

Case Study 4

School Planning in the Education Sector

Introduction

In the 1980s, Ireland undertook a comprehensive restructuring of its expenditures in an effort to address the fiscal imbalance resulting from a persistent slowdown in economic growth. This *Programme for National Recovery* entailed reducing Public Service personnel and cutting wages, income transfers and subsidies. Although necessary at the time, these restraint measures led to a significant overall deficit in infrastructure, in particular, to a shortage of new school buildings. This also meant that existing school buildings were not adequately maintained. With renewed economic growth, tackling this infrastructure deficit has been a priority.

Renewal in economic growth, coupled with a rapid expansion of the population has made school planning more complex. The Irish population has diversified, with an increasing share of the population living in urban areas and commuting significant distances to work; enrolment patterns have changed, parents are making different choices regarding the type of school they want their children to attend and there is increased competition for schools. To address these challenges, the government has significantly increased funding for school infrastructure, primarily through the National Development Plans (NDPs). The Department of Education and Science, which is responsible for the school building and planning programme, has introduced a number of structural reforms in an attempt to better manage its responsibilities, including the devolution of responsibility for overseeing small maintenance and upgrading projects to individual school Boards of Management, the use of Public Private Partnerships and common designs for new school builds, and other innovative approaches. This case study examines the impact of these developments from a systems and organisational view point.

Ireland has done a remarkably cost effective job at managing and developing schools. The fragmented, small-scale, and voluntarily managed system is close to users and seems to reflect their preferences. The rapidly changing demographic context in Ireland, however, raises a number of challenges: 1) speed and responsiveness – new housing developments are being built in many cases without commensurate provision being made for the accompanying infrastructure, while in other cases it is being provided but the pace is such that it cannot keep up with demand; 2) agility – the population base of both new and existing neighbourhoods is changing so that the mix of schools may also need to change in order to serve both parochial and secular students; 3) capacity – the fragmented and voluntary nature of the current system may mean that some school boards and local authorities do not have the capacity, or the planning and development tools available (*e.g.* land banks, etc.) to anticipate needs, rally resources and manage or oversee projects; 4) coherence – the different sectors may not be sufficiently working together to help anticipate needs and to make the most of infrastructure (*e.g.* community use of school facilities)

These challenges raise questions about whether the Public Service as a whole has sufficient capacity to undertake school planning and whether the current governance structure is the best way to handle large-scale expansion and less predictable population

movements. By failing to look at the capacity of the system as a whole, the Department may, with the positive intention of improving service delivery and autonomy, have delegated responsibilities locally (for small scale projects, such as Summer Work Schemes) without necessarily giving individual school boards the commensurate supports, tools and capacity to perform. More specifically, under the current system, decision making and policy is centralised in the Department of Education and Science, while management and implementation is decentralised. Ireland may want to explore delegating some decision making so that it is adapted to local needs, but regroup some implementation (e.g. using larger Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) as centres of excellence) in order to benefit from economies of scale and to regroup competencies. Finally, there needs to be a discussion about whether a paradigm shift is required, in which the cost of fragmentation is communicated to local communities, so that a discussion can be started on how to find innovative solutions. This case study looks at other potential models for optimising strategic linkages in future planning, building capacity in a complex policy and delivery framework, while also balancing devolution, value for money and accountability.

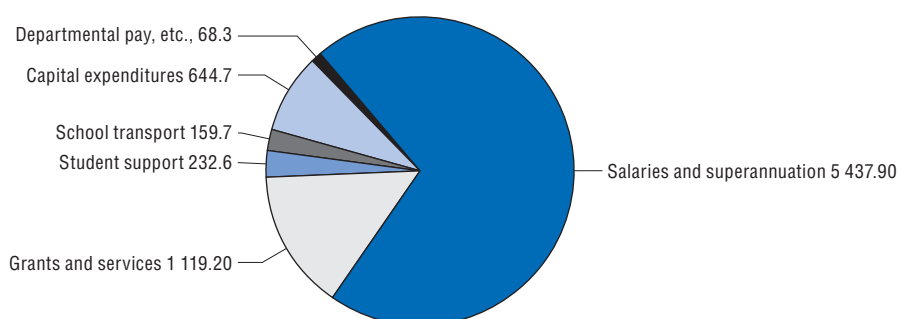
Context: New investments and policies in response to “infrastructural deficits” and a changing population base

In Ireland, there are over 3 200 first level schools, 750 second level schools, seven universities, 14 institutes of technology, 8 Colleges of Education, as well as eight other institutions that are aided by the State. Most of the first and second level schools in Ireland are privately owned and managed by local diocesan trusts and/or patron bodies, but funding is largely provided by the central government. The Department of Education and Science sets the general regulations for recognition of schools, prescribes the national curricula and establishes regulations for the management, resourcing and staffing of schools. It also negotiates teacher salary scales. For first (primary) and second (secondary) level schools, funding is provided directly to the individual schools. For third (post-secondary including community and technical colleges and universities) level schools, funding is channelled through the Higher Education Authority.¹

The Department of Education and Science provides funding to all three levels of education. This includes salaries, pensions, operations, transport, capital, and student support (for those at third level only). In 2006, the Department for Education and Science spent EUR 7.7 billion (Figure CS4.1) on education of which over 70% was for salaries and employee benefits. Capital expenditures amounted to approximately 8.5%.

Figure CS4.1. Irish Education sector: Financial support – all levels

Areas of expenditure – Euro millions, 2006

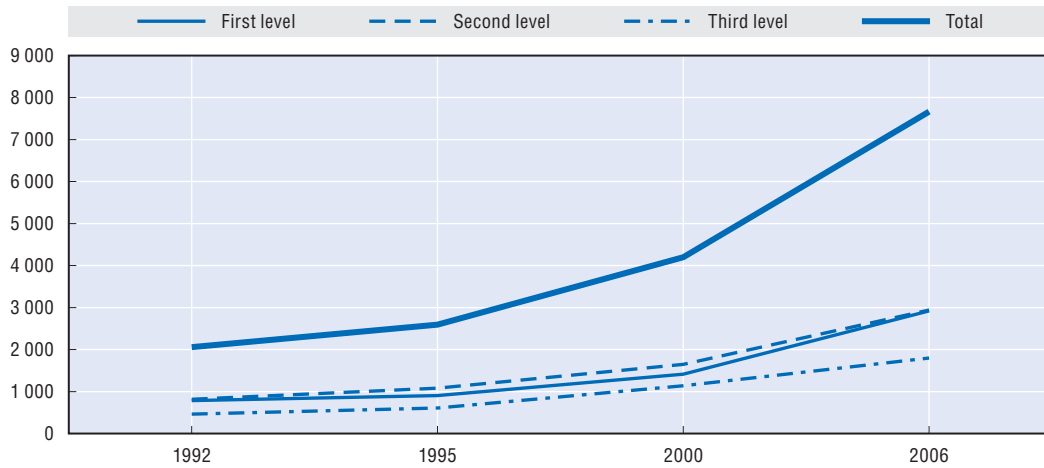


Source: Department of Education and Science.

