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Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland



ASTI DEMANDS COVID-SECURE SCHOOLS

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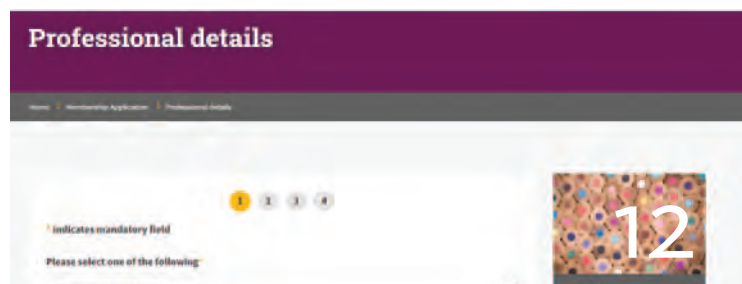
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The *ASTIR* Editorial Board is interested in receiving feedback on *ASTIR*.

Members can email astirfeedback@asti.ie or text 087-9349956.



CLARITY NEEDED FOR SCHOOLS

"They (teachers) are on the frontline and deserve the gratitude of the entire nation."
"Where large crowds gather together, the virus spreads."
 Micheál Martin TD, Taoiseach

The much-needed mid-term break allowed one week of partial pause from the intensive stress for school staff and students. While classroom teaching is favoured by teachers over remote learning, safety concerns remain as pronounced now as they were in August. Ballot results focused on key areas that have been consistently raised by the ASTI.

A major concern is test turnaround times: 24 hours is a necessity to ensure contact tracing is instigated immediately following a positive result. The definition of a close contact within a classroom is elusive and vague. Close contacts are currently identified following public health risk assessment. Teachers need clarity about this process. What is involved? Is it the same in every school? Assurances on the thoroughness of such assessments are needed to inspire confidence in the system. While many very high-risk teachers work from home, teachers in the high-risk category are of serious concern. Teachers with severe conditions such as chronic kidney disease, liver disease, cancer, heart failure and lung conditions have not been granted reasonable accommodations and continue to work in schools in heightened, stressful conditions. A serial testing programme for schools would identify positive Covid-19 cases early. As some students do not exhibit symptoms when positive, serial testing would be another potential step towards reducing the number of Covid-19 cases nationally and alleviating apprehensions.

More progress needed

Teachers and parents must be informed how many cases have been in each school. Individual privacy will be maintained. As we veer in and out of different levels of the *National Framework for living with Covid-19*, numbers will fall and rise. There may be instances when classes are required to self-isolate or schools may close. It is essential that each teacher is provided with a laptop and provision of equipment for students is vital to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged by remote learning. Some progress has been made, including the following: meetings with public health officials have begun, some answers have been provided, teams will assist schools, and senior politicians have indicated a willingness to address the ASTI's concerns.

As we approach a possible pay deal, the longstanding issue of equal pay for equal work must finally be resolved.

Principals have spent mid-terms replacing sanitising products and summer holidays were devoted to preparing schools for opening. The hard work of management and staff involved is acknowledged and appreciated.

Wishing you all well as you continue to support the welfare of your students.



Ann Piggott
 ASTI President

SCHOOL COMMUNITIES MUST BE PROTECTED

The ASTI has been consistent in our position that schools should stay open if possible, in the interests of students and everyone concerned in our schools. We have been equally adamant throughout that this can only be maintained in a context whereby schools are Covid-19 secure and the health and safety of the entire school community is protected. The recent ballot of members endorses this position. ASTI members voted overwhelmingly to insist that proper provision is made in the areas of testing, the definition of close contacts and for those in the high-risk category. It was very disheartening as we embarked on a well-deserved mid-term break that there were still issues arising in schools that should have long since been addressed. School principals reported enormous difficulties in establishing appropriate communications with the HSE when a Covid-19 case arose. That was why the ASTI insisted on the establishment of dedicated teams led by public health officials to liaise directly with schools.

It is also imperative that the testing and tracing regime being implemented for school Covid-19 cases is sorted out. It is unacceptable that tracing in particular has been especially tardy. The support that is needed to ensure that schools can properly combat the spread of Covid-19 must be provided.

Among the other challenges that have to be faced if schools are to remain open on a sustainable basis are addressing ventilation issues in cold weather and ensuring that an appropriate level of substitution cover is available. A winter like none we have seen before is in prospect. The ASTI will ensure at all times that the key objective of providing education for our students in a Covid-19-secure manner is front and centre of all we do.

Calculated grades

The calculated grades debacle has underlined a point that has been the mainstay of ASTI policy for many years. There is no viable substitute for proper examinations that are credible, independent, objective and fair to underpin the second-level certification system. This point must be borne in mind in a context where calls for 'reform' of curriculum and the examination system never cease. Education reform is a serious and sensitive matter, which can have significant consequences for young people, parents, schools and teachers. The ASTI has never been an obstacle to meaningful reform. However, reform should follow proper and comprehensive engagement with the relevant stakeholders.

We have seen that the unavailability of an externally conducted assessment model based on nationally established criteria – where written exams, project work, and course work are marked anonymously outside the school – can have disastrous consequences. Reform must be based on sound educational merit and take into account the resource capacities of schools, and the national cultural and social context within which teachers and schools work. It must also protect students against the perpetuation of social inequities, another matter that featured heavily in the calculated grades controversy. Hopefully, a lesson has been learned.



Kieran Christie
 ASTI General Secretary

Right to disconnect

At its meeting of September 24 and 25, 2020, ASTI Standing Committee adopted the following motion regarding out-of-hours communications with members:

“That the ASTI advise management in all schools in which it has members that a moratorium on reading, acknowledging and responding to non-emergency communications emanating from management outside of school hours applies forthwith. The moratorium will apply from 5.00pm to 8.00am Monday to Friday and all day Saturday, Sunday and public holidays”.

School stewards have been notified of this advice and have brought it to the attention of ASTI members in their school and their school management. Members are strongly urged to implement this advice. This advice is not a directive.



Director of the Teaching Council Tomás O'Ruairc interviewed former President of Ireland Mary Robinson.

FÉILTE 2020

On October 3, the Teaching Council hosted its eighth national FÉILTE, which was fully online for the first time ever.

FÉILTE 2020 was originally planned to return to Dublin this year; however, due to Covid-19 it was moved to an online platform, while keeping the theme of 'Collaborating to Connect: Empathy with our Communities'. The online festival took all the physical elements of FÉILTE and placed them on a virtual platform, allowing attendees to enjoy all aspects of the festival, including the ability to network with each other in a digital lobby.

Despite the fact that teachers were teaching online and adapting to their new working environment, the Teaching Council received over 100 videos – including 45 showcases, 22 TeachMeets, and 24 pre-recorded workshops – with 12 workshops delivered live on the day. Newly qualified teachers presented their research in the StudentMeet booth, while LeadershipMeet held a session with school leaders, facilitated by the Centre for School Leadership.

The festival also included the pre-recorded launch of FÉILTE by Minister for Education Norma Foley TD, an opening address by the Chairperson of the

ASTI fully supports Debenhams workers

The ASTI is expressing its full support for the Debenhams workers. We support the joint initiative by their trade union Mandate and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), which is designed to secure urgent enactment of legislation that would help to resolve the intractable dispute and ensure guarantees for workers finding themselves abandoned by their employer in similar circumstances in future. The ASTI is adding its voice to the campaign calling on the Government to introduce legislation to protect terms and conditions of employment in the event of receiverships and liquidations of businesses. The main recommendations of the Duffy/Cahill report should be implemented as a matter of urgency.



Panel discussion on 'Teaching and Learning during a Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities', featuring (from top left): P.J. Ryan (parent), Cecilia Munro (principal, Ballyfermot College of Further Education, Dublin), Tracie Tobin (principal, St Michael's Infant School, Sexton Street, Limerick City), Michael McGroarty (teacher, Milford Community College, Co. Donegal, and ASTI member), and Aoileann Mooney (student, St. Peter's College, Dunboyme, Co. Meath). The discussion was chaired by Phil Fox, Deputy Director of the Teaching Council.

Teaching Council Seán McMahon, and an outstanding interview by video link with Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland, by the Director of the Teaching Council, Tomás O'Ruairc.

The live programme allowed attendees to engage in real time with the hosts and each other. Live panel discussions took place on the main stage on the topics of 'Teaching and Learning during a Pandemic: Opportunities and Challenges', and 'From the lecture room to the classroom: how research enhances practice across the teaching continuum' featuring post-primary, primary and further education teachers.

In a poll taken on the day, 80% of attendees stated that they wanted FÉILTE to remain online next year. Going online meant that teachers from all around the world could join in, with attendees watching from Ireland, Australia, Canada, USA, UK, Sweden, Italy, South Africa and Saudi Arabia.

All videos (keynote interview, showcases, workshops, TeachMeets, etc.) can be accessed on www.teachingcouncil.ie.

Employee Assistance Service provides support for teachers

The re-opening of schools has led to additional stress and uncertainty for teachers as schools implement new operational arrangements and protocols. It is very important to mind our mental and physical health at this time.

Teachers who are experiencing personal and work-related problems, e.g., health, relationships, addictions, bereavements, stress, trauma, etc., can get direct access to advice through the Employee Assistance Service (EAS) provided by the Department of Education and Skills. Where appropriate, this may involve free, short-term, confidential, one-to-one counselling.

The service is delivered by Spectrum.Life and includes a freephone confidential helpline at 1800 411 057. Alternatively, text 'Hi' to 087-369 0010 to avail of EAS support via SMS and WhatsApp.

Family members over the age of 18 may also be able to avail of short-term counselling. A family member includes a spouse, civil partner or dependent, where the family member can be described as a person over the age of 18 residing at the family home.

Teachers can also access live chats, videos, podcasts and blogs on topics around mental health, family life, exercise and nutrition. In addition, online cognitive behavioural therapy is also provided to employees. The platform is available via web, iOS app or Android app. Spectrum.Life will also be providing a series of webinars and presentations to promote well-being in schools during the upcoming school year.

Bliain na Gaeilge

Tá an ASTI ar cheann de na hurraitheoirí ar 'Bliain na Gaeilge', a d'eagraigh earnáil an Bhoird Oideachais agus Oiliúna (ETB), a seoladh i mí Dheireadh Fómhair.

The theme of the year-long festival to celebrate the Irish language is 'Ag tabhairt na Gaeilge linn' – 'Bringing Irish with us'. Over 100,000 students will be celebrating the Irish language and culture during the school year.

