



**WRITTEN OUT  
WRITTEN OFF**

**FAILURE TO INVEST IN EDUCATION  
DEPRIVES CHILDREN OF THEIR POTENTIAL**



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## Foreword

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Education is a right, not a privilege. It is a right that can make all the difference to a child: the difference between believing in their own future and despairing of it; the difference between living in poverty and forging their own path out of it. Education can give children the best start possible in life and set them on a path to opportunity and hope for a bright future.

Investment in measures tackling educational disadvantage is crucial to ensuring that all children are given the tools they need to create the opportunities they deserve.

And yet in Ireland in 2009, one in three children living in disadvantaged areas continues to leave school with serious literacy and numeracy difficulties. We are failing our most vulnerable children; those who most need the best possible education they can get. Through our experience of working with children and families, Barnardos sees the daily lived experience of educational disadvantage on children and how it can impact on their future lives.

In 2006, Barnardos ran the Make the Grade campaign, which looked at Government's progress in tackling educational disadvantage and made key recommendations to improve the educational outcomes for children living in disadvantage. At that time, the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) strategy had just been recently introduced and was held up as an answer to many of the challenges Barnardos outlined. Three years later, we now need to look again at how our children are faring in the education system and consider whether or not the DEIS programme is serving the needs of the most disadvantaged children. As in 2006, Barnardos has drawn on the real life experience of the children and families we work with and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that their voices are heard.

The economic situation has changed dramatically over the last year and we have all been asked to take our share of the burden to ensure the country can weather the storm. Barnardos does not accept that this includes children for whom education is already a struggle and who need the highest levels of supports to ensure they can stay in school and get the education they deserve. Failure to invest in

education is a false economy that deprives children of their potential and leads to higher costs for the State in the future.

It is not acceptable that so many of Ireland's children are written off before they begin.

Fergus Finlay  
Barnardos  
Chief Executive

Norah Gibbons  
Director of Advocacy  
and Central Services

May 2009

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Education is crucial for children's self-esteem and development. It is a proven route out of poverty; a path through which children can see what is possible for them and that can help them to reach their full potential.

Education matters because it is intrinsically valuable, allowing children and young people to develop intellectually and socially. It also matters because, in Ireland, as in many other countries, education is a powerful predictor of adult life chances. Inequality in education means that some children do not reach their potential because their opportunities are limited before they begin.

This report highlights the social inequalities that still exist in the Irish education system, the consequences of early school leaving and provides an insight into the progress of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) strategy and the likely impact of the cutbacks within the education budget that have been made in response to the current economic recession.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

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This report was compiled using the following research methods:

- Barnardos commissioned Dr. Emer Smyth and Dr. Selina McCoy of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to undertake a literature review exploring different aspects of educational disadvantage in Ireland and abroad and measures to combat it. This review also aimed to provide a snapshot of how the current educational disadvantage strategy Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) is working and to assess the likely impact of the cutbacks within the education sector announced in Budget 2009 and since. Extracts from the report are used in this publication; their full report is available on [www.esri.ie](http://www.esri.ie) or [www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie).
- Qualitative interviews were conducted with a selection of key stakeholders, principals of DEIS schools, parents and children to gain their opinions on how the educational system is working and recommendations to improve it. The ESRI conducted interviews with representatives from

the following agencies: Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI), Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), National Association of Principals & Deputy Principals (NAPD), National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), Youthreach, School Completion Programme, Department of Education and Science and five principals of DEIS schools. Barnardos interviewed a selection of parents and children working with Barnardos as well as a DEIS school principal.

- Barnardos created an online survey inviting interested parties to give their feedback on the current cutbacks being phased into the education system. Over 300 respondents from a range of backgrounds completed the survey.

This report combines facts from a comprehensive breadth of international and national literature examining various aspects of educational and related material, supplemented by the on-the-ground experience of a non-representative sample of stakeholders in the education system including parents. It aims to provide an overview of the current developments in the education system in Ireland and the implications of these for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### 3. INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

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Many comprehensively evaluated programmes have been carried out internationally, providing crucial learning on the interventions that best support children living with disadvantage to get the most from their education. While some of these models have been adapted into Irish education policy, more can be done to ensure optimum benefit from proven programmes. The work of Barnardos has also been influenced by these successful external initiatives including the use of the High/Scope curriculum in early years services and the roll out of the Wizards of Words<sup>1</sup> intensive literacy support project.

#### 3.1 Early Childhood Education

Evaluations of the High/Scope Perry Pre-School Program for 3-4-year-old children in the US found both short-term and long-term positive effects on the children taking part in them. Participants had higher achievement levels over the course of their schooling year. The benefits from participation persisted into adulthood, with a higher rate of high school graduation, higher earnings, a lower take-up of welfare and a lower crime rate (Wortman, 1995; Weikart, 1996; Gombay 1995). Economically this programme found that the rate of return to society was \$17 for every \$1 spent on each participant attending the programme (Schweinhart, 2005).

Similarly, participants in the Child-Parent Centers in Chicago had lower rates of early school leaving along with lower juvenile crime rates (Reynolds, Wolfe, 1997; Bryant and Maxwell, 1996; Reynolds et al., 2001). These systematic evaluations indicate that the benefits of high quality preschool education are particularly evident for disadvantaged and minority groups and that they are the most cost-effective way of reducing educational inequality (Levin, 2009; Temple and Reynolds, 2007; Heckman et al., 2006).

#### 3.2 Measures Designed to Boost Academic Achievement

Although it can be difficult to separate out the effects of class size from other factors affecting educational

outcomes, the evaluation of Project STAR in Tennessee, US yields some insights into the potential effects of this intervention. In this study, children were randomly allocated to significantly smaller classes (13-17pupils) compared with their peers who were in classes of 22-25 pupils. Being in a small class was found to have a positive effect on academic achievement and participants were significantly more likely to graduate from high school than their peers (Finn et al., 2001; 2005). Effects were more marked for disadvantaged groups and for those who remained in small classes for a more extended period; those in classes with fewer than seventeen students for a period of three years were almost six months ahead of their peers in reading achievement (Finn et al., 2001).

Other studies have focused on the provision and effectiveness of intensive literacy and numeracy programmes to improve academic achievement. Intensive Reading Recovery programmes in the US have generally yielded improvements in educational performance (D'Agostino and Murphy, 2004) as has the literacy hour intervention in the UK (Machin and McNally, 2007). Reading programmes with cooperative learning at their core tend to be more successful in yielding positive outcomes for children (Slavin et al., 2008). The Success for All programme in the US involves intensive reading activities and close liaison with parents in the early years within schools serving disadvantaged communities. Participation significantly boosted reading performance and resulted in lower incidence of children being 'kept back' a year because of educational failure as well as higher achievement levels at age 14 (Slavin and Madden, 1999; Borman et al., 2002).

#### 3.3 Targeting Additional Resources on Disadvantaged Schools and / or Areas

A number of different examples of targeting additional resources on schools serving disadvantaged and/or immigrant communities or schools located in disadvantaged areas were examined and the evaluations indicate varied successes. The implementation of educational priority policies in the Netherlands and Belgium (Flanders) has had

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<sup>1</sup>This innovative initiative pairs 1st and 2nd class students who are nominated by classroom teachers for extra reading support with an appropriate older volunteer (55 years+) with the purpose to improve children's overall reading achievement. It presently operates in some schools in Dublin and Limerick.

mixed results, with variable effects on student outcomes (Bernardo and Nicaise, 2000; Mulder and van der Werf, 1997).