Between 1992 and 2006, total expenditures on education increased significantly from EUR 2.1 billion to EUR 7.7 billion – an increase of nearly EUR 5.6 billion, of which EUR 3.5 billion occurred over the 2000 to 2006 period (Figure CS4.2). All three levels of schooling exhibited substantial boosts in their spending.

Figure CS4.2. **Nominal education expenditures in Ireland by level of education**

Euro millions, selected years

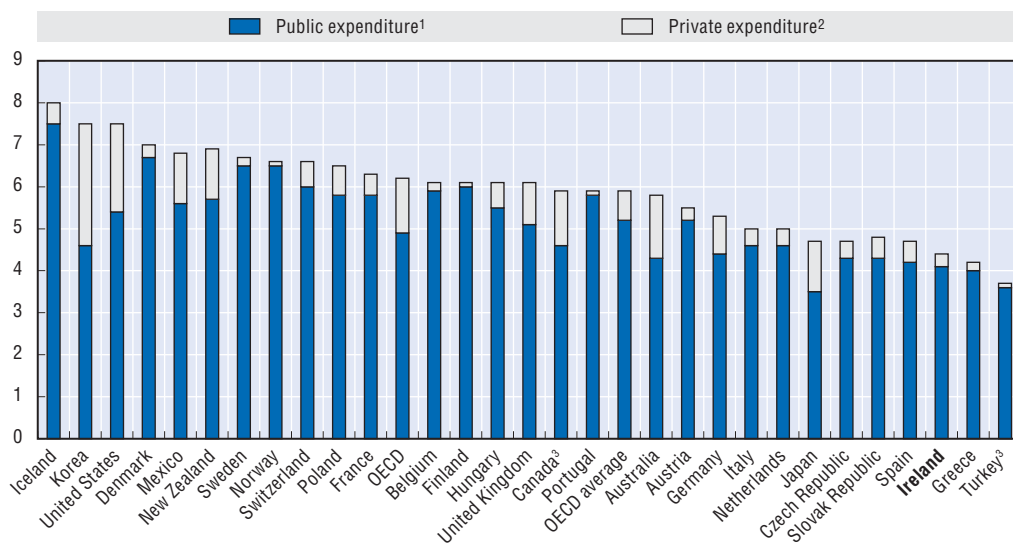


Source: Department of Education and Science.

Despite this period of “catching up”, Ireland spends a relatively low amount on education as a percentage of GDP relative to other OECD countries (Figure CS4.3). This is in part due to the largely voluntary nature of school boards which have traditionally been

Figure CS4.3. **Expenditure on educational institutions**

OECD, percentage of GDP, 2003



1. Including public subsidies to households attributable for educational institutions. Including direct expenditure on educational institutions from international sources.
2. Net of public subsidies attributable for educational institutions.
3. Year of reference 2002.

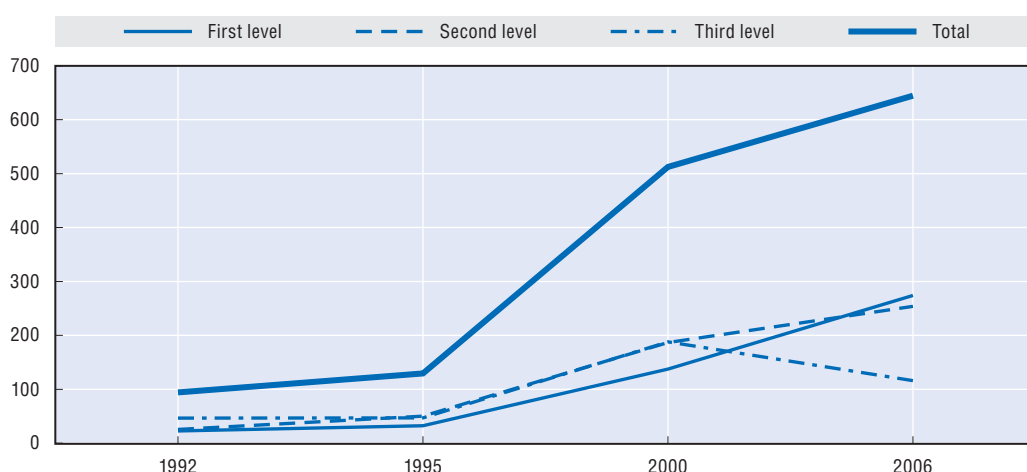
Source: OECD Factbook 2007.

supported and run by churches. This has not prevented the Irish educational system from achieving high quality outputs and outcomes: 80% of the 25-34 age group has attained at least upper secondary level education above the OECD average of 77%.³

Investment in the School Building Programme has increased by nearly 600% since 1992, from EUR 94.1 million to EUR 644.6 million in 2006 (Figure CS4.4), with the largest increase occurring between 1995 and 2000. Although all three levels of education registered substantial increases in capital spending over the 1992 to 2006 period, their profile differs somewhat. Increases in capital spending at the first level lagged behind the other two levels over the 1992 to 2000 period, but has expanded rapidly since 2000 and has now overtaken second and third level capital spending.

Figure CS4.4. **Irish Funding for School Building Programme**

Euro millions, selected years



Source: Department of Education and Science.