The initiative was launched virtually by former RTÉ Gaelic Games commentator and broadcaster Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh accompanied by broadcasters Bláthnaid Ní Chofaigh, Séamus Ó Scanláin and Bláthnaid Treacy.

The programme will run for the duration of the school year with a new competition/initiative featured every month. In the interest of fairness, Irish-medium schools will not be pitted against English-medium schools. Each monthly competition will award a prize (including €500) for the best entry from an English-medium and an Irish-medium school.

Students who have little or even no Irish will be encouraged to get involved and collaborate with each other in a flexible way, with students actively encouraged to lead and drive the programme in their school.

The initiative is sponsored by Foras Na Gaeilge along with Conradh na Gaeilge, the ASTI, TG4, the TUI, Instructional Leadership Programme, ETBI TAKE 1 Programme, and the 16 ETBs across the country.

BelongTo Annual Report 2019

BelongTo, the national organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) young people in Ireland, launched its annual report for 2019 in October. The organisation's work in the education sector in 2019 included:

Stand Up Awareness Week

In 2019, BelongTo offered free training sessions to teachers, principals, guidance counsellors, board of management

members, school psychologists

and education welfare services staff as part of Stand Up Awareness Week. Participants learned how LGBTI+ bullying can impact on the mental health of students, how to signpost a young person to support services, terminology to ease conversations around the topic, and how to support an LGBTI+ person in coming out.

Stand Up Awareness Week 2020 takes place from November 16-20. Stand Up Awareness Week is a time for second-level schools to take a stand against homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and an opportunity for schools to look at how they can be safe and supportive places for LGBTI+ students. See www.belongto.org/professionals/training/ for upcoming training opportunities for teachers.

School Climate Survey

In 2019, BelongTo partnered with the Teacher College, Columbia University, for the first School Climate Survey. This ground-breaking study was a first for Ireland, shining a light on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people in schools across the country. The research examined indicators of a negative school experience, the effects of school climate on students, and school-based supports that can improve the lives of LGBTI+ young people.

Findings indicate that in the 2018-2019 school year, an alarming 73% of LGBTI+ students felt unsafe at school, with the majority of students experiencing homophobic remarks, many experiencing harassment, and some experiencing physical and sexual assault. Journalist Charlie Bird hosted the launch of the survey, which included a presentation of key findings and a panel discussion that included: Deputy General Secretary of ASTI Diarmaid de Paor; author of the LGBTIreland Report Prof. Agnes Higgins; GAA referee and teacher David Gough; and LGBTI+ youth activist Ayrton Kelly. This research will be conducted every two years to assess the progression of the school climate for LGBTI+ students.

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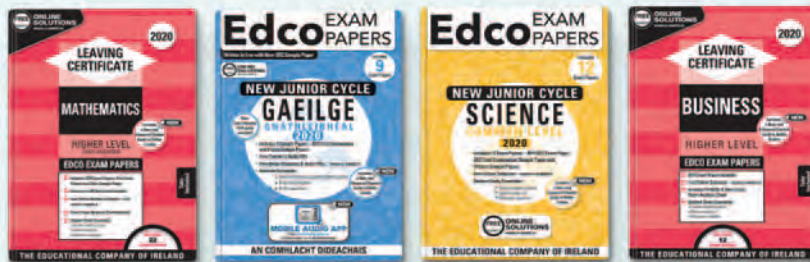
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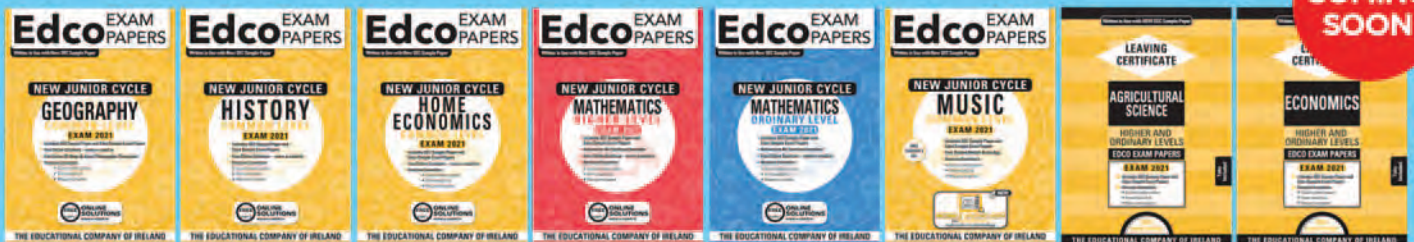


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School steward training

Online school steward training took place in October and November. The training was open to all school stewards and is particularly helpful for newly elected stewards. Participants received comprehensive e-packs in advance with links to information and videos on key aspects of the role. The emphasis in the training is on responding to current issues in your school and how best to represent your colleagues. Issues covered included:

- role of the school steward
- contracts
- leave for teachers
- disciplinary and grievance procedures
- conducting school ballots, and
- update on national issues.

Teaching Council update

Education Support Centres Ireland (ESCI) and the Teaching Council are co-hosting a series of three interactive webinars aimed at supporting schools in their professional learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Under the banner ‘Adapting to Change, Reflecting for the Future’, the webinars will be open to primary and post-primary schools, and centres for education in the further education sector. They will be facilitated by practising teachers, and will provide opportunities for schools to learn from each other through reflective conversations that are underpinned by Cosán, the national framework for teachers’ learning. Teachers and school leaders will be invited to share their professional learning journeys during these extraordinary times. Facilitators will provide helpful tools and strategies to support teachers and school leaders in the development of flexible, autonomous and context-relevant professional learning experiences for all.

- | | | |
|----------------------|--------------|-------------|
| ■ Dublin West | ■ Drumcondra | ■ Blackrock |
| ■ Kildare | ■ Navan | ■ Kilkenny |
| ■ Carrick on Shannon | ■ Donegal | ■ Cork |
| ■ Clare | ■ Limerick | ■ Laois |

For further details, please visit your local education centre website, or www.esci.ie, or check your email inbox for the special edition ezine dedicated to this webinar.

Get retirement ready seminar

In order to facilitate members who are considering retirement during 2021, the ASTI is providing online seminars for those who have not yet attended an ASTI retirement seminar.

This two-evening programme is for members considering retirement during 2021.

The first session will include an overview of the occupational pension scheme, discussion of retirement options and how to retire.

The second session will include information on additional voluntary contributions (AVCs) and financial planning for retirement, guidance on preparing mentally for this exciting new chapter, and Brent Pope interviewing a retired ASTI member on overall well-being and life after work.

Seminars are taking place in November and further seminars are planned for 2021. New dates will be posted on www.asti.ie. Pre-registration is essential to attend. Please contact Danielle Cullen at dcullen@asti.ie to register.

SafeSPACE Create Safer Classrooms.



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Ventilation Monitor

Step 2

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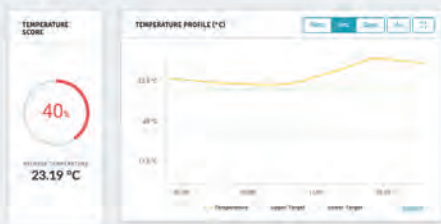


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Current Occupancy: 87. Safe Occupancy: 75

EazySafe
Cleaning Reminder!
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EazySAFE

World Teachers’ Day 2020

World Teachers’ Day, October 5, celebrated teachers with the theme ‘Teachers: Leading in crisis, reimagining the future’.

ASTI President Ann Piggott had the following message for ASTI members on World Teachers’ Day 2020: “This has been a most difficult year and teachers have demonstrated extraordinary commitment and creativity in responding to Covid-19. It is positive that the public see the tremendous job that teachers do. You as teachers have gained appreciation and respect for the care you show to students and the education you provide. Your selfless efforts continue as you reawaken the minds of students in this inconceivable school year. Thank you for all you do”.



Convention 2021

ASTI Standing Committee has decided, in the context of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, to plan for a remote Annual Convention at Easter 2021. It was agreed that Annual Convention should comply with the terms of the ASTI Rules and Constitution as far as possible.

If you are interested in taking part in Convention 2021, you should join your next branch meeting.

If you are unsure about how to attend a branch meeting, ask your school steward for your branch’s meeting schedule.

Motions at Convention

ASTI members get to decide what is debated at Annual Convention. Motions are presented to Convention and delegates speak to these motions.

Branches normally decide on the topics they would like to see discussed at Annual Convention at their November branch meetings. ASTI Steering Committee then prepares a list of the motions received from branches.

The list is circulated to all branches and branches are asked to prioritise motions for inclusion on the Convention agenda. They can also propose amendments to any of the motions circulated. Motions and amendments are considered again by Steering Committee in early February and a final agenda is drawn up based on the feedback from branches. It is recommended that branches hold meetings early in November to discuss motions for Convention.

For up-to-date information on Convention 2021, visit www.asti.ie.

Update your email and access web benefits



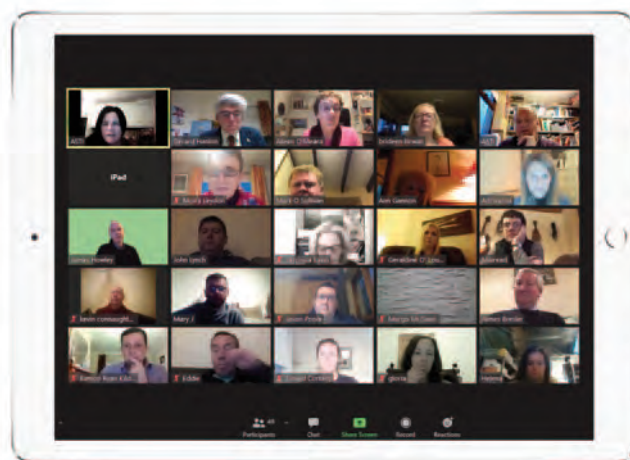
The new ASTI website is being rolled out over the coming weeks and months (see page 12). Members will be able to register for a MyUnion web account and access additional benefits such as a members’ area, a sick leave calculator and direct contact to Head Office/elected representatives. To register for an account your email address must match the one we have for you on our members’ database. If you do not currently receive regular emails from ASTI Head Office, this may be because we do not have your email address, or because the one we have is no longer in use. Update your email address in time for the launch of our MyUnion facility by emailing janem@asti.ie.

