

Assessment of DEIS Programme

Template for Stakeholder Consultation

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Part A-ESRI Report 'Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS'

Observations / Comments on ESRI Report 'Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS'

(This section relates to Report Observations only)

It should be said at the outset that the report confirms the value and success of the DEIS programme to date. This is due to the professional and enthusiastic commitment of those working in disadvantaged communities to be risk takers and innovators, leading significant change within their schools. This has not been an easy journey but it has been a determined one and has led to very positive outcomes for the children in these communities. DEIS pupils are the most disadvantaged and marginalised in the country and Principals are often their only advocates. In the words of one principal commenting on DEIS, 'Without these interventions, there is absolutely no doubt but that our improvements would not be what they are today.' It is fair to say that his words reflect the experience of all DEIS principals.

While the outcomes from analysis of Reading & Mathematics scoring show consistent improvement in attainment levels, it is apparent that some of the cross sectional trends are driven by changes in profile. This is a significant feature of the analysis and warrants ongoing attention when looking at data going forward. It is also interesting to note that the gap in achievement between Urban DEIS schools and other schools remains significant. This may well relate to the profile changes that have occurred and continue to occur in urban areas. DEIS schools have identified the importance of including social context in all aspects of ongoing analysis of the programme. It is also a feature of the research that a greater emphasis is placed on outcomes from Standardised Testing and academic achievement without assessment of pupil's well-being, school experience and future aspirations.

The improvement in school attendance rates highlighted in the report is very commendable and indicates the value of target setting and strategies for improvements, which have been a feature of DEIS planning from the outset. Support from the School Completion Programme and the provision of Breakfast Clubs/ School Lunches is no doubt a significant contributory factor in this success. However, ongoing cuts in grant allocation to the School Completion Programme over the past four years have resulted in a significant reduction in programmes supporting good attendance practices available to schools. This is an unhealthy and potentially regressive factor which may negatively impact on future retention figures. While target-setting and strategies for promotion of good attendance of pupils in schools is admirable and desirable, the ongoing provision of quality programmes through SCP is a vital component to ensure a continuation of positive outcomes.

While the report refers to the fact that DEIS Band 1 schools have a reduced class size which supports early intervention and the delivery of specific programmes targeting disadvantage, DEIS Band 2 schools retain the same class size as non- DEIS schools. This warrants further review given the social context of pupils attending DEIS Band 2 schools and the number of pupils with significant special educational needs who present for enrolment in DEIS Band 2 schools, which the report recognises in the outcomes.

Enhanced capitation for DEIS schools undoubtedly allows for greater flexibility in relation to the provision of appropriate resources and supports. It is widely recognised that DEIS schools have limited capacity for fundraising and for contribution from parents towards school expenses.

While the ESRI report refers to Home/School Community Liaison, it doesn't really give a clear understanding of the very positive impact the HSCL officer makes to a DEIS school.

Agree with the report conclusions that the research needs to focus on more than reading and Maths outcomes. Schools work very hard to overcome all sorts of other issues such as self esteem, health and fitness and the more holistic education of children, which aren't being measured in the same way but will have just as much, if not more, impact on those children over time.

Utilising information from state-level systems to track children in DEIS and non-DEIS schools throughout their lives would provide a wealth of information – about mental and physical health as well as education outcomes at primary, second and third levels and beyond into their working lives.

Part B-Observations on DEIS - Current Provision

Observations of Current Programme i.e. Experience of Implementation / Interventions / Outcomes

(This section relates to experience of DEIS programme observations only)

The School Completion Programme is a vital element in the provision of appropriate, targeted programmes for DEIS schools and has allowed for an enhanced menu of opportunities to be made available to target pupils. It allows for greater access to Outreach Programmes and community-based initiatives with skilled support staff, which DEIS schools have benefited from enormously.

Continued access to specialist support from PDST is a vital component in the provision of ongoing quality CPD and support to school staff. It complements the setting of specific targets and gives staff confidence to fully engage in the range of methodologies recommended by the various programmes and explore their own classroom practice and teaching styles. This provides for desirable outcomes for pupils supported by an informed staff.

The support and role of Home School Community Liaison in maintaining and enhancing home / school links is vital and continues to be a pivotal post in all DEIS schools.

