

Campaign Against Cuts

Campaign Against the Education Cuts Continues this Week

Demonstration is a major success

Up to 12,000 teachers, parents, school management and other members of the public participated in the protest against the education cuts outside the Dáil on October 29th.

Despite the bitter cold, ASTI members gathered for up to two hours to communicate the message that second-level students matter.

ASTI Head Office staff and volunteers from Standing Committee handed out 500 posters. Many teachers had made their own posters containing their messages to the Minister and Government.

The ASTI wishes to thank all members who contributed to this enormously successful protest. The three teachers unions are considering arrangements for a further demonstration and march on December 6th.

ASTI arranges further meeting with Minister

The ASTI was the first group from the educational partners to meet with the Minister for Education and Science Batt O'Keefe following the announcement of the Budget education cuts.

At the meeting ASTI representatives presented to the Minister the drastic impact which the cuts will have on individual second level schools. There was a lengthy discussion about the impact of the increase in the pupil teacher ratio. The ASTI told the Minister how the cuts would result in a severe curtailment of school activities such as the Young Scientist exhibition in January, sporting activities, and debating competitions.

ASTI representatives warned of chaos in schools from January when the decision on substitution is to be implemented and asked for a reversal of this decision.

The ASTI has arranged a further meeting with the Minister in the coming weeks. ♦

"This protest and the campaigns to follow are not about teachers or teachers' unions. Parents, school managers and teachers oppose these cuts as a duty to our young people." Joe Moran, ASTI Vice-President speaking at the protest against education cuts.

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1000+ teachers posts lost

ASTI in the media

Lobby your TDs



A group of protesters pictured at the recent budget cutbacks protest

Campaign with Parents and Management Bodies

Immediately following the Budget announcements, the ASTI put in motion a campaign by the Post Primary Education Forum (PPEF) against the education cuts. The group, made up of the National Parents' Council, the ASTI and TUI, and the second-level school management bodies, held a press conference which was covered widely by the media. All members of the PPEF gave their support to the public protest outside Dáil Éireann against the education cuts. The PPEF also placed an advertisement in the national newspapers highlighting the impact of the cuts on schools. The group is meeting this week to arrange a series of local campaign meetings for parents, teachers and others against the cuts.

All politics are local!

Tell your TDs how these cuts will affect your school

- Teachers lost
 - Larger class sizes
 - Reduced subject choice
 - Field trips and games cancelled
-



John White, ASTI General Secretary speaks out against the budget cuts.

Substitution Cut Will Cause 'Chaos' in Schools

The decision to suspend substitution cover from January for absences arising from uncertified sick leave in all schools as well as for school business absences in post-primary schools is the decision which will have the most immediate impact on schools. The day after the budget the ASTI arranged a meeting of the Post Primary Education Forum and we identified this as the most urgent problem to be dealt with.

On the night of the demonstration outside Dáil Éireann we prioritised this matter as requiring immediate attention in our meetings with large numbers of government backbenchers in the Dáil. Our understanding is that the issue was discussed at a meeting of Fianna Fáil backbenchers the following day addressed by the Minister. At the meeting with the Minister last Thursday as reported in the Irish Times, "John White, General Secretary of the ASTI, said he had forcefully told the Minister and a phalanx of Department officials how the Budget would severely curtail many aspects of school life. Second-level school managers have clearly stated that there will be chaos in schools from January if these cuts go ahead and he emphasised this with the Minister. He said the new limits on substitution cover could have a devastating impact on activities such as the Young Scientists Exhibition in January".

ASTI Legal Challenge to Early Retirement Scheme Suspension

The ASTI believes this scheme has served the education service well and that its suspension will prove to be counterproductive. Its suspension, particularly in the context whereby the Department of Education & Science had agreed to extend the pilot scheme to cover those retiring on August 31st 2008 and on August 31st 2009, was draconian. Teachers who might otherwise have opted for early retirement on August 31st 2008 but decided to remain in teaching for a further year in the expectation that they could avail of the provisions of the scheme at the end of the current year could justifiably complain that they were entitled to notice.

