

CHILDREN AT THE HEART OF EDUCATION

Welcome to everyone and thank you for coming.

Tá mórathrú tábhachtach ar bun sa chóras oideachais faoi láthair. I rith na mblianta fada sin sular cuireadh na hinstiúidí comhaontaithe polaitíochta ar bun, bhí na hairí ó Londain ag iarraidh conspóid a sheachaint agus rinne siad neamhaird den ghá a bhí ann le hathrú bunúsach sa chóras oideachais. Má tá feidhm ar bith le bheith ag na hinstiúidí nua polaitíochta, caithfimid tabhairt faoi na dúshlán mhóra seo; caithfimid athrú a thabhairt isteach i ngach gné den tsochaí, go háirithe i dtaca leis an gcóras ársa oideachais de.

This is a time of enormous change in our education system. For decades before our agreed political institutions were established, London based ministers avoided controversy and ignored the need for fundamental change in our education system.

If our new political institutions are to mean anything, they must face these challenges head on; they must deliver

change across our society, not least in our out-dated education system.

That is the approach I have taken. Change is always difficult. I know and understand that. But change is also necessary and I am determined to implement an agenda of change to better serve the education of our young people.

Today is an important day for our young people.

Today we will hear about "Together towards Entitlement" the work of the Area Based Planning Groups I established last year.

This report, which I will be publishing soon, sets out a road map to delivering a better; equality based post-primary education system that serves the needs of **all** our young people.

I will say more about the report shortly – and I will then ask Adeline Dinsmore, who along with Joe Martin led the exercise, to highlight the critical messages in it.

But first I want to set out how our education system needs to progress to serve our children better.

The step changes we need **to put our children first, at the heart of education.**

Despite our best efforts, the system is letting too many young people down. And contrary to what some people think, albeit a decreasing minority, we do not have a world class education system.

Yes we have elements – certainly – that are world class but far too many elements that are not.

A system that perpetuates the gap in achievement between our most disadvantaged and our most affluent pupils is far from world class.

Ligeann an córas atá againn do [cheithre mhíle] duine óg imeacht ón mbunscolaíocht gach bliain gan na scileanna bunúsacha litearthachta agus uimhearthachta acu atá de dhíth orthu le rochtain a fháil ar an gcuraclam fadréimseach iarbhunscoile. Níl sé seo inghlactha.

A system that allows [4,000] young people every year to complete their primary education without the basic literacy and numeracy skills they need to access a wide-ranging and relevant post-primary curriculum is far from world class.

In 2008/09 almost 11,000 young people (10,519 or 43.7% of school leavers) left school not having achieved five good GCSE's including literacy and maths.

A system that achieves for some pupils at the expense of others is far from world class.

We need to recognise we fall short in far too many cases and we need to do something about it.

Up to now we have focused too much on the needs of institutions rather than the needs of young people.

We have a system that too often advantages further those who already are the most advantaged rather than ensuring that every young person has the chance to succeed.

We need to change. Change now. Change radically.

Equality and improvement for all

In April I introduced “Every School a Good School – a policy for School Improvement” this is a pupil centred policy which will tackle underachievement and promote equality and the raising of standards in all schools across the north.

The new Education and Skills Authority will have a pivotal role in this. I have made it clear to the chair Sean Hogan and Gavin Boyd, Chief Executive, that I expect them to set the pace, working with schools to ensure that there is a sustained focus on improving outcomes for every child. That is their number one priority.

I will soon bring forward a strategy to raise standards in Literacy and Numeracy. I commissioned Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry to address the particular problems of underachievement in these cities. I have also set up a Taskforce on Traveller Education.

I work through the North South Ministerial Council to tackle underachievement and I will ensure that equality is at the core and will develop increased action and co-operation

across the island to ensure that we all benefit from our shared resources. To ensure that this happens, I have established an All Ireland and Equality Directorate within DE.

