

DEIS

(Delivering Equality Of Opportunity In Schools)

An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion



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AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

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Foreword

By any yardstick, we have an education system that serves us well and it has been a key driver of our social and economic development. We hold our education system in high regard, and rightly so.

And yet, we know that too many of our people do not reach their full potential in our education system and, as a result, cannot benefit from full participation in our society and economy. Making a real difference in addressing this situation is a key priority both for me, as Minister for Education and Science, and for the Government.

We know that many of the barriers to educational access, progression and attainment lie outside the education system. While we cannot expect our education system to address all the causes of disadvantage, we can and should expect the system to make special efforts to help everyone reach their full educational potential.

In developing this new action plan for educational inclusion, I have drawn on the experience of students, parents and family members, teachers and other education professionals and other partners active in this area. While additional investment is both an important and necessary element of the action plan, I consider the more integrated and focused approach it adopts, supported by a much increased emphasis on target-setting and measurement of progress and outcomes, to be equally as important to its success. Furthermore, research and evaluation will be essential tools underpinning our new plan.

We all know that educational disadvantage is complex and multi-faceted and that we need to design our response accordingly. And yet, despite this complexity, our objectives are clear. We want all our young people to derive maximum personal benefit from the education system. We want the needs of the learner and a culture of high expectations to be at the centre of all our actions. These actions must include a concentration on literacy and numeracy from an early stage; strong links between the home, school and community; strong links between schools working co-operatively; and added value from links between education and other services. And we want supports, and second-chance provision, for the minority of our young people who, for various reasons, leave education early without the knowledge and skills they need to support them in later life.

This action plan is about building on the success stories we have had in tackling educational disadvantage, and addressing shortcomings where we have been less successful. It is about doing what is right for our young people.

Ba chóir go mbeadh deis ag gach duine oideachas den scoth a fháil.

Mary Hanafin, T.D.
Minister for Education and Science



Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Introduction and Context

This action plan focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). Its frame of reference is based on the definition of “educational disadvantage” in the Education Act (1998) as:

“...the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools.”

The action plan is, therefore, one element of a continuum of interventions to address disadvantage, which include second-chance education and training and access measures for adults to support increased participation by under-represented groups in further and higher education. A further element of this continuum is the ongoing development of provision for pupils with special educational needs in light of the enactment of the Education for Persons with Special Needs Act (2004) and the establishment of the National Council for Special Education.

The action plan is grounded in the belief that:

- every child and young person deserves an equal chance to access, participate in and benefit from education
- each person should have the opportunity to reach her/his full educational potential for personal, social and economic reasons and
- education is a critical factor in promoting social inclusion and economic development.

The plan will both complement and support efforts at national and European level to bring about greater social cohesion and economic progress. The Lisbon Strategy, the Agreed Programme for Government, the social partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress*, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion are all catalysts for a new approach.

The Basis for Reform

Significant emphasis has been placed on addressing educational inclusion issues, particularly since the late 1980s. The approach adopted has focused primarily on:

- identifying schools serving disadvantaged communities and targeting additional supports to such schools under a range of measures

- providing additional supports for vulnerable groups, particularly Traveller students and students for whom English or Gaeilge is not their first language
- legislative measures, with particular reference to the enactment of:
 - the Education Act (1998), which provides for the establishment of an Educational Disadvantage Committee, with the remit of advising the Minister for Education and Science on policies and strategies to identify and correct educational disadvantage
 - the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), which established the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) as the key national body with responsibility for school attendance
- providing education, training and work experience for young early school leavers, allied with expansion of second-chance education and adult literacy programmes
- promoting parental involvement and forging closer ties between the school and the wider community
- enhancing quality through curricular reform, professional development and the establishment of a national framework of qualifications.

A description of the existing measures in this area is available on the social inclusion section of the Department's website at www.education.ie.

While both strengths and weaknesses can be identified in the present approach, considerable progress has been made in overall terms through the implementation of a wide range of measures to address educational disadvantage. However, rates of educational under-achievement and early school leaving remain much higher for pupils from disadvantaged communities than for other pupils. This situation is a primary motivating factor for the action now being taken.

At the request of the Minister for Education and Science, the Educational Disadvantage Committee undertook an examination in 2003 of the wide range of programmes in place to tackle educational disadvantage. On foot of this examination, the Committee made a submission to the Minister in December, 2003, entitled: "*A More Integrated and Effective Delivery of School-Based Educational Inclusion Measures*".

The Committee's submission stressed the need to improve methods of identification of schools and targeting of resources, with a greater emphasis on more flexible, planned and integrated responses at local level and enhanced supports for teachers and schools in planning, monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of educational inclusion measures. The submission took account of the recommendations in relation to a new strategy for educational inclusion that emerged from the first meeting, in November, 2002, of the wider Forum on Educational Disadvantage, which brought together all the main stakeholders.

The advice provided by the Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Educational Disadvantage Forum has been central to the development of this action plan.

The Action Plan – An Overview

The aim of this action plan is to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are prioritised and effectively addressed. Its core elements comprise:-

- *a standardised system for identifying, and regularly reviewing, levels of disadvantage*
- *a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which will bring together, and build upon, existing interventions for schools and school clusters/communities with a concentrated level of educational disadvantage. The differences between urban and rural disadvantage will be taken into account in targeting actions under the programme.*

A broad indication of the number of schools that will be included in the SSP is as follows:

Primary	Second-Level
600 schools comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300 urban/town • 300 rural 	150 schools

In addition, supports will continue to be provided for schools where the level of disadvantage is more dispersed.

The action plan will be implemented on a phased basis over five years and will involve an additional annual investment of some €40m on full implementation. It will also involve the creation of about 300 additional posts across the education system generally.

The following existing schemes and programmes will be integrated into the SSP on a phased basis over the five year implementation period:

- *Early Start*
- *Giving Children an Even Break* (incorporating the primary Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and *Breaking the Cycle*)
- the Support Teacher Project (primary level)
- aspects of the Early Literacy Initiative, including the Reading Recovery initiative and the Junior Certificate School Programme Literacy Strategy and Demonstration Library Project
- the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme
- the School Completion Programme (which is being funded under the National Development Plan with assistance from the European Social Fund)
- the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme for second-level schools and related projects in second-level schools supporting access to third-level.

The primary and second-level School Books Grant Schemes will continue to operate as before but will take account of the identification process being introduced by this action plan and targeted additional funding will be made available under the schemes to schools participating in the SSP.

Key Measures to be Implemented

The arrangements for the first phase of implementation, which runs to the end of the school year 2005/2006 and those envisaged for the second phase, which runs to the end of the school year 2006/2007, are described in section 10 of this document.

The following key measures will be implemented over the five-year timescale:

- there will be a new initiative on early education provision for the most disadvantaged urban/town communities

- existing measures for addressing educational disadvantage will be integrated and streamlined. Additional financial supports will be provided to schools through the SSP. The Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme services will be extended during Phases 1 and 2 to all urban/town primary schools and second-level schools participating in the SSP and not already benefiting from these services. Integration of both the HSCL Scheme and the School Completion Programme into the SSP framework will be effected over the five-year implementation timeframe
- the 150 urban/town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage will be targeted to benefit from maximum class sizes of 20:1 in junior classes (infants through second-class) and 24:1 in senior classes (third through sixth-class)
- rural primary schools participating in the SSP will be targeted to benefit from access to a teacher/co-ordinator serving a cluster of schools, where not already in place through the *Giving Children an Even Break* programme. Rural primary schools that cannot be clustered will be provided with financial support as an alternative to teacher/co-ordinator support
- targeted measures will be implemented to tackle problems of literacy and numeracy, with particular reference to family literacy, early education, primary and second-level education and the role of the local authority library system. School library and librarian support will be extended, on a phased basis, to the 50 second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
- measures will be implemented to enhance student attendance, educational progression, retention and attainment. Enhanced guidance counselling provision, targeted at supporting junior cycle students, will be provided in second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
- greater curricular choice will be promoted
- the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) will be expanded
- increased access to third-level for students from disadvantaged backgrounds will be promoted, in co-operation with the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education

- measures will be put in place to support the recruitment and retention of principals and teaching staff in schools serving disadvantaged communities, with particular reference to the following:
 - urban/town primary schools participating in the SSP will, on a phased basis, be allocated administrative principals on lower enrolment and staffing figures than those applying in primary schools generally
 - a sabbatical leave scheme will be introduced to create opportunities for principals and teachers who have served for a defined period in schools participating in the SSP, to apply to undertake a period of development to enhance their own learning and effectiveness, and to bring subsequent benefits to their students and their school. Access to this scheme, which will provide for about 50 sabbaticals annually, will be extended to all SSP schools on a phased basis.

Planning at both individual school and school cluster/community level under the SSP will include target-setting and ongoing review processes. A planning template and a common set of indicators will be developed on a partnership basis to facilitate progress reporting on the implementation of school action plans which will operate on a three-year cyclical basis.

Professional development for principals, teachers and other personnel in schools participating in the SSP will be enhanced, with both pre-service and in-service professional development being addressed.

There will be a renewed focus on integration of services and partnership working. Through the development of its network of ten regional offices, the Department of Education and Science will have increased capacity to work in partnership with locally based agencies and bodies in promoting social inclusion measures.

The Department will liaise with existing networking structures for school principals at both national and local level, with particular reference to discussion of the planning and professional development measures proposed in this action plan and exploring opportunities for integration of services.

Research and evaluation are central to effective policy making and implementation. An in-depth programme of both research and evaluation will be implemented to inform policy formation on educational inclusion issues on an ongoing basis.

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An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion

1. Background and Rationale

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1.1 Introduction

This action plan focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). Its frame of reference is based on the definition of “educational disadvantage” in the Education Act (1998), section 32(9), as:

“...the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools.”

The action plan is, therefore, one element of a continuum of interventions to address disadvantage, which include second-chance education and training and access measures for adults to support increased participation by under-represented groups in further and higher education. A further element of this continuum is the ongoing development of provision for pupils with special educational needs in light of the enactment of the Education for Persons with Special Needs Act (2004) and the establishment of the National Council for Special Education.

The action plan is grounded in the belief that:

- every child and young person deserves an equal chance to access, participate in and benefit from education
- each person should have the opportunity to reach her/his full educational potential for personal, social and economic reasons
- education is a critical factor in promoting social inclusion and economic development.