The demise of the highly effective and supportive Cumasú programme is regrettable as it provided vital regional links for principals and HSCLs. The listening opportunities provided at these sessions were an excellent support to DEIS schools and allowed for active learning to take place from within the DEIS 'family'.

Planning in DEIS schools has been highly effective and has undoubtedly informed the current SSE model now in place in all schools.

While PDST support the planning and CPD needs of DEIS schools in a professional and appropriate manner, schools need more active engagement from Social Inclusion to provide ongoing support to meet the ever-changing needs in DEIS schools. The range and complexity of the challenges faced by DEIS schools demand a centralised support system which is available to provide this support on a regional basis.

The opportunities afforded to schools to provide for enhanced resources and programmes appropriate to the specific needs of individual schools is supported by the provision of the DEIS Grant. This is an essential component of the DEIS programme and central to the provision of targeted supports. Much hard work has gone into improving Literacy and Numeracy, among other supports, but this has only been possible because of the implementation of DEIS initiatives. If some resources are removed from existing DEIS schools, or interfered with, it will no longer be possible to implement the initiatives which will lead to a reversal in the improvements gained.

DEIS provision is clearly working – this is also confirmed by Educational Research Centre (See **Appendix I – ERC Summary 'The Evaluation of DEIS'**) – therefore it needs to be continued and expanded.

The list of schools included in DEIS have not been updated in several years. As it is so out of date, there is inequitable funding and support for similar schools, even within the same campus or parish. This also hinders collaboration between local schools.

Where multiple sources of funding overlap, these are often 'earmarked', which creates difficulty administering programmes such as Breakfast Clubs. For example, if a school secures some funding from St Vincent de Paul to run a breakfast club, they cannot get financial support from DEIS or other government agencies.

In addition to the above, feedback from IPPN members (primary principals) tells us the following works well:

- Funding and resources made available to schools are very welcome and fully utilised, if insufficient
- Staffing – where additional teachers and learning support provided, this enabled schools to set up strong learning support teams to raise literacy and numeracy standards
- Smaller class sizes
- Food grant from social welfare/DFSA for breakfast/lunch clubs - great success. Significant change in healthy lunches which reaps rewards in terms of focus and attention in class.
- Cuiditheoir designated for literacy & numeracy - targeting of numeracy, literacy and attendance is good and

continuity of their service is good

- Good opportunity for children to go on trips or access other extras that they might not otherwise be able to attend/avail of
- Funding has enabled some schools to buy graded library books as we they had not received the library grant.

The main weaknesses pertaining to the current model that principals reported include the following:

- Funding doesn't go far enough in many schools due to education cuts over the last 6-7 years
- Does not really help small rural schools - inequitable
- Considerable additional workload for principals, especially for teaching principals - more meetings, more planning
- Larger cluster size and make-up of clusters that cross county borders, HSE areas, management bodies also problematic – travel time and coordination makes it very inefficient
- Loss of Post allowance a big disadvantage - prevents experienced teachers from applying.
- Children/families can feel stigmatised by inclusion in DEIS grouping. A model that recognised disadvantage at child/family level without labelling children or entire schools as disadvantaged would be helpful. A common enrolment policy would be one such approach.

Part C- Suggestions for Future interventions to Combat Educational Disadvantage

Suggestions for future identification of schools

and/or

Suggestions for interventions that might be included in any future 'DEIS' programme

(This section relates to suggestions for future Model of DEIS only)