In Britain, Educational Maintenance Allowances, means-tested weekly payments to 16-18 year olds in post-compulsory education in selected areas, were found to increase the likelihood of remaining in education by 4-6 per cent, with the strongest effects found for those from the lower income groups (Dearden et al., 2005). An overview of interventions designed to reduce early school leaving in the Australian context indicates that a strong supportive school culture is key to the success of any programmes adopted (Lamb and Rice, 2008).

## Conclusion

International research suggests that a number of interventions combating specific aspects of educational disadvantage can have positive outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people. Research suggests that interventions work best when they are introduced early on in a child's development and when they are sustained over time. Such interventions can have a marked impact on children's lives, levelling the playing field for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and providing the opportunities that enable all children to get the most from education.

## 4. SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN IRISH EDUCATION

In Ireland, a child's life chances are still disproportionately affected by their family's social and economic position in Irish society, limiting their potential and their ability to find their way out of poverty. As a result, disadvantaged children still face stark inequalities of opportunities and outcomes in education. They are more likely to have difficulties in areas such as literacy and numeracy, to leave school early and they are far less likely to progress to university or other higher education options. In fact, almost one in six young people continues to leave school every year without completing the Leaving Certificate.

### 4.1 Literacy Levels

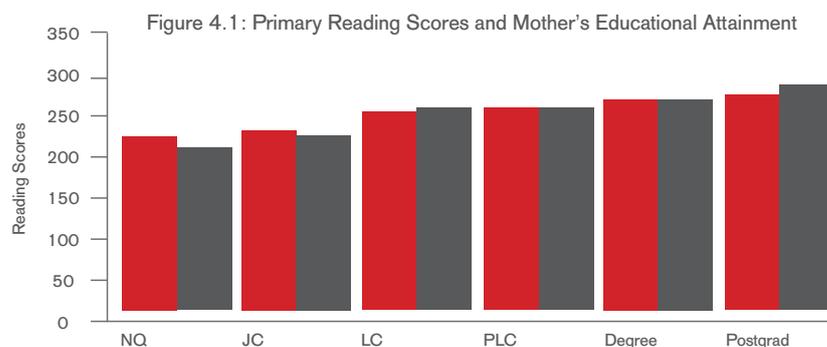
Unfortunately, literacy levels have remained largely unchanged since 1980 with one in three pupils from disadvantaged areas continuing to have severe literacy difficulties (DES, 2006). Interestingly, when assessing reading scores between first and fifth class both the mother's educational attainment level and social class are important determinants in how pupils score. The gap between reading scores for those whose mother left school with no qualifications and those whose mother achieved post-graduate level increases between first and fifth class indicating that disadvantage in literacy increases as children progress through school (Fig 4.1). Reading tests on first year students also found that those from higher professional backgrounds recorded a mean score of 43, in comparison to a score of 28 among those from semi- and unskilled manual backgrounds and 25 among those where neither parent is in employment.

### 4.2 Exam Performance and School Completion Rates

Social inequality is similarly prominent in performance in the Junior Certificate. Students from higher professional backgrounds achieve grade point average scores of 7.9, relative to just 6.7 for young people from skilled manual backgrounds, 6.2 among the semi- and unskilled manual class and just 5.9 for the non-employed group. Therefore, young people from higher professional backgrounds achieve, on average, two grades higher per subject taken in the Junior Certificate exam compared to those from non-employed backgrounds (Post Primary Longitudinal Study).

Performance in the Leaving Certificate is also strongly patterned across social class lines. While 58 per cent of students from higher professional backgrounds achieve four or more honours grades in the Leaving Certificate, students from manual backgrounds are much less likely to achieve any honours with just 16 per cent achieving four or more honours (School Leavers Survey 2006 and 2007).

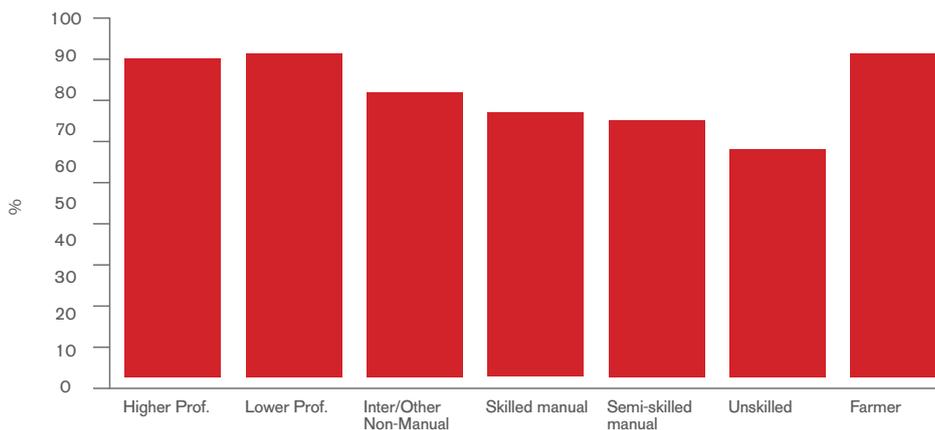
Wide social class differences in second-level retention are also apparent (Fig 4.2). While over 90 per cent of young people with parent(s) in professional occupations complete the Leaving Certificate, just two-thirds of their counterparts from unskilled manual backgrounds do so.



Source: 2004 National Assessment of Reading.

Note: 'NQ' No qualifications (pre-Junior Cert); 'JC' Junior Certificate; 'LC' Leaving Certificate.

Figure 4.2: Leaving Certificate Completion by Social Class Background<sup>2</sup>



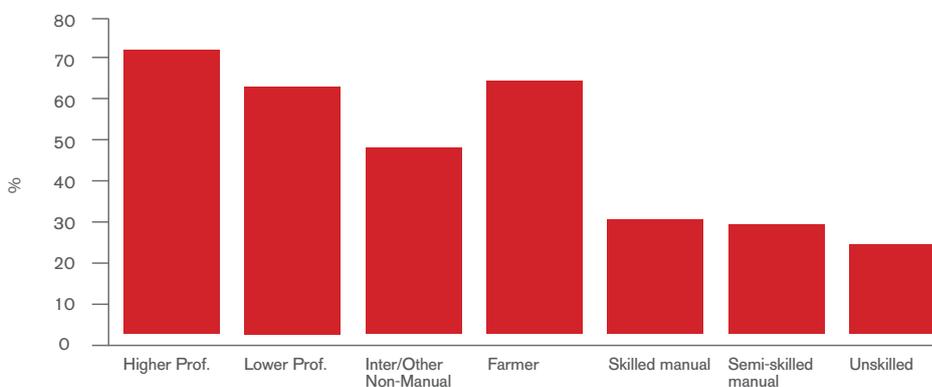
Source: School Leavers' Surveys 2006 and 2007.

### 4.3 Progression to Higher Education

Over 70 per cent of young people from higher professional backgrounds progress to Higher Education within the first two years of leaving school (Fig 4.3). This compares to less than half of those from intermediate and other non-manual backgrounds and just 30 per cent of those from

semi- and unskilled manual backgrounds. This clearly impacts on young people's labour market opportunities as they progress into adulthood and can have a significant impact on their future prospects, recreating cycles of low educational attainment in further generations.