With the exception of the third level, the significant investment in capital spending since 1991-92 occurred in an environment of declining school enrolment. Total student enrolment in the 2005-06 school year was down 30 640 students compared to 1991-92 (Table CS4.1). Full-time enrolment at the first school level declined by 76 400 students between 1991-92 and 2005-06. Annual declines were recorded to 2000-01, with enrolment down 94 729 students from 1991-92 school year levels. Since 2000-01, however, there has been an increase of 18 329 full-time students. At the second school level, full-time student enrolment dropped by 16 510 since 1991-92, with annual declines recorded continuously since the 1994-95 school year. In contrast, there has been a large increase at the third level – up 62 270 since the 1991-92 school year.

The large increase in student enrolment at the third level coincides with the elimination of tuition fees for undergraduate students in 1995. This increase in turn required major new capital investments in new and existing facilities. In contrast, the increases in capital spending at the first and second levels were directed to address a significant historical infrastructure deficit in existing schools which had built up during the fiscal consolidation efforts of the 1980s. With increased economic growth and higher government revenues, the government was able to allocate expanding resources to address urgent needs in existing schools. A key objective of the National Development

Table CS4.1. **Key Irish education statistics: Full-time students, selected years**

| | First level | Second level | Third level | Total |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|---------|
| Number | | | | |
| 1991-92 | 534 289 | 348 917 | 74 449 | 957 655 |
| 1996-97 | 469 628 | 371 184 | 100 204 | 941 016 |
| 2000-01 | 439 560 | 345 384 | 119 991 | 904 935 |
| 2005-06 | 457 889 | 332 407 | 136 719 | 927 015 |
| % change | | | | |
| 1991-92 to 1996-97 | -12.10 | 6.38 | 34.59 | -1.74 |
| 1996-97 to 2000-01 | -6.40 | -6.95 | 19.75 | -3.83 |
| 2000-01 to 2005-06 | 4.17 | -3.76 | 13.94 | 2.44 |
| 1991-92 to 2005-06 | -14.30 | -4.73 | 83.64 | -3.20 |

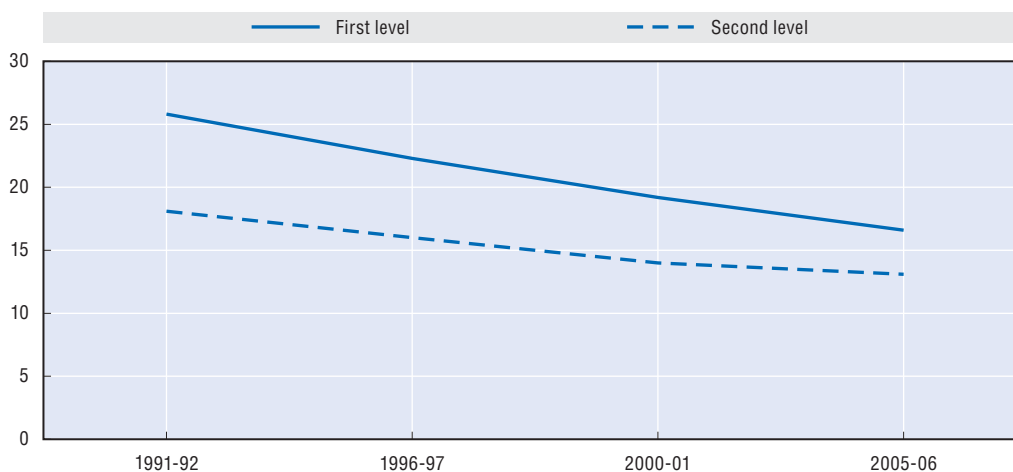
Source: Department of Education and Science.

Plan 2000-2006 was to address this school infrastructure deficit. The most recent National Development Plan (2007-2013) has earmarked EUR 4.49 billion for a schools infrastructure sub-programme (for first and second level schools).

Another key policy initiative affecting capital spending at the first and second level was the decision to lower the teacher-to-pupil ratios, requiring additional classrooms in existing schools, as well as some new schools. Between 1991-92 and 2005-06, the number of teachers at the first and second levels increased by nearly 13 000. This resulted in a drop in the pupil-to-teacher ratio at the first level, from nearly 26 in 1991-92 to about 17 in 2005-06 and, at the second level, from about 18 in 1991-92 to about 13.5 in 2005-06 (Figure CS4.5). New teacher positions have been created in response to initiatives to reduce class size, to cater to pupils in disadvantaged areas and to provide for those with special educational needs.

Figure CS4.5. **Key Irish education statistics: Teacher-to-pupil ratio**

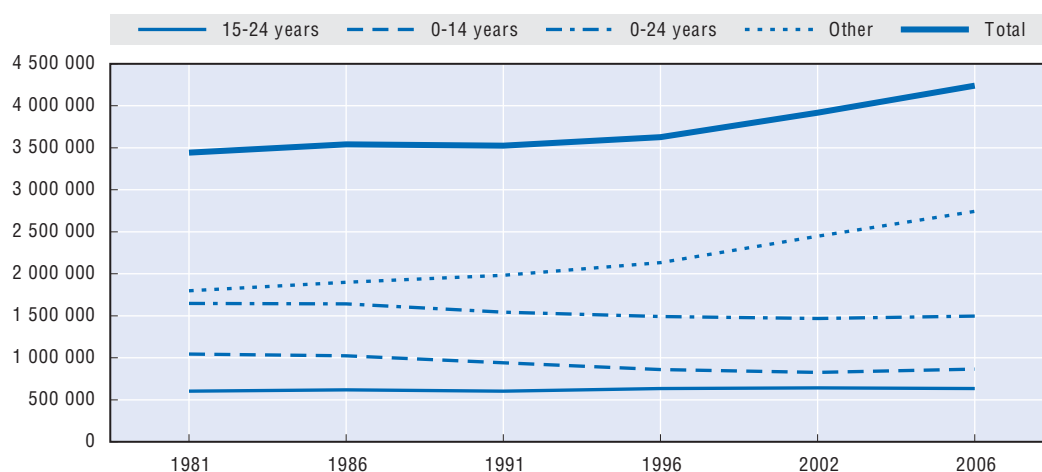
Selected years



Source: Department of Education and Science.

