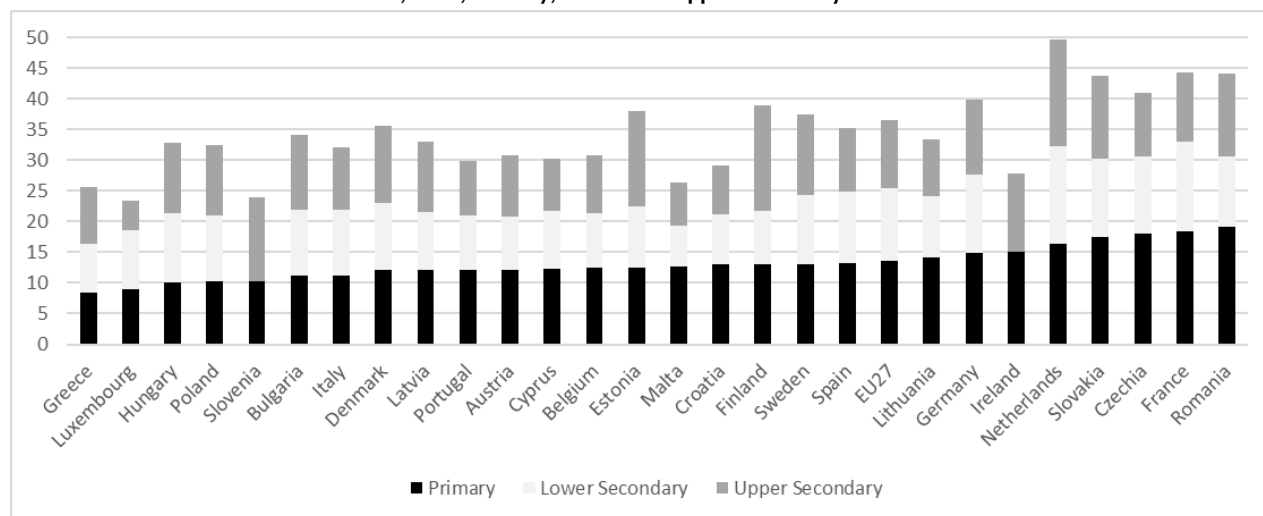


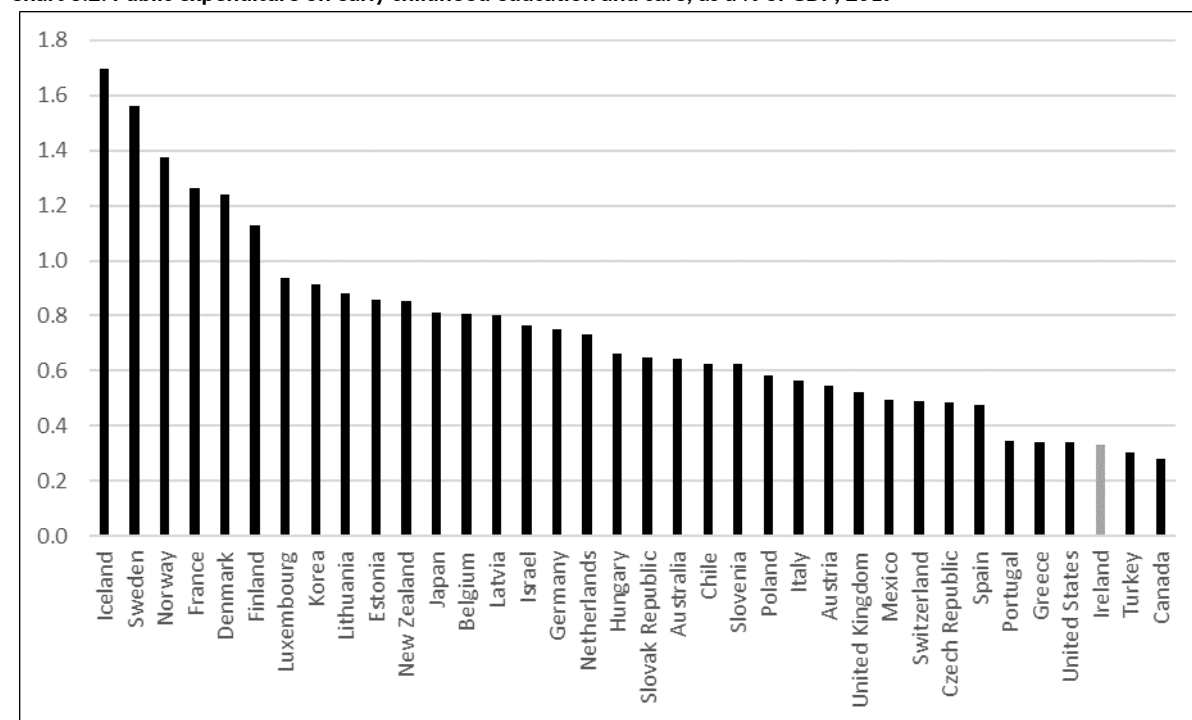
Education and Skills

Chart 3.1: Ratio of students to teachers, 2020, Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary



Source: CSO, Measuring Ireland's Progress 2021, Table 4.3: By country: Ratio of students to teachers, 2020.

Chart 3.2: Public expenditure on early childhood education and care, as a % of GDP, 2019



Source: OECD (2023), Social Justice Ireland Socio-economic Review: a 2023 guide to a fairer Irish society.

Education and Skills

Access to appropriate education and skills development from early years to adulthood is one of the key public services that enables participation in society, public life and the labour market.

Educational Disadvantage

The gap between the performance of students in disadvantaged areas and their peers is evident in results on education and cognitive development. The Growing up in Ireland survey found significant differences in reading test scores by socio-economic background and that this socio-economic gap in reading test scores widened in primary school, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds who were early high performers being outperformed by children from more advantaged backgrounds by 9 years of age.¹

Previous Action Plans for Education focused on the need to address the disparity between DEIS bands by increasing literacy and numeracy levels in DEIS Band 1 schools with a target improvement rate of between 27 and 42 per cent by 2020. The final evaluation of the Action Plan for Education is not available, but this target did not demonstrate sufficient ambition to really effect change. A Consultation is currently underway on a new literacy and numeracy strategy for young people. It is important that ambitious targets, with a particular focus on DEIS schools are included.