The objective of the education system is to provide a broadly based, inclusive, high quality education that will enable individuals to develop to their full potential and to live fulfilled lives, as well as contributing to Ireland’s social and economic development. Education has a critical role to play in nurturing children’s development across a range of intelligences and skills, and in laying the foundations for successful participation in adult life. Education not only reflects society but helps shape its future development, contributing to our national identity, culture and values, supporting citizenship and sustainable development, and contributing to the growth of individuals, their families and their communities.

Under-achievement in school can have profound consequences for children and adults in later life, not only in terms of economic uncertainty, but also in terms of well being, health, self esteem and participation in family and community life. For young children in school, the experience of success and enjoyment in learning is vital if they are to be encouraged and motivated to reach their full educational potential. There is ample evidence to show that it is children from disadvantaged communities who constitute a majority of those who currently fail to benefit from the education system, and that under-achievement in school can have inter-generational effects on families and their communities. It is the children of early school leavers who are most at risk of leaving school early themselves. Intervening in this cycle of deprivation demands that a systematic, integrated and effective strategy is put in place to address educational disadvantage.

The purpose of this action plan is to identify and assist those children and young people most in need of support under the measures it will introduce. The plan will strengthen supports for parental and family involvement and for teachers, schools and communities. It requires that educational inclusion measures must have clear objectives and targets, that progress is monitored and measured and that outcomes are evaluated.

1.2 The Social Inclusion Context

There is no doubt that many of the barriers to the educational progress of children and young people are caused by issues outside the education system. These barriers can be financial, family and health related, social/communal, cultural and geographic or a combination of any of these. The challenge for the education system is to work, in partnership with others, to overcome as many of these barriers as possible in a way that is learner-centred, systematic and effective in terms of educational outcomes.

The Lisbon Strategy, the Agreed Programme for Government, the social partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress*, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and the National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs/incl) are all catalysts for driving educational reform in the broader context of tackling poverty and social exclusion. They provide a common language of objectives and priorities, strategies and approaches, targets and timescales, monitoring and evaluation processes which enable all concerned to inform and support each other in working to address educational disadvantage.

National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)

The NAPS, which was published in 1997, and revised in 2002, focused on five key areas:

- educational disadvantage
- unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment
- income adequacy
- disadvantaged urban areas
- rural poverty.

Since its inception, the NAPS has featured prominently in the social partnership agreements between Government and the social partners - employers, trade unions, farming bodies and the community and voluntary sector. In addition, structures have been put in place to ensure that the issue of social inclusion is central to government policy formation and implementation. The Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, which is chaired by An Taoiseach, and the inter-departmental Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, oversee an integrated cross-departmental approach in this area. The establishment of the Office for Social Inclusion in the Department of Social and Family Affairs and of the Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Education and Science are examples of actions taken at departmental level in support of the NAPS. Other bodies and agencies such as the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the Combat Poverty Agency have also been an important part of this structured response.

At European level, one of the objectives set at the Lisbon European Council (March, 2000) was to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010. Each EU member state is required to produce a National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs/incl), which sets out the strategies, specific measures and institutional arrangements in place at national level to support the achievement of its objectives in this area. The first NAPs/incl covered the period 2001-2003. The second NAPs/incl, covering the period 2003-2005, was submitted to the European Commission in July, 2003 by the Irish Government. It is complemented by the National Employment Action Plan, 2003, which also has an important role to play in addressing social exclusion.

A central theme of the NAPs/incl, 2003-2005, is to ensure that all young people leave the education system with a high quality education and related qualifications to support their full participation in society and the economy.

Social Partnership

The social partnership agreement, Sustaining Progress, 2003-2005, includes ten special initiatives, one of which is entitled *Tackling Educational Disadvantage: Literacy, Numeracy and Early School Leavers*. This initiative references the following NAPS targets:

- *to halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006*
- *to ensure that participation rates to completion of upper second-level education, or equivalent, increase to 90 per cent by 2006.*

It goes on to specify that:

“Critical attention will be paid to literacy and numeracy both in school and for adults of all ages. Systematic monitoring of literacy attainment levels and assessment and remediation strategies in primary schools will be implemented, supported by targeted initiatives to address the specific needs of disadvantaged schools. Initiatives will be implemented to prevent and address early school leaving, taking account of the framework set out in the NESF Report on Early School Leavers. The range of initiatives focused on school retention and completion will be reviewed to ensure optimum synergy and integration, advised by the Educational Disadvantage Committee.”

The new approach under this action plan is central to the Department’s response to the agenda set out in the special initiative.

As well as establishing a series of target outcomes to be achieved from the measures under its direct remit, the Department will work in co-operation with other Departments and agencies in setting relevant cross-sectoral objectives and targets in such areas as early childhood education and school meals provision. Locally-based targets will also be established at school and school cluster level in relation, for example, to literacy and numeracy attainment and parent and community partnership. This target-setting at Department, cross-sectoral and local level will inform and complement the formulation and establishment of future national education targets in the context of both NAPs/incl and social partnership agreements.

Other measures

A range of other Government measures have also played an important role in ensuring that a focused and targeted approach is taken to addressing social exclusion. These measures include the development of national strategies such as the National Children's Strategy and the National Drugs Strategy, 2001 – 2008. An increasing emphasis on the value and use of statistical data has also been evident from:

- the work of the Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics, which was established on the initiative of the National Statistics Board and
- the work being led by the Central Statistics Office in developing the statistical potential of administrative records across Government departments and agencies.

In addition to national measures, there has also been an increasing emphasis on social inclusion initiatives at regional, county and local level through County Development Boards (CDBs), Area Development Management Ltd and area partnership companies, regional and local drugs task forces and the RAPID and CLAR programmes.

Integration of Services

A key objective of this action plan is to enhance integration and partnership working both within the education sector itself and between the Department of Education and Science and all other relevant departments and agencies (details of the actions proposed in this regard are outlined in Section 7 below). Priorities will include seeking to expand and develop areas of mutual co-operation with other departments and agencies in relation to, for example, early childhood education and care, nutrition and health, and literacy and numeracy. The Department will continue to work in co-operation with the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion and the Office for Social Inclusion in seeking to integrate, and promote complementarity of, measures under this action plan, the NAPs/incl and social partnership agreements.

In addition, the Department, through the development of its new network of ten regional offices, will continue to enhance its capacity to work in partnership with CDBs and locally based agencies, partnerships and individuals promoting social inclusion measures. The Department's Regional Offices Directorate will develop an overall plan for addressing services integration and partnership working, which will take into account the potential for increased co-operation with a wide range of partner organisations at local, county/regional and national level.

1.3 Educational Inclusion – The response to date

Nationally, significant emphasis has been placed on addressing educational inclusion issues, particularly since the late 1980s. The approach adopted has focused principally on the following:

- the identification of schools serving disadvantaged communities
- the targeting of additional supports to such schools under a range of measures including *Early Start*, *Giving Children an Even Break*, the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme, the School Completion Programme, the Early Literacy Initiative and the School Books Grant Schemes at primary and second-level
- the provision of additional supports for vulnerable groups, particularly Traveller students and students for whom English or Gaeilge is not their first language
- legislative measures, with particular reference to the enactment of:
 - the Education Act (1998), which provides for the establishment of an Educational Disadvantage Committee, with the remit of advising the Minister for Education and Science on policies and strategies to identify and correct educational disadvantage
 - the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), which established the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) as the key national body with responsibility for school attendance
- the provision of education, training and work experience to young early school leavers through the Youth Encounter Projects, the Youthreach programme and the Senior Traveller Training Centres, allied with expansion of second-chance education and adult literacy programmes
- targeted youth work measures for disadvantaged young people. The Youth Work Act (2001), has served to strengthen the legislative base in this area
- quality enhancements through curricular reform, professional development and the establishment of a national framework of qualifications
- a range of measures to support access to third-level education.

The supports that have been provided include reduced class sizes and additional capitation grants and other financial supports. A full description of the measures involved is available on the social inclusion section of the Department's website at www.education.ie.

A range of initiatives and other work undertaken by VECs, by the National Educational Psychological Service and by agencies of the Department, including the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, also represent a very important element of the state's response to educational disadvantage.

In addition, the support of other Government departments and of many agencies and organisations in the public, private and community and voluntary sectors at all levels (national, regional/county and local) constitutes a key contribution to addressing educational disadvantage in all its aspects. The Department of Social and Family Affairs have a particular role in this regard, through their operation of the School Meals Programme, which provides funding on a targeted basis for the provision of school meals, and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance Scheme, which assists low-income families with the cost of school uniforms and footwear.

In the case of area partnerships, the Department co-funds the work of education co-ordinators, appointed to assist in the identification and promotion of suitable educational initiatives, to co-ordinate the services of the public and private sectors in education and to support cohesion of educational initiatives within the partnerships.

The structural reform programme within the Department of Education and Science itself, including the establishment of the State Examinations Commission, the National Council for Special Education, the Teaching Council and ten new regional offices of the Department has also led to a new strategic and administrative approach which, when combined with the legislative changes of recent years, has resulted in considerable change in the whole area of education, and underpins the new approach set out in this action plan.

1.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Measures

Considering all the educational inclusion measures that have been put in place since the late 1980s, a number of broad strengths and weaknesses can be identified.

Strengths:

- strong and sustained Government investment, including class size reductions at primary level and a wide range of other human and financial supports
- substantial expertise developed through experience with existing measures
- strong commitment of school principals, teaching staff and other education professionals, programme co-ordinating personnel, agency staff, community interests and others involved in working for, and promoting, educational inclusion
- successful home/school/community linkages and greater parental involvement in school life
- learner-centred strategies to address early school leaving based on best practice identified through evaluation
- enhanced co-operation between primary and second-level schools working in clusters
- adoption of development planning in both primary and second-level schools through the School Development Planning initiatives
- strong support from a wide range of partners in the public, private, community and voluntary sectors
- expert research and policy support provided by the Educational Disadvantage Committee, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) and others.

Weaknesses:

- the lack of a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage in schools
- limited early childhood education supports
- insufficient focus on target-setting, measurement of progress and outcomes

- insufficient steering and evaluation of some measures
- insufficient co-ordination across schemes and cross-sectorally
- limited attention to educational inclusion issues in pre-service and in-service teacher education.

