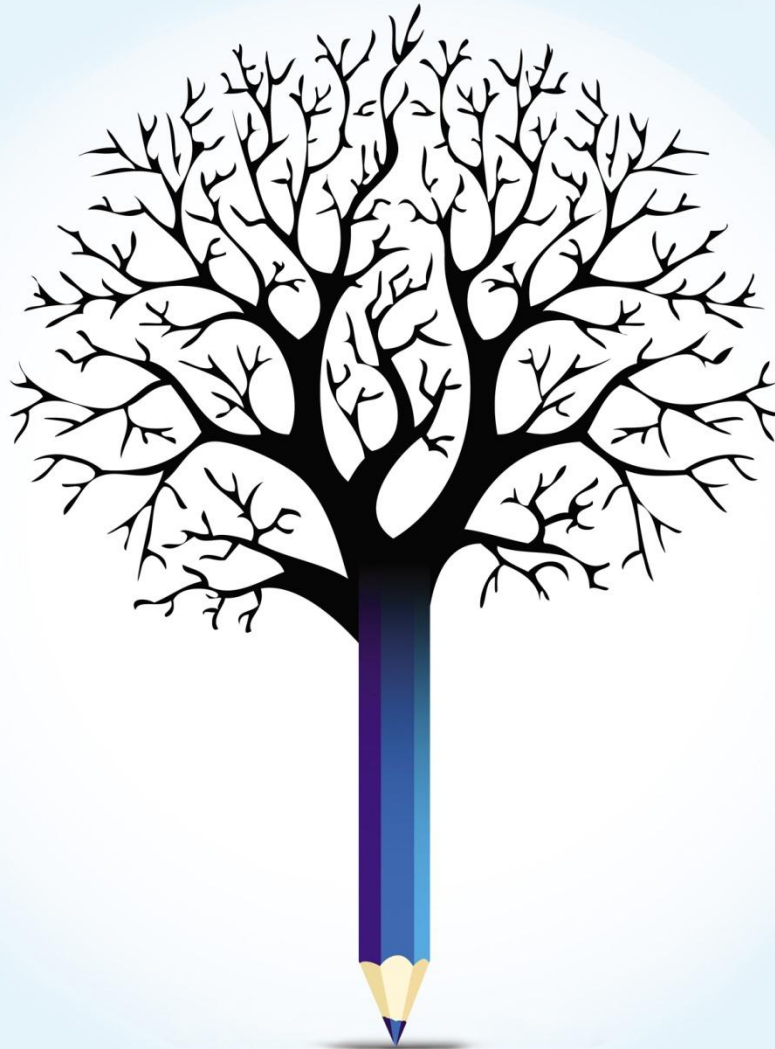




## EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK: IRELAND



## EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK

This **policy profile on education** in Ireland is part of the new *Education Policy Outlook* series, which will present comparative analysis of education policies and reforms across OECD countries. Building on the substantial comparative and sectorial policy knowledge base available within the OECD, the series will result in a biannual publication (first volume in 2014). It will develop a comparative outlook on education policy by providing: a) analysis of individual countries' educational context, challenges and policies (education policy profiles) and of international trends and b) comparative insight on policies and reforms on selected topics.

Designed **for policy makers, analysts and practitioners** who seek information and analysis of education policy taking into account the importance of national context, the country policy profiles will offer constructive analysis of education policy in a comparative format. Each profile will review the current context and situation of the country's education system and examine its challenges and policy responses, according to six policy levers that support improvement:

- Students: How to raise outcomes for all in terms of 1) equity and quality and 2) preparing students for the future
- Institutions: How to raise quality through 3) school improvement and 4) evaluation and assessment
- System: How the system is organised to deliver education policy in terms of 5) governance and 6) funding.

Some country policy profiles will contain spotlight boxes on selected policy issues. They are meant to draw attention to specific policies that are promising or showing positive results and may be relevant for other countries.

Special thanks to the Irish Government for their active input during consultations and their constructive feedback on this report.

**Authors:** This country policy profile was prepared by Beatriz Pont, Diana Toledo Figueroa, Juliana Zapata and Sylvain Fraccola (statistics and design), from the Education Policy Outlook team, which is part of the Policy Advice and Implementation Division, led by Richard Yelland. Editorial support was provided by Lynda Hawe and Susan Copeland. This profile builds on the knowledge and expertise of many project teams across the OECD's Directorate for Education and Skills, to whom we are grateful.

**Sources:** This country profile draws on OECD indicators from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and the annual publication *Education at a Glance*, and refers to country and thematic studies such as OECD work on early childhood education and care, teachers, school leadership, evaluation and assessment for improving school outcomes, equity and quality in education, governing complex education systems, vocational education and training, and tertiary education.

Most of the figures quoted in the different sections refer to Annex B, which presents a table of the main indicators for the different sources used throughout the country profile. Hyperlinks to the reference publications are included throughout the text for ease of reading, and also in the References and further reading section, which lists both OECD and non-OECD sources.

More information is available from the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills ([www.oecd.org/edu](http://www.oecd.org/edu)) and its web pages on Education Policy Outlook ([www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm)).



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## HIGHLIGHTS

### Ireland's educational context

**Students:** Ireland's performance on the 2009 PISA assessment of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science is close to the OECD average. The government has worked to support the education of 3-6 year-olds through a variety of measures, both in and out of school. In recent years, Ireland has a more diverse immigrant student population, and PISA results show large performance gaps between native and immigrant students. Socio-economically disadvantaged students also face challenges, including higher levels of dropout in post-compulsory education. Enrolment and completion rates in upper secondary and tertiary education are higher than the OECD average, but with the economic crisis, unemployment rates have increased for youth transitioning into the labour market.

**Institutions:** Irish school leaders and teachers need to meet the particular challenges of learning environments in small schools and to deliver quality education across all schools. The Inspectorate undertakes external school and system evaluations, using various sources of information, including standardised tests and examinations focused on student achievement. School self-evaluations, teacher appraisals and assessments for improvement can be strengthened. An integrated evaluation and assessment framework can help improve teaching and student outcomes.

**Governance and funding:** The centralised school system is steered by the government and the Department of Education and Skills. Schools are locally owned and managed by private (mainly religious) organisations, and universities are autonomous. Public funding for education has increased to reach the OECD average. In the context of the economic crisis, the government is assessing how to reallocate resources to ensure sustained investment in education.

### Key policy issues

During the crisis, Ireland has had to cope with many difficulties, including an increase in youth unemployment rates and budget cuts in education. In addition, Ireland's immigrant student population and socio-economically disadvantaged students are facing academic challenges. Schools need the capacity to handle these complex challenges – to raise performance and deliver quality education across all schools for all students, with special attention to diversity and the most disadvantaged.

### Recent policy responses

Current education policies focus on strengthening equity and quality of education. Strategies include [Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools](#) (2005), which has shown positive results, and an intercultural education strategy (2010), developed to support diversity.

