

Mr. Paschal Donohoe TD  
Minister for Finance  
Department of Finance  
Government Buildings  
Upper Merrion Street  
Dublin 2  
D02 R583

17<sup>th</sup> August 2022

Dear Minister Donohoe,

I write to outline ASTI priorities in the context of the forthcoming budget. I would ask that you would give our view favourable consideration.

#### **ASTI Budget 2023 Priorities**

The pandemic has highlighted how crucial a quality education service is for young people. The most recent OECD report *Education at a Glance 2021* finds Ireland, once again, in last place out of 36 countries for investment in second-level education as a percentage of GDP. It is therefore essential that the Government commits to a significant increase in investment in education in Budget 2022.

#### **ASTI priorities:**

##### **1. Cost of Living measures:**

ASTI members, in keeping with all other public service workers are suffering the effects of the cost-of-living crisis. It is imperative that teachers' pay is substantially increased against the background of high and sustained inflation. It is vital that an acceptable review of the pay terms set out in Building Momentum is achieved to ensure industrial peace and enable teachers and other public service workers to deal with the soaring cost of energy, fuel, food and other basic essentials.

##### **2. Significant increase in investment in second-level education as a percentage of GDP**

In 2018, Ireland invested 1.1% of gross domestic product (GDP) in second-level education compared to the OECD and EU averages of 1.9%, according to Education at a Glance 2021.

Expenditure per second-level student is \$10,634 compared to \$11,590 OECD average and \$11,543 EU average.

### **3. Equal pay for post-2010 entrants to teaching**

The Government must commit to equal pay for post-2010 entrants to teaching if it is serious about recruiting and retaining second-level teachers at this time. A significant number of teachers have been subjected to pay discrimination for up to a decade. It is no coincidence that Ireland has experienced a serious shortage of second-level teachers in recent years.

### **4. Smaller class sizes**

Research carried out by the ASTI in 2020 found that the majority of Junior Cycle classes are above the EU and OECD class size averages. This means many students are not getting the attention they deserve. Differentiated teaching, which is the foundation of inclusive education, is problematic in overcrowded classes. Large class sizes also impede the use of diverse teaching methodologies which are very much required for the Framework for Junior Cycle.

Additional teachers were deployed to schools during the pandemic to help schools to cope with Covid absences, support students at increased risk of learning loss and to help manage the implementation of Covid mitigation measures. The fact is these additional teachers were always needed in our under-resourced schools. A positive first step in rebuilding our school communities would be to ensure these teachers form part of the permanent annual allocation of teachers to schools. This would allow schools to begin to work towards reducing class sizes.

### **5. School building infrastructure**

The pandemic has put the spotlight on school buildings. It is now glaringly obvious that Irish second-level schools operate on shoestring budgets, with most schools having to fundraise to meet day-to-day meeting costs. An ASTI survey of school principals in 2021 found that in addition to smaller classes to reduce classroom overcrowding, principals believe their schools need:

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GENERAL SECRETARY: KIERAN CHRISTIE

- Adequate work-spaces for teachers
- Improved ventilation systems
- Upgraded toilet/sanitary facilities for staff
- Adequate canteen facilities for students
- Better heating systems
- More/ larger communal spaces

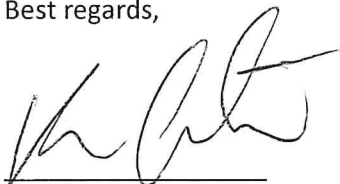
#### **6. Restoration of guidance counselling to pre-recession levels**

This service is over-stretched as there are simply not enough such teachers in our schools. The pandemic has highlighted the need to ensure student wellbeing is supported in a variety of ways including adequate access to one-to-one counselling services within the school community. We must also make provisions for more guidance counsellors to support students to make informed decisions and choices about their future learning and working lives in a rapidly changing global labour market.

#### **7. Digital Technology**

Students' unequal access to broadband and appropriate digital devices was repeatedly highlighted during the pandemic. The next national Digital Learning Strategy must include a dedicated strand of funding to ensure that both students and teachers have full access to broadband and appropriate digital devices. Each school should also have a dedicated leadership post to oversee the implementation of the school's digital learning strategy.

Best regards,



Kieran Christie  
General Secretary