In overall terms, considerable progress has been made through the implementation of a wide range of measures to address educational disadvantage. This action plan will seek to build on the existing strengths, while at the same time addressing the identified weaknesses, which have served to reduce the overall effectiveness of the state's investment in this area.

1.5 The Need for Reform

There is a need to improve integration of educational inclusion measures and to enhance delivery structures both externally and within the Department. The involvement of parents, family members and the community must be further strengthened. Planning, co-ordination and processes for monitoring and evaluating progress need to be further developed at every level. An increased focus is needed on joint action by primary and second-level schools and on integrated services. Supports for principals and teaching staff need to be further enhanced.

There is also a need to ensure that existing best practice is shared and widely disseminated. Equally, there is a need to identify the causes and to take appropriate action when interventions have not met expectations.

In moving forward, the complex and multi-faceted nature of educational disadvantage has to be recognised and it has to be accepted that there are no “quick-fixes” and that knowledge in relation to educational disadvantage will need to be continually developed.

At the request of the Minister for Education and Science, the statutory Educational Disadvantage Committee undertook an examination in 2003 of the wide range of programmes in place to tackle educational disadvantage. On foot of this examination, the Committee made a submission to the Minister in December, 2003, entitled: *“A More Integrated and Effective Delivery of School-based Educational Inclusion Measures”*.

The Committee called for:

- improved methods of identification and selection in order to ensure the appropriate targeting of resources for schools most in need

- more effective targeting and deployment of financial and teaching resources by moving, to a substantial degree, from the present programme-based approach to a more flexible, planned and integrated response to meeting identified needs at local level
- the delivery of a range of supports to teachers and schools in understanding and serving the needs of disadvantaged communities and in planning, monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of educational inclusion measures in order to ensure a real and sustainable impact on the students and schools targeted
- the development of a transition plan by the Department of Education and Science to plan and manage transition to the new integrated delivery model.

The Committee's submission took account of the report of the first meeting, in November, 2002, of the wider Forum on Educational Disadvantage, which brought together all of the main stakeholders.

The Forum made three key recommendations for the future:

- a new strategy should be implemented at Departmental level to address the issue of disadvantage in a focused and systematic way
- more coherent structures should be established, at both policy and operational levels, to address educational disadvantage
- there should be a greater emphasis across the education system generally on setting targets and applying appropriate measurement indicators to monitor progress against these set targets.

The advice provided by the Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Educational Disadvantage Forum has been central to the development of this action plan.



2. The Action Plan – Overall Framework

2. The Action Plan – Overall Framework

The aim of this action plan is to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people in disadvantaged communities are prioritised and effectively addressed. Its core elements comprise:-

- *a standardised system for identifying levels of disadvantage*
- *a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which will bring together, and build upon, existing interventions for schools and school clusters/communities with a concentrated level of educational disadvantage. The differences between urban and rural disadvantage will be taken into account in targeting actions under the programme.*

A broad indication of the number of schools that will be included in the SSP is as follows:

Primary	Second-Level
600 schools comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300 urban/town • 300 rural 	150 schools

In addition, supports will continue to be provided for schools where the level of disadvantage is more dispersed.

The action plan will be implemented on a phased basis over five years and will involve an additional annual investment of some €40m on full implementation. It will also involve the creation of about 300 additional posts across the education system generally.

2.1 Identification of Disadvantage and Targeting Supports

Research carried out by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) for the Educational Disadvantage Committee found strong evidence for the proposition that the disadvantage associated with poverty and social exclusion assumes a multiplier effect when large numbers of pupils in a school are from a similar disadvantaged background (the “social context effect”).

In addition, the ERC found no evidence of a specific point at which the multiplier effect becomes evident and no point at which the relationship changes qualitatively. The relationship is best represented as linear, progressing from schools with relatively few pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds on a sliding scale to those with large numbers of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A standardised system will be put in place for identifying schools at both primary and second-level for the purposes of qualifying for resources, both human and financial, according to the degree of disadvantage experienced. This standardised system will replace all of the existing arrangements for targeting schools for participation in initiatives to address disadvantage. It will involve the collection and analysis of data on levels of disadvantage in individual schools to inform the allocation of supports to schools and school clusters/communities for a three-year planning cycle under the SSP. The indicators used will take account of the differences between urban and rural disadvantage.

The identification and analysis process will be managed by the ERC on behalf of the Department.

The first set of data on levels of disadvantage in both primary and second-level schools identified under the standardised system will become available in 2005, following a new survey by the ERC of primary schools and the updating by them of existing data sources on levels of disadvantage in second-level schools.

The overall process will be assisted by a new Advisory Group, which will be supported by quality assurance work co-ordinated through the Department's regional offices and the Inspectorate. Information available from other sources (e.g. in relation to areas selected for inclusion in the RAPID and CLÁR programmes administered by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs) will also be taken into consideration.

About 600 primary schools and 150 second-level schools will be identified for participation in the SSP arising from the identification process and these will be targeted for particular support over the next five years.

Supports will continue on the existing basis for 2005/2006 for all other schools receiving additional teaching or financial resources under current schemes and programmes for addressing disadvantage. The efficacy of these supports will be kept under review.

The next identification process will be carried out in the school year 2009/2010 (to allow time for the phased implementation of this action plan) and the process will continue thereafter on a three-year cyclical basis, in line with the proposed three-year planning cycle for schools participating in the SSP detailed in section 5 of this document.

The development of a new Primary Pupils Database, a Further Education Management Information System, and the continuing development of the existing Post-Primary Pupils Database and student databases in higher education institutions, all using the Personal Public Service number (PPS No.), will further enhance the identification process for future planning cycles. The availability of the Primary Pupils Database, in particular, will enable the tracking of pupils from their first enrolment in school through second-level education and beyond. In addition, the Department will continue to develop its overall data/statistics strategy and will work in co-operation with other Departments and agencies in the context of the National Statistics Board's Strategy for Statistics.

2.2 The New School Support Programme (SSP)

Under the SSP, schools and school clusters/communities, will be allocated supplementary resources and supports on a phased basis, in accordance with their level of concentration of disadvantage. These are outlined in section 3 below.

2.3 Unifying School Supports

There is general agreement that, notwithstanding the benefits of individual interventions, a more integrated and coherent response to the issue of educational inclusion is required. This message was reinforced by both the Educational Disadvantage Forum and the work of the Educational Disadvantage Committee.

The following existing schemes and programmes will, therefore, be integrated into the SSP on a phased basis over the five years 2005/2006 – 2009/2010:

- *Early Start*
- *Giving Children an Even Break* (incorporating the primary Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and *Breaking the Cycle*)
- the Support Teacher Project (primary level)
- aspects of the Early Literacy Initiative, including the Reading Recovery initiative and the Junior Certificate School Programme Literacy Strategy and Demonstration Library Project
- the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme
- the School Completion Programme (which is being funded under the National Development Plan with assistance from the European Social Fund)
- the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme for second-level schools and related projects in second-level schools supporting access to third-level.

The primary and second-level School Books Grant Schemes will continue to operate in their own right. However, the results of the identification process now being introduced will be taken into account in allocating resources under the schemes. Targeted additional funding will also be made available through the schemes, on a phased basis, to schools participating in the SSP. This additional funding will be aimed primarily at supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes.

The Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme services will be extended during Phases 1 and 2 to all urban/town primary schools and second-level schools participating in the SSP and not already benefiting from these services. Integration of both the HSCL and School Completion Programme services into the SSP framework will be effected over the five-year implementation timeframe.



3. The Action Plan – Support Measures

3. The Action Plan – Support Measures

3.1 Early Childhood Education Provision

Targeted early childhood education provision will be a key element of this action plan. Investment in early education provision, supporting the most vulnerable children, can be a powerful intervention yielding lifelong educational benefits. Such investment can also reduce or avoid the necessity for spending on remedial measures later in the child's educational life, when they may not be as effective and are likely to involve greater costs.

Early childhood provision in disadvantaged communities currently encompasses a wide range of providers, settings and approaches. The broad emphasis is on childcare, with only a limited number of projects addressing both education and care needs simultaneously. The Department of Education & Science already funds pre-school provision for children from disadvantaged communities under the Rutland St. Project, the *Early Start* programme and in Traveller pre-schools.

The action plan will aim to concentrate early education actions on those children, aged from three up to school enrolment, who will subsequently attend urban/town primary schools participating in the SSP and serving the most disadvantaged communities. The extension of early education supports to areas served by other primary schools participating in the SSP will be considered after this objective has been achieved.

The Department will work in partnership with other departments and agencies to complement and add value to existing childcare programmes in disadvantaged communities, with a view to ensuring that the overall care and education needs of the children concerned are met in an integrated manner. The Department's particular contribution will be to provide funding or part-funding for the educational dimension of provision, where new places are involved, and on supporting the further development of an educational dimension in the case of existing childcare provision. It will also involve delivering education-related professional support and training to existing providers, together with a curriculum and quality framework for early childhood education with the assistance of the NCCA and the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE). These measures will greatly increase the potential to embed quality early learning experiences for children within childcare provision.

In addition, inspectors based in the Department's regional offices will evaluate educational outcomes, with a view to supporting the continuous development and improvement of the services involved.

The CECDE will make recommendations on the future development and direction of existing pre-school measures for children in disadvantaged communities funded by the Department. The findings of a number of evaluation reports on *Early Start* prepared by the ERC will be taken into account in this regard. The future position in respect of early education provision for Traveller children is also being considered in light of an evaluation published by the Department's Inspectorate in 2003 and as part of the continuing development of an overall five-year Traveller Education Strategy. The Department will seek, over time, to increase the level of integration between its existing pre-school measures and between these measures and the work of other providers in the overall childcare and early education sector.

An Inter-Departmental High-Level Working Group on Childcare and Early Education, chaired by the National Children's Office, is considering issues in relation to co-ordination across the different departments involved in the childcare and early education sector, with a view to eliminating duplication and optimising use of the resources involved. In addition, a wide-ranging OECD review of early childhood care and education policy and practice in Ireland, published in September 2004, and complementary work by an NESF project team to set out a policy framework and implementation process for early childhood care and education, will support the development of future policy in this area.

3.2 Literacy and Numeracy

Literacy and numeracy (defined as the integration of reading and writing, listening, speaking and mathematics for everyday life, for communication and learning to learn) are fundamental skills in deriving benefit from education.

