Government is tackling inequality in education

The Government has done much to reduce inequality in education, argues Willie O’Dea in response to a recent article by Róisín Shortall.

LIKE all those engaged in the education sector, I understand the barriers and prejudices we face, and the social education present across our education system. I also think that the recent crunch voiced by Róisín Shortall in the Irish Times on 16 August is not the first and is not the last. Like many of us, I have read the report of the Inspector of Schools and know the teachers and pupils she met. The Inspector’s report is, however, I do not have the luxury of offering any explanations about pupil disadvantages only. The Inspector’s report is focused to that end.

Our aim is clear: to provide education and training of the highest quality, and, through the creation of a common educational experience, regardless of their background, to give every young person the opportunity to succeed in education. We are committed to this principle.

The Labour Party’s commitment to the principle of equality of opportunity has been a cornerstone of its education and training policy. In particular, the principle of equality of opportunity is enshrined in the Report of the Inspector of Schools, which is the basis for this policy.

In truth, however, social inclusion has become more than an abstract catch-all or a political slogan. Equality of opportunity, and the need for social inclusion from the beginning, is enshrined in the Report of the Inspector of Schools.

In the education sector, no government has done so much to promote the agenda of social inclusion, to a comprehensive approach to tackling disadvantages. In the 1995 Budget, the Government allocated some £5 million specifically to tackling educational disadvantage, as part of its budgetary measures. The Government also established the first major increase in resources for the Department of Education.

One of the first decisions we took in the education sector was to introduce the junior cycle, which will be implemented in 1999. In addition, we have also established a new curriculum for schools and have introduced new standards and certification schemes.

We have also introduced new standards for schools and have introduced new standards and certification schemes. These changes will provide a new and modern framework for education in Ireland.

In summary, I believe that the Government has made significant progress in reducing inequality in education. While there is still much to do, we have made important steps towards achieving our goal.

Mr Willie O’Dea, debate about importance of social inclusion in education and the demand for a more diverse approach to education, argues against party-political sniping

Mr O’Dea is a Member of State for Education and Labour. His contribution to the debate on educational disadvantage is timely. It is a debate we should all engage with, because it is not just about party-political sniping, but about the need to address the issue of educational disadvantage in our schools.

Labour’s only concrete input to the debate so far has been to extend the programme of a new textbook policy.

The reality of social exclusion and the cycle of poverty demands a more specific, policy-based approach.

Willie O’Dea is a Member of State for Education and a Fianna Fail TD for Naas, Kildare.

Rite and Reason