Figure 4.3: Entry to Full-Time Higher Education among All School Leavers



Source: School Leavers' Surveys 2006 and 2007.

<sup>2</sup>The School Leavers' Survey analysis is based on the Census 1986 Classification of Occupations. Here are some examples of each group:

- Higher Professional: medical practitioners, judges/barristers/solicitors, business consultants
- Lower Professional: pharmacists, opticians, teachers, social workers
- Intermediate Non-Manual: clerical supervisors, Garda sergeants and lower ranks, publicans, government executive officials
- Other Non-Manual: bus drivers, waiters, chefs, hairdressers, air stewards
- Skilled Manual: electricians, plumbers, carpenters, printers
- Semi-Skilled Manual: milk processors, packers and bottlers, laundry and dry cleaning workers
- Unskilled Manual: porters, labourers

## Conclusion

As can be seen there are clear differences in educational outcomes according to social class. Succeeding in education is the key to providing children with the tools they need to break intergenerational cycles of poverty and to create positive futures for themselves. However, without the proper supports many children living in disadvantage simply don't have the resources they need to get an adequate education. Early intervention is crucial to supporting these children and their families to give them the best hope of learning and staying in school, which is vitally important for both children and society.

## 5. CONSEQUENCES AND COSTS OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

When the education system fails a child and they leave school early it affects all aspects of their future life – including employment opportunities, health and risk of involvement in crime. There is a significant cost to society through the provision of services and remedial interventions. Barnardos firmly believes, therefore, that early intervention in education to support vulnerable children can make a huge difference and circumvent many potential problems bringing significant benefits to both individuals and society.

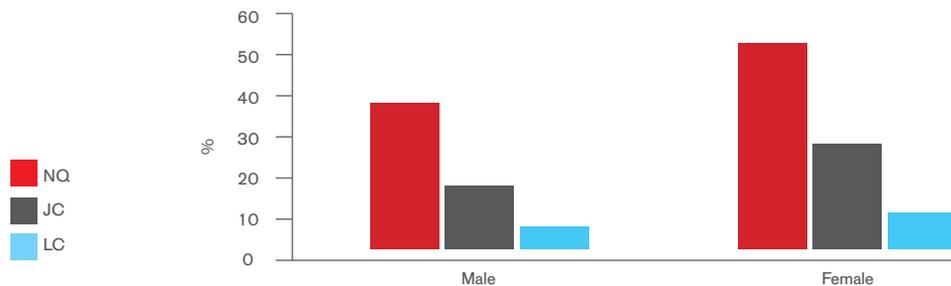
### 5.1 Labour Market Outcomes

In Ireland as with the international experience, young people leaving school early experience a much higher risk

of unemployment (Fig. 5.1). Although more boys than girls leave school early, it is girls who have a higher risk of unemployment with nearly 40 per cent of boys and 53 per cent of girls with no qualifications being unemployed one year after leaving school compared with only 7 per cent of boys and 12 per cent of women with a Leaving Certificate.

Early school leavers continue to have a significantly higher risk of unemployment throughout their adult lives (Fig. 5.2) – with early leavers three to four times more likely to be unemployed than their more highly educated peers.

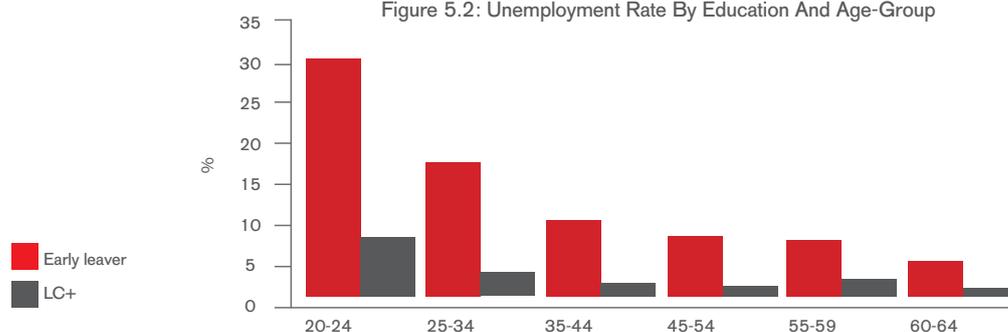
Figure 5.1: Unemployment Rate One Year After Leaving School By Educational level



Source: School Leavers' Surveys 2007.

Note: 'NQ' No qualifications (pre-Junior Cert); 'JC' Junior Certificate; 'LC' Leaving Certificate.

Figure 5.2: Unemployment Rate By Education And Age-Group



Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, 2008.

Even examining trends over time it is apparent that during the Celtic Tiger era, those with low levels of education continued to experience significant difficulties in accessing paid employment relative to their more highly qualified counterparts (Fig. 5.3).

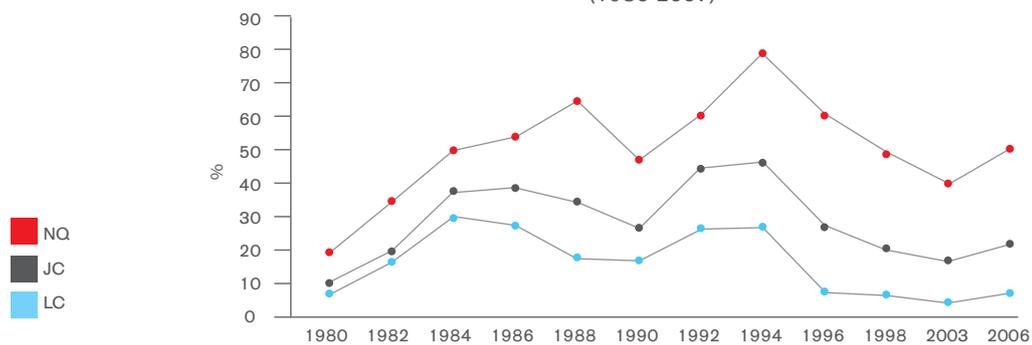
Education influences not only the likelihood of obtaining employment but also the quality of that employment, with those having lower levels of education found disproportionately in less skilled and lower paid work. Hourly pay rates (Fig. 5.4) increase with level of education for both women and men. While there is a pay return to completing second-level education, the main pay difference is between graduates and others. Net returns to educational qualifications are evident even taking into account number of years in employment and the hours worked (McGuinness et al., 2009).

## 5.2 Health

Education influences health both directly and indirectly. It influences health directly by influencing knowledge about healthy behaviour and diet, and indirectly as education influences material circumstances in later life.