Advance preparation at national level for literacy and numeracy measures to be implemented under this action plan will take into account the recommendations of the ERC report, *Reading Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools* (October, 2004). This report is based on an in-depth survey of 94 schools. The preparatory process will also be informed by a report produced by the Department's Inspectorate, *Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners* (April, 2005), following an evaluation in 2004 of literacy and numeracy teaching in 12 primary schools serving disadvantaged communities.

Achievement of proficiency in literacy is a crucial objective of education. The impact of early literacy difficulties increases as children progress through their education. Unless children reach adequate literacy standards, they cannot properly benefit from the literacy-based education system that is at the core of a modern developed society. Research has shown that those with low levels of attainment in literacy are significantly more likely to experience educational failure and to leave the education system without qualifications. The ERC report referred to above found that the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in schools serving disadvantaged communities averages in the region of 27-30% (about three times the national average), with the percentage for some schools being significantly higher. Also, the available information on numeracy achievement in schools serving disadvantaged communities indicates that it is at a lower level than that for literacy achievement.

Despite the very significant increases in resources applied across a range of initiatives, there is little evidence of any improvement in the average literacy and numeracy standard of pupils attending primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. It is on this basis that a high priority will be given, within the new integrated approach being adopted under this action plan, to specific measures and supports to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes, with a particular emphasis on early intervention at primary level.

To date, sufficient emphasis has not been placed on measuring and reporting, on a systematic basis, the achievement levels of children in literacy and numeracy. Consequently, timely remedial measures, based on the development of *Individual Profile and Learning Programmes* (IPLPs), as recommended in the Department's Learning Support Guidelines, published in 2000, are not always put in place for individual children.

There will be a renewed focus on the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills in schools participating in the SSP, and on measuring progress systematically. Schools will develop three-year action plans which will prioritise, and set targets for, literacy and numeracy achievement, taking account of the supplementary human and financial resources provided to contribute to this effort.

A number of specific literacy/numeracy measures as set out in sections 3.2.1 - 3.2.5 below will be implemented, with priority being given to implementation in the schools and school communities with the highest concentrations of disadvantage.

3.2.1 Family Literacy

Recognising the vital role of parents and other family members in children's literacy development, a new family literacy project will be initiated. The project will build on previous experience in this area and will be implemented on a phased basis. It will be based on a partnership approach involving the VEC adult literacy services, HSCL co-ordinators at home-community and school levels and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). A range of strategies will be considered, including strategies for supporting learning within the home, without the necessity for attendance at formal classes. The potential gains to be made through increased "joining up" of the professional skills available in the school and adult literacy sectors are considerable. The National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programme Implementation Plan, published by NALA in late 2004, sets out a path for structured further development of the adult literacy service and underlines the importance of effective partnership with relevant stakeholders and communities for the future development of the service.

3.2.2 Literacy and Numeracy - Early Childhood Education

The Department will aim to add value to early childhood provision in communities served by the urban/town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage by supporting the implementation of a quality early education dimension. This will place a strong emphasis on developing, through structured play, and the involvement of parents, the cognitive and oral language skills that underpin children's subsequent acquisition of literacy and numeracy capability in school learning. The curricular guidelines for the *Early Start* programme identify good practice in this regard.

3.2.3 Literacy and Numeracy - Primary Education

Extra resources will be made available for intensive professional development programmes for teachers in literacy and numeracy. In line with ERC recommendations in *Reading Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools*, a number of literacy and numeracy advisers (cuiditheoirí) will be made available through the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) to support and advise schools in adopting effective whole-school, group and individual pupil approaches and in co-ordinating the work of class and support teachers. This advisory service will incorporate expertise in the area of speech and language therapy, to assist both class and support teachers in developing whole-school programmes to address language deficits, especially in infant and junior classes.

Reading Literacy in Disadvantaged Schools recommends that schools where large numbers of pupils have serious reading difficulties should re-structure the provision of reading instruction and support services, particularly for children in the junior classes. The new literacy and numeracy advisers will assist schools participating in the SSP in developing and implementing appropriate local arrangements in this regard. The ERC report gives examples of the changes that might usefully be made, based on international research findings, including:

- “cross-grade groups (for reading classes only) composed of pupils in senior infants to second-class with similar levels of (regularly reviewed) reading achievement;
- reading groups assigned to class and support teachers on a rotating basis, so that most or all pupils have access to a support teacher for at least part of the school year”

These actions will be complemented by implementation of the following measures:

- the availability of the Reading Recovery and First Steps programmes will be extended. Reading Recovery (RR) is an early intervention programme to assist children who are having difficulty learning to read and write. One-to-one teaching is at the heart of the RR approach and it helps to prevent literacy difficulties from becoming entrenched and having extensive and long-lasting negative effects that impact on children’s educational, social and emotional development. First Steps is a research-based approach to literacy development, and includes professional development courses and support materials for primary teachers. It offers teachers an accurate means of assessing and monitoring children’s competencies and progress in oral language, reading, writing and spelling. It then links this assessment to appropriate classroom-based activities and strategies to ensure that steady progress is made and maintained throughout the primary years. Reading Recovery and First Steps provide a complementary “twin-track” approach to tackling literacy problems at primary level
- the availability of the Mathematics Recovery programme will be extended and the *Ready, Steady, Go Maths* materials will be made available for the first time. Mathematics Recovery is an early intervention programme developed to provide a systematic approach to assisting children who are having particular difficulty in mathematics. The programme provides intensive, individualised teaching to the lowest attaining pupils in order to advance them to a level at which they are likely to learn successfully in a regular class. *Ready, Steady, Go Maths* consists of games and concrete materials for use in teaching number and spatial concepts to children thus strengthening, at a crucial stage of their development, their grasp of numeracy. Again, Mathematics Recovery and *Ready, Steady, Go Maths* provide complementary approaches to tackling numeracy problems at primary level

- the further development of paired reading and paired maths initiatives and of the *Reading for Fun* and *Maths for Fun* initiatives implemented through the HSCL Scheme, will be supported. Recognising the vital role of parents as the prime educators of their children, these initiatives directly involve parents and other family members in classroom or home-based activities assisting children's literacy and numeracy development
- the further development of after-school and holiday-time supports assisting children's literacy and numeracy development through their involvement in, and enjoyment of, extra-curricular activities, will be supported. The wide range of such activities already being funded through the School Completion Programme will continue to be extended and developed. These activities have the advantage of providing additional time outside the school day to build up children's literacy and numeracy skills and they complement family literacy activities currently being supported through the HSCL Scheme.

In addition, the Inspectorate will follow-up on its report *Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners*, by identifying existing models of best practice in this area, with a view to disseminating them and promoting their wider application.

3.2.4 Literacy and Numeracy - Second-Level Education

At second-level, the work which is already taking place on the development and implementation of whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies under the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) will be further supported and extended. Additional funding will be made available for this purpose, and this will assist second-level schools participating in the SSP in giving priority to the following measures at junior cycle:

- implementing an intensive intervention process for pupils with serious literacy difficulties, using their learning support provision and adopting a whole-school strategy supplemented, as necessary, by supports funded from the additional resources provided to schools and school clusters through the SSP
- planning, monitoring and recording the educational progress of each targeted student
- evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies being used on a continuous basis and making adjustments, where appropriate.

On the basis of positive evaluation findings, the JCSP Demonstration Library Project will be extended on a phased basis to additional second-level schools participating in the SSP and will support the implementation of whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies in the schools concerned. The implementation of mobile library and shared librarian support options will be considered, where these may be most appropriate to needs and circumstances at local level.

The further development of the *Reading for Fun* and *Maths for Fun* initiatives implemented through the HSCL Scheme, will be supported, at second-level as well as at primary level.

The needs of senior-cycle students, particularly Leaving Certificate Applied students, in respect of more advanced literacy and numeracy supports, will be examined as part of an ongoing NCCA review of senior cycle second-level education.

3.2.5 Literacy and Numeracy - Role of Local Authority Library System

The local authority library system provides the largest cultural and information infrastructure in the state through a network of 340 branch libraries and 30 mobile libraries. The Department's existing National School Library Scheme is administered through the local authority library system and the Minister for Education and Science made increased funding available for the Scheme in 2004 to provide additional books for primary schools with a concentrated level of disadvantage. The books purchased through the library system as a result of this initiative are being used in conjunction with parents to promote a culture of reading in the home. Further co-operation on educational inclusion issues between the library system and the education sector will be actively pursued in implementing this action plan. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government strategy document, *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*, identifies a range of opportunities in this regard. Examples of areas in which the local authority library system is already supporting schools and school-based communities and that can provide a basis for further development include:

- assisting schools in selecting and procuring reading material appropriate to different age groups
- supporting homework clubs at local level
- promoting and supporting reading groups and hosting discussions with authors
- advising on the stocking and running of school-based libraries.

3.3 Role of Home and Local Community

An OECD study, *Parents as Partners in Schooling* (1997), cited the Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme as “a good example of innovative central government initiatives” and went on to state that “It is clear from the Irish experience that educational initiatives based in schools can raise the educational level of the adults involved, and result in a general sense of empowerment in the local community. Parental involvement, especially in areas of socio-economic deprivation, does not just benefit the children and the school - it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning.”

One of the main objectives of this action plan is to build on the successful work of the HSCL Scheme over the past 15 years.

A renewed emphasis will be placed on the involvement of parents and families in children’s education in schools and school clusters participating in the SSP. It will be a requirement that schools incorporate the Home/School/Community liaison function as part of their three-year action plans, with co-ordinators being employed on a full-time basis to cover one or more schools. Teacher/co-ordinators, working with clusters of rural primary schools, will have responsibility for the HSCL function as a key element of their duties. These teacher/co-ordinators will work with pupils, parents, teachers and community representatives in addressing children’s educational needs, including their needs in relation to literacy and numeracy.

Specific actions to be taken in relation to the current HSCL Scheme under the action plan will include the following:

- integration of the rural teacher/co-ordinator service under the remit of a strengthened national HSCL team
- continuing to build on the work already being done by HSCL co-ordinators to support parents in developing their children’s literacy and numeracy skills and, in the case of very young children, their oral language skills
- building on existing strategies to improve parental involvement in respect of pupils in the middle and senior classes at primary level and second-level pupils, where the challenges involved are greater than in the case of younger children
- continuation of work on the development of “key performance indicators” and on the systematic collection and analysis of data on achievement and outcomes. In this regard, case studies on successful initiatives by schools in relation to the involvement of parents in their childrens’ education will be published in order to facilitate more widespread dissemination of the best practices involved

- increasing the level of integration between the primary and second-level elements of the Scheme. In this regard, the sharing of co-ordinator posts across the two sectors will be considered, where appropriate.