Getting the most from Zoom

ASTI branch officers recently received training in how to conduct effective Zoom branch meetings from Aileen O'Meara Media. Aileen is a former RTÉ and *Sunday Tribune* journalist and spoke to *ASTIR* afterwards to share some of her top tips.

Her main tip is to recreate an in-person meeting, as much as is possible. Use your hands when speaking and don't sit too far away from the computer. It's also important that people can see you properly on screen. Make sure the background is not too brightly lit, as you may appear silhouetted: "For Zoom meetings, you have to work as much as you can as if you're in the room with somebody. I know that's hard because I know we're not, but it's the next best thing. What I try to do is look into the camera, look at myself, and I look at you as well".

She also advises hosts to say hello to everyone when they come into the meeting. Tell people about the chat function because that's a way for those in the meeting to interact, and Aileen says interaction is very important: "Don't just stand there or sit there and do PowerPoints for an hour". Sound is the next important thing. Ask people if can they hear you properly.



Aileen recommends that people don't use earbuds and use a headset with a microphone instead. Remember to be flexible: "Be ready for something going wrong. I learned that as well, that I had to have a plan B. The internet is going to go down some days".

Upskilling programmes for teachers

Upskilling programmes for teachers

New programmes to upskill registered post-primary teachers to teach an additional subject (mathematics, physics or Spanish) have been announced by the Department of Education. The following three Level 8 programmes will begin in January 2021:

Professional Diploma in Mathematics for Teaching

Delivered by University of Limerick in collaboration with NUI Galway, Dublin City University, Technological University Dublin, Cork Institute of Technology, Letterkenny Institute of Technology and Waterford Institute of Technology.

Professional Diploma for Teaching Physics

Delivered by Dublin City University in collaboration with University of Limerick and NUI Galway.

Higher Diploma in Spanish for Teachers

Delivered by University College Cork.

Programme highlights:

- commencing January 2021
- two years' part-time, delivered in a flexible and innovative environment
- Teaching Council additional subject registration
- Level 8 qualification: teach at the highest level
- mathematics and physics programmes offered through the medium of Irish
- enhanced career prospects, and
- no fee cost to participating teachers.

Post-primary teacher upskilling programmes in Mathematics, Spanish & Physics

- Programmes starting in January 2021
- 2 years part-time, flexible
- Teaching Council's additional subject registration
- Level 8 qualification: teach at the highest level
- Enhance your career prospects
- Mathematics and Physics programmes offered through the medium of Irish
- No fee

These new programmes are designed to upskill already registered post-primary teachers to meet the Teaching Council's curricular subject requirements in an additional subject. The programmes will be delivered on a part-time, flexible basis allowing greater participation and flexibility. There will be no impact on class contact time for serving teachers.

The ASTI welcomes this announcement: not only is it an effective way of addressing teacher supply problems in key areas, it is also a recognition of the importance of supporting teachers' professional learning to ensure a quality education service for students. Teacher supply and retention is increasingly a problem in second-level education. A key driver of this trend is unequal pay for teachers. The fact that teachers in the same school are doing the same work, sometimes teaching the same subjects, and yet are on unequal salary scales, is having a highly corrosive impact on the attractiveness of teaching as a profession. Working conditions and salary are important dimensions of making teaching an attractive profession for graduates. Education policy cannot ignore this and the Government must move to address pay inequality now. The application processes will open shortly and applications should be made directly to the appropriate higher education institute.

Register now!
For more: gov.ie/teachingtransforms

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

scales, is having a highly corrosive impact on the attractiveness of teaching as a profession.

Working conditions and salary are important dimensions of making teaching an attractive profession for graduates.

Education policy cannot ignore this and the Government must move to address pay inequality now.

The application processes will open shortly and applications should be made directly to the appropriate higher education institute.

Further information can be found on
www.gov.ie/teachingtransforms.

NEW ASTI WEBSITE

The new ASTI website has been launched, with new functions and features to connect you to your union and improve your online experience being rolled out over the coming weeks.

The new and improved ASTI website will be fully rolled out in the coming weeks and months, and allows members to join online, access information about their membership and quickly find out more about issues relevant to them, including ASTI campaigns and their terms and conditions of employment. There will also be additional functionality for activists such as school stewards and branch secretaries, to assist them in carrying out their roles.

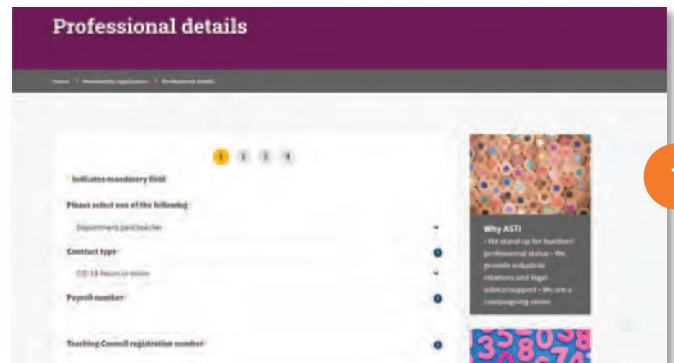
Join online

New and returning members can now join the ASTI by completing the online form. Once you have the key details to hand, this form takes just a few minutes to complete (1). The online form will also allow you to authorise payment of your membership fees through deductions at source from your salary, and at a later date by credit/debit card, depending on your membership category. Remember, if you were first appointed to a teaching position on or after February 1, 2012, you are entitled to your first year of ASTI membership at no cost!

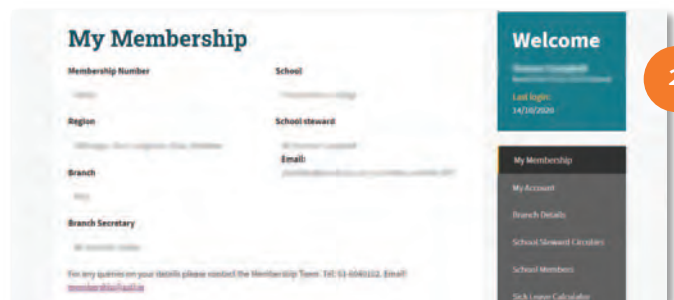
Personal dashboard

Later this winter, we will be launching our MyUnion section. ASTI members will be able to log in to their own MyUnion account on the new website (2) – all you need is your email address (3). On your personal dashboard you will be able to see information relating to your ASTI membership such as your membership number and your school steward, and branch and Standing Committee representatives.

You will also be able to quickly and easily check and update your details, for example your home address or school name, on your MyUnion account. Members will be able to contact the ASTI membership department directly with any queries or questions they may have.



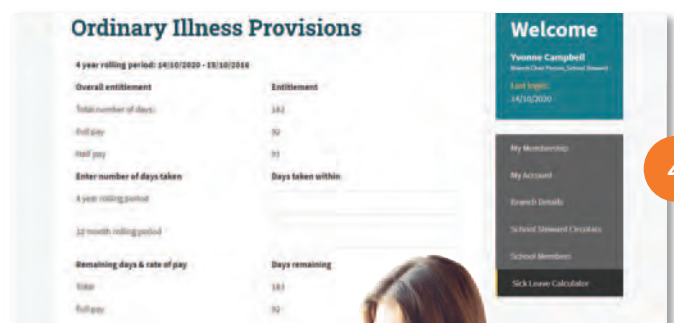
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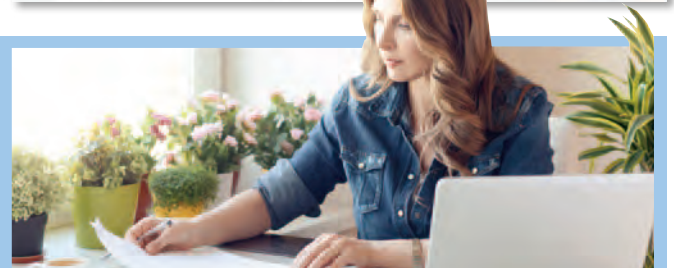
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Before you join

Before you join online you will need the following information to hand.

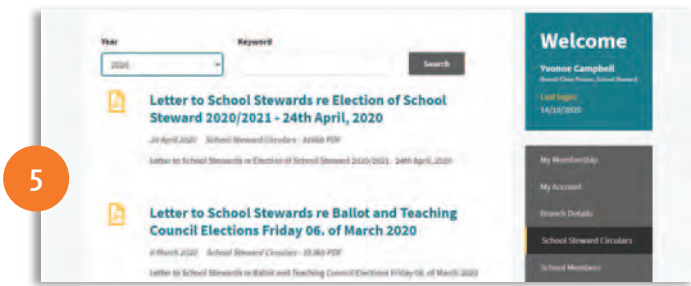
Department of Education-paid teachers, ETBI-paid teachers and school-paid teachers:

- payroll number
- Teaching Council registration number, and
- names and ASTI membership numbers of proposer and seconder, if known (ideally your proposer and seconder will be from your local branch, e.g., school colleagues)



Student teachers – for lay Professional Master's in Education or final-year college students:

- name of degree qualification
- name of third-level institution and year of graduation, and
- teaching practice – school name (if known).

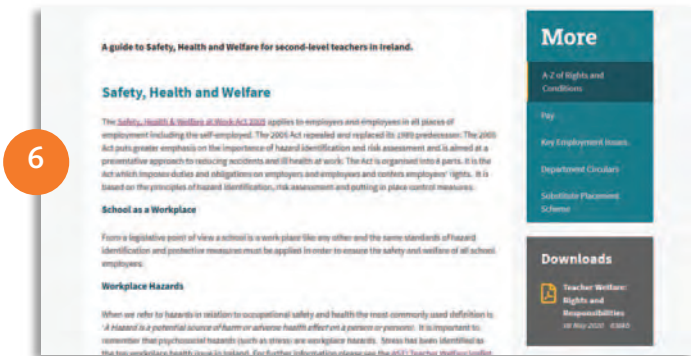


5

A sick leave calculator will also be available to members who are logged in to their MyUnion account. Simply answer a few questions about what sick leave you have previously taken to calculate your remaining sick leave entitlements (4).