The school building program is now facing an additional challenge – a significant increase in school enrolment, especially at the first level. As noted in the chapter on Fiscal and Demographic Developments, strong economic growth has been accompanied by an increase in population. After a period of negative population growth between 1986 and 1991, due to net outward migration largely reflecting the economic slowdown at that time, Ireland has experienced a rapid increase in total population since 1991, up by over 714 000 since 1991, an increase of over 20%. However, the population aged 0 to 24 only increased in the latest census period. This profile is strongly influenced by a decline in the number of children aged 0-14, which have been recorded in each census period to 2002. In the 2006 census, an increase of over 37 000 was recorded (Figure CS4.6). The OECD projects that Ireland will experience the largest expansion in the population of the 5-14 year age group – 19% – among all OECD countries over the 2005 to 2015 period. This is primarily the age group in the first school level. In contrast, population declines are projected for both the 15-19 age group (primarily second school level) and the 20-29 age group (primarily third school level). Based on these demographic developments, the Department of Education and Science is expecting a boost in student population of 100 000 at the first school level over the next seven years.

Figure CS4.6. **Population by selected age groups**



Source: Central Statistics Office – Ireland.

As noted earlier, the rapid rise in population as a result of immigration is posing new challenges for the education system, most notably in relation to rapidly changing social and cultural needs, but also in terms of the changing demographic profiles of communities which requires quicker investment decisions and construction of new infrastructure. In the latest census, a significant portion of immigrants came from non-traditional sources, including Poland, Lithuania, other European Union countries excluding Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and from non-EU countries (see chapter on Fiscal and Demographic Developments).

In common with most developed countries, Ireland has moved from a largely rural population to a predominately urban one, with the cross-over occurring around 1966. The urban population currently represents about 61% of the total population. However, after decades of decline, the population living in rural areas has increased in recent years, albeit

not at the same rate as those in the urban areas. In addition, the trend in urbanisation is most evident in towns rather than in cities (Table CS4.2). The large urban centres have seen a decrease in population share in 2006 as compared with 2002, while the share of those living in towns has increased. With the government's 2003 programme of administrative relocation – relocating the headquarters of approximately half of its departments and 10 000 staff out of Dublin – this trend could well continue.

Table CS4.2. **Population statistics by area**

| | 2002 | 2006 | Change | Proportion of total population | |
|--------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| | | | | 2002 | 2006 |
| Large urban areas | | | | | |
| Dublin | 1 004.6 | 1 045.8 | 41.2 | 26 | 25.1 |
| Cork | 186.2 | 190.4 | 4.2 | 4.8 | 4.6 |
| Limerick | 87 | 90.8 | 3.8 | 2.3 | 2.2 |
| Galway | 66.2 | 72.7 | 6.5 | 1.7 | 1.7 |
| Total | 1 344 | 1 399.7 | 55.7 | 34.8 | 33.5 |
| Towns | | | | | |
| 10 000 and over | 496.2 | 615.9 | 119.7 | 12.9 | 14.8 |
| 5 000 to 9 999 | 233.9 | 272.7 | 38.8 | 6.1 | 6.5 |
| 3 000 to 4 999 | 99.5 | 108.6 | 9.1 | 2.6 | 2.6 |
| 1 500 to 2 999 | 114 | 128.3 | 14.3 | 3 | 3.1 |
| Total | 943.6 | 1 125.5 | 181.9 | 24.5 | 27 |
| Other | 1 570.9 | 1 646.8 | 75.9 | 40.7 | 39.5 |
| Total | 3 858.5 | 4 172 | 313.5 | 100 | 100 |

Source: Central Statistics Office – Ireland.

Significant progress has been made in addressing the infrastructure deficit in existing schools and addressing new policy initiatives, such as reduced class size. The key challenge for the school planning and building programme will be to address the emerging needs in the rapidly developing areas while doing so in a changing social and cultural environment.

Actors

Role of the central government

As noted earlier, the Department of Education and Science sets the general regulations for the recognition of schools, controls the curriculum and the public examination system, establishes rules and regulations for the management, resourcing and staffing of schools, controls the quality of school infrastructure, sets precise technical specifications regarding the design and build of new schools, and negotiates teachers' salary scales. The Department of Education and Science also exercises detailed budgetary control functions. The Minister of Education and Science approves recognition of a school for the purpose of the *Education Act 1998*. The Minister grants recognition where it has been demonstrated that there is sufficient demand and where no suitable alternative provision exists within reasonable distance. Once recognition is granted, that school is eligible to receive resources and funding from the government, provided it meets the terms and conditions set out in the *Education Act 1998*.

The central government, through the Department of Education and Science, provides most of the infrastructure funding for schools at all three education levels. Since 2000, overall funding projections are provided through the NDPs, which specify the aggregate

funding, with notional annual allocations over a multi-year period. Annual allocations are set out in the budget. Incremental funding beyond what is specified in the NDP may also be provided through the budget. In 2004, five-year multi-annual capital investment envelopes, with roll-over provisions, for public investment were introduced.

The Planning and Building Unit of the Department of Education and Science is responsible for the planning and accommodation delivery for the three education sectors. This includes funding for new schools, renovations/additions to existing schools and for maintenance costs. The Unit is divided into a number of sections at present, and the Department is currently reorganising the Unit to place particular focus on advance planning for rapidly developing areas:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| School Planning Division: | Assesses and plans projects for the inclusion in the school building program. Uses census data and school population projections; contacts/engagements with local planning authorities and individual schools. Prepares detailed draft Area Development Plans for review and consideration by the Commission on School Accommodation. |
| School Building Section: | Manages the delivery of the school building program. Primary function is to approve projects based on greatest need, consistent with applicable National Development Plan. |
| Professional and Technical Unit: | Provides professional and technical advice to individual schools to ensure project is managed as approved. This is done through circulars, seminars, workshops, and direct contact, where applicable. |
| Public Private Partnership Unit: | Assesses and manages delivery of PPP projects. This is in its early phases of development. There are currently five pilot projects, although incremental funding was provided in both 2005 and 2007 for an additional project. |
| Third Level Building/ Finance Unit: | Manages delivery of projects at the third level (universities, technical schools) and processes payments for all levels. |

The focus and scope of the Planning and Building Unit's work has changed dramatically over time. Traditionally, the Unit was involved in site acquisition, design and development and procurement through planning, construction, and post-contract administration, including equipment renewal programs, financial administration and audit. Following the *Pignatelli*⁴ and *Cromien*⁵ reports commissioned by the Department of Education and Science, internal procedures for decision making were streamlined and responsibility for construction oversight and post-contract administration (e.g. self-certification) for small-scale projects (typically ones under EUR 1 million) was devolved to the individual schools, with general oversight by the Planning and Building Unit. While part of the reason for this streamlining and devolution was due to the effective limit on public sector hiring and pressures on the capacity of the central Department, it was also in recognition of reducing bureaucracy at the central level and giving greater autonomy to schools for smaller scale projects. The Unit could not manage its traditional functions efficiently within its approved resource levels. To further reduce costs and streamline operations, the Unit introduced generic school building designs, bundling of contracts, build and design contracts and has become involved in public and private partnerships.