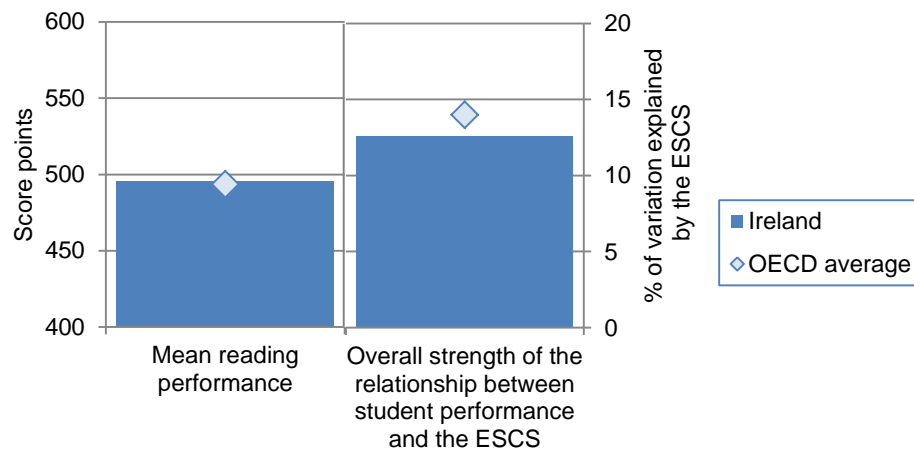
Additional efforts are being made to improve schools, teachers and school leaders through a [national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy](#) (2011), a comprehensive framework for school improvement, a reform of initial teacher training and the development of guidelines for school self-evaluation.

Vocational education and training has been targeted, through the creation of Education and Training Boards (2012), and a strategy for higher education has been defined. Following the EU 2020 Strategy, the government has set performance targets for the education system in the year 2020. Measures have been taken to limit the impact of budget cuts due to the crisis on the quality of education. In higher education, reforms phased in incremental student fees from 2011 until 2015, with a means-tested student grant.



The impact of socio-economic status on educational attainment at age 15 is similar to the OECD average (Figure 1). In earlier PISA assessments for 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science, Ireland's performance surpassed the OECD average, but in 2009 it fell to around the OECD average. However, according to government sources, the most recent international surveys at primary level show Irish students in 4<sup>th</sup> grade performing at above average levels in reading, mathematics and science.

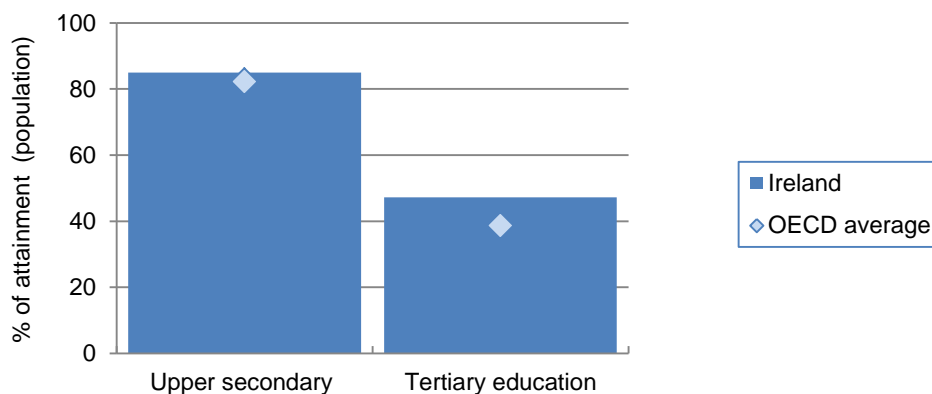
**Figure 1. Student performance in reading and relationship between student performance and the economic, social and cultural status (ESCS), for 15-year-olds, PISA 2009**



Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091450-en>.

Ireland has increased its attainment levels, which are higher than the OECD average: 85% of 25-34 year-olds have attained secondary education (OECD average of 82%); 47% have attained tertiary education (OECD average of 39%) (Figure 2). Attainment level in vocational education and training among 25-64 year-olds is 13%.

**Figure 2. Upper secondary and tertiary attainment for 25-34 year-olds, 2011**



Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en>.



## EQUITY AND QUALITY: AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATION

Ireland has average PISA performance and **positive equity indicators**. The proportion of 15-year-old students (17.2%) who underperformed on PISA 2009 for reading (below proficiency Level 2) is below the OECD average of 18.8% (see Figure 3). These results have not improved since 2000. The impact of socio-economic status on educational attainment at age 15 is similar to the OECD average, and academic performance between boys and girls is equal to the OECD average (boys scored 39 points lower than girls in reading on PISA 2009).

Providing **education for all** from early childhood through to upper secondary education is key to improving equity and quality. Ireland provides one year of free early childhood education to all 3 to 4 year-olds, and most of these children continue receiving similar services from the age of 4 to 6 in primary schools. Access to quality early childhood programmes with well-trained staff is especially important for Traveller<sup>1</sup> children as well as other disadvantaged children. Education is compulsory for children in Ireland from the ages of 6 to 16 or until students have completed three years of second-level education.

**System level policies** such as school choice and academic grouping can hinder equity. In Ireland, students can attend the school of their choice, and schools can define their enrolment policies. If not properly managed, greater school choice can lead to segregation of students. While a high proportion of disadvantaged students attended schools with mixed backgrounds in 2009, principals stated that 96% of Irish students in secondary schools are grouped according to their academic ability, although this was not the case for students in primary education. Permanent grouping by ability can be detrimental to equity, increasing the variation in performance between students and adversely affecting student achievement.

**Immigrant children** who arrive in Ireland between the ages of 4 and 18 have the right to attend compulsory school. From 2000-09, the share of 15 year-old immigrant students in Ireland increased from 2.3% to 8.3% (an increase of 5.9%, compared to the OECD average of 26 countries with available data of 2.1%). Policies that aim for successful inclusion of migrants in mainstream education should strengthen the capacity of school leaders and teachers to address linguistic and cultural diversity among their students. On the 2009 PISA reading assessment, the difference in performance between native students and students with an immigrant background increased by 53% – the largest change since 2000 among 26 OECD countries.

