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An Chéad Tuarascáil

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Tosca Scoile agus Tosca Lasmuigh den Scoil is Cosaint ar an Scoil a
Fhágáil go Luath**

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Houses of the Oireachtas

Joint Committee on Education and Skills

First Report

**Staying in Education: A New Way Forward
School and Out-of-School Factors Protecting Against
Early School Leaving**

May 2010

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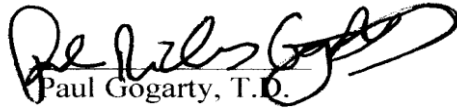
Foreword by the Chairman of the Joint Committee on Education and Skills, Paul Gogarty, TD

The Joint Committee on Education & Science was established in October 2007. In 2008 the Committee identified early school leaving as a priority issue. Arising from this the Committee decided to produce a report on the issue.

In July 2008, the Committee appointed a Member of the Committee, Senator Fidelma Healy Eames, to produce a report on behalf of the Committee. The report, as amended, was agreed.

The Joint Committee would like to thank Senator Healy-Eames for producing such a comprehensive and timely report and expresses its gratitude to the Expert Group who gave up so much of their time and expertise to assist her in this endeavour. The Committee would also like to express its heartfelt thanks to Ms. Jude Cosgrove, Research Associate, Education Research Centre (ERC), St. Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra, who undertook such important research work that culminated in many of the findings contained in the report and to the ERC for providing valuable support in carrying out the study.

The Joint Committee also requests that the issues raised in this report be the subject of a debate in both Houses of the Oireachtas.



Paul Gogarty, T.D.

Chairman,

Joint Committee on Education & Skills,

May 2010

Preface

On my motivation for seeking this study

Up and down the country I have met with too many young people, mostly boys, with poor literacy skills, frequently in low-streamed classes in their Junior Cert. year, who can't wait to leave school. They know full well they are failing before they sit any exam. Ironically, while it is easier to drop out before a system formally tells you that you are a failure, most don't have this choice since they don't turn 16 until after their Junior Cert. Exam.

The over-loaded exam-based system does not suit many young people. It loses them early. The majority of these young people are carrying embedded difficulties with school and learning from primary level. Unfortunately, the opportunity, the hope and enthusiasm they frequently feel at moving to post-primary level is quickly quashed. The pace of instruction and curriculum delivery and the lack of consistent home support means they lose pace very quickly with their peers. These students are not adequately coached and supported from the outset when they enter school. As a result, they experience under-achievement and failure from an early age.

Any school system that largely relies on a 'one size fits all' instruction and assessment approach is fundamentally wrong. It does not facilitate these young people to grow or indeed to demonstrate and realize their full range of talents and skills. Our post-primary education system as currently constructed and paced is doing these youngsters a grave injustice and society is paying the price in the long run. This does not represent equality of opportunity.

I am very grateful to the Oireachtas Education and Skills committee for granting me this study so that we might, through its findings and recommendations, effect change across the education system and above all, contribute to better lives for our young people. This is our objective. I am particularly indebted to the expertise and

commitment of my very fine research partner Dr Jude Cosgrove at the Educational Research Centre. I am deeply grateful to the 25 members of our Expert Group (shown on page 8) and individuals from 18 bodies who gave generously of their time and brought enlightenment and perspective to this work. Thanks most of all to the 41 individuals who participated in interviews as part of this study, without whom we would not have the real picture of the young people who have suffered early school leaving. Your contribution to this study is significant.

Together, we now entrust this work to the Minister for Education and Skills and ask her to implement the report's findings. More is possible than we may at first realize.

Dr Fidelma Healy Eames

Membership of Expert Group

Mr Eddie D'Arcy, Director, Catholic Youth Care

Dr Peter Archer, Director, Educational Research Centre, Dublin

Senator Ivana Bacik

Ms Anne Buggie, Principal, Scoil Mhuire, Portlaoise

Dr Delma Byrne, Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin

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Dr Paul Downes, Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre, St Patrick's College,
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Mr Bartley Fannin, Principal, St Mary's College, Galway

Mr Brendan Forde, Principal, Claddagh National School

Mr Tim Geraghty, St Tiernan's Community School, Dundrum

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Senator Fidelma Healy Eames

Mr John Lonergan, Governor, Mountjoy Prison

Mr Michael Francis McDonagh, Youthreach, Tuam

Ms Ruth McNeely, Mayo Rape Crisis Centre

Dr Sandra Ryan, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

Mr Aidan Savage, National Co-ordinator, School Completion Programme

Dr Emer Smyth, Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin

Dr Dermot Stokes, National Co-ordinator, Youthreach

Ms Rose Tully, PRO, National Parents' Council (Post-Primary)

Acknowledgements

The compilation of this report would not have been possible without the advice, guidance and assistance from a large number of individuals.

Firstly, thanks to the members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills for their support in conducting this study.

We also wish to acknowledge the significant input of the Expert Group convened for this study, whose membership is shown on page 8. Members of the Expert Group provided guidance on the focus and design of the study, provided detailed and insightful comments on drafts of the report, and suggested relevant literature for inclusion in the report.

Representatives from a number of bodies, in addition, provided clarifying information and/or detailed comments on the draft of this report. These are Seán McDonnell (Archways), Michael Barron (BelongTo), Marian Brattman (SCP, DES), John Cole, Ruairí Gogan and Michelle Shannon (IYJS), Donagh Kelly, Breda Naughton and Anne O'Mahony (IU, DES), Aidan Curtin (National Juvenile Office), Mary Keane (NBSS), John Hammond (NCCA), Pat Curtin and Clare Farrell (NCSE), Fergal Nolan (NEPS), Elaine O'Mahoney (NEWB), Darragh Doherty, Peter Meany and Stephen O'Brien (OMCYA), Cliona Saidleir (RCNI), Ian Robertson (TCD), Carmel Kearns (Teaching Council), Mark Considine, Michael Garvey and Alison McDonald (TES, DES), and Áine Hyland (UCC).

Several members of the Expert Group, along with others, assisted us in convening the interviews described in Chapter 5 (see also Appendix 4). These are Glenn Keating (BelongTo), Eddie D'Arcy (CYC), Anne Fahy (HSCL), John Lonergan (Governor, Mountjoy Prison), Kathleen McMahon and Fiona Moran (Mountjoy Prison), Séamus Beirne (Secretary, Prisoner-based Research Ethics Committee), Ruth McNeely and Anne Whittle (RCNI), Anne Buggie (School Principal), Stephen Hartnett (School Principal), Jimmy Deenihan (TD), Michael McDonagh (Director, Youthreach, Tuam).

Thanks to these individuals and their colleagues.

Thanks to the 18 organisations that provided written submissions. These are listed in Chapter 6. The content of the submissions has confirmed findings from other Phases in the study, as well as providing fresh insights.

Thanks to Peter Archer (Director, ERC), for unwavering advice and support in the course of drafting this report, and to Aiden Clerkin (ERC), Lorraine Gilleece (ERC), Mary Lewis (ERC) and Susan Weir (ERC) for comments on specific parts of this report.

Thanks to Adrian O’Flaherty (ERC) in assisting in some of the interviews reported in Chapter 5, and to Marguerite Doran and staff in Ubiquis for transcribing the interviews.

Thanks to Mary Rohan (ERC) and Patricia Watts (Seanad Éireann) for administrative support.

Finally, our sincere thanks to the 41 individuals that participated in the interviews described in Chapter 5. The details and insights that you provided us with in the course of the interviews have added invaluable to the study.

List of Acronyms

ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
BELB	Belfast Education Library Board
BSC	Behaviour Support Classroom
CAO	Central Applications Office
CPA	Combat Poverty Agency
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CRA	Children's Rights Alliance
CRC	Children's Research Centre
CYC	Catholic Youth Care
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science
DFI	Disability Federation Ireland
DHC	Department of Health and Children
DLP	Demonstration Library Project
DRCC	Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
EAL	English as Another Language
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EDC	Educational Disadvantage Committee / Educational Disadvantage Centre
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
ERC	Educational Research Centre
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GAM	General Allocation Model
HETAC	Higher Education Training and Awards Council
HSCL	Home-School-Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
IEP	Individual Education Plan
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
IRL	Irish Rural Link
IU	Integration Unit
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
IY	Incredible Years

IYJS	Irish Youth Justice Service
JCSP	Junior Certificate Schools Programme
JMB	Joint Managerial Body
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCV	Leaving Certificate Vocational
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCO	National Coordinator
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NDA	National Disability Authority
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Services
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
NEWB	National Education Welfare Board
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMYCA	Office of the Minister of Children and Youth Affairs
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLC	Post-Leaving Certificate
POR	Post of Responsibility
PPDS	Primary Professional Development Service
PTR	Pupil-Teacher Ratio
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
QDOSS	Quality Development of Out of School Services
RCC	Rape Crisis Centre
RCNI	Rape Crisis Network Ireland
RDO	Regional Development Officer
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SAF	School Admission Forum
SATU	Sexual Assault Treatment Unit
SAVI	Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland
SCP	School Completion Programme
SCPA	Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments
SEN	Special Educational Need
SENI	Special Educational Needs Initiative
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organisers
SESS	Special Education Support Service

SLSS	Second Level Support Service
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
SSP	School Support Programme
STTC	Senior Traveller Training Centres
SVP	St Vincent de Paul
TES	Teacher Education Section
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
TPSP	Teen Parents Support Programme
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
VFM	Value For Money

Selected Quotations from the Study

The following are an illustrative sample of quotations from the study and are intended to give a flavour of the content of the report and are not comprehensive as such.

Something definitely needs to change, something has to, there's too many kids not wanting to go to school and they can't all be wrong (a mother who participated in this study, May 2009)

From the research:

Imagining equality involves envisioning a condition that we have never seen (Malone, 2006, p. 34).

[Early school leaving is] among the most serious economic and social problems which this state must address (NESF, 1997, p. 3)

...what is needed is a coherent, consistent commitment resourced and led by those who are motivated by the imperative that now is the time to vision and shape a new educational landscape in Ireland where all people will be within the frame (Downes & Gilligan, 2007, p. xiv).

...the persistence of early school leaving despite widespread structural change in the Irish education system challenges the view that the system's structure and differentiation into school types *of itself* causes early school leaving or disadvantage. Rather, it suggests that the Irish school system reflects, reproduces and indeed reinforces the inequalities inherent in Irish society (Stokes, 2003, p. 178).

From written submissions to the study

This year's Budget cuts have been highly effective at wiping out the very inclusion/participation structures we have been struggling to achieve and develop in schools for decades... If this study did nothing other than point out what we've lost in less than a year, it will have been truly worthwhile. (Joint Managerial Body)

What cannot be allowed to continue is the constant loss of children from the educational system. ... The extent of inequality in Irish education represents a betrayal of our commitment to cherish all our children equally. (Irish National Teachers' Organisation)

The maxim *the earlier the better* has a particular resonance in terms of positively affecting cognitive development, school affection and subsequent educational outcomes. ... The best solution to offset multiple challenges faced by some young people is to engage families with high quality services when the children are at pre-school age. (Irish Youth Justice Service)

From written submissions to the study (Continued)

Making the transition from one system to the other is very difficult and serious questions remain as to the necessity for such a major change from one sector to the other. (Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools)

It seems obvious that the current student welfare/support service is grossly deficient in many respects. (Irish Vocational Education Association)

The ability to read and write is critical to success at school; yet one in ten children in Ireland leaves primary school unable to write properly; this figure rises to one in three in disadvantaged areas. Despite this obvious problem Ireland has no national-level literacy policy. (Children's Rights Alliance)

The transformation necessary – to revise the knowledge and attitudes of teachers and able-bodied students, the expectations of young disabled people and their families and to introduce inclusive educational approaches, curriculum, technology and materials – to support progress by individuals with a disability has not yet been implemented. The whole issue of reforming teacher training has been a live issue for nearly two decades yet many of the criticisms that attended teacher training in the early 90s are still prevalent today. In the meantime, however, the whole context in which the second level teacher operates has been transformed and this transformation continues at a pace. (Disability Federation of Ireland)

The lack of a comprehensive, national level tracking system for children in education creates a barrier to finding effective solutions – we must understand the nature of the problem if we are able to solve it. (Children's Rights Alliance)

The invisibility of rural poverty and disadvantage is an issue. It results in a lack of recognition of rural specific factors in second level underachievement and a lack of appropriate and necessary investment. (Irish Rural Link)

Very little allowance is made for those vulnerable to early school leaving by way of reduced curricula and a variety of programmes. (Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools)

Executive Summary

E.1. Overview

In October 2008, the (then) Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science (DES) approved a proposal submitted by Senator Fidelma Healy Eames to examine the problem of early school leaving from a broad perspective, i.e. not just examining school-based issues, but also individual-, home-, and school-based characteristics, as well as broader structural features of the education system itself, including links with other agencies and Government Departments.

To guide the study, an Expert Group was convened. Individuals with expertise in a range of areas, both researchers and practitioners, sat on the Group. The Educational Research Centre (ERC) was asked to collaborate with the Committee and the Expert Group in the conduct of the study and the production of this report.

Early school leaving is defined in this study as leaving education without having completed the Leaving Certificate Examination or equivalent. With increasing requirements for educational attainment and qualifications, not having the Leaving Certificate is associated with significant negative outcomes in the longer term, such as unemployment, lower earnings, limited (or no) access to further education and training, crime, drug-taking, and poorer quality of life more generally. Furthermore, increases in birth rates indicate an increase in the school-going population in the region of 9%, which will result in a further strain on the education system at a time when resources are already stretched.

Research has consistently indicated that estimated returns on quality, targeted investments in education, particularly from pre-school age and with parental involvement, yield substantial returns to both individuals (for example in a reduction in early school leaving and therefore increased opportunities for further education and better-paid employment) and the State (for example in reductions in social welfare benefits, increased tax returns, and reductions in crime rates).

E.2. Aims

The study focuses on *early school leaving* as the most striking result of lack of engagement in education. It aims to:

1. Identify processes and characteristics that distinguish young people of post-primary age who do and do not successfully engage with their education.
2. Identify examples or models of good practice that lead to more positive outcomes in terms of engagement in education.
3. Use the findings as the basis for drawing up conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice.

The study set out to address five related questions:

1. Are specific groups of learners under-engaging and under-achieving within mainstream and non-mainstream education, and how might these groups be better targeted and supported?
2. What are the critical transition points in the education system (both mainstream and non-mainstream), and how might these points be strengthened in terms of continuity and consistency?
3. How can the functioning of the education system be improved through auxiliary support systems, in order that the needs of individual children, both educational, and non-educational, are better met and maintained?
4. What are the gaps in the provision for children (both educational and non-educational), and how might these be supported in order to better engage children in their education?
5. What are the gaps in the knowledge about the education system itself, and how might these be addressed in order to better inform policy about the engagement of children in their education?

E.3. Design

The study builds through four inter-related Phases supplemented with a literature review and a consideration of supports currently available:

- Phase 1. The use of existing data in order to update the statistical picture on early school leaving.

- Phase 2. Interviews with groups and individuals. Although not claiming to be comprehensive, groups that have not been well represented in previous research are prioritised.
- Phase 3. Written submissions from Government Departments, partners in education, research institutions, and organisations that are represented in the Community and Voluntary Pillar of the Social Partners.
- Phase 4. The drafting of this report, which includes a literature review, description of current supports, a summary of results from Phases 1, 2 and 3 and a set of policy recommendations.

E.4. Statistical Picture on Early School Leaving

The most recent retention estimates from the DES (for the cohort enrolling in post-primary school in 2001) is estimated at 84.7%, which is an increase of about 4.2% since 1991. About 4% of those who leave school early do not sit the Junior Certificate. A problem with these data is that the destinations of students who transfer outside the mainstream State-funded education system are not known, since there is no individual-level tracking system in place that cuts across levels and sectors. Also, while exact figures are unavailable, it is estimated that up to 1,000 children per annum do not transfer to post-primary school.

E.5. Existing Research on Early School Leaving

The literature review provides strong evidence for a consistent association between early school leaving and socioeconomic disadvantage. Socioeconomic disadvantage is associated with lower levels of literacy, difficult or damaging family circumstances, poorer health (e.g. poorer nutrition, inadequate sleep), and should therefore be understood in its wider context. There is also a marked gender difference. For example, of the cohort entering post-primary school in 2001, for every 14 girls that leave school early, 23 boys do so.

Furthermore, there are a number of subgroups that tend to have higher rates of early school leaving than the general population. Other than the comparatively high rates of early school leaving in boys, the research evidence indicates that some students with special educational needs, Travellers, and students experiencing mental health/emotional difficulties/trauma have higher rates of early school leaving than other sub-groups of the population.

The literature review also confirmed that, over and above individual and background characteristics, aspects of the education system have the potential to engage or disengage some students from their education, and the processes by which this occurs are complex.

Difficulties in making the transition to post-primary and disruptions in schooling were found in the research which, although not widespread, can have serious consequences in terms of students' educational outcomes. Streaming was also identified in the research as problematic, whereby students in the 'bottom' stream disengage and have their educational potential curtailed; such students are more commonly boys, Travellers, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

School and class climate emerged as important aspects of schooling. For example, it has been argued on the basis of some studies that schools that are successful in engaging students have a formal school plan underpinned by an informal school climate that is positive and inclusive.

A number of curricular issues were identified in the research. These include the limited relevance of the curriculum for some students, particularly the preference in many for practical subjects; the high number of subjects taken for the Junior Certificate; the limited (although growing) availability of programmes such as the JCSP (Junior Certificate Schools Programme) and LCA (Leaving Certificate Applied); and the over-reliance on a written examination for certification. The research also indicated a strong preference in students for interactive and varied teaching methodologies over didactic whole-class teaching.

It was noted that, in the absence of structured emotional supports, provision of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) may not be adequate. It is only offered at Junior Cycle level for one class period a week. Furthermore, research indicates that Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is not offered in some 10% of schools, despite the fact that early school leavers are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours and teenage pregnancy is strongly associated with early school leaving.

In addition, the research suggested that although participation in paid work while in school in and of itself was not inevitably related to early school leaving, working more intensively (20 hours or more per week) was associated with a higher likelihood of leaving school (and in turn more intensive working patterns were found to be more common among students from disadvantaged backgrounds).

Finally, the research highlighted some gaps in the provision of careers guidance, particularly for students in Junior Cycle who may be considering leaving school prior to the Leaving Certificate. Research also suggested that there would be merit in re-focusing the role of the careers guidance teacher to one that is primarily informational and advisory with respect to further education paths and requirements, and careers options at both Junior and Senior Cycle. These issues may be considered in the wider context of the provision of information to students on subject choice, etc.

It should be noted that a report on early school leaving conducted by researchers at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) is forthcoming (due for publication in April 2010 but unavailable at the time of writing). Readers are encouraged to read that report in conjunction with this one.

E.6. Supports Relevant to a Consideration of Early School Leaving

The educational supports in place that are relevant to an analysis of early school leaving were considered with a view to providing a description that is as up-to-date as possible. The areas were examined under the broad headings of early childhood care and education, curricular innovations, alternatives to mainstream school, key agencies working with schools, targeted programmes and supports, and professional development and support for teachers. Although not claiming to be exhaustive, this review aimed to be sufficiently comprehensive to inform the aims of the study as set out under Section E.2.

It should be noted that while some of these supports (e.g. a targeted, quality early childhood education programme with parental involvement) may be viewed as preventative, others attempt to remedy a problem which has already arisen (e.g. some forms of second-chance education). Traditionally, the education system in Ireland has focused on remedial approaches more so than preventative ones.

The key areas identified in the course of this review are the need to monitor and evaluate the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme and augment it by including targeted supports, the lack of a national system to track children at an individual level, discontinuities at certain points in the system and across sectors (e.g. mainstream post-primary education and Youthreach), some resource challenges (e.g. the comprehensive provision of careers guidance), the possible gap in provision of targeted supports for some students in moderately disadvantaged non-DEIS schools, the need for targeted and needs-based Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that is incentivised and convenient for school staff to attend, and the need to protect out of school services (such as those provided by the School Completion Programme; SCP) from further cutbacks.

E.7. Statistical Analyses of Early School Leaving (Phase 1)

Results of statistical analyses were reported in order to update the broad statistical picture on characteristics that are associated with early school leaving. Consistent with previous research, student early school leaving intent was found to be strongly associated with student gender (male), lower reading achievement, and school socioeconomic composition. Regarding school socioeconomic composition, this finding confirms the ‘social context effect’ whereby schools with increasing levels of disadvantage in their student populations experience increasing rates of early school leaving, over and above individual student characteristics.

The analyses also included measures of home educational environment and these were significantly associated with early school leaving intent. In contrast to previously-reported analyses, behavioural variables such as students’ participation in paid work and rates of absenteeism were unrelated to early school leaving intent. This suggests that a supportive home environment is a key characteristic underpinning subsequent behaviours and levels of engagement.

It was also found that students in schools of similar socioeconomic composition but whose level of home educational support differed had different likelihoods of intending to leave school early. That is, students with higher levels of home educational resources had a lower likelihood of intending to leave school than

students with lower levels of home resources in schools of similar socioeconomic intake. This finding underlines the importance of the role of the ‘under-the-roof’ culture of the home.

Finally, the analyses provided some evidence that socioeconomic disadvantage impacts differentially in urban and rural areas, having a more marked negative impact in urban areas. However it is not clear from the analyses why this is the case.

The main implications of these analyses are the key importance of the home environment, further confirmation of the association between gender and socioeconomic status with early school leaving, and the need to better understand how rural poverty impacts on educational outcomes in post-primary schools.

It should be noted that, as with any single set of analyses, these cannot address all issues in the area of early school leaving. Importantly, the dataset used (based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of 15-year-olds conducted in 2006) did not allow the identification of Travellers; only very small numbers of newcomer students were in the dataset; students with special educational needs were not in the database; and nor were students who were absent on the day that the survey was conducted.

These findings suggest several key areas that merit further research:

- The need to search outside these empirical analyses to gain a better understanding of the educational outcomes of students with special educational needs, low attenders, newcomer students, young Travellers, and young people who are outside the mainstream education system.
- The need to gain a better understanding as to why boys more frequently disengage from the education system than girls, i.e. the need to examine the issue as a systemic rather than an individual problem.
- The need to gain a deeper understanding of what quantitative indicators of home environment are actually measuring.
- The need to gain a better understanding of the differential impacts of poverty on educational outcomes of post-primary schools in urban and rural settings.

E.8. Interviews With Target Groups (Phase 2)

In Phase 2, a total of 41 individuals were interviewed in the following groups:

- Parents of early school leavers
- Young Travellers
- Individuals recovering from heroin addiction
- Young lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered individuals
- Young people with special educational needs
- Young women who experienced rape or sexual assault
- Young men and women in prison.

As with Phase 1, Phase 2 has some limitations. The numbers participating were relatively small, convenience sampling was used, and some subgroups of the population identified in the literature review were not included. Nonetheless, analyses of these interviews suggested several themes, which were divided into school-based themes and broader themes.

Some key results included:

- The perception that the transition from primary to post-primary school represented a critical period, and a view that some students could be given more preparation and support at this point in the system.
- A strong preference for teaching styles associated with non-mainstream education settings such as Youthreach in participants that had attended both mainstream and non-mainstream education settings.
- A preference for a more balanced, practical and real-life curriculum, with more physical activities.
- A recognition of the pressure that teachers are under to cover the curriculum and the view that initial education and professional development should enable teachers to tackle a number of issues, including the identification of behaviours indicative of an underlying problem; behaviour management and teaching of mixed-ability classes; bullying; and sensitive issues such as sexuality.

- The view that there is a need for an increased emphasis on the teaching of a number of topics including mental health education (for example bullying and suicide); age-appropriate, holistic sex education; and drugs education.
- Negative views towards authoritarian discipline practices and a view that they are ineffective in changing ‘problem’ behaviour.
- The perceived need, for some students, to have a more flexible balance between school and paid work.
- The perceived importance of an inclusive school environment, particularly for ‘minority’ groups.
- The view that more post-primary schools should be non-denominational, and that there should be more mixed-sex post-primary schools.
- Problems encountered by some participants with the provision of assessment and support for special educational needs, along with communication difficulties between schools and parents of children with special educational needs, in particular emotional/behavioural difficulties and mild general learning disabilities.
- A strong perceived need for access to a counsellor or key staff with appropriate skills to provide emotional/therapeutic support in a respectful and confidential context, and a strong perceived need for schools to be able to respond to trauma (e.g. bereavement, rape).

E.9. Analysis of Written Submissions (Phase 3)

In Phase 3, a total of 18 written submissions was received. It was found that there is considerable overlap in the themes emerging from Phases 2 and 3. It should be borne in mind that, while the bodies making submissions cut across a range of agencies/sectors, they should not necessarily be considered representative of bodies and agencies that are engaged in working with young people.

Among the issues raised in the submissions were:

- The need for reform of the teacher education sector, including the role of teachers, teacher induction, accreditation and the incentivisation of CPD.
- The need for restructuring to promote smooth transitions at all levels, flexibility in the delivery of educational programmes with clear paths of

progression, more vocational programmes, and fluidity between mainstream and other settings.

- The potential for a more integrated support service that has school-based and out-of-school supports complementing one another.
- The need for a national, integrated literacy strategy.
- The need for full implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) and Disability Act (2005).
- The need to promote inclusive enrolment and the promotion of an inclusive learning environment (e.g. with respect to discipline, bullying).
- The need to track students via a centralized database from primary to post-primary.
- The potential role of the media in enhancing the debate on equality in education.

E.10. Conclusions and Recommendations

In Chapter 7, a set of 38 recommendations is presented under 13 key headings. These were established in accordance with a set of guiding principles which are described at the start of Chapter 7. In making each set of recommendations, a preamble is provided which explains their rationale and context. Readers are strongly encouraged to read the preamble accompanying each set of recommendations in order to interpret them in context. It should also be noted that the order in which the recommendations are made do not represent priorities; rather, the recommendations should be viewed as a complementary and integrated set.

Examples of Positive Initiatives Identified in the Study

Below is a list of four initiatives that appear to be quite successful at attaining their objectives. The first two address younger age cohorts in disadvantaged communities (and also involve their families and others, including teachers); the latter two address older cohorts specifically with respect to emotional, therapeutic and mental health supports. These are just a sample of a wide range of programmes and initiatives. And although it is acknowledged that the education system in Ireland already implements supports that can be considered of quality, such as the School Completion Programme, the Home-School-Community Liaison initiative, and the Demonstration Library Project, the initiatives below would merit examination in particular when considering early childhood education, family literacy development, and emotional, therapeutic and mental health needs of young people.

- **Incredible Years** (programmes for teachers, parents and children in disadvantaged communities; **Section 3.2.2**).
- **Familiscope** (integrated and multidisciplinary services for children and families in Ballyfermot; **Section 3.2.2**).
- **Belfast Education Library Board** (mental health, counselling and therapeutic support for post-primary schools that are linked with structures in the local community; **Section 6.4.1**).
- **Jigsaw** (community-based mental health services for teenagers; **Section 3.2.6**).

Chapter 1: Background to the Present Study

1.1 Introduction

In October 2008, the (then) Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science approved a proposal submitted by Senator Fidelma Healy Eames to examine the problem of early school leaving.

To guide this study, an Expert Group was convened. Individuals with expertise in a range of areas, both researchers and practitioners, sit on the Group. This is the first time that a Joint Oireachtas Committee has convened a group of this kind. Page 8 shows the membership of the Group. The Educational Research Centre was asked to collaborate with the Committee and the Expert Group in the conduct of the study and the production of this report.

The study focuses on *early school leaving* as the most striking result of lack of engagement in education. It set out to address five related questions:

1. Are specific groups of learners under-engaging and under-achieving within mainstream and non-mainstream education, and how might these groups be better targeted and supported?
2. What are the critical transition points in the education system (both mainstream and non-mainstream), and how might these points be strengthened in terms of continuity and consistency?
3. How can the functioning of the education system be improved through auxiliary support systems, in order that the needs of individual children, both educational, and non-educational, are better met and maintained?
4. What are the gaps in the provision for children (both educational and non-educational), and how might these be supported in order to better engage children in their education?
5. What are the gaps in the knowledge about the education system itself, and how might these be addressed in order to better inform policy about the engagement of children in their education?

It is an aim of the study that answers to these questions will lead to the identification of processes and characteristics that distinguish young people of post-primary age

who do and do not successfully engage with their education. Although the study's main focus is on post-primary, a number of key system-level issues will also be examined where considered relevant. In particular, it is hoped that factors that act as impediments to engagement will be identified. Another aim of the study is to identify examples or models of good practice that lead to more positive outcomes in terms of engagement in education. A third aim is to use the findings of the study as the basis for drawing up conclusions and recommendations for policy and practice.

This report is primarily aimed at policy makers in the Department of Education and Science (DES) and in other Government Departments and agencies with a role in the wellbeing of children.

Although primarily aimed at policymakers, it is expected that this report will also be of interest to:

- staff in schools and other settings where education is provided
- bodies representing the partners in education (parents, teachers, school management etc.)
- individuals working with young people in a supportive role, such as guidance counsellors, literacy tutors, and staff of organisations such as the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), and the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB).

1.2. Study Design and Timeline

The study has four Phases. Although termed 'Phases', these are not chronologically sequential and are, rather, interlinked:

Phase 1. The use of existing data in order to update the statistical picture on early school leaving.

Phase 2. Interviews with groups and individuals. Although not claiming to be comprehensive, we have chosen to interview groups of people that have not been well represented in previous research, i.e.:

- Parents of early school leavers

- Young Travellers
- Individuals recovering from heroin addiction
- Young lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered individuals
- Young people with special educational needs
- Young women who experienced rape or sexual assault
- Young men and women in prison.

Phase 3. Written submissions from Government Departments, partners in education, research institutions, and organisations that are represented in the Community and Voluntary Pillar of the Social Partners. Chapter 6 provides a list of bodies that provided a written submission.