School stewards

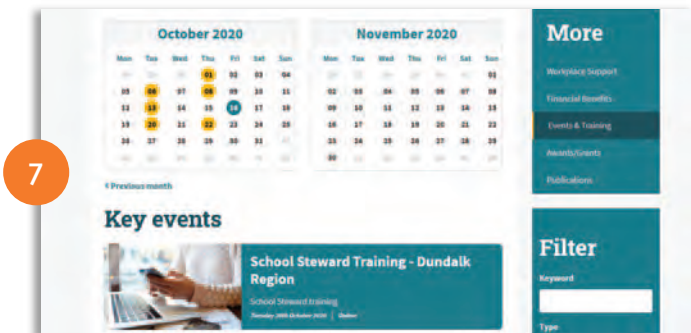
ASTI school stewards who log in to the website will have a special dashboard, which allows them to access information they need to carry out their role. Each school steward will be able to access an up-to-date list of members in their school and information about their mailing preferences for ASTI publications.



6

Key employment issues

Our new website has a section dedicated to providing you with information regarding the key employment issues affecting our members (5). You can search by category or keyword for information about various leave schemes, and you also have access to our FAQs on pensions and retirement. Our Contracts page explains important information about different contract types so that members can better understand the terms of their employment. We also have a guide to safety, health, and welfare for second-level teachers, addressing issues such as workplace hazards, stress at work, and the duties of employers (6).



7

Events and training

The Events and Training section of our new website makes it easier than ever to get involved in the broad range of events that the ASTI offers its members (7). You can find information about events including school steward training and upcoming Conventions. You can also keep up to date with upcoming events, book online, and add events to your Google or Outlook calendar.



8

Terms and conditions

The website's newly configured Your Employment section contains an A-Z covering all aspects of teachers' employment (8). Here you will find everything you need to know about your terms and conditions with each page including FAQs, Department Circulars, and other related information as appropriate. This will make it easier than ever before to find the information you need to know about your employment.

Check out the new website at www.asti.ie.

Coming soon: win €200 worth of One4All vouchers

This winter we will launch our MyUnion section for ASTI members. All ASTI members who register and log in to their MyUnion account within the first month of its rollout will be entered into a draw. Three winners will be chosen from the draw and each winner will receive €200 in One4All vouchers. All you need to do is go to www.asti.ie and log in to be entered into the draw.



CAMPAIGNING UNION

A series of ballots of members in October have given the ASTI a mandate to take industrial action, if necessary, to protect teachers and students.



Covid-secure schools

The results of the ASTI's ballots of members in October demonstrate the high level of concern among teachers regarding the safety and welfare of students and teachers during the pandemic. It is also clear that members want schools to remain open, in so far as is possible. Where this is not possible, students must be able to access quality teaching and learning remotely.

ASTI members have voted to take industrial action, up to and including strike action, on the following issues:

- the definition of close contacts in a school setting
- a comprehensive testing programme for schools with guaranteed test turnaround times of 24 hours
- reasonable arrangements to protect teachers in the "high-risk" category, and
- laptops for students and teachers, procured centrally.

Following repeated demands by the ASTI, engagement between the teacher unions and the Department of Education and Skills and the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) improved in late October. Standing Committee continues to monitor this ongoing engagement closely in the context of the mandate for industrial action.

Standing Committee continues to monitor ongoing engagement between the teacher unions, the Department of Education and Skills, and the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE).

Changes to work practices

Separately, ASTI members have voted on the issue of changes to work practices in schools.

The ASTI has received reports of attempts to impose unilateral changes to teachers' work practices in some schools in recent months, further increasing teachers' workload and work intensity.

Following the ballot, ASTI Standing Committee issued two Directives directing members not to co-operate with changes to work practices unless:

- a consensus on the proposed changes was achieved at a staff meeting, and
- the proposed changes are time neutral.

The Directives are set out in a poster, which has been distributed to schools and is available on the ASTI website www.asti.ie.

Equal pay

October also saw the re-running of the ballot on equal pay (which was interrupted in March 2020 due to Covid-19 school closures). ASTI members have voted in favour of industrial action, up to and including strike action, to be taken in conjunction with one or both of the other teacher unions. The ASTI has contacted the INTO and TUI with a view to seeking a combined effort to bring an end to pay inequality for teachers who entered the profession since 2010.

There must be a proper acknowledgement of the contribution that teachers have made, not just during this pandemic but also over the last 10 years

Public sector pay

The Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) comes to a conclusion at the end of 2020. At time of writing there is no clarity on whether a replacement agreement will be negotiated. The Government has indicated some willingness to engage but no movement has taken place. While exploratory talks have taken place between the Government and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), there has been no discussion on pay or on any issues specific to the teaching profession. A framework for negotiations to commence is not yet in place. The Programme for Government states that it "will seek to negotiate a new public pay deal with the public service unions" and also commits to a "bargaining clause" in order to "make progress on sectoral issues". The ASTI will once again put the issue of unequal pay

at the top of our agenda. We will fight to maintain the concept of pension parity. We will seek to defend members from any attacks that will inevitably emerge on their conditions of service. The reversal of additional working hours, introduced under the austerity measures in the Haddington Road Agreement as an alternative to an additional pay cut at the time, remains a priority issue for the union. We will seek to ensure that pay is advanced and protected. There must be a decent outcome for ASTI members. There must be a proper acknowledgement of the contribution that teachers have made, not just during this pandemic but also over the last 10 years.

The ASTI will engage with the Department of Education and Skills and all the other relevant stakeholders to ensure a decent outcome for members

Based on the coalition Government's Programme for Government, the official side will place an emphasis on productivity and change. The three-party Programme says that the Government "will ensure that there is an emphasis on embedding positive work practice changes that have emerged due to the Covid-19 Emergency as well as general productivity gains and effectiveness based on measurable outcomes". This could constitute a very real threat to the working conditions of members and we must guard against it.

Meanwhile, the accompanying commitment in the Programme for Government regarding bargaining on "sectoral" issues could provide both threats and opportunities. There may be scope here on the pay equity issue for example. The ASTI will engage with the Department of Education and Skills and all the other relevant stakeholders to ensure a decent outcome for members. Indeed, specific detail on what sort of money might be attributed to specific categories, how much could be allocated to teachers for instance, will have a major bearing. It will be important that we get a fair share of whatever might be on offer.

And of course, regarding what might be termed cost of living increases, there have been some reports in the media that there will be nothing on the table for 2021, given the emphasis on Covid-19 wage supports, supports for business, and increased costs in health and elsewhere. The Government may plead that the coffers are empty. We're in an uncertain period. If there is no agreement, there will be drift and tensions will mount. There will be interesting months ahead.

Keep up with ASTI campaigns at www.asti.ie.

IRELAND'S UNDERFUNDED EDUCATION

Ireland is yet again bottom of the global league on education spending, says **GEMMA TUFFY**, ASTI Media and Communications Officer.

The OECD report *Education at a Glance 2020*, published in September, ranks Ireland bottom of the international league when it comes to the proportion of gross domestic production (GDP) spent on second-level education. This comes as no surprise. Education at a Glance has been published annually by the OECD since 1992 and provides statistical information on how countries across the world invest in and operate their education systems. Ireland's historically poor track record for investment in education has been highlighted in these international comparisons for almost 30 years. *Education at a Glance 2020* is based on data from 2017-2019. Throughout these three years, the ASTI continued to campaign vigorously for increased spending on second-level education, including the full restoration of the 'austerity' education cuts, which were implemented between 2009 and 2012. In 2017 Ireland invested 1.1% of GDP in second-level education compared to the OECD and EU averages of 1.9%, according to the 2020 report.

As a result, Ireland is ranked in last place out of 36 countries for this indicator. Not surprisingly, Ireland is also among the OECD countries that spent the lowest proportion of its GDP across all primary to tertiary institutions in 2017. Overall, Ireland invested 3.4% of GDP in primary, second- and third-level education compared to the OECD average of 4.9% and EU average of 4.5%.

The report includes data on the long-term effects of investment in education on economic progress, individuals' earnings, and young people's future life chances, as well as on social outcomes such as citizen engagement. It states: "Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with several positive economic and social outcomes for individuals. Highly educated individuals tend to be more socially engaged and have higher employment rates and higher relative earnings".

Impact of Covid-19

Education at a Glance 2020 acknowledges the enormous challenges facing education systems – and underfunded education systems in particular – due to Covid-19. In his editorial in the report, OECD Secretary General Angel Gurría notes that "long-term public spending on education is at risk despite short-term stimulus packages in some countries...the pandemic has

Schooling during lockdown

The OECD found that schools and teachers used a wide variety of methods to support students' learning during school closures, including instructional packages (textbooks, worksheets and printouts), radio education, educational television and online instructional resources. Countries usually used several tools to reach the largest proportion of students possible. Across the world, online platforms were the most popular tool used during school closures.

In France, an already-existing distance learning programme *Ma Classe à la Maison* (My Class at Home) became available for all students in primary

and secondary schools. Another popular learning arrangement in many OECD countries was TV broadcasts of educational content. Other measures were also taken to help students to learn at home. For example, in Luxembourg the Government set up a support system for students and parents to promote home schooling.

However, the OECD report warns of the limits of distance learning, particularly for disadvantaged students. Early evidence suggests that the gap between the achievement of students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds widened in many countries during school closures.

exposed our vulnerability to crises and revealed how precarious and interdependent the economies we have built can be. Disruptions on the scale we have just witnessed are not limited to pandemics, but may also result from natural, political, economic and environmental disorder. Our capacity to react effectively and efficiently in the future will hinge on governments' foresight, readiness and preparedness...education systems will need to be at the heart of this planning".

The OECD report also warns that class size will be a determining factor in efforts to keep schools re-opened following Covid lockdown measures in most countries: "Countries with larger classes will face more challenges in reorganising student groups to minimise the risks of viral transmission".

Good news for Ireland

Despite our poor funding record, there is plenty of good news for Ireland in the report. School retention rates remain among the highest in the OECD: 93% of 15-19 year olds are in school compared to the OECD average of 84% and the EU average of 88%.

Progression to third-level education remains higher than average too – 45% of 20-24 year olds are full-time students compared to the OECD average of 41%. The report outlines the benefits of greater educational attainment for individuals, including the fact that those with further (non-tertiary) education earn 23% more than those with just second-level education, while those with a degree earn 54% more. Ireland has a slightly lower percentage of young people aged 20-24 who are neither in education, employment nor training (termed NEETs) – 13% compared to the OECD average of 15.2% and the EU average of 14%.

Ireland's 15 year olds continue to do well in OECD performance assessments. Ireland comes in second place out of 36 OECD countries for performance in reading tests. More than 85% of 15 year olds in Ireland achieved Level 2 or above in an OECD PISA reading assessment, ahead of countries such as Finland and Canada.