**The challenge: Catering to an increasingly diverse student population, particularly migrant and Traveller students.**

### Recent policies and practices

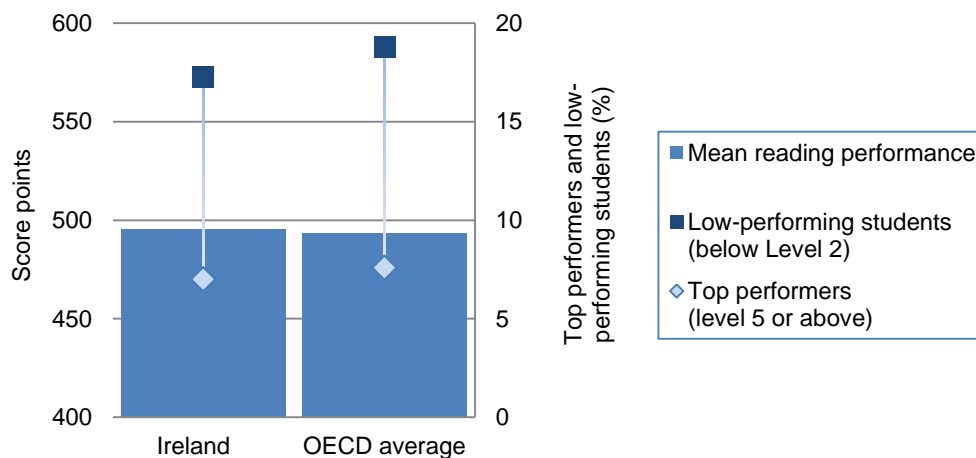
*[Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion](#)* (2005) was developed to ensure support for schools catering to students in the most disadvantaged communities (see Spotlight 1).

The *[Traveller Education Strategy](#)* (2006) addresses the education of the Traveller community from pre-school through tertiary education within the context of lifelong learning. The strategy aims to develop more inclusive education practices and environment, based on the principle of resource provision related to individual educational need for all children rather than just for children with a Traveller identity.

The *[Intercultural Education Strategy](#)* (2010) was developed to promote inclusive, integrated and intercultural learning environments, particularly for migrant students. It is based on developing leadership, instructional language knowledge, mainstreaming, rights and responsibilities, high expectations, teaching quality, partnerships, effective communication, data collection and research, and strategy evaluation. *[English as an Additional Language](#)* (2000) aimed to provide additional teaching resources to schools with migrant students and is currently focused on increasing the capacity of all teachers.



**Figure 3. Mean score in reading performance and percentage of low and top performers, for 15-year-olds, PISA 2009**



Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Students Know and Can Do: Student Performance in Reading, Mathematics and Science (Volume I)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091450-en>.

### Spotlight 1. Improving opportunities for disadvantaged students

To respond to the challenge of improving the performance of Irish children, especially in disadvantaged communities, in 2005 the Department (then called Education and Science) developed *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)* as an on-going national policy for educational inclusion. The plan consists of a standardised system to identify a school's level of socio-economic disadvantage (based on its community) and an integrated School Support Programme that provides schools and school clusters or communities with additional resources and support, depending on the level of disadvantage.

The key initiatives of DEIS include:

- early childhood education for disadvantaged communities
- targeted student-teacher ratio to reduce class size in disadvantaged primary schools
- access to teachers/co-ordinators in rural primary schools
- professionalising school leaders and teachers as well as access to an administrative principal
- measures to target deficits in literacy and numeracy (see Spotlight 2)
- additional funding for school books, based on level of disadvantage
- support for school library and librarians for post-primary schools with high levels of disadvantage
- access to Home, School, Community Liaison services and to the School Completion Programme
- measures such as guidance and counselling to increase attendance, retention and attainment
- more curriculum choice
- more use of information and communication technologies
- improved access to higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The independent government-funded Educational Research Centre evaluated the programme in 120 DEIS schools first in 2007 and again in 2010. The findings show an overall improvement in reading and mathematics in both urban and rural schools, with rural students improving more than their urban peers do. Evaluations by the Inspectorate confirmed the positive effect of DEIS in primary schools. The Department points to positive outcomes of DEIS post-primary schools, with an increase in completion rates of 68.2% for cohorts starting in 2001 and completing in 2006-07 to 80.1% for those starting in 2006 and completing in 2011-12. Further evaluations are planned in order to understand the specific aspects of the policy, which are contributing to the positive outcomes.



## PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE: LARGE INCREASES IN ATTAINMENT

**Labour market perspectives** can play an important role in educational decisions of young people. In Ireland, unemployment rates across all education levels are above the 2011 OECD average and they have more than doubled for individuals between 2008-11. The share of 15-29 year-olds not in education and not employed (22%) is above the OECD average (15.8%) (see Figure 4). Improving youth outcomes requires policies to address skills needs and support transition into the labour market.

Ireland is fostering policies to fight dropout in **upper secondary education**. More 25-34 year-olds have attained secondary education than the 2011 OECD average (85% in Ireland, compared to the OECD average of 82%). It is compulsory for students to attend school until age 16. They can take two or three years to complete the senior cycle and obtain a leaving certificate. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to drop out. At this level, many countries share the challenge of providing relevant education to prepare young adults for work or continued education and, at the same time, capacity for further learning.

**Vocational education and training (VET)** can ease entry into the labour market. Yet many VET programmes make insufficient use of workplace training. The apprenticeship system (limited to a narrow set of occupations) lasts four years, during which apprentices hired by firms follow a predetermined sequence of on-the-job and off-the-job phases. Because of the economic crisis, fewer apprenticeships were available. Diversifying apprenticeships into more sectors can improve the offer and better meet the demands of the labour market. Ireland has a comprehensive national qualifications framework that includes vocational and general qualifications, which can help remove dead ends as students' progress through their education. In 2011, the probability of graduating from pre-vocational or vocational programmes was 69%, well above the OECD average of 47%.

**Tertiary education** graduation rates have increased over 2000-11 and are above the OECD average. Almost half of 25-34 year-olds (47%) have attained tertiary education in 2011 (compared to the OECD average of 39%). During this period, the graduation rate from academic programmes (tertiary-type A) increased by 13 percentage points to 43%, and that of more technical programmes (tertiary-type B) increased by 7 percentage points to 22%. This is partly due to high wage premiums for tertiary-educated workers (35-44 year-olds), who can expect to earn at least 75% more than those with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education do. To expand participation in tertiary education, access should be improved for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As in other OECD countries, the expansion of tertiary education implies providing a sufficiently wide offer of studies to address the needs of the labour market and the interests of the student population.

**The challenge: Maintaining high completion rates while strengthening transitions between education and the labour market.**

### Recent policies and practices

The [Action Plan for Jobs 2012](#) is the government's new annual plan to rebuild the economy and create jobs. With over 270 actions by 15 government departments and 36 state agencies, it presents a number of measures to strengthen education and its links to the labour market, including a review of the apprenticeship training model initiated in 2012.