Tá ról tábhachtach ag Boird Gobharnóirí maidir le caighdeáin níos airde a chothú. Caithfimid tacaíocht a thabhairt dóibh le cur ar a gcumas an fheidhm ríthábhachtach seo a chomhlíonadh. Tá obair ar an réimse seo faoi lánseol cheana féin agus beidh an tÚdarás um Oideachas agus Scileanna freagrach as dul chun cinn a dhéanamh ar an obair seo.

Boards of Governors have a key role in promoting higher standards. We need to support and equip them to enable them to discharge this vital function. Work is already underway here and again ESA will have a major responsibility.

The revised curriculum is now in place in all year groups and I am delighted with the impact that it is having – and I pay tribute to the teachers who are making wonderful use of the flexibility it presents to engage and excite young people.

And all of us who are parents – particularly of teenagers – know that we will make most ground when, alongside teachers and governors, we have young people themselves engaged and enthused.

At Key Stage 4 and above, of course, the Entitlement Framework is a core component of the revised curriculum. When they reach that critical age of 14, all of our young people need to have equal access to a much wider and more balanced range of courses. I am determined that this will be the case.

I have considered carefully “Together towards Entitlement”. It is clear that we have made some progress but not enough.

We need to step up a gear.

The full Entitlement Framework will be a statutory requirement from 2013. From that date, all our young people must have access to a broader, better balanced range of courses. Courses that interest them; that they see as relevant; that will lead to fulfilling careers.

And so, from today, I am spelling out to all post-primary schools that I want to see a change in pace, a stepping up of efforts. I will require schools to demonstrate how they will effectively deliver the Entitlement Framework and seek to maximise choice for children in the future. I want to see their plans and I want to be sure that they are robust and deliverable.

Alongside this we need to transform how we plan our provision. At present we plan on an unco-ordinated bottom up basis, with individual institutions essentially competing with one another. A market in other words with the needs of institutions outweighing the needs of the children we are here to serve.

We need to put in place a pattern of provision that delivers quality learning that guarantees wider more coherent curriculum choice and delivers equality.

We will therefore move to develop area based planning led by ESA to ensure that we put in place the right pattern of

provision in the future. A pattern that puts children, their aspirations and their potential first.

In the current budget period, 2008 – 2011, I intend to invest some £718m on school and youth services and over the ten year period to 2018, total planned investment is £3.5 billion.

Tá sé riachtanach go bhfuil an mórinfheistiú seo san eastát oideachais i gcomhréir leis agus mar thacaíocht ag an gcreat beartais atá á chur i bhfeidhm agam. De réir mar a thagann forbairt ar phleanáil cheantarbhunaithe, beidh na polasaithe seo mar stiúradh ag athstruchtúró an eastáit agus na pleananna infheistithe a éireoidh as sin. Mar Aire Oideachais, caithfidh mise a chinntiú go soláthraíonn na hacmhainní substaintiúla atá á n-infheistiú againn faoi láthair, go soláthraíonn siad na torthaí is fearr do na páistí agus an luach is fearr don cháiníocóir.

Mar sin de, tá athbhreithniú ar na tionscadail atá á ndéanamh faoi láthair údaraithe agam lena dheimhniú go bhfuil siad ar fad i gcomhréir leis an gcreat beartais agus dá bhrí sin go mbeidh siad inmharthana san fhadtréimhse.

It is essential that this enormous investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place. As area based planning develops these policies will drive the reshaping of our estate and the consequential investment plans. As Minister for Education I need to ensure that the substantial resources we are now investing produce the best outcomes for children and value for the taxpayer.

I have commissioned therefore a review of current projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term.

We must put in place provision which offers the widest possible range of opportunities for young people. We need to optimise provision for all, not settle for second best.

We have a sustainable schools policy which sets the thresholds in different circumstances. Quality and equality are the key criteria. With academic selection ended the future must be based on popular, all-ability entry post-primary schools – schools that build on existing excellence and focus on standards but offer wider choice for all children.

Within that context, I have also asked my Department and ESA to review the progress of every post-primary school towards delivery of the full Entitlement Framework. And let me be clear – this is not simply about checking whether schools are offering a certain number of courses. It is about ensuring that those courses cover both general and applied options; are coherent; and are planned in a way that takes account of other provision, particularly that offered by Further Education colleges.