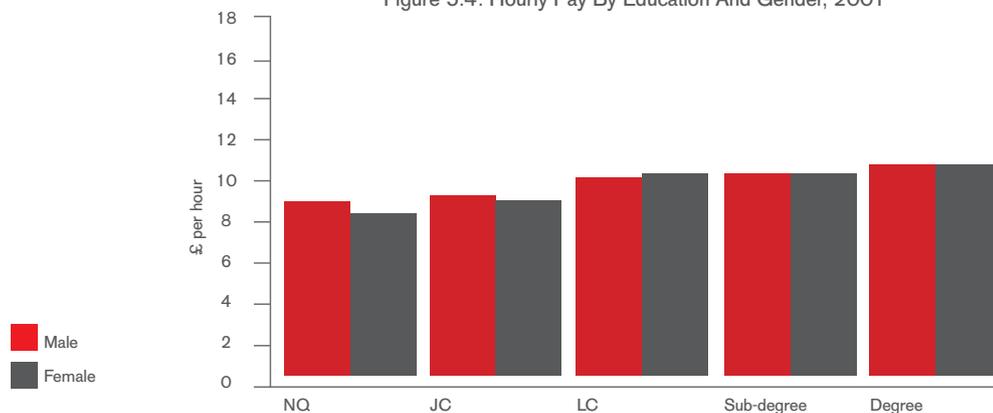
US and European studies indicate that people with lower levels of education have higher mortality rates, lower levels of general health and a higher incidence of particular conditions (Higgins et al., 2008). In the Irish context, data from EUSILC 2004 indicate that less than good health is more frequently reported by those with lower levels of education, especially those with primary education only (Layte et al., 2007). The differential is found to be greater for men than for women. Those who have a primary education only also have the greatest frequency of visiting a GP with the lowest average number of visits found among the third-level education group (Layte et al., 2007).

Figure 5.3: Unemployment Rates Among School Leavers By Education Over Time (1980-2007)



Source: School Leavers' Survey, various years.

Figure 5.4: Hourly Pay By Education And Gender, 2001



Source: Living in Ireland Survey data, presented in McGuinness et al. (2009).

Note: 'NQ' No qualifications (pre-Junior Cert); 'JC' Junior Certificate; 'LC' Leaving Certificate.

Using the SLAN 2002 survey data, a number of differences are identified when comparing the health of early school leavers with more educated respondents. Early leavers are:

- 2.4 times more likely to describe their general health as 'poor' or 'fair'
- 1.8 times more likely to report restrictions in their daily activity or work as a result of long term illness or disability
- 1.4 times more likely to report moderate or extreme anxiety or depression
- 1.2 times more likely to report having six or more alcoholic drinks more than once a week
- 4.5 times more likely to be in receipt of a medical card

### 5.3 Crime

Early school leavers have a higher risk of committing or being convicted of a crime. American research, for example, indicates higher incarceration rates among high school dropout males than among other groups (Lockner et al., 2004; Arum and Beattie, 1999). In Ireland, there is little systematic information available on the educational profile of offenders or prisoners but smaller studies reveal similar results. A sample of prisoners in Mountjoy (O'Mahony, 2002) indicated that 80 per cent had left school before the age of 16, 50 per cent had left before the age of 15, while 75 per cent had never sat a State examination. Over a quarter (29 per cent) of the prisoners had difficulties in relation to literacy. The costs associated with each prison place are €97,700 per year (2007 figures).

### 5.4 Intergenerational Effects

As indicated previously there is a strong relationship between the levels of parental education and their children's educational level and academic achievement (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993; Gamoran, 2001), with the mother's education having a stronger effect on a child's educational outcomes than that of the father. Children whose mothers have higher levels of education are more likely to reach Leaving Certificate level (School Leaver's Survey, 2007).

## 5.5 Overall Cost Benefit Analysis of Education

A number of studies internationally have looked at the costs associated with early school leaving from the individual and/or societal perspective. For instance, in the UK, Chevalier and Feinstein (2006) estimate that an increase in the proportion of women taking A levels would yield STG£200 million per year by reducing the lost output associated with higher rates of depression among early school leavers. In the Netherlands, increasing average education by one year is estimated to save €623 million per year because of reductions in shoplifting, vandalism and violent crime. However, higher tax fraud rates among the more highly educated group reduce the net gain to €578 million per annum (Groot and van den Brink, 2007). In the US, Levin (2009) estimates the total public savings arising from a student completing high school to be \$209,100, being made up of benefits from additional tax revenue (\$139,100), and savings in health expenditure (\$40,500), crime (\$26,600) and welfare (\$3,000). Even Levin's thorough analysis is likely to represent an underestimate of these costs and savings since it excludes wider impacts, such as life expectancy, health status, social cohesion and intergenerational effects.

In Ireland there is a lack of studies estimating the individual and societal costs of early school leaving due to an absence of systematic data on unit costs and benefits. However, the OECD (2008) using 2004 data provides estimates of the individual rate of return and the societal rate of return from educational investment for Ireland and other countries. The individual rate of return is based on gains associated with higher education levels in the form of employment chances and higher earnings, minus the costs (the expenditure on education, the income foregone by staying in education and the additional tax associated with higher earnings). On this basis, in Ireland there is a return of 7.9 per cent for men and 8.8 per cent for women associated with staying in education to Leaving Certificate or PLC level relative to Junior Certificate level (OECD, 2008). Societal returns are calculated based on additional tax revenue minus expenditure on education and the tax foregone while the person is in education. This yields returns of 7 per cent for men and 5.1 per cent for women who have completed the Leaving Certificate (OECD, 2008).

More specifically, Barnardos estimates that the current costs to the exchequer in terms of claimants of Jobseekers Allowance who are early school leavers could be as high as €19m per week or €9.87billion per year. This is based on the fact that according to the Quarterly National Household Survey 2008, nearly a quarter of unemployed people are early school leavers. Applying this to the Live Register figure for March 2009 (372,800) implies over 93,000 people currently looking for work are early school leavers. Barnardos believes this is a conservative cost estimate as it does not take into account the dependants of these individuals who may also be eligible for a social welfare payment and the wider costs associated with income tax foregone, health and crime. However, the estimated figures outlined strongly indicate the high level of cost to the state of early school leaving. It is clear that supporting children to stay in school has serious cost saving implications for both individuals and society.

## Conclusion

As described, early school leaving affects all aspects of an individual's life – their employment chances, health and risk to crime, and has subsequent societal costs. While it is difficult to actually quantify these costs because of lack of available data on unit costs of public expenditure and the absence of longitudinal research tracking early school leavers over adulthood, investing in education has proven to be cost effective for both children and society. Education helps children to reach their potential during childhood and become the adults they can be tomorrow.

*“Education is a key revenue generator for the society and a proven cost eliminator. Strategic investment in education especially in the early years is vital to drive Ireland's future prosperity.”* **Online Survey Respondent**

## 6. EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN THE IRISH CONTEXT; DEIS

The persistence of educational inequalities and the consequences and costs of early school leaving on the individual and society are clear. Efforts to address these inequalities and provide supports have shaped educational policy in Ireland in recent years. However, in the current economic climate cutbacks have been made to these supports that Barnardos believe will undo some of the positive work addressing educational disadvantage, which will have significant short-term impact on children, particularly disadvantaged children, and long-term affects on both individuals and society.

*“The children today are tomorrow’s adults. It is wise to invest in children’s education as it saves money in the long term- it lessens other difficulties.”*

**Online Survey Respondent**

### 6.1 Educational Expenditure in Ireland

Over the period 1992-2007 (Fig. 6.1), expenditure per student increased at all levels. While there has been a shift towards reducing the gap spent on each student in third level in comparison to each student in primary school, in 2007 expenditure on each third-level student still amounted to 1.8 times that for a primary student. By EU standards, Ireland spent 4.6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on the entire education system in 2005 compared with 5.5% spent in the EU 19 countries (OECD, 2008). In fact Ireland’s GDP percentage investment in education decreased from 5.5% in 1995 to 4.6% in 2005.