Ireland currently has a pupil teacher ratio at primary level of 15.0 (the EU average is 13.6) (Chart 3.1) and an average class size of 25 (the EU average is 20). The policy focus must be on keeping average class sizes low, reducing the

pupil teacher ratio further and ensuring all DEIS Band 1 and 2 schools have sufficient resources to implement strategies to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for pupils.

Early Childhood Care

One of the key challenges identified towards the provision of universal early childcare in Ireland is the market driven approach to provision at present. As shown in Chart 3.2, public expenditure on early childcare in Ireland compared to other OECD countries was very low. High staff turnover and poor pay and conditions are also a feature of the sector. A review of Early Years Education published by the Department of Education and Skills² found that while almost all services provide warm and welcoming environments and strong evidence of positive relations was found between the staff, the children and their families, there remained many challenges including the need to improve working conditions for staff in the sector.

Policy Priorities

- Commit to reducing class sizes and pupil teacher ratios at primary and post primary level by 1 point per annum to 2030.
- Make the improvement of educational outcomes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and disadvantaged communities a policy priority.
- Commit to increasing investment in Early Childhood Care and Education by 0.1 per cent of GNI* annually, starting in Budget 2024.

¹ Government of Ireland (2021) Growing up in Ireland: The lives of nine years olds of Cohort '08. Report 10

² Department of Education and Skills (2018) Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025. Dublin: Stationery Office.