Finally, in Ireland educational attainment is positively associated with political engagement, and the impact may be more pronounced than it is in other countries. Sixty-four per cent of tertiary-educated adults in Ireland reported being quite or very interested in politics (compared to the OECD average of 57%). This share falls to 47% for those who have completed second-level and/or further (non-degree) education (compared to the OECD average of 40%).

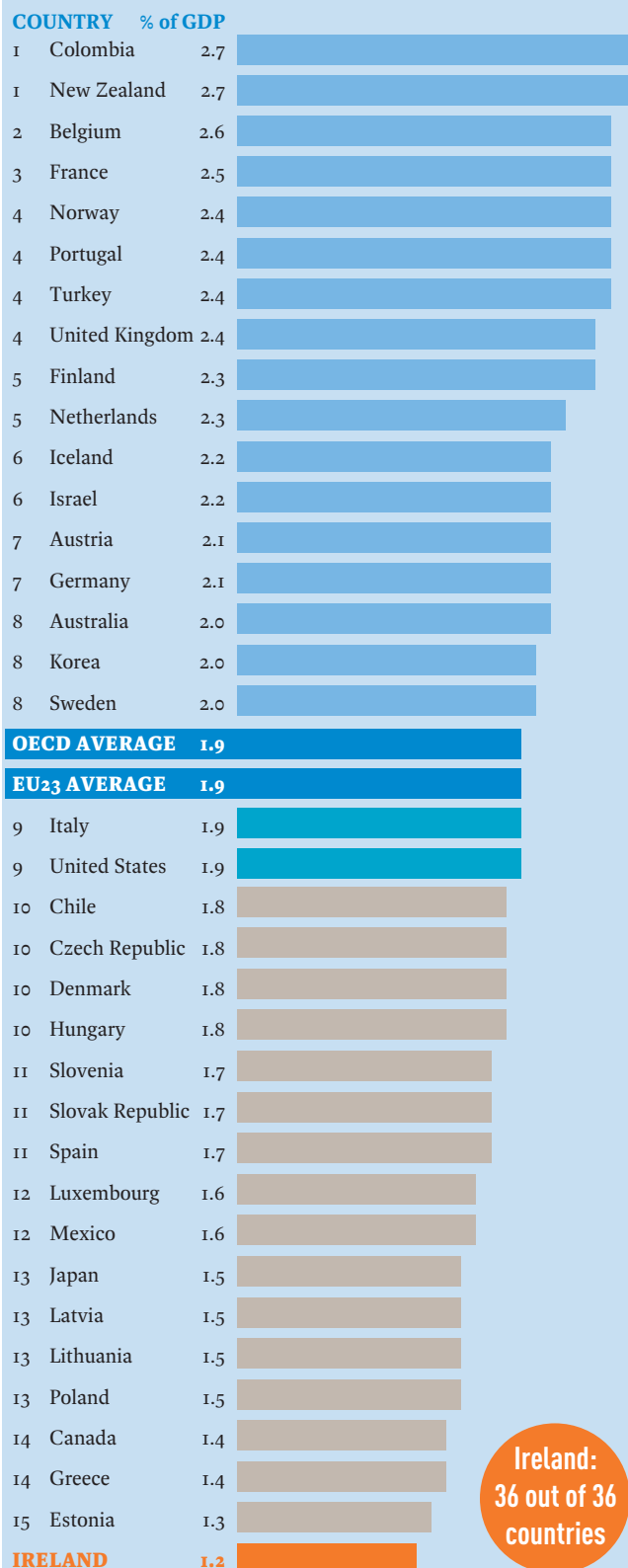
Teachers' conditions

In Ireland, second-level teachers earn, on average, 85% of the average salary of a tertiary-educated worker. This wage gap is seen in many OECD countries. Teachers' average actual salaries (pre-primary, primary and second-level) are typically 80-94% of the earnings of tertiary-educated workers on average across OECD countries. Responding to this finding, the international trade union body Education International stated: "The fact that teachers' salaries are between 80 and 94% of earnings of workers with equivalent qualifications in other sectors reflects the overall gender gap in pay and the fact that teachers' pay continues to be inadequate".

Second-level teachers in Ireland spend more time teaching than the OECD and EU averages for teaching time at upper second level.

OECD, EDUCATION AT A GLANCE

Total expenditure on second-level education as a percentage of GDP 2017



Ireland: 36 out of 36 countries

Education at a Glance 2020 can be accessed here: www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/.

EFFECTIVE POLICIES AND SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

A recent OECD report looks at the characteristics of successful schools, and shows that Ireland lags behind in a number of areas, says MOIRA LEYDON, ASTI Assistant General Secretary – Education and Research.

Concerning for Ireland

Indicators for Ireland on several key policy levers

Percentage of Irish students in schools where the principal reported that the school’s capacity to provide instruction is hindered to some extent or a lot by



LACK OF TEACHING STAFF

44.8%

compared to the OECD average of

27.1%



LACK OF PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

(e.g., buildings, grounds, heating/cooling systems, lighting and acoustic systems)

44.6%

compared to the OECD average of

33.1%



INADEQUATE OR POOR-QUALITY PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

(e.g., buildings, grounds, heating/cooling systems, lighting and acoustic systems)

40.7%

compared to the OECD average of

32.5%

What policies matter most for effective schools? According to a recent OECD survey the answer is: “the material resources available to schools, teachers and support staff, organisation and duration of instructional time, nature of the curriculum and assessment”. Covid-19 has also dramatically focused attention on another emerging factor – ICT capacity and usage in schools. Volume 5 of PISA* looks at the characteristics of successful schools and while it underlines the profoundly encultured nature of education systems, it analyses how combinations of policies impact on 15 year olds’ educational achievement and the overall quality of education.

Concerning for Ireland

At first glance, indicators for Ireland on several key policy levers are extremely concerning:

- 44.8% of Irish students were in schools where the principal reported that the school’s capacity to provide instruction is hindered to some extent or

a lot by lack of teaching staff compared to the OECD average of 27.1%

- 44.6% of Irish students were in schools where the principal reported that the school’s capacity to provide instruction is hindered to some extent or a lot by a lack of physical infrastructure (e.g., buildings, grounds, heating/cooling systems, lighting and acoustic systems) compared to the OECD average of 33.1%, and
- 40.7% of Irish students were in schools where the principal reported that the school’s capacity to provide instruction is hindered to some extent or a lot by inadequate or poor-quality physical infrastructure (e.g., buildings, grounds, heating/cooling systems, lighting and acoustic systems) compared to the OECD average of 32.5%.

Digital infrastructure

The Report provides data on schools’ digital infrastructure and again students in Ireland are less well served than comparator countries:

- 56.5% of Irish students were in schools where the principal agreed or strongly agreed that the number of digital devices connected to the internet was sufficient compared to the OECD average of 67.2%
- 45.3% of Irish students were in schools where the principal agreed or strongly agreed that the number of digital devices for instruction was sufficient compared to the OECD average of 59%, and
- 45.4% of Irish students were in schools where the principal reported that an effective online learning support platform was available compared to the OECD average of 54.1%.

Equity in education as measured by PISA performance scores in core subjects was related to equity in access to an effective online learning support platform:

- 47.4% of Irish students were in schools where the principal agreed or strongly agreed that professional resources were available for teachers to learn how to use digital devices compared to the OECD average of 64.7%
- Ireland outperformed comparator countries only in the areas of internet bandwidth or the speed and quality of digital devices, and
- At the system level, countries and economies whose schools offer more creative extracurricular activities tended to show greater equity in student performance.

For more information on investment in education in Ireland see our report on Education at a Glance 2020 on page 16.

Successes despite investment failures

Notwithstanding this abysmal failure to invest in education, Irish second-level schools have strong success indicators, namely quality as defined by high student achievement, equity, and strong curriculum and assessment models. The relationship between quality and equity is critical. Despite the national evidence on income inequality and social deprivation, in Ireland this relationship was weak. In other words, a 15 year old's socio-economic background has a lesser impact on their level of educational achievement compared to many other OECD countries. Factors sustaining this positive relationship include: admission policies that do not take into account students' academic record or other selective criteria; limited stratification or streaming according to ability; and, access to a common curriculum and assessment process.

Teachers and school support staff

It goes without saying that the teaching profession is hugely influential on successful schools. The OECD looked at whether schools have an adequate number of them, their levels of qualification and their working conditions. Working conditions matter because they impact on teachers' morale, on perceptions of the status of the profession in the wider society, and on the attractiveness of teaching as a career to graduates. Access to professional development is often a neglected dimension of working conditions. Unfortunately, the data for Ireland was poor on this dimension as the Department of Education and Skills no longer takes part in the triennial OECD TALIS** survey.

In addition to teachers, levels and quality of school support staff – defined by the OECD as including career guidance counsellors, special education teachers, and psychological and social work services, are also important. Irish second-level schools are way behind their OECD peers in this regard.

In conclusion, Ireland's policy mix for successful schools is heavily dependent on the teaching profession. Teachers' professionalism and their commitment to their students is the bedrock of quality and equity in the system. At the same time, school principals state that they do not have adequate staffing

Vital role of teachers

“Out of all the school resources that are needed to boost students’ learning and well-being, teachers are perhaps the most important. If schools do not have a sufficient number of teachers, or if teachers are not adequately qualified and able to support their students’ needs, improving the quality and equity of education is unlikely. By contrast, effective teacher policies can be the foundation on which to build successful education systems.”


PISA 2018 Results (Volume V)

levels in schools, which is, as successive ASTI research studies confirm, creating unsustainable workloads, decreasing levels of job satisfaction and undermining teacher well-being. Recent ASTI/Red C research found that the level of job satisfaction has decreased to 48% – down from 77% in 2009. Add unequal pay and the strains of ensuring the safe operation of schools in the pandemic and the situation becomes untenable and, increasingly, from the Government's side, indefensible.

* *PISA 2018 Results (Volume 5): Effective Policies, Successful Schools* is the triennial survey of 15-year olds in OECD countries. Each survey has several volumes focusing on aspects of education policy.

** The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) asks teachers and school leaders about working conditions and learning environments at their schools to help countries face diverse challenges.

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Class size for many Junior Cycle subjects is higher than the OECD and EU averages.

