

# NUAUGHT

Issue No 1 – January 2020

## ELECTION SPECIAL



## Make Education an Election Issue

Dear Member,

The long awaited General Election has been called and it is up to us as a profession to ensure that education features prominently alongside health, housing, climate change and the economy, which are important matters of concern for teachers too. Now is the time to use our voice and our vote to further our objectives. In recent months the ASTI has lobbied party leaders and education spokespersons regarding the key issues for second-level teachers. We will continue to engage with all parties and seek strong commitments on our issues in the coming days.

Election 2020 presents you with an opportunity to have your say. Our most powerful tool in ensuring we influence the national agenda at this time is our membership. We have in excess of 17,000 members throughout the country, this is a potent force for advocating the changes we are seeking in education. Now is the time to scrutinize the politicians who are seeking your vote on the issues that are important to us. Election 2020 is the time to use your professional voice.

This Nuacht sets out eight essential issues and a selection of questions you can put to the candidates on the door step. Prioritise the questions that are most pertinent to you. The cumulative effect of over 17,000 members and their families asking these questions can make a significant difference in placing education at the centre of the national agenda.

Let us renew our efforts to have the teachers' voice heard so that our education system can evolve in a positive and sustainable manner. Together we are stronger in making education an election issue. You have a voice and a vote, these are powerful tools, the time to use them is now.

Best wishes with your endeavours,

ASTI President

**Deirdre MacDonald**

### 8 Education Essentials

1. Pay Inequality
2. FEMPI
3. Investment in Education
4. Recruitment and Retention – Teachers' Wellbeing
5. Curriculum Change
6. Student and Parent Charter
7. Pension Parity
8. Flat-rate Expenses

**ASTI**  
A century of service

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ASTI members took strike action over unequal pay

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Many ASTI members continue to suffer due to delayed increments

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We are consistently bottom of the league for investment in second-level students

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## Election 2020:

# 8 Education Essentials

## Pay Inequality

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The ASTI has been at the forefront of the campaign for equal pay for post 2010 entrants to teaching for several years. This included ASTI members taking industrial action in opposition to the injustice of unequal pay. We are alone among the public sector unions in having taken strike action in 2016. The ASTI remains fully committed to rectifying this stain on the teaching profession. We will not stop until this issue is finally and fully addressed. In addition, the time has come for all teachers to receive a decent pay increase after a decade of austerity.

## FEMPI

2

ASTI members paid a huge price in terms of the penalties imposed under FEMPI legislation during the new-entrants to teaching dispute in 2016/2017. Many continue to suffer in terms of lost and delayed increments. The ASTI has used every opportunity to have this matter addressed including launching a legal case in the courts.

## Investment in Education

3

The most recent OECD *Education at a Glance* report placed Ireland last out of 35 countries in investment in second-level education as a proportion of GDP per capita. If we want a quality second-level education for all our young people, we must invest more in our schools. We are consistently at the bottom of the league when it comes to investment in our second-level students. Overcrowded classes remain rampant in the second-level system. Students with special educational needs are not receiving adequate support. Teachers cannot access appropriate and meaningful continuous professional development. There is a long list of issues. The message is simple, greater investment is needed urgently.

## Recruitment and Retention – Teachers' Well-being

# 4

There is a major recruitment and retention crisis in second-level schools. The crisis will undoubtedly grow in the years to come unless decisive action is taken by the Government. This means tackling the substantive issues. The fall of over 50% in the numbers applying for places on the PME postgraduate teacher education courses between 2011 and 2018 didn't happen by accident. The drop coincided with the withdrawal of the HDip/PME allowance and abolition of incremental recognition for the period of pre-service.

The onslaught on teachers' pay and conditions has been relentless. The inexorable onslaught of increased workload has continued unabated. Initiative overload has exacted an enormous price. An ASTI survey carried out by RedC in 2019 found that job satisfaction amongst second-level teachers has dropped from 77% in 2009 to 50% in 2019. Teachers are at breaking point. The implications for the mental health and wellbeing of our teachers must be addressed immediately.

A proper and realistic promotional structure will have to be put in place. The lack of opportunities for promotion remains a real problem. Special Education Needs provision in schools has grown enormously in recent years. The consequent expectations placed on teachers have not been matched with adequate continuous professional development – a disservice to teachers and students alike. These are just some of the many issues. The future of our profession is at stake.

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Initiative overload has enacted  
an enormous price

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## Curriculum Change

# 5

Over the past decade, curricular reform has been a fraught experience. The memory of the debacle surrounding the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle is fresh and we are still dealing with the fallout. To compound matters, before the rollout of the Framework for Junior Cycle has been completed, the NCCA has initiated a review of Senior Cycle education. ASTI participated in all cycles of consultation thus far in order to ensure that the voice of teachers would be heard. In addition, ASTI has made a detailed submission to the NCCA to set out our concerns. The mistakes of the past must not be repeated. Fundamentally, there is a need for a full and proper evaluation of the Framework for Junior Cycle before any proposals for Senior Cycle are brought forward. In addition, upon completion of such an evaluation, there should be a comprehensive and meaningful consultation process with all stakeholders to discuss any changes which must be underpinned by strong evidence-based research.