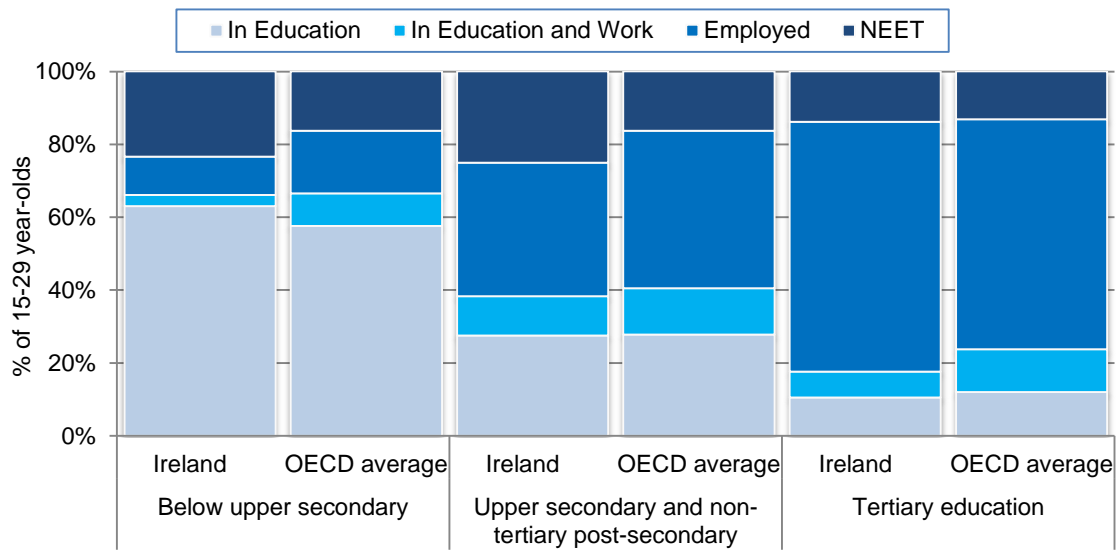
The [Education and Training Boards Bill \(2012\)](#) aims to better integrate skills and training into education by replacing the 33 Vocational Education Committees with 16 Education and Training Boards. Programmes implemented by the boards will develop skills for employed and unemployed individuals, assist students' transition into the workplace, and provide literacy and numeracy skills to disadvantaged adults.

The [Springboard](#) programme (2011) funds free part-time courses in higher education for unemployed individuals in areas with labour market skills shortages. As a direct response to skills shortages in information and communication technology (ICT), a joint government-industry ICT Action Plan was developed.





**Figure 4. Percentage of 15-29 year-olds in education and not in education, by educational attainment and work status, 2011**



NEET: Neither Employed, nor in Education and Training

Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en>.



## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: FOSTERING LEADERSHIP AND TEACHING

The key to raising achievement in Ireland's 4 034 primary and secondary schools is developing the conditions for school leaders and teachers to succeed. Particular to Ireland is the fact that there are a large proportion of small schools, many in rural areas (around 46% of primary schools, for example, had fewer than 100 students in 2012). Overall, Ireland's **learning environments** and student-teacher relations are slightly less positive than the OECD average (see Figure 5). The number of hours 7-14 year-olds are taught per year is above the OECD average.

**School leaders** currently focus more on administrative than pedagogical leadership tasks. Principals must be qualified teachers and, in general, have at least five years of teaching experience (except in primary schools of fewer than 80 pupils). There is no formal requirement for leadership training, but many applicants have related diplomas (e.g. management, administration, education) and many complete non-accredited courses for school leaders. Ensuring that principals have quality initial training and on-going support can help develop effective school leaders. 2008 data show that a majority of principals perform administrative tasks related to budget or staff. More school principals than average in the 2008 OECD [Teaching and Learning International Survey](#) (TALIS) reported that a lack of support, personnel or materials hinders instruction at their schools.

According to the TALIS survey, Irish **teachers** indicated high levels of self-efficacy and participation in professional development. However, more training and feedback could help improve their practice. Primary school teachers teach more hours (915 hours per year) than their counterparts in secondary education (735 hours per year); this is the sixth highest among OECD countries for primary school teachers in 2011. Teachers' salaries are relatively generous: after 15 years experience, teachers can expect to earn among the highest salaries in OECD countries. But salaries of new entrants have fallen considerably since the beginning of the economic crisis. Recent reforms of teacher training are now underway (see below). Teachers in Ireland receive less feedback on their work from school principals than the TALIS 2008 average of 37.4%. Furthermore, in the TALIS survey 21.3% of teachers conveyed that the feedback they received resulted in a plan for professional development.

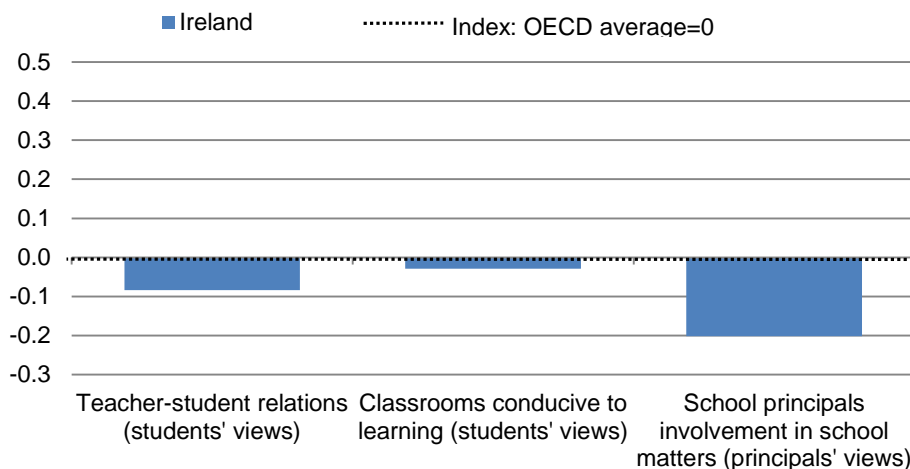
**The challenge: Ensuring all schools, their leaders and teachers have the capacity to perform well.**

### Recent policies and practices

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: [The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020](#) aims to improve literacy and numeracy standards for students by providing clear targets (see details in Spotlight 2).

Initial teacher education programmes are being reconfigured after a [review by the Teaching Council](#) (2011) with the aim of supporting the national strategy on literacy and numeracy as well as other improvements. As of 2012/13, all primary school teachers have to graduate from a four-year programme, instead of a three-year programme. In coming years, secondary school teachers will have to earn a two-year professional diploma in education.

[Project Maths](#) (2010) is a syllabus development initiative introduced in all secondary schools to encourage a better understanding of mathematics, reinforce its relevance to everyday life, ensure better curriculum continuity across the system and promote tertiary study of this subject. Professional development support to mathematics teachers in the use of pedagogical methodologies will be provided until at least 2015.

**Figure 5. The learning environment, PISA 2009**

Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091559-en>.

### Spotlight 2. Investing in literacy and numeracy

To improve school and student outcomes, the Irish Department of Education and Skills has introduced and funded the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*, in consultation with social partners, education agencies and different stakeholders. The strategy has set performance targets to be met by 2020:

- *primary level*: in national assessments of reading and mathematics, increasing by 5% the number of students performing at Level 3 or above and reducing by 5% the number of students performing at or below the lowest level (Level 1)
- *post-primary level*: in OECD's PISA assessments of reading and mathematics, increasing by at least 5% the number of 15-year-old students performing at Level 4 or above and reducing by 50% the number of students performing at Level 1 (the lowest level).