Phase 4. The drafting of this report. The report draws on relevant literature, a review of supports currently in place, and includes a summary of results from Phases 1 to 3 and a set of policy recommendations.

1.3 Why is Early School Leaving a Problem and How is it Defined in This Study?

It will be shown at various points throughout this report that early school leaving is strongly associated with low socioeconomic status (e.g., a hugely disproportionate number of young people who leave school early are from families dependent on social welfare and/or where the adults are in poorly paid employment). As a result, discourse about early school leaving often takes place within the context of a consideration of the concept of ‘educational disadvantage’.

Educational disadvantage is defined in the 1998 Education Act as ‘the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent student from deriving appropriate benefits from deriving appropriate benefit from education’ (Government of Ireland, Section 32, 9). This definition may suffice in a legislative context and its inclusion in the Act probably helps to ensure that this general area is not neglected by policymakers. However, as Kellaghan (2001) points out, the definition ‘provides little guidance for educational intervention’ (p. 3). For example, he notes that ‘no attempt is made to identify the ‘impediments’ that might be regarded as constituting the case of disadvantage’ (p. 4). He goes on to propose a definition of disadvantage in terms of discontinuities between the competencies and dispositions

that children bring to school and the competencies and dispositions valued in schools. The development of these competencies and dispositions can be influenced by a variety of factors conceived of as economic, cultural and social capital. Lack of money (economic capital) in the home can impact on educational outcomes generally and decisions about whether to remain in or leave education in particular as a result of hardship (e.g., hunger) or the inability to purchase advantage (e.g., extra tuition).

Cultural capital is often described in terms of Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1995, 2004) theoretical work on how children develop through their interaction with a variety of microsystems (e.g., family, peer network) and, to a lesser extent, macrosystems in the community and wider society. It is arguably the type of capital most closely related to doing well in school. It consists not just of cultural goods (e.g., books, works of art, computers) but also relates to the use of language in adult-child interaction, the types of academic aspirations held and communicated and a variety of other subtle factors that have the potential to impact on the development of competencies and dispositions that are valued by schools.

Definitions of social capital vary but it is generally agreed that it is embedded in relationships between individuals in informal social networks. Social capital functions by securing benefits for individuals by virtue of their membership of those networks. Social capital has shared values, norms and sanctions, and is reciprocal in nature. It is therefore an important force of social control, parental support, and so on (see, for example, Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998).

The three types of capital can interact with each other in ways that can have a large influence on the benefits that individuals derive from their education and, where levels of capital are low, lead to a premature ending of formal education.

In this study, early school leaving is defined as leaving education prior to completing the Leaving Certificate or equivalent. This definition includes both those who have completed the Junior Certificate and those who have not. It is noted that there are many other dimensions of underperformance. For example it may also be the case that students underperform on the Leaving Certificate Examination.

According to the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) (1997, p. 3): early school leaving is ‘among the most serious economic and social problems which this state must address’. In essence, not having basic educational qualifications is a strong determinant of various life-chances across developed Western societies, including Ireland. Examples of such outcomes include level of entry to the labour market (Malone & McCoy, 2003) and long-term unemployment (e.g. McCoy & Smyth, 2005).

It is important to note that early school leaving is not always a negative outcome. Some young people who leave school prior to completing the Leaving Certificate continue in some form of further education and training (e.g., Byrne, McCoy & Watson, 2008). A classification used in a recent UK study on early school leaving (Olmec, 2007) is useful in this respect. It defines *positive* and *opportune leavers* as those who have chosen to take up employment or an apprenticeship. While positive leavers have a definite career or study plan, opportune leavers may do so because they happen to have been offered work. Four other categories used by Olmec are *reluctant stayers* (those who would otherwise leave if a job opportunity presented itself), *circumstantial leavers* (leaving school for non-educational reasons, e.g. family need, illness), *discouraged leavers* (those not experiencing success in their schooling and who have low levels of performance and interest), and *alienated leavers* (those who have additional needs that are more difficult to meet than discouraged leavers).

1.4. Extent of Early School Leaving in Ireland

The EU adopted, through the Lisbon Strategy, the setting of common objectives for education and training. These include a rate of early school leaving of no more than 10% by 2010 (Commission of the European Communities, 2005).

A recent report of the Commission of European Communities (2007) notes that member states have not made substantial progress in meeting EU targets in this area. The report holds that a determined effort must be made to raise the basic skills of young people and to drastically reduce early school leaving. The report goes on to suggest that resources need to be concentrated over a period of years in order to effect change.

Statistics relating to early school leaving are almost invariably related to socioeconomic characteristics (as already noted) and gender. For example, McCoy (2000) has reviewed trends in early school leaving and entry rates to post-secondary education and concludes that social inequalities in educational attainments have remained remarkably stable in Ireland over the past two decades with the exception of entry rates for institutes of technology. This stability is evident in some other European countries also.

A recent report (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; OECD, 2008) comparing rates of early school leaving in different countries indicates that 14% of students in Ireland do not complete upper secondary education which is similar to the OECD and EU averages of 17% and 14%, respectively. However the Irish figure falls behind a number of countries such as the Czech Republic (10%), Finland (7%), Norway (9%), Switzerland (11%) and the United Kingdom (12%). Of the 14% of students leaving school early in Ireland, over twice as many are male (19%) than female (7%) (OECD, 2008). The greater prevalence of early school leaving among males is evident in many other OECD countries, but there is little if any gender difference in some countries such as Italy, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland. Indeed, the pattern of early school leaving in both the Czech Republic and Switzerland suggests that it is possible to maintain relatively high retention rates equally for males and females. Note, however, that these countries, in contrast to Ireland, do not have unified provision to the end of post-primary education. The Department of Education and Science (DES, 2008) has noted that the gender difference in retention rates in Ireland is the fourth highest across the EU (though this pattern may have been influenced by the high labour demand in the construction sector during the economic boom).

The Department of Education and Science (DES) has published reports on retention rates at post-primary level, beginning in 2005, which followed the cohort of students beginning in post-primary school in 1995 and 1996. The most recent study of retention by the DES (2009a) provides figures that are consistent with the OECD (2008). The report includes an analysis of trends in retention rates for cohorts spanning 1991-2001 on the basis of records held in the post-primary pupil database (PPPDB). Two limitations are noted and these are both due to the lack of a

comprehensive national tracking system. First, data are not available on the educational pathways taken by students outside of the mainstream State-aided schooling system (e.g., Youthreach). In a previous report on retention rates of the 1996 cohort (DES, 2005b), it was noted that

More recently, with the co-operation of the schools, the Department has been in a position to use the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) as the means to identify and track pupils. As the use of the PPSN becomes more widespread, it will be possible to produce a more complete picture embracing avenues and options such as Youthreach and other programmes for early school leavers, apprenticeship, FÁS, CERT and Teagasc training leading to awards under the National Framework of Qualification (p. 1).

Yet, the lack of individual-level data and hence lack of information on transfer outside mainstream education remains. Second, while the analysis allows for movement of students between mainstream schools, it is only possible to estimate the numbers of students who leave State-aided schools e.g. to attend privately-funded schools, or who leave the system for other reasons (e.g. emigration or death). Regarding the second shortcoming, the DES has applied an adjustment. The adjusted retention rate to Leaving Certificate level for the cohort enrolling in post-primary schools in 2001 is estimated at 84.7% (DES, 2009a). Examining trends from previous cohorts, a small increase is evident (e.g. by 4.2% since 1991 and 3.5% since 1996).

It is important to distinguish between retention rates at various points in the system. Note that these are unadjusted retention rates so the final figures are likely to be somewhat higher. Of the 56,278 students enrolling in post-primary schools in 2001, 98.8% proceeded to second year and 96.1% sat the Junior Certificate. The DES (2009a) estimates that 93.7% of the 2001 cohort progressed to Senior Cycle, and 81.3% sat the Leaving Certificate. Comparing these figures with the 1991 cohort, the rate of Junior Certificate sits has increased by 2.7% and Leaving Certificate sits has increased by 4.2%. Also, no reliable statistics are available on the number of children who do not at all. More than ten years ago, an estimate of 1,000 a year was made by the NESF (1997) but the basis of that estimate was not provided in the report.

The DES (2009a) also provides (unadjusted) retention rates by gender. For the 2001 cohort, the retention rate for males was 98.8% in year 2 of the Junior Cycle, and

95.4% of males sat the Junior Certificate. For females, retention to year 2 was similar, at 98.9%, and Junior examination sits were slightly higher than for males, at 96.8%. The gender gap increases markedly when one compares (unadjusted) Leaving Certificate sits for males and females, which were 76.9% and 85.8%, respectively, for the 2001 cohort. In other words, for every 14 girls that leave school early, about 23 boys do so.

The report on the 2006/7 school leavers' survey¹ suggests a similar rate of early school leaving for Ireland to that provided by the OECD (2008) and DES (2009a). Their estimates indicate that 14% leave school prior to the Leaving Certificate, and 2% without the Junior Certificate. Also consistent with other sources, more males (18%) than females (8%) left school early. Furthermore, Byrne, McCoy and Watson's (2008) findings again show the strong link between socioeconomic characteristics and early school leaving. They note that this in turn impacts on participation in further education and training, employment status and job satisfaction.

McCoy, Kelly and Watson (2007) estimated that 53% of students who left school prior to the Leaving Certificate pursued various types of further training within one year of leaving school. Early school leaving, however, was still associated with a lower rate of further education and training. In the most recent annual school-leavers' survey (Byrne et al., 2008), it is noted that while 85% of those completing the Leaving Certificate went on to pursue some form of post-school education or training, this figure was just 64% for those leaving with the Junior Certificate and 52% leaving prior to the Junior Certificate. The results also indicated that a somewhat higher percentage of females compared with males who left school prior to completing the Leaving Certificate pursued post-school education or training.

Regardless of take-up of further education and training, however, the figures cited in this section suggest that currently, Ireland is some distance from its target of a retention rate to Leaving Certificate of 90% for the 20-24-year-old population of Ireland by 2013 (Government of Ireland, 2007). Moreover, this general statistical overview indicates that socioeconomic characteristics and gender must be dual foci of

¹ This is the latest of an annual/bi-annual survey of a representative sample of youth that examines educational and occupational outcomes after upper post-primary (Byrne, McCoy & Watson, 2008).

attention, not just in terms of individuals' contexts but also in the context of the system as a whole.

1.5. The Current Economic Climate

At the time of writing, the full scale of the recession and its impact on various sectors of Irish society is unclear. However, two comments may be made with respect to the education system. First, the decrease in employment opportunities is likely to result in an increase in retention rates, resulting in more students in the system, particularly at senior cycle (e.g., GHK, 2005). Already, the number of people registering to do an apprenticeship has dropped dramatically, particularly in the construction and electrical trades (Walshe, 2010). Second, this will be happening at a time when the education system is increasingly strained for resources. There will, of course, be more generalised negative consequences associated with the current economic climate that can be expected to impact both directly and indirectly on children and their education. It may also be noted that there has been an increase of 9.1% of enrolments in the primary school sector since 2003-2004 (Millar, 2010). This implies a substantial increase in the need for places in post-primary schools in due course.

1.6. Structure of the Present Report

Chapter 2 considers previous studies relevant to early school leaving that focus on the Irish context.

Chapter 3 considers current initiatives and supports in place that are relevant to a consideration of early school leaving, and outlines some of the challenges in tackling early school leaving.

Chapter 4 describes the results of the Phase 1 (statistical) analyses of school-level retention rates, early school leaving intent, and reasons for wanting to leave school. The results add to the review of the existing empirical research and provide an up-to-date picture of patterns of early school leaving and associations with school and student characteristics across the student population in general. Implications for future research are considered.

Chapter 5 describes the composition of each of the Phase 2 groups of interviewees, and key themes arising from the interviews with these individuals. Findings suggest several areas that merit policy attention, and are discussed in the conclusion of this chapter.

In Chapter 6, we describe the main themes arising from the written submissions from various agencies associated with Phase 3. Again, findings suggest several areas that merit policy attention, and are discussed in the concluding section of this chapter.

Chapter 7 consists of a set of 38 recommendations under 13 headings, and it is stated explicitly whether the recommendation arises from the findings of the present study, from previous research, or both. To frame the conclusions and recommendations, we outline a set of guiding principles at the beginning of Chapter 7.

Chapter 2: Review of Research on Early School Leaving in the Irish Context

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews research on early school leaving, focusing on studies conducted in Ireland.

There are a number of ways to classify research studies. For example, they can be classified on the basis of their design (analytic technique, target sample, etc.), or on the kinds of research questions addressed in the studies and hence, the key themes arising from them. We have chosen to use the latter way to classify the research findings, but will, in the course of describing the key findings, provide the reader with information about the methods and samples associated with each study. Where appropriate, we give the reader an overview of implications of the findings, as described by the researchers.

Findings from these studies will be presented in terms of the following two broad questions:

- What characteristics do individuals bring with them into an educational setting relevant to engagement/disengagement?
- What characteristics of the education system may affect individuals' engagement/disengagement?

The characteristics are discussed under the following headings.

Characteristics brought to an educational setting (Section 2.2):

- Socioeconomic factors, especially those relating to poverty and deprivation
- Gender
- Children with special educational needs
- Children from the Traveller community
- Children from migrant families
- Children emotional or mental health difficulties
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students
- Sexuality, sexual behaviour and sex education.

Features of educational settings relevant to engagement/disengagement (Section 2.3):

- Transitions and disruptions
- Streaming and class allocation
- School and class climate
- Curricular issues
- Teaching style
- School and work
- Careers guidance.

We then present the results of some analyses that examine both personal/background characteristics and school characteristics simultaneously. We also consider evidence that supports the argument that investment in education is associated with significant returns to both individuals and the State, thereby showing that not only is it ethically justifiable to pursue this issue for individuals experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage and longer-term poorer outcomes, both educational/occupational, and others, including health, social cohesion, and overall quality of life.

It should be noted that this review is by no means exhaustive. For example, we have not included a review of the youth justice service, nor of recreation and leisure facilities, despite their associations with disengagement from education. However, the authors can supply those interested with a draft review of these issues on request. Also, it should be noted that a report on early school leaving conducted by researchers at the ESRI is forthcoming (due for publication in April 2010 but unavailable at the time of writing) and readers are encouraged to that report in conjunction with this one.

The conclusion draws the various sections together by identifying some key themes and issues.

2.2. Background Characteristics Brought to Educational Settings

2.2.1. Socioeconomic Factors, Especially Those Relating to Poverty and Deprivation

A consistent finding in research in this area over a period of at least 50 years is of an association between socioeconomic measures and educational outcomes, including retention, which suggests that *poverty and deprivation* lie at the heart of early school

leaving and other forms of underperformance, both preceding it and following it (e.g., Greaney & Kellaghan, 1984). As will be shown in Chapter 3, considerable resources are being targeted to support the education of young people in disadvantaged circumstances, yet the association between socioeconomic factors and disengagement from education remains strong. Study after study uncovers this association (e.g., Kellaghan et al., 1995; Eivers, Ryan & Brinkley, 2000; McCoy, Kelly, & Watson, 2007; Smyth & McCoy, 2009). Stokes (2003) comments: ‘Whether one examines poverty or social exclusion, early school leaving is seen as both a cause and a consequence’ (p. 7). Some illustrative examples from the literature are described here.

A study by Eivers, Ryan and Brinkley (2000) examined characteristics of early school leavers that participated in the 8- to 15-year-old Early School Leavers’ Initiative (involving interviews with 54 early school leavers and a comparison group of 40 non-leavers). Their results provide strong support for the contention that the condition of early school leaving is associated with social inequalities. For example, compared with non-leavers, early school leavers much more commonly experienced parental unemployment and lower levels of parental educational attainment.

Goodwin’s (2003) results (in a study entailed interviews with 10 male early school leavers from a highly deprived community in the mid-West supplemented with 70 questionnaires by males attending the same school as the early school leavers) found evidence of intergenerational transmission of educational qualifications and associated outcomes such as job quality and unemployment. For example, just one in eight questionnaire respondents reported that their mother had completed the Intermediate Certificate (this was the predecessor to the Junior Certificate) and 64% of respondents’ mothers had primary school education only. Just over half of the respondents’ fathers were unemployed while the respondents were at school. About half of respondents reported living in local authority accommodation. Goodwin also found that these inequalities also translated into subsequent poorer occupational outcomes. Similar to their parents, the occupations held by the respondents were generally not well paid and of lower social status. Also, the nature of work was transient for many. Since leaving school, about two-thirds of questionnaire respondents (between the ages of 21 and 23) had held three jobs or more.

The reproduction of social inequality was also strongly in evidence in Stokes' (2003) findings of a study of 58 Youthreach participants. The majority of the participants were from 'working-class' backgrounds, both urban and rural; over half had fathers not in employment; and a further one-sixth were involved in the black economy. In contrast, one in ten was from what would be described as 'middle-class' homes, hence it is of interest that participation in Youthreach is not *exclusive* to young people from 'working-class' backgrounds.

Children from poorer socioeconomic contexts tend, on average, to have lower levels of literacy and numeracy and lower levels of engagement in school generally (e.g. rates of absenteeism), and this in turn presents complex challenges for school staff (see, for example, DES, 2005f; Eivers, Shiel, & Shortt, 2004).

Furthermore, Stokes (2003) has made a link between socioeconomic disadvantage and the preponderance of family difficulties. He found that while family structure and size were unrelated to early school leaving, difficulties experienced by families (arising, for example, from violence, breaches of the law, alcohol and drugs) were widespread. Families in his study were generally characterized as being under pressure financially or having difficulties in coping under difficult circumstances.

Downes, Maunsell & Ivers' (2006) survey of four RAPID-area² primary schools in Blanchardstown, Dublin, indicated that a consistent figure of 18% of senior primary pupils stated that they were either 'often, very often or always' too hungry to concentrate on their work in school, and lack of sufficient sleep was common. Hence, some students are lacking some of the most basic requirements in order to engage in learning.

The recent SLÁN report (Department of Health and Children, 2009) includes an analysis of overall quality of life, which is poorer in men, those from a lower social class background, with lower levels of education, and low income. The addition of variables indicative of social support suggests that individual circumstances and vulnerabilities have a multiplicative effect on well-being over and above demographic

² The RAPID Programme is a Government initiative overseen by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, which targets 45 of the most disadvantaged areas in the country.

and socioeconomic characteristics. Thus, after adjusting for this first set of variables, poorer well-being was associated with being separated or widowed, having poorer social support, loneliness, psychological distress, and poor self-rated health. This finding is consistent with Stokes' (2003) position that early school leaving arises from a 'combination of personal and ecological consequences, multiplier influences, diminished self-esteem, school and systematic failures and social reproduction' (p. 237).

2.2.2. Gender

As was shown in Chapter 1, higher rates of early school leaving are consistently found among males. There are some differences in the educational experiences of males and females that are worth considering.

First, rates of special educational needs are higher in males than in females for all categories, and particularly with respect to autistic spectrum disorders and specific learning disabilities (this is discussed further in Section 2.2.3).

Second, girls on average acquire language skills at an earlier age in boys and studies have consistently found a female advantage in reading/literacy skills (e.g. Eivers et al., 2005, 2008). These differences have implications for both school readiness and the opportunities for pupils to expand and develop their learning during their educational careers.

Third, hormonal changes at puberty generally result in different experiences for males and females. In adolescent males, levels of testosterone have been linked directly with impatience, irritability and aggressive/destructive behaviour (Olweus et al., 1988), although the relationship is complex and appears to be mediated by body size (e.g. Tremblay et al., 1998). Although testosterone levels are not related to cognitive ability, research suggests that boys with both lower levels of cognitive ability *and* higher levels of testosterone may be at a particular disadvantage, which is evident as early as the ages of 9 to 11 (Chance et al., 2000). In contrast, research has established positive links between females' oestrogen levels and attention span, learning of rules, and shifting attention from one stimulus to another. This suggests that girls on average have a hormonal advantage in terms of skills such as concentrating at school and

complex reading tasks (www.endocrinology.org). However it should also be noted that levels of depression and other mood disorders are positively associated with levels of oestrogen (e.g., Angold et al., 1999).

Fourth, girls consistently perform better than boys on the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations (i.e. on a composite performance measure rather than on individual subjects), and, furthermore, take subjects at higher level more frequently than males in 75% of Junior Certificate subjects and 80% of subjects at Leaving Certificate level (O'Connor, 2007).

Fifth, it has been acknowledged that the education system in Ireland (and elsewhere) is becoming more feminised.³ At primary level, the percentage of all teaching staff that is female increased from 77% in 1985 to 82% in 2003 and at post-primary level the figures for 1985 and 2003 for post-primary level are 50% and 60%, respectively (O'Connor, 2007). However, males are over-represented in senior posts. So if we examine class teachers only, the trends for 1990 to 2005 suggest that the percentage of female class teachers at primary level has increased from 85% to about 90% (O'Connor, 2007). A recent survey of teachers conducted by the OECD in 2008 (Teaching and Learning International Survey; TALIS) indicates that about 69% of subject teachers at post-primary level is female (Shiel, Perkins, & Gilleece, 2009). These figures imply a mismatch between the population of school-goers and the population of teachers in terms of gender and there is evidence for negative consequences of learners. For example, a detailed study of 25,000 eighth grade (second year) student conducted in the US, Dee (2006) examined the impact of the gender of students and teachers in terms of achievement and attitudes. He found that, generally speaking, boys achieved better results when taught by a male teacher, and the same pattern held for girls taught by female teachers. Other findings included boys' perceptions that the subject being taught was more likely to be perceived as personally relevant when taught by a male teacher, and boys taught by female teachers were more likely to be perceived as disruptive in class. Furthermore, there is evidence that the mismatch in the social class of teachers and students can negatively impact on learning outcomes, for example with respect to lowered teacher

³ Feminisation in this context means a trend towards the involvement of more females.

expectations for students of a lower social class (e.g. Drudy, 2005; Lyons et al., 2003; Smyth, McCoy & Darmody, 2004).

Sixth, the gendered nature of various sectors of the workforce is a relevant system-level factor. For example, males are significantly over-represented in apprenticeships (e.g., Byrne, McCoy & Watson, 2008). Byrne and McCoy note (2008, p. 1): ‘Almost a quarter of young people with a Junior Certificate qualification had opted for the apprenticeship route, many of whom are male’ and they raise concerns about the reliance of this group on apprenticeships, which, as was mentioned in Chapter 1, have declined significantly over the past 12 months.

Summing up, we argue that the substantial gender difference in early school leaving must be seen as a significant impediment to equitable outcomes for males and females in their education. We further argue on the basis of the research reviewed in this section that this issue should be viewed as a system-level problem, and not merely an individual-level one.

2.2.3. Children With Special Educational Needs

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE, 2006, discussed further in Chapter 3) draws on a number of sources to provide the best estimates of special educational needs (SEN) available as defined in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004. It notes (p. 15) that ‘there is no definitive, agreed and accepted source or sources of data on SEN prevalence’. It estimates that:

- 1.2% children (aged 0-17) have physical or sensory disabilities, and that 61% of these is male.
- The percentage of children with a mild intellectual disability is 1.5%, and again, around 60% is male.
- The percentage of children with a moderate, severe or profound intellectual disability is 0.5%, and around 60% male.
- About 6% of children have a specific learning disability. These are much more common in boys than girls, since boys make up 80% of this group.
- Autistic spectrum disorders have a prevalence of around 0.6% and 80% of this group is male.

- Moderate to severe mental health difficulties are present in 8% of children and two-thirds of this group is male.

The NCSE Implementation Report (2006) estimated that 17.7 % of children aged 0-17 had a special educational need, by virtue of a disability or other condition, as defined in the EPSEN Act. Note, however, that this estimate does not allow for the existence of multiple disabilities in a single child, so the *per capita* figure could be somewhat lower. (Table 1, discussed in Chapter 3, suggests that somewhere between 3% and 9% of children may have multiple disabilities.)

The NCSE is committed to the ongoing improvement of data on children with special educational needs and to developing an independent and accurate statistical profile of the cohort of children on whom the EPSEN Act confers rights. In 2009, the NCSE commissioned a study to re-examine the issue of prevalence drawing on more recently available data. This study is being carried out by the ESRI and findings will be available later in 2010 (NCSE, personal communication, March, 2010).

We now consider evidence that (i) special educational needs are somewhat more prevalent in lower socioeconomic groups and (ii) some classes of special educational needs are associated with higher rates of early school leaving.

The 2006 census (www.cso.ie) indicates that 5.4% of individuals with a disability came from professional backgrounds, compared to 11.6% of individuals from unskilled backgrounds. Furthermore, it is estimated that 38% of people with a long-term illness or disability were in households at risk of poverty, compared with 17% of others (National Disability Authority; NDA, 2005b). Hence, many young people with a disability are multiply disadvantaged. Having said this, disability is common to all societal groups and is not caused by social and educational inequalities but may be compounded by such.

The NDA (2005b) conducted an analysis of the 2002 Census results concerning the educational outcomes of people with disabilities, and found a fairly consistent pattern of lower levels of education achieved by people with disabilities compared to others of their age. Teenagers with a disability were more likely to have left school than their

peers. The NDA observed that 27% of young people aged 15-19 with a disability had finished their education, compared to just 19% of non-disabled people. Furthermore, one-fifth of people aged 25-34 with a disability did not complete the Junior Certificate, which is five times the prevalence of non-completion in the general population (4%). Individuals who were physically disabled were the most likely group to leave school early, followed by individuals with an intellectual disability, and lastly individuals with a sensory disability. It should be noted that these figures are based on data gathered eight years ago so the current picture may well have changed. Furthermore, these data apply to individuals who had completed their education prior to the census and do not therefore reflect the significant developments in provision for students in special educational needs that have occurred in recent years. However, analyses of the 2006 Census indicate that the prevalence of early school leaving is higher among young people with a physical disability when compared to other types of disability (www.cso.ie).

2.2.4. Children in the Traveller Community

There are estimated to be 25,000 Travellers in Ireland, making up more than 4,485 Traveller families. This constitutes approximately 0.5% of the national population (www.itmtrav.com).

An examination of enrolment rates of Traveller students in schools over time indicates that these have increased substantially in the past number of years. For example, 8,158 Traveller children were enrolled in mainstream primary schools in 2007/2008, compared with 3,953 in 1988. Also, 2,596 Traveller children were enrolled in mainstream post-primary schools in 2007/2008 compared with less than 1,000 in the 1999/2000 school year (DES, 2006c; DES briefing document, February 2009).

However, completion rates for the Leaving Certificate remain low – with just 102 Travellers completing the Leaving Certificate in 2007/2008. This is estimated to be a completion rate of less than 20%, which is considerably lower than the national average of 84% or so. Similarly, only 56% of Travellers completed the Junior Certificate compared with an estimated 96% nationally. Completion rates are lower for males than for females (DES, 2006c; DES briefing document, February 2009).

In interpreting these findings, some broader factors that can act as barriers to participation in education by Travellers need to be considered. First, the health status of Travellers is significantly worse than people in the Settled community (www.paveepoint.ie). Second, Pavee Point (2006) maintains that ignorance and prejudice are still deeply entrenched in various sectors of Irish society and these serve to act as barriers to efforts towards integration. Third, issues within the Traveller community also present difficulties. These include drug use (Homeless and Drugs Services/Pavee Point, 2006) and particular issues faced by Traveller women (e.g., very young average rates of marriage and expectations of having high numbers of children; Pavee Point, 2005). Finally, and particularly for children from nomadic families, lower rates of attendance can also create barriers to Traveller children staying in school (DES, 2005c).

2.2.5. Children from Migrant Families

It is estimated that 10% of students at primary level, and 8% of students at post-primary level are from migrant families (Smyth et al., 2009). The OECD (2009a) notes that, prior to the economic boom, the migrant population in Ireland comprised mainly English-speaking people from Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA. Therefore the significant population of non-English-speaking migrants is a relatively recent phenomenon in Ireland and is largely comprised of first-generation migrants. The OECD further notes that the distribution of migrant students, although somewhat clustered in urban areas (due to employment and housing availability), is much more widely dispersed compared to other countries. However, while about 90% of post-primary schools have 2% to 9% of newcomer students, only 56% of primary schools have newcomers (OECD, 2009a). There is also a greater variety of nationalities in individual post-primary schools compared with primary schools. This, coupled with the increased structural complexity and higher linguistic demands associated with post-primary school, suggests more complex challenges for the post-primary sector, particularly in meeting the needs of migrant children who have only recently arrived to live in Ireland and hence have not attended an Irish primary school.

The OECD (2009a) notes that since no data are collected on the enrolment of children by migrant or language status that there is no way of ascertaining whether these groups currently have higher rates of early school leaving or not. Evidence from the

ESRI report indicates, however, that these students are regarded by principals as motivated, well-behaved and achieving on a par with their native peers so it is unlikely that significant numbers are currently at risk of early school leaving. Nevertheless, this may well become more of an issue in the future since international research cited by the OECD suggests that educational outcomes of second-generation migrants may be poorer than those of first-generation migrants in many countries.

Finally, features which are relevant to engagement/disengagement, such as transitions and disruptions and school and class climate may be particularly relevant to migrant students (OECD, 2009a).

2.2.6. Mental Health

There is a clear relationship between mental ill-health and indicators of social exclusion such as low educational attainment, low income, unemployment, and drug-taking (DHC, 2009; Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2009; NESF, 2007). Mental health is an issue of acute concern to young people throughout Ireland: physical and mental health were the two key topics for discussion for Dáil na nÓg at its 2009 delegates' meeting (OMCYA, 2009). Also, a majority of students that were surveyed in a small number of DEIS schools stated that they would not be willing to confide their personal problems to an adult working in the school, including teachers, and attributed this to concerns with confidentiality (Downes 2004; Downes, Maunsell & Ivers 2006; Downes & Maunsell 2007).