SURVEY CONFIRMS OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS

An ASTI/Red C survey carried out in February raises serious concerns about overcrowding and lack of physical infrastructure in schools, even before the pandemic.

One of the biggest challenges for schools this school year is lack of capacity to put safe physical distancing measures in place in classrooms. ASTI/Red C research conducted in February 2020 found that large class sizes and inadequate physical environments in schools were matters of concern for teachers even before the pandemic.

The survey of 1,829 classroom teachers who teach Junior Cycle subjects found that the majority felt that large class sizes were negatively impacting on teaching and learning. Teachers were also asked about the physical environment of their school, with only around 30% describing it as 'good'. Overcrowding in classrooms was the biggest concern of teachers in terms of the physical environment of schools.

Class size

Teachers surveyed reported that core subjects such as English and history have larger than average class sizes, followed by geography, business studies and religious education:

- 55% of history classes have 26 students or more
- 49% of English classes have 26 students or more
- 41% of maths classes have 26 students or more
- 62% of CSPE classes have 26 students or more, and
- 56% of Spanish classes have 26 students or more.

Almost 18% of teachers surveyed strongly agreed with the statement "my teaching space is overcrowded"; 31% of teachers agreed somewhat with the statement. The average OECD class size in lower secondary education is 23; in the EU it is 21. Class size in the Irish Junior Cycle is higher than both these global averages. Only in subjects requiring specialist equipment are Irish class sizes in line with international norms.

The negative impact of large classes is strongly articulated by teachers. Large class sizes and overcrowding have a negative impact both in terms of learning and health and safety. The majority of teachers stated that large classes have a negative impact on teaching and learning, and on the disciplinary climate in the classroom. At least four in five teachers felt that class size inhibits the range of teaching strategies used, as well as opportunities for students to engage in group and other collaborative work. Although a huge amount of work has been done by schools in implementing physical distancing protocols, many schools simply do not have adequate space to maintain physical distancing, increasing risk for students and staff.

Physical environment

As well as class sizes, the ASTI/Red C survey looked at the quality of the physical environment in schools.

Overall, just over one in three teachers agreed that the quality of the physical environment in their school was good. More than half – 52% – stated that their school was overcrowded. Adequacy of facilities for students such as canteen/dining spaces, corridor space and toilet/sanitary facilities was also of concern. These issues have likely been exacerbated in most schools by the new requirements for physical distancing.

Teachers reported their biggest concerns with the physical environment of their schools as:

- overcrowding in the classroom
- inadequate storage space, and
- inadequate sound-proofing.

Less than half of schools – 47% – have dedicated office space for assistant principals. Slightly over half have staffrooms with dedicated work spaces for teachers. Just over one-third of schools – 39% – have dedicated rooms for teachers’ meeting and planning activities.

The physical environment in schools is critical for both teachers and learners. It is clear from responses to the open question on schools’ physical environment in the survey that inadequate facilities impact on teaching and learning, and on teacher well-being.



Just over one-third of schools – 39% – have dedicated rooms for teachers’ meeting and planning activities.

To read the results of the survey in full, go to <https://www.asti.ie/news-campaigns/research/>.

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- M Oid san Oideachas Lán-Ghaeilge agus Gaeltachta
- MA in Education and the Arts (META)
- MA in STEM Education
- Graduate Diploma / M Ed in Adult and Further Education
- Graduate Diploma / M Ed in Information and Communication Technologies in Primary Education
- Graduate Diploma / M Ed in Special Education Needs
- Graduate Certificate/Graduate Diploma/M Ed in Middle Leadership and Mentoring in Primary and Post-Primary Settings
- An Teastas Iarchéime i dTeagasc Ábharbhunaithe (TTA) san Iarbhunscolaíocht Lán-Ghaeilge agus Ghaeltachta
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- Graduate Certificate in Autism Studies

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- MA in Modern English Literature
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CAMPAIGNING FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

Covid-19, underinvestment in education, calculated grades, and the ASTI's recent ballot have all featured prominently in the media.

"Teachers are going into work into classrooms with 30 people in front of them and collectively during the day they are meeting up to 200 students. We want social distancing and an effort is being made to have that in all schools, but in some areas it is not possible because of the older buildings so there are certainly problems for teachers that other workers may not face. We also have high-risk teachers at work. There are 800 high-risk teachers who applied to be allowed to do remote working, but they are not allowed to. If they come into contact with Covid they are in a very serious position. So we have the high-risk teachers, we have the teachers very worried about going home to vulnerable relations on a daily basis."

Ann Piggott, ASTI President, *The Hard Shoulder*, Newstalk, October 19

"Well, given the amount of money going around in Budget 2021 I think we would have expected a little bit more invested in education. We've seen the amount of money it has taken to get schools to where they are now and they are still far from perfect. We would have liked far more investment in buildings and more money for computers and digital equipment that might be needed. It has also been a disappointment that the two-tier pay system in teaching was not addressed. We have been calling for that a long time. There is a pay deal coming up and perhaps the Government might commit to extra there to deal with it. This is going on a long time; it's going on since 2010 and our very good teachers are leaving the country because they see this as a huge discrimination."

Ann Piggott, *Drivetime*, RTÉ Radio 1, October 13

"We are balloting because we are a trade union. We are consulting with our members and we need to be in a position to react with agility if things deteriorate to the point where we need to take industrial action. Now I can tell you, it will be a last resort absolutely; nobody wants to be doing this. We have been consistent in our message. We want schools open and we want them open safely. However, the evidence that has been provided to us has been sparse and sketchy thus far in relation to the medical situation. What we are seeing on the ground, particularly in relation to the tracing, is at variance with what we are hearing in the public announcements. We wrote many weeks ago and requested a meeting with the Health Protection Surveillance Centre and it was denied. Today is the first day we are going to get some contact with these people."

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary, *Morning Ireland*, RTÉ Radio 1, October 20

"Some schools are set up that social distancing is more manageable than in others and we accept that, but at the same time the health and the welfare of teachers, students and all school staff is what's at issue here. One of the issues that we have quite a number of concerns around is in relation to testing and the lack of information within schools... Take the meat factories that I heard contributions about earlier in the programme. I'm not too *au fait* with what went on there, but there is a perception out there that things were happening and it was a lot later before the proper interventions were made. We are not going to allow that to happen in schools."

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary, *The Tonight Show*, Virgin Media, September 23

"If you go into your workplace, as a teacher, or into your school as a student, and you find out that the other day, you were sitting in a room with somebody who's now got Covid, and it's not really been particularly explained to you what the situation is, you can imagine how unsettling that is. That's the problem. We'd like greater clarity to be provided in relation to the criteria that are being applied, and that will be applied in schools when issues arise."

Kieran Christie, ASTI General Secretary, *Claire Byrne Live*, RTÉ 1, September 8

"The OECD report has confirmed many of the claims about underinvestment in education. Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of infrastructure and digital learning. The Government must prioritise funding for education in the October budget to upgrade school buildings and facilities so as to ensure that students and staff are protected, and that every school has the capacity to revert to partial or full remote learning during this pandemic."

Ann Piggott, ASTI President, *Irish Examiner*, September 29



“Teachers took part in the calculated grades process in good faith and we were assured that the process was robust and fair for students. Teachers I have spoken to are very concerned about the impact of today’s announcement on those students affected, as well as the entire class of 2020 who have endured so much stress and uncertainty this year. It is essential that students affected by the errors can access the courses they are eligible for without delay. In addition, the Department of Education and Skills must complete a thorough and full investigation of this matter immediately.”

Ann Piggott, ASTI President, *The Irish Times*, September 30

“We also need to have adequate physical distancing in schools. It is there in some schools, mainly the smaller schools where they have been able to repurpose rooms thanks to Trojan work undertaken by principals, deputy principals, caretakers and other staff during the summer holidays. But not all schools are able to do this.”

Geraldine O’Brien, ASTI Standing Committee Region 4 (Clare, Limerick Sth, Limerick Nth, Nenagh), Clare FM, September 26

“It’s great to see capital investment in schools, but that capital investment should have been happening for years and years. What’s going on now is a small amount that won’t remedy and won’t do enough. It is just a drop in the ocean. It’s also another budget that’s gone by that pay equality for post-2010 teachers hasn’t really happened. That’s really disappointing because I’m getting older – you’re no longer talking about young teachers, but teachers who are looking to start their lives and we’re still down quite a substantial amount of money.”

Christopher Davey, ASTI member and physics teacher in St Leo’s College, Carlow, discussing Budget 2021, *Irish Independent*, October 14

“[The reduction in the pupil teacher ratio at primary] needs to be fed through the whole system. It is especially important in the pandemic. All the issues we have with class size have been exacerbated by Covid-19 and social distancing.”

Órlagh Nic Eoin, ASTI member and maths and applied maths teacher, Coláiste Ghlór na Mara, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin, discussing Budget 2021, *Irish Daily Star*, October 14



The ASTI’s concerns around Covid-19 in schools were highlighted on the front page of the Irish Independent on September 8.

MEET YOUR STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Eamon Ryan

Standing Committee Region 10

Teaches wood technology at Scoil Dara, Kilcock, Co. Kildare



I got involved in the ASTI because...

In 2000, in the midst of the ASTI's campaign for better pay, I was invited to join the ASTI by the school steward in St Joseph's, Rush. Like all young teachers I was swept along under the guidance and tutelage of a cohesive and united staff as the strike days and supervision withdrawals ensued. Those early days of industrial action gave a young teacher an idea of the strength, support, spirit, and solidarity that a true teachers' union could provide. I joined Scoil Dara, Kilcock, in 2002, and found a staffroom packed with truly fantastic people and a strong ASTI presence. Serving as school steward for several years led to my participation in our local Kildare Branch as a branch officer, CEC rep, regional organiser, Convention delegate and now Standing Committee member for Region 10.

The ASTI's biggest priorities right now are...

The list of priorities for the ASTI will always be a long one but pay inequality in our staffrooms is the scandal of the last decade. It is an injustice that must be a red line issue for the ASTI and ICTU in the upcoming negotiations on the successor to the PSSA. This, along with the casualisation of our profession, is pushing the best and brightest away from teaching. Right now, our workplaces are a pale shadow of the rich and vibrant environments we left behind in March. Covid-19 has fundamentally changed our schools and left many feeling vulnerable and isolated in their classrooms. The ASTI does, and must continue to, advocate for our members, especially our vulnerable high-risk colleagues, and seek every and all protection for the health and welfare of teachers and students.

