



Variation No.6

Who are you:	Prescribed Body
Name:	Department of Education and Youth
Reference:	VAR6-160126
Submission Made	January 16, 2026

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Planning Section,
Wicklow County Council,
Station Road,
Wicklow Town

16th January 2026

Proposed Variation No. 6 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028

Dear Sir/Madam

I refer to the above. The Department of Education and Youth wish to make the following submission to proposed Variation 6 of the Wicklow CDP 2022- 2028. The department has considered the above document and notes that the proposed variation will revise the Wicklow Core Strategy and associated housing targets and a number of related housing objectives set out in the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 Written Statement.

In the context of future population trends and their potential impact on school place requirements, the department notes that this variation refers to the population growth identified for County Wicklow in the recent Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028. The department notes that the population scenario envisaged in Wicklow overall is the high NPF target of 164,000 by 2031. The department made its submissions to the CDP on the basis of the potential population growth within the county between 2022 and 2031. It is noted that the Census 2022 population for Wicklow County was 155,851, with a housing stock of 54,059. Housing completions in County Wicklow from Q2 2022 to Q3 2025, inclusive, was 4,950. This equates to a 9.2% increase in housing numbers over the 3.5 years. Allowing for the Census 2022 average of 2.84 persons per household in County Wicklow, the occupancy of these houses would be 14,058. Therefore, the population at the end of Q3 2025 is projected to be in the region of 170,000. This is in excess of the projected 2031 population target of 164,000.

This higher than projected population resulted in a higher demand for school places, which has had to be catered for in existing and new schools across the County.

In terms of future population growth in County Wicklow as proposed in this variation, the department notes that Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy in variation 6 is being amended to include a new housing target from 2025 to 2031 of 17,908 for the county. The department notes that the target in table 3.1 for the same period is 14,476 but understands that the 17,908 target is based on the new housing target 2022-2031 as set out in Table 3.3 less the units already delivered from Q3 2022 to Q2 2025.



Allowing for the Census 2022 average of 2.84 persons per household in County Wicklow, these proposed 17,908 units could see a population increase of over 50,000 people within the listed settlements. When this figure is added to the current estimated population figure of circa 170,000, the projected population of County Wicklow could exceed 220,000 by the end of 2031.

The department further notes that the Table 3.1 Housing Targets for County Wicklow from Q1 2025 to Q4 2040 is 26,266 units. Therefore, the department has to be cognizant of the potential impact of future population growth beyond 2031.

Notwithstanding the fact that there is capacity for the development of c. 21,500 – 25,500 units under the provisions of the current County Development Plan and existing local plans as of Q3 2025, the above population figures, for the period 2025 to 2031 & 2031 to 2040, would see the demand for school places increase substantially and could place significant pressure on existing schools to cater for the extra school place requirement.

In terms of future school place provision, the department notes the following settlements identified in the Core Strategy Table of the Variation and would like to make the following observations on them. The department's preference would be to expand existing facilities (if possible) should there be a requirement for additional school places resulting from planned population increases. Therefore, the department requests the Planning Authority to examine the potential of protecting a land buffer around each school to enable them expand further if required.

Bray

There are 20 schools (nine primary, eight post-primary (two of which are fee paying) and three special education schools) located in the Bray area.

The department notes that as per Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy there is a target of an additional 5,526 residential dwellings by 2031. If this target is achieved, it would see a potential future requirement for at least one additional primary school in Bray and the possibility of another subject to the projected population materialising, the age profile of that future population and other factors which influence school accommodation needs. Allowing for further housing development identified beyond 2031, a potential requirement for this second additional primary school becomes a probability. This is something that will need further consideration at some future time

In the context of post primary provision, the projected growth figures could see a significant increase in post primary school place demand, some of this demand could be accommodated with the current capital projects and possible expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

Wicklow - Rathnew

There are 10 schools (six primary and four post-primary schools) located within the Wicklow – Rathnew area.