Other State government bodies also assist the Department and/or have direct responsibilities for school planning and building in their respective jurisdictions. The Commission for School Accommodation provides policy advice on the provision of school accommodation services at the first and second levels. Initially, the Commission's reports dealt with criteria and regulations on the recognition of new schools. Since 2004, the Commission has undertaken detailed consultations on draft Area Development Plans that are produced by the Planning and Building Unit on proposed new schools, renovations or

additions to existing schools, closures and amalgamations. Its recommendations are submitted to the Minister for consideration.

In most countries, like Ireland, it is the central/state/provincial government (depending on who has control over education) that sets education policy and provides most of the funding. However, the operation and management of schools in Ireland (along with New Zealand and Portugal) is different from most countries. At the first and second school levels (excluding vocational schools and community colleges), it is the individual school Boards of Management that are responsible. At the vocational school and community college levels, this responsibility rests with the VECs. At the university and college level, in-house expertise has been developed to manage responsibilities such as building projects.

There are 33 (28 county and five city) VECs which generally follow county boundaries. The VECs are headed by a Chief Executive Officer who is responsible for the administration of the vocational schools in that area. This includes responsibility for the planning and building of new schools, renovations and extensions to existing schools, pending approval of funding by the Minister of Education and Science. The professional management structure of each VEC, coupled with responsibility for several schools in its area, allows them to build up experience and expertise in school planning that can be reused as new projects come up. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has statutory responsibility for furthering the development of higher education and assisting in the co-ordination of central government investment in higher education.

Role of private sector/school boards

As noted earlier however, most first and second level schools are privately operated, and the principal of the school is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school. He/she answers to a Patron, who can be either an individual or a group, representing the owners of the school. The patron may manage the school personally or may appoint a person or group, such as a Board of Management to act as a manager. Most primary and secondary schools are run by either the Catholic Church or the Church of Ireland and the bishops or religious orders are the patrons of schools within the churches' diocese. In multi-denominational schools, the patron is usually the board of trustees of a limited company, such as Educate Together. The dominance of the religious orders has been decreasing over time, which is a result of an ageing clergy, a reduction in the numbers of new vocations to religious life and changing demographics.

At the first and second school levels, the school Patron is responsible for initiating the necessary steps for having a school recognised by the Minister of Education and Science.

Table CS4.3. Patrons of primary and secondary schools

| | 1995 | | 2006 | |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | First level | Second level | First level | Second level |
| Catholic Church | 2 966 | 424 | 3 032 | 366 |
| Church of Ireland | 189 | 25 | 183 | 25 |
| Multi-denominational | 18 | 317 | 40 | 338 |
| Other | 20 | 2 | 25 | 2 |
| Total | 3 193 | 768 | 3 280 | 731 |

Source: Department of Education and Science.

Once recognised, the Patron is responsible for establishing a Board of Management for the school, appointing the elected representatives to that Board and nominating the Chairperson of the Board. One of the members of the Board is typically the school principal and most Boards include a parents' representative and a representative for the teaching staff. Separate boards are set up for each school. The Board, which generally meets after school hours as required (members participate on a voluntary unpaid basis) is responsible for the day-to-day governance of the school, subject to the regulations set out by the Department of Education and Science. The Board engages professional teams in consultation with the principal and school community, to formulate proposals for renovations or improvements to existing schools, and submits these proposals to the School Planning Division for consideration. Once approval is received, it is the responsibility of the schools to engage with locally retained private sector contractors to deliver the project as per the agreed terms of the contract, and to manage the project within the funding provided. Cost overruns must be covered by the individual school.

As Board members are voluntary and may have little or no expertise or capacity to assist in regular liaison with the contractors, this function is usually delegated or assumed by the school principal. This puts additional pressure on the school principal, who apart from performing his/her normal duties (teacher, school administrator, etc.), must also engage at the local level with the consultants (project managers, architects, engineers, etc.) on an ongoing basis regarding the renovation/expansion of the school. Principals may need to give clarification on requirements or preferences regarding school and/or community facilities, or liaise on access to the building and site outside of usual office hours, or on arrangements regarding water/electricity if these need to be shut-down for safety reasons during school hours. Those Boards that do include professionals/experts in planning and construction, or who can call on parents of children in the school with such expertise, are fortunate, especially if these members get actively involved in the project.

The Irish school system is fragmented and small-scale: over 50% of schools in Ireland have 4 or fewer teachers, and each individual voluntary board typically manages a single school. This is the result of the system's historical evolution and is in keeping with the preferences of many Irish citizens, but it results in a system that lacks efficiencies of scale.

Role of the local government

Until recently, local governments have not been directly involved in school planning. However, in the current environment of strong economic growth and rapid population increases, a number of local governments have come to realise the implications of developments in their area and have begun to take better account of reconfiguring existing school facilities, or providing for new ones, in their future planning. The central government has also recognised this and negotiations are ongoing at present between the Department of Education and Science, and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, to establish protocols that would encourage and facilitate a more active, integrative and transparent role by local governments in the development of strategic longer-term plans for schools. This includes the identification/provision of sites for schools in their respective areas.

In the approval of new housing developments, progressive local government authorities (notably Fingal County Council), are negotiating with the developers/builders for school sites, arguing that earlier identification and provision of such sites provides both tangible and intangible benefits in the promotion and sale of properties in their

development. In doing so, they are better placed than the Department of Education and Science in obtaining not only appropriate sites within the proposed community, but also more favourable land sale prices for the proposed sites, and other community service indemnities. The local government authorities are compensated by the Department of Education and Science. In return, the local government authorities are able to use any savings made from the negotiated land sale price and the market value for community service related facilities in the proposed schools.