Something people may not know about me is...

As a wood technology teacher, I enjoy watching students bringing their ideas to life and the pride they take in their accomplishments. I enjoy running and a rare round of golf. I grew up in the picturesque village of Holycross in Tipperary and am a passionate Tipperary hurling supporter. Thiobraid Árann Abú.

Honorary National Organiser

Michael McGrath

Teaches science at St Augustine's College, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford

I got involved in the ASTI because...

Within days of starting teaching at St Augustine's College I was handed an application form by the school steward, Mr Liam O Mahony, with a simple comment: "We are all members here". I have been a very active member since then and have worked hard to protect our working conditions. I served as school steward for over 10 years and ensured that ASTI policy has always been rigidly adhered to. All new teachers, whether permanent, part-time, casual substitute or PME student, are always repeatedly encouraged to join the ASTI in our school. ASTI meetings are very well attended, debate is encouraged, decisions are made by consensus, and ASTI policy within the school is then presented to management.

I served three terms on Standing Committee up to Convention 2019 representing members in Region 7. During those years I visited many schools and always impressed on teachers to:

- join the ASTI
- hold regular ASTI meetings to discuss relevant issues, and
- present a united front with decisions reached by consensus.



Changes to **work practices** must always be agreed by consensus achieved at a staff meeting and not be **imposed** by management

I have always found this strategy to be very successful. I am honoured to now be elected Honorary National Organiser. I will strive to maintain the ASTI as the dominant trade union in post-primary schools. Liaising with the Regional Organisers, I will visit many branches and schools, and make a huge effort to increase membership. Far too many schools have non-union members on staff, particularly younger teachers, a situation which I firmly believe weakens the resolve of the ASTI within a school. My main motto is 'Ní neart go cur le chéile'. A united staff behind a strong school steward best serves the members to protect our working conditions.



Anne Loughnane

Represents Carbery, Cork South Paddy Mulcahy

Teaches Irish and English at Kenmare Community School, Kenmare, Co. Kerry

I got involved in the ASTI because...

I strongly believe in trade unionism and joined the ASTI when I started teaching. Since 2002, I have been very active in the Carbery Branch and have held many officer positions. I currently serve as Vice-Chair. It is a relatively small branch with a tremendous spirit. Meetings held each month in Dunmanway provide invaluable support and information. I have personally benefitted from the wise advice of many branch stalwarts.

It's been a privilege to serve on many national ASTI committees, such as Bullying, Equal Opportunities, Safety, Health & Welfare, and Education. I gained great insights from each committee and deepened my understanding of the pathways for achieving change. Prior to moving to Standing Committee, I was Chairperson of the Education Committee and Regional Representative for Carbery and Cork South Paddy Mulcahy branches.

The ASTI's biggest priorities right now are...

Our main priority is the safety of our members as they continue to work during the pandemic. Pay inequalities have continued for far too long and fairness, which is the essence of trade unionism, must be restored. Instances of intimidation and victimisation of hardworking teachers must be vigorously pursued and eradicated. I feel hugely honoured to serve on Standing Committee and will do my utmost to represent the concerns of members and seek solutions.

The ASTI's biggest priorities right now are...

To offer support to worried ASTI members during this stressful time for teachers:

- the ASTI must address the serious health and safety concerns of members around Covid-19 in schools
- changes to work practices must always be agreed by consensus achieved at a staff meeting and not be imposed by management, and
- pay equalisation must remain the number one priority.

Remember that united we succeed, divided we fail. I am asking all members in schools with non-members to please encourage them to join the ASTI and not leave this work to the school steward alone. Remember, as Honorary National Organiser, I am available to help you in that quest.

Something people may not know about me is...

I walked part of the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain. It was such an enjoyable experience, with time to switch off, think and reflect. The friends I made along the way, fellow pilgrims, friendly locals, breathtaking scenery and the simplistic way of life all added to what was a truly memorable experience!

Finally, I strongly encourage you to become active in and aware of the work of the ASTI. Much of it is done quietly, but with determination. Without the ASTI, our professional lives and working conditions would be very different.

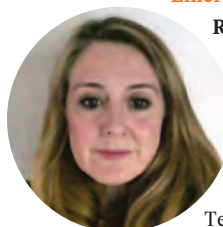
Something people may not know about me is...

I grew up in Kilflyn, north Kerry. I have lived most of my adult life near Glengarriff in west Cork, a naturally beautiful area with a strong community spirit and a great place to live. My leisure time is spent outdoors and centres on our dogs and horses. We have a few traditional Irish Draught mares and breed foals from rare and endangered bloodlines. I co-authored a book on the Irish Draught. It's a fascinating and rewarding interest that has led to great friendships with like-minded enthusiasts, both within Ireland and overseas.

Emer Brady

Represents Region 16 Dublin North 1, Dublin North Central

Teaches maths at Mount Temple Comprehensive School in Dublin



I got involved in the ASTI because...

Teachers have worked hard to insist on fair treatment and working conditions, and a lot of progress has been made. However, pressures will always exist to improve productivity and restrain wages to the benefit of particular sections of society, usually those with the loudest voices. The union has a responsibility to strive for fair treatment for teachers. Teachers are acutely aware of the problems of wider society. Every day we are exposed to every social issue experienced in Ireland and this provides us with deep insights into the challenges faced by students and their families. The ASTI can protect teachers and, with the support of other unions, keep social justice issues to the fore, particularly as we face uncertain economic times.

The ASTI's biggest priorities right now are...

In the immediate future the ASTI must seek to protect the health and welfare of teachers, their families and their students. The ongoing issue of unequal pay needs to be addressed once and for all, and the increased workload and stress that teachers face in these Covid-19 times needs to be acknowledged and rectified. The current crisis has highlighted the need to build capacity in the education system. For too long education has been run on the tightest margin and our teachers and students have suffered. Considering how well the Irish education system performs when compared with other similar economies, imagine what could be achieved with a permanently lower pupil-teacher ratio and improved funding for ICT and infrastructure.

Something people may not know about me is...

Prior to teaching I worked for ten years in engineering. I have worked with both the PDST as an associate and the JCT as an associate and a maths advisor. I have been involved in research projects with DCU focused on student transition from primary to post-primary, and I have worked as an examiner with the SEC. I am passionate about education and count myself lucky to have worked with Irish teachers who are hardworking and talented through my various roles.

The uniqueness of school year 2020/21

Schools on the front line

Each September marks the beginning of another school year with the normal challenges of the onward cycle of life, for students, teachers and the retired. This year Covid-19 has exacerbated the situation, adding extra unpredictability. However, there is a strong determination to keep the schools functioning wherever possible. Teachers are now essential frontline workers performing their duty with the added health risks involved. The RSTA wishes our working colleagues well as they adjust to the necessary protective measures provided in schools over the summer: hand sanitisation, social distancing, one-way systems, masks, and the adjustments that will be constantly reviewed to enable learning to continue.

Branch activity

For the recently retired, their immediate plans of foreign travel or visits to family abroad have been put on indefinite hold. Local activities are confined to journeys of necessity. In normal times, local branches would be welcoming them to their branch meetings and AGMs. Under the direction of the National Committee, all local AGMs due to take place before the end of November have been cancelled and office holders have agreed to continue in their roles for another year; a similar arrangement has been made at national level.

Pension

In spite of the much-needed concentration on counteracting the virus, the RSTA appreciates the efforts of the ASTI to ensure that the talks now due on a new pay deal are kept on track; the need for pay parity, equality of pay,



Midland Branch socially distanced meeting. Front row (from left): Niamh Higgins, Rosemary Kiernan, Michael Moriarty, and Pádraic O'Doherty. Back row (from left): John Moloney, Mary Kenny, Geraldine Quinn, and Martina Brammigan.

and anomalies from the FEMPI legislation are part of the focus. The Zoom meetings of The Alliance of Retired Public Servants (ARPS) with their links to the Retired Workers Party (RWC) and the ICTU are added assurances that our pension protection is to the forefront.

Guidelines

Meanwhile, let us continue to follow the guidelines of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) as we take personal responsibility through rapidly changing and unprecedented circumstances. Coinnigí slán sábháilte.

RSTA membership application/renewal

Name:

Address:

Home phone:

Mobile:

Email:

RSTA branch:

Annual subscription: €24
Annual renewal date: September 1

Payment options: Bank standing order (recommended by RSTA) or cheque (payable to RSTA)
Return to: Mrs Muriel McNicholas, Cordarragh, Kiltimagh, Claremorris, Co. Mayo.
Contact: murielmcnicholas@gmail.com or 085-118 1330

The personal information requested here is required to administer your membership of the RSTA. It is used by the RSTA in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). See the RSTA Data Protection and Privacy Policy on the RSTA website – www.rsta.ie.

Standing order set-up form

Please complete in **BLOCK CAPITALS** using black or blue pen.

To: The Manager (Bank name and full address)

I hereby authorise and request you to DEBIT my account:

Account name/s:

IBAN BIC

And to credit the account of:

RETIRED SECONDARY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

IBAN: IE55 AIBK 9323 6112 7290 80 (BIC: AIBKIE2D)

with the amount of **€24** (twenty four euro)

Start Date: ___/___/20___ **Frequency:** Annually until further notice

Reference: (To identify member's subscription on RSTA bank statement):

Member name and RSTA branch

Signature: Date: ___/___/20___



Take a bow



The ASTI Achievement Awards
recognise the outstanding contribution teachers make to
schools, students and society.

Nominate an outstanding teacher or teaching team for their achievements
in school or outside their professional life

The ASTI Achievement Awards recognise teachers in three categories:

The Outstanding Teacher Achievement Award
recognises the contribution of individual teachers to their schools and education

The Outstanding Teacher Team Achievement Award
recognises the contribution of a team/group of teachers to their school and education

The Outstanding Individual Achievement Award
recognises the outstanding achievement of individual teachers outside their professional life

Log on to the ASTI website to find out more or to nominate a colleague.

The closing date for applications is
Friday, February 5th, 2021

www.asti.ie
1850-418400
www.twitter.com/astionion
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**ASTI**
A century of service

COVID-19 AND TEACHERS

The ASTI is continuing to monitor the Covid-19 situation in schools, and new questions and answers relating to Covid-19 are frequently posted on the ASTI website. A selection of recently posted questions and answers is published here and many more are answered in the FAQ on re-opening of schools on the ASTI website.