In addition to the HSCL Scheme, a number of innovative programmes and services have been implemented in recent years, with the aim of increasing the involvement of parents and families in education. These include pilot family literacy programmes, adult literacy programmes, the Back to Education and Education Equality Initiatives and increased childcare, counselling and adult guidance services. As outlined in section 3.2.1 above, resources will be provided for a family literacy project, to be implemented on a collaborative basis by the VEC sector, HSCL co-ordinators and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

3.4 Measures to enhance attendance, educational progression, retention and attainment

The Education (Welfare) Act (2000) established the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) as the key national body with responsibility for school attendance. The Act, which was fully commenced in July, 2002, provides for the raising of the school leaving age to 16 years or the completion of three years' second-level education. It establishes a comprehensive framework promoting regular school attendance and tackling the problems of absenteeism and early school leaving. Analysis carried out for the first national report on non-attendance, compiled by the NEWB in 2004, shows that schools serving disadvantaged communities have significantly higher levels of non-attendance. In view of the clear link between pupils' attendance patterns and their educational attainment, strategies for improving attendance will be an important element of the planning process to be implemented at both school and school cluster/community level to support implementation of the SSP (see section 5 below).

The NEWB will have a vital role to play in the successful implementation of this action plan and additional resources have been made available to support the continuing development of the services provided by the Board. The Board and the Department will work together to ensure that an integrated approach to children at risk is adopted between educational welfare officers and other staff involved in the implementation of the SSP.

The School Completion Programme, which incorporates the learning, experience and best-practice emerging from two previous pilot initiatives, provides a wide range of targeted supports on an individual and group basis to children and young people who may be at risk of early school leaving. As outlined earlier, additional clusters (each including both primary and second-level schools) will be created under the Programme during the school years 2005/2006 and 2006/2007. Arising from the identification process, some of the 53 second-level schools, which continue to receive funding under the Stay in School Retention Initiative (SSRI) strand of the SCP, may qualify for inclusion in the additional clusters.

Following an evaluation of the School Completion Programme, it will be integrated into the SSP over the five-year implementation period, with any appropriate changes being made to the model of support involved. School clusters participating in the SSP will be required to incorporate the best practices identified through the evaluation into their cluster-level action plans.

Progression from primary to second-level is recognised as a crucial transition period in a child's education. Pupils who fail to make this transition successfully are more at risk of early school leaving or educational underachievement. A study carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on behalf of the NCCA, *Moving Up - The Experiences of First Year Students in Post-Primary Education* (2004), examined this issue in detail and highlighted its particular importance for groups of students who were "at risk". A continuing emphasis will be placed on the development of effective transfer programmes by building on the existing work of the HSCL Scheme and the School Completion Programme in this area. An additional guidance counselling provision, being made available for second-level schools having the highest concentrations of disadvantage (see section 3.6 below), will also assist in this regard.

During the process of transition to the new integrated model, the School Completion Programme will, with the support of the National Educational Psychological Service, continue to assist schools in meeting the needs of emotionally or behaviourally disturbed students. The best practices identified in this area will remain a feature of school and school cluster action plans under the SSP. Responsibility for overall co-ordination of the work of the additional teachers provided to 47 primary schools under the Support Teacher Project will be assigned to the national team for the School Completion Programme for the period 2005/2006 - 2006/2007. During this time, proposals will be developed in relation to the most appropriate arrangements that should apply in this regard within the new framework provided by the SSP.

The existing partnership between the School Completion Programme and the Schools' Business Partnership (one of a number of social inclusion programmes managed by Business in the Community - Ireland) will be further developed by extending access to the Schools' Business Partnership to other second-level schools participating in the SSP. This will involve matching each school with a business and providing schools with the opportunity to participate in three core programmes encompassing student mentoring, summer placements for students and a management development programme for principals.

The Youth Encounter Projects (YEPs) were first established in the 1970s to provide educational facilities for children who had become alienated from the conventional school system, had high levels of absenteeism or had become involved in, or were at risk of becoming involved in, minor crime and delinquency. The primary objective of the YEPs is to rehabilitate the pupils and to return them to the conventional school system in the shortest possible time. The YEPs consist of five special schools: three in Dublin, one in Limerick and one in Cork. They are set up as special primary schools, each catering for an enrolment of approximately 25 pupils aged between 10 and 15 years. Pupils are referred to the school by a number of agencies, including the courts. A comprehensive life-skills programme is provided, in addition to the standard curriculum. It is proposed to carry out a thorough review of the role and function of the YEPs during 2005.

In relation to early school leavers, increased integration will be promoted between the work of second-level schools and centres catering for young early school leavers, particularly *Youthreach* centres and Senior Traveller Training Centres, in the overall educational interest of the young people concerned. A report will be prepared on the work of a number of other centres for young early school leavers currently being supported by the Department. The report will give consideration to the most appropriate arrangements to be applied in relation to the provision of support by the Department in this area in the future.

3.5 Targeted additional educational supports

Traveller students and students for whom English or Gaelige is not their first language, are provided with targeted additional educational supports over and above the general educational inclusion measures which are currently in place and which will be enhanced under the SSP.

The future development of policy in relation to these targeted additional educational supports will be undertaken in such a way as to complement the measures in this action plan and in the National Action Plan against Racism, published by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in January, 2005.

A comprehensive five-year strategy for Traveller education is being developed with the assistance of the Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education. One of the core issues it is addressing relates to how existing targeted educational supports for Traveller children and young people might best be integrated, on a phased basis, into an enhanced mainstream provision rather than being provided on a standalone basis.

It is proposed that the Department's regional offices will co-ordinate the provision of existing supports at local level for children and young people enrolled in primary and post-primary schools who do not speak English or Gaeilge as their first language. These supports take the form of grant assistance and/or additional temporary teacher posts. In addition, there are general policy issues in relation to the education of people who do not speak English or Gaeilge as their first language. The mechanism for dealing with these policy issues is being reviewed by the Department.

3.6 Curricular relevance and choice

Second-level schools participating in the SSP will be encouraged to make optimum use of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). In tandem with a review by the NCCA of the profiles and statements that comprise the JCSP, the present resourcing arrangements for the programme will be reviewed.

A recent report by the ESRI, *The Transition Year Programme - An Assessment* (2004), highlighted the fact that students attending schools serving more disadvantaged communities are less likely to have the chance to take the Transition Year Programme. Consideration will be given as to how this issue can best be addressed in the context of the rollout of the SSP.

Guidance counsellors have a particularly important role to play in advising second-level students on career options and on the related issue of appropriate subject choice. This involves the provision of advice on an individual or group basis, as appropriate. Additional guidance counselling provision will be made available for second-level schools participating in the SSP and having the highest concentrations of disadvantage. This provision will be targeted at meeting the needs of junior cycle students, with an emphasis on supporting them through the initial period of their second-level education and assisting them in making appropriate subject choices and in developing good habits of study.

This action plan places a strong emphasis on the development and monitoring of literacy and numeracy skills because of their central place as vital tools for life, for learning, and for social and economic participation. While their importance is clear, these skills are only aspects of the integrated curricula in primary and second-level schools that are designed to provide a broadly based education, to nurture and develop a range of intelligences and skills. It is important, therefore, that all intelligences and skills are promoted in schools and that pupils have exposure to a wide variety of opportunities to develop their potential and that will support a growth in the self-esteem, engagement, and motivation which are necessary for successful learning. Learning through guided activity and discovery, with pupils as active agents in their own learning and enrichment, is a vital part of this process.

In this context, physical education and arts education play a particularly important role in offering learning opportunities which are enjoyable and fulfilling, which encourage creativity, imagination and self-expression and promote skills in the conceptual, physical and affective domains.

As well as providing in-school academic support for children and young people on a targeted basis, the School Completion Programme provides a wide range of non-academic supports, mainly outside of school hours and during holiday time. These non-academic supports, including sporting and cultural activities, are vital to building self-esteem, confidence, social skills and enthusiasm for learning in children and young people as well as promoting awareness of communal support and a sense of belonging, ownership and pride in their school. As such, they are key supports in preventing early school leaving and in underpinning better educational attainment and are a vital part of the overall strategy to promote a multi-faceted response to educational disadvantage. The provision for supports of this nature will continue to be developed in the context of the SSP and the participating schools will be encouraged to share best practice in this area, and to work collaboratively in the organisation of activities and events as part of their overall plans.

3.7 Role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

The promotion of greater access to, and use of, ICTs by children and young people in disadvantaged communities is an important element of this action plan. This arises from the widespread awareness that lack of ICT access and skills, particularly among young people, leads to new social divisions (the “digital divide”).

The development of ICT literacy has been shown to have a significant impact on literacy and numeracy development generally. Innovative projects such as the learning programmes being undertaken in the Liberties area of Dublin by the Digital Hub Development Agency and a number of projects providing broadband connectivity to remote rural schools, demonstrate how ICTs can support improved educational participation and access. Where correctly integrated into an educational setting, ICTs can enable students to learn in new and exciting ways, encouraging their engagement and making communication easier. There are a number of examples of innovative after-school programmes, including some sponsored by the business community, which provide children and young people from disadvantaged communities with the opportunity to engage with ICTs, allowing them participate in challenging activities, problem-solving and creative expression by, for example, using digital video technology or animation software. There is evidence to indicate that the creative application of ICT in education can allow students at risk of early school leaving to connect with learning in new ways, resulting in improved motivation, attendance and application across subject areas.

ICT availability and access is also a valuable tool in improving communication between schools and can, for example, play a valuable role in the delivery of effective transfer programmes from primary to second-level.