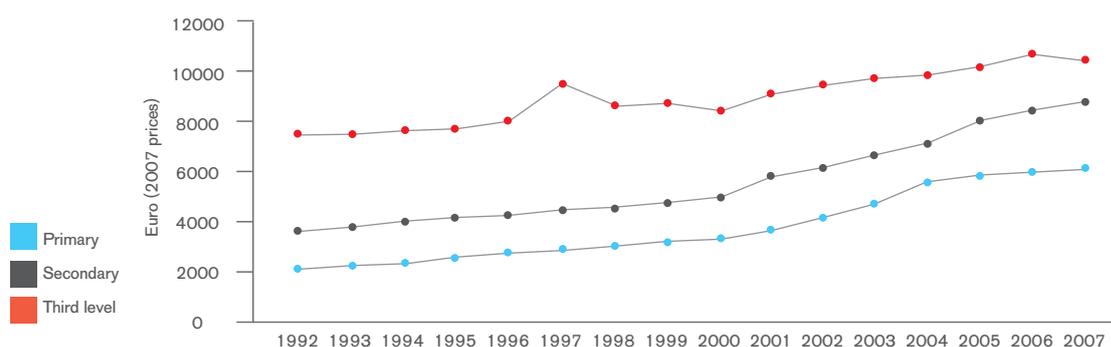
### 6.2 Educational Policy

In addition to increasing overall levels of participation, educational policy has focused on addressing educational inequalities through curriculum reform and the provision of additional funding for schools serving disadvantaged areas. Curricular reform has included introducing the Junior Certificate School Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme targeted at at-risk students. These programmes are now taken by 3 per cent and 7 per cent of the school population respectively.

The additional funding to specific schools has enabled the roll out of a number of initiatives such as Breaking the Cycle, Early Start, Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme. Independent evaluations of these initiatives indicated some positive results including improved school readiness and enhanced parental involvement. However, criticisms remain including the fragmented nature of the supports, the criteria used for targeting schools and too few students benefiting from the supports. These, coupled with the fact that literacy levels have not improved and overall ‘rates of educational underachievement and early school leaving remain much higher for pupils from disadvantaged communities than for other pupils’ (DES, 2005, p. 8), was the rationale for subsuming existing schemes for disadvantaged primary and second-level schools into the DEIS Programme.

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Figure 6.1: Expenditure Per Student (Adjusted For 2007 Prices), 1992-2007



Source: DES Statistics database.

## 6.3 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools 2006 – 2010 (DEIS)

The DEIS action plan was devised using a new procedure for identifying disadvantaged schools and has a number of components to it which are rolled out in schools according to their level of disadvantage. The primary schools identified for inclusion in DEIS were based on information reported by principals as to the prevalence of disadvantage in their schools. This led to three categories of schools being identified: urban band 1 schools, urban band 2 schools and rural schools. Additional schools with 'dispersed disadvantage' were to continue to receive some funding under the scheme. At second level, the use of socio-economic indicators (e.g. medical card ownership) along with measures of educational outcomes (junior cycle drop-out and Junior Certificate performance) were used to identify schools (Weir, 2006).

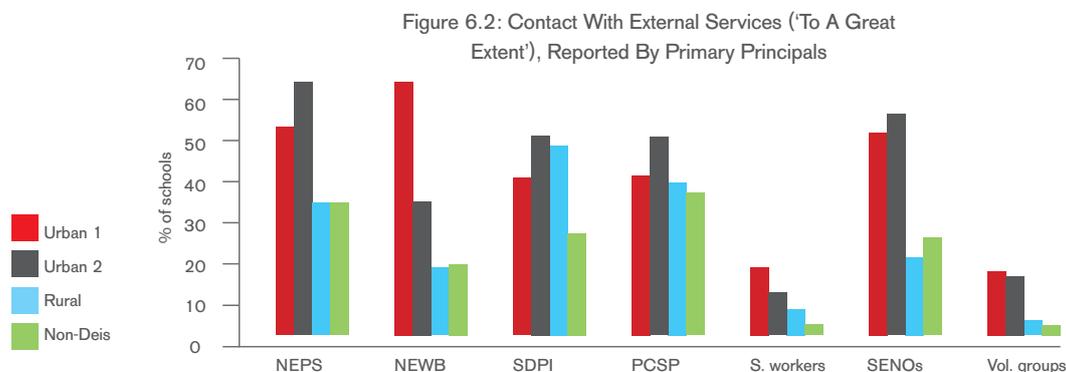
In 2008, there were 199 urban band 1 primary schools, 141 urban band 2 primary schools, 333 rural primary schools and 203 second-level schools in the DEIS programme. In terms of funding, in 2008 the overall budget to the Department of Education and Science was €9.3 billion and the allocation for DEIS within this consisted of grants of €10 million for primary schools and almost €5 million to second-level schools. In addition, almost €4 million in grant assistance went to primary schools with 'dispersed disadvantage'. In the 2007/8 school year, almost €5 million went to primary and second-level schools who had been receiving grants under pre-existing schemes but were not included in DEIS; these grants are being discontinued from the next school year (see below).

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### 6.3.1 Profile of DEIS schools

The differences between DEIS and non-DEIS schools can be quite stark and imply an increasing ghettoisation of those schools designated as disadvantaged. Not only do these schools have a higher prevalence of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds but also report a greater concentration of:

- Pupils from newcomer and Traveller communities
- Pupils with serious literacy and numeracy difficulties
- Pupils with emotional / behavioural difficulties
- Pupils with learning disabilities (more so in second level than primary level)
- Contact with external agencies; not only education related services such as National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), School Development Primary Initiative (SDPI), Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), Special Education Needs Officer (SENO) but also broader social work and voluntary services (Fig. 6.2).



Source: Survey of Diversity, 2007.

The ESRI Post Primary Longitudinal Study also found that disadvantaged secondary schools were more likely to offer the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (60 per cent v. 27 per cent) but less likely to offer Transition Year (67 per cent v. 81 per cent). Principals of disadvantaged schools reported more settling-in difficulties among first year students in relation to academic progress, behaviour in class, absenteeism and interaction with peers. Designated disadvantaged schools were much more likely to use streaming (that is, allocating students to base classes according to their assessed ability) than non-disadvantaged schools (47 per cent v. 15 per cent). This is despite research showing that the use of streaming contributes to an achievement gap and greater likelihood of dropping out of school for those allocated to lower stream classes (Smyth et al., 2007).

### 6.3.2 Benefits of DEIS programme

This report does not purport to be a full assessment of the effectiveness of the DEIS programme as a comprehensive evaluation is ongoing through the Educational Research Centre. However, what is presented here is valuable in that it provides a snapshot of feelings and concerns from a non-representative sample of stakeholders and individuals (comprised from interviews and Barnardos online survey) as the DEIS programme is being rolled out.

While recognising what DEIS is trying to achieve, it was uniformly emphasised that children in these schools are already disadvantaged relative to their peers when starting school and not on an 'equal playing field' and that DEIS could not solve all these problems.

*"These children who present at school are significantly behind their peers and that's mainly because of poverty, poor expectations at home, and the social milieu where they live. Basically they're playing catch-up from then on."* **DEIS School Principal**

Notwithstanding these ongoing difficulties, components of DEIS and the School Completion Programme were praised for providing additional funding which is being used to subsidise a range of activities for children and their parents including enabling smaller class sizes, placing emphasis on literacy, providing school meals and offering more vocationally oriented alternatives in the curriculum. It was seen that the small investment yielded significant returns to both children and society.