The department notes that as per Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy there is a target of an additional 3,170 residential dwellings by 2031. This is a sizeable increase of units on what was identified for the 2025 Wicklow-Rathnew LAP. In its submission to that plan, the department did not seek a reservation for a school site. However, if the targets identified in this variation are achieved, it would see a potential future requirement for at least one additional primary school in Wicklow-Rathnew, subject to the projected population materialising, the age profile of that future population and other factors which influence school accommodation needs. Allowing for further housing development identified beyond 2031, a potential requirement for a second additional primary school will also need to be considered at some stage.

In the context of post primary provision, the projected growth figures could see a potential projected increase in school place requirements which could be met by the current capital projects and possible expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

Arklow

There are 15 schools (five primary and four post-primary schools) located in Arklow.

The department notes that as per Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy there is a target of an additional 3,793 residential dwellings by 2031. This is a sizeable increase of units on the target identified for the draft Arklow Local Planning Framework 2025 for Variation 5 of the current Wicklow CDP. In its submission to that plan, the department did not seek a reservation for a school site but it did refer to section B:6.1 Education in the Framework Plan. In that section, it states "*It is considered that towards the end of the lifetime of the LPF the existing primary schools in Arklow may start to reach saturation if the 2031 population target is achieved. This would indicate that there will be a need for schools to either expand or a fifth primary school to be planned for and built*". This statement clearly recognizes the potential need for a future school based on a housing target significantly less than the target in this variation. Therefore, if the targets identified in this variation are achieved, it would see a potential future requirement for at least one additional primary school in Arklow, subject to the projected population materialising, the age profile of that future population and other factors which influence school accommodation needs. Allowing for further housing development identified beyond 2031, a potential requirement for a second additional primary school will also need to be considered at some stage.

In the context of post primary provision, the projected growth figures could see a potential projected increase in school place requirements Section B:6.1 Education of the Framework Plan states "*If growth in the settlement exceeds the 2031 target there will be a need to plan for a fifth post primary school in the settlement. In order to ensure that such a school can be planned for in the medium to long term, this LPF shall ensure that there is appropriate zoned land to accommodate at least 1 new post primary school*". The targets in this variation will further increase the need for future post-primary school place provision.



The department would like to re-iterate its acknowledgement of the list of existing school sites and the proposed “community & education” zoned sites as identified in Table B:6.1. of the Local Planning Framework 2025.

Greystones - Delgany

There are 11 schools (eight primary and three post-primary schools) located within the Greystones - Delgany area.

The department notes that as per Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy there is a target of an additional 1,717 residential dwellings by 2031. In respect of primary provision, the projected growth figures could see an increase in primary school place demand which could be met by expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

The projected growth figures could see an increase in post-primary school place demand which could be met by the current capital projects and possible expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

Blessington

There are 6 schools (five primary and one post-primary school) located in Blessington.

The department notes that as per Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy there is a target of an additional 806 residential dwellings by 2031.

In respect of primary provision, the projected growth figures could see an increase in primary school place demand which could be met by expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

The projected growth figures could see an increase in post-primary school place demand which could be met by the current capital project and possible expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

Baltinglass

There are 3 schools (two primary and one post-primary school) located in Baltinglass.

The department notes that as per Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy there is a target of an additional 170 residential dwellings by 2031.

In respect of primary provision, the projected growth figures could see an increase in primary school place demand which could be met by expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

The projected growth figures could see an increase in post-primary school place demand but it is currently expected that this extra requirement could be met by expansion of the existing facilities, if required.



Enniskerry

There are two primary schools located in Enniskerry.

The department notes that as per Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy there is a target of an additional 418 residential dwellings by 2031.

In respect of primary provision, the projected growth figures could see an increase in primary school place demand which could be met by expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

Kilcoole

There are 2 schools (one primary and one post-primary school) located in Kilcoole.

The department notes that as per Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy there is a target of an additional 878 residential dwellings by 2031. This is a sizeable increase of units on the target identified for the draft Greystones, Delgany and Kilcoole Local Planning Framework for Variation 4 of the current Wicklow CDP. In its submission to that variation, the department did not seek a reservation for a school site. However, if the targets identified in this variation are achieved, the possibility of a potential future requirement for a primary school will need to be considered.

The projected targets could see an increase in post-primary school place demand which could be met by the current capital project and possible expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

Newtownmountkennedy

There are two primary schools located in Newtownmountkennedy.