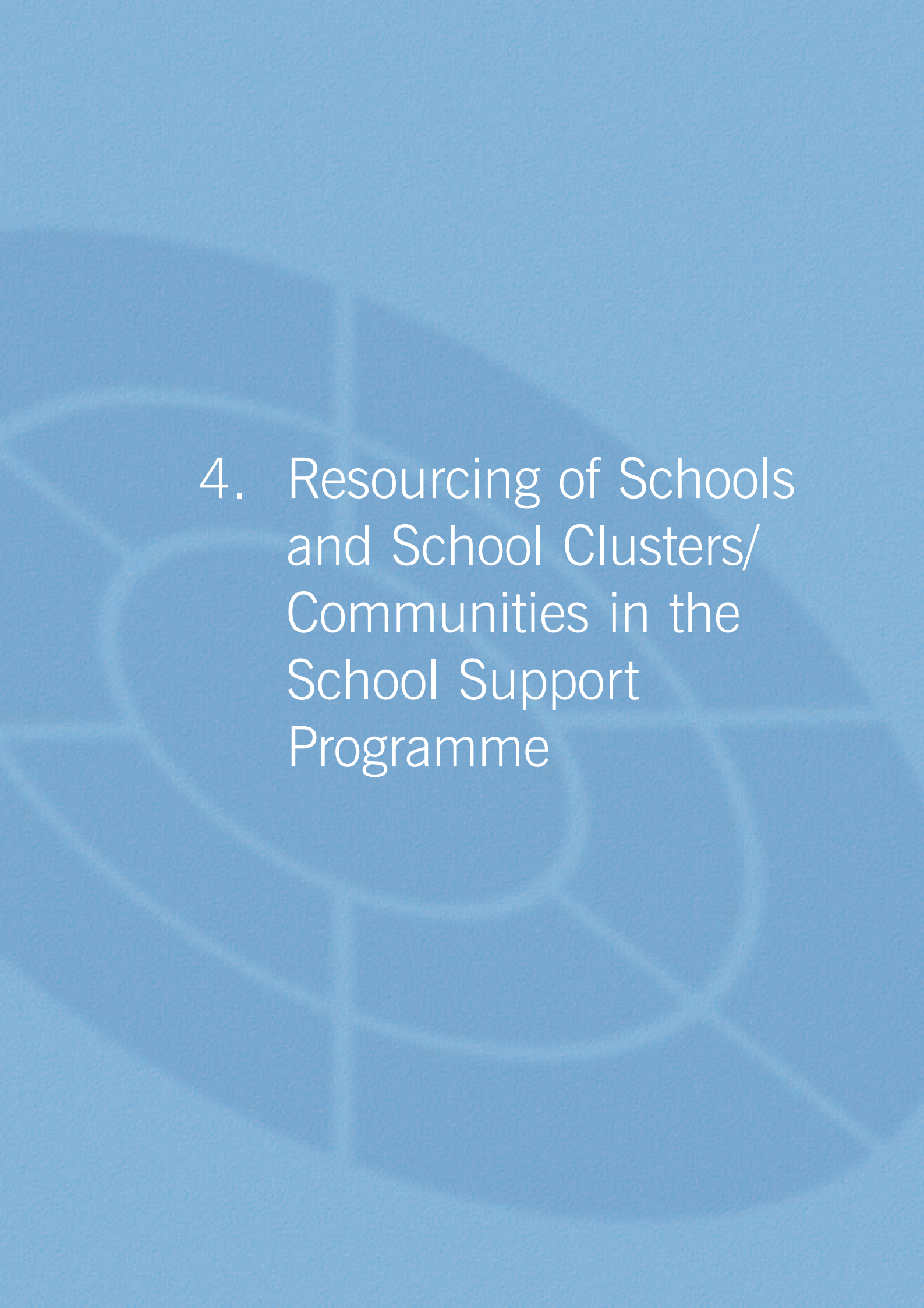
The joint commitment by the telecommunications sector and the Government of €18m towards the rollout of broadband capacity to all primary and second-level schools and the provision of additional funding of €18m by the Department of Education and Science in 2004 to support the development of schools' ICT infrastructure, will assist schools generally in improving access to ICT facilities and opens the potential for the wider use of innovative learning interventions to promote educational inclusion. The Department will continue to progress the position as regards ICT in schools, with priority being given to supporting developments in schools serving disadvantaged communities and making provision for children with special needs.

3.8 Higher Education Access Programmes

A National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education was established within the Higher Education Authority in early 2004. The remit of the National Office is to facilitate inclusive and equitable access to higher education from under-represented groups and promote improved participation by students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students with a disability and mature “second chance” students. With the exception of some projects operating in second-level schools, the National Office now administers access measures formerly managed by the Department of Education and Science, namely the Student Assistance Fund, the Fund for Students with Disabilities and the Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage, as well as the access element of the Higher Education Authority's targeted initiatives.

The National Office published an action plan for the period 2005-2007, entitled *Achieving Equity of Access to Higher Education in Ireland*, in December, 2004. The areas for action identified by the Plan include the development of a national framework of equity of access policies, initiatives to widen access by under-represented learners and the provision of supports for higher education institutions in pursuing a practical agenda for achieving equity of access as a core part of institutional strategy. The work to be carried out in these areas will complement the new approach to educational inclusion set out in this document and the Department and the National Office will work together in this regard.

The work of the access projects that the Department continues to administer at second-level will be monitored and reviewed during 2005/2006 - 2006/2007 with the assistance of School Completion Programme co-ordinators at local level. A National Office action plan proposal to promote links between higher education institutions and schools serving disadvantaged communities provides a basis for further developing integration between these projects and the work of the National Office in the future.



4. Resourcing of Schools
and School Clusters/
Communities in the
School Support
Programme

4. Resourcing of Schools and School Clusters/Communities in the SSP

Anomalies in participation in current schemes will be eliminated by bringing together both the identification and resourcing processes for the existing measures listed in section 2.3 above under the unified SSP model.

Resources will be channelled both to individual schools and to school clusters/communities participating in the SSP as set out below. The resources provided will take account of level of disadvantage.

4.1 Resourcing of individual schools

Staffing and financial supports provided to individual schools through a range of schemes and programmes will be brought together and channelled to schools participating in the SSP through the new integrated framework. Supports will be streamlined on a phased basis. For example, HSCL services will be rolled out to all urban/town primary schools and second-level schools participating in the SSP, and not already in receipt of these services, over the school years 2005/2006 and 2006/2007.

Maximum class sizes will be reduced to 20:1 in all junior classes (junior infants through 2nd class) and 24:1 in all senior classes (3rd class through 6th class) for the 150 urban/town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage.

The following class reductions provided to urban/town primary schools under previous schemes will also continue in operation in the schools concerned:

- *Breaking the Cycle*: 32 schools benefit from maximum class sizes of 15:1 in junior classes and 27:1 in senior classes
- *Giving Children an Even Break*: 211 schools benefit from maximum class sizes of 20:1 in junior classes and 27:1 in senior classes

School principals will administer supplementary financial resources locally and new guidelines and criteria will be drawn up to cover the uses to which these resources may be put. Appropriate reporting arrangements will also be put in place in this regard.

4.2 Resourcing at school cluster/community level

School clusters (including both primary and second-level schools) and school communities served by the SSP will have access to human and financial resources for addressing educational disadvantage made available at local cluster level.

For the initial phases of implementation, rural primary schools participating in the SSP will be allocated a local teacher/co-ordinator to serve a cluster of schools, broadly in line with the arrangements already in place for this under the rural dimension of the *Giving Children an Even Break* programme. Rural primary schools that are isolated from other similar schools and hence cannot be clustered will be provided with financial support as an alternative to teacher/co-ordinator support. The long-term arrangements to be adopted in this area will be the subject of a review, aimed at determining whether the particular model of support involved is the most appropriate in this context.

Resources will also be made available to qualifying school clusters through the School Completion Programme during the period prior to its integration into the SSP, with a cluster-level resourcing dimension continuing thereafter to ensure that the integrated cross-sectoral and cross-community delivery model, which underpins both the School Completion Programme and the HSCL Scheme, can be further strengthened under the SSP.

4.3 Recruitment and Retention of Principals and Teaching Staff

There is a need to ensure that schools participating in the SSP can continue to attract and retain well qualified personnel to positions of leadership and teaching on an ongoing basis. While all the supports, both human and financial, which will be provided under this action plan will contribute to achieving this objective, the following specific measures will be implemented on a phased basis in support of it:

- administrative principals will be allocated to urban/town primary schools participating in the SSP on lower enrolment and staffing figures than apply in primary schools generally
- a sabbatical leave scheme will be introduced to create opportunities for principals and teachers, who have served for a defined period in a school participating in the SSP, to apply to undertake a period of development to enhance their own learning and effectiveness, and bring subsequent benefits to their students and their school. The scheme will provide for about 50 sabbaticals annually, with access to it being extended to all SSP schools on a phased basis.

In addition, schools participating in the SSP will, in line with existing practice, receive priority support from the following:

- the National Educational Psychological Service
- the National Educational Welfare Board
- the Primary Curriculum Support Programme
- the Second-Level Support Service
- the School Development Planning teams at primary and second-level
- the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (in the context of combating early school leaving).

In line with a recommendation of the Educational Disadvantage Committee, consideration will be given to the potential for introducing a Direct Access Programme for all pre-service teacher education programmes at both primary and second-level, so that a greater proportion of individuals from disadvantaged communities can enter such programmes in the future.



5. Planning, Target-setting and ongoing Review Processes

5. Planning, Target-setting and ongoing Review Processes

The implementation of this action plan will be supported by a locally-based planning process at the following two levels:

- individual school level
- school cluster/community level

The involvement of students, parents, local communities and agencies operating at local level will be an important dimension of the overall planning process. In particular, all second-level schools participating in the SSP will need to have a student council in operation to support engagement between school staff and students in the process of planning for the effective implementation of SSP measures. Plans developed at school cluster/community level will also need to be informed by a structured process of consultation with learners. Both HSCL and School Completion Programme co-ordinators will be well placed to support this process. The HSCL Scheme, in particular, has developed considerable experience in involving parents in policy formation during the fourteen years in which the Scheme has been in operation. Pupils have also been involved in this process for the last four years.

A common set of indicators will be developed on a partnership basis to facilitate progress reporting on the implementation of school and school cluster/community action plans. Some examples of areas of activity for which indicators would be appropriate include:

- pupil attendance
- pupil retention
- literacy and numeracy progression/attainment
- educational progress/examination attainment for second-level students
- parent and community partnership
- partnership between schools, including in relation to transfer programmes
- links with external agencies

Progress with the implementation of school and school cluster/community action plans will need to be kept under review, with plans being adjusted, as necessary, in the light of experience.