The ASTI has received Senior Counsel's opinion that teachers sufficiently prejudiced by the immediate termination of the scheme could justly complain that they were entitled to notice.

The ASTI, guided by Counsel's opinion, will take whatever legal action is necessary.



1,000 + Teaching Posts Lost

A key message to be communicated to parents, politicians and the media is the impact of the increase in pupil teacher-ratio on schools. This will not result in 'just one extra pupil in a class'. The effect at second-level is as follows:

- ◆ For every teacher lost, a school will have 32 class periods per week to replace.
- ◆ Schools will have to consider dropping subjects.
- ◆ Schools will have to consider combining classes (e.g. higher and ordinary level Leaving Certificate Classes).
- ◆ Class sizes of 30 and more will become commonplace (a 2007 survey found that 16% of Third year students are regularly in classes of 30 or over and 65% are regularly in classes of 25-30).

Supports for Vulnerable Withdrawn

Despite the promise of a Budget which protects the disadvantaged, a range of supports for vulnerable pupils have been withdrawn including:

- ◆ Cut of €2 million from the capitation grants for Traveller children.
- ◆ Abolition of grants for Junior Certificate Schools Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied, LCVP and Transition Year.
- ◆ Removal of the free book scheme for non-deis schools.
- ◆ The reintroduction of the cap on Language Support Teachers.
- ◆ Additional capitation and teachers, including Home School Liaison Teachers, have been removed from non-DEIS schools.

ASTI in the Media

Since Budget Day the ASTI has been highlighting the impact of education cuts in the media. The ASTI has issued 11 separate press releases since budget day and participated in a large number of media interviews.

The ASTI General Secretary John White has been interviewed for:

- ◆ RTE 6:1 News
- ◆ RTE 9 O'Clock News
- ◆ Primetime
- ◆ TV3 News
- ◆ RTE Drive Time
- ◆ RTE Radio News
- ◆ Today FM News
- ◆ Today FM The Last Word
- ◆ Newstalk News
- ◆ Newstalk Breakfast Show
- ◆ INN News

In addition ASTI spokespersons and members have participated in a wide range of interviews in the national and local media including:

- ◆ Today with Pat Kenny
- ◆ Today FM The Last Word
- ◆ TV3 Ireland AM



Brian Hayes TD, Fine Gael



Eamon Gilmore TD, Labour

Brian Hayes, Fine Gael and Eamon Gilmore, Labour Party were among those who spoke out against budget cuts to education at the protest

**Demonstration pictures by
Tommy Clancy**

Left: First the old - now the young:
A group of protesters make their
message heard outside the Dail
on October 29th

An article by John White which appeared in Irish Times on 28th October

Education Cuts will Damage Schools and Communities

Schools are at the heart of communities. This is why the education cuts announced in the budget are so devastating: damage a school and you damage the community it serves.

Irish schools are much more than physical spaces for the provision of educational services to young people. By supporting a myriad of social, cultural and community activities and providing significant opportunities for community interaction, Irish schools serve as institutions for social cohesion.

From the Schools Mini Company project to school visits to the local Chamber of Commerce, to work experience in the community, schools play a key role in creating new networks and strengthening existing ones in the local community. In the era of commuter workers and new suburban communities, schools continue to help create a sense of belonging among individuals.

Schools run, inter alia, football, hurling, camogie and basketball teams; they raise money for charities; they put on musicals and plays; they engage in community service. Schools have identities: when you think of hurling, you think of St. Kieran's in Kilkenny or St. Flannan's in Ennis; when you think of gaelic football, you think of St. Jarlath's in Tuam or St. Brendan's, Killarney. It is this sense of identity which gives schools their strengths and it is the reason why parents, teachers and management are incandescent with anger over the budget cutbacks, cutbacks such as increased class size, removal of the free book scheme, slashing the teacher substitution scheme, and curtailment of Physics and Chemistry grants.