More than anything, it is about ensuring that the range of courses offered by each school is capable of supporting all young people to achieve to their full potential and to go on to access further or higher education and well paid jobs. And it is about ensuring that the needs of children in rural areas – and in urban areas – are met equally.

Chomh maith leis sin, d'iarr mé ar na Cigirí a chinntiú go gcuimseoidh gach cigireacht a dhéanfar as seo amach in iarbhunscoileanna, go gcuimseoidh siad fócas ar an rogha atá ar fáil do dhaltaí ag ceithre bliana déag d'aois agus iad ag ullmhú le dul isteach chuig an séú bliain – le fócas ar leith ar chomhleanúnachas na n-ábhar atá ar fáil agus ar an oideachas agus treoir faoi ghairmeacha atá ar fáil le cuidiú leis na daltaí roghanna eolasacha a dhéanamh.

I have also asked the Inspectorate to ensure, from now on, that all inspections in post-primary schools include a focus on the offer available to pupils at 14 and as they prepare to enter sixth form – and a particular focus on the coherence of what is available and the careers education and guidance that is available to help pupils make meaningful choices.

Schools will need support to deliver this change. Today's report makes clear that support is better in some areas than in others. That is not acceptable. And that is why I am also asking ESA, as soon as it is established, to conduct an immediate assessment of the support available to schools and to their area learning communities to ensure that it is responsive, high quality and focused on helping them deliver

the Entitlement Framework for their pupils.

I have said a lot so far about post-primary education. All the evidence tells us that we need to invest more in children as early as possible – at early years and at the Foundation Stage of education. It is wrong and unacceptable that a child's education and life opportunities are affected adversely by their socio-economic circumstances – a post-code lottery. Yet this is what happens now. I will therefore be bringing forward a new Early Years Strategy, to ensure that the foundations that are laid in early childhood can be built on as children move through the education system.

I have also commissioned a comprehensive review of the school funding formula at present and will be publishing proposals for change shortly.

We are still working on the details of this but I do have clear objectives.

I want to invest more resources in early years and in primary.

Ba mhian liom a chinntiú go ndíreoimid isteach ar riachtanais shóisialta le gníomhú in aghaidh na míbhuntáistí a bhíonn ag cuid mhór páistí mar gheall ar an áit a bhfuil cónaí orthu ann agus ba mhian liom a chinntiú go gcloítear leis na dualgais chomhionannais a cuireadh orainn faoi Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta agus faoi Chomhaontú Chill Rímhinn.

I want to ensure that we genuinely target social need to counter the disadvantages many children face because of where they live and adhere to our equality duties under the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement.

I also want to make sure that we fund post-primary schools consistent with progress towards full implementation of the Entitlement Framework.

Le blianta fada anuas, chuir an Teist Aistrithe isteach ar an gcuraclam i mbunscoileanna agus ba mhinic a tréigeadh páistí nach raibh an cumas acadúil céanna iontu mar gheall ar an Teist seo. B'ionann na teisteanna aistrithe agus braistint neamhábaltachta, diúltaithe agus teipe mar go raibh múinteoirí ag streachailt le roinnt páistí a ullmhú do chóras aistrithe a bhí go hiomlán lochtach agus éagórach.

Bhí an córas sin freagrach as deighiltí agus neamhionannas a chruthú agus a chothú.

For decades the 11+ distorted the curriculum in primary schools and often led to the abandonment of less academically able children. The perceptions of inability, rejection and failure pre-dated the transfer tests as teachers struggled to prepare some children for a system of transfer which was fundamentally flawed and unfair. Our system was both directly and subliminally generating divisions and creating inequality.

I would again urge the breakaway grammar schools to reconsider their position. No child should have to face the trauma of testing at 10 or 11 to access an education system that every child is entitled to. The 11+ is now gone and the curriculum is delivered on a statutory basis and will not be distorted or bent to serve the needs of a few breakaway schools.