*"I think it's come a long way to have that DEIS strategy, because it does focus on the main areas, it focuses on literacy and numeracy, it focuses on attendance, it focuses on retention, it's putting in targeted resources, its trying to be more robust in terms of the methodology of identifying schools."* **Education Stakeholder**

*"Those [Reading and Maths Recovery] are really, really vital for disadvantaged schools, giving the children that little bit of a leg up."* **DEIS School Principal**

*"Our homework club was a proven initiative to tackle educational disadvantage. The children felt great as their homework was done and they could get help if needed, it took pressure off the parents especially if they weren't able to help them and for the teachers it meant no-one was falling behind in the class. The costs were minimal given the returns to the individual and school."* **DEIS School Principal**

*"We notice the difference with the kids in the lunches because everybody is getting two decent snacks every single day and it is nourishing food."*

**DEIS School Principal**

*"The budget for the School Completion Fund is small but unlike other aspects of the school system it is flexible and practical and can be spent on meeting the different needs of the young mothers enabling them to stay in school and be successful role models for their own children."* **Barnardos Project Leader**

*"The availability of the Junior Certificate School Programme as an alternative to the Junior Cert is great as it monitors their progress over the three years and then they are given credits for that at the end. The very existence of the programme is helping to retain those very vulnerable young people in the system"*

**Education Stakeholder**

### 6.3.3 Concerns about DEIS

Again drawing on the feedback from the interviews and online survey, a number of recurring themes emerged regarding experiences of educational disadvantage generally and the roll out of the DEIS programme specifically.

#### Issue of Funding

The lack of funding to effectively address educational disadvantage was repeatedly mentioned and, given the

current economic climate, fears over further cutbacks to education services were highlighted. The issue of insufficient funding for education was seen as short-sighted and cutbacks made were viewed purely as being in the interest of exchequer savings rather than focusing on the benefits of education for children. It was generally held that the consequences of such cuts would exacerbate the already fragmented nature of public services and have long-term societal implications given the costs associated with early school leaving as shown above.

*“There is huge uncertainty regarding funding and continuation of support services – it causes anxiety for both parents and teachers. The Government must realise that the education of our children is so important. By cutting back on our education programme we are cutting back on the future of our country.”*

**Online Survey Respondent**

*“How can we give children the best start in life if there are no supports available!”*

**Online Survey Respondent**

*“By about eight or nine, if the children have not tuned into school and seen it as valuable, they are going to have difficulties with secondary schooling, are likely to drop out, are likely to get in trouble with drugs, crime.”*

**DEIS School Principal**

*“There are already discontinuities between primary and post-primary and between post-primary and further education. If they drop out of school and enter Youthreach, even if only 16 or 17, resources from school do not follow through, they can't access the resources of NEPS and also there is no formal contact with NEWB.”*

**Education Stakeholder**

### **Classification of Schools within DEIS**

For those within the DEIS programme, it was highlighted that the selection of schools at primary level was fairly arbitrary. A combination of the absence of a national database of primary-level pupils and objective criteria meant ‘issues around the over- or under-reporting of data’ were apparent. This was felt to result in a further discrepancy between rural and urban schools as the distinction seemed to be based largely on geography rather than the level of need among the children. The consequences of the classification system meant that some schools were ineligible for additional supports because they were not deemed disadvantaged enough.

*“It's not easy to assess the level of disadvantage because you're going into very private areas of people's lives. ... A lot of the time you're only guessing or assuming from what you heard.”*

**DEIS School Principal**

*“A primary pupil database is necessary as the lack of data generally is very significant as we are unable to track pupils' transfer to secondary school. When DEIS was being organised, secondary schools just pushed a button and they were able to tell the number of families with medical cards, unemployment etc. But at primary level you had principals trying to guess without being invasive to the families they are serving.”*

**Education Stakeholder**

*“Our school would really benefit from initiatives such as Reading Recovery and Ready Steady Go but we can't as we are not classed disadvantaged enough. It seems to presume that in a rural setting all the children would be from a farming background but this is not the case. Our children's needs are no less than any urban-based disadvantaged child.”* **DEIS School Principal**

The present method of identifying schools for inclusion in DEIS was seen to penalise schools which, despite having pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, had been successful in addressing low retention rates and poor performance in the past. These schools are largely left to their own devices and while some may have received some additional statutory funding in recognition of dispersed disadvantage, this funding is now being phased out. In reality while the DEIS programme is targeted at schools with high level of disadvantage, 61 per cent of young people from semi/unskilled manual backgrounds and 56 per cent of those from non-employed households attend non-DEIS schools (School Leavers Survey, 2007). This raises the question of the adequacy of supports for those pupils in non-DEIS schools.

Fears were expressed that, in the future, schools which are effective in using the additional resources in the current DEIS programme to address educational disadvantage would be ‘thrown out’ of the programme at the end of the current phase, in the same way as former disadvantaged schools were. They would become victims of their own success and have supports withdrawn, potentially resulting in a reversal of fortune as new students in the school would require the help and receive none.

### **Lack of Continuity of Support**

In theory there are a plethora of supports that complement the work of schools such as allocation of resource teachers, language support teachers, Special Needs Assistants, NEWB and NEPS. However, in reality it was felt that serious inadequacies in funding within these services results in capping the availability of these services, lengthy waiting lists for assessments and little subsequent follow up. As a consequence these services are fragmented and often only able to react to cases of highest concern rather than being proactive to support all children at risk. For DEIS schools this lack of support presents real challenges in their ability to enable all disadvantaged children to reach their educational potential.

*“Failure to provide support at the early stage in primary school will impact on [my son’s] ability to get the most out of school. It will also impact on whether he will transfer onto secondary school. It is denying him the opportunity of an equal start.”* **Mother of two, Dublin**

Furthermore, these supports, where available, to a child in primary school don’t automatically follow the child into secondary school, often resulting in them having difficulty settling into larger class sizes and coping with having more teachers and subjects. This lack of continuity poses significant difficulty for children who have special needs leading to a sense that the secondary school cannot support them.

*“I found it hard changing from primary to secondary school. There was a homework club in primary that was good. You got help from the teacher and other people in the class. It helped me get through primary. They should have it in secondary school.”*

**Boy aged 13**

*“It’s like the system helps them in primary school and then leaves them to their own devices in secondary school but that’s not right as the help should continue otherwise they will get nothing out of education.”*

**Mother of five, Waterford**

*“Why accept a child with special needs into secondary school if they can’t facilitate him? I had all the required proof of his condition but no supports were offered. He had a SNA in primary school but not available in secondary school. Without help of course he was going to fall behind and act out, but then he was labelled bold and no-one wanted to help him.”*

**Mother of two, Dublin**

Lastly it was highlighted that while supports may be offered to assist a child in improving their educational performance, often schools have difficulty in addressing the child’s emotional and behavioural problems which are also outside the remit of many education related support services such as NEWB. As seen in the profile of DEIS schools, such problems are prevalent but the supports are inadequate emphasising the lack of a holistic view of the child and their family.