These cutbacks affect every school. Individual schools have contacted the ASTI to say they will lose anything from 2 to 5 teachers thus depriving highly qualified young teachers of practising their profession. Losing two teachers might seem not so significant to someone in the Department of Finance but it means that a

Principal has to factor in the loss of 66 class periods to the timetable for next year; the loss of four teachers means the loss of 118 classes. Just consider what this means in terms of the curriculum offered: it will inevitably lead to a diminished education: subjects being dropped, higher and ordinary level classes being combined and larger classes.

One of the major strengths of Irish schools - possibly a legacy of religious involvement - is the concern to educate the whole person. I was once told by a senior civil servant from France that they "don't have schools in France in the same sense as you do in Ireland". Apart from the grind schools, all Irish second-level schools share this goal of educating the whole person. Hence, the OECD statement that Irish parents can rely on high and consistent standards across all school sectors. The importance of out-of-school activities - such as choirs, orchestras, debates, theatre visits, is obvious in this regard. That is why the decision not to provide substitute cover for certain absences of teachers and for teachers absent on school business has so concerned the managerial authorities. At the meeting of the Post-Primary Education Forum on Friday (October 24th), they stated that schools will have to close in January because of this decision. This is entirely unnecessary and I call on the Minister for Education to enter discussions as a matter of extreme urgency to deal with this.

Everybody recognises that there is a crisis in the government's finances which has to be dealt with. However, doing the bidding of the discredited neo-liberal economists and slashing public services is not the way forward, particularly in Ireland when the OECD recently stated that by international standards, Ireland's expenditure on public services is low.

The education service is certainly not "bloated" and solving the fiscal problem by cutting the lifeblood of schools is no solution. ♦

LOBBY AGAINST THE EDUCATION CUTS

ALL POLITICS ARE LOCAL!

1. **Arrange to meet your T.D.**

2. **Tell them how it will affect your school which is in their constituency - give specific examples:**
 - ◆ Teachers lost
 - ◆ Larger class sizes
 - ◆ Reduced subject choice
 - ◆ Field trips and games cancelled.

3. **Tell them of the realities of the modern second-level school classroom** - up to 30 vibrant adolescents including pupils with special needs and pupils whose first language is not English or Irish.

4. **Ask them what they propose to do to reverse the cuts.**

WHAT ARE THE BUDGET CUTS IN SECOND-LEVEL EDUCATION?

1. **The pupil teacher ratio has been raised by one to 19:1.** This will mean increased class sizes. Already 30 thousand second-level pupils are in classes over 30. Subjects will be dropped. Higher and Ordinary level classes will be combined.

2. **Substitution cover for uncertified sick leave and for school business is being withdrawn.** This measure will create chaos in our schools and put under threat many extra-curricular activities. Teachers will not work for nothing and deprive their part-time colleagues of much needed income.

3. **Many supports for the most vulnerable children in our schools have been withdrawn.** These include:
 - ◆ Cutting €2 million from the capitation grants for Traveller children.
 - ◆ Abolition of grants for Junior Certificate Schools Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied, LCVP and Transition Year.
 - ◆ The reintroduction of the cap on Language Support Teachers.

These measures have been introduced in a budget which promised to protect the disadvantaged.

4. **Other grants have been withdrawn from Choirs and Orchestras, Home Economics and Physics and Chemistry.** This measure will reduce the diversity of Irish second-level education; a diversity which is greatly valued by employers.

5. **Additional capitation and teachers, including Home School Liaison Teachers, have been removed from non-DEIS schools.** This is another measure that will affect the most vulnerable children in our schools.

6. **The Early Retirement Scheme is being ended.** This short-sighted measure is a breach of a national agreement and removes the legitimate expectation of many teachers who have given a lifetime of service.