According to Downes (2003), the role of schools in relation to mental health and trauma can be clarified by distinguishing three levels of support: mental health promotion, stress prevention and therapeutic support. Schools have a direct role in the first two levels, such as establishing a supportive, inclusive school environment and promoting self-esteem and positive communication strategies, as well as in bullying prevention. However, the level of therapeutic support is beyond the scope of the teacher who needs to refer such students to other support services (Downes, 2003).

Sullivan et al. (2004) reported on the results of a survey of a representative sample of 3,800 15- to 17-year-olds in Ireland. Serious personal, emotional, behavioural or mental health problems were experienced by 27% of teenagers. Of these, only 18%

received professional help. Girls were more likely to display signs of both depression (8.4%) and anxiety (12.7%) than boys (5.1% and 5.8%, respectively). About 9% of teenagers had engaged in self-harm, and close to half of this group had done so more than once. Girls were three times more likely to harm themselves than boys.

Self-harming behaviour was found to be strongly indicative of other problems or underlying trauma. Teenagers who had harmed themselves were 2 to 3 times more likely to have had problems with relationships, family difficulties, being bullied at school and/or to have been in trouble with the police. They were also 4 times more likely to be concerned about their sexual orientation, 9 times more likely to have family who had engaged in suicidal behaviour, 8 times more likely to have been physically abused and 7 times more likely to have been forced to engage in sexual activities against their will.

Lynch et al. (2006) studied a sample of about 720 12- to 15-year-olds in eight schools in Ireland. Close to one in five young people that were screened were identified as being at risk. Secondary interviews of this group indicated that 16% met the criteria for a current psychiatric disorder, including 4.5% with an affective disorder, 4% with an anxiety disorder and 4% with ADHD. Significant past suicidal ideation was experienced by 2%, and 1.5% had a history of parasuicide. Binge drinking was associated with both affective and behaviour disorders. Lynch et al. concluded that the rates of psychiatric problems including suicide ideation and risk are similar to those in other Western cultures.

However, when overall suicide rates are considered, Ireland ranked 18th out of 25 EU states (with a rate of 10.2 per 100,000), but when 15- to 24-year-olds are considered separately, Ireland had the 5th highest across the EU (with a rate of 15.7 per 100,000). Male suicides in this age group exceeded female suicides by a ratio of 7:1 (Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children, 2006). Furthermore, the economic costs of suicide are significant: human and indirect costs were estimated at €871.5 million in 2001, equivalent to approximately 0.5% of the Gross National Product. This is broken down as 72% related to the human cost and 28% to lost productivity to society (Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children, 2006).

Next, we consider trauma, since traumatic experiences commonly give rise to emotional and mental health difficulties. We focus on trauma as experienced through sexual violence as an example. McGee et al. (2002) cite evidence that supports individuals' reactions to sexual violence as having features characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) more generally. Furthermore, the specific trauma of sexual violence has not previously been given much policy attention in the context of education, and we demonstrate in the remainder of this section that there are clear links between rape, mental health difficulties, and early school leaving.

O'Shea (2006, p. 19) has noted that

The seriousness and extent of rape/sexual assault is generally not acknowledged and it remains one of the most under-reported and under-recorded of violent crimes. There is a stigma attached to disclosing rape/sexual assault which makes it difficult for victims to report it to the Gardaí or support services, therefore the prevalence of sexual violence in Ireland is unknown. Incomplete evidence from crime statistics, previous research reports and service uptake figures is insufficient to fully understand the nature and extent of the problem.

The mental health consequences of rape and sexual abuse can be severe. For example, in the Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) report (McGee et al., 2002), it was noted that 30% of women and 18% of men reported that their experiences of sexual violence (either in childhood, adulthood or both) had had a moderate or extreme effect on their lives overall. Furthermore, 25% of women and 16% of men reported having experienced symptoms consistent with PTSD as a consequence of their experience of sexual violence. Those who had experienced sexual violence were significantly more likely to have used medication for anxiety or depression or to have been a psychiatric hospital inpatient than those without such experiences.

The principle sources of initial support available to individuals who have experiences sexual violence include Sexual Assault Treatment Units (SATUs), GPs, and Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs). There are six SATUs in Ireland (Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Letterkenny, Mullingar, and Galway) as well as some forensic examination facilities in Limerick (Hanly, Healy, & Scriver, 2009). SATUs are now nationally planned with a majority of the funding ringfenced. A national set of guidelines has been developed by the Health Service Executive (HSE) in partnership with the relevant agencies. Most SATUs are open to survivors without making a report to the Gardaí. Currently,

largely due to resource considerations, immediate access to some SATUs may still require Garda accompaniment, although the case for general access and availability to these services and to the expertise that these service provide is amassing. Open access is a best practice goal of SATUs (HSE guidelines) (Hanly, Healy, & Scriver, 2009).

We focus here on RCCs since they play an important support role for individuals who have experienced rape/sexual assault. It may be noted that there are no Government-funded services dedicated specifically to children who experience acute sexual assault in Ireland.⁴

Rape Crisis Centres emerged from the women's movement in the 1970s with the recognition that rape, incest and child abuse are all acts of violence, involving abuse of power and control. Staff and volunteers are trained in the reality and extent of sexual violence. Support is provided through helplines, advocacy, counseling, and assistance in accessing medical and legal services. Confidentiality is treated with utmost importance. The RCCs also raise awareness through education and training and have a commitment to research and the production of statistical information. The survivor/recovery model underpins the work RCCs, i.e. its focus is on growth rather than on symptoms and defects (www.rcni.ie).

Most of the 16 RCCs are currently part of the Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI). The RCNI was established in 1985. It is a member-owned network organisation i.e. it is formed by, accountable to and governed by member RCCs. Membership of RCCs to the RCNI is voluntary. Although both Cork (the Sexual Violence Centre)⁵ and Dublin were at times part of the network, currently they are not. However, all RCCs participate in some activities, such as large research projects, and Dublin RCC will be included in the 2009 statistics of the RCNI. The RCNI negotiates with Government Departments and other agencies on behalf of its centres (RCNI, personal communication, August 2009).

⁴ There is a service for children, CARI, but it is a registered charity (www.cari.ie).

⁵ It should be noted that the Sexual Violence Centre in Cork sees children from the age of 13. It also engages in work to protect against sex trafficking and domestic violence (SVC, Cork, personal communication, August 2009).

According to the RCNI (personal communication, August 2009), there are gaps in current service provision of RCCs. There are areas in the country that have no RCC service, while other areas are dependent on a service in the neighbouring county. That is, the populations served by the various RCNIs and hence level of service delivery is quite varied and perceived to be inadequate in many regions. Perhaps most relevant to the present study, there is at present no national strategy on the services for teenagers, although the RCNI is developing national RCC policy on *RCC* service delivery to teenagers (RCNI, forthcoming).

McGee et al. (2002) and O'Shea (2006) have commented that accurate estimates for rape/sexual assault are extremely difficult to derive, particularly for individuals under the age of 18. Estimates derived from RCNI in 2007, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (DRCC) in 2006 and extrapolating the DRCC figures to Cork with reference to the 2006 Census (www.cso.ie) indicate that approximately 121 individuals aged between 15 and 17 undergo counselling in a Rape Crisis Centre as a result of sexual assault each year.⁶ Estimates on the basis of data from the Forensic Science Laboratory suggest that approximately 65 sexual assault/rape cases per annum are under the age of 15 years (O'Shea, 2006). Estimates from the SAVI report suggest that in childhood (i.e. 17 years or under), 5.6% of women and 2.7% of men experienced unwanted penetration or oral sex, and 2.0% of women and 1.5% of men experienced attempted penetration. A further 12.8% of women and 12.0% of men had experienced contact abuse (i.e. non-penetrative abuse). Figures from referrals to the Garda Diversion Programme in 2008 indicate that 60 sexual assaults and 24 rapes or attempted rapes were reported (Smyth, 2010).

These figures should be interpreted with caution, however, for four reasons (RCNI, personal communication, August 2009). First, the numbers only reflect children who have suffered some form of sexual abuse who are being supported in a rape crisis centre and/or who have come forward for forensic evidence. There may be additional children receiving support elsewhere. Second, the SAVI Report (McGee et al., 2002) indicated that 50% of survivors had told no one. However, this may be somewhat out of date since a higher rate of disclosure in recent years is likely. In addition, disclosure

⁶ This estimate was made in consultation with the RCNI (personal communications, June and August 2009).

rates in teenagers seem to follow a different pattern to that of adults. For example, teenagers accessing services tend to be referred by friends/family/professionals whereas older clients may be more likely to self-refer – which may suggest that teenagers whose abuse is not detected or who do not disclose do not seek or get support. Third, the SAVI Report also found that only 11% of all survivors sought professional counselling support. This figure may have changed since 2000 when the survey was carried out and again the pattern of uptake of services may be different for teenagers. Finally, the SAVI Report noted difficulties in estimating the prevalence of rape due to under-reporting of sensitive information, particularly when the perpetrator is known to the victim, differences in methodologies of studies designed to assess prevalence rates, and differences in response rates of these studies.

Regardless of the exact prevalence, the significance of this issue becomes clear when we consider the findings of a qualitative study conducted by a Rape Crisis Centre, which found that, of a cohort of 19 15- to 17-year olds who availed of the service between 2002 and 2005, all but one left school without having completed the Leaving Certificate (MacNeely, 2009).

To establish whether the link between early school leaving and rape or sexual assault is generally the case, the RCNI consulted with counsellors in its centres. Their observations confirm that there was an impact on schooling for all clients. This was described as taking two general patterns (see also RCNI, forthcoming):

1. On the one hand, and in the majority of cases, children could not focus, coping strategies (such as not attending school) had negative impacts on their ability to learn and they began to fail/not sit exams/or not attend school - many eventually became early school leavers. Low self esteem, being bullied, depression and acting out behaviour were common.
2. On the other hand school acted as an important positive coping mechanism for a minority of children who put all their energy into focusing on their school work. Many spoke of how school acted as a refuge and a safe place for these children – many excelled in their school work. Low self esteem and depression however, remained a theme (RCNI briefing document, June 2009, p. 1).

Thus, the link between sexual violence and disruptions in schooling appear quite consistent, and are not unique to the cohort of 19 young women studied by one of the Rape Crisis Centres (MacNeely, 2009).

The RCNI briefing document (June, 2009) further noted that the likelihood of a successful intervention was higher with early disclosure and placing appropriate supports in place quickly.

Various suggestions and recommendations for how to address mental health and trauma issues in young people have been made. These include those made by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMYCA) (2008, 2009) and Sullivan et al. (2004) and include the provision of mental health education and self-esteem as part of compulsory schooling, the need for counsellors and mentors in all schools, more support for teachers to address bullying and mental health (this in turn suggests the importance of the participation of teachers in CPD in SPHE), enhanced provision of information to students, and national awareness campaigns.

We conclude this section with an example of a model of mental health services that appears to have potential in meeting the needs of young people in a specific community context. This is the Headstrong initiative, *Jigsaw*. The model of delivery is in accordance with best international practice and entails a detailed preliminary analysis of community readiness for such a service to be implemented in a specific area (Headstrong, 2009). The model is then implemented in seven steps. An important feature of the implementation process is that evaluation is inherent in the model, and it is monitored and revised on an ongoing basis. Another important feature is the collaborative basis on which the model operates, as well as its strong emphasis on outreach and advocacy work. Jigsaw currently operates in two quite different communities – Ballymun, Dublin, and Galway city and county. A preliminary review of data collected over the first three months in which the Jigsaw centre in Galway was operating (December 2008-February 2009) is promising, particularly with respect to the gender of young people using the service: of 140 people accessing the service, 45% were males (Headstrong, 2009). The Jigsaw website for Galway is at www.jigsaw.ie.

Another model for the provision of therapeutic/emotional support – the Belfast Educational Library Board – is discussed in Chapter 6.

2.2.7. Sexual Orientation

The Equal Status Act (2000, 2004) explicitly protects rights with respect to race, religion, family and marital status, age, gender, disability, membership of the Traveller community, and sexual orientation. It is the last group that is the focus of this section. Section 11 of the Act explicitly describes the responsibilities of educational institutions with respect to this Act, and, regardless of the religious ethos of the institution, all must comply with the Act. The Equal Status Act (2000, 2004) should not be confused with the Employment Equality Act (1998, 2004), where, under Section 37 of the Equal Status Act (200, 2004), it explicitly states that religious, educational or medical institutions under the direction of a body established for religious purposes are exempt from the Act. The differences between these two Acts may imply that teachers do not have the same rights as students.

It is estimated that approximately 6% of the school population in Ireland is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT; GLEN/BelongTo, 2009). This equates to about 20,000 students in the population. Research indicates that, on average, LGBT youth become aware of their identity aged 12 to 14 years, and most commonly disclose their identity to others aged 17 to 21 years (Mayock et al., 2009).

Mayock et al.'s (2009) report on the mental health and well-being of LGBT individuals, which surveyed 1,110 participants, 40% of whom were under 25, provides some evidence of the extent of homophobic bullying in schools. Some key findings include the following:

- 50% of participants were called abusive names relating to their sexual orientation or gender identity by fellow students
- 40% were verbally threatened by other students
- 25% were physically threatened by other students
- 34% heard homophobic comments made by school staff.

Of the respondents, 20% reported missing school on a regular basis because they felt threatened or afraid, while a number of them attributed leaving school prior to the

Leaving Certificate directly to the treatment they received as a result of their LGBT identity.

The impacts are not just educational. The statistics relating to mental health indicate that over one-quarter of LGBT youth (27%) had self-harmed, and the majority had done so more than once. A further 18% had attempted suicide more than once. One-third of LGBT individuals under the age of 25 had seriously thought about ending their lives in the past year (Mayock et al., 2009).

Research suggests that while there is widespread awareness among school staff with respect to homophobic bullying, a number of other barriers would need to be addressed in order to effectively deal with homophobic bullying and provide an inclusive environment for LGBT students. In a survey of teachers (Norman, 2004), it was found that 90% of schools did not include references to homophobic bullying in its anti-bullying policy. About 79% of teachers were aware that homophobic bullying was taking place in their school and this was higher in all-boys' and mixed sex schools compared to all-girls' schools. A further 16% were aware of physical homophobic bullying.

Teachers identified lack of professional guidance and lack of policy guidelines with respect to homophobic bullying as the two most significant barriers for them to address this type of bullying. Fear of parental disapproval and disapproval by the board of management also emerged as issues, the latter being more commonly cited by teachers in rural schools. Close to half of teachers reported that SPHE did not cover LGBT issues, citing concerns about age appropriateness and lack of timetabling space as reasons for not covering them (Norman, 2004).

With respect to policy guidelines, the development of a template to develop and refine a school's anti-bullying policy (DES, 2006a) gives due attention to homophobic bullying and makes explicit reference to various Acts that schools have a responsibility to comply with. An evaluation of the extent to which this template has been used and whether a reduction in bullying, particularly homophobic bullying, has occurred, is not as of yet available. Furthermore, the DES's guidelines for countering bullying behaviour in schools have not been updated since 1993 and are currently out

of sync with the 2006 template. For example with respect to sexual orientation in particular, the guidelines only mention this issue once, and only in passing: ‘It [‘slagging’] may take the form of suggestive remarks about a pupil’s sexual orientation.’ (DES, 1993, p. 3).

Lodge, Gowran and O’Shea (2008) have identified the following barriers that also merit attention:

- The need for principals and teachers to develop their own understanding of the issues experienced by LGBT youth
- The need to develop professional capacity to deal with homophobic bullying
- The challenge entailed in dealing with the various concerns of parents
- The need for clarity with respect to how issues of sexual orientation relate to school ethos
- The need for direction and leadership from boards of management.

2.2.8. Sexuality, Sexual Behaviour, and Sex Education

Sex and sexuality are important and unique facets of individuals. At post-primary level, students are experiencing changes and new awareness about these aspects of themselves, and therefore the education system has potentially important role to support positive, safe and respectful development of sexual identity, attitudes and behaviour. Sexuality is not simply about sex in a physical sense, but also encompasses wider issues of gender, relationships, love, trust and respect (NDA, 2005a).

We first consider some background statistics on sexual behaviour and show that the promotion of safe and respectful sexual behaviour may be of particular relevance to early school leaving. We then consider the educational supports relevant to sexuality and sex education in Irish schools.

Although it is difficult to obtain reliable figures on sexual activity in Ireland, it is thought that up to one-third of 16-year-old school-goers may be sexually active, with young men considerably more likely than young women to be initiated into sex by the age of 17 (Mayock & Byrne, 2004; Mayock, Kitching & Morgan, 2007). Furthermore, the age of first sex has fallen: for 18-24 year olds the average age of first sex is 17; for 35-39 year olds the average age is 19 for women and 18 for men (Layte et al., 2006).

Also, although the percentage of people that reported having received education on safe sex and STIs (sexually transmitted infections) has increased over the past number of years, the number of teenage births has remained stable; Mayock et al., 2007; www.crisispregnancy.ie).

Research suggests that early school leavers are more vulnerable to health risks and unplanned pregnancies due to lack of sexual knowledge, low awareness of the risks of unprotected sex, and, consequently, high levels of sexual risk-taking (Mayock and Byrne 2004). Riordan (2002) has noted that low levels of education combined with early parenthood can have an immediate impact on young people's life chances, and ultimately contribute to the long-term social exclusion of their children. The Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP, 2009) has noted that of all teenage females accessing their services, 32% had not completed the Leaving Certificate and a further 21% had not completed the Junior Certificate. Of teenage males accessing the service, about 44% had left school without completing the Leaving Certificate and 18% without the Junior Certificate. Importantly, the TPSP notes that early school leaving in teenage females is much higher during compared with after their pregnancy. Overall, these findings imply that both preventative and supportive approaches are required.

The provision of sex education at post-primary level is through Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). RSE (part of SPHE) was launched by the DES in 1997. It should be noted that SPHE is not examined as part of the Junior Certificate, not offered in Senior Cycle, and guidelines recommend one period of SHPE per week. The emphasis in RSE is on relationships as opposed to factual information about sex. The published resource materials for RSE are not prescriptive, even though schools are supposed to deliver all aspects of the programme (Mayock et al., 2007).

A recent evaluation of RSE indicates that provision varies according to the school's policy on RSE as well as the perceived specific needs of the students attending a particular school. Furthermore, parents still have the right to withdraw their child from RSE. Therefore, students do not have equal opportunities for learning, discussion and debate on various aspects of sex and sexuality (Mayock et al., 2007).

Mayock et al. (2007) reported that 11% of the schools that they surveyed reported that they did not teach RSE. Also, while RSE was taught in first and second year in 81% schools surveyed, this dropped to 58% in third year. Implementation at Senior Cycle was lower still. They argue that the reduction in the availability of RSE in third year may be particularly disadvantageous to young people at risk of early school leaving. However, the available research cannot inform us as to whether or not the provision of RSE is effective in promoting safer sexual behaviour, particularly amongst groups that are disadvantaged and/or at risk of early school leaving.

RSE has recently been introduced at Senior Cycle and an Interdepartmental Advisory Committee on SPHE has been convened with a sub-committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (DES, personal communication, March 2010).

2.3. Features of Educational Settings Relevant to Engagement/Disengagement

2.3.1. Transitions and Disruptions

One key finding to emerge from the work of Smyth et al. (2004)⁷ is the critical period of the transition from primary to post-primary:

The transition from primary to post-primary education has been recognized as a crucial stage in young people's schooling career. Young people's experience of the transition process can influence their subsequent academic and social development and *difficulties during the transfer from primary to post-primary school can contribute to later educational failure* (Smyth et al. 2004, p. 1, italics added).

It is clear that the primary and post-primary sectors are very different to one another in many respects, including the culture of care, school size, one versus many teachers per class, timetabling, homework, curriculum, examinations pressure, streaming, school discipline, teaching styles, and so on (see Smyth et al., 2004, for a review and commentary; also O'Brien, 2004). It is important to recognise that transition is a system-level issue, requiring background supports to establish continuity between

⁷ This is the first report on a longitudinal study 900 students in 12 case study schools that followed them up until and just after the Junior Certificate, and supplemented with the results of a survey of 570 school principals and 226 teachers (Smyth, McCoy & Darmody, 2004; Smyth, Dunne, McCoy & Darmody, 2006; and Smyth, Dunne, Darmody & McCoy, 2007; see also NCCA, 2007a).

primary and post-primary schools, and not simply a problem of the individual's difficulty in adjusting (Downes, Maunsell, & Ivers 2006).

Smyth et al. (2004) found that informal (verbal) communication was more common than written communication on incoming pupils, and was provided for incoming students in just 35% of cases. There were variations in which staff had access to this information and perceived difficulties with accessing and sharing information that was felt to be of a sensitive nature. This may be compounded by a lack of a tracking system that cuts across primary and post-primary levels (this issue is considered further in Chapter 3).

While a pastoral care system was in place in the vast majority of schools, it was more common in all girls' schools and larger schools and the nature of the care system varied widely. School staff reported that they would like more supports in the areas of learning support, psychological support, and in establishing links with students' homes and the local community (Smyth et al., 2004).

Research suggests that sustained transition difficulties are not particularly widespread (e.g., O'Brien, 2004). However, when they do occur, there is evidence to suggest that the consequences tend to be quite serious. Teachers estimated that about one in ten students experienced transition difficulties (Smyth et al., 2004). Reasons cited by them included socioeconomic background, the move to a larger school, adjusting to a new peer group, the number of teachers, being of lower ability, and various personality factors. It is notable that teachers accorded a low emphasis on family support and the number of subjects taught as factors contributing to transition difficulties. Bullying emerged as a serious issue in all 12 schools in Smyth et al.'s study, which is not consistent with principals' reports. The less visible forms of bullying were a source of particular concern.

Reports by students indicated that transition difficulties in Smyth et al.'s (2004) study were more common in students with lower self-confidence, Travellers, and newcomer students. These students relied particularly on key staff (e.g. class tutor) within the school during the settling-in Phase. Transition difficulties were also more common in

students with a physical disability.⁸ Also, students with less information about what to expect took longer to settle in. More pre-entry contact between schools and their parents gave students a better idea of what to expect. Students settled more quickly in schools with more developed integration/induction programmes, but only to the extent that these programmes were underpinned by a positive informal school climate.

Aside from the transition to post-primary generally, research indicates that disruptions in schooling are associated with early school leaving. For example, Goodwin (2003) found that a majority of her study participants (all male, situated in the mid-West of Ireland) had attended more than one primary school. This was mainly due to one of two reasons – transfer at the end of Infants, or transfer due to ‘disruptive’ behaviour. The 70 questionnaire respondents in her study tended to be older than average entering second-level: 52% were 13 and 32% were 14 or older. Goodwin also noted that 30% of respondents had spent two years in sixth class due to not obtaining a place in post-primary school. From the comments of the 10 case study individuals in her study, this situation caused considerable damage in terms of self-esteem, as well as a sense of boredom and time-wasting. Eivers et al. (2000) also reported that early school leavers in their study were more likely to have repeated a year while in primary school.⁹

Several of the studies also raised the issue of absenteeism (e.g., Malone, 2006; Finn, 2001; Eivers et al., 2000), noting that patterns of chronic absenteeism were common in early school leavers. Eivers et al. (2000) found that rates of absenteeism in early school leavers were highest in second year. Specifically with respect to Travellers, the DES (2005g) reported that, on average, Traveller children in halting sites, particularly unofficial ones, experienced significant amounts of absence.

2.3.2. Streaming and Class Allocation

In about 90% of schools in Smyth et al.’s (2004) study, pre- and/or post-entry tests were administered. Test results were most commonly used for allocating learning

⁸ Note that the NCSE, discussed in Chapter 3, is in the process of developing a practical resource tool for schools to assist them in developing inclusive policies and practices. It is anticipated that this resource will be piloted in the coming months (NCSE, personal communication, March, 2010).

⁹ Incidentally, Canadian research (Dechman, 2003) provides strong evidence that, even after controlling for achievement, early school leavers were considerably more likely to have repeated a grade and/or changed schools at least once than students who completed high school.

support (in over 90% of cases), but also widely used for allocating students to a specific class (in about 50% of cases).

The most recent figures of the percentage of schools practicing streaming are from 2002 (ESRI, personal communication, January, 2010). Comparing figures from 1984, the ESRI has shown an increase in mixed-ability base classes in first year from 40% to 65%. Figures for 2002 for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate years were 62% and 61%, respectively. Ability-based differentiation in 2002 was strongly associated with school sector. It was lowest in co-educational secondary schools (15%), followed by girls' secondary schools (18%), boys' secondary schools (26%), and in the region of 42% in vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Furthermore, ability-based differentiation was much more prevalent in designated disadvantaged schools (51%) compared to non-designated schools (20%). These findings should be interpreted with respect to school size, i.e. smaller schools with one class per year level will, by default, be mixed-ability.

The practice of streaming was found by Smyth et al. (2004) to act as a mechanism to reinforce and magnify social class differences, particularly in boys. Furthermore, allocation to the lower stream placed ceiling effects on the potential of students' achievement (e.g. by having a lower probability of taking subjects at higher level). This effect remained even after adjusting for students' reading and mathematics scores (measured about three months prior to the Junior Certificate Examination). In fact, a quarter of students in lower streams reported that the pace of teaching was too slow for them. There was a dip in motivation and engagement of students in second year and this was most clearly in evidence in students in lower-stream classes, and particularly boys. Smyth et al. (2006) noted that, with respect to the level at which students took various subjects, there was little if any 'upward' movement (e.g. from ordinary to higher level) and 'downward' movement was more common. Consistent with these findings, a study on early school leaving in Youthreach participants (Stokes, 2003) found that being in the 'bottom' stream tended to increase participants' pessimism about living with and overcoming learning difficulties, which were widespread in this group. It should also be noted that most Travellers in post-primary schools are enrolled in lower streams (DES, 2005g).

Smyth et al. (2004) observed that, in the 12 case study schools in their research, comparatively more academic progress was made by students with lower scores at the beginning of first year. Students in mixed classes also had higher than average progress, while students in middle or lower streams made the least progress. About one third of students, particularly in lower classes in streamed schools, reported wanting to receive additional help, but did not.

Smyth et al. (2004) suggested that alternatives to streaming are needed and argued that schools and teachers should be supported in managing mixed-ability classes. They observed that learning support is particularly important in mixed-ability settings and schools should be fully supported in providing such assistance to students that require it. They also identified a need for greater flexibility in the provision of additional support to students particularly in the early Phase of first year, given the range of ability in the core competencies of students at intake.

2.3.3. School and Class Climate

In the second report on their longitudinal study of Junior Cycle students, Smyth et al. (2006) observed that the informal school climate and the nature of teacher-student interactions appear to as important, if not more so, than formal supports such as guidance counseling to enhance students' engagement with school: 'Fostering good relations within the school environment is ... as important as putting formal structures in place for students' (p. 190), and suggested that school climate to be considered in school development planning that would include structures that promote cohesion between and among staff and students.

A number of studies identified bullying as being a problem (e.g., Smyth et al., 2004; Mayock et al., 2009), but it is difficult to infer the extent to which the experience of bullying contributed to disengaging from school in this research. Having said this, a study by Downes (2004) found that responses of children in fifth and sixth class children in six primary schools in Ballyfermot indicated an explicit link between being bullied and not attending school.

There are some difficulties with the definition and reporting of bullying. For example, of the 8,600 or so 9-year-olds surveyed in 2007-2008 in the first data collection wave

of the *Growing up in Ireland* study (Williams et al., 2009), 40% of children reported having been bullied in the past year and the prevalence was about the same for boys and girls. However, only 24% of mothers reported that their child had experienced bullying in the past year and there were inconsistencies between mothers' and children's reports. Regardless of the actual prevalence, however, it is of concern that 36% of boys and 47% of girls reported being 'upset a lot' as a result of being bullied. At post-primary level, estimates from the 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is an OECD study of 15-year-olds (Eivers et al., 2008) suggest that about 43% of students reported at least one of a number of forms of bullying, and 14% reported having experienced three or more forms. Eivers et al. noted a steady decline in the achievement scores as the number of types of bullying increased. Note, however, that PISA did not provide an indication of the frequency of bullying.

Findings from Downes and Maunsell (2007) have some implications in this regard. In their study that examined ways to address early school leaving in southwest inner city Dublin, their conclusions emphasise the need for an environment where students feel they are treated fairly; having a key worker available to act as a mediator; stronger community-based emotional supports; and a confidentiality policy in schools. These implications are consistent with Smyth et al.'s (2006) emphasis on the importance of a supportive informal school climate. Downes and Maunsell also suggested that successful strategies for eliminating bullying should be identified and disseminated across the school, and that this work might be co-ordinated by an individual teacher or team of teachers in school. Smyth et al. (2006) have pointed to the potential of the SPHE programme in bullying prevention and the promotion of an inclusive¹⁰ school climate.

Finally, with respect to the disciplinary aspect to school climate, Smyth et al. (2004, 2006) and Downes and Maunsell (2007) have noted that authoritarian disciplinary practices, particularly suspension, appear to be ineffective, and this perception was shared by students and school staff alike. Some of the comments from the students in

¹⁰ In general, when reference is made to inclusive school or class climate in this report, it is intended to refer to a school/class that uses policies, practices and resources to promote an atmosphere that is caring and respectful of all of its students, irrespective of race, religion, family status, gender, disability, membership of the Traveller community, and sexual orientation.

Downes and Maunsell's study indicate that students were being suspended for relatively minor misbehaviours. Furthermore, being given out to frequently was associated with negative attitudes to school, both of which in turn were more commonplace among boys (Smyth et al., 2004, 2006).

2.3.4. Curricular Issues

About half of the 226 post-primary teachers interviewed by Smyth et al. (2004) indicated that they were unfamiliar with the primary school curriculum, and wide variation across schools and subject areas was found in terms of levels of familiarity. A mismatch of standards in Irish, English and Mathematics between primary and post-primary was noted by Smyth et al. (e.g., teachers were commonly of the view that, compared to primary school, standards in these three subject areas were markedly higher in post-primary school, presenting challenges in terms of both teaching and learning).