There is no doubt that since DEIS was first introduced in 2005, some schools have changed in terms of context. This effectively means that some schools currently included in the DEIS programme no longer have the level of need as was previously presented. Similarly, some schools previously outside the DEIS programme have now become centres for disadvantaged communities and urgently need access to the supports provided by the programme. It is fair to say that the location of a school within a previously identified RAPID area may no longer warrant automatic inclusion in DEIS as enrolments can come from a very wide spread within any given area. This will be further enhanced by the new provision for enrolments in schools recently announced by the Minister for Education. The situation where two schools on the same campus, one designated disadvantaged, the other not, and with pupils from the same family attending both schools, is unsustainable and unjustifiable. Therefore, if a robust process is to be undertaken, a more thorough analysis of complexity of need is warranted in determining access to DEIS. This might well be verified by collaborating with Local Area Partnerships, City/County Councils, Social Welfare Offices & Health Boards who have access to data which is verifiable and accurate. It is unfair to expect schools, and particularly school Principals, to gather sensitive data on social context which is a key component in the needs analysis for DEIS. It is not enough to rely on Standardised Test results as a criterion for determining access to the DEIS Programme as this could well exclude high-functioning schools who support a complex school community. It is crucial that schools that have good outcomes as a result of implementing DEIS programmes are not penalised for their success. Similarly, some schools with legacy posts are finding resources being arbitrarily cut, despite the ESRI evidence that 'legacy schools' have a higher level of need. This 'cuts by stealth' approach is detrimental to those schools and needs to be urgently reviewed.

The complexity of need identified in DEIS schools supports the demand for centralised services based within clusters of targeted DEIS schools. This might include EAL resources, Speech & Language Therapists, Play & Family Therapists, Occupational Therapists and Social Workers. This requires a more cross-departmental approach to DEIS which requires creative conversations at the highest level. The increase in demand for Mental Health Services, as well as increased demand for programmes to alleviate food poverty in DEIS schools supports the need for centralised services to ensure early intervention and identify complexity of need.

Supports for children for whom English is Additional Language (EAL) and those from the Traveller community have been severely cut in the past few years, which has had a significant impact on schools' ability to adequately support them. EAL and Traveller community membership should be part of the DEIS criteria, with an appropriate weighting for schools with higher numbers of these children. It is impossible to break the cycle of illiteracy without dedicated, intensive support.

The restoration of the 'Cumasú' programme or similar is vital to maintain the much-needed collegial support for networks of DEIS Schools. The provision of such a targeted and appropriate continuous professional development is essential for the wellbeing of those leading DEIS schools. More resources could also be put into the area of social skills and behaviour management. For example some schools use the SALT programme and the Incredible Years Programme for positive behaviour management and social skills-building. If wider training was available in these programmes funded by DEIS, all teachers could avail of it. An expansion into support and training for *parents* of pupils attending DEIS schools would also be very welcome and beneficial.

With 20% of principals surveyed in 2013 saying that children are coming to school hungry, food poverty must be high on the agenda. Access to the School Meals Programme needs to be a priority for review as current arrangements appear to act as a deterrent and do not encourage schools to participate in the programme. It begs the question 'Why are so many schools reluctant to avail of the grants currently available'? Furthermore, the programme needs to be expanded to reach all children in need of such support – as all schools have a percentage of neglected and/or disadvantaged pupils, the healthy lunch scheme and breakfast club scheme should be extended to all schools. Consideration should be given to moving the School Meals provision from the Department of Social Protection to

Department of Education & Skills in line with the need to centralise services, as outlined above.

Principals also suggested the following measures in relation to DEIS provision:

- The Pupil/Teacher ratio in all bands needs to be reduced. This is the key to giving disadvantaged pupils an equal chance, not simply increasing financial resources – although both are needed. Resources should target the most disadvantaged. Also, the ratio for senior schools should be the same as for junior schools. Pupils often require more support as they move through the school levels, rather than less support, as mental health problems begin to manifest themselves.
- Reverse the cuts to the DEIS programme – Rural coordinator, HSCL, VTT etc. 50% of principals tell us that there was a medium to high impact on children from the Traveller community after their supports were reduced or removed. While the reduced capitation grant had by far the most impact on most schools, 12% of principals told us that the removal of the RTT was the cut that most impacted their school; the loss of EAL teachers was the biggest loss among a further 12% of schools while a further 3% cited the loss of the DEIS Rural Coordinator as their most significant impact.
- Additional release time for Teaching Principals in DEIS schools – considerable administration and meetings required outside class contact time.
- By any measure, there is no comparison between teaching in a middle class school and teaching in a disadvantaged school (as several principals who have worked in both types of school have commented). The introduction of an additional allowance to teachers in DEIS schools may be warranted.
- Rural disadvantage should not be forgotten. The needs of such schools may not be the same as urban disadvantaged schools but there are significant needs nonetheless.
- Redraw the clustering model to enable primary schools in a geographical area to be clustered for HSCL.
- Facilitate and fund increased parental involvement in DEIS schools e.g. through parental support and training
- Full-time administrative deputy principals should be appointed to schools with a staff of 24 or more teachers (70% of principals agreed or strongly agreed). At the very least, provide release time for Deputy Principals and/or Assistant Principals to support the Principal in implementing the DEIS scheme.
- Allow for lack of expertise on Boards in DEIS schools. They are often the very schools that lack financial / HR / legal expertise locally.
- Boards of Management should have more flexibility in how they spend the DEIS allocation, based on the needs of the particular mix of children in the school.
- Increase the role of the Inspectorate in relation to ‘supporting’ schools as opposed to simply ‘inspecting’ them
- Consult directly with principals involved in DEIS to ensure detailed learning is captured on an ongoing basis
- Rather than shared HSCL teacher, appoint a qualified teacher for a certain number of hours per week to ‘release’ the DEIS teaching principal to deal with parents/ families. In small schools, principals will have built up relationships with parents already that can be fruitful. This could be piloted.
- Speech and Language Therapists should be appointed by the DES rather than the HSE and Speech & Language Classes extended to support other children with Speech and Language Difficulties, who may not qualify for S&L classes and cannot adequately access the curriculum.
- The vital HSCL post should be allocated, like all other roles in the school, by the principal.
- Funding for After School/Homework Clubs to be made available to all DEIS schools.
- The NEWB's remit is not until the child reaches the age of six. By then, poor school attendance may have already become a pattern, with the child missing out on vital learning in the first two years of school. If parents choose to enrol their children in school, those children should come under the remit of NEWB.

Appendix I – ERC Summary ‘The Evaluation of DEIS’

By Dr Susan Weir, Research Fellow, Educational Research Centre. Susan has been principal investigator on the DEIS evaluation since 2007.

The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme, which was introduced by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in 2006/2007, is aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. The Educational Research Centre (ERC) has been conducting an independent evaluation of the most intensive form of DEIS, the School Support Programme (SSP), at primary level since 2007, with the aim of monitoring its implementation and assessing its impact on students, families, and schools. This article relates to an assessment of the programme’s impact on pupil achievement.

Change in pupil achievement

Baseline test data in reading and mathematics were collected from all pupils in 2nd, 3rd, and 6th class in a sample of 120 urban SSP schools in 2007 (71 Band 1 and 49 Band 2). Follow-up testing was carried out in 2010 (when 5th class was added to the testing programme), and a further round of testing was carried out in May of 2013. On each testing occasion, all schools agreed to participate, yielding a 100% response rate. Very large numbers of pupils participated. For example, over 17,000 pupils were involved in testing in the Spring of 2013.

Outcomes were similar for both reading and mathematics achievement, so only reading outcomes are described here. Evaluation data indicated that the achievements of pupils in our sample were well below those of pupils in the norm group. However, comparisons of the overall average reading score in 2007 with the follow-up scores in 2010 revealed improvements in reading at all grade levels. Results of the most recent cycle of testing in spring of 2013 showed that the previously observed gains had not only been maintained, but had been built on. Although significant increases in reading were found at all four grade levels tested, increases were greatest at lower grade levels and the largest gains were found for pupils in 2nd class. There was a marked decrease in the percentage of very low achieving pupils between 2007 and 2013. At second class level, the percentage of pupils scoring at or below the 10th percentile fell from 22% to 11% between 2007 and 2013 (the national norm is 10%). Progress was more evident in Band 1 than in Band 2 schools.

The design of the testing programme included two longitudinal cohorts. Analyses of their initial and follow-up scores showed that, on average, pupils performed better in 2013 than they had in 2010.

Conclusion

The results are very encouraging. Work has begun on investigating why some participating schools have made large gains while others have not. A range of home, pupil, and school factors are being examined as part of the analysis. For example, the level of engagement in planning for DEIS is one of the factors that might be implicated at school level, whereas the ways in which pupils spend their leisure time might be related to achievement at pupil level. We hope to continue to monitor achievement in schools in the programme, either as standalone exercises, or as part of other studies (e.g., national assessments). The evaluation of the programme is ongoing, and we will continue to ask schools to participate in evaluation activities from time to time.