The department notes that as per Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy there is a target of an additional 545 residential dwellings by 2031.

In respect of primary provision, the projected growth figures could see an increase in primary school place demand which could be met by expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

Rathdrum

There are 4 schools (three primary and one post-primary school) located in Rathdrum.

The department notes that as per Table 3.5 Wicklow Core Strategy there is a target of an additional 190 residential dwellings by 2031.

In respect of primary provision, the projected growth figures could see an increase in primary school place demand which could be met by expansion of the existing facilities, if required.



The projected growth figures could see an increase in post-primary school place demand which could be met by the current capital project and possible expansion of the existing facilities, if required.

In terms of the identification of future school place requirements that necessitates the need for the reservation and acquisitions of sites for future new schools or the requirement of new sites to facilitate the relocation of existing schools, the department would like to highlight the following points.

It is generally considered that schools are enabling infrastructure for housing and as such, schools should be positioned in the heart of new and expanding sustainable communities, allowing for the maximum benefit to the community inside and outside school hours. Further to this, other community facilities and amenities should also be positioned close to school facilities to allow for all community facilities be complimentary to each other for the benefit of the whole community. It is the department's request that the site identified fits the criteria above and would be grateful if the Council could confirm if this is the case.

Further to this, all enabling infrastructure required to develop and operate school facilities should be provided in advance of the need for such schools. This infrastructure includes road, electricity, water infrastructure, sustainable transport links, active travel networks, road safety measures and safe routes to school facilities. It should be noted that it is not within the remit of the Department of Education and Youth to develop or fund this enabling infrastructure.

In relation to other aspects of the draft plan, the department notes that the targeted growth in housing and population can be accommodated within the county's existing settlement boundaries and on land that is already serviced, or is serviceable, by infrastructure. Accordingly, the increase in housing as a result of the NPF Housing Growth Requirements will not require the zoning of new land or the extension of settlement boundaries in the Wicklow County Development Plan.

The department also anticipates that additional Special Education Needs (SEN) provision at both Primary and Post Primary level will be required in the future throughout the country and this may result in schools requiring additional accommodation or space to meet this growing need. On a point of information, the Department of Education and Youth engages closely with the National Council for Special Education in relation to the forward planning of new special classes and additional special school places. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a statutory function to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs, in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE). This includes the establishment of special class and special school placements in various geographical areas where there is an identified need.

The department and the NCSE are working with schools and patrons to make increased provision for children with special education needs, both in special classes at



mainstream schools and in special schools. At post primary level, all schools have been advised to plan for an average of 4 special classes per school. At primary level, the focus is on ensuring appropriate provision at all medium to large primary schools (8 mainstream classes or more) in the first instance. Most special classes are established in existing accommodation and where there is a further requirement within that accommodation, additional capacity can be catered for through the provision of extension facilities.

In recent years, the department has seen an increase in SEN school place requirement. Since 2019, 11 new special schools have been established, with five more due to be established for the 2025/26 school year. The continuing need for additional provision across the country, including in County Wicklow, is kept under constant review. In this regard, the department will consult with the Council if and when additional special education needs accommodation or sites for future special schools are required within specific locations. In the context of this variation and being mindful of a substantial population growth that may arise from the various future planned housing developments within its environs, the department would welcome explicit support within the plan for the provision of school accommodation for children and young people with special educational needs.

In terms of assessing current and future capacity, the Department of Education and Youth has to be mindful of potential unforeseen circumstances such as the Ukrainian crisis, which have the ability to put undue pressure on school place provision and could necessitate reassessments of school place provision from time to time. The department will engage with the Council where the findings of an assessment require a review of existing or future school site provision within a specific location.

Finally, the department welcomes the continued engagement with the Council regarding the development of both new and existing schools, as appropriate, and emphasizes the critical importance of the ongoing work of the Council in ensuring sufficient land is zoned for this purpose. It would be both essential and beneficial for the department to have further engagement with the Council in relation to the potential and significant additional school provision that may be required arising from the adoption of this variation as it is proposed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mairead Garry', is placed over a horizontal line.

Mairead Garry

Statutory Plans

Forward Planning & Site Acquisition Section