The strategy aims to raise literacy and numeracy standards for students by:

- helping parents and communities to support their children
- supporting teachers and early childhood education staff during pre-service and in-service education
- building the skills of school leaders
- setting goals and monitoring progress
- clarifying curricular expectations of students at each level of education
- targeting learners who need additional resources the most.

A number of initiatives are in progress:

- From 2011-12, primary schools increased reading instruction time to 90 minutes per day and mathematics instruction time to 50 minutes per day.
- From 2014, a new *Framework for Junior Cycle* aims to reform the Junior Certificate and to propose a new lower secondary (junior cycle) programme in four phases. Schools will be expected to deliver a programme that enables students to develop a wide range of skills, including critical thinking skills and basic skills such as in literacy and numeracy.
- Greater use of standardised assessment in literacy and numeracy in primary schools began in 2012 and will be extended to lower secondary education in 2014.
- Professional development courses for teachers and school leaders are being prepared.
- School self-evaluation has been introduced to complement external school inspections.



## EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES: SHAPING A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and national agencies participate in **evaluation and assessment**, along with principals, teachers, parents and students (see Figure 6). The Inspectorate is responsible for external evaluation and accountability of education at primary and secondary levels. Defining evaluation and assessment strategies is important for improving student outcomes and the quality of the school system.

**System evaluation** focuses on student achievement, and is undertaken through Inspectorate evaluations, national and international assessments or research commissioned by the DES. While results have impact on policy decisions, Ireland acknowledges the need to balance top-down evaluations and interventions with bottom-up approaches.

External comprehensive **school evaluations** are conducted by the Inspectorate and provide evidence of performance within the school context and broader learning objectives. School boards implement the recommendations of the external evaluations. The Government of Ireland reports that, since 2009, they have made efforts to improve the regularity of external evaluations. School self-evaluations became mandatory as of 2012/13, and guidelines on school self-evaluation were published in 2012.

There is no formal **appraisal system for teachers**. School principals are expected to monitor their work, but there are no requirements or procedures, and in-school teacher appraisal seems limited. Appraisal of probationary teachers is the responsibility of the Inspectorate in primary schools and of the school principal in secondary schools. Underperforming teachers are appraised by principals initially and required to demonstrate improvement. If the school remains dissatisfied, it can request the Inspectorate to appraise the teacher's work and teachers can be dismissed if their work is unsatisfactory.

**Student assessments** at primary and secondary levels vary in their emphasis on formative and summative approaches. Summative assessment has traditionally predominated at secondary level; formative assessment is gaining importance, although its use remains limited. Some link between kinds of assessments is being made: for example, summative results are used for formative purposes at some schools. To promote this co-ordination, standards for both primary and secondary education are being clarified in revised curricula. The goal is to ensure a better understanding of what students are expected to learn and to support the use of assessment techniques in schools. The use of standardised tests at three fixed points in primary schools (and reporting of outcomes to parents and the DES) became mandatory in 2012 and will be extended to secondary schools in 2014.

**The challenge: Building an integrated framework that promotes formative evaluation and assessment as a way of improving teaching and learning.**

### Recent policies and practices

Arrangements for school inspections have been reformed, and [School Self Evaluation: Guidelines for Primary Schools](#) and [School Self-Evaluation: Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools](#) have been published.

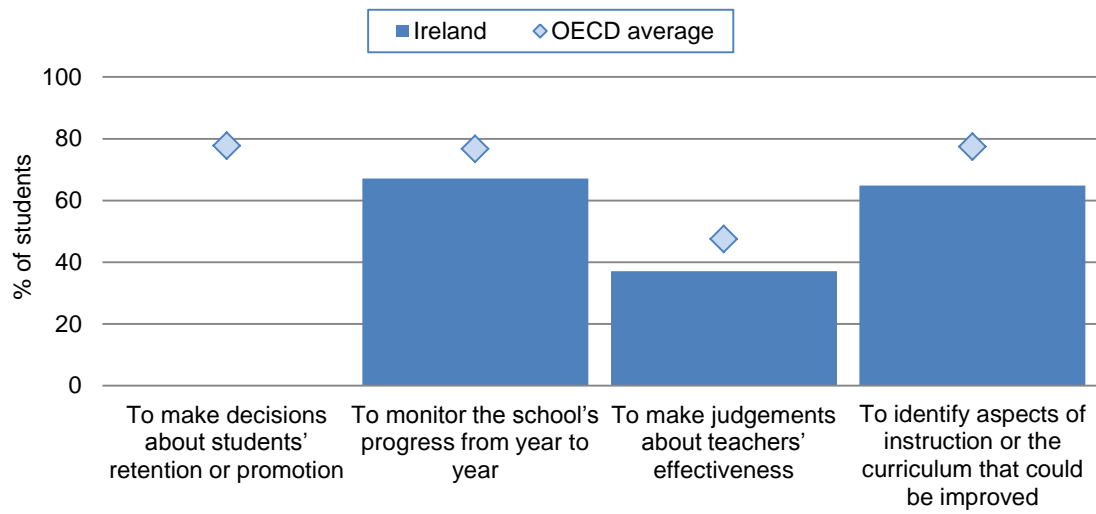
The Teaching Council is expected to pilot revised procedures for the induction and probation of teachers (2013-14) with the intention of implementing new arrangements. Since 2010, school boards and the Inspectorate have been able to formally discipline and eventually dismiss primary and secondary school teachers.

The [Survey on Lifeskills in Primary and Post-Primary Schools](#) (2009-12) gathered information on school policies and practices related to nutrition, exercise, health, growing up, bullying and other aspects of the Social, Personal and Health Education programme.

As part of the literacy and numeracy reform (see Spotlight 2), the Junior Certificate examination will be replaced with a school-based model of assessment with an emphasis on the quality of students' learning experience and outcomes.



**Figure 6. Percentage of students in schools where the principal reported assessments of students in national modal grade for 15-year-olds, PISA 2009**



Source: OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*, OECD Publishing, Paris <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264091559-en>.



## GOVERNANCE: NATIONAL POLICY, LOCALLY OWNED AND MANAGED SCHOOLS, AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITIES

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) **steers the education system** and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) is responsible for early childhood issues. Other bodies help shape different aspects of education policy in Ireland:

- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) advises on curricular objectives.
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) maintains and develops the qualifications framework, based on standards, skills or competencies acquired by learners.
- The Inspectorate evaluates the quality of schooling.
- The Teaching Council focuses on issues related to the teaching profession, including professional development and standards.
- Vocational Education Committees (VEC) manage vocational education at the regional level.
- The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is a funding and advisory body to the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to the higher education sector.
- Consultation with a wide range of stakeholders is an important element of policy formulation (underpinned by the Education Act, 1998). Most major policy developments and all significant developments regarding curriculum and assessment are subject to consultation with stakeholders. Stakeholders include national bodies representing the interests of school management and patrons, teachers' unions, national associations of school principals and national associations of parents and students. Depending on the issues under discussion, stakeholders may also include representatives of third-level institutions, business and farming organisations, and a range of non-governmental advocacy bodies.