Q. Where can I find details of the special leave arrangements available to teachers in the context of Covid-19?

A. Circular Letter 0049/2020 sets out the specific special leave with pay arrangements for teachers. It can be accessed on the ASTI website. Additional useful information is available in a document published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform entitled Update (22 October 2020) to Guidance on working arrangements during Covid-19 for the Civil and Public Service, available from <https://www.gov.ie/en/news/092fff-update-on-working-arrangements-and-leave-associated-with-covid-19-fo/>.

Q. What leave applies under the terms of Circular Letter 0049/2020 if a teacher is in close contact with a confirmed Covid-19 case (for example a household member)?

A. The teacher in question is not on special leave with pay as this only applies to those employees diagnosed with Covid-19 or those with Covid-19 symptoms who have been medically advised to self-isolate. In this particular case, paragraph 8 of Circular Letter 0049/2020 applies. The teacher is on restricted movement for the 14-day period, as advised by the HSE, and is facilitated to work from home. If a teacher is restricting their movements, they may be asked to do the following tasks (section 12, Circular Letter 0049/2020): “Liaising closely with and supporting the work of the substitute teacher(s) who becomes responsible for the teaching duties of the teacher on special leave with pay. Supporting and engaging, using online technology, the work and progress of very high risk or extremely vulnerable pupils who are unable to attend school. Participating in staff meetings, team/subject planning meetings and all other normal meetings using online technology. Participating in relevant professional development through online media. Developing aspects of the school’s teaching resources or teaching plans. Undertaking administrative or other tasks associated with a post of responsibility (provided they hold the post in line with relevant DES publications) to the greatest extent possible using online technology”.

Q. I had a Covid-19 test and the result was negative. I have been advised to self-isolate for a further 48 hours. Is this Covid-19 leave?

A. Yes. This should be recorded as special Covid-19 leave.



Q. What arrangements apply if a teacher is a parent of a child who is self-isolating due to being a close contact of a confirmed/suspected Covid-19 case?

A. If you are living with someone who is self-isolating and waiting on test results, you should seek advice from your general practitioner as to what action it is necessary for you to take.

Q. What is the process for a return to the employer’s work premises after a positive case of Covid-19?

A. Circular Letter 0049/2020 section 7.2 states: “The OHS advises that in a confirmed Covid-19 infection, an employee needs to be 14 days post onset of symptoms and also five days fever free (which may run concurrently) before returning to the workplace. It should be noted that the 14 days is from the onset of symptoms and not the date of receiving a positive Covid-19 test result”.

Q. What if a teacher has had a negative test for Covid-19?

A. For individuals who were tested because they had symptoms of coronavirus and receive a negative test result, they should continue to self-isolate until they have not had any symptoms for 48 hours. They can return to normal activities once 48 hours without symptoms have passed. The usual rules applying to certification/self-certification continue to apply. Note that this FAQ ONLY applies to individuals who were symptomatic. Individuals who are close contacts of a confirmed case must continue to restrict their movements for 14 days even after negative test results.

Q. What paid Covid-19 leave is available for long-term substitutes?

A. Where a substitute has a contract and needs to take special Covid-19 leave, the Department of Education has confirmed to the ASTI that they will be paid.

For more Covid-19 FAQs, see www.asti.ie.

Great Reads Award 2020

The Great Reads Awards (GRAs), now in their fifth year, offer a reading activity to all second-level students and an opportunity for students to decide the Award winners. The Awards, presented by the School Library Association in the Republic of Ireland (SLARI), is for debut writers of young adult titles. Works are shortlisted by librarians and teacher-librarians. Schools are invited to register for the activity, and get students to read as many of the titles as possible and then to vote for their favourites. Awards are presented in both junior and senior categories. This year's short list titles offer a range of reading levels and interests, by authors from a variety of backgrounds, including an Irish language title for which a glossary is available. All English language titles are available in ebook format. Eligible JCSP and DEIS schools can access ebook titles from the JCSP Library Project Digital Library via SORA. Membership of SORA is free for all eligible schools. The reading period runs up to Christmas and possibly into 2021, depending on the date for presentation of the awards. So there is still plenty time to sign up and get students involved.



For more information and resources, including how to register, see: www.greatreadsaward.ie or email: secretary@slari.ie.

Simon Christmas Appeal



The ASTI is continuing its support for the Simon Community during their 2020 House of Cards Christmas Appeal. The Simon Community provides essential services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness across Ireland. The charity seeks to empower people to access and retain a home by providing housing, prevention, addiction treatment, emergency response, and other targeted interventions through advocacy and partnership. This year, the ASTI is donating €2,000 to the Simon Community House of Cards Christmas Appeal in order to support the delivery of these essential services.



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Schools in Europe

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- Access professional development opportunities
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eTwinning is a free online platform linking a community of more than 800,000 teachers across Europe. It supports primary and post-primary schools to find partners and work on joint projects in any curricular area, using Information and Communication Technology.

The Digital Strategy for Schools Action Plan 2019-2020 names eTwinning as a key platform "to showcase school projects and to foster collaboration between schools" for Irish teachers.

etwinning.ie



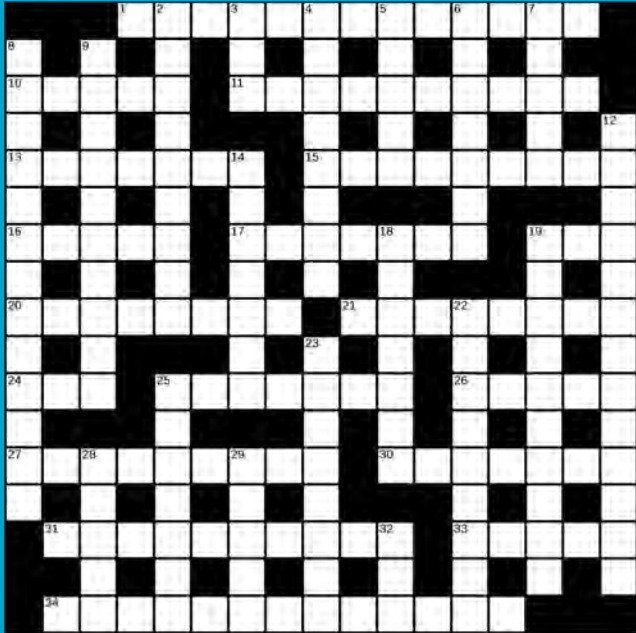


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ASTIR CROSSWORD NO. 2005

The winner will receive €250 in One4All vouchers.

If you wish to keep your copy of *ASTIR* intact you may send a photocopy of the crossword. One entry only per member.



Name

School

Address

ASTI Branch

Entries to: ASTIR Crossword No. 2005, Think Media, The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1.

To arrive by: Monday, December 7, 2020.

ACROSS

- 1. What the clown might provide, in time (1,5,1,6)
- 10. Sounds like it was consumed at famous public school (5)
- 11. Colleges, academies, universities (10)
- 13. Gone beyond what is expected (7)
- 15. Ascertain, or establish exactly (9)
- 16. Avoid godhead? Ah, no! (5)
- 17. She might be one of the 19 down (7)
- 19. The German way to say it (3)
- 20. Organ located behind the stomach (8)
- 21. Sheet metal worker (8)
- 24. Scotland says no! (3)
- 25. E.g., Pb, Xe, Na (7)
- 26. Orange-toothed invasive species resembling large rat (5)
- 27. "In war, the heroes always the soldiers 10 to one" – H.L. Mencken (9)
- 30. Type of bread from 33 across (7)
- 31. Throw purest acid in face to get 1 across (7,3)
- 33. Country very large in diameter (5)
- 34. Singer Gloria took this in 1977 (3,3,2,1,4)

DOWN

- 2. 364,3671 days (5,4)
- 3. Machine gun of Israeli design (3)
- 4. Wash completely from top to bottom (4,4)
- 5. Tom is this after 4 down (5)
- 6. Disengaged gears in Renault (7)
- 7. Almost invert Roman fountain (5)
- 8. Another view? Think again! (6,7)
- 9. In this for those here (10)
- 12. Green Party TD for Dublin Central (5,8)
- 14. Blink!
- 18. Witless, silly, stupid (7)
- 19. Once used to milk cows (10)
- 22. Economic system based on public control of property (9)
- 23. Ted Price is worn out (8)
- 25. Reputed volcanic activity (7)
- 28. A lepton of very great mass (5)
- 29. Chuck, Halle or Mary (5)
- 32. Medical specialty (1,1,1)

Solution to ASTIR Crossword No. 2004

Across	Down
1. Lead a dog's life	2. Emolument
10. Alamo	3. Dab
11. Barbed wire	4. Derisory
13. Avenues	5. Gleam
15. Sympatico	6. Lowland
16. Yahwe	7. Farsi
17. Abraded	8. Canary Islands
19. Hoi	9. Catechumen
20. Sometime	12. Robin Williams
21. Canon law	14. Scammer
24. Ann	18. Deadens
25. Acreage	19. Hellraiser
26. Peril	22. Opposites
27. Draconian	23. Mainstay
30. Sashimi	25. Avocado
31. Infatuated	28. Annoy
33. Therm	29. Inure
34. My Lovely Horse	32. Duo

Did you miss?

- ASTI campaigns update 14
- Survey confirms overcrowded classrooms 20

CONGRATULATIONS

The winner of Crossword No. 2004:
Jan McNamee
 Loreto College Swords,
 River Valley, Swords,
 Co. Dublin.
 Fingal Branch

Check out our Irish Aid Centre online resources and workshops at:
<https://www.irishaid.ie/teaching-and-learning/postprimary/>



Ireland's commitment to a world without poverty and hunger

SCHOOL WORKSHOPS ON IRELAND'S ROLE IN FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY AND HUNGER



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development



For:
Transition Year
CSPE
Junior Cycle
Senior Cycle

The Irish Aid Centre is currently closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We look forward to seeing you back in the Centre in January, subject to public health advice.

Until then, check out the online resources and workshops at:
<https://www.irishaid.ie/teaching-and-learning/postprimary/>

Over 6,000 teachers and learners from 137 schools visited the Irish Aid Centre in 2019, now we're going online!



Students from St. Mac Dara's Community College, Templeogue enjoy an Irish Aid workshop

To make a booking:
Contact
E Irishaidcentre@dfa.ie

Irish Aid Centre
3 Clonmel Street (off Harcourt St.)
Dublin 2
www.irishaid.ie

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