Teachers in Smyth et al.'s study also expressed concerns about the unsuitability of the Junior Cycle curriculum for lower-ability students. The number of subjects provided to first years was high, ranging from 12 to 16 subjects in most schools. In Junior Certificate year, the number was lower but still high, at around 12 to 14. Although schools with lower average literacy levels had students take slightly fewer subjects for the Junior Certificate, the number of subjects was still high at an average of 11.5. Students who perceived that they were studying too many subjects (i.e. regardless of the *actual* numbers studied) had greater difficulty in settling in.

Smyth et al. (2004) reported that students preferred practical subjects and found languages, mathematics and science difficult. They wanted more time to do PE and computers. The scaling back of subjects such as PE and computer studies in some schools in third year was noted as a factor that further disengaged students who were already struggling in school. Stokes (2003) examined reasons that students gave for leaving school and these are consistent with Smyth et al.'s findings, namely boredom, a perceived lack of curricular relevance, and a lack of practical subjects.

Malone (2006) noted that the students in her study appeared to have been assigned to the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) and also the Leaving Certificate

Applied (LCA)¹¹ with little if any consultation with the students or their parents in the four schools that she studied. However, the LCA was seen by school staff as preventative in terms of early school leaving. The modular structure was liked by students, as was the vocational relevance and lack of homework. Some participants felt that their confidence and attendance had increased since beginning the LCA. However, they also tended to view themselves as less 'intelligent' than their non-LCA peers. Consistent with these findings, Fagan (1995), who interviewed a small sample of early school leavers, noted the positive effects of practical and goal-oriented activities in engaging disaffected students.

Arising from their findings, Smyth et al. (2004, 2006) made three observations with respect to curriculum. First, they suggested that greater awareness among post-primary teachers is needed with respect to the primary curriculum. Second, they suggested that a broader range of practical subjects should be on offer particularly for students with less interest in academic subjects. Third, they commented that schools might expand the range of extra-curricular activities to cater for a range of interests. Conclusions drawn by Downes and Maunsell (2007), Goodwin (2003) and Malone (2006) are consistent with those of Smyth et al.

2.3.5. Teaching Style

In a number of studies, participants were asked what makes a good teacher. The responses of individuals in Malone's (2006) study are representative of the views expressed in other studies. Participants in her study described a good teacher as someone who talks to and listens to students, of whom they aren't afraid to ask questions, who respects students, is competent (i.e. can explain things in a way that is understandable to students), uses a variety of ways to convey information, can combine fun and humour with work, works at a suitable pace, can control the class without being authoritarian (e.g. giving out with no explanation), and does not treat some students more favourably than others.

Smyth et al. (2004, 2006) found that there was a high reliance on 'chalk and talk' teaching methods, while only a minority of students liked such methods. The majority

¹¹ These are curricular programmes described in more detail in Chapter 3.

of students preferred when a teacher could explain things clearly, when there is a positive relationship between the teacher and the students, and having fun while learning. Also, many students reported not being satisfied with the pace of learning and this was not solely associated with mixed-ability classes. A quarter found the pace too slow and a third found the pace too fast: 'It is clear that differentiation in the work assigned and methods used in response to differing student needs and abilities is not occurring in many classrooms' (Smyth et al., 2006, p. 195).

2.3.6. School and Work

In a survey of about 1,000 post-primary students in six schools conducted in 2001, McCoy and Smyth (2005) observed that over 60% of students were in part-time work. They found that boys and students from less advantaged socioeconomic background engaging in higher numbers of hours worked per week, and that more time spent in paid work was associated with poorer examination performance. Furthermore, risk of early school leaving was associated with those working 15 hours or more per week.

Of the students that participated in PISA 2006 (about two-thirds in Junior Cycle, and one-third in Senior Cycle), about 63% participated in paid work, with an average of about 6 hours 30 minutes, which is consistent with McCoy and Smyth's (2005) findings. Eivers et al. (2008) noted a weak negative correlation between the number of hours paid work per week and achievement. Secondary analyses of the PISA 2006 dataset by the authors of this report provide an indication, consistent with McCoy and Smyth, that participation in work while at school is both (i) related to socioeconomic background and (ii) associated with early school leaving intent. For example, students not working (36.8% of the sample) had a parental occupation score that was two-thirds of a standard deviation higher than students working 20 or more hours a week (4.1% of the sample). Also, 23.9% of students working more than 20 hours a week expressed an intent to leave school prior to completing the Leaving Certificate, compared with just 8.1% of the students not working.

In a study of 16 Dublin schools (8 designated disadvantaged and 8 not designated disadvantaged), Morgan (2000) suggests that working more than 20 hours a week may be associated with early school leaving. Interestingly, students in his study did not believe that working would result directly in them leaving school early, but about half

of those that were working indicated that work might interfere with their education, with less time to complete homework and being tired during the school day.

McCoy and Smyth (2005) comment that the Irish education system is largely academic, with underdeveloped links between the school and workplace. This stands in contrast to other countries such as Germany and Belgium (Flanders). They noted that participation in work can act as a factor to disengage students from school and that gender and social class differences in patterns of early school leaving should be viewed in the context of differential participation in paid work. McCoy and Smyth's (2005) main suggestion was to provide more flexible arrangements to students to combine school and work: '...in order to promote student retention and maximize their learning from (paid or unpaid) work, more innovative ways of combining work and study should be investigated' (p. 109). Morgan's (2000) recommendations are consistent with those of McCoy and Smyth.

Related to the research described in the previous paragraphs, Malone (2006) has noted that students' views of schooling were essentially utilitarian in her study. Educational qualifications were seen to be required to secure a job. Also, some students constructed school as 'an anomalous form of work in which workers have no rights and do not get paid' (p. 209). This was viewed as a key factor in disengaging many students. They perceived the teachers as interfering with their private lives outside school (e.g. telling them not to engage in paid work).

2.3.7. Careers Guidance

McCoy et al. (2006) found variations in the role taken by guidance counsellors in their study conducted in 260 schools with 15 case study follow-ups. Some combined careers advice with pastoral care, while others took a narrower, careers-based approach. Generally, schools in McCoy et al.'s study were unhappy with the level of available resources and time allocation. This problem was more acute in smaller schools. A significant finding was the low levels of provision of careers guidance to Junior Cycle students, which is of concern for students who may not stay on to Senior Cycle. Furthermore, it was found that guidance activities emphasized opportunities relating to third-level institutions to the detriment of Post Leaving Certificate Courses (PLCs), apprenticeships, and diverting to the labour force.

McCoy et al. (2006) had seven suggestions for improving the content and delivery of careers guidance: the development of a comprehensive policy on guidance services, a standardized career component taught to each year level (perhaps as part of SPHE class), a targeted approach to allocating more resources for guidance, better whole-school planning in terms of the role of guidance counsellors and co-ordination of guidance and pastoral care issues, promotion of a broader definition of careers guidance in schools, provision of adequate guidance to Junior Cycle students at risk of early school leaving, and greater involvement of parents in guidance activities.

However, given the unwillingness of students to confide in school staff with respect to sensitive matters (discussed in Chapter 2), and the perspective that the role of school staff is not to directly provide an emotional therapeutic role (but rather to refer students to emotional/therapeutic services), it is argued that the combination of guidance (informational) and counselling (emotional) support provided by a single person represents a role conflict. It is argued therefore that the role of careers guidance teachers (perhaps better referred to as education and careers advisors) should be with respect to educational and occupational options rather than providing an emotional counselling role.

Malone's (2006) study of early school leavers provides some evidence for a lack of provision of important information relating to entitlements and requirements for further education. For example she noted that some students were unaware of their entitlements to fee waivers, and of the difference between the 'mocks' (i.e. a 'practice run' of the Junior Certificate examination, about three months before the examination) and the examination itself. It was also common for students to be uninformed about requirements for further education, for example, the need to have five passes to be eligible for certain FÁS courses. Participants in her study noted the lack of careers guidance provision at Junior Cycle as a problem generally. However, this may also be indicative of a lack of a whole-school approach in this area generally, as well as careers guidance more specifically.

In this context, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) (2007b) curriculum framework for guidance notes that provision should be made for

Junior Cycle students. In a follow-up consultation with four schools (NCCA, 2008), staff were asked to consider the likely implications of the framework (particularly its whole-school approach) in the schools. Results of note include variations in the perceptions of provision of guidance. Some schools weighted the focus in favour of Senior Cycle students, while others put equal focus on Junior and Senior Cycles. There were also variations in the relative emphasis of informational and emotional (pastoral) provision. Preferred modes of provision also varied considerably. In considering the implementation of the framework, there was a strong emphasis by participants in the consultation on a need for more resources for planning, teacher involvement, and broader implementation. A tension between the curricular and service dimensions of the guidance programme was also noted. The NCCA (2008) proposed to examine these issues in the next steps of implementing the framework. Currently, resources are not available to implement it (NCCA, personal communication, April 2010).

2.4. Background and Personal Characteristics in the Context of Schools

This section demonstrates, by drawing on two sets of analyses of large-scale datasets using a multivariate statistical approach, that, when considered together, demographic (e.g., gender), socioeconomic, and school characteristics are associated jointly with early school leaving, although it does seem that school-based characteristics may have less of an influence than demographic and socioeconomic ones. However, it is extremely important to note that the analyses discussed here do not get at the processes or interactions underpinning the variables, e.g. between gender and streaming, or socioeconomic characteristics and class climate.

As part of a study that looked at the extent to which schools differed on a number of student outcomes at second level, Smyth (1999) included an analysis of early school leaving. She considered both potential early school leaving (i.e., early school leaving intent) and actual retention rates prior to completion of the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. Her analysis methods (multilevel modelling and regression analyses) were similar to those included in Phase 1 of the present study (see Chapter 4).

She analysed potential early school leaving within a series of multilevel logistic regression models that allowed an examination of the simultaneous impact of both student and school characteristics. The predictors were divided into two groups or 'blocks'. First, a student block consisting of background variables (demographic and socioeconomic) and a measure of prior achievement (collected about three months prior to the Junior Certificate Examination), and second, a school block consisting of a social context measure (school socioeconomic composition), school type, organisational features, management characteristics, involvement of students and parents, school climate (extent of positive and negative interaction between students and teachers), as well as school-based mediating variables (i.e. teacher expectations, student absenteeism, and student participation in part-time work). Smyth also examined actual retention rates at the school level, adjusting for a number of school characteristics.

Smyth's (1999) analyses of individual early school leaving intent confirmed the multiple associations of gender, socioeconomic background, and school-related characteristics with early school leaving. She found higher rates of school-leaving intent among boys, lower-achieving students and students in the 'lowest' stream, in students with lower levels of parental education and in schools of lower average socioeconomic composition. Early school leaving intent was also higher in vocational schools, and in schools where students reported more frequent negative interactions with teachers and lower teacher expectations. Even after adjusting for prior achievement, the associations between early school leaving and socioeconomic measures remained statistically significant. Also of note was that student background characteristics were more strongly associated with early school leaving intent than school-based ones. After adjusting for a range of variables, schools still differed significantly with respect to rates of early school leaving. In other words, the model included some but by no means all of the characteristics relevant to a consideration of early school leaving.

McCoy (2000) also analysed the extent to which variables predicted early school leaving intent in Irish second-level schools using multilevel modelling. It should be noted that the background variables are not the same as those used by Smyth (1999) and that models were estimated separately for boys and girls.

McCoy grouped variables into ‘blocks’ (school processes, school structure, school context, and individual background¹²). She found that the variables had better explanatory power for early school leaving in girls, and that for both boys and girls, school context and structure variables had little explanatory power: rather, characteristics of school processes and individual background were more relevant.

Her results were consistent with Smyth (1999), in that variation in rates of early school leaving between schools were dramatically reduced when students’ individual backgrounds are taken into account. Also consistent with Smyth (1999), measures of school/class climate, notably negative interaction with teachers (criticism, negative feedback, inattentiveness) were associated with early school leaving. McCoy suggested some factors that may protect against early school leaving. These included the provision of personal and social development programmes, having appropriate remedial instruction provided through a central (special) class, facilitation of parental involvement, and the provision of extracurricular activities that suited a range of interests.

2.5. Evidence for Returns on Investment in Education

This section aims to demonstrate that not only is the reduction of inequalities in educational outcomes desirable from an ethical point of view (as noted in Chapter 1), it is also a sound strategy from an economic point of view.

The majority of studies in this area have examined returns for higher levels of educational completion in terms of individual income and returns to the state in terms of tax revenue. For example, the OECD (2008) estimates that there is a return of 8% for men and 9% for women who complete the Leaving Certificate or PLC course compared with those who complete only the Junior Certificate. The public returns for men and women are 7% and 5%, respectively. However, it will be shown that the returns on education apply not only to income and tax revenue.

¹² *Process variables* capture aspects of school functioning such as level of academic focus, social and personal development courses; negative and positive teacher-student interactions, and parental involvement; *structural variables* capture fixed aspects of the school and those relating to resources, such as school sector, and decline in the number of teachers; *context variables* include characteristics such as school location; while *individual variables* include parental unemployment, number of siblings, ability and age.

We focus on a US-based longitudinal study of the effects of a preschool programme that has received considerable attention in order to illustrate the other areas in which returns are evident. The High/Scope Perry Preschool study aimed to identify the effects of participation in a high-quality preschool education programme for African American children living in poverty (Levin, 2009; Schweinhart et al., 2005).

There are two features of the study that have attracted attention. First, children were randomly assigned to a ‘treatment’ or a ‘control’ group (this is ethically questionable but it provides an excellent means to estimate the ‘treatment’ effects). Second, participants in the study were tracked for a long period of time. This feature allows one to estimate the returns from the investment in the preschool programme in terms of future personal and societal financial gains at various points in time.

By age 40, the difference in the two groups on a number of outcomes was clearly in evidence. Rates of arrest were lower – 36% of the programme group was arrested five times or more compared with 55% of the no-programme group. Crime rates were lower in the programme group compared to the non-programme group across various types of crime (violence, theft, drugs). The programme group served less time in prison overall compared to the non-programme group (9% compared with 21% ever served). More of the programme group earned \$20,000 USD or more per annum compared with the no-programme group. In fact median earnings of the programme group (\$20,800) were \$5,000 higher than those in the non-programme group. Employment rates were also higher at age 40 (76% compared to 62%). Living arrangements were significantly more stable for the programme group with higher rates of home ownership in the former group (37% compared to 28%).

Earlier outcomes are also of note. High school graduation rates in the programme group (65%) were higher than those in the no-programme group (45%), and there were marked differences in indicators of ability. For example, even at age 5, 67% of the programme group had an IQ of 90 or higher compared with just 28% of the no-programme group.

The estimated public return per dollar invested in the programme is substantial (and made on a conservative basis): \$12.90 at age 40 and \$7.16 at age 27. Personal returns per dollar invested at age 40 were estimated at \$3.24. The public savings were due to lower crime rates, savings in education and welfare, and increased tax revenue. A large majority of the savings (88%) was due to reductions in crime. This finding should be considered, however, with respect to differential rates of imprisonment by ethnicity/race. In 2008, African American males were incarcerated at 6.6 times the rate of Caucasian males. That is, one in 21 black males was incarcerated, compared to one in 138 white males (West & Sabol, 2009). Thus one weakness of the study is that it may overstate public returns if applied to other racial or ethnic groups.

Unfortunately, there are few studies on returns to investment in education that are of an adequate standard of evaluation and the vast majority is US-based. However, from a review of some 200 studies on the topic, Levin (2009) identified five (including the Perry Project) that were rigorous enough to inform policy and practice. Aside from the Perry Project, the four studies were First Things First (a comprehensive school reform programme), the STAR project (which involved a reduction in class size from Kindergarten to Grade 3 from 25 to 15), the Chicago child-parent centres programme (a preschool programme with extensive parental involvement and other supports), and an evaluation of the effects of a 10% teacher salary increase (see Levin, 2009, and Smyth & McCoy, 2009, for more details of these studies). All studies were estimated to yield substantial economic returns, but the class size reduction was judged to be the least effective in this regard. Temple and Reynolds (2007) have noted that despite differences in the regions, participants, time, and exact nature of intervention, the principle of return on investment, particularly in early childhood intervention, holds across studies.

There have been only limited cost-benefit analyses of interventions in Ireland, due to the unavailability of systematic information on the costs associated with early school leaving on a range of outcomes, as well as a lack of information on the unit cost per intervention. However, Smyth and McCoy (2009) provide cost estimates on a range of outcomes per early school leaver as follows:

- Welfare payments – €12,300 per annum over the life course of one early school leaver.

- Tax foregone – €17,000 over the life course of one early school leaver.
- Lone parent welfare payments – €4,000 (per female) over the life course of one early school leaver.
- Health services – greater expenditure, but not quantified.
- Crime – €280 million per annum for the State.

The NESF (2005) estimates that, overall,

...the benefit-cost ratio, for government, society and participants remains above three for both more and less conservative baselines. In short, the overall economic returns (under more and less conservative assumptions) are such that gains outweigh costs. **This leads to the conclusion that investment in early childhood education can result in longterm payoffs for government, society and participants** (p. 131, bold in original).

Clearly, a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the various initiatives in place in Ireland would be of value for development and planning purposes.

On a final note, none of the research on returns to investment in education considers a situation where more than one initiative or intervention is in place. Were it possible to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of initiatives in place in Ireland, estimated returns on various combinations of interventions could be built in. Caution, however, is warranted, in the choice of outcomes used to evaluate the returns to investment in education, and it is suggested by Downes (2007) that these be assessed with regard to the needs of the relevant group rather than more concrete, though potentially less relevant, outcomes.

2.6. Conclusions

Above all other characteristics, *poverty and deprivation* (socioeconomic disadvantage) has the strongest association with early school leaving and other poor educational outcomes. There is strong evidence for a process of social reproduction whereby poor educational outcomes are transmitted from one generation to the next. This area is complex; for example, disadvantage is associated with family problems, lower levels of literacy, and nutritional and sleep deficits. It was also acknowledged that, although the Irish educational system has invested significantly in the area of educational disadvantage, the association between disadvantage and early school leaving remain strong. In Chapter 3, we consider the extent to which the supports

offered to students in disadvantaged contexts appear to be addressing this problem, and what challenges remain.

In terms of *gender*, there appears to be a subtle interplay between *individual* gender differences and wider *systemic* factors. Boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were identified as being at a particular disadvantage. The higher rates of early school leaving among boys represent a significant barrier to the attainment of equitable educational outcomes for males and females.

In Chapter 3, progress with policy and provision for special educational needs is described. Yet, we noted in this chapter that *special educational needs*, particularly those associated with a physical disability, as well as being more prevalent in boys, are somewhat more prevalent among lower socioeconomic groups, and also related to early school leaving.

Also, although significant progress has been made with the levels of educational attainment of *Travellers*, rates of early school leaving among this group remain much higher than in the general population. Traveller children, generally speaking, are vulnerable to absenteeism and transition (particularly where their accommodation is at a halting site), and it was argued that Traveller education should be viewed in its wider social context (e.g., health status of Travellers, negative stereotyping, drugs, and expectations of Traveller women to enter the role of mother from an early age).

With respect to *newcomer students*, it was noted that this group also presents complex challenges, particularly at post-primary level (where they comprise about 8% of the school-going population). And, although there is currently no evidence for differential rates of early school leaving between newcomers and Irish-born students at present, this pattern may well take shape in the future, as the number of second-generation newcomer families increases. The capacity to track the progress of this group through the system in order to monitor their educational attainment is particularly important.

Issues relating to *mental health and trauma* are of key importance in a consideration of early school leaving and youth well-being generally. Youth suicide rates are unacceptably high, and disadvantaged, traumatised and LGBT youth continue to

represent high-risk groups. Programmes such as SPHE promote positive mental health, and an enduring mental health disability is a special educational need under the EPSEN Act (2004); nonetheless, the statistics cited in this chapter suggest that more needs to be done in this area. It was argued that school staff should not play a direct therapeutic support role in this respect; yet the increasingly varied and complex problems faced by the youth of today indicates the need for a more coherent and structured therapeutic support system is needed. This issue is taken up further in Chapter 3.

Linked with the previous point, it was noted that there would be merit in *updating the anti-bullying policy of the DES* in line with the Equal Status Act (2000, 2004) and including adequate reference to LGBT issues. However, it is unlikely to be sufficient to simply update these guidelines. Research shows that school staff are aware of, and concerned about, homophobic bullying, and may need additional assistance and guidelines in dealing with complex and delicate issues such as parental disapproval, disapproval by the board of management, and DES policy on inclusivity in schools vis á vis school ethos, and enhancements to the SPHE programme.

Links between educational disadvantage, including early school leaving, and risky sexual activity have been established in the research. Research indicates that schools might play a more active, preventative role through the *RSE component of SPHE*. It was noted that SPHE is generally only offered for one class period per week, is not examined in the Junior Certificate, and is not offered at all at senior cycle. The research reviewed showed that in about one in ten schools, RSE was not taught at all, and that RSE was much less likely to be taught in third year. Sex education programmes targeted at specific groups, namely potential early school leavers, are also suggested in the research.

In considering personal and background characteristics, it was noted that *demographic and socioeconomic characteristics* of individuals appear to exert a *stronger influence* over early school leaving when compared with school-based characteristics, at least in multivariate statistical analyses. However, when one considers the manner in which features and processes of the education system interact with individual characteristics, a more nuanced picture emerges.

For example, it would appear to be important to understand the process of *transition from primary to post-primary* school for certain sub-groups of students, such as students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, students with special educational needs, Travellers, and newcomer students (particularly if they have limited knowledge of the language of instruction). That is to say, while transition difficulties are not present in the majority of students, where difficulties do emerge, they can result in significant disengagement from education. Progress has been made with smoothing the transition process particularly in schools in the School Support Programme (SSP, under the DEIS initiative) and we review this issue further in Chapter 3 in the context of educational supports for students.

The practice of *streaming* also emerged as being of key importance to understanding the process by which some students disengage. In particular, boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, Travellers, those who have literacy difficulties, and those who are placed in the bottom stream in the absence of additional educational supports are more likely to disengage than students of a similar background in mixed-ability settings. Yet, mixed-ability settings require a variety of teaching methods, classroom management techniques, and support staff, so it would seem important to ascertain whether teachers are receiving adequate support to implement suitable classroom practices to maximize teaching and learning experiences.

Other characteristics relating to the education system that were identified in previous research included the importance of *school and class climate*, *curricular issues*, *school and work*, and *careers guidance*. Again, these issues are not new, but we suggest that they need to be considered with respect to the provision for students who may be at risk of disengaging from their education. For example, early school leaving in order to secure work must be understood in its wider socioeconomic context, i.e. it is, at least in part, a class-based phenomenon, although the current economic climate may influence this pattern somewhat. Furthermore, the academic curriculum and large number of subjects associated with the Junior Certificate are more likely to lose the interest and engagement of students with a preference for practical subjects, as well as those that may be lacking literacy skills. The provision of careers guidance may be more critical for students who are disengaged from the system and whose parents may

not have themselves have experienced a personal engagement in education, and who lack familiarity with the system. It is acknowledged that a curriculum framework for careers guidance has been developed by the NCCA that includes provision for Junior Cycle and the NCCA's consultation process in this respect suggests that considerable resources may be required in order to enhance the provision of careers guidance. It was also argued that there would be merit in re-focusing the role of the careers guidance teacher to one of advisor since the provision of advice and of counselling are viewed as a role conflict.

It was noted that the estimated *returns on investment in education* are high, and benefits can be expected to be accrued for both individuals and wider society. Research indicates that high-quality, sustained supports that begin early in a child's life (i.e. pre-school) and that actively engage the child's parent(s) are associated with long-term benefits. However, there is a lack of systematic cost-benefit analysis in the Irish context, and the estimated returns for combinations of interventions is unknown. Furthermore, it is suggested that there is a need to re-focus the supports and distinguish better between preventative supports and interventionist ones.

In conclusion, there is a need to examine the complex issue of early school leaving with a variety of methods and from the point of view of a variety of groups in society. The issues raised in this chapter are by no means exhaustive, and it will be seen in the chapters that follow, several new themes arise.

Chapter 3: Current Supports Relevant to a Consideration of Early School Leaving

3.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of supports that are relevant to a consideration of early school leaving and which are directly connected to education. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the key challenges identified.

It will be seen that the supports considered are not exhaustive. For example, we have not included Youth Encounter Projects (YEPs) since there are only five of them and they do not have a broad systemic presence. Also, we have not included Secure Units and High Support Units funded by the DES and HSE. Nor have we included a review of RAPID-funded programmes that may be considered relevant to engagement in education. Furthermore, because this study seeks to focus on particular on the system at post-primary level, we do not review the provision of adult and continuing education. Nonetheless, the review aims to be reasonably comprehensive in informing the brief of the study as outlined in Chapter 1.

The authors acknowledge the significance of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ; www.nfq.ie) in providing a unified way to describe and discuss school-based, FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) and HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council) qualifications, and the potential of this framework as a vehicle to develop continuities between mainstream and non-mainstream education settings; however a detailed consideration of NFQ is beyond the scope of this report.

In this chapter (and elsewhere in the report), a number of references are made to personal communications with various agencies. These communications had one of two purposes (i) to obtain factual information where not readily available or (ii) to seek further clarification and guidance in response to comments made in response to an earlier draft of this report.

3.2. Current Educational Supports Relevant to a Consideration of Early School Leaving

3.2.1. Overview

A discussion of the history of policy responses to address social inclusion/disadvantage in education is beyond the scope of this report (see Archer & Weir's (2004) submission to the Educational Disadvantage Committee). However, over the past five years, there have been a number of developments in this area. Perhaps one of the most significant of these is the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Action Plan (DES, 2005a) which has two key features: first, a standardised approach to targeting resources, and second, a more streamlined and integrated delivery of supports. Therefore, the delivery of DEIS through the SSP (School Support Programme) includes, but is not limited to, Early Start, the School Completion Programme (SCP), Home-School-Community Liaison Co-ordinators (HSCLs), and the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

In a further effort to streamline and integrate supports, from the September 1st, 2009 the remit of the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) was expanded to include responsibility for the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL), the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) for Traveller students as well as the National Educational Welfare Service. This expanded remit will bring together four individual services under one common management team thereby providing for a single, more focussed, strategic direction at local, regional and national levels, and reflecting equally the nature and strength of each of the services. The underlying rationale for this new single strategic approach, acknowledging and utilising the combined strengths and capacities of the four services, is to deliver better outcomes for children, families and schools (see Ward, 2009).

This streamlining of initiatives is explained in more detail in the relevant sections that follow.

The main educational supports considered in this chapter are discussed under the following six headings:

- Early childhood care and education
- Curricular innovations
- Alternatives to mainstream school: Youthreach
- Key agencies working with schools
- Targeted programmes and supports
- Professional development and support for teachers.

3.2.2. Early Childhood Care and Education

With the exception of the targeted programme Early Start (discussed later in this chapter), the lack of early childhood care and education in Ireland has been subject to considerable attention in recent years. Donnelly (2007, p. 109) has commented on ‘how embarrassingly out-of-step Ireland is with most other Democratic states’ in this regard. Urgent calls to reform this sector have been made (e.g., NESF, 2005; DES/OECD, 2004), particularly since the provision of quality pre-primary education and care is known to be effective in increasing the social and economic opportunities in disadvantaged communities, for example by fostering literacy and numeracy skills, and thereby closing the gap between the more and less disadvantaged such that they enter primary school on a more equitable basis; moreover these effects persist over time (Heckman, 2006; McLelland, Macock & Morrison., 2006; Sylva et al., 2007; van Tuijl & Leseman, 2007).

The DES/OECD (2004, p. 10) has noted that:

We are confident that cost-benefit analyses can show that adequate public funding of early childhood services in Ireland will be amply compensated by enhanced social cohesion, improved education levels and productivity in the next generation, greater gender equality, increased tax returns from women’s work and by savings in health and social security expenditure.

The NESF (2005) supports this view, and demonstrates that returns are expected to be significant using a range of cost-benefit analyses.

Up until 2010, the Irish government provided about €500 per annum per child under the age of 5 in the form of an early childhood supplement (this supplement was introduced in 2006 and halved from about €1,000 to €500 per annum in 2009). This payment is intended to assist families in raising children, e.g. by providing childcare (www.welfare.ie).

However from 2010 the supplement is to be abolished and replaced by the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme administered by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMYCA), which aims to provide free preschool education for all children between the ages of 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months for two hours and 15 minutes per day, 50 weeks per year. Typically, the scheme allocates €48.50 to a childcare facility per child per week (or around €2,400 per child per year). Some €170 million is due to be invested in 2010 (www.omc.gov.ie; www.pobal.ie). Of the services in the ECCE system in contract, 1,117 (25%) are Community and 3,294 (75%) are Commercial (www.omyca.ie). The scheme will be implemented in accordance with *SÍOLTA*, a national quality framework (www.siolta.ie), and *Aistear*, a national curriculum framework (www.ncca.ie/earlylearning). The scheme also specifies that the pre-school year leader should have a qualification in early childhood care/education at a minimum of Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Figures from the OMYCA (OMCYA Briefing Document, October 2009) suggest that 4,200 or so pre-school services have applied, with the capacity to provide some 96,000 places which is in excess of the number needed. Latest figures (OMCYA, personal communication, October 2009) indicate that some 98,000 places are being offered. It is estimated that no more than 70,000 will be needed. Although overall the number of places is likely to be more than sufficient, it is possible, particularly in isolated rural areas, that places will be limited.

The OMYCA acknowledges that it does not expect the scheme to run perfectly in its first year, but overall, it is satisfied that it is starting off on a good basis, that the large majority of services are happy with the provisions of the scheme, that the large majority of qualified children will benefit from the scheme, and that commercial providers will be in a far better financial position as a result of the introduction of the scheme (OMCYA, personal communication, October 2009). With this in mind, the anti-ECCE claims made in some newspaper reports (for example, O'Farrel, Sheehan & McDonagh, August, 2009) are inaccurate and not backed up by evidence.