**Schooling decisions** are shared between the national government and schools (see Figure 7). Schools follow the 1998 Education Act and the curriculum and evaluation framework established by the DES. Private organisations play a key role in the provision of education in Ireland. State-funded schools are owned and managed by private organisations (mainly church authorities and religious organisations at the primary level, with greater diversity in secondary), and run by boards of management. In 2011, there were 3 305 state-funded primary schools, 35 independent primary schools (self-owned, self-managed and self-financed institutions) and 730 secondary education schools (junior and senior cycles) that can be voluntary, vocational, community or comprehensive. In tertiary education, 7 universities and 14 institutes of technology (state-funded) are autonomous, academically independent institutions.

**The challenge: Ensuring that those working at the local and school level can respond to national education objectives.**

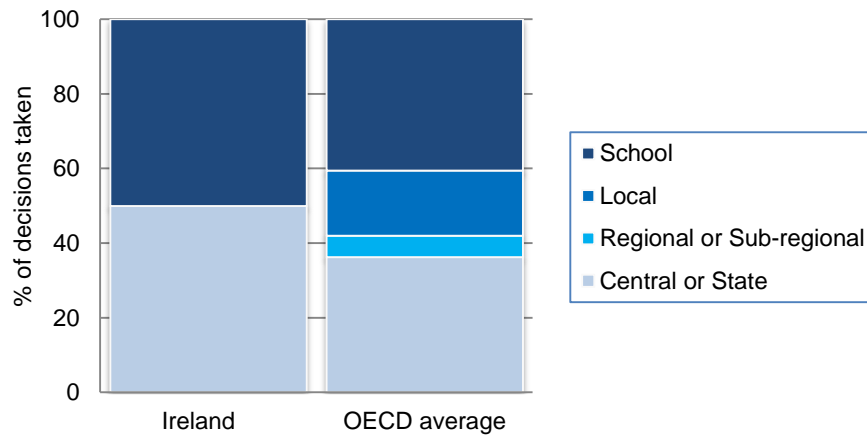
### Recent policies and practices

Ireland has set national targets in different strategies for 2020, including the [National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020](#) (see Spotlight 2) and the [European Union 2020 Strategy](#), which aims to reduce to 8% the number of 18-24 year-olds with less than upper secondary education and to increase to 60% the number of 30-34 year-olds with tertiary education.

In addition, the [National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030](#) sets out the basis for development of the higher education sector over the next two decades. Recommendations for the implementation strategy are underway, and a progress report is available on the DES website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie).



Figure 7. Percentage of decisions taken in public lower secondary schools at each level of government, 2010



Note: Value for local government level is not available for Ireland.

Source: OECD (2012), *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2012-en>.



## FUNDING: MAINLY FROM PUBLIC SOURCES

Ireland has increased its **investment in educational institutions** to reach the OECD average. Expenditure on educational institutions at all levels is 6.4% of its GDP, compared to the OECD average of 6.3% (see Figure 8). Since 2005, Ireland has increased its education spending by 1.9 percentage points, above the OECD average of 0.5 percentage points. As in most OECD countries, a large portion of Ireland's expenditure on educational institutions comes from public sources (92.5%, compared to the OECD average of 83.6%). The share of private expenditure is 7.5% (compared to the OECD average of 16.4%), mostly accounted for by household expenditure (6.9%).

**Annual expenditure per student** from primary to tertiary education was USD 10 685 in 2010, above the OECD average of USD 9 313. This indicator does not take into account public subsidies, which include financial aid to tertiary students (13.1% of public expenditure on education, below the OECD average of 21.7%). From 2005-10, expenditure per student in primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education increased by 33%, while enrolment increased by 8%. Tertiary expenditure increased by 28%, while enrolment increased by 9%.

**Public funding** covers all levels of education. Ireland funds most education services from early childhood education to tertiary and adult education, although full-time undergraduates pay an annual student contribution (details below) and universities charge fees for postgraduate and part-time undergraduate studies. Publicly funded schools receive direct payments for the salaries of teachers and other staff and grants to cover day-to-day running costs (e.g. heating, cleaning, maintenance). Schools can also undertake fundraising activities. Vocational, community and comprehensive schools are financed from the national budget and may receive a higher proportion of state grants.

**Budgets** are under pressure. As a result of the economic and financial crisis, there are restrictions of varying degrees on operational costs, training and apprenticeship programmes, programmes for disadvantaged students, guidance counselling for vocational and secondary schools, and funding for higher education. The DES has undertaken studies to determine the effects of budget cuts and measures to minimise negative impacts on learning. One of these reports found no significant relation between school size and the quality of education; however, another report found that budget cuts would have a great impact on staffing for disadvantaged schools within the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools programme. In light of these findings, some funds have been reallocated to maintain support for these schools. In addition, the government has sought to ensure that front-line education services are protected, through measures such as exempting teaching vacancies from the general public sector moratorium.

**The challenge: To maximise resources so budget cuts do not affect the quality and equity of the system.**

### Recent policies and practices

The government is committed to developing schools and college buildings as part of a larger investment in [education infrastructure](#). In 2012, a five-year capital investment programme to provide 275 new major building projects was announced. Since then, over a third of all schools that currently rent prefabricated buildings (almost 200 schools) have been offered grants to build permanent accommodation.

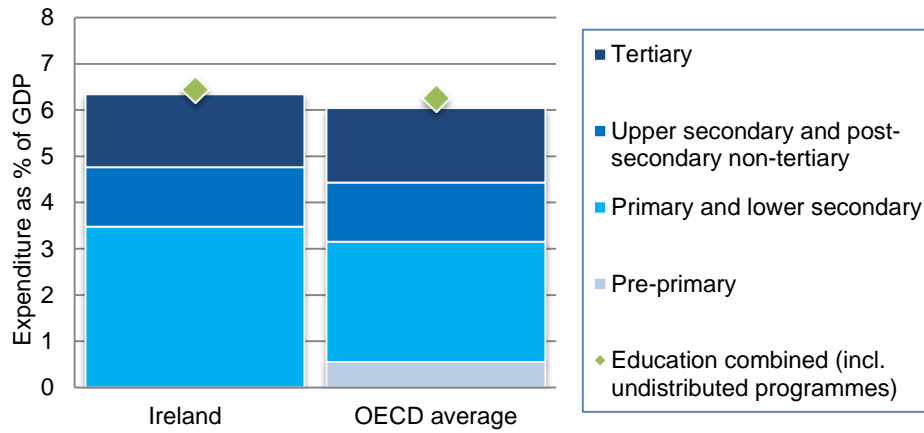
[Higher education reforms](#) aim to ensure more efficient and transparent use of funding. The Higher Education Authority is undertaking a study on the sustainability of the current higher education funding system. In addition, in 2011/12, a new student contribution of EUR 2 000 replaced the Student Services Charge of EUR 1 500. This will increase to EUR 2 250 in 2012/13 and will rise by EUR 250 each year up to a maximum of EUR 3 000 by 2015. Currently, students may be eligible for a full grant to meet this cost depending on the level of their income.