County/city development boards (CDBs) have been established in each of the 34 county/city councils to provide an integrated approach to the delivery of State and local services. County Development Plans are prepared by the local authority once every five years. These plans include indicators of population growth and potential new housing developments, which are used by the School Planning Division to assess future school building requirements in the respective areas.

Responsibility for school planning and building in other countries

Few countries have devolved the responsibility for school infrastructure oversight to individual schools and their Boards of Management to the extent that Ireland has. New Zealand and Portugal also have one Board of Management (or Trustee) per school. In the case of New Zealand, management of individual schools is the responsibility of elected boards of trustees, much like in Ireland, even though the majority of schools are owned and funded by the central government. Long-term planning issues, however, are dealt with on a more systematic basis rather than on the foresight and management acumen of the individual board. In New Zealand, the board of trustees prepares and implements a Ten-Year Property Plan that identifies and prioritises maintenance and capital projects and looks after the day-to-day property requirements. The boards also engage property managers who are responsible for the management of applicable building projects. School principals are not directly involved in the oversight of extensions, etc. of their existing school.

In most other OECD countries, local government authorities play a much more active role in school planning and building because of their knowledge of local community needs. In general, first and second level schools are grouped together and managed either by the local government authority in that area or by elected schools officials, who, in turn, are supported by in-house professionals and technical personnel. In some jurisdictions such as Ontario, Canada, this is done along private (religious)/public lines. These local/school authorities are responsible for identifying current upgrades, closures/amalgamations and future accommodation requirements through long-term planning. They are also responsible for working with other stakeholders (*e.g.* parents, school principals, local governments, contractors, etc.) and for acquiring the expertise, either in-house or through contract, to oversee and manage capital projects.

In the case of school boards responsible for a number of schools in a particular area, they work closely with local governments in the proactive identification of future needs such as securing required land for new school facilities. They also interact with parent associations and other stakeholders to determine the most efficient use of school properties, to rationalise school facilities which may entail closures and amalgamations of existing schools. In other cases, for example, in the Netherlands, the administration and management of primary and secondary schools is delegated to the municipal or local

government authorities. They are responsible for the planning, construction, renovation, extension, and maintenance of all school buildings. They also have statutory authority to ensure maximum use of the school buildings.

Policy goals

The key objective for the school planning and building programme, as stated in the Department of Education and Science Annual Report 2006, is:

“We will plan for and provide suitable cost-effective accommodation to underpin the delivery of quality education.”

This objective supports the government’s policy measures outlined in the 2007 *Agreed Programme for Government, Towards 2016* (and previous Agreements) and in the *National Development Plan – 2007-2013*. As indicated, the current National Development Plan has earmarked nearly EUR 5 billion for investment in first and second level school infrastructure, with an additional EUR 1.4 billion earmarked for third level infrastructure. Of this amount, over EUR 1 billion has been earmarked for public private partnerships (PPPs). The programme will aim to:

- provide new schools in rapidly developing areas;
- provide appropriate facilities to teach all subjects within the revised Primary Curriculum;
- provide accommodation for additional teachers made available by improvements in special education provision, language support and reduced class sizes;
- provide for the introduction of revised subjects at post-secondary level such as Technology and Art, which have specialist IT and equipment requirements; and
- provide improved facilities for the practical work required by the third level science syllabus and support the completion and assessment of practical coursework in the Leaving Certificate examination.

The main focus will be on the provision of additional school places in rapidly developing areas. The Department’s strategies to deliver this will include:

- pro-active planning by close and regular engagement with local authorities;
- the implementation of a partnership approach with local authorities to deliver community facilities in tandem with new schools;
- the active participation, where possible, of school management authorities;
- early involvement in education provision in strategic development zones;
- publication and implementation of area development plans; and
- use of “Generic Repeat Designs” and “Design and Build” contracts for new primary and post-primary schools and an openness to the delivery of schools by innovative methods intended to reduce waiting times for permanent school accommodation.

Issues

The school planning and building programme has undergone significant changes over the past few years, with many of the responsibilities for planning and building of small scale projects devolved to the individual Boards of Management. This was done in an environment of declining school enrolment, especially at the first level, and in response to constrained administrative resources. Many aspects of the current system have only

recently been put in place and it is too early to assess the full impact of many of these changes. Area Development Plans have been conducted for seven of the 34 areas and official assessments of the pilot PPPs by the Department of Education and Science have not yet been completed.

However, with the increase in population, the environment is changing again. At the first level, it is projected that an additional 100 000 spaces will be required over the next few years. Although some of these additional spaces will be accommodated within existing schools, new school facilities will be required in the more rapidly developing or more densely populated areas many of which are on the periphery of the large urban centres. Increased net migration has also resulted in much more cultural diversity than in the past, leading to new demands on the education system. The following sections identify a number of issues that will need to be addressed to successfully meet the new challenges.

Speed and responsiveness: inability to anticipate investments

As noted, the current system of administering the school planning and building programme was put in place at a time of an overall decline in school enrolment and tight fiscal control on departmental administrative budgets. However, the current environment is much different from that of the 1990s. The population has increased significantly resulting in new communities, in new locations, and increased cultural diversity. New government policies have been aimed at reducing class size and addressing special educational needs. Because local authorities do not have statutory responsibility for this area the school planning and building system has not been able to respond adequately to this pressure. The current National Development Plan has provided incremental funding for new school facilities to 2013. Although funding has been earmarked, the identification of all the potential requirements that are likely to arise over this period has not. The Department of Education and Science has produced a limited number of Area Development Plans, which have identified requirements for expanded and/or new facilities and the closure of others. However, the current system is slow in reacting to the new pressures and in the identification of new investments.

