
FÁS Course 2010	172	4.7	301	7.5
<i>Of those remaining</i>				
Social Welfare Activity 31st December 2010	245	6.6	266	6.6
Employment Activity During 2010~	213	5.8	256	6.4
Outward Migration up to June 2010	63	1.7	57	1.4
Enrolled in Education or Training Outside of the State	602	16.3	468	11.6
<i>Estimates for</i>				
Youthreach*	1,155	31.3	786	19.5
Enrolled in Private Educational Institutions*	799	21.7	912	22.7
Other (includes emigration, seasonal employment abroad and all other categories)	368	10.0	936	23.3

~ Of those with no social welfare activity 31st December 2010.

This means that for the first time the Department of Education and Skills has now tracked the progress of individual school leavers in Ireland from a single year, including both those who have completed the Leaving Certificate Examinations and those who have dropped out. The study shows that over 75% of school leavers in 2010 have continued their education either in higher education institutions or in training programmes, further education facilities or in second level schools.

The response to the reports in Ireland was very positive with many ministers confirming that our current government continues to emphasise the importance of young people availing of educational opportunities appropriate to them in order to equip them with the skills to enter the workforce and secure employment in the future and value the publication of both these reports as a valuable source of information for the future planning of educational and training needs.

### **Regionally and Locally in Clare**

<b>Regionally</b>			
2005 Clare	1384 sat Leaving Cert and Junior Cert	95.95 Sat Junior Cert	91.69 Sat Leaving Cert
2006 Clare	1402 sat Leaving Cert and Junior Cert	95.51 Sat Junior Cert	90.15 sat Leaving Cert
<b>Locally –</b>			
2010/11	3.5 % left school prior to Junior Cert 3.6% left school after Junior Cert before upper secondary school.		

The report “Early leavers-what’s next” looks at the percentage of Early Leavers from the Local Authority Area of the School they attended. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown had the highest percentage of Early Leavers at 4.3%, followed by Carlow County Council (3.8%), Galway City Council (3.6%), Cork City Council (3.2%) and Limerick City Council (3.2%). **The lowest rates were observed in the areas of Clare County Council (1.5%) and Roscommon County Council (1.7%).**

## **Ireland's National policy's to support and focus on early school leaving:**

- DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) Programme
- NEWB (National Education Welfare Board)
- Schools Completion Programme (SCP)
- Home School Community Liaison Scheme(HSCL)
  - Primary & post primary
- Family learning projects
  - Primary, post primary & early school leavers
- Adult Education Programme - Back to Education (BTEI)
- Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme(VTOS)
  - Early school leavers

The Education Centre network works in collaboration with all the above initiatives and supports them at local level.

## **How do these work to prevent students dropping out?**

DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools) aspires to the concept that the education system is inclusive and enables every student to reach their potential. Education is viewed as “critical in nurturing children’s development across a range of intelligences and skills, and in laying the foundations for successful participation in adult life”.(DES, 2008, p13)

DEIS aims to challenge under-achievement in schools which can have profound consequences for children and adults in later life, not only in terms of economic uncertainty, but also in terms of well being, health, self esteem and participation in family and community life. (DES, 2008, p 10)

The challenge for the education system is to work, in partnership with others, to overcome as many of these barriers as possible in a way that is learner-centred, systematic and effective in terms of educational outcomes. (DES, 2008, p 15)

FAS in its 2009 Statement on Education and Training notes that;

Underperformance at primary level means that significant numbers of Irish children enter second level schools at a disadvantage and with a limited range of skills. The 11.5 percent of Irish people aged 18-24 who have not completed the Leaving Certificate or equivalent remains too high. There are significant concentrations of underperformance in certain locations. (NCC, 2009, p.8)

The National Skills Strategy proposes that by 2020:

- 48 percent of the labour force should have qualifications at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Levels 6 to 10 (Third level certificate and above);
- 45 percent should have qualifications at NFQ levels 4 and 5 (Leaving Cert or equivalent); and
- The remaining seven percent should have qualifications at NFQ levels 1 to 3 (up to and including Junior Cert).

In order to achieve these objectives, it will require:

- An additional 500,000 individuals within the workforce to progress by at least one NFQ level;
- The proportion of the population aged 20-24 with Leaving Certificate or equivalent vocationally-oriented programmes should be increased to 94 percent.
- The retention rate at Leaving Certificate needs to increase from 82 percent in 2006 to 90 percent by 2020; and
- The progression rate to third level education will need to increase from 55 % in 2004 to 72 % by 2020.