A [new scholarship scheme](#) for higher education has been introduced to improve access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It replaces five previous scholarship schemes. Awards under the new scheme will be fixed at EUR 2 000 per student based on the student's leaving certificate results. In 2012, 60 students received bursaries, and this number is expected to increase to 350 by 2015.





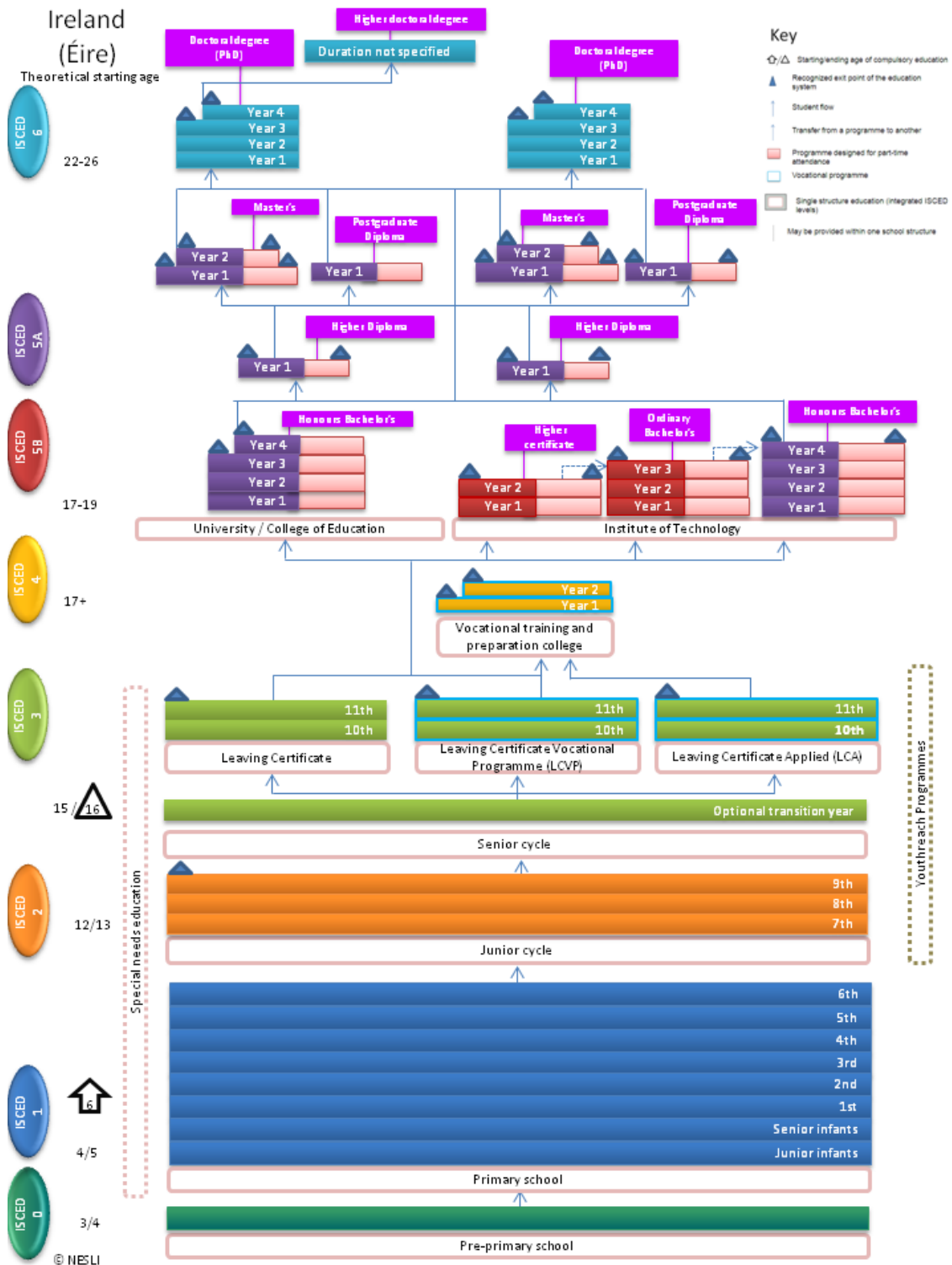
Figure 8. Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, by level of education, 2010



Source: OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en>.



ANNEX A: STRUCTURE OF IRELAND'S EDUCATION SYSTEM





ANNEX B: STATISTICS

#	List of key Indicators	Ireland	Average or total	Min	Max
<b>Background information</b>					
<i>Political context</i>					
1	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, 2010 (EAG 2013)	6.5 %	5.8 %	3.8 %	8.8 %
<i>Economy</i>					
2	GDP per capita, 2010, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs (EAG2013)	41 000		15 195	84 672
3	GDP growth 2011 (OECD National Accounts)	m	1.8 %	-7.1 %	8.5 %
<i>Society</i>					
4	Population density, Inhab/km2, 2010 (OECD Statistics)	65.4	138	2.9	492
5	Young people, aged less than 15, 2010 (OECD Statistics)	21.5 %	17.3 %	13 %	28.1 %
6	Foreign-born population, 2009 (OECD Statistics)	17.2 %	14.1 %	0.8 %	36.9 %
<b>Education outcomes</b>					
7	Mean reading performance (PISA 2009)	496	493	425	539
8	Change in Mean reading performance, 2000-09 (PISA 2009)	-31	1	-31	40
9	Change in Mean mathematics performance, 2003-09 (PISA 2009)	-16	0	-24	33
10	Change in Mean science performance, 2006-09 (PISA 2009)	0	3	-12	30
11	Enrolment rates in early childhood education and primary education, ages 3 and 4, 2011 (EAG 2013)	69.9 %	74.4 %	11.6 %	98 %
12	Population that has attained below upper secondary education, 25-64 year-olds, 2011 (EAG 2013)	27 %	25 %	7 %	68 %
13	Population that has attained at least upper secondary education, 25-34 year-olds, 2011 (EAG 2013)	85 %	82 %	43 %	98 %
14	Population that has attained tertiary education, 25-34 year-olds (EAG 2013)	47 %	39 %	19 %	64 %
15	Population whose highest level of education is vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary, 2011 (EAG 2013)	12.5 %	33.5 %	8.4 %	73.9 %
<b>Unemployment rates, 25-64 year-olds, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
16	Below upper secondary	21.7 %	12.6 %	2.7 %	39.3 %
	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	15 %	7.3 %	2.2 %	19.2 %
	Tertiary education	7.1 %	4.8 %	1.5 %	12.8 %
<b>Students: Raising outcomes</b>					
<i>Policy lever 1: Equity and quality</i>					
17	First age of selection in the education system (PISA 2009)	15	14	10	16
<b>Proficiency levels on the reading scale (PISA 2009)</b>					
18	Students below Level 2	17.2 %	18.8 %	5.8 %	40.1 %
	Students at level 5 or above	7 %	7.6 %	0.4 %	15.7 %
<b>Between- and within-school variance in reading performance (PISA 2009)</b>					
19	Between schools	2 805	3 616	665	6 695
	Within schools	6 966	5 591	2 795	8 290
20	Students reporting that they have repeated at least a grade in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary schools (PISA 2009)	12 %	13 %	0 %	36.9 %