5.1 Planning at Individual School Level

The School Development Planning (SDP) initiative was launched in 1999 to support development planning in schools, with priority being given to the needs of schools serving disadvantaged communities. Guidelines for School Planning were made available to schools under the initiative. Progress on the initiative, since 1999, together with the challenges ahead, were outlined in the National Progress Report, published by the Department in 2003. These challenges included the establishment of development planning as a cyclical process in all schools, the promotion of school self-evaluation as the basis for all development activities, the maintenance of a focus on teaching and learning and the increased inclusion of parents and other partners in the planning process.

A tailored planning template will be developed for implementation on a phased basis, through the School Development Planning initiative, in schools participating in the SSP. This will facilitate the development by schools of their own individual three-year action plans. School action plans will be developed on the basis of an assessment of the school's current situation, involving both self-evaluation by the school and the input of the Department's Inspectorate. The finalised plans will include locally developed targets under each of the agreed indicators. These targets will need to be agreed at whole-school level, with all staff members then taking them into account, as appropriate, in their individual short-term and long-term planning.

In addition, the planning process at school level should, in line with the Department's Learning-Support Guidelines, make provision for establishing and maintaining an *Individual Profile and Learning Programme* for each pupil in receipt of significant extra supports to underpin an integrated approach by all of the professionals assisting her/his educational development. The precise arrangements to be put in place in this regard will be developed, with assistance from the National Educational Psychological Service, and implemented on a phased basis under the SSP.

5.2 Planning at School Cluster/Community Level

The detailed Retention Plans prepared by each School Completion Programme cluster and the Integration and Development Plans of HSCL clusters will provide the main focal points for planning at this level until all the relevant existing programmes have been integrated into the SSP. These plans identify supports to be provided to young people, their parents and community on a targeted basis under each of the following headings:

Young people

- In-School Supports
- After-School Supports
- Holiday Supports
- Out-of-School Supports

Parents and Community

- Parental supports, development and involvement
- Community/agency participation, involvement and partnership

Best practice in this area will be built upon in continuing to develop the planning process at school cluster/community level.



6. Professional Development

6. Professional Development

Principals, deputy principals, post of responsibility holders, teachers and other personnel in schools/school clusters participating in the SSP will require professional development support to enable them to effectively implement the new approaches required and to make optimum use of the supplementary resources made available through the SSP.

Consequently, a new initiative on pre-service and in-service professional development will be designed and implemented on a phased basis. Research carried out by the ERC for the Educational Disadvantage Committee has highlighted studies which have found that successful professional development is more likely to occur:

- in school and classroom settings
- where opportunities are provided for teachers to be actively involved in the analysis of teaching and learning, such as receiving feedback about their teaching and
- where mentoring support is available

than through the traditional off-site “training course” model. These findings will form the basis for a new approach to professional development.

Key actions will include:

- working with the Colleges of Education and other approved course providers to ensure that a significantly increased focus is put on literacy and numeracy teaching skills and methodologies in pre-service training and on teaching strategies to accommodate a diverse range of learning needs and styles
- targeting of schools participating in the SSP for the induction programme for newly qualified primary teachers
- professional development for teaching staff in schools participating in the SSP, to include:
 - an understanding of educational inclusion issues at a whole-school level
 - giving priority to pedagogy, including teaching methodologies and practices for smaller classes, teaching literacy and numeracy, assessment strategies and methodologies, attainment-related target setting, promoting learner engagement and motivation and collaborative working. Whole-school and school cluster approaches will be emphasised as well as professional development and mentoring delivered on-site by the new team of literacy and numeracy advisers (see section 3.2.3 above), wherever possible

- addressing the issue of teacher expectations. Work carried out by the ERC for the Educational Disadvantage Committee has highlighted a body of international research indicating that a climate of high expectations of their students by teachers is a commonly cited feature of effective schools and that programmes that are characterised by a strong drive towards high expectations show evidence of positive effects on student achievement. The research also indicated that good professional development programmes aimed at encouraging more responsive teaching methods are important in this regard
 - student behavioural issues (the National Educational Psychological Service will make an input to professional development in this area, taking into account the recommendation of the Task Force on Student Behaviour established by the Minister for Education and Science in January, 2005)
 - involving parents and the wider community in the learning process
 - strategies for preventing early school leaving
 - specialised training for teachers in SSP schools, in line with the specific needs of such schools
- professional development for principals in schools participating in the SSP, including programmes supporting the development of skills in the areas of strategic leadership and change management, with the assistance of the Leadership Development in Schools programme.



7. A renewed focus on
Integration of Services
and Partnership Working

7. A renewed focus on Integration of Services and Partnership Working

The education system operates in a context of broader social and economic circumstances. A wide range of issues such as poverty, family breakdown and health problems can adversely affect the learning capacity of pupils. The education system cannot resolve these issues single-handedly, nor can it be expected to, but it must adopt a leading role in influencing interventions that directly impact on the ability of pupils to derive maximum benefit from educational provision. It is clear that educational attainment is one of the most significant factors in helping people to escape inter-generational poverty.

A key objective of this action plan is to enhance integration and partnership working, both within the education sector itself and between the Department of Education and Science, education agencies and providers and all other relevant Government departments, agencies, organisations and groups. Through the development of its new network of ten regional offices, the Department is enhancing its capacity to work in partnership with County Development Boards (CDBs) and locally based agencies and individuals promoting social inclusion measures.

Specific actions to be taken in relation to the integration of services and partnership working include:

- further extension, in co-operation with the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Department of Agriculture and Food, of the existing School Meals Programme and the EU School Milk Scheme. Meal provision in schools serving disadvantaged communities can, in addition to nutritional benefits, have a positive effect on both attendance and educational attainment
- increased alignment of the following Youth sector measures, with actions being taken by schools and school clusters/communities participating in the SSP to tackle early school leaving:
 - Special Projects for Disadvantaged Youth
 - Projects managed by Léargas, including the International Youth Exchange Programmes and Group Initiatives (projects run and managed by young people that serve to develop or improve their local communities).

Youth work can play a very important role in complementing young people's formal education and, by aiding and supporting their social development, it provides another avenue to participation and inclusion for young people from disadvantaged communities

- working with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Library Association of Ireland and the Library Council, with particular reference to further developing partnership approaches between the local authority library system and schools and school clusters/communities participating in the SSP on literacy issues
- development by the Department's Regional Offices Directorate of an overall plan for addressing services integration and partnership working issues. This will take into account the potential for increased co-operation with a wide range of partner organisations already implementing, supporting or integrating with educational inclusion initiatives at local, county/regional and national level. Examples include area partnerships, the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme, "Springboard" projects and speech and language therapy services in the health sector, St. Vincent de Paul, foundations and non-profit organisations such as Atlantic Philanthropies, the Irish Youth Foundation, Junior Achievement and others. The planning process will incorporate:
 - researching and evaluating, on a region by region basis, existing projects with an educational inclusion dimension and identifying opportunities for greater co-ordination/integration or partnership working
 - identifying existing models of best practice for the delivery of integrated services and partnership working between education providers and those from other sectors, and promoting their wider application
 - reviewing the present role of education co-ordinators attached to area partnerships and making recommendations in relation to the future direction of this service.



8. Liaison with School Principals' Networks

8. Liaison with School Principals' Networks

Networks of school principals can play an important role in supporting and assisting the implementation of the SSP.

In the context of the rollout of the SSP, the Department will liaise with existing networking structures at both national and local level. It is envisaged that areas for beneficial mutual discussion and co-operation could include:

- discussion of the proposals on locally-based planning, target-setting, assessment, self-review and evaluation as set out in this document
- examination of needs and discussion of effective implementation arrangements for professional development
- identifying opportunities for sharing or pooling resources, where this can achieve added value and better value for money
- exploring, promoting, and providing feedback on partnership approaches and integration of services both within the education sector and between the education sector and other sectors
- sharing experience and information on best practice.

Networking provides opportunities for constructive listening, learning and collaboration in relation to educational inclusion issues on a “community of interest” basis.

The Department's regional offices will act as the main point of contact with school principals' networks on an ongoing basis.





9. Research and Evaluation

9. Research and Evaluation

The vital role that research findings and reflection on the experience of interventions have to play has not always been fully recognised in the past. To address this concern, the Department, with the advice and assistance of the Educational Disadvantage Committee, will implement an in-depth programme of both research and evaluation to inform policy formation in this area on an ongoing basis. An increased emphasis will be placed on formative evaluation, in the sense of providing regular feedback on the operation of programmes, as well as on summative evaluation, which assists in coming to a judgement regarding the overall worth or value of a particular measure.

The Department will determine how progress and outcomes achieved by all of the contributors (including the Department itself) are to be evaluated during, and at the end of, the three-year action plans implemented by individual schools and school clusters participating in the SSP. Appropriate data-gathering arrangements will be put in place in this context.

Key actions will include:

- strengthening research, and research co-ordination/management, capacity within the Department
- the putting in place of a phased research programme to:
 - improve the existing knowledge base in relation to addressing educational disadvantage
 - develop a deeper understanding of the underlying issues and the reasons behind the success or lack of success of particular actions
 - examine successful approaches in other countries in more detail, with a view to considering their potential applicability in the Irish situation
- the putting in place of an evaluation programme, including provision for feedback from both parents and learners, to support the implementation of this action plan. The Department will aim to ensure that the best possible approaches to measuring progress and outcomes are implemented at both local and national level and that, for each new three-year cycle, adjustments are made on the basis of what has been learnt from both the research and evaluation processes.





10. Implementation of the Action Plan

10. Implementation of the Action Plan

Implementation of this action plan will be phased over five years. The following paragraphs summarise the implementation arrangements for:

- **Phase 1:** school year 2005/2006
- **Phase 2:** school year 2006/2007
- **post Phase 2:** school year 2007/2008 onwards.