Agus an nimh sin a bhí sa Teist Aistrithe curtha dínn, is féidir le gach páiste bheith ag dúil le comhionannas maidir leis an mbealach a gcaitear leo agus maidir leis an teagasc. Lena chinntiú gurbh amhlaidh an scéal seo, beidh soláthróirí luathbhlianta agus bunscoileanna níos cuntasáí as úsáid acmhainní agus as na torthaí oideachais a sholáthróidh siad, go háirithe na cinn sin a bhaineann le litearthacht agus uimhearthacht.

Now that the distraction of the 11+ has been removed all children can expect equality of treatment and teaching. To ensure that this is the case, early years providers and primary schools will be held more accountable for the utilisation of resources and for their educational outcomes, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

Post-primary schools too will need to show that they are raising standards, improving outcomes and offering the Entitlement Framework.

But the quality of outcomes is ultimately dictated by the quality of teaching. We have one of the best qualified teaching workforces in the developed world but the quality of actual teaching is less than we might expect. We know from ETI reports for example, that too many lessons fall below standard.

Again that is simply not acceptable.

I want all our governors, principals and teachers to understand their responsibility for ensuring the highest possible standards for all children. ESA and ETI will be charged with monitoring and where necessary challenging schools to succeed.

School leaders will be pivotal. In future we will build a professional development model which is responsive to and supportive of schools and which draws effectively on the best practice within the existing system. Schools will get the support they need to improve performance but will be expected to deliver and will be held accountable for their outcomes.

We will want to work closely with the education workforce. I have established a new Education Workforce Directorate in my Department. This is evidence of how valuable and critical our workforce - the entire workforce - is. We will face challenges with the resource pressures facing the Executive and my Department over the next few years. The School Workforce Review will go ahead shortly. But beyond that I want to work closely and develop new relationships and collaborative arrangements with the trade unions representing the entire workforce. A problem shared is often a problem solved.

Complementing my determination to raise standards I want to help schools to tackle the barriers to successful learning which face many children. I will consult on my new SEN and Inclusion policy. Our Traveller Task Force will bring its work to a conclusion and I will continue to press for the best support possible to be offered to newcomer children.

Ba mhian liom go ndéanfar níos mó dul chun cinn ar fhorbairt na Gaelscolaíochta, go háirithe i dtaca le moltaí forbartha ag leibhéal na hiarbhunscolaíochta de; is ceist thábhachtach chomhionannais í seo do pháistí atá ag iarraidh an Ghaeilge a úsáid mar chéadteanga.

I will wish to see continuing progress in the development of Irish medium education, especially in bringing forward proposals for development at post-primary level; this is a key test of equality for children who aspire to having Irish as their first language.

Conclusion

I want now to hand over to Adeline who will tell you in more detail about the challenge that I set her and her colleagues back in the spring of last year. She will also say a little about the findings from her work. Adeline and her colleagues will also, over the coming weeks, be giving more detailed presentations at events across the north to ensure that schools, parents and communities have an opportunity to hear the messages from their report and to engage in discussion with them.

It would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to Adeline Dinsmore, Joe Martin, Tom Shaw, John Young, Margaret Martin, Pat McAleavey and Rev Robert Herron, on both the central and local groups who gave so generously of their time and expertise to help us map out a new way forward for our young people.

They have completed a complex piece of work with great skill and care, ensuring at all times a clear and unequivocal focus on the needs and aspirations of young people.

They have identified great practice and tell me there is much to encourage us – but they have also made clear that the pace of change needs to be quickened.

A Adeline – táimid réidh leis an athrú sin a chur i bhfeidhm. Agus táimid ag súil leis na tuairimí tábhachtacha a chloisteáil ó bhur dtuarascáil. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil sibhse ar aon intinn linne maidir leis an bhfís gur chóir tacaíocht a thabhairt do chuile pháiste lena gcumas iomlán a bhaint amach. Ná déanaimis dearmad ar an bhfís sin choíche.

Adeline – we stand ready to implement that change. And we look forward to hearing the key messages from your report. I know that you share our vision of ensuring that every child should be supported to reach their full potential. We must not lose sight of that.