#	List of key Indicators	Ireland	average or total	Min	Max
21	Variance in student performance explained by student socio-economic status (PISA 2009)	13 %	14 %	6 %	26 %
22	Difference in reading performance between native students and students with an immigrant background, after accounting for socio-economic status (PISA 2009)	33.0	27	-17.0	85.0
23	Gender differences in student performance on the reading scale (PISA 2009)	-39	-39	-55	-22
<i>Policy lever 2: Preparing students for the future</i>					
<b>Upper secondary graduation rates, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
24	General programmes	68 %	50 %	18 %	82 %
	Pre-vocational/ vocational programmes	69 %	47 %	4 %	99 %
25	Change in upper secondary graduation rates (average annual growth rate 1995-2011), (EAG 2013)	1.6 %	0.6 %	-1 %	3.6 %
<b>Graduation rates, first-time graduates, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
26	Tertiary-type 5A	43 %	40 %	21 %	60 %
	Tertiary-type 5B	22 %	11 %	0 %	29 %
	Tertiary-type 5A (average annual growth rate 1995-2011)	3.5 %	4 %	-1 %	11 %
	Tertiary-type 5B (average annual growth rate 1995-2011)	3.8 %	0 %	-20 %	14 %
27	Youth population not in education, employment or training 15-29 year olds, 2011 (EAG 2013)	22 %	15.8 %	6.9 %	34.6 %
<b>Institutions: Improving schools</b>					
<i>Policy lever 3: School improvement</i>					
28	Index of teacher-student relations based on students' reports (PISA 2009)	-0.08	0	-0.42	0.44
29	Index of disciplinary climate based on students' reports (PISA 2009)	-0.03	0	-0.40	0.75
<b>Teachers younger than 40 years-old, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
30	Primary education	55.6 %	41 %	15 %	60 %
	Lower secondary education	m	39 %	11 %	56 %
	Upper secondary education	42.6 %	34 %	7 %	47 %
<b>Number of teaching hours per year in public institutions, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
31	Primary education	915	790	589	1 120
	Lower secondary education	735	709	415	1 120
	Upper secondary education	735	664	369	1 120
<b>Ratio of teachers' salaries to earnings for full-time, full-year adult workers with tertiary education, 2011 (EAG 2013)</b>					
32	Primary education	0.82 %	0.82	0.44	1.34
	Lower secondary education	0.82 %	0.85	0.44	1.34
	Upper secondary education	0.82 %	0.89	0.44	1.40
33	Change in teachers' salaries between 2000 and 2011 in lower secondary education (2000 = 100), (EAG 2013)	3.53 %	16 %	-9 %	103 %
34	Impact of teacher appraisal and feedback upon teaching, 2007-08 (TALIS 2008)	18.7 %	33.9 %	10.9 %	69.1 %
35	Teachers who wanted to participate in more development than they did in the previous 18 months, 2007-08 (TALIS 2008)	54.1 %	55 %	31 %	85 %
36	School principals' views of their involvement in school matters, Mean Index, (PISA 2009)	-0.20	-0.02	-1.29	1.03



#	List of key Indicators	Ireland	average or total	Min	Max
<i>Policy lever 4: Evaluation and assessment to improve student outcomes</i>					
<b>Assessment purposes (PISA 2009)</b>					
37	To make decisions about students' retention or promotion	m	78 %	1 %	100 %
	To monitor the school's progress from year to year	67.1 %	77 %	35 %	98 %
	To make judgements about teachers' effectiveness	37 %	47 %	8 %	85 %
	To identify aspects of instruction or the curriculum that could be improved	64.8 %	77 %	47 %	98 %
<b>Frequency and source of teacher appraisal and feedback, 2007-08 (TALIS 2008)</b>					
38	Once every two years or less	57.8 %	35.8 %	13.8 %	65.6 %
	At least once per year	35.8 %	52.2 %	27.6 %	68.6 %
	Monthly or more than once per month	6.5 %	12 %	3.3 %	29.8 %
<b>Systems: Organising the system</b>					
<i>Policy lever 5: Governance</i>					
<b>Decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2011 (EAG 2012)</b>					
39	Central or state government	50 %	36 %	0 %	87 %
	Regional or sub-regional government	m	6 %	0 %	36 %
	Local government	m	17 %	4 %	100 %
	School government	50 %	41 %	5 %	86 %
<i>Policy lever 6: Funding</i>					
<b>Annual expenditure per student by educational Institutions, for all services, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, 2010 (EAG 2013)</b>					
40	Pre-primary education	m	6 762	2 280	20 958
	Primary education	8 384	7 974	1 860	21 240
	Secondary education	11 380	9 014	2 470	17 633
	Tertiary education	16 008	13 528	6 501	25 576
<b>Relative proportions of public and private expenditure on educational institutions, 2010 (EAG 2013)</b>					
41	Public sources	92.5 %	83.6 %	57.9 %	97.6 %
	All private sources	7.5 %	16.4 %	2.4 %	42.1 %
	Public sources, index of change in expenditure on educational institutions (2000-2010)	194	136	101	195
	All private sources, index of change in expenditure on educational institutions (2000-2010)	151	211	104	790
Note: The average, minimums and maximums refer to OECD countries except in TALIS where they refer to participating countries. "m" refers to data not available. PISA values that are statistically significant are indicated in bold.					



## NOTES

1. The Traveller community in Ireland is an indigenous minority with a nomadic tradition. For more information, see [Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy](#).

2. Voluntary schools are privately owned and managed (but most are publicly funded), while vocational, community and comprehensive schools are publicly owned. All operate according to regulations and curriculum from the DES despite differences in management and governance. Vocational schools are managed and financed by one of the 33 local Vocational Education Committees in each county and large urban area. There are plans to rationalise these into only 16 Education and Training Boards. Comprehensive and community schools have their own boards of management and ethos. Community schools can draw from the combination of schools of various types in a geographical area, or can be new institutions, and are community based. There is also an increasing number of Irish-language medium schools, called *Gaelcholáistí*. Education for children who leave school is provided through Youthreach (generally modular courses in alternative centres, paying students for their participation and providing work experience).



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