Nonetheless, the OECD (2009a) has noted, citing examples from other countries, that ‘the right to access may not be guaranteed or exercised if ... duty holders (providers) are not aware of legal obligations, or families are not aware of, or able to exercise, their rights’ (p. 34). Therefore, even with an approach that attempts to be universal, targeted measures are likely to be necessary in order to promote awareness of specific sub-groups, including those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, from rural areas, and newcomer families, particularly those whose first language is not English. In fact, notwithstanding that the ECCE scheme is in its very early stages, its implementation is inconsistent with the principles underlying provision of education at primary and post-primary levels in that, at these levels, universal provision is complemented by targeted supports (DEIS, discussed later in this chapter). It is acknowledged, however, that some of the types of supports provided under DEIS would be inappropriate to the needs of pre-school aged children, and that there is some provision (via the HSE) for speech and language support (DES, personal communication, April 2010). It would also seem appropriate to monitor the implementation of the scheme carefully in terms of overall quality, content and rate of uptake.

Two further issues should be mentioned with respect to early childhood care and education.

First, as noted elsewhere in this report, the involvement of parents in their children’s education from an early age is of critical importance to subsequent outcomes. This contention has received strong support in a review of the literature on the impact of parental involvement on children’s outcomes (e.g., Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Desforges and Abouchaar note that parental involvement is strongly related to indicators of poverty and socioeconomic status. They also show that focused intergenerational programmes are effective in both the short and medium term for both parents and children with poor initial literacy skills. The National Adult Literacy Agency’s (NALA) (2009) policy brief on family literacy is consistent with the intergenerational approach.

Second, it is likely that families in disadvantaged communities will require and benefit from targeted supports that complement the ECCE scheme. Some effective

models of support programmes already exist, though they are not necessarily limited to pre-school age.

Two illustrative examples of such initiatives are described here. It is acknowledged that there are many more initiatives in place in local communities. First, Familiscope (www.familiscope.ie) was established in Ballyfermot in 2004 with funding from URBAN Ballyfermot, the Ballyfermot Drugs TaskForce and the (then) South West Area Health Board. It takes a systemic and three-pronged approach by working with parents, teachers and individual children, while centrally including a mental health focus. The model highlights the involvement of parents as key to its success.

Second, the Incredible Years (IY) programmes for children, parents, and teachers are designed with the primary aim of addressing emotional/behavioural problems in children aged 2 to 10, although the range of supports is wider than this (www.incredibleyears.com; www.archways.ie). Incredible Years was developed in the US some 30 years ago. It is a model whose effectiveness is strongly backed up by research demonstrating significant short-term and long-term benefits, as well as being cost-effective. These benefits apply not only to children's emotional/behavioural difficulties but also to other outcomes such as improvements in family literacy and the breaking of intergenerational drug usage patterns (e.g. Clondalkin Partnership 2006; Drugli et al., 2009; Edwards et al., 2007; McGilloway et al., 2009). Archways has lead the development of the IY initiative in Ireland, and it is run in 13 locations throughout Ireland (incidentally, Incredible Years is offered within the Familiscope initiative). Atlantic Philanthropies fund Archways to introduce and implement the programme but do not fund the IY organisation itself. Funding also comes indirectly from drugs taskforces and DES (i.e., payment for individuals to attend specific courses). Archways works closely with the HSE, drugs taskforces, to a lesser extent with DES on research, and within existing local partnerships with a strong focus on inter-agency collaboration. Archways has witnessed an increasing demand for places on Incredible Years programmes and its waiting list is increasing rather than decreasing (Archways, personal communication, March 2010). Furthermore, although its aims may be regarded as complementary to the ECCE, there are no formal linkages between Incredible Years and ECCE.

3.2.3. Curricular Innovations

This section describes two programmes offered at post-primary level that aim to provide differentiated programmes for students – the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). It concludes with a brief description of current work of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) with respect to the Junior Cycle and the mathematics curriculum.

3.2.3.1. The Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP)

The JCSP was established in 1996. It is targeted at young people who are identified as being at risk of leaving school early. These students receive a Junior Certificate upon completion of the JCSP, along with an individual profile that covers not only literacy and numeracy and academic skills, but also personal and social achievements. By receiving regular feedback on successful attainment of learning goals (or statements), the aim is to boost confidence levels of these students as they approach the Junior Certificate examination (DES, 2005d).

In the 2007/2008 school year, around 7,600 students were in the JCSP, 60% of these boys and 40% girls. Students were in approximately 160 schools. This represents 4.5% of the entire Junior Cycle cohort. Schools offering the JCSP are located disproportionately in the vocational sector (59% of JCSP schools are vocational, while just 34% of all schools are in the vocational sector) (DES Post-Primary Schools Database, 2007/2008). In addition to being provided in post-primary schools, the JCSP is provided in a small number of special schools, senior Traveller training centres, remand centres, and youth encounter projects. The JCSP is linked with DEIS (discussed later in this chapter) in that DEIS schools have access to the JCSP and associated staffing and supports.

Generally, the JCSP is organized in schools via a Co-ordinator, whose time allocation depends on the number of students in the programme. A team-based approach is taken in delivering the programme, since close collaboration amongst school staff is needed. A JCSP Support Service is available to staff implementing the programme, which

plays an important role in its administration, support and development, including the certification of student profiles.

The JCSP was subject to an evaluation by the Inspectorate (DES, 2005d) that includes some detailed recommendations regarding the management, planning etc. of the JCSP. However, the evaluation lacks detailed information on potential outcomes of interest, such as retention rates, the future educational pathways of these students, and changes, if any, to outcomes such as literacy, numeracy, social and interpersonal skills. The DES (2005d) recommended that better attendance and retention records be kept and suggested that the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) play a role in aggregating these data nationally.¹³ However, the report also cites anecdotal evidence that both attendance and retention generally improved.

The promotion of literacy and numeracy is a major component of the JCSP. The JCSP Support Service requires schools that participate in a wide range of literacy and numeracy initiatives to submit an evaluation report. The JCSP Support Service's (2007) evaluation of these initiatives indicated that not all were deemed suitable for evaluation using a pre- and post-test of a standardized achievement measure. So, for example, only around 30% of the reading initiatives were subjected to a pre-test and 26% to a post-test. In the case of mathematics, these figures were 21% and 21%, respectively. Cassidy and Kiely (2009) evaluated the post-test gains in 20 schools implementing literacy initiatives in the 2008-2009 year for whom achievement data were available. The average gain was 7.2 months (range = 1.9 months to 13.6 months).

The Demonstration Library Project (DLP), an 'initiative within an initiative' (i.e. within the literacy and numeracy initiative) that entailed the setting up of a high quality library, initially in 11 schools offering the JCSP. Each library is managed by a qualified librarian. The DLP was implemented in the context of poor library facilities in most of the JCSP schools. The project has been extended and now operates in 30 schools (www.jcspliteracy.ie). The objective of the DLP is to show that 'a good library, which caters for the needs of students with literacy difficulties, actually

¹³ Data issues relating to NEWB are discussed later in this chapter.

impacts on their learning experience and allows them to address and overcome literacy difficulties' (Cassidy & Kiely, 2001, p. 10). The project aims to foster the following types of skills in students: enjoyment of reading for pleasure; development of information skills; participation in literacy and literary events; engagement in research and project work; and development of skills associated with independent learning (Cassidy & Kiely, 2001).

Key findings from an evaluation of the DLP include the following (Haslett, 2005):

- About 70% of students showed increases in reading scores, comparing test performance in 2004 with 2003. Furthermore, about two-fifths of students showed reading score increases of between one year and 7 months and three years and six months. The average reading age increase was 19 months.
- Book-borrowing for independent reading increased by a factor of six in girls and seven in boys.
- Students' affective and attitudinal outcomes such as their enthusiasm, concentration and perseverance on a task were all reported as having improved.

The DLP evaluation report has identified several characteristics that are key to the success of a school library targeted at students with literacy difficulties and who do not normally engage in reading for pleasure. These include student ownership of the library, use of the library at lunchtime and out of school time for various activities, project work that cuts across subject areas and skills, establishing links with parents through the library, a collaborative working relationship between the librarian and other staff, links with feeder primary schools, and strong management support from the JCSP support team.

3.2.3.2. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

The LCA is a two-year self-contained programme, introduced initially in 53 schools in 1995, that aims to prepare students for adult and working life (DES/NCCA, 2001). It recognizes a range of skills and achievements that is broader than the more traditional Leaving Certificate programme. It is delivered in four half-year blocks or sessions where a student studies distinct modules, with credits awarded at the end of each session. There is some provision of choice of modules studied. Students study 44

modules in total. The delivery of the LCA emphasizes variety in teaching and learning methodologies tailored to the learners, the promotion of key skills such as communication, literacy and numeracy, and the use of teaching and learning resources in the local community, including local enterprises and employers (DES/NCCA, 2001).

At the end of the two years, students receive a Leaving Certificate graded as pass, merit or distinction, depending on the number of credits attained. Student performance is assessed on the basis of coursework (31%), on student tasks or projects (35%), and on terminal written examinations (34%).

In the 2007/2008 school year, approximately 7,400 students, or 7% of all students enrolled in senior cycle, were enrolled in the LCA. Of these, around 54% was male and 46% was female (DES Schools Database, 2007/2008). While largely delivered in post-primary schools in DEIS (approximately 300 in total, the majority of which are community and vocational sectors), the programme is also offered in Youthreach centres and some special schools.

School staff are supported in a manner analogous to the JCSP Support Service. For example, 10,221 teacher hours were devoted to attendance at programmes provided by the LCA Support Service (SLSS, personal communication, January 2010). And, as with the JCSP Support Service, the LCA Support Service offers a number of additional resources and supports, ranging from assessment to programme evaluation (see www.lca.slss.ie). Also, analogous to the JCSP, the LCA is overseen in individual schools by a Programme Co-ordinator.

An evaluation of the LCA by the ESRI on behalf of the NCCA is forthcoming (April, 2010). Unfortunately, it was not possible to draw on that report at the time of writing, but readers are encouraged to consult it in order to get an up-to-date picture on the thinking on the provision of LCA, etc. It is hoped that the issue of progression to further education is addressed in this process, since progression to further education of those with an LCA is low at 28%, and there is a perceived lack of suitable courses in third-level colleges for these students (Smyth & McCoy, 2009).

3.2.3.3. *Current Work of the NCCA*

In response to the longitudinal study of Junior Cycle students (reviewed in Chapter 2; e.g. NCCA, 2007a), the NCCA is currently reviewing the Junior Cycle with respect to the following key issues (see NCCA, 2010):

- transition from sixth class to first year remains very difficult for some students
- a minority of students disengage from learning in second year
- students experience an overcrowded curriculum
- the Junior Certificate Examination exerts too great an influence on the teaching and learning in Junior Cycle (www.ncca.ie).

The Minister for Education and Science has asked that the NCCA to:

- review international practice in lower secondary education
- identify areas of the curriculum should be prioritised within the totality of the Junior Cycle experience
- assess the nature and form of assessment which would be most suitable for students at that stage of their development
- address the issue of overload, breadth and balance in the curriculum and make more time for active learning (www.ncca.ie).

If successful, it might be able to address some of the issues discussed in Chapter 2 (and these issues also crop up in Chapters 5 and 6). However the review and implementation timeline is not yet available (NCCA, personal communication, February 2010).

Also of note with respect to this study is NCCA's *Project Maths*, which commenced in September 2008 initially in 24 schools. The aim of the project is to significantly revise the Junior and Leaving Certificate syllabi, accompanied by revised teaching materials and teaching approaches. A key aim is to enhance teaching and learning of mathematics, and therefore increase the engagement of students in this subject area. From September 2010, it is envisaged that all schools will begin to implement the revised curriculum. The approach of the project is novel in that curriculum revisions are a work in progress, in line with the experiences and views of students and teachers in the 24 pilot schools (www.projectmaths.ie).

Some concerns have been raised in terms of the implementation of *Project Maths*. For example, Engineers Ireland (2010) are of the view that implementation is a long-term rather than a short-term process; that it presents significant challenges for teachers; will require significant investment in CPD; that there are as of yet inadequate or no textbooks or sample examination papers; and that discontinuities between primary and post-primary mathematics need to be further addressed.

3.2.4. Alternatives to Mainstream Education: Youthreach

Youthreach is located within the further education sector and is funded jointly by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (with assistance from the ESF). It is targeted at young early school leavers aged between 15 and 20. Youthreach provides educational opportunities for students who have left formal education. The programme is offered in a range of settings, including VEC (Vocational Education Committee) centres for education, FÁS-funded community training centres, and Justice workshops funded jointly by FÁS and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. In addition, a culturally appropriate parallel programme is delivered in Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs; discussed later) (www.Youthreach.ie). The curriculum delivered to learners is flexible to individual and local needs. There is a strong focus on literacy, numeracy, personal development/health promotion, sports, and vocational subjects (*DES VFM Review*; DES, 2007a).

The first Youthreach centres were established in 1989. In 2004, Youthreach centres and STTCs were designated as Centres for Education under the Education Act (1998). There are approximately 110 Youthreach centres across Ireland with 3,700 or so learners enrolled (DES, 2007a). Of these, 54% was male and 46% was female. On the basis of the 2006 census (www.cso.ie), it is estimated that 370,000 individuals in Ireland are aged between 15 and 20, implying that Youthreach participants account for 1% of the population. Previously, proportionately more males were enrolled, but the buoyant labour market of 1996-2006 facilitated the equalization. It should also be noted that, since the decision by the DES that Travellers under 18 years of age should not enrol in STTCs, there has been an increase of around 30% in Travellers enrolling in Youthreach centres between 2007 and 2008 (from 364 to 473) (Youthreach, personal communication, January 2010). Furthermore, the decision by the Department

of Social and Family Affairs to reduce the dole for 18- to 20-year-olds, but not if they are undergoing training in order to incentivize training and raise levels of qualifications has the consequence of placing further pressure for places in Youthreach programmes and this may affect the recruitment of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged (Youthreach, personal communication, February 2010).

Youthreach centres deliver 35 hours of education and training per week to learners for 45 weeks per year. To deliver the programme, VECs are allocated 4,200 tuition hours per group of 25 learners (DES, 2007a).

Learners receive a weekly allowance and support for accommodation and travel. The 2010 weekly allowances are as follows (www.citizensinformation.ie):

- Aged 16 years : €79.90
- Aged 17 years: €99.80
- Aged 18 years and over: €196.00.

An additional Training Bonus of €31.80 per week is provided if the participant has been getting Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance for 12 months or more, is progressing from at least 12 months on a FÁS Community Employment scheme or a FÁS Job Initiative scheme, or a combination of these.

A development that occurred following the Youthreach consultation process in 2000 was the forging of formal links between Youthreach and mainstream educational qualifications following the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999, which led to the establishment of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and the Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC) (Stokes, 2000).

In 2001, the target group for Youthreach was reconsidered by the DES (2007a) and two priority groups were identified.

Priority Group 1 learners:

- are aged between 15 and 20
- have left school

- are unemployed
- have no or incomplete qualifications from Junior Cycle, i.e., less than five D grades at ordinary level in the Junior Certificate or otherwise lack competencies or skills.

Priority Group 2 learners:

- Lone parents
- Referrals from former NRB- (National Rehabilitation Board) funded courses
- Trainees who have been released from detention
- Trainees whose personal circumstances are such that a foundation education and training programme is the most appropriate option for them
- Travellers
- Drug Court participants.

In addition, following the establishment of NEWB in 2002, an increase in demand for places on Youthreach by learners with special educational needs and emotional and behavioural difficulties was reported.

Given the priority groups and changes since the establishment of NEWB, it is not surprising that young people come into contact with Youthreach through a variety of channels:

- school personnel, welfare officers, Juvenile Liaison Officers etc.
- self-referral or via siblings or friends who are or were on the programme
- HSE social care staff, probation services etc., in cases where young people have been in difficulty with the law or where they are living in chaotic situations and social care personnel are making arrangements for their care.

Youthreach participants are a vulnerable, but not homogenous. Of learners surveyed in 2006, the following incidences of various difficulties were reported (Stokes, 2009). It should be noted, however, that are based on the judgments of centre co-ordinators and have no objective status. Furthermore, the estimate for intellectual disability is likely to be higher than the 4% estimate below (DES, personal communication, April 2010).

- Dysfunctional family background: 37%
- Literacy and numeracy problems: 23%
- Need for sustained psychological support: 22%
- Substance misuse problems: 20%
- Specific learning disability: 13%
- Formally cautioned by police: 13%
- Poor physical health: 13%
- On probation: 4%
- Intellectual disability: 4%
- Physical disability: 1%.

To address the (frequently acute) needs of YouthReach participants, the DES put three financial supports in place (DES, 2007a). First, an annual payment of approximately €911,000 (2005 figure) split across Youthreach and STTCs for the provision of guidance, counselling and psychological services. This figure has remained around the same since 2001. Second, a one-off payment in 2005 of €400,000 to VECs for professional development for staff to help them to further cater for students with special educational needs and third, since January 2007 at the cost of €1.4m annually, the provision to twenty Youthreach centres of an additional annual budget to pay for a Special Educational Needs Initiative (SENI). The SENI was originally implemented on a pilot basis in the 20 centres. The financial resources invested were €58,500 per annum per group of 25 learners; hence the allocation of resources follows the General Allocation Model (GAM) implemented in primary schools. About 18 months after its establishment, the co-ordinator of the SENI provision reported that the following key practices were fully in place:

- An assigned key worker for each learner
- Systematic profiling of each learner
- The development of an individual action plan out of this process
- Engagement in inter-agency work if appropriate (Gordon, 2009).

The 20 original centres continue to benefit from this initiative, but budgetary constraints have limited the scope of its extension, at least in the short term.

However, many Youthreach centres not in SENI are adopting some features of SENI already, particularly the assessment of learner needs and learner mentoring (DES, personal communication, March, 2010).

The NCSE does not allocate additional resources for special educational needs to Youthreach centres, and there are no official links between NEPS/NEWB and Youthreach, thereby limiting continuity and type of provision. For example, if a student who was eligible for additional support in post-primary then transfers to Youthreach, that support should also transfer, but it does not (DES, 2007a; Stokes, 2009).

Two further issues identified in the DES *VFM review* (2007a) were that Youthreach programmes do not come under the capital programme of the DES. This means that there is a lack of funding available to improve existing accommodation. Second, given the profile of the young people that are in Youthreach centres, there is a need for more support and professional development for Youthreach staff.

In 2005 the total spend of €46.9m on the Youthreach programme represented 0.7% of the total gross spend by the DES (DES, 2007a). Of young people completing Youthreach courses in 2006, 37% proceeded into employment, 34% to further education and training, while 14% were unemployed (the remaining 11% were ‘other’ or ‘not known’) (Stokes, 2009). In order to better evaluate Youthreach, it has been recommended to develop a set of formal performance indicators and to track learners for 18 months after leaving Youthreach (DES, 2007a). At present, therefore, it is not possible to comment on the effectiveness of the programme in terms of the longer-term outcomes of its participants.

3.2.5. Key Agencies Working With Schools

This section considers the key agencies that work to support schools to engage students in their education, namely, the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), and the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS).

3.2.5.1. National Education Welfare Board (NEWB)

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was established in 2002 and has a statutory function to ensure that every child either attends a school or otherwise receives an education. In particular, the Board has a key role in following up on children who are not attending school regularly, and where there is a concern about

the child's educational welfare (NEWB, 2008). The roles and responsibilities of schools, parents and children are outlined at www.newb.ie.

The Board also has responsibility for children who are being educated outside of schools (e.g. at home) and 16- to 17-year-olds who leave school to take up employment.¹⁴

In addition, under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, the Board must ensure that every child receiving education in a place other than a recognised school (such as in the home or in a private school) must be registered with NEWB.

As already mentioned, the remit of NEWB has been extended and it is charged with developing a single, strategic approach reflecting the nature of and strengths of each of the services, including the National Educational Welfare Service to address school attendance, participation and retention. These services are all, to a greater or lesser extent, concerned with attendance, early school leaving, engagement and behaviour. All deploy a range of targeting strategies, aimed at identifying children at risk, and all engage with children, parents, schools/teachers/principals and external services at different levels and this development brings together some 750 personnel under the direction of the Board.

A central priority for the Board has been the establishment of an Educational Welfare Service. NEWB's network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWOs) is the key means by which the Board delivers on its statutory remit to ensure that each child benefits from an education.

In the initial stages of NEWB's service development, priority was given to the most disadvantaged areas (RAPID 1) with significant school-going populations, and EWOs provided an intensive service in these areas. Outside of these areas, a less intensive service was provided where priority was given to children who had significant non-

¹⁴ It should be noted, however, that there is a gap in legislation insofar as youth over 16 years of age and children having completed three years of post-primary school are not covered by Act, yet NEWB is required to maintain a register of young people in employment if the student applies to go on the register.

attendance or who were out of school entirely. In line with DES policy, the Educational Welfare Service also gives priority to children attending DEIS schools.

NEWB's service is provided from 31 locations nationwide and 91 staff are directly involved in service delivery. EWOs deliver a service to children, families and schools to ensure that each child attends and benefits from education. They assist schools, students and parents in complying with their legal obligations under the act. Key aspects of the role include (NEWB, 2008):

- Monitoring school attendance, and taking a range of measures where children do not attend school and where parents breach their legal obligations in relation to school attendance
- Working with other statutory and voluntary services to support children's attendance and participation in schools
- Encouraging and advising schools in developing school attendance strategies, codes of behaviour and other policies that create an environment that encourages children to attend school regularly.

In recognition of the cross-cutting nature of the factors impacting on school attendance, under Section 12 of the Education (Welfare) Act, NEWB is charged with ensuring that there is consistency and strong co-ordination with the work and policy development of a wide range of Government Departments and State agencies.

Central to the work of NEWB is the development of close working relationships with other professionals and agencies, to ensure an integrated approach to children's educational welfare. The Board has specifically developed national protocols with the NCSE and NEPS and is in the process of elaborating similar protocols with other agencies with similar objectives (NEWB, personal communication, November 2009). The Board has also developed professional working arrangements with a range of statutory and voluntary service providers who work with vulnerable children and their families.

In 2009 NEWB launched its new strategic plan *Every Child Counts 2010 – 2011* (NEWB, 2009a), which is focused on achieving better outcomes for children's school attendance and participation. *Every Child Counts* draws on the experience and

achievements of the past, including recent consultations with staff and unions. Five strategic goals have been identified which focus the organisation's work for the next two years. The first four goals take account of external realities, resource constraints and challenges and are shaped by a desire for efficient public services that meet the needs of stakeholders. Emphasis is placed upon the development of good practice, the effective use of resources, the development of partnerships within education and its services that can impact positively on school attendance. The fifth goal addresses the planning necessary for the extended remit of the NEWB.

In 2008, a new model of working with vulnerable children and families in collaboration with schools and other colleagues in education support services was developed. The model represents a shift in paradigm from focusing solely on raw attendance data. An evaluation of a pilot of the new model provides some promising results and supports its further development. In particular, school principals involved in the pilot of the new model were strongly in favour of interagency case planning and collaborative working, and EWOs were also in favour of these aspects, along with focused target-setting (NEWB, 2009b).

In terms of tracking attendance, an important development is the establishment of NEWB's *Annual Attendance Report* starting in the 2003-2004 academic year. The quality of the data are such that they constitute a national database that can be used to monitor school-level non-attendance, expulsion and suspension at both primary and post-primary levels (MacAogáin, 2008), and improvements have been made to the data compared with earlier reports. Millar (2010) has collated the data for all five years and, after matching it with data held by the Educational Research Centre, these outcomes were analysed with respect to structural and socioeconomic features of schools in a longitudinal context.

Findings of this analysis confirm that links between social deprivation, non-attendance, and early school leaving at both primary and post-primary levels. At post-primary level, higher rates of non-attendance were associated with higher rates of poverty, early school leaving, and lower Junior Certificate examination performance.

Millar (2010) shows that at primary level (2007-2008), 6.5% of total pupil days were lost due to non-attendance, and 7.7% of total student days were lost due to non-attendance at post-primary level. These equate to an average of 15 days lost per primary level pupil and 13 days per post-primary student. Further, 12.0% of pupils at primary level missed 20 or more days of school in 2007-2008, and 16.9% of students at post-primary level missed 20 or more days in the same time period. Overall rates of non-attendance and 20-day absences were relatively stable over the five-year period examined. With respect to expulsions (due to the exhaustion of all appeal processes), rates were much lower (2007-2008) – 0.003% at primary level and 0.045% at post-primary level. Suspensions were much lower in primary (0.2%) compared with post-primary (5.3%) and there has been an increase of 0.4% in the rate of suspensions at post-primary level since 2003-2004.

Comparisons across post-primary schools by sector show considerable variability on some, but not all, of the outcomes. For example, overall rates of non-attendance ranged from 7.2% in secondary schools to 9.2% in vocational schools. In contrast, rates of 20-day or more absences varied considerably – 14.1% in secondary schools, to around 23% in both vocational and community/comprehensive schools. Although tiny, the rate of expulsions was again lowest in secondary schools (0.04%), followed by community/comprehensive schools (0.06%), and 0.08% in vocational schools. Again, rates of suspension were highest in vocational schools (7.4%), followed by community/comprehensive schools (6.6%), and secondary schools (4.5%). Comparing post-primary schools in DEIS and not in DEIS, the results follow a consistent pattern. All four outcomes were higher in DEIS schools: overall non-attendance was 10.1% (compared with 7.2%), 20-day or more absences was 26.5% (14.8%), expulsions was 0.12% (0.03%), and suspensions was 9.9% (4.0%).

Having an annual set of figures in which to monitor attendance patterns is a useful resource. However, there are aspects of the data which merit consideration for improvement. Millar (2010) has noted that in Northern Ireland, England and Wales, attendance data distinguish between authorised and non-authorised absences. Moreover, these data are gathered at the individual student level on a twice-daily basis. This makes it possible to monitor attendance patterns by sub-groups of the population, such as gender, socioeconomic characteristics, ethnicity, and newcomer

status. Millar (2010) suggests that this model of gathering attendance data could be used as a template, if it were felt that this level of detail would be of merit in the Irish context. A second issue with the attendance data as gathered in Ireland is that rates of attendance in mainstream and special schools at primary level are treated as an homogenous whole. Given that non-attendance rates in mainstream schools with no special classes are lower than in primary schools with special classes, and particularly in special schools, Millar (2010) suggests a consistent approach with respect to reporting these data in order to better develop an understanding of, and deal with, patterns of non-attendance.

3.2.5.2. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

The enactment of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) is aG103

recent legislative development in this area. It applies to all children with special educational needs as defined under the Act. The sections of the Act on assessment and individualized planning have as yet not commenced. However, the following aspects of the Act have been implemented (NCSE briefing document, July, 2009):

- Adoption of the policy of inclusive education
- Establishment of the NCSE, its staff, functions, etc.
- Adoption of the policy of detailed record keeping by the NCSE in the interest of provision to children with special educational needs
- Where requested, the support of local health boards in the work of the NCSE
- Establishment of the duty of schools with respect to children with special educational needs
- Some amendments to the Education Act (1998), e.g. the definition of disability.

The chief focus of the Act is that of inclusive education, i.e., in its preamble it is noted that

...having regard to the common good and in a manner that is informed by best international practice, the education of people with special educational needs shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment.

The principal provisions of the Act relate to a commitment to inclusive education for children with special educational needs, a right to assessment, an Individual Educational Plan (IEP), the allocation of adequate resources and the provision of an

appeals process. (See DES, 2007b for a description of the policy and legislative context that led up to the EPSSEN Act.) It was originally envisaged to implement all aspects of this Act by 2010 but in the current economic climate, this is not longer viewed as possible (Brian Hayes, Parliamentary Question No. 1109 to Minister for Education and Science, July 2009). Specifically, the parts of the Act that deal with IEPs and an appeals process are only partially implemented.

Another recent Act, the Disability Act (2005) merits mentioning here also, though its remit is broader than that of education, and spans six Government Departments (Communications, Marine and Natural Resources; Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Environment and Local Government; Health; Social and Family Affairs; and Transport). It focuses on two key provisions to people with disabilities – accessibility and appropriate information provision. There is also a complaints procedure if bodies specified under the Act do not comply with the provision of accessible infrastructures and appropriate information.

The NCSE was established as an independent statutory body in 2005 in order to improve the delivery of services and supports to individuals with special educational needs. The NCSE has varying levels of independence in executing its functions. It is required to operate within the policy parameters issued by the DES when implementing current policy. Specifically, it has to abide by provisions in relation to the level of supports and or resources available in particular situations. The NCSE allocates additional teaching and other resources available to support the special educational needs of children with disabilities. The NCSE took over this function from the DES in January 2005. In the areas of research and advising the DES on special education policy, the NCSE is free to engage in research it deems necessary and provide advice on matters related to special education. The DES may also request the Council to undertake specific research or on a particular special education issue (*NCSE Strategy Statement 2008-2011*; NCSE, 2008).

The functions of the NCSE may be summarized as follows:

- Planning and co-ordinating education and support services for children with special educational needs

- Disseminating information on best practice concerning the education of such children
- Providing information to parents regarding the entitlements of such children
- Assessing resources required by such children
- Ensuring that progress is monitored and reviewed
- Reviewing education provision for adults with disabilities
- Advising educational institutions on best practice
- Consulting with voluntary bodies
- Advising the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to special education
- Conducting research and publishing findings.

The *NCSE Implementation Report* (2006) set out the NCSE's views and recommendations on a plan for the Phased implementation of the EPSEN Act (2004) in accordance with the obligations placed on the Council under Section 23 of the Act. It was submitted to the Minister for Education and Science on October 1, 2006. This plan noted the following gaps and deficits (NCSE, 2006, pp. 17-18):

- Early identification of needs, early intervention and pre-school provision are significantly behind what is needed
- Few children obtain certificated outcomes, fewer progress to further education and drop out rates are high
- There is a heavy overemphasis on inputs with no means of ascertaining what outcomes are being achieved
- Schools are under-resourced in terms of capacity to deliver inclusive education
- Institutional and systemic supports for schools in relation to inclusive education provision are inadequate
- There is insufficient investment in education, support and development at all levels
- Assessment is not delivered when needed, and is overly linked to resource considerations
- The education and health sectors have not, in the past, been required to work effectively together on the ground in the manner now required
- Research on SEN issues is not sufficiently supported.