*“While resource teachers or Special Needs Assistants might be available to the child, they are not child psychologists or psychiatrists and can’t sort out the emotional problems for the child.”*

**DEIS School Principal**

*“My biggest concern has always been children with emotional or behavioural disturbance. And I think that their school life is very disrupted. And I can only hope that services would become more coordinated for those children.”* **DEIS School Principal**

### **Class Size**

The issue of class sizes emerged in different ways, including the perceived positive impact of reduced class sizes for schools within the DEIS programme (urban band 1 schools); the need for reduced class sizes for all students during the early years of primary and post-primary education and for core subjects; and the challenges of teaching in large class contexts. There was an overriding sense that smaller class sizes benefit all children.

*“I have 17 in my class, I like it being small because the 3rd class has 25 children. We have two teachers, one who teaches us and the other who makes sure we do our work because she comes around to us often, without her the class would be a lot noisier.”*

**Girl aged 8**

*“He has 20 in his class and a support teacher to help them out. Having her makes a big difference as it is hard for the class teacher to teach all those children on her own especially when there are kids in the classroom who may have extra needs and the teacher wouldn’t be able to support that child.”*

**Mother of four, Dublin**

*“The biggest single change that I would like to see at primary level is early investment to keep class numbers low in the junior and senior infants.”*

**Education Stakeholder**

### **Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)**

A significant criticism of the DEIS programme and Government policy in general was the failure to improve the availability and accessibility of quality ECEC. Unfortunately, while the benefits of participating in quality ECEC are significant both for the child in improving school readiness, school performance and social skills and to society in improving school retention rates and employment opportunities, the evolution of a comprehensive infrastructure in Ireland has been extremely slow. There are some state subsidised facilities but the majority of services operating remain in the private market. At policy level, the issue of ECEC largely remains outside the remit of the Department of Education and Science and within the DEIS programme the extension of the early childhood education measures have been stalled. The announcement in April 2009 of the roll out of universal free half day pre-school place to all children the year prior to joining primary school is a welcome development and will improve children's educational experience and outcomes. It is estimated that the cost of implementing these places for all 3 to 4 year olds is €170m (Irish Times, 20th April 2009).

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*"All my boys went to a pre-school, I think it should be compulsory as it helps them get ready for school. It is good for mixing them with other children the same age."*

**Mother of three, Dublin**

*"You can tell a child that's attended playschool because they're more confident, their language would be much better than a child who hasn't. The place to make the difference is right back at the start."*

**DEIS School Principal**

*"For those who have had a good foundation through early education, facing challenges of drug use, poverty etc in their teen years can be overcome far more effectively."* **Online Survey Respondent**

### **6.4 Effects of Budget 2009**

In light of the worsening economic situation and in the interest of exchequer savings, numerous cutbacks to different aspects of educational provision were announced in Budget 2009 and since. As some of these changes have yet to take effect it is too early to determine the full implications of these cuts on children's educational experience and performance. However, Barnardos expects the impact to be very significant affecting all children but particularly those least able to succeed within the education system.

## Change/Cut

## Likely Impact

1.	Increase in pupil-teacher ratio at primary (from 27-to-1 to 28-to-1) and post-primary (from 18-to-1 to 19-to-1) levels	Implications for subject options and (vocational) programme provision, which is likely to have greater impact on less academically oriented students.
2.	Withdrawal of some capitation funding for former disadvantaged schools	Loss of posts such as Home-School Community Liaison and Guidance in schools which were formerly classified as disadvantaged; impact on schools with some prevalence of disadvantage.
3.	A change in the criteria for the allocation of language support teachers, especially for schools with a higher proportion of newcomers	Greater difficulties for larger schools with higher concentrations of newcomer students; DEIS schools are over-represented in this category.
4.	Non-implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Needs Act	Implications for students with a range of learning difficulties.
5.	Removal of 128 Mild General Learning Disability Classes	It is estimated that 80 of these posts are located in disadvantaged areas – these students will now be placed in mainstream classes.
6.	Changes to teacher substitution and supervision arrangements	Likely to have a bigger impact in smaller schools. Will impact also on provision of sports and other extra-curricular activities, which have been found to be important for the engagement and retention of students at risk of early leaving.
7.	Abolition of grants for cookery, resource grant for language support teachers and equipment grant for resource teachers at primary level	Will impact on the nature of learning support for weaker students.
8.	Abolition of grants for choirs/orchestras, Home Economics, Physics and Chemistry, JCSP, LCA, LCVP, and Transition Year at post-primary level	JSCP and LCA, in particular, play an important role for less academically oriented students, these programmes may be phased out in some schools.
9.	Reduction in capitation funding for Travellers	Already low levels of retention and performance among students from Traveller Community may worsen.
10.	Abolition of book grant scheme for non-DEIS schools	Greater financial difficulty for the majority of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds attending non-DEIS schools.
11.	Increase in charges for School Transport Scheme at post-primary level	Likely to place greater financial pressure on families on low incomes.
12.	Reduction in places on Back to Education Initiative and in Senior Traveller Training Centres	Curtailing the opportunity for second-chance education and up-skilling.
13.	No increase in Student Maintenance Grants	Decline in the relative living standards and greater financial strain for third-level students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## Reactions

It was felt that overall these recent cuts in educational expenditure were short-sighted and would ultimately lead to longer term cost implications for society in general, placing further pressure on already tight resources across the public services and having an adverse impact on the most marginalised children.

*"It is very short-sighted, children's education is the last thing that should be cut especially in disadvantaged areas—research tells us that education is key to future employment."* **Online Survey Respondent**

*"I firmly believe that cutbacks in education are a false economy. We do not wish to see children leaving school unable to read as was the situation and still is in some cases. Education lifts the soul, nourishes the mind and gives purpose and possibility."* **Online Survey Respondent**

*"When you think of it proportionally, what they're saving is miniscule and the damage they're doing—dismantling the infrastructure that we have taken years to build up."* **DEIS School Principal**

18 The Department has given some reassurances that cutbacks announced would not directly affect DEIS schools but in reality these schools will suffer in a number of ways. For instance they are affected by the reintroduction of the limit on English language support teachers despite having a higher concentration of newcomer children.

*"The loss of language support teachers in our school will be a great loss. These students struggle as it is and without this much needed extra support they will be unable to keep up to the level in the classroom. It also puts huge pressure on the class teacher to assist these children while also trying to maintain a high standard of English language with the rest of the class."* **Online Survey Respondent**

The opportunity to offer the Junior Certificate School Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme and the Transition Year Programme is also restricted given the abolition of grants in this area. Availability of these programmes benefit disadvantaged students the most as they are at most risk of dropping out and tailoring the curriculum to offer a wide range of subjects is essential in keeping them in school.

*"More worryingly in terms of disadvantage, the Leaving Cert Applied, Transition Year and Junior Cert Schools Programme are very much at risk. One of the things we are so proud of is the Transition year with its wide variety of subjects and experiences, when it's a good programme it can have fantastic benefits for the children and now suddenly schools are having to make choices not to do it."* **Education Stakeholder**

Having a varied extra curricular programme is very beneficial to students and these cuts will see this aspect of school curtailed, e.g. music and dances classes, homework clubs, sports and afterschool clubs.