It goes on to state that

In order to achieve the participation targets set in the *National Skills Strategy*, patterns of educational disadvantage in Irish schools must be tackled. Investments in tomorrow's labour force should begin as early in life as possible. (NCC, 2009, p.6)

## **What Works to Tackle Early School Leaving ?**

### **Nationally**

- SCP core elements were evaluated and form part of core plan nationally
  - Homework clubs
  - Breakfast clubs/school meals
  - Summer programmes
  - Transition programme
  - Behaviour support work
  - Educational support
  - Attendance tracking
  - Personal supports
  - Interagency collaboration
  - Family supports
  - Mentoring
  - After school clubs

- Extra-curricular activities/sports

### **Regionally**

- Local steering committees work in an interagency method linking groups and schools and choosing core elements to deliver
- Home links
- Attendance monitoring
- Educational supports
- Behavioural supports
- Interagency work
- Parent educational links
- Attendance tracking
- In school/ out of school initiatives
- Work in co-operation with Local Education Centres

### **School Completion Programme:**

In Ireland the Department of Education and Skills and recently the Department of Youth and Family Affairs have responsibility for and set up designated programmes to tackle early school leaving. SCP (Schools Completion Programme) works to meet its primary aim of: “breaking the pattern of early school leaving and tackling educational disadvantage”.

SCP has adopted the following aims to govern its work:

1. To retain young people in the formal education system to completion of the Senior Cycle, or equivalent.
2. To improve the quality of participation and educational attainment of targeted children and young people in the educational process.
3. To bring together all local stakeholders (home, school, youth, community, statutory and voluntary) to tackle early school leaving.
4. To offer positive supports in primary and post-primary schools towards the prevention of educational disadvantage.
5. To encourage young people who have left mainstream education to return to school.
6. To influence in a positive way policies relating to the prevention of early school leaving in the education system.

SCP is based on a number of principles:

1. The programme is based on the principle of partnership. Schools (primary and post-primary), parents and relevant agencies collaborate formally through Local

Management Committees and informally through the Local Co-ordinators.

2. The programme is young person-centred. Each targeted young person at risk of early school leaving has supports tailor-made to suit his or her personal and academic needs.
3. The programme is preventative. Young people at risk of early school leaving are supported from an early age in recognition that home, school, environmental, social and economic factors influence the patterns of early school leaving.
4. The programme is based on a 'bottom-up' approach. A range of supports are offered in each cluster (project area) depending on local needs, being mindful that local factors can influence early school leaving.
5. The young person's inclusion in the programme is based on an agreed set of criteria targeting those most at risk of early school leaving.
6. A whole-school approach can be utilised in order to minimise the potential for stigmatisation of particular young people at risk of early school leaving.
7. Supports are offered In-school, After-school, Out-of-school and during Holiday time in recognition of the fact that continuous support must be given to young people at risk of early school leaving

In Clare we support over 400 students at risk of early school leaving by offering multidimensional strategies and supports

- ⊙ Educational support
- ⊙ Behavioural support
- ⊙ Therapeutic support
- ⊙ Personal/ social development programmes
- ⊙ Parent work
- ⊙ Holiday time supports
- ⊙ Liaising with other agencies
- ⊙ In school initiatives
- ⊙ Out of school initiative and Alternative learning environments
- Alternative learning opportunities

On a day to day basis this means that SCP project workers/ student support workers employed in the schools and working with school management, teachers, support workers, parents and students in ever changing and creative ways to reach our aim of breaking the pattern of early school leaving and tackling educational disadvantage. On a practical level this means ringing students if absent and making house calls if refusing to come to school or if they need support to attend; helping in the classroom by staying with and supporting the young person; working with the resource team to ensure that each student is receiving the necessary supports and, if not, applying for additional teaching hours and by offering extra classes. SCP refers students to other agencies if needed, undertakes intensive numeracy and literacy work, provides uniforms, books and pens and meets with parents. SCP also provides summer camps and after school programmes such as music, art and crafts and sports. SCP staff work with the schools by offering alternative learning and educational provisions such as the ORBITAL (Outdoor Resources Brought Into Teaching and Learning) programme and withdrawal timetables for set periods of time for students not coping or managing themselves in mainstream classes. The local co-ordinators and project workers also work with school management on school policy to ensure that the needs of the most disadvantaged and marginalised students are heard and met.

The current RECIPE Comenius Project aims to show that the local Education Centre has an important role to play in supporting the work of SCP at local level. This national initiative has been very successful with a retention figure of 90% announced recently (Jan. 2014) However any further gains will be hard won as we will now be looking at young people who have a chronic school attendance issue. It is well established that the decision to leave school is made well in advance of it actually happening, often while the pupil is still in primary school. RECIPE will attempt to investigate how an enhanced curriculum at Primary level will influence pupils to stay in school until completion. Clare Education Centre will work with a number of partners including Mary Immaculate College of Education , Renaissance Learning, PDST, DES and others in supporting these pupils.

## Sources:

<http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports>

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