The NCSE (2006) estimated that over the five-year implementation period €397 million euro is required. The areas identified for funding were as follows:

- Pre-school provision: €45.25m
- Building capacity in schools: €194m
- Developing educational support services: €76m
- Training and development: €49m
- Service integration: €5m
- Appeals and mediation: €8m
- Educational progression: €8.5m
- Outcome of reviews: €4.5m
- Further and continuing education: €3.75m
- Research: €3m.

In addition, a projected investment of €60m is envisaged in putting locally-based multi-disciplinary support teams in place as well as a further €17m in developing mental health support services.

There has been a marked increase in investment in providing supports for pupils with special educational needs in recent years. There are now about 20,000 adults in schools working solely with pupils with special educational needs. This includes over 10,000 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), 8,600 resource and learning support teachers, over 1,100 special school teachers, and hundreds of other teachers in special classes. Over €1 billion is being spent in supporting special educational provision this year (DES, personal communication, March, 2010).

The task of allocating additional resources for special educational needs is carried out by Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), of which there are currently 80, and on average, one SENO is responsible for a cohort of approximately 10,000 children of school-going age, which translates into an average of approximately 500 children with special educational needs per SENO. The appointment of twelve Senior SENOs in 2007 marked a significant development in the establishment of regional structures and improved management (NCSE, personal communication, October 2009).

A general problem with the terminology used in this area is highlighted by the NCSE (2006): i.e. that the definition of special educational need is much broader than that of ‘disability’, ‘learning disability’, or ‘intellectual disability’. Furthermore, a child who is identified as having a special educational need does not automatically mean that that child would receive additional resources. We draw the reader’s attention to the definition of special educational need in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004, Section 1) i.e. *an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which restricts the child’s capacity to participate in and benefit from education*. Further, the 14 categories of SEN used by the DES and the NCSE (e.g. DES, 2007b) are as follows and in this report, SEN refers to any or all of these categories.

- Physical disability
- Hearing impairment
- Visual impairment
- Emotional disturbance
- Severe motional disturbance
- Mild general learning disability
- Borderline mild general learning disability
- Specific learning disability
- Moderate general learning disability
- Severe or profound general learning disability
- Autism/autistic spectrum disorder
- Pupils with special educational needs arising from an assessed syndrome
- Specific speech and language disorder
- Multiple disabilities.

The categories listed above are used for the allocation of additional resources to support pupils with special educational needs (see DES Special Education Circulars 07/02, 01/05 and 02/05) in the education system as follows:

- At primary level, pupils with what are known as *high incidence* special educational needs are supported through the allocation of additional teaching resources to schools under the DES General Allocation Model (GAM) (see DES circular 02/05). These refer to (i) borderline mild general learning disability; (ii) mild general learning disability; and (iii) specific learning disability. Under the

GAM additional teaching resources are provided to schools on the basis of overall school enrolment numbers, gender breakdown and DEIS status. The general allocation of teaching resources ensures that schools have a means of providing additional teaching support to these pupils with special educational needs, without recourse to making applications on behalf of individual pupils. The model also allows for the flexible deployment of these additional teaching resources within schools, but the resources cannot be used to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio in mainstream classes. It should be noted that the GAM does not apply to post-primary schools.

- At primary level, pupils with what are known as *low incidence* special educational needs (all of the other eleven categories of SEN above) are allocated additional teaching resources as required on an individual basis by the NCSE.
- At both primary and post-primary levels, children with special care needs arising from a disability may be allocated Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support through the NCSE, again on an individual basis. Applications for SNA support can be considered where a pupil has a significant medical need for care assistance, a significant impairment of physical or sensory function or where their behaviour is such that they are a danger to themselves or other pupils.

Table 1 shows the allocations, as at September 2009, by category of special educational need and separately for primary and post-primary levels. The supports are split according to whether the pupil/student is working with a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) or in receipt of resource teaching hours (see DES, 2007b for definitions and allocations of SNAs and resource teachers, as well as a list of relevant DES circulars). Note that the table does not include data on children who are provided additional support under the GAM.

In total, 2,818 students were in receipt of SNA and 16,038 in receipt of resource teaching hours at post-primary level, and the figures at primary level are 8,564 and 14,061, respectively. Across both levels, the three largest SEN groups in receipt of SNA support were emotional/behavioural disturbances, autistic/autistic spectrum disorders, and physical disabilities. In terms of resource teaching hours, at post-primary level, the majority of pupils in receipt of resource teaching hours have borderline to mild general learning disabilities, a specific learning disability, or

emotional/behavioural disturbances. At primary level, the majority in receipt of resource teaching hours have emotional/behavioural disturbances, autism/autistic spectrum disorders, specific speech and language disorders, or a physical disability.

Table 1. Number of pupils/students with SNA support and teaching hours by type of SEN and primary/post-primary sector, for the 2009-2010 school year, as at September 2009¹⁵

Category of Special Educational Need	SNA Support				Teaching Hours			
	Post-Primary		Primary		Post-Primary		Primary	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Assessed Syndrome	72	2.6	364	4.3	86	0.5	267	1.9
Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders	496	17.6	1890	22.1	944	5.9	2375	16.9
Borderline Mild General Learning Disability	78	2.8	127	1.5	3419	21.3	26	0.2
Emotional/Behavioural Disturbance	675	24.0	2114	24.7	1771	11.0	3237	23.0
Hearing Impairment	48	1.7	208	2.4	294	1.8	587	4.2
Mild General Learning Disability	246	8.7	314	3.7	3439	21.4	62	0.4
Moderate General Learning Disability	133	4.7	366	4.3	221	1.4	462	3.3
Multiple Disabilities	259	9.2	794	9.3	456	2.8	1002	7.1
Physical Disability	16	16.8	176	15.5	10	7.8	19	16.8
Severe Emotional/Behavioural Disturbance	474	6.9	1327	4.8	1256	2.1	2359	3.9
Severe/Profound General Learning Disability	195	0.1	410	0.2	335	0.3	546	0.1
Specific Learning Disability	3	0.8	16	0.1	43	19.6	19	0.1
Specific Speech and Language Disorder	22	0.4	11	3.4	3147	2.8	17	20.1
Visual Impairment	10	3.2	290	1.8	454	1.0	2827	1.8
Other	91	0.6	157	2.1	163	0.1	256	0.1
Total	2818	100.0	8564	100.0	16038	100.0	14061	100.0

Source: NCSE, personal communication, November 2009.

In terms of continuity from primary to post-primary, *resource teaching support* continues in many cases. However, two issues should be noted in relation to this transition. First, applications for resource teaching support are made by the school. Therefore, if a child is transferring from primary to post primary school, a new

¹⁵ To date the NCSE has not had a structured application process for special schools. The pupil-teacher ratios and the class-SNA ratios have generally been determined by guidelines set out in the Special Education Review Committee (SERC). However, since its establishment, the NCSE has processed a small number of applications from special schools. The NCSE has also provided reports to the DES in cases where an application for transport has been submitted. Since April 2009, the NCSE has been undertaking a review of the level of SNA allocations to all schools. Following the completion of this review the process for allocating resources to special schools will change. All special schools will be required to submit applications for access to resources to the NCSE for all new entrants for the academic year 2010/11. Therefore, the NCSE should be in a position to maintain accurate records for resources provided to children in special schools on the NCSE Special Education Administration System (SEAS) database, from September 2010 (NCSE, personal communication, February 2010).

application will have to be made by the post primary school on behalf of the child. Second, some children with high incidence special educational needs at primary level may receive additional resource teaching support through the General Allocation Model (GAM) which does not require an application to the SENO. However, the GAM does not apply at post-primary level. Therefore in the case of these children, an application will have to be made to the SENO by the post-primary school, for the provision of resource teaching support, if this is required.

In the case of *special needs assistant* (SNA) support, some SNA support may continue to be provided in post-primary school if the care need for which the SNA support was allocated at primary level continues to exist. However the following two issues are important. First, applications for Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support are made by the school. Therefore, if a child is transferring from primary to post-primary school, a new application will have to be made. Second, SNA posts are allocated to schools on the basis of the assessed care needs of individual children, rather than attaching to particular children. It is important to note therefore, that an SNA post, does not transfer with a child from one school to the next. It may also be recalled that there is no continuity of supports of this kind between mainstream schools and Youthreach settings.

Allocations for support are reviewed by SENOs on a periodic basis, depending on the needs of particular children. The school-level allocation of support is reviewed by an SENO on a yearly basis to take into account children leaving and entering the school (NCSE, personal communication, September 2009). The DES has also requested that the NCSE carry out a review of SNA allocations in all schools, on a once-off basis, in order to ensure that all SNA posts meet the criteria governing the allocation of such posts, as outlined in the Department's Circular 07/02. The NCSE has not been requested to review resource teacher support allocations (NCSE, personal communication, September 2009). Results of the review of SNA allocation for the period April 2009-March 2010 indicate that, overall, there has been a decrease of 4.1% of SNAs. These figures are 4.8% and 3.0% at primary and post-primary levels, respectively. Changes in the numbers were due to students leaving schools, diminishing care needs, and in a majority of cases, SNAs were re-allocated to other students (NCSE, 2010).

Other than its forthcoming study on the prevalence of SEN (noted in Chapter 2), two further projects of the NCSE are of note. First, later this year the NCSE will be publishing an international literature review of the evidence of best practice in relation to the education of children with emotional and behavioural disturbances/difficulties. Second, the NCSE has established an interagency *Policy and Research Advisory Group on the Education of Children with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (EBD)* to assist its Strategy and Policy Committee in the formulation of policy and research proposals in this area for consideration by Council. The NCSE is currently compiling an overview of Irish provision for children with educational and behavioural disorders to support the work of this group (NCSE, personal communication, 2010).

It may be noted that the work of the NCSE and indeed NEPS (discussed in the following section) are augmented by the Special Education Support Service (SESS) which was established in 2003 by the DES. It is a nationwide service, serving mainstream primary and post-primary schools, special schools and special classes. Currently, its work is carried out by one Director, two Deputy Directors, 12 Assistant National Co-ordinators, and four Advisors. The key aim of the SESS is to enhance the quality of teaching and learning with a particular focus on children with special educational needs. Its role is to provide CPD to teachers on the basis of individual needs and preferences of teachers and schools in addition to systemic priorities. As with the Second Level Support Services (SLSS, discussed later), the SESS provides CPD in a variety of formats, ranging from funded post-graduate programmes, school-based seminars, projects and action research, conferences, and e-learning. These are supplemented by support in the form of telephone and email contact and a range of publications available at www.sess.ie. A secondary role of the SESS is to assist in building on the existing expertise of teachers and schools through developing CPD locally and regionally (DES, 2009c).

The SESS facilitates a partnership approach involving support teams of practising teachers, Education Centres, the Inspectorate, NEPS, the NCSE, the NCCA, colleges, health board personnel, teacher unions and other relevant bodies and services.

Figures for the 2008-2009 school year indicate that 707 applications were made to the SESS. Of these, 454 were from the primary sector, 138 from the post-primary sector, 106 from special schools, and nine group applications were made. Of these, just under 10% was refused support (all of the refusals were for funding). Applications are refused for a variety of reasons. Examples include alternatives offered through SESS team; the course applied for may not be directly related to cohort of students that a teacher has in their class or may not relate directly to learning and teaching; applicants were not teachers; support required may be the remit of another support service; or courses may not have sufficient evidential basis. Of the successful applications, 402 received in-school support, and 305 received funding. All nine group applications were for funding and were successful (SESS, personal communication, January, 2010).

While individual courses are evaluated using feedback material, there is not, currently, an overall evaluation of the SESS (SESS, personal communication, February 2010). In order to provide external evaluative data to the DES in relation to the SESS, it is planned to engage in an external evaluation of the SESS over a two-year period from September 2010 (DES, personal communication, March 2010).

3.2.5.3. National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

NEPS was established in 1999 as a unit within the DES with a view to developing and providing a local and accessible service to all schools. Psychologists working for NEPS are located in 10 regions and 22 local offices across Ireland and are allocated to specific schools. For schools that do not currently have access to NEPS, there is provision for them to apply for an assessment under the Scheme for Commissioning Psychological Assessments (SCPA; see www.education.ie). Under this scheme schools can have an assessment carried out by a member of the panel of private psychologists approved by NEPS, and NEPS pays the psychologist the fees for this assessment directly.

The mission of NEPS is to ‘support personal, social and educational development of all children through the application of psychological theory and practice in education, having particular regard to children with special education needs’ (NEPS, 2002, p. 1).

The key functions of NEPS are to provide direct services to young people that need an educational psychologist, to assist schools in the effective use of educational resources, develop service models that foster support, development, assessment and systems work, to advise the Minister for Education and Science (now Skills rather than Science) on relevant policy, and to develop effective communication with other sections of DES and other relevant bodies that deliver services to children and adolescents (NEPS, 2006).

The NEPS Model of Service (NEPS, 2002) seeks to achieve a balance between consultation and casework about individual children (individual casework) and work of a more preventive or developmental nature (support and development work). A planning and review process underpins the Model of Service. This consists of review by an individual school and a NEPS Educational Psychologist early in the school year, to arrive at a joint agreed initial plan for how to best use the service in the time available. Generally, the initial plan is reviewed towards the end of the school year.

One objective of NEPS is a focus on prevention through supporting teachers in early identification and intervention with pupils with special educational needs. In this context, the DES has published and distributed a set of guidelines for use by school staff entitled *Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support* (NEPS, 2007). These guidelines present a continuum of assessment and intervention processes that acknowledge the central role of the class teacher, supported, as appropriate, by the school's special education needs personnel and by agencies external to the school. The guidelines are underpinned by the three-stage approach to assessment and intervention as described in the NEPS Model of Service and in DES Circular (02/05). NEPS psychologists offer support to schools at each stage of this process through consultation with teachers and parents, and psychologists also work with schools and teachers in developing this approach. The use of the consultative model means that psychological advice and expertise can be made available to more children than could be reached by engaging solely in individual casework. That is, each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, educational planning and remedial intervention, in consultation with their assigned NEPS psychologist. Only if there is a failure to make reasonable progress in spite of the school's best efforts, will a child be referred for individual psychological assessment. This system allows the psychologists to give

early attention to urgent cases and also to help many more children indirectly than could be seen individually (DES, personal communication, April 2010). Also, children who manifest special or urgent needs and who have not been previously assessed by a psychologist are usually brought to the attention of a NEPS psychologist by the principal, and are generally assessed within that school term (DES, personal communication, April 2010).

NEPS psychologists also have a role in promoting mental health in schools (NEPS, 2006) in that they advocate the three-tiered integrated model of mental health promotion (DES, personal communication, March 2010). The primary focus is at the whole school level with an emphasis on prevention. In addition, many NEPS psychologists are trained in the delivery of the Teacher classroom Management Programme strand of the Incredible Years Programme at primary level (see also Section 3.2.2).

Additional functions of NEPS include the processing of applications for Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations (RACE) and responds to queries in relation to individual children from other sections of the Department and from specialist agencies. They also work with schools to assist with Critical Incidents (such as bereavement or suicide). The DES has published guidelines and resource materials for schools to deal with Critical Incidents (DES, 2007c, 2007d).

In general, NEPS psychologists' caseloads involve working in a number of primary and/or post-primary schools in a particular geographical area. NEPS psychologists are assigned to schools on the basis of total school population, type of school, the geographical distribution of schools, and on the basis of a weighting given to schools designated as disadvantaged. Therefore, the number of schools allocated to a psychologist in a highly urban area will differ from the number of schools allocated where there is a wide dispersal of small schools. In urban areas the range in the number of schools can vary typically from 15 schools to 20 schools. In a rural area the range will vary between 25 and 40 (DES, personal communication, March 2010). Currently, approximately 155 psychologists work in NEPS, and about 90 psychologists are listed on the SCPA (www.education.ie).

In 2008/09 NEPS psychologists were assigned to 74% of primary schools (covering 83% of pupils) and 92% of post-primary schools (93% of students). Across all schools this represented an increase in pupil coverage (primary and secondary) from 71% in 2006/7 to 87% in 2008/9 in line with psychologist staffing increases in the period. It is notable that NEPS is one of the few agencies that has experienced an increase, rather than a decrease, in funding. Under the Renewed Programme for Government a commitment has been made to increase the number of NEPS psychologists to 210. The recruitment process in this regard has been put in train by the Public Appointments Service. It is envisaged that, when realized, this number of psychologists will allow for the assignment of a NEPS psychologist to every school in the country (DES, personal communication, March 2010).

During the 2008/09 academic year, NEPS psychologists were involved with referrals (casework) in relation to 7,433 named students. It is also estimated that they made interventions and provided advice on a further 7,000 un-named students. Some 2,875 assessments were funded under the SCPA at a cost of approximately €0.9 million. NEPS Psychologists made recommendations on some 4,095 additional pupils under the Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations scheme (RACE) on behalf of the State Examinations Commission. NEPS psychologists were also invited by schools to advise and assist at some 100 critical incidents in 2008/09 (DES, personal communication, March 2010).

NEPS aims to actively engage and collaborate with relevant service providers in the education system. Protocols have been developed with NEWB and are almost completed with the NCSE. Protocols are also in development with the NBSS. Further, NEPS is a member of the steering group of the SESS and the NCCA Special Education Committee. Liaison is maintained with the SCP, the SPHE Support Service, and SESS. NEPS staff also meet with relevant professionals in the local and regional HSE services to co-ordinate support for school-aged children (DES, personal communication, March 2010).

There has not yet been a systematic, external evaluation of NEPS (Ryan & Downes, 2007). This would appear to be particularly relevant currently, given recent increases

in NEPS psychologists and recent attempts to provide a continuum of support and work more actively with schools.

A satisfaction survey on NEPS was conducted in 378 primary schools and 221 post-primary schools receiving support from NEPS in May 2007 (Shiel & Cunningham, 2010). It should be noted that only principals and NEPS staff were surveyed, and that teachers, parents and students were not. The results confirm that the principal perceived barrier to the effective delivery of NEPS services to schools is resource-related. However, the recent increase in the number of NEPS psychologists will, hopefully, address this perceived shortage. For example, around 80% of respondents in post-primary schools indicated overall satisfaction with the services provided by NEPS, and a majority of comments from respondents that were not satisfied related to resource issues. Overall satisfaction was highest in girls' post-primary schools and lowest in boys' post-primary schools.

Relative satisfaction with specific aspects of the service in post-primary schools ranged from 74.8% to 92.5%. These were, in order of lowest to highest satisfaction levels:

- NEPS psychologists deliver effective professional development, when requested
- NEPS psychologists provide a good consultation and advice service
- Interventions offered by NEPS psychologists are appropriate
- NEPS psychologists provide a good assessment process
- NEPS psychologists' reports provide this school with useful recommendations
- NEPS psychologists provide effective support during a Critical Incident
- NEPS psychologists' reports are clearly written.

Satisfaction levels were lower with professional development, consultation and advice. This is due to the fact that NEPS and school staff had to prioritise the time available for individual assessments, and only 53% of post-primary schools agreed that service delivery time was adequate.

It can be argued that there are some gaps in provision of psychological support, and it remains to be seen whether NEPS, or other agencies, may be best placed to provide

this support. For example, NEPS' role in relation to emotional support may be viewed as reactive to critical incidents rather than being preventative or in providing emotional therapeutic support at an early intervention stage. Moreover, NEPS does not engage in emotional therapeutic work at a family level and its psychologists' training is in the area of educational psychology more so than in therapeutic work more generally. It has little distinctive focus on areas of disadvantage *per se* (other than in considering caseload, as described previously), nor on areas such as emotional supports to help prevent substance abuse (see Ryan & Downes, 2007). We refer the reader to Chapter 2, which includes a discussion of the widespread incidence of mental health difficulties experienced by Irish teenagers, and the comparatively high rates of suicide amongst Irish youth, particularly males.

Finally, the NCSE (2006) notes difficulties associated with the SCPA. Schools may commission one assessment for each cohort of 50 pupils (see DES, 2009b). This quota system is problematic, however. It does not take into account the actual level of demand in a school at a particular time and is not focused on the needs of the children. Furthermore, there is no clear guideline on the number of assessments which may be commissioned nationally in a year or a system for redistributing any unused quota. The number of assessments carried out under this scheme in the 2005 calendar year was 3,400 (NCSE, 2006). Again, it remains to be seen whether recent funding increases for NEPS will address these perceived problems.

3.2.6. Targeted Programmes and Supports

This section considers targeted programmes and supports relevant to educational disadvantage generally (and as a corollary, early school leaving), namely Early Start, the Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme, the School Completion Programme (SCP), and the National Behaviour Support Services (NBSS). It also includes a consideration of the educational supports available to two specific groups – Travellers and newcomers.

3.2.6.1. Early Start

The Early Start Programme began in 1995. It is a one-year scheme offered in 40 selected schools in acutely disadvantaged areas in Ireland and attended by about 2% of the total population of children of this age. Each school offering Early Start caters

for about 60 children aged between 3 and 4, with a daily programme that runs for two-and-a-half hours. Parental involvement is an important feature of the scheme. Early evaluations of Early Start did not show enhanced cognitive skills for participants (e.g. Kelly & Kellaghan, 1999) but did indicate enhanced school readiness. Subsequent changes to the curriculum supported by research have been implemented to enhance cognitive outcomes (Lewis & Archer, 2002). It may also be the case that the scheme is too short to have an optimal impact (Archer & Weir, 2004). The initiative is still in its pilot Phase and evaluation is ongoing (see www.erc.ie). Recently, the OECD (2009a) has recommended subsuming Early Start under the ECCE.

3.2.6.2. Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme

As noted earlier, the HSCL Scheme has been integrated with NEWB since September 2009. It operates at both primary and post-primary levels. The scheme coordinated and managed by a National Co-ordinator and five Regional Co-ordinators. HSCL co-ordinator posts are provided on a full-time or shared basis. The scheme aims to maximise active participation of children in the learning process; to promote co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies; to raise awareness in parents of their capacities to enhance their children's educational progress; and to enhance retention rates to the highest level possible in the education.

More than 400 local HSCL co-ordinators currently provide HSCL services to 691 schools (370 primary and 281 post-primary). However, 62 HSCL posts provided to 100 schools (73 post-primary and 27 primary), were withdrawn from schools that are not in DEIS with effect from 31 August 2009.

A recent appraisal of the scheme (Archer, 2007) indicated that the majority of principals and HSCL officers were positive about the scheme. Evidence on its impact on students, particularly in terms of achievement gains, was less strong (see also Archer & Shortt, 2003; Conaty, 2007).

3.2.6.3. School Completion Programme (SCP)

The SCP has also been integrated with NEWB from September 2009. It covers both primary and post-primary sectors and targets around 36,000 young people across 124 SCP projects and 26 counties, covering 464 primary schools and 227 post-primary schools, or about 20% of the total school-going population (SCP, n.d.a).

The overall objective of the SCP is to provide a significant and positive impact on levels of young people's retention in primary and post-primary schools and on the numbers of young people completing the Leaving Certificate (or its equivalent). Schools participating in DEIS have been invited to participate in the SCP. Also, schools already participating in SCP but not included in DEIS will continue to participate in SCP for the duration of DEIS. This stands in contrast with the HSCL scheme, which is now confined to DEIS schools.

The management of SCPs is designed to be local and community-based. A committee of participating schools and other statutory, youth, community and voluntary agencies forms the Local Management Committee of each SCP. Each committee must prepare and cost a Retention Plan which includes in-school, after-school, out-of-school and holiday supports. The targeting of supports prioritises individual young people who are deemed most at risk of early school leaving, as well as those outside the formal school system. Some of the less intensive supports target wider groups (e.g. sports and leisure facilities). In addition, schools must plan a whole-school strategy to promote retention. Support in formulating the Retention Plan is available through the National SCP Co-ordination Service. The Plan is subjected to a recurring process of planning, implementation and review. The provision of grants is conditional on the quality of the Plan, on the formulation and implementation of actions supporting targeted young people, and on meeting agreed targets.

The SCP is based on the concept of integrated services in two senses. First, it includes a review of the use and deployment of traditional resources in schools and their catchment areas, as well as the co-ordination of DES provisions (e.g. HSCL scheme, NEPS, NEWB, JCSP and LCA) and area-based partnerships and supports. Through co-ordination and flexibility to meeting local needs, the SCP argues that 'greater benefits may be derived from the combined effects of these considerable resources' (n.d.a, p. 3). Second, effective responses (both preventative and supportive) must be multifaceted and meet young people's needs. Therefore the Plan must be a collaboration between schools in partnership with community, youth and sporting agencies, local representatives of national statutory bodies, HSE personnel, social workers, etc.

Data from a consultation process regarding SCP projects indicated that 16 strategies were listed as the most powerful and effective (SCP, n.d.b). It may be noted that the range of supports offers a holistic approach to the needs of students. Starting in order with the most commonly-cited strategy, the most important were perceived to be: extra-curricular activities/sports; after-school clubs/homework clubs; individual support/keywork/personal development work; breakfast clubs/lunch clubs/school meals; counselling/therapy; summer programmes/educational trips; learning support/literacy and numeracy support; attendance tracking and monitoring/rewards for attendance; transfer programmes/transition/induction; additional staff; interagency co-operation and collaboration; family support/home visits; behaviour management/anger management/suspension intervention; targeting of young people at risk; mentoring; transport. On average, each SCP delivered four core strategies.

The SCP has not yet been subject to a formal evaluation (Smyth & McCoy, 2009); however, its approach is flexible and tailored to local contexts, and local and ongoing evaluation is an integral part of the SCP (SCP, n.d.a). The SCP also includes guidelines for and examples of best practice for each of its component activities (DES, 2005e). All 124 SCPs returned annual progress reports covering the following: Personnel, committee membership, interagency co-operation, targeting, retention/destinations of school leavers, local project review, supports, and professional development.

One outcome worth considering is the rate of early school leaving in terms of the success of the SCP. This is available but only in terms of initial destinations; longitudinal data would be preferable. The composite of the 124 annual progress reports (SCP, n.d.c) indicates that of children targeted for early school leaving, 95.5% of them remained in school during this period. However, Traveller children were more about three times more likely than others to have left school during this period (15% did so). The report also provides adjusted and unadjusted rates of early school leaving. The adjusted rates take into account whether or not the destination of the young person was to further education, training or employment. The unadjusted figure was about 4.5% (as above), while the adjusted figure was 1.9%. Some 6% of the

cohort of school leavers did so prior to transfer to post-primary school, 30% prior to completing the Junior Cycle, 40% after completion of the Junior Cycle, and 25% prior to completing the Senior Cycle (SCP, n.d.c).¹⁶

It is worth noting the importance of out-of-school services generally, both associated with the SCP and with other agencies such as drugs taskforces in terms of engaging children, particularly those in disadvantaged contexts (see for example Downes, 2004, 2006; McNeal, 1995; Mahoney, 2000; Murphy, 2007; New Zealand Ministry for Women's Affairs, 2007). In this context, out-of-school services may be defined as a '...wide range of activities from sport, music and drama to remedial reading, homework assistance and more therapeutic or preventive interventions aimed at reducing drug use, teen pregnancy and criminal behaviour' (New Zealand Ministry for Women's Affairs, 2007). At present, though, there is no national policy or strategy in this area and the out-of-school services sector has as yet no central driving source in a government department. It should be noted, however, that a network, Quality Development of Out of School Services (QDOSS), was established in 2006 to develop and advocate for an out-of-school services strategy targeting contexts of educational disadvantage (Downes, 2006).

Such services depend in part on local infrastructure, such as sports facilities and libraries. The OMCYA (2007a) notes that 'The absence of leisure and recreation facilities and activities for children and young people was the most pressing issue raised during the public consultation undertaken to inform the development of the National Children's Strategy' (p. 11). Furthermore, the provision of out-of-school services has recently been the target of recent budget cuts (EDC, personal communication, March 2010).

¹⁶ It may be noted that the Support Teacher Project (STP), established in 1995 as a staff-led initiative, was subsumed under the SCP in 2006. In the STP, teacher posts are assigned to individual schools or shared between schools to assist in supporting pupils with very disruptive behaviours. The project was evaluated by the Department's Inspectorate in 1998 (www.education.ie). There are 41 Support Teachers currently serving 47 schools and a project co-ordinator was appointed in January 2000. The co-ordinator post no longer exists, and is now managed via the assistant national co-ordinator of the SCP. The emphasis of the work of the Support Teacher is preventative and supportive, based on a whole-school strategy, small-group and individual teaching, and adapted curricula. Emphasis is placed on careful record-keeping of data such as attendance, behaviour, and psychological assessments.

Recently, a national recreation policy for young people has been published (*Teenspace*, OMCYA, 2007b). It aims to promote better recreational facilities for young people aged 12 to 18. The report on the policy outlines 76 action points with target dates; 26 of these are related to an objective entitled ‘Maximise the range of recreational opportunities available for young people who are marginalised, disadvantaged or who have a disability’ (OMYCA, 2007b, p. 23). It is unclear, however, the extent to which these points have been implemented. There are several issues that make the implementation of the action points difficult to evaluate (OMCYA, personal communication, July 2009). First, the role of the OMCYA in the policy is mainly one of advocacy; it is up to the various departments and agencies to implement the action points as appropriate. Second, the complexity of the implementation of these points is evident when one considers the large number of agencies and departments that are involved: Departments of Arts, Sport and Tourism; Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; and Education and Science; the HSE; VECs; Local Authorities and City and County Development Boards, to name but a few. Third, it would seem that the area of recreation is not high up on the agenda of many of these departments and agencies. Fourth, there needs to be a better understanding of the concept of recreation amongst the relevant stakeholders that moves well beyond sport.