Additional budget flexibility would enable the Department of Education and Science to be more responsive. Currently, strict expenditure regulations included in the Multi-Annual Framework set out by the Department of Finance limit the ability of the Planning and Building Unit to ensure that the annual spending allocations set out in the budget can be achieved. In-year changes to the spending profile are difficult to accommodate due to the lack of flexibility, which would provide the authority for incremental in-year spending. Although the Department of Finance has recently permitted the carry-over of 10% of approved capital expenditures in the current fiscal year to future years, the amount of funding currently available through the NDP requires more flexibility to allow the Planning and Building Unit to respond to unforeseen emerging developments. The approval process for funding for new projects is quite slow as it requires detailed consultation with a range of organisations and careful checking of the plans before they are approved. In recent years, increased pressures due to demographic changes mean that the approved funding set out in the budget is insufficient to cater for all emerging needs, especially in urban areas of rapid population growth. This has led in the past year to curtailment of some activities, as funds are prioritised towards ensuring that sufficient school places are available to meet demand. As more Area Development Plans are prepared and updated,

future planning within approved reference levels may be facilitated as there will be an inventory of new projects for funding for a five-year time framework.

Agility: current patronage model not up to new challenges

As noted earlier, the majority of primary and secondary schools are run by either the Catholic Church or one of the other faith denominations, and the bishops or other faith leaders are the patrons of schools. They are responsible for the identification of new schools and remediation/expansion of existing schools in their diocese. In the environment of declining school enrolment, the identification of new schools was not a major issue. Their focus, instead, was largely on the maintenance and possible extensions of existing facilities. However, the increase in population, combined with a decline in the number of vocations to the religious orders has stretched the resources available to the churches to identify and operate new schools while effectively managing their existing schools. In addition, falling church attendance has led to a reluctance on the part of main churches or religious orders to step up and become patrons for schools in areas where it is unclear what the likely religious persuasion of the majority will be. Increasingly, given the growing ethnic diversity in Ireland, parents (both Irish and new immigrants) are choosing to opt for non-denominational or multi-denominational schools, such as Educate Together, where schools are ‘parent-initiated’ and the patron is a company limited by guarantee.

The increase in demand for new school facilities has left some areas without a school patron and a Board of Management to manage the building and operation of new schools. In these cases, the responsibility falls back to the Department of Education and Science.

Capacity: uneven management capacity within the Public Service

The result of the devolution of school planning and building responsibilities is that school authorities, usually the school principal, now have additional pressures regarding liaison with the on-site project manager or consultants, during school refurbishments. Each project must have a “Project Supervisor Design Process” person and it is the responsibility of the voluntary Board of Management to appoint this person and appoint a design team of 4 professionals – architect, surveyor, building engineer and civil/structural engineer. This requires that school principals (over and above his/her responsibilities for school administration and teaching) and/or Boards of Management to have a minimum understanding of procurement and contracting procedures in order to manage such appointments. While Boards usually have a Buildings sub-committee, for small schools (over 50% of schools in Ireland have 4 or fewer teachers) many of these are small schools, who are now responsible for hiring appropriate consultants and overseeing the project. Some Boards need to develop new skill sets to successfully manage projects under the terms of agreement, including those under PPPs.

This requirement for Boards of Management or principals to become more actively involved in the provision of new school facilities may have been in reaction to a rather homogenous demographic structure, stable population base and person-year limits at the central government level. The typical career path of most principals is to stay in the same school where they were originally appointed. This means that after successfully acquiring the skills to interact in a meaningful way with the technical consultants responsible for delivering the school building project, most school principals will not have the opportunity

to use these skills again in their career. In addition, the requirement to devote a considerable amount of time to advancing the project and ensuring that the interests of the school community are not overlooked implies that his/her “core” functions – as administrator and teacher⁶ – may be compromised, especially in the smaller schools. Furthermore, the fragmentation of the system makes it too difficult to build up shared in-house expertise in these areas, as has been the case with some VECs.

While the Department of Education and Science authorises and pays the school authorities to engage external technical consultants to design the buildings and manage the construction process on site, it has not provided them with additional administrative resources to carry out their increased responsibilities. The Ministry of Education in New Zealand, in comparison, is heavily involved in the oversight of both existing properties and new construction/renovations through the regional offices.

The Department has introduced a number of initiatives to streamline the process and to provide technical assistance through information circulars and seminars. However, in the case of first level and most second level schools, there is no intermediate agency between the Department of Education and Science and the individual schools. This is unlike the case for the VEC sector where the larger Vocational Education Committees, such as County Dublin VEC, have built up in-house expertise to manage the planning and building of new facilities, as well as the remediation/expansion of existing ones in their respective areas. It is also unlike most other countries, which have either local governments or school boards responsible for a number of schools rather than just one, acting as the intermediate agency and responsible for all aspects of school building planning and facilities. The projected increases in school enrolment, as well as providing additional spaces to meet government policy initiatives with respect to the revised Primary Curriculum, reduced class size, and special needs, will place additional demands and stress on the individual Boards of Management and their principals. The current model may no longer be applicable to meet these increased requirements in a co-ordinated, cost-effective and consistent manner.

Coherence: uneven local government authority involvement

The involvement of local government authorities across the country in the identification and planning of new school accommodation is varied. In some areas, local government authorities are very active, and these tend to be in areas of population growth and new housing developments. These authorities see the value of a co-ordinated approach to school buildings and community-related services. They also are in a position to negotiate more favourable land site agreements with prospective builders for school properties.

However, this is not the case throughout the country. In areas where new housing construction is on a considerably smaller scale, the role of the local government authorities in planning new schools and renovations/additions to existing schools is significantly reduced. In areas of less robust economic and demographic growth, for example, local government authorities, while involved in consultation with the Department of Education and Science regarding site acquisition, are not significantly involved in the planning of new school projects. Only if there is a need for expanded community facilities do local government authorities get actively involved. In the case of existing schools, individual Boards of Management or school principals more normally initiate contact with local government authorities about the possible inclusion of space for community-related

facilities. This level of autonomy makes sense, given that local schools will have more knowledge and awareness of community and local needs, and as such are better placed to hold discussions on a bilateral basis with local authorities.

In a recent policy document, the government indicated that local authorities needed to become more involved in school planning. It made a number of proposals including that no rezoning of land for residential development take place without prior commitment of an appropriate proportion of land for schools. A *Developing Areas Unit* has been established within the Department of Education and Science to liaise with local authorities, identify where new schools are needed and ensure that they are delivered in the fastest possible timeframe. In addition, as indicated, discussions are underway with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to develop agreed protocols and procedures which local authorities would need to follow to ensure proper planning for new schools and extensions of existing schools. And finally, it proposed to promote and support the use of school facilities by community groups and other appropriate services and to design new schools in order to facilitate multi-use of their facilities. These proposals would significantly improve planning at the local level and ensure that local authorities and the community are aware of their planning decisions on school accommodation.