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There is a need for a full and  
proper evaluation of the  
framework before any  
proposals for Senior Cycle are  
brought forward

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ASTI is insisting that teachers must not be excluded

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## Student and Parent Charter



The Education (Student and Parent Charter) Bill 2019 was initiated in the Seanad last year.

The proposed legislation required that every school must publish and operate a Student and Parent Charter in accordance with national guidelines published by the Minister.

The ASTI has been very pro-active in seeking substantial changes to this legislation. We had a number of key concerns. Uppermost of these is our view that it was not an inclusive piece of legislation, best exemplified in the title of the Bill. Teachers were excluded.

Schools are vibrant learning communities that rely on full equality of participation of all stakeholders. The ASTI has a long track record in promoting equality, democratic participation and transparency in all that schools do. This Bill ignored these realities.

The Bill also promised to address the necessity to introduce statutory provisions that provide for procedures for dealing with grievances of students (over 18) or their parents relating to the school.

This is something that ASTI has supported in order that such procedures will align with the provisions of the Teaching Council Act. However, this is a matter that should have been dealt with separately as a single piece of legislation.

The ASTI is determined to ensure that any discussions that might arise on the national guidelines will provide workable, respectful and fair procedures. Such procedures must not add enormously to the already creaking and overburdened bureaucracy that is smothering schools.

Overall, we consider that the general elements were not consonant with the concept of education as a common good. The overall thrust of the Charter, and particularly the material the Department of Education and Skills chose to put forward to the media at the time of announcement of the proposed legislation, is redolent of policies which aim to commodify education as primarily a relationship between providers and consumers. This was unacceptable and any legislation brought forward in the next Dáil must not include such provisions.

## Pension Parity

The principle that there should be pension parity between serving and retired teachers has long been defended by the ASTI. This is the concept that any increases in the pay of serving teachers are also applied to our retired members. Essentially, pensions should be index-linked to future public pay increases. This is a concept that has been increasingly attacked, both legislatively and within sections of society. ASTI succeeded in ensuring that pension parity will be maintained for the duration of the Public Service Stability Agreement. We are determined to ensure this position is rolled over into any successor agreement and beyond.



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Pension parity must be maintained

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## Flat-rate Expenses

The Revenue Commissioners announced that it planned the abolition of flat-rate expenses for teachers in recent years. It attempted to do so with effect from January 1, 2019 and again from January 1, 2020. Following strong submissions from the ASTI and other public service unions both efforts were blocked and did not go ahead. Revenue has referred an impending review to the Tax Strategy Group with a view to delaying implementation until January 1, 2021.

The ASTI has lobbied hard to prevent this proposal to abolish the flat-rate expenses and will continue to do so. We have raised it with Revenue, the Government, the opposition parties and within the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). We are delighted that our campaign, which secured an initial postponement of the change last year, has now yielded a further delay to 2021. We believe that the proposal should be abandoned.




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The proposal to abolish flat rate expenses should be abandoned

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### Make Education an Election Issue

We are asking you to identify which of these 8 Education Essentials matter the most to you and to raise them with your politicians during the Election 2020 campaign. See page 6 for a list of suggested questions to ask your politicians. For further information on Election 2020 visit [www.asti.ie](http://www.asti.ie).



Pay inequality

FEMPI

Investment in education

Recruitment &amp; retention

Teachers conditions

Curriculum change

Parent Student Charter

Pension parity

Flat-rate expenses

## Questions for Election 2020 candidates:

- Q.** What actions will you and/or your party take to ensure that pay inequality for post 2010 entrants to teaching is fully addressed?
- Q.** What actions will you and/or your party take to ensure that the incremental dates for progression up the pay scales of ASTI members, that were adjusted during the industrial dispute of 2016/2017, are restored to their original dates?
- Q.** If you are elected will you and/or your party commit to ensuring that the level of funding for second-level schools will be raised to the OECD average during the next Dáil?
- Q.** If you are elected what actions will you and/or your party take to address the recruitment and retention crisis in second-level schools?
- Q.** If you are elected what actions will you and/or your party take to improve teachers' working lives?
- Q.A.** If you are elected will you and/or your party commit to ensuring that a full and proper evaluation of the Framework for Junior Cycle is conducted prior to any proposals for Senior Cycle reform being brought forward?
- Q.B.** In addition, will you and/or your party commit to ensuring that upon completion of such an evaluation, there will be a comprehensive and meaningful consultation process with all stakeholders to discuss any changes?
- Q.** What actions will you and/or your party take, if legislation for a Charter for Schools is being enacted, to ensure that it is inclusive and accords equal status to all stakeholders in schools?
- Q.** If you are elected will you and/or your party commit to ensuring that pension parity is maintained for the duration of the next Dáil and beyond?
- Q.** If you are elected will you and/or your party commit to ensure that flat-rate expenses for teachers are retained?

## What you can do to make a difference.....

- Leave this edition of Nuacht somewhere to hand and use it when your local politicians call to your door.
- Bring this edition of Nuacht with you when you visit your local politicians.
- Spread the word: Follow our Election 2020 campaign on Facebook/ Twitter.
- Ask others to raise these issues with their local politicians.
- Put second-level education on every politician's agenda.