3.2.6.4. National Behaviour Support services (NBSS)

The NBSS was set up in 2006 in response to recommendations made in the Report on the Task Force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools (*School Matters*; DES, 2006b). The NBSS aims to promote and support positive student behaviour. The view of the NBSS is that by learning to behave appropriately every student can experience success in the school community; unacceptable student behaviour can improve with appropriate support; and school staff should be able to access support and assistance to develop strategies and interventions (www.nbss.ie). The guiding principles of the NBSS (2009, p. 6) are that:

- Schools can make a difference in young people’s lives
- A whole-school approach, founded on respectful relationships, is essential in promoting and supporting positive behaviours throughout the school community

- Behaviour is intrinsically linked to teaching and learning
- Inclusion is a core educational value
- Good practice in schools is acknowledged and disseminated.

The work of the NBSS is carried out by a multi-disciplinary professional team. The NBSS is working with 73 post-primary schools. All 73 schools that work with the NBSS are self-selected. That is, the NBSS wrote to all post-primary schools in January 2007 to invite them to work with the NBSS if they wished to do so. They received 124 applications in total. Depending on resourcing and funding, the aim is to eventually work with all 124 schools, signing off with working with schools when appropriate (NBSS, personal communication, August, 2009). Schools applying for support do so on the basis of behavioural issues rather than special educational needs. However, many students receiving support do present with very low reading scores (NBSS, personal communication, January 2010). Each school is assigned 11 hours for the appointment of a Positive Behaviour Liaison Teacher from the staff in order to plan for behaviour improvement sustainability (DES, personal communication, April 2010).

To date, the work of the NBSS has focused on development and dissemination of models of best practice, professional development, targeted interventions, establishment of behaviour support classrooms, and interagency work (www.nbss.ie). Recently, the NBSS has published two documents aimed at supporting and promoting positive behaviour. In developing its *Model of Support for Behaviour Improvement in Post-Primary Schools* (NBSS, 2009), the NBSS has drawn extensively on the available research. It is noted that ‘...there is a wealth of international studies providing evidence that academic difficulties promote, or at least exacerbate behavioural problems’ (p. 19), which in turn are linked with disengagement from school. This implies that both behavioural and academic supports need to be provided to students who are disengaged from their education. The NBSS (2009) estimates that in most schools, between 80% and 90% of students will be sufficiently supported to learn through whole-school initiatives related to positive behaviour. It estimates that 5-10% of students will need additional support, and possibly 1-5% in need of intensive, individualized support. Their model of behaviour support therefore comprises a three-tier system to match these three groups of students, and these are

also matched to academic supports. First, universal interventions are designed to be proactive and preventative, and aimed at all students (to support the 80-90% of students mentioned above). Second, targeted group interventions are aimed at the 5-10% in need of additional support. These are designed to be efficient and rapid in response. Third, intensive, individualized interventions are aimed at the remaining 1-5% or so of students, and should be assessment-based and of high intensity.

With respect to the third group, the NBSS advocates support for these students through behaviour support classrooms (BSCs), which should be an integral part of the whole-school approach to promoting positive behaviour. This is an intensive, individualized intervention for students who ‘consistently fail to respond to alternative interventions and supports provided in the school’ (NBSS, 2008, p. 5). In its *Best Practice Guidelines* for BSCs (NBSS, 2008), the features, resourcing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of BSCs are documented. The *Guidelines* also include practical materials such as checklists and references to additional resources. The DES permits up to three teaching contracts to support BSCs in a single school. This is to ensure a consistent approach when working with students (see NBSS, 2008, p. 49).

Since the establishment of the NBSS is quite recent, a formal evaluation is not yet available, and it would be useful to ascertain whether the outcomes of students in these schools, including rates of early school leaving and educational attainment, have improved. It would also be useful to examine whether the professional development needs of teachers are being met. An evaluation report of the 36 BSCs set up to date is expected in 2010. Furthermore, it is expected that all schools will have provided the NBSS with responses to a detailed questionnaire, which can then be used to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of its work to date (NBSS, personal communications, August 2009; January 2010). Future evaluations could usefully include the views of other stakeholders including parents and the students themselves and it is planned to include the views of students and parents in the 2010-2011 research programme of the NBSS (DES, personal communication, April 2010).

In Downes’ (2009) view, a wider focus on student needs than in the current NBSS supports would be of benefit. He highlights that methods for addressing discipline

issues need to include other factors such as hunger and lack of sleep due to stress and anxiety-related issues. He argues that more emphasis needs to be put on the emotional issues underlying the behavioural ones in the classroom, ranging from substance abuse to bereavement, sexual abuse, and parental separation. However, it should be noted that Behaviour for Learning Programme Teachers will be appointed in a number of schools from September 2010. These teachers will work with identified students individually or in small groups on Behaviour for Learning programmes designed to meet the students' social, emotional and academic needs (DES, personal communication, April 2010).

3.2.6.5. Traveller Education

An important development in the area of Traveller education is the publication of the *Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy* (DES, 2006c). The report covers Traveller education from pre-school to further and higher education. The core principle underlying the recommendations in the report is one of inclusion, with an emphasis on equality and diversity and the adoption of an intercultural approach (DES, 2006c; DES briefing document, February 2009). The underlying principle of individual educational need rather than Traveller identity is recommended as the criterion to be used to provide additional resources to all children, including Traveller children.

Currently, there are 33 Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTCs). The STTC programme is targeted at Travellers over 18 years of age. Recent reports and analysis recommend that adult Travellers should be integrated into mainstream adult education and training. It has been recommended that STTCs are Phased out as a segregated provision. No timeline has yet been announced for the phasing out of the programme (DES, 2006c, 2007a).

3.2.6.6. Supports for Migrant Students

This section draws mainly from a recent OECD (2009a) review of migrant education in Ireland. The report was drawn up in consultation with members of the DES, various partners in education, and research institutions. It draws on findings from Smyth et al.'s (2009) report on migrant students, and some analyses of PISA 2006 (e.g. Eivers

et al., 2008), and of the 2004 national assessments of reading and mathematics conducted at primary level (Eivers et al., 2005; Shiel et al., 2006).

Irish policy on the inclusion of migrant students has been quick to respond to this rapid change in the Irish population (see OECD, 2009a, for a review). However, the rapid increase of newcomer families to Ireland (noted in Chapter 2) presents challenges to the education system to effectively integrate children from these families.

The provision of support for migrant students who do not speak English is provided through language support teachers. From September 2009, there was some reduction in the level of language support, however, such that one whole-time post could be obtained for schools with 14-30 such students, two for 31-90 students, and depending on size and demand, provision for a third or fourth post. The work of these (EAL) teachers has been supported by resource kits sent out to all schools in 2008 and 2009, as well as documentation supporting the integration of migrant students developed by the NCCA (2005, 2006). EAL teachers can also avail of continued professional development but the OECD (2009a, p. 40) argues that this has been inadequate and fragmented. This issue is further compounded by the finding that EAL teachers tend to comprise three groups: those with a TESOL qualification, learning support teachers, and mainstream teachers (Smyth et al., 2009).

The OECD (2009a) notes that, on average, migrant students have similar socioeconomic backgrounds to their Irish-born peers. Nonetheless, migrant students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds do relatively less well than their Irish-born peers. Furthermore, when the achievements at both primary and post-primary level are compared by newcomer status and language group, non-English-speaking newcomers have the lowest levels of achievement. Parents of these students as well as school staff experience barriers in communicating about or getting involved with their child's education.

The OECD (2009a) recommends targeting support at disadvantaged non-English-speaking migrant children at all levels of the system, particularly at preschool and post-primary levels, that initial and ongoing professional development opportunities

for language support teachers be strengthened, and that tracking of newcomers be enabled in order to monitor the educational outcomes of these students.

3.2.6.7. Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

DEIS was launched in 2005 (DES, 2005a) and is designed to provide an integrated and strategic approach to tackling educational inequality through a new School Support Programme (SSP) whose aim is to ‘ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are prioritised and effectively addressed’ (DES, 2005a). Previously, provision spanned a number of different initiatives and was thus fragmented and inconsistent in terms of criteria for provision (EDC, 2003). DEIS spans across pre-school, primary and post-primary levels¹⁷. As well as providing a more integrated service, a more standardized approach to assessing the relative disadvantage at the school level has been developed by the Educational Research Centre (ERC).

Specifically, at primary school, unemployment rates, percentages of lone parent families, of Travellers, of large families, of pupils receiving free book grants and of those in local authority housing were combined to form an overall scale of disadvantage. At post-primary level, the index is somewhat different, combining percent of medical card owners with the percent of students leaving prior to the Junior Certificate, along with school average performance on the Junior Certificate (ERC, n.d.; Weir, 2006). At primary level, schools are divided into Urban Band 1, Urban Band 2, and Rural, with the more disadvantaged schools in the Band 1. Currently there are 679 primary schools in DEIS (200 Urban Band 1, 145 Urban Band 2 and, 334 rural), and 202 post-primary schools.

The range of supports offered to these schools is extensive. These are specified in detail below (DES, 2005a). The supports vary depending on the band/level the school is in.

Post-primary schools receive:

- access to the JCSP and LCA

¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that preschool provision through DEIS is confined to Early Start, which is rather limited, as noted earlier in this chapter.

- additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage
- enhanced guidance and library support
- additional funding under school books grant scheme
- access to the School Meals Programme
- access to HSCL services
- access to a range of supports based on the best practices identified through the SCP
- 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 the case of urban primary schools, those with the highest concentrations of disadvantage (Band 1) receive access to early education for children, aged from three up to school enrolment, and maximum class sizes of 20 in all junior classes and 24 in all senior classes.

All urban primary schools receive:

- allocation of administrative principals on lower enrolment and staffing figures than apply generally
- additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage
- additional funding under school books grant scheme
- access to the School Meals Programme
- access to a literacy/numeracy support service and various literacy/numeracy programmes
- access to HSCL services
- access to a range of supports based on the best practices identified through the SCP
- 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.

Primary schools in rural areas receive the following:

- access to a Rural Co-ordinator who serves a cluster of schools, whose functions include the development of home, school and community linkages, and supporting implementation of literacy and numeracy measures. Where the school cannot be clustered (e.g. due to remote location), financial support is offered instead
- additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage
- additional funding under school books grant scheme
- access to the School Meals Programme
- 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.

It can be seen that DEIS incorporates the Early Start, HSCL, and SCP initiatives, and the JCSP and LCA programmes (with the assistance of the Second Level Support Service, SLSS, at post-primary level), although with respect to the JCSP and LCA these are not solely confined to DEIS schools. For example, they are also available in some mainstream schools as well as Youthreach centres. Furthermore, not all DEIS schools who are offered the JCSP and LCA actually deliver these programmes, although the majority do.

An important aspect of DEIS is the Planning Process, in which all schools must prepare a three-year Action Plan according to the planning template in Section 5 of the DEIS Action Plan (DES, 2005a) which covers attendance, retention, progression in literacy and numeracy, educational (examination) attainment, partnerships (with parents, between schools, and with external agencies). The website http://www.sdpi.ie/DEIS_Planning.htm provides details of the documentation and supports available to DEIS schools in the areas of planning, target-setting and professional development. The Planning Process is also supported via the Second-Level Support Service (SLSS) and the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS), particularly in relation to supporting and promoting literacy and numeracy (see www.slss.ie, www.ppds.ie). Other supports are available; for example the NCCA

has issued guidelines on assessment, and progress is monitored and supported by the Inspectorate (DES, personal communication, April 2010).

A further feature of DEIS is that SCP and HSCL Co-ordinators work with primary and post-primary schools to assist students in making the transition to post-primary school: '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' (DES, 2005a, p. 45).

It is important to note that this initiative identifies disadvantage at the level of schools, not individual students. This is justified on the basis that students in schools with high concentrations of disadvantage tend (on average) to do worse than students in less disadvantaged schools. For example, Sofroniou, Archer and Weir (2004) have shown that this so-called 'context effect' is linear (i.e. a steady decline in achievement as concentrations of disadvantage increase) and they suggest that a sliding scale rather than rigid cut-points may be preferable. Smyth and McCoy (2009, p. 16) comment (see also NESF, 2009, p. 33): '...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'. While not able to access the full range of supports available through DEIS, the DES is of the position that these children are already supported within mainstream learning support allocations across the system (DES, personal communication, March 2010). Nonetheless, the allocation of additional learning support to all schools does not address other needs of these students (e.g. nutritional, emotional), and DEIS is still in reasonably early stages of development. There would be merit in exploring Sofroniou, Archer and Weir's (2004) recommendation regarding a sliding scale, notwithstanding the need to offset refinements to classifying schools with the administrative complexity of the scheme. The methods used to classify schools in the DEIS initiative are due to be reviewed in 2010/2011 but it is not known how schools will be identified for future provision (ERC, personal communication, July 2009).

In relation to the assessment of levels of disadvantage in post-primary schools, it is sometimes argued that the inclusion of performance on the Junior Certificate and retention rates has the potential to penalise schools that have had success in improving

attainment or achievement. However, there is no evidence that this has occurred. Weir (2006) has noted that the relationship between rates of medical card possession and both of these outcomes is strong and the decision to use measures of both poverty and educational outcomes is based on the definition of educational disadvantage as specified in the Education Act (1998) (i.e. the impediments to education arising from *social or economic disadvantage* which prevent students from *deriving appropriate benefit from education* in schools). At primary level, there are no centrally available data on pupils' socioeconomic backgrounds or performance, so the indices are based on principals' reports. Objective, standardized measures would be preferable, were they available.

Finally, Downes (2008) has criticised the lack of a mental health strategy in the DEIS plan.

The full budget allocated to DEIS schools in 2009 was some €202 million and a comprehensive evaluation of DEIS by the Educational Research Centre is ongoing (see www.erc.ie).

3.2.7. Professional Development and Support for Teachers

It is widely recognised that teachers are key drivers in the process of education (e.g., Granville, 2005), and it is also recognised that the teaching force in Ireland is of high calibre and highly motivated in international comparisons (e.g., OECD, 2009a).

However, in a rapidly-changing society where the needs of learners, educational and otherwise, are becoming more challenging and diverse, and where the past decade has seen an unprecedented initiatives to promote change at all levels of education (Granville, 2005), it is essential that teacher initial education and ongoing professional development and supports are suited to these changes.

One development in this respect is the establishment of the Teaching Council. The Teaching Council is the statutory body for teaching which was established under the Teaching Council Act (2001) in March 2006. The Council has a central role in the areas of teacher education, registration, and codes of professional conduct (www.teachingcouncil.ie). Specifically, its functions are:

- To protect standards of entry to the profession

- To maintain and improve standards of professional practice and conduct
- To establish and maintain the Register of Teachers
- To promote research and establish procedures for the exchange of information with teachers, organisations involved in education and the public
- To advise the Minister for Education and Science on teacher supply and a range of professional matters
- To promote teaching as a profession.

It is important to note that the Council deals with professional matters only and has no role in employment matters such as terms and conditions of employment, contracts of employment, or leave entitlements.

A notable publication of the Teaching Council (2007) is the *Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers*. The Teaching Council has worked to promote and disseminate the Codes. They were launched at a media event. Copies were sent to all teachers, via their schools, with a covering note advising them of the importance of the document and the need to observe the Codes. The Codes were also circulated to all the partners in education (Teaching Council, personal communication, January, 2010). Reminder articles in relation to the Codes were published on a number of occasions in the Teaching Council newsletter (*Oide*) and principals were encouraged to facilitate staffroom discussions on the Codes. A prompt sheet for that purpose was circulated to all schools and published on the Council's website. In addition, as part of the registration renewal process, a *Codes Request Form* was enclosed for registered teachers who had mislaid their original copy of the Codes. A similar form is being included with the *Certificate of Registration* which was sent to all teachers in early 2010. Also, as part of the Graduate Registration process, Codes are circulated to all new registrants each year (Teaching Council, personal communication, January 2010).

In 2009, the Council initiated the first review of the Codes and, as part of that process, invited all schools to host a meeting on the Codes (which would be attended by a member of Teaching Council staff, if requested to do so). A number of focus groups on the Codes were also organised, and a *Review Form* was published on the website

for those wishing to make written submissions (Teaching Council, personal communication, January, 2010).

The position of the Teaching Council is that teachers have primary responsibility and are individually accountable for their own conduct and practice. As professionals, they are answerable for the decisions they make and the actions they take in the course of their professional practice. The Codes provide the framework within which teachers can reflect on their conduct and practice. They make explicit the values that underpin the profession of teaching and outline the key responsibilities which are central to the practice of teaching. A breach of the Codes is defined in the Teaching Council Act (2001) as professional misconduct and the Council is committed to seeing that the Codes are promoted and observed.

When Part 5 of the Teaching Council Act (2001) is commenced, the Council or any person may apply to the Council's Investigating Committee for an inquiry into the fitness to teach of a Registered Teacher (see Teaching Council, 2008, pp. 8-9).

In the more general area of teacher education and professional development, it should be noted that the Teaching Council is developing its strategy for the review, and professional accreditation of, programmes of initial teacher education. This takes place in four distinct Phases:

- Phase 1 involved meetings with all partners advising them of the Council's plans, hearing their general comments and setting out the timeframe for the development of the strategy. These meetings took place in February 2008.
- Phase 2 involved meeting the partners in education at 11 separate meetings and presenting a framework document which provided 'the bones' for the Council's strategy. Also at that time, partners were invited to make written submissions to the Council.
- Phase 3 involved sending a more detailed document to the (then) Minister for Education and Science and the teacher education providers for their comments, and then reviewing four programmes on a pilot basis. The four reviews are currently ongoing and are expected to be completed in the current academic year.

- Phase 4 will involve all the partners in education and will take account of all submissions made and of the experience of the Teaching Council in the first four reviews.

After the Phase four consultation process, the Council's final review and accreditation strategy will be published and the Council will begin reviewing all remaining programmes of initial teacher education, having regard to that strategy (Teaching Council, personal communication, January 2010).

The primary source of professional development and support for teachers is within the remit of the Teacher Education Section (TES) of the DES. The TES was established in 2004 and incorporates the work of the former In-Career Development Unit (ICDU). The TES operates in accordance with the view of teacher education as a continuum. The work of the TES includes policy formulation, co-ordination, direction and management, financial and quality control, and provision of education and continuing support for teachers (DES, 2009c).

The TES is involved in delivering a range of services, from initial teacher education at primary and post-primary levels, teacher induction, continuing professional development, curricular support at primary and post-primary levels (via the PPDS and SLSS, respectively), programme-specific reports, support for special education (via the Special Education Support Services, SESS), and leadership development (DES, 2009c).

The main focus of the remainder of this section on Continued Professional Development (CPD) provided by the SLSS¹⁸. CPD is provided by the SLSS in a range of areas such as school development planning, support for new and revised curricula, and specific projects and initiatives. The SLSS was established in 2001 as a vehicle to promote the better coordination of and collaboration between previously-established support services which tended to be subject-based. The main objectives of the organization have been established through dialogue with the TES and the DES

¹⁸ It should be noted that the SSLS and PPDS are to be merged later in 2010 to form the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

Inspectorate and through interaction with teachers and the Education Centre Network (SLSS, personal communication, January, 2010). These are:

- To support CPD of teachers and schools
- To promote high quality teaching and learning
- To support the implementation of national curricular reform.

The SLSS provides ongoing support for the implementation of Transition Year, LCA and LCV (Leaving Certificate Applied and Vocational) programmes. Furthermore, when subjects with revised syllabi complete the initial Phase of intensive support for implementation (usually after three years) a programme of continuing support is offered by the SLSS at a less intensive level. In 2007-2008 the subjects in this category were English (Junior and Senior Cycle), Mathematics (Junior and Senior Cycle), Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Home Economics. Also in 2007-2008, the support service for Gaelge, comprising a National Co-ordinator (NCO) and a team of six Regional Development Officers (RDOs) commenced work.

Here, we focus on the work of the SLSS in the 2007-2008 school year (as described by the SLSS, personal communication, January, 2010) as an illustration of the range and extent of supports provided.

Support was provided for the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) under the auspices of the SLSS in 2007-2008 by a team of seven specialized JCSP Regional Development Officers (RDOs) led by a NCO and Assistant NCO. This team also supported schools in meeting the demands arising from the DEIS initiative. Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) is a mandatory subject in the junior cycle and support for it falls under the remit of the SLSS. The support needs were ongoing in 2006-2007 due to the high turnover rate of teachers of this subject.

An Assistant National Co-ordinator (ANCO) commenced work in September 2007 to support the establishment and development of Student Councils in schools.

The SLSS has aligned its regional structure with that of the Association of Teacher and Education Centres of Ireland and assigned two RDOs to each of the six regions. In 2007-2008 these RDOs responded to requests from schools in their regions to

facilitate in-school staff development programmes related to generic issues of teaching and learning which transcend subject and programme boundaries. They also designed and offered an extensive programme of out-of-school courses which facilitated teachers in experimenting with new ideas in their classrooms and sharing expertise and learning with their colleagues within their own schools and between schools. The SLSS promotes and supports a range of ancillary projects and initiatives which enhance the provision of support to schools and teachers, including journals, magazines, an extensive website, and national conferences.

CPD is delivered in a variety of formats. With *school-based support*, SLSS staff visit a specific school on the request of the school, and meet with the principal, deputy principal, programme co-ordinator/team, and/or subject department. In 2007-2008, 762 visits to 2,666 staff totaling 5,356 contact hours were completed. *Day courses* are one day in duration, and are organized regionally during school time. The number of such courses is confined in order to minimise the loss of tuition time in schools, and prioritized on the needs of schools introducing programmes for the first time, as well as the needs of coordinators and teachers new to programmes and syllabi. In 2007-2008, 7,916 teaching staff attended 384 day courses, totaling 41,462 contact hours. *Modular courses* are three (non-consecutive) days in duration, and address a wide range of topics (45 in 2007-2008). These courses are structured on the basis of action research, linking practice with theory and they promote peer conversation and sharing of good practice. In 2007-2008, 2,846 individuals participated in 380 courses, totaling 16,102 contact hours. *Staff development programmes* are planned with individual schools or groups of schools to address generic issues tailored to the schools' needs. In 2007-2008, 207 courses were attended by 5,670 participants (a total of 19,088 contact hours). Finally, *local courses* take place in the evenings in partnership with Education Centres, tailored to local needs, and aim to support and encourage local peer networking. In 2007-2008, this programme extended the capacity of the SLSS to make a viable provision for continuing professional development and enabled the Education Centres to extend the range of supports they offer. These courses are designed to enable capacity-building at local level and this form of provision has become a strong growth area (SLSS, personal communication, January, 2010). In 2007-2008, 1,645 individuals attended 135 of these programmes, totaling 3,853 contact hours.

CPD does not suffer from resource barriers: generally, when an application is made, a place is available (SLSS, personal communication, January 2010). Also, the collegiality of the SLSS staff and quality of professional development is viewed highly by school staff (e.g. Granville, 2005). An evaluation of the SLSS (Granville, 2005), however, has identified four key barriers to the effective provision of CPD. First, school planning for CPD is often fragmented and *ad-hoc*, mainly due to the competing demands on school management and teachers. There may be merit in this respect in consulting schools on a periodic basis requesting their views on specific areas of CPD that are needed. Second, although it is estimated that CPD accounts for just 1% of total teaching time, the significant disruptions to arrange substitution etc. prevent many teachers from participating in CPD. Granville (2005) has suggested a combination of cluster inservice and CPD in schools as a potential model to improve delivery, along with the provision of CPD outside of school hours with remuneration which would be offset by reductions in teacher substitution costs. He has also noted the potential of e-learning in this context. Third, although improving, the working relationships between SLSS staff and individual Education Centres is quite varied and Granville has suggested further clarity with respect to this aspect of the work of both the SLSS and Education Centres. Fourth, a lack of accreditation and lack of specification of the minimum requirements for participation in CPD (e.g. for a teacher to continue to be registered with the Teaching Council) may serve as a disincentive to some teachers to participate in CPD.

3.3. Summary of the Key Challenges Arising for Policy and Provision

The establishment of the *ECCE scheme* is a significant development in that it aims to address the significant gap in preschool education provision. However, its implementation will need to be monitored to ensure that it is in accordance with SÍOLTA and Aistéar. Furthermore, it was noted that the universal model of provision underlying the ECCE is inconsistent with the combined targeted and universal model of provision at other levels in the system and experiences of other countries indicate that universal provision of pre-school education and care does not guarantee that all will avail of it. Therefore, there would be merit in establishing targeted interventions promoting access by certain sub-groups, particularly children in disadvantaged areas and children of migrant families and monitoring the uptake and provision of ECCE

more generally. Also, with time, consideration will also need to be made with respect to adjustments to other initiatives. The research has shown conclusively that early, quality intervention is the most effective in reducing early school leaving and other undesirable outcomes such as poor literacy levels and crime.

In a number of places in this chapter, the *lack of a national tracking system* has been identified as a barrier to the effective delivery of supports. For example, the destination of students moving out of mainstream State-funded education is unknown. Also, although student attendance data are collected by NEWB on an annual basis, this is done at the school level. Following our counterparts in Northern Ireland, England, and Wales, there would be merit in considering gathering individual-level data and distinguishing between authorised and unauthorised non-attendance. This would permit the monitoring of non-attendance patterns by policy-relevant sub-groups such as newcomers and children with special educational needs.

A lack of a tracking system might be further compounding some of the difficulties with *continuities across levels and sectors* of the system. For example, there are no links between Youthreach and agencies such as NEPS and NCSE, which is a concern, given the frequently acute needs of Youthreach participants. Thus, even if a Youthreach learner had support while in mainstream school, this support does not transfer when he or she enrolls in a Youthreach centre. It was noted that while some evaluative information is available for Youthreach, the longer-term outcomes of participants are unknown, so it is not possible to assess its efficacy.

Furthermore, the General Allocation Model (GAM) for the provision of supports for students who require learning support and those with low incidence special educational needs applies at primary level but not at post-primary level (see DES Circular 02/05). Therefore a post-primary school will need to apply to a SENO for individual resource teaching support if required for a new entrant pupil. Also, SNA posts are allocated to schools on the basis of the assessed care needs of individual children rather than attaching to particular children. so SNA support does not transfer with the child from one school to the next.

Regarding the work of *NEPS*, it was noted that recent increases in funding will aim to see NEPS psychologists working in every school in the country. However, the review also indicated that gaps in provision may remain and a formal evaluation of NEPS has not yet been completed. It was argued that emotional therapeutic supports and a preventive, early intervention and family level are outside its scope.

In considering *targeted supports for schools*, the main focus of the review was on DEIS. It was noted that some students from disadvantaged backgrounds attend non-DEIS schools. A national tracking system might be a useful tool to monitor the outcomes of all children in order to further inform policy on educational disadvantage. Also, there may be merit, in the next round of DEIS (2010-2011) to explore identifying schools on a sliding scale rather than rigid cutpoints. It was also noted, in the context of reviewing the SCP, that, despite the body of evidence supporting out-of-school services, there is as yet no national strategy in this area, and that these services have recently been subject to budgetary cuts. However the establishment of QDOSS and *Teenspace* are also acknowledged.

The *key importance of teachers* is acknowledged, as is the high quality of individuals entering the teaching profession in Ireland. Significant changes in Irish society and educational policy, as well as curriculum and assessment, have taken place over the past decade, and continuing support for teachers is important. The establishment of the Teaching Council is a significant development in this regard, as is the establishment of the SLSS and SESS within the TES in the DES. However, although satisfaction with the quality of these support services is high, some barriers to effective implementation have been identified. These include time for the planning for CPD occurring in competition with other (at times urgent and often essential) school activities, difficulties in making substitution arrangements to facilitate teachers' attendance at CPD, and lack of linkages between CPD and the accreditation and registration of teachers. It is hoped that the work of the Teaching Council will address these important issues.

Curriculum (content, relevance, difficulty level, choice) remains an issue for many students. From the available information, the *JCSP* and *LCA* are successful in engaging students in their schooling. Restricting the provision of JCSP and LCA

largely to DEIS schools would merit examination in a systematic review of these programmes. It is hoped that the ongoing work of the NCCA and ESRI in reviewing the LCA and the Junior Certificate will result in significant improvements in the engagement of young people in the education system.

Chapter 4: Phase 1 Results: Empirical Analysis of School Retention Rates and Student Early School Leaving Intent

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the results of analyses of school retention rates and of students' intent to leave school early. These analyses draw on existing datasets that are, broadly speaking, representative of the school-going population in Ireland. The key aims of these analyses are to provide an updated statistical picture of early school leaving/retention, particularly following the work of Smyth (1999) (discussed in Chapter 2) and to provide a quantitative base in which to consider the results associated with Phase 2 (Chapter 5) and Phase 3 (Chapter 6). The analyses can be expected to provide new insights as they build on previous research, particularly that of Smyth (1999) and the availability of strong measures of home environment not previously available in other datasets, can add to our understanding of this key aspect of students' lives.

The chapter first provides a description of the data, outlines the research questions to be addressed, points to some limitations of the analyses, and describes the methods used to analyse the data as well as the characteristics of the respondents.

The results are then presented in three sections: school-level retention rates, student early school leaving intent, and reasons provided by students for wanting to leave school early.

The chapter finishes with a summary of results and some conclusions.

4.2. Description of Empirical Data Sources

4.2.1. School Retention Rates

For 155 of the 165 schools that participated in PISA 2006 in Ireland, the retention rates for both the Junior and Leaving Certificates were available from the Department of Education and Science Post-Primary Pupil Schools Database. Data were not available for all schools due to some non-returns and school

closures/amalgamations.¹⁹ These rates correspond to the average percentages of students that entered the school between 1996 and 1998 and who completed (i) the Junior Certificate and (ii) the Leaving Certificate.