Conclusion

The environment in which the planning and building process operates has changed considerably since the reforms to the system were introduced in the late 1990s. Previously, the overriding objective was to address the fiscal imbalance. However, renewed and unparalleled economic growth, accompanied by both an increase in population and cultural diversity has placed renewed pressure on the school planning and building program. In response, the government has undertaken a number of Area Development Plans to identify needs, consult with affected stakeholders and implement the resulting recommendations with respect to school accommodation. It has indicated that it will seek more local involvement, especially by local governments, in the identification of emerging needs. It has introduced public private partnerships to reduce costs and improve efficiency.

However, at the primary and secondary school level, the basic structure of individual school patrons responsible for the identification and oversight of school accommodation issues remains basically unchanged. Their capacity to effectively manage the new challenges has been limited by the declining role of the religious orders. A new patronage model is required to meet the challenges of an increasing school population and the changing preferences of a more diverse multi-denominational population. Local governments need to be more actively involved in the planning and identification of new and expanded school facilities as part of their planning and approving of new residential projects. This is required not only to ensure school facilities are in place to meet the increased demand, but also to ensure that such projects are an integral part of community life. The Department of Education and Science also needs to be more pro-active in longer-term planning, working with local authorities and other government departments to identify and provide additional spaces. Their traditional role of providing funding and technical assistance to individual Boards of Management needs to be expanded, for ultimately, it will be the government that will be held accountable for ensuring that there are adequate spaces to meet the increasing demands.

When considering new or changed structures for education it is important not to view school planning and building needs in isolation. Ireland has a highly centralised education system, with very limited intermediate structures between the Department of Education and Science, and the significant majority of schools in the system. While such structures have undoubted advantages and are administratively cost effective, issues arise as to the most appropriate structural shape of the system into the future. Ireland retains a large number of very small primary schools which are regionally dispersed and each one of these requires investment at the level of Principal and Board of Management.

In order to meet these challenges, the Department of Education and Science must work with a network of partners both inside and outside of the Public Service. While its policy responsibilities remain fairly centralised, implementation is a shared responsibility. Sharing expertise through networks and pooling some implementation responsibilities can help to meet some capacity issues and gain benefits of scale without necessarily losing the small and local nature of the school system.

Ireland had a debate in relation to the regional structures in education in the 1990s and ultimately decided against these. Some of the larger Vocational Educational Committees however, have a capacity to react to change and to promote and

Box CS4.1. Key recommendations

Strengthen workforce planning: While the Planning and Building Unit of the Department of Education should continue to provide support to schools, they need to also ensure that at the local level Principals and Boards of Management have the necessary management and oversight skills to ensure they liaise effectively with project managers and consultants they have engaged to oversee projects. Functional reviews would also help devise a long-term strategy to help determine whether these services should be delivered by government employees or by government-funded private firms.

Devolve authority to local government: A number of innovative approaches exist at the local authority level such as land banking and rezoning. The government should explore how it can further promote such good practices by communicating successful experiences. It should also make available template agreements, both between the Department of Education and local authorities for the procurement of school sites, and between local authorities and private developers

Create framework for developing and sharing skills: Ireland should decide what reforms can best encourage the formal and informal development and sharing of school planning and building capacity, and develop a plan with consultation from stakeholders. Strategies can range in level of ambition, but will require that stakeholders understand why the reforms are needed. Some possible approaches: 1) reforming the school board structure in order to amalgamate schools and/or school districts in order to better build up and share competencies; 2) promoting an internal service market where Vocational Education Committees could propose school planning services to school boards; 3) encouraging greater mobility of school principals with school planning experience; or 4) encouraging informal networks and conferences for the exchange of good practices.

Improve linkages with local authorities: The proposed Developing Areas Unit within the Department of Education and Science should not restrict its work to developing areas, but should be applied to all areas in the country in order to help meet changing demographic needs.

oversee building projects in their areas of responsibility. The VEC structure which has been a feature of Irish education since the 1930s still plays a limited role in relation to wider education provision, albeit this is expanding somewhat with the evolution of a new patronage model for primary schools. They have built up expertise to manage school facilities and identify emerging needs within their geographical areas of responsibility. Such an intermediate agency may now be required for the first and second levels of education as well, as is the case in most OECD countries. Such an agency could be the local governments or a new structure encompassing a number of schools in a geographical area. It would still be accountable to the citizens in that area. However, it would assume responsibilities for the planning and building of new schools in that area as well as the maintenance and operation of existing schools. This would allow the individual schools to focus on their core responsibilities in providing high quality education to their students.

While the area of school planning and building provides an insight into some of the challenges faced by the education system, the debate in relation to changed structures and responsibilities is clearly a wider one and ultimately best decided by reference to the wider education challenges and landscape.

Notes

1. This is a statutory body whose functions include funding universities and other designated third level institutions, developing third level education that meet the needs of the community, and offering advice on all matters relating to third level education. The various roles and responsibilities are set out in the *Universities Act, 1997* and the *Education Act, 1998*. For the purposes of this case study, the *Education Act* defines the roles, responsibilities and functions of the Boards of Management and the State for recognising the funding of schools. The *Universities Act* outlines the conditions for the incorporation of universities, and the governance for those in receipt of state funding.
2. OECD (2007d).
3. Information from Eurostat for the period 1999 to 2006, indicates that in 2006, the rate of Irish persons aged 20-24 years attaining at least the equivalent of a Leaving Certificate (the exam taken on leaving second level school in Ireland) was 85.7.
4. July 1999 report on *Prioritisation of School Building Projects* recommended allocating projects into bands for improved decision making.
5. October 2000 report on the structures and procedures of the Department of Education and Science recommended devolution of certain aspects of school planning and building.
6. Many School Principals are “teaching” Principals, retaining a set number of teaching hours per week.



From:
OECD Public Management Reviews: Ireland 2008
Towards an Integrated Public Service

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264043268-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2008), "Case Study 4: School Planning in the Education Sector", in *OECD Public Management Reviews: Ireland 2008: Towards an Integrated Public Service*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264043268-13-en>

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