

NUAUGHT

Issue No. 3 – August 2021



Message from ASTI President Eamon Dennehy:

Dear ASTI Member,

Since March 2020 Ireland like every other country in the world has been struggling with the Covid-19 Pandemic. The impact this has had on our schools has been enormous. During this difficult time teachers have shown themselves to be resourceful, flexible and committed to the education and wellbeing of their students.

The virus continues to be a serious threat and all possible measures must be taken to ensure that schools receive the resources necessary to allow them to reopen safely and to protect the health of all staff and students. The ASTI has been strong on this and must continue to be so.

Ireland has been placed last out of 35 countries for investment in education as a percentage of GDP. This lack of investment results in unreasonable and unsustainable workloads for teachers and the denial of important services for students. Lack of investment has also led to the introduction of pay inequality and precarious teaching contracts which make teaching unattractive as a career option. The impact of this inadequate investment has caused difficulties in recruitment and retention of teachers for various subjects.

From late August to the Christmas break Teachers did everything in their power to keep schools open and to provide face to face education for their students, however in January it became apparent that due to the rapidly growing number of Covid-19 cases in the community it would not be safe to reopen schools. The ASTI was the first to voice these concerns and made sure that teachers' health and wellbeing and that of their students were protected in spite of opposition and criticism from other quarters.

Schools remained closed for a prolonged period of time and concerns were raised about the feasibility of holding the Leaving Cert Exams. Eventually students were offered a choice of SEC Accredited Grades or a modified Leaving Cert Exam or both. The ASTI ensured that teachers were given indemnity for the work they had to do on SEC Accredited Grades and held a meeting of its Subject Representatives to discuss modifications to the Leaving Certificate Exam so that any submissions made by the union would accurately reflect the views and concerns of classroom teachers.

The ASTI has a proud tradition of standing up for teachers' rights. Being a member of a trade union like the ASTI helps protect our rights in the workplace but perhaps more importantly it gives us an opportunity to help and support our fellow workers in times of difficulty.

Our union is committed to the provision of high-quality education for all students regardless of socioeconomic background and a system of assessment that enjoys high status and is independent and fair. Many of our members are concerned about the introduction of the Junior Cycle Framework and the impact it will have on the delivery and assessment of education for second level students. ASTI has demanded a review of the Framework to ascertain how well it is performing. This has to be done before any further changes to the Leaving Certificate Examination are considered.

Please continue to refer to the ASTI website for latest news and to find answers to queries you may have.

Le gach dea-guí,

Eamon Dennehy, President


ASTI
A century of service

ASTI has led the
campaign to ensure
Safety, Health and
Welfare of school
communities

Lead worker
representatives
play a vital role in
overseeing safety
in schools



ASTI continues to
protect the terms
and conditions
of our members

This pandemic
has highlighted
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strong trade union

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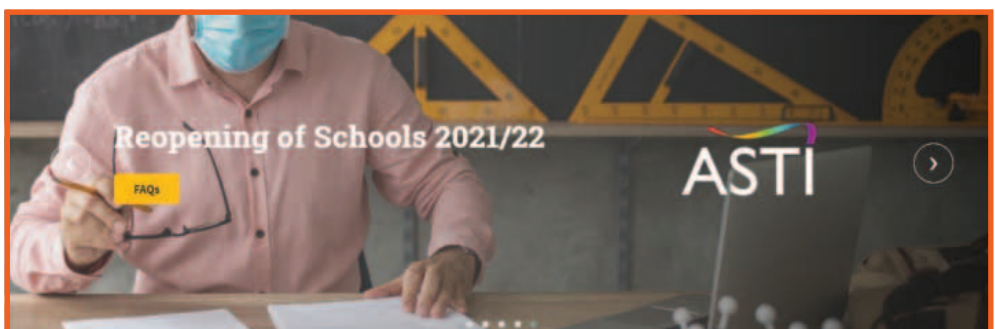
ASTI Acts to Protect Members

Who knew when schools originally closed in March 2020 that the pandemic would create a much havoc as it did, both in wider society and within our schools? Indeed, who could have foreseen the immediate response of the teaching profession, with teaching and learning temporarily reshaped, undertaken remotely without resources or training, typifying the professionalism that has long been a feature in second-level schools? When schools reopened, the superlative service continued in the most challenging of circumstances. The importance of the contribution teachers made by engagement with the calculated/SEC Accredited grades processes must be recognised. There is greater awareness of the crucial role that teachers play within society.

Now, hopefully on the last leg of this marathon we are enduring, the challenge of reopening schools faces us again.

ASTI has been proactive in demanding that appropriate resources are made available to schools and that public health advice reflects the realities experienced by school communities. We have insisted that teachers, together with everyone in our school communities, must be safe. Schools must be Covid-19 secure workplaces. Whether it was raising and highlighting issues such as face coverings, indemnification of teachers, protections for Very High Risk or pregnant teachers or several other matters, we were not found wanting. We will not relent on this work until this pandemic is formally declared a thing of the past.

Covid19 has highlighted, more than ever, the need to be in a strong trade union. Now that we can tentatively dare to look beyond the Pandemic, other challenges come into focus. For our part, we must ensure that the second-level education system gets the investment needed to build back better. More immediately, the negotiations around the implementation of the "Building Momentum – A New Public Service Agreement 2021–2022" are in train. Change at Senior Cycle is being discussed. The student and parent charter, which ASTI has successfully lobbied to be renamed as more inclusive of school communities – *School (Community Charter) Bill* – continues to weave its way through the legislature. There is much to be done.



ASTI Keeps Members Informed – Visit www.asti.ie

Since the onset of the Pandemic, ASTI has striven to keep members informed and updated on evolving events. Members should make sure to visit our website regularly for latest news as it comes to hand. ASTI has a large store of information on the arrangements for reopening schools including a substantial **Frequently Asked Questions** section. Make sure to visit.