4.2.2. Student Early School Leaving Intent and Reasons for Early School Leaving Intent

These data were derived from the 2003 and the 2006 datasets of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA is an OECD initiative. It is a survey implemented every three years, beginning in 2000 (see Cosgrove et al., 2005; Eivers et al., 2008; OECD, 2001, 2004, 2007; Shiel et al., 2001). It examines the extent to which students are able to demonstrate key competencies in reading, mathematics and science. The approach taken to measuring students' knowledge and skills is that of real-life 'literacy'. For example, reading literacy is defined as *...the ability to understand, use and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and skills, and to participate effectively in society* (OECD, 2001). Students participating in the assessment are aged 15, which is at or close to the end of compulsory schooling in OECD member states. In Ireland, students sampled to participate are mainly in third year (about 60%), but some are also in second, fourth (Transition) and fifth years.

In addition to completing a two-hour assessment of reading, mathematics and science, students also completed a questionnaire asking them about their home background and various attitudes and activities (e.g. time spent on homework, interest in reading). School principals also completed a questionnaire that asked for information about areas such as school management, staffing, resources, and climate.

In Ireland, additional questionnaire items were added. These include questions on early school leaving intent (collected in 2006) and reasons for wanting to leave school (collected in 2003). This information, along with several school- and student-level variables (both nationally and internationally derived), is used to examine whether

¹⁹ There is a possibility that the 10 schools without the data may have differed to the schools with the data, which raises the possibility of bias in the sample. To investigate this possibility, a binary logistic regression with missing/non-missing retention as the outcome indicated that the availability of the school retention data was unrelated to school sector, size, or location, i.e. that the sample was unbiased with respect to these characteristics.

and what school and student characteristics predict early school leaving intent. Specifically, the 2006 dataset is used to analyse early school leaving intent, and the 2003 dataset is used to analyse reasons for wanting to leave school early.

4.3. Aims of the Analyses

The aims of the analyses are threefold:

1. To identify school characteristics that are associated with school retention rates at Junior and Leaving Certificate levels, and to establish whether these characteristics are the same for both levels.
2. To identify the individual and school-level characteristics of students who intend to leave school early.
3. To examine reasons that students give for wanting to leave school early, and whether these reasons differ for males and females, school sector, and school location.

4.4. Variables Considered

With respect to school-level retention, Junior and Leaving Certificate retention rates are the outcomes (i.e., the percentage of students completing the Junior and Leaving Certificates in each school). Explanatory variables considered are:

- school sector
- school size
- location or population density (urban/rural)
- parental pressure for academic achievement
- use of ability grouping
- academic selectivity at intake, and
- the proportion of students in the school entitled to a Junior Certificate fee waiver (this is a proxy for the proportion of medical card holders and thus a good index of poverty).²⁰

This set of variables was established on the basis of characteristics examined in Chapters 2 and 3 that were deemed relevant to retention, though constrained by the available data.

With respect to student-level analyses, the outcome variable for the PISA 2006 analysis is student early school leaving intent. Table 2 shows the characteristics

²⁰ It should be noted that this measure does not fully capture socioeconomic characteristics relating to, for example, parental education or supportive home climate.

relevant to a consideration as identified by Smyth (1999) and McCoy (2000), compared with those available from PISA 2006. Readers are referred to Table A3.1 in Appendix 3 for detailed information on the variables drawn from PISA 2006.

Table 2. Variables associated with student early school leaving intent as identified in Smyth (1999) and McCoy (2000), and variables available in the PISA 2006 database for Ireland

Smyth (1999)	McCoy (2000): Males	McCoy (2000): Females	PISA 2006 Database
Student Level			
Demographic Background			
Male Older than average	Older than average Higher number of siblings	Older than average	Male Newcomer Minority home language Higher number of siblings
Socioeconomic Background			
Non-professional occupations Lower levels of maternal education	Farming backgrounds	Parental unemployment Higher number of siblings	Lower occupation (socioeconomic index) Lower levels of parental education Low wealth (proxy for low income)
Home Climate			
			Poor home educational resources Few books in the home Low levels of cultural capital
Behaviour and Attitudes			
	In part-time work		High rates of absenteeism In paid work
Ability/Achievement			
Low test score	Lower ability	Lower ability	Low PISA reading, mathematics and science scores

Table 2. Variables associated with student early school leaving intent as identified in Smyth (1999) and McCoy (2000), and variables available in the PISA 2006 database for Ireland (continued)

Smyth (1999)	McCoy (2000): Males	McCoy (2000): Females	PISA 2006 Database
School Level			
School Structural Features			
School Sector (vocational)	School sector (community/comprehensive)	Vocational subject provision	School sector (not secondary)
	No separate remedial class	Provision of LCA	School size (large)
	Not in West of Ireland		Population density (urban)
School Climate			
Negative interaction with teachers	Negative interaction with teachers	Negative interaction with teachers	Low parental expectations/involvement
Low teachers' expectations	Low academic focus	Low parental involvement in subject choice	
Low student's aspirations	Decline in numbers of teachers	Low parental achievement press	
	Perceived friendliness of school		
	Low parental involvement		
	Low student involvement in extracurricular activities		
School Policies			
	Higher amounts of homework	No social/personal development	Academic selectivity at intake (academic record/placement test)
	Less preparation for work		Use of ability grouping
			Low rates of feedback to parents
Social Context			
Low school average SES			Low school average SES

Note. See Appendix 3 for a detailed description of the variables taken from the PISA 2006 database. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the results in Smyth (1999) and McCoy (2000).

They are divided into student and school levels, and grouped into several categories: student demographic characteristics, socioeconomic background, home climate, behaviour and attitudes, and ability; and school features, climate, policies, and social context. Again, the set of characteristics in Table 2 was established on the basis of the literature review, within the constraints of the available variables in the dataset.

For the 2003 analysis, we simply examine the pattern of students' responses across eight reasons for wanting to leave school early, and compare these patterns by gender, school sector, and school location.

4.5. Strengths and Limitations of the Analyses

On the plus side, PISA provides good measures of students' socioeconomic backgrounds, home educational climate, and cultural capital, to a level of detail not previously available. Another advantage of the PISA dataset is that the achievement measures are relevant to policy in that they are explicitly designed to measure the knowledge and skills relevant to students' current and future lives in a real-life literacy context.

At the same time, it should be borne in mind that the analyses presented suffer from some limitations. Some of the population of interest is not in the dataset. PISA does not permit the analysis of students with disabilities, whether physical, learning or behavioural, since these students are exempt from participating in the assessment, and this should be regarded as a significant omission. Migrant students with less than one year's experience of the language of instruction are also exempt (see OECD, 2009b, for more details on exempt students and absent students). Furthermore, students that are chronic low attenders tend to be absent on the day of the PISA assessment. Cosgrove (2005) has shown that the achievements on the Junior Certificate examination (spanning 2002, 2003 and 2004) of absent students and students with special needs are significantly lower than those of students who did participate in PISA 2003. Furthermore, Travellers are not explicitly identified in the dataset. Unfortunately, it is not possible to infer more about these students on the basis of the PISA dataset, but it is probable that a significant proportion of these groups of students intended to leave school early – in other words, it is likely that the PISA dataset underestimates the number of students intending to leave school early.

The sample design also places limitations on the interpretation of results. It is age-based (i.e. a sample of all students in schools that are 15) rather than based on a given year level. For the analyses that include third years only, these do not cover all third years – only students of around average age.

Also, as with any cross-sectional survey, the design is such that it equates to a snapshot of the situation in the system at a given point in time. So, for example, while the results presented here may indicate that poverty is relevant to a consideration of student early school leaving intent, they cannot inform us as to how or why poverty

operates to contribute to this outcome. Also, results are indicative of *initial* early school leaving. Nothing can be inferred about the pathways of students beyond the time-point at which the PISA data were collected.

Further, it was not possible to consider all potentially relevant variables. For example, coverage of aspects relating to student attitudes is not good in PISA (e.g., attitude to school and sense of belonging at school are not included). Measures of school climate are not well covered which must be seen as a shortcoming, given the relevance of school and class climate demonstrated in previous research (e.g. Smyth et al., 2004, 2006), and the measure for ability grouping used in PISA does not permit us to categorise whether individual students are in the ‘top’, ‘middle’ or ‘bottom’ streams (as was done by Smyth, 1999).

Finally, the analyses of early school leaving use two somewhat different measures, as Smyth (1999) has done; i.e. prospective early school leaving at the student level, and actual retention rates at the school level. It should be borne in mind that these measures are related but not identical.

4.6. Method

Box 1 explains four key concepts that are useful for interpreting the analysis methods used for the results presented in this chapter.

Multiple linear regression was used to analyse *school* retention rates.

Student early school leaving intent was examined in two steps. Initially, descriptive analysis was conducted, whereby the means of continuous variables and frequencies of categorical variables were examined one at a time, e.g., early school leaving intent of males and females. Appendix 3 gives more detail on how these estimates were computed.

Box 1. Interpreting the results of regression analyses (statistical techniques employed in this chapter)

In a *regression analysis*, the aim is to establish, for a given outcome (in this chapter, the outcome is either school retention rates or student early school leaving intent), which combined set of background variables best explain that outcome.

Two pieces of information are used to evaluate the importance of each background variable.

First, we examine the *statistical significance* of the association of that variable with the outcome. That is, if the probability that the observed association between a variable and the outcome can be expected by chance is 5% or less, then that variable is said to have a statistically significant association with the outcome (i.e. $p \leq .05$ = statistical significance). Put simply, this means that the observed association is unlikely to have been found by chance.

A second way to evaluate the importance of a variable in its association with the outcome is to examine the substantive (as opposed to merely the statistical) importance of the association with the variable and the outcome. This evaluation depends on how the outcome is measured.

In the case of school retention rates, this outcome is continuous, i.e. a percentage. We use the R^2 statistic, *explained variance*, to evaluate the importance of each variable. This indicates the amount of variation in the outcome that is attributable to a particular variable. In interpreting results, it should be borne in mind that an explained variance of .05 or less (5% or less) indicates weak explanatory power; explained variance in the region of .15 indicates moderate explanatory power, and explained variance around .30 or higher indicates strong explanatory power.

In the case of student early school leaving intent, the outcome is binary (i.e. takes two values – intend to leave/do not intend to leave). When analysing a binary variable in a regression analysis, it is useful to consider the *odds ratios* along with the statistical significance associated with each explanatory variable. The odds ratio is the ratio of the odds of early school leaving intent in one group compared to another group. For example, the odds ratio associated with low reading achievement in Table 9a is 4.67, meaning that students with low achievement are close to five times more likely than students with medium and high levels to intend to leave school early.

In both sets of analyses, use is made of *reference and comparison groups* in the case of explanatory variables that are binary or categorical in nature. For example, the reference group for school sector/gender composition in Table 3a is mixed sex secondary. A comparison of vocational schools with this reference group shows that the expected retention rate in vocational schools is 12.6% lower than in mixed sex secondary schools. Similarly, in Table 8a, the reference group for gender is female, and the odds ratio of 0.33 indicates that girls are one-third as likely as boys to intend to leave school early.

Following the descriptive analyses, early school leaving intent was examined with respect to the explanatory variables simultaneously. Binary logistic multilevel modelling was used. One advantage of this modelling technique is that it allows for the clustered nature of the sample design (i.e., students in a given school are more likely to share similar characteristics). Appendix 3 provides more detail on this technique, along with the modelling strategy employed, and detailed descriptions of the variables used.

As noted, the analyses of both retention rates and early school leaving intent, variables were initially examined separately, and then all together. This was done to examine the relative independence of the effects of each variable. So, for example, if the effects associated with gender are similar when examined on its own compared to when included in a model with the other characteristics, then we can conclude that gender is operating independently from the other characteristics in the model.

4.7. Respondents: Students in PISA 2003 and PISA 2006

In PISA 2006, a total of 4,585 students took part (50.6% female, 49.4% male). Of these, 2,722 (59.4%) were in third year. Third year students only were selected to allow the interpretation of results to be focussed on a single point in the system. Since the software used to analyse the data employs listwise deletion in the case of missing variables, the dataset used for analyses contained only cases with no missing data on any of the variables to be considered. This dataset comprised 2,537 third years (48.6% female, 51.4% male), or 93.2% of all participating third years. Early school leaving intent for third years in the dataset used for analysis (10.8%) was similar to third years in the PISA sample as a whole (11.2%). In PISA 2003, a total of 3,880 students took part. Of these, 49.6% were female and 50.4% were male. We included all PISA 2003 students in the analyses since relatively small numbers have responded to the reasons for wanting to leave school early.

4.8. Results Section One: Retention Rates at Post-Primary Level

School-level retention rates (an average for the cohorts entering post-primary school in 1995, 1996, and 1997) averaged 95.4% at Junior Certificate (standard deviation = 4.30) and 80.1% at Leaving Certificate (standard deviation = 10.85). Retention rates at Junior and Leaving Certificates were quite highly correlated ($r = .87$).

Table 3a shows the results of a set of regressions for each variable when considered separately to examine the extent to which they predict retention rates at Leaving Certificate. The variables were examined separately *initially* so that some information can be obtained about the extent to which various school characteristics covary with one another. Readers are advised to pay greater attention to the *final* model (Table 3b), which considers all of the variables together.

Table 3a. Results of initial linear regressions with school retention rates at Leaving Certificate as the outcome variable: Variables examined one at a time

Variable/Comparison		Expected Change in % Retention	Standard Error	B	t	p	Proportion of Variance Explained
Sector	Comm/comp-mixed sex secondary	-6.277	2.674	-0.223	-2.348	.020	.251
	Vocational-mixed sex secondary	-12.649	2.491	-0.512	-5.078	.000	
	Boys' secondary-mixed sex secondary	-2.533	2.674	-0.090	-0.947	.345	
	Girls' secondary-mixed sex secondary	2.094	2.527	0.083	0.829	.408	
Size	Small-medium	-5.800	3.659	-0.132	-1.585	.115	.077
	Large-Medium	5.090	1.895	0.223	2.686	.008	
Location	Rural-Suburban	-0.125	2.069	-0.005	-0.060	.952	.021
	City-suburban	-4.558	2.117	-0.184	-2.153	.033	
Parental pressure	High-medium	6.386	1.745	0.290	3.659	.000	.114
	Low-medium	-4.663	2.743	-0.135	-1.700	.091	
Ability grouping all classes all subjects		-2.626	3.464	-0.063	-0.758	.450	.003
Academic selectivity at intake		-3.015	2.404	-0.101	-1.254	.212	.004
Average JCE fee waiver		-6.604	0.738	-0.586	-8.944	<.001	.339

Note. R^2 of variables considered together is .55.

When examined separately, the three variables most strongly predictive of retention are fee waiver (the higher the rate of fee waiver, the lower the retention; $R^2 = .34$, or 34% of the variation in retention rates is explained by variations in fee waiver), school sector (with lower retention rates in community/comprehensive and particularly vocational schools, both compared with mixed secondary schools; there is no difference between secondary schools whether single or mixed; $R^2 = .25$), and parental pressure on academic achievement (high pressure predicts higher retention and vice versa; $R^2 = .11$). A weaker but nonetheless statistically significant effect is evident for school size (higher retention rates are associated with large schools) and

school location (lower retention rates are associated with cities). Ability grouping and academic selectivity do not predict Leaving Certificate retention rates.

When examined all together, the explained variance is .55, indicating some, but not substantial, covariation among the predictors (if the variance explained by the explanatory variables did not overlap, i.e. were unique, the R^2 for the combined model would equal the sum of the R^2 for variables examined one by one, i.e., .81).

The final model is presented in Table 3b. It has good explanatory power, accounting for three-fifths of the variance in school retention rates at Leaving Certificate ($R^2 = .60$). It can be seen that retention rates do not vary across secondary schools, whether single or mixed sex, and that community/comprehensive and in particular vocational schools have lower retention rates compared to secondary schools. This is so even after adjusting for fee waiver. The expected change in retention rates, i.e. a decrease in retention of 8% for every standard deviation increase in fee waiver applies equally across sectors. The effects associated with fee waiver and location should be interpreted with respect to an interaction between these two variables.

Table 3b. Final (best-fitting) model of school retention rates (Leaving Certificate), including interaction terms

Variable/Comparison		Expected Change in % Retention	Standard Error	B	t	p
Main effects						
Sector	Comm/comp-mixed sex secondary	-3.744	1.805	-0.161	-2.075	.040
	Vocational-mixed sex secondary	-8.606	1.688	-0.421	-5.097	<.001
	Boys' secondary-mixed sex secondary	-2.709	1.987	-0.116	-1.363	.175
	Girls' secondary-mixed sex secondary	2.394	1.886	0.114	1.269	.206
Location	Rural-Suburban	1.792	1.397	0.090	1.283	.202
	City-suburban	-4.231	1.179	-0.207	-3.589	<.001
Average JCE fee waiver		-5.799	1.036	-0.622	-5.596	<.001
Interaction terms						
Location*Fee waiver	Rural*fee waiver	5.959	1.416	0.347	4.208	<.001
	Urban*fee waiver	0.533	1.248	0.038	0.427	.670

Table 4 and Figure 1 show expected changes in retention rates for urban, suburban and rural schools, for low, medium and high levels of fee waiver for the Leaving Certificate (i.e. 1 standard deviation below the national fee waiver average, at the fee waiver average, 1 standard deviation above the fee waiver average). Results indicate that, regardless of the level of fee waiver, schools in rural areas have about the same expected level of retention rates. In the case of both suburban and urban schools, there is a steady decline in expected retention rates in both suburban schools (-16% points) and urban schools (-15% points) as the rate of fee waiver increases.

Table 4. Example values for interaction between location and fee waiver (final model of Leaving Certificate retention rates)

Location	Fee Waiver		
	Low	Average	High
Rural	1.632	1.792	1.952
Suburban	5.799	0.000	-5.799
Urban	1.035	-4.231	-9.497

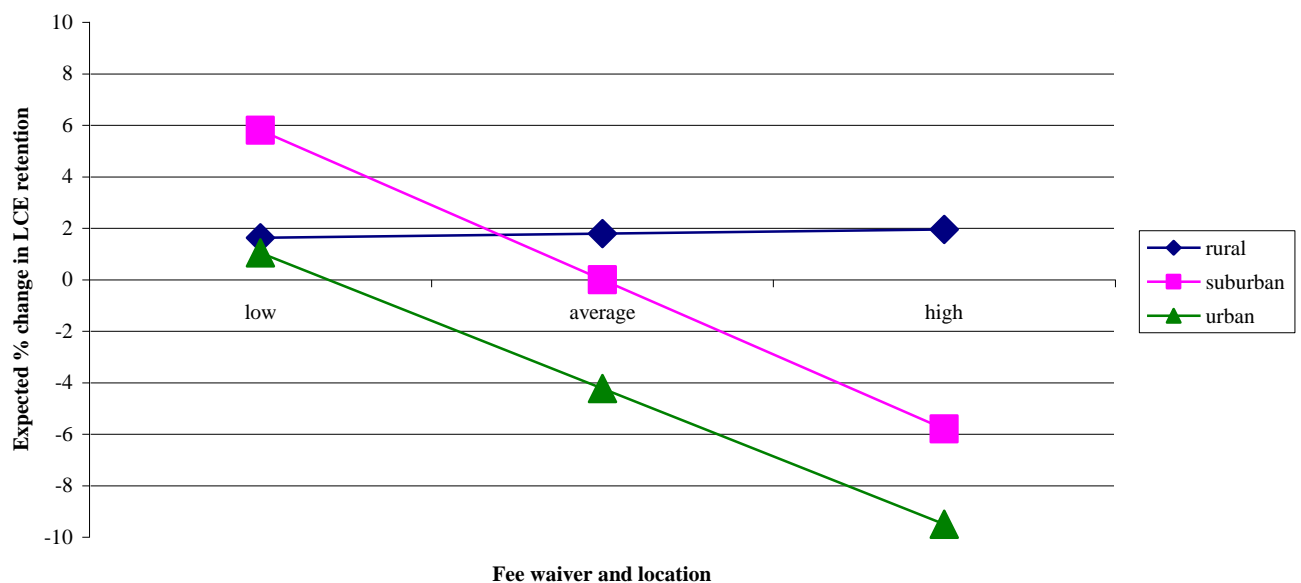


Figure 1. Plot of interaction between fee waiver and location in the final model of Leaving Certificate retention rates

Table 5a shows the results for each variable examined one at a time with respect to the extent to which each predicts retention rates, this time at Junior Certificate level. Again, more attention should be paid to the final model, which is in Table 5b.

Table 5a. Results of initial linear regressions with school retention rates at Junior Certificate as the outcome variable: variables examined one at a time

Variable/Comparison		Expected Change in % Retention	Standard Error	B	t	p	Proportion of Variance Explained
Sector	Comm/comp-mixed sex secondary	-2.352	1.136	-0.211	-2.070	.040	.138
	Vocational-mixed sex secondary	-3.185	1.059	-0.325	-3.008	.003	
	Boys' secondary- mixed sex secondary	0.589	1.136	0.053	0.518	.605	
	Girls' secondary- mixed sex secondary	0.823	1.074	0.082	0.767	.444	
Size	Small-medium	-1.873	1.462	-0.107	-1.281	.202	.061
	Large-Medium	1.914	0.757	0.212	2.528	.012	
Location	Rural-Suburban	0.107	0.833	0.011	0.128	.898	.012
	City-suburban	-0.294	0.852	-0.030	-0.345	.730	
Parental pressure	High-medium	1.419	0.694	0.163	2.045	.043	.108
	Low-medium	-3.574	1.091	-0.261	-3.278	.001	
Ability grouping all classes all subjects		-0.804	1.347	-0.048	-0.597	.552	.004
Academic selectivity at intake		-1.627	0.948	-0.137	-1.716	.088	.012
Average JCE fee waiver		-2.514	0.298	-0.563	-8.428	<.001	.313

Note. R^2 of variables considered together is .44.

When examined separately, the three variables most strongly predictive of retention are once again fee waiver (the higher the rate of fee waiver, the lower the retention; $R^2 = .31$), school sector (with the same pattern of results as was found for retention rates at the Leaving Certificate; $R^2 = .14$), and parental pressure on academic achievement (high pressure predicts higher retention and vice versa; $R^2 = .11$). Similar to Leaving Certificate retention rates, a significant effect is evident for school size (higher retention rates are associated with large schools). Location, ability grouping and academic selectivity do not predict Junior Certificate retention rates.

When examined all together, the explained variance is .44, indicating some covariation among the predictors (the sum of the R^2 for variables examined one by one is .65). The final model, shown in Table 5b, is similar to the final model of retention rates at Leaving Certificate level. Also consistent with the model for Leaving Certificate retention rates, there is an interaction between school average fee waiver and urban/rural location, which shows that schools in rural areas have similar

expected retention rates, regardless of Junior Certificate fee waiver rate (Table 6; Figure 2).

Table 5b. Final (best-fitting) model of school retention rates (Junior Certificate), including interaction terms

Variable/Comparison		Expected Change in % Retention	Standard Error	B	t	p
Main effects						
Sector	Comm/comp-mixed sex secondary	-2.186	0.987	-0.196	-2.215	.028
	Vocational-mixed sex secondary	-1.767	0.923	-0.180	-1.913	.058
	Boys' secondary-mixed sex secondary	0.192	1.087	0.017	0.176	.860
	Girls' secondary-mixed sex secondary	0.605	1.032	0.060	0.586	.559
Location	Rural-Suburban	1.098	0.764	0.115	1.437	.153
	City-suburban	0.244	0.645	0.025	0.379	.705
Average JCE fee waiver		-3.474	0.567	-0.778	-6.130	<.001
Interaction terms						
Location*Fee waiver	Rural*fee waiver	3.269	0.775	0.398	4.221	<.001
	Urban*fee waiver	0.651	0.682	0.096	0.954	.342

Table 6. Example values for interaction between location and fee waiver (final model of Junior Certificate retention rates)

Location	Fee Waiver		
	Low	Average	High
Rural	1.300	1.100	0.900
Suburban	3.500	0.000	-3.500
Urban	3.090	0.240	-2.610

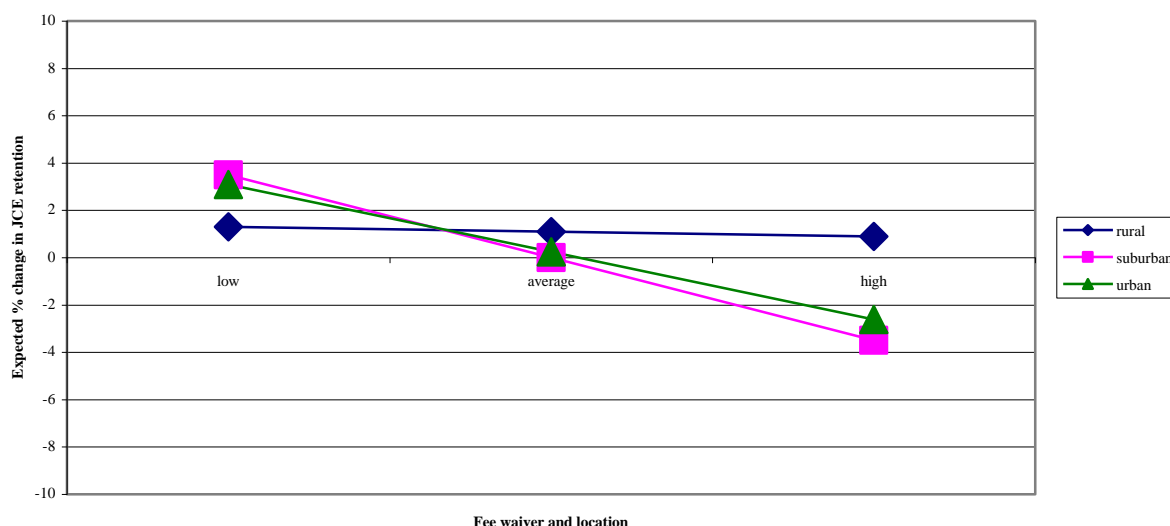


Figure 2. Plot of interaction between fee waiver and location in the final model of Junior Certificate retention rates

Comparing Table 3b with Table 5b, and Table 4 with Table 6 (Figures 1 and 2), it can be seen that, although the same variables appear in the final models of both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate retention rates, the effects of the variables, including the interactions, are stronger in the case of the Leaving Certificate. Also, schools in cities have lower expected retention rates at Leaving Certificate but not at Junior Certificate, relative to schools in suburban areas.

4.9. Results Section Two: Descriptive Analyses of Student Early School Leaving Intent

The results in this section are intended for broad descriptive purposes only. The next section is more important since it examines all of the variables together.

Across the sample as a whole, 10.8% of students indicated that they intended to leave school early. Table 7 shows the means, standard errors and standard deviations for each continuous variable by early school leaving group. The first five variables in the table are standardised to have a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1, so the mean difference can be interpreted in standard deviation units. The highest mean difference on these five variables is for the home educational resources scale, whereby students intending to leave school have a score of about 0.70 of a standard deviation lower than those who do not intend to leave. The mean difference on the parental occupation scale and books in the home is in the region of half a standard deviation, for the

cultural capital scale the difference is about two fifths of a standard deviation, while the difference on the material possessions scale is smaller, at around one quarter of a standard deviation.

Students intending to leave school tend to be in schools with higher rates of fee waiver, with an average difference of around one third of a standard deviation.

Students intending to leave school also have substantially lower average achievement scores than those who do not. The score differences for reading, mathematics and science shown in Table 7 are equivalent to three-quarters to nine-tenths of a standard deviation, with the largest difference associated with reading.

Table 7. Means, standard deviations and standard errors for continuous variables, by early school leaving group (PISA 2006)

Variable	ESL Intent - No			ESL Intent - Yes			Mean Diff
	Mean	SE	SD	Mean	SE	SD	
Parental occupation	0.029	0.039	1.003	-0.417	0.066	0.857	0.446
Material possessions	0.013	0.030	0.991	-0.217	0.066	1.033	0.230
Home educational resources	0.061	0.023	0.951	-0.651	0.088	1.216	0.713
Books in the home	0.038	0.031	1.006	-0.408	0.051	0.796	0.446
Cultural capital	0.034	0.028	1.002	-0.352	0.082	0.916	0.387
School average JCE fee waiver	22.2	1.02	13.9	29.9	1.68	16.2	-7.7
Reading Achievement	525.4	3.61	82.9	446.3	5.87	81.1	79.0
Mathematics Achievement	506.3	2.76	75.7	448.7	4.76	67.1	57.6
Science Achievement	517.0	3.19	87.1	439.3	5.80	79.3	77.7

Table 8 shows the distribution of students across categories of non-continuous variables by early school leaving group. The table shows, with respect to student variables, that early school leaving intent is more prevalent amongst boys (14.6%) compared with girls (5.5%); in newcomer students (17.2%) compared with students born in Ireland (11.0%); with increasing numbers of siblings; with lower parental education (14.5% early school leaving intent rate amongst students whose parents do not have a tertiary degree compared to 7.4% of students whose parents do have a tertiary degree); and with increasing rates of absenteeism and amounts of paid work. The results for newcomer status and home language should be interpreted with respect to the small overall percentages of students in the newcomer and language minority

groups: it is unfortunate that the PISA dataset includes just 4.9% of students born outside Ireland, and 1.5% of students whose first language is not English or Irish. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this implies that the PISA dataset is not optimal for addressing the issue of early school leaving among newcomer students.

Table 8. Percentages and standard errors for categorical variables, by early school leaving group (PISA 2006)

Variable	Group	ESL Intent - No		ESL Intent - Yes		Overall %
		%	SE	%	SE	
Gender	Male	85.5	1.567	14.6	1.567	51.4
	Female	94.5	0.689	5.5	0.689	48.6
Newcomer status	Born in Ireland	89.0	0.934	11.0	0.934	95.1
	Not born in Ireland	82.8	3.789	17.2	3.789	4.9
Language spoken	English or Irish	89.0	0.923	11.0	0.923	98.5
	Other	74.2	9.534	25.8	9.534	1.5
Number of siblings	None or one	89.8	