10.1 Implementation Phase 1 - school year 2005/2006

The first phase of implementation will involve the following key measures:

- **Primary schools:**
 - an additional €1m will be made available for financial support for the 600 primary schools participating in the SSP, with the support provided per school taking account of level of disadvantage and relevant financial supports currently in place
 - an additional €0.25m will be made available under the School Books Grant Scheme to primary schools participating in the SSP and that have the highest concentrations of disadvantage. This funding will be aimed primarily at supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes. The number of schools to be targeted under this measure in Phase 1 will be decided following consideration of the results of the identification process
 - school planning and target-setting measures will be developed in an initial group of about 10 primary schools participating in the SSP. These will be selected from among the schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage and liaison with school principals' networks at primary level will take place in this context

- **Specific supports for urban/town primary schools:**
 - the 150 urban/town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage will be targeted to benefit from:
 - maximum class sizes of 20:1 in junior classes (infants through second-class) and 24:1 in senior classes (third through sixth-class)
 - allocation of administrative principals on lower enrolment and staffing figures than apply in primary schools generally, under the following terms:
 - ◆ the enrolment figure for the appointment and retention of administrative principals in urban/town primary schools participating in the SSP will be 146 pupils. This will facilitate the principal becoming an administrative principal. In such instances, a permanent mainstream class teacher may be appointed to replace the principal

OR

 - ◆ principal teachers in urban/town primary schools participating in the SSP with an enrolment of less than 146 pupils but with a staffing of principal plus seven or more teachers when all ex-quota posts are counted, may be appointed as administrative principals. In such instances, a permanent mainstream class teacher may be appointed to replace the principal- the Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme services, where not already in receipt of these services
- the Reading Recovery programme will be extended to about 50 schools, selected from among the 150 schools with the highest levels of disadvantage
- the existing First Steps pilot project will continue to be developed.

- **Specific supports for rural primary schools:**
 - the 150 rural primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage will be targeted to benefit from:
 - access to a teacher/co-ordinator serving a cluster of schools, where not already in place through the *Giving Children an Even Break* programme
 - schools that cannot be clustered will be provided with financial support as an alternative to teacher/co-ordinator support
 - an initiative aimed at increasing take-up of the School Meals Programme (administered by the Department of Social and Family Affairs) in rural schools, with a particular focus on co-ordination at cluster level
 - the rural teacher/co-ordinator service will be integrated under the remit of a strengthened national HSCL team, with implementation of literacy and numeracy measures provided through HSCL being prioritised in rural primary school clusters
 - a special study will be carried out on literacy and numeracy in rural primary schools with high concentrations of disadvantage, with the assistance of teacher/co-ordinators.

- **Second-Level Schools:**

- an additional €1m will be made available for financial support for the 150 second-level schools participating in the SSP, with the support provided per school taking account of level of disadvantage and relevant financial supports currently in place
- an additional €0.25m will be made available under the School Books Grant Scheme to second-level schools participating in the SSP and with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. This funding will be aimed primarily at supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes. The number of schools to be targeted under this measure in Phase 1 will be decided following consideration of the results of the identification process
- additional funding will be made available to support the development and implementation of whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies under the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP)
- the 100 second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage will be targeted to benefit from the Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme services where they are not already in receipt of these services
- 40 additional whole-time equivalent posts will be provided for guidance counselling, targeted at supporting junior cycle students, in second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage. The number of schools to be targeted under this measure, and the criteria for allocation of the posts, will be decided following consideration of the results of the identification process
- the JCSP Demonstration Library Project, in which 11 schools are currently participating, will be extended to a further 10 schools. These will be selected from among the schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
- school planning and target-setting measures will also be developed in the above group of 10 schools and liaison with school principals' networks at second-level will be take place in this context.

Planning and preparatory work will also take place in Phase 1 in the following key areas:

- integration of existing measures to address educational disadvantage
- early childhood education
- extension of targeted additional funding under the School Books Grant Schemes at both primary and second-level to a second group of schools, with the aim of supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes
- further development and extension of a range of specific literacy and numeracy interventions in primary and second-level schools and development of a new Family Literacy project
- extending access to the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) to second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
- school planning, target-setting and ongoing review processes, including the putting in place of templates for the development of three-year action plans at school level. These templates will be developed by building on existing processes under the School Development Planning (SDP) initiative
- establishing a common set of indicators to facilitate progress reporting on the implementation of school and school cluster/community action plans
- establishing the new sabbatical leave scheme for principals and teachers who have served for a defined period in schools participating in the SSP
- professional development
- inter-agency co-operation and partnership working
- research and evaluation.

10.2 Implementation Phase 2 - school year 2006/2007

Following a progress review in early 2006, arrangements for the second phase of implementation of the action plan, covering the school year 2006/2007 will be finalised. It is envisaged that particular priorities for the second phase of implementation will include:

- **Extending availability of key services:**
 - **urban/town primary schools and second-level schools:**
 - extending the Department's Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme services to any remaining urban/town primary schools and second-level schools participating in the SSP
 - **rural primary schools**
 - extending teacher/co-ordinator services (or financial support where a school cannot be clustered) to any remaining rural primary schools participating in the SSP
- **Literacy and numeracy:**
 - extending the Reading Recovery programme to a further 50 schools selected from among the 150 urban/town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
 - implementing other literacy/numeracy measures (including a literacy/numeracy advisory service through the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), First Steps, Maths Recovery and *Ready, Steady, Go Maths*) in up to 50 urban/town schools selected from among the 150 primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
 - implementing specific literacy and numeracy measures, building on existing approaches under the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), in second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
 - implementing, with the assistance of teacher/co-ordinators, specific literacy and numeracy measures in rural primary schools/school clusters with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
 - commencing implementation of a new Family Literacy project

- commencing implementation of early childhood education measures, following an examination of existing early childhood provision in communities served by the 150 urban/town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
- extending targeted additional funding under the School Books Grant Schemes at both primary and second-level to a second group of schools, with the aim of supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes
- continuing the process of extending access to the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) to second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
- commencing the report on the work of a number of centres for young early school leavers being supported by the Department
- extending school planning and target-setting processes for implementation by:
 - the 150 urban/town primary schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
 - the rural primary schools/school clusters (comprising up to 150 schools) with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
 - the 50 second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage
- commencing implementation of identified professional development measures
- implementing a new sabbatical leave scheme, providing for about 50 sabbaticals, and confined initially to the 150 urban/town primary schools and 50 second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage.

10.3 Implementation after Phase 2 - school year 2007/2008 onwards

Progress will be reviewed annually in early 2007, 2008 and 2009, with arrangements for further phasing of implementation over the school years 2007/2008 – 2009/2010 being put in place accordingly.

The following tables detail the measures that it is envisaged will be in place under the SSP when full implementation of the action plan has been achieved.

Overview of measures to be in place on full implementation of the School Support Programme

Supports to urban/town primary schools and school clusters/communities in SSP

- For the 150 primary schools serving communities with the highest concentrations of disadvantage:
 - access to early education for children, aged from three up to school enrolment, who will subsequently attend these primary schools
 - maximum class sizes of 20:1 in all junior classes (junior infants through 2nd class) and 24:1 in all senior classes (3rd class through 6th class)
- For all 300 urban/town primary schools participating in the SSP:
 - allocation of administrative principals on lower enrolment and staffing figures than apply in primary schools generally
 - additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage
 - financial allocation under school books grant scheme based on level of disadvantage and additional funding targeted primarily at supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes
 - access to the School Meals Programme, with co-ordination provided at cluster level
 - access to a literacy/numeracy support service and to literacy/numeracy programmes as follows: Reading Recovery, First Steps, Maths Recovery, *Ready, Steady, Go Maths* and homework clubs/summer camps assisting literacy and numeracy development
 - access to Home/School/Community Liaison services (including literacy and numeracy initiatives involving parents and family members, such as paired reading, paired maths, *Reading for Fun* and *Maths for Fun*)
 - access to a range of supports (both academic and non-academic, and including after-school and holiday-time supports) for young people, with the best practices identified through an evaluation of the School Completion Programme being incorporated into cluster-level action plans
 - access to transfer programmes supporting progression from primary to second-level
 - access to planning supports
 - access to a range of professional development supports
 - eligibility for teachers/principals to apply for sabbatical leave scheme

Note: The following class size reductions provided to urban/town primary schools under previous schemes will continue in operation in the schools concerned:

- *Breaking the Cycle*: 32 schools benefit from maximum class sizes of 15:1 in junior classes and 27:1 in senior classes
- *Giving Children an Even Break*: 211 schools benefit from maximum class sizes of 20:1 in junior classes and 27:1 in senior classes.

Overview of measures to be in place on full implementation of the School Support Programme

Supports to rural primary schools and school clusters/communities in SSP

- access to a teacher/co-ordinator, serving a cluster of schools, and whose functions will include the development of home, school and community linkages, supporting implementation of literacy and numeracy measures, planning supports etc.
- financial support as an alternative to teacher/co-ordinator support where school cannot be clustered
- additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage
- financial allocation under school books grant scheme based on level of disadvantage and additional funding targeted primarily at supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes
- access to the School Meals Programme, with co-ordination provided at cluster level
- access to after-school and holiday-time supports
- access to transfer programmes supporting progression from primary to second-level
- access to a range of professional development supports
- eligibility for teachers/principals to apply for sabbatical leave scheme

Note: The first two supports listed above will be the subject of an evaluation exercise to determine whether the particular model of support involved is the most appropriate in the long term.

Overview of measures to be in place on full implementation of the School Support Programme

Supports to second-level schools and school clusters/communities in SSP

- For second-level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage:
 - enhanced guidance counselling provision
 - provision for school library and librarian support (will be extended to the 50 SSP schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage over five years - extension to further SSP schools will be considered subsequently)
- For all 150 second-level schools participating in the SSP:
 - access to Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) (and literacy/numeracy supports developed by building on existing measures under the JCSP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and associated staffing and funding supports
 - additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage
 - financial allocation under school books grant scheme based on level of disadvantage and additional funding targeted primarily at supporting the establishment, development and ongoing operation of book loan/rental schemes
 - access to the School Meals Programme, with co-ordination provided at cluster level
 - access to Home/School/Community Liaison services (including literacy and numeracy initiatives involving parents and family members, such as paired reading, paired maths, *Reading for Fun* and *Maths for Fun*)
 - access to a range of supports (both academic and non-academic, and including after school and holiday-time supports) for young people, with the best practices identified through an evaluation of the School Completion Programme being incorporated into cluster-level action plans
 - access to transfer programmes supporting progression from primary to second-level
 - access to planning supports
 - access to a range of professional development supports
 - eligibility for teachers/principals to apply for sabbatical leave scheme

In addition to the above early education and school-based measures at primary and second-level, a new Family Literacy Project will be implemented, targeting SSP school communities generally.