*"My daughter misses the homework club big time, it used to help her along and take pressure off me as I didn't get much education myself when I was young. She is struggling more now as there are some things I can help her with and others I can't."* **Father of Four, Offaly**

*"The funding for our homework club has ceased from December and it is a big loss. It was really successful targeting the children most at risk of falling behind. It had huge benefits in that the children were happy they had their homework done and could get help if needed and they wouldn't get into trouble the following day. For the parents it alleviated the pressure of doing homework at home especially for those whose own education is poor or if they had a large family."* **DEIS School Principal**

*"School has to be more than books, school has to be an experience for children and the sports and the games and the extra-curricular – that's what has made our education system good."* **Education Stakeholder**

The removal of 128 mild learning disability classes will affect all schools including DEIS. This is overall estimated to affect 900 pupils who will now have to be taught largely in the mainstream classroom. The likely impact of this on an individual and school is significant and is seen as a drastic step backwards in the bid to help children with disabilities, however mild, meet their full educational potential.

*"My son would emphatically not have made the progress he has without the support he received – he successfully did the Junior Cert and is now heading for the Leaving. His resource hours may be cut, which beggars belief that all the effort to keep him in school may be at risk."*

*A mild learning difficulty can translate into low self esteem, poor attainment and general disaffection in an adult and we know where that can lead.”* **Online Survey Respondent**

The abolition of the book grant scheme for non-DEIS schools will put additional financial pressure on parents, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The costs associated with returning to school are significant with school books alone costing between €100 per child in primary school to €300 per child in secondary school. The absence of this scheme will result in some children not having the correct materials and being at risk of falling behind before starting the school year.

*“The school book grant scheme is a great help. I am a lone parent and only earn so much. If that scheme was cut in this school it would put huge pressure on me and the children, if you haven’t got it you haven’t got it.”*

**Father of Four, Tipperary**

*“The costs of school are really expensive at the start and throughout the year. I have to buy all the books because they can’t be handed down as they use workbooks that they all write in. I would like if a school book scheme was working in the school.”*

**Mother of Four, Dublin**

For the School Completion Programme, the cut in funding is seen to have implications for the types of activities the programme covers and the ‘innovative’ element of the programme in meeting the diverse needs of recipients including teenage mothers. Its likely consequences would be higher early school leaving among this already at risk group resulting in entrapping them and their children into the cycle of poverty.

*“The School Completion Programme was my lifeline. It helped fund practical things for me like uniforms and books and enabled me to go back to school. Without its help I would have had to drop out and now I am in college studying nursing.”* **Mother of Two, Dublin**

## Conclusion

While much effort towards tackling educational disadvantage in Ireland has been made at policy level there is a huge sense that these inroads will be eroded following the introduction of cutbacks in the Budget. It is Barnardos view, shared by others, that these cuts will adversely affect those children who need the best start and help in their education in order to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ability to participate and succeed within the educational system in Ireland greatly influences children's future life chances and outcomes. One in six Irish young people still leave school without reaching Leaving Certificate level and their likelihood of doing so is strongly influenced by their social background. Those who leave school before the Leaving Certificate are more likely to be unemployed, earn less if they have a job, have poorer health and higher crime levels. This has substantial costs for the young people themselves and for society as a whole. Higher rates of early school leaving mean higher exchequer expenditure on welfare, health and prisons and lower tax revenue.

The percentage of Ireland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spent on education decreased over the years of economic prosperity. As the country got wealthier, the investment in education failed to increase proportionally. Across the OECD countries, the average spend on education is 5.5%; in Ireland it is 4.6%. It is vital that importance of education is prioritised by Government and that adequate resources are allocated accordingly.

### Recommendation

- **Increase education spending to 5.5% of GDP in line with the OECD average.**

Investment in education yields significant economic and social benefits for society at large and efforts to tackle some of the ongoing educational and social inequalities have been made through the DEIS programme. However, the current economic crisis is already seeing cutbacks to vital supports within the education system which will make it more difficult for children to overcome adversity and reach their educational potential. It is for this reason that Barnardos is totally opposed to any further cuts being made to the education provision.

### Recommendation

- **No further cuts to education services.**

International research has shown that there are proven ways of supporting children into school and retaining them in full-time education, namely early childhood education and care (ECEC) and measures to boost academic achievement such as intensive literacy supports and reducing class sizes. These activities verify that early interventions at pre-school and primary level are more cost effective than later remediation. Such interventions within ECEC must be of high quality in terms of curriculum offered, standards of care and appropriate training of staff.

### Recommendations

- **At Departmental level, integrate the current childcare and early education policies to improve co-ordination across services.**
- **Ensure the universal free half-day pre-school place to all children the year prior to joining primary school is of a high standard and compliant with the Framework for Quality (SIOLTA) and the Framework of Early Learning (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment).**
- **Reverse decision to increase class size and honour the commitments given in the Programme for Government.**

The availability and continuity of appropriate supports was a recurring theme in all interviews conducted and responses to the Barnardos online survey. It is clear that a holistic, child-centred approach to the provision of supports is necessary to ensure that children are given the assistance they deserve to help them reach their educational potential. Provision of appropriate supports in a timely fashion has been shown to improve a child's experience of school and their educational performance.

## Recommendations

- **Improve the accessibility and availability of education related services including NEWB and NEPS.**
- **Improve access to and collaboration with services such as child psychologists, psychiatrists and speech and language therapists.**
- **Ensure continuity of services between primary and secondary school, recognising the ongoing impact of difficulties on a child's education.**
- **Introduce a comprehensive induction phase for children moving from primary to second level. For many the transition between primary and secondary schools is difficult and can influence their attendance and success at second level. An appropriate induction involving the secondary school is vital to helping children, especially those with special needs, to cope with this transition.**
- **Ensure the greater involvement of parents in the education of their children and communication with the school through improved literacy**

## **supports and a comprehensively resourced Home School Liaison Scheme.**

A child's ability to benefit from all the educational opportunities on offer is obviously affected by their family's household income. For parents on low income or reliant on social welfare the educational costs can be excessive. Although the costs of living are expected to decrease throughout 2009, the ongoing rise in unemployment will cause more families to feel the burden of these school costs than ever before. The abolition of the school book grant scheme in non-DEIS schools will further exacerbate this situation resulting in some children not having the required materials or dropping out of school because their parents cannot afford to send them.

## Recommendation

- **Roll out national school book rental scheme.**

As the DEIS pilot phase is to end in 2010, the development of further national education policy must ensure greater collaboration between all stakeholders in the development of more holistic strategies that support children, particularly disadvantaged groups and those with special needs. Linked to this it is crucial to ensure that schools which manage to raise the educational outcomes of their students are not penalised for their success.

## Recommendation

- **Ensure future educational disadvantage policies builds on the progress of DEIS and guarantees greater collaboration between Government Departments and agencies.**

## Concluding Remarks

It is vital that the education system does not prevent children benefiting from an education because they live in disadvantage or have special needs that require extra support. We must re-think how we deliver education in Ireland, focusing on how the system fits the child rather than how the child fits the system. Our current education system, despite definite improvements and developments, has a long way to go before it adequately serves the needs of the most vulnerable Irish children. Many of the supports needed are already in place but need firm commitment from Government to ensure the joined up implementation and expansion of services. Recent cutbacks have been deemed necessary because of our current economic situation, but many services were not adequately resourced over the past ten years and while modest gains were inarguably made they are now in serious danger of being wiped out.

If we are serious about ensuring the future of Ireland as a modern, thriving society and economy, then investing in education is crucial. We are only as strong as our next generation and if we write them off before they begin, we limit not only their futures but our own as well. Education is the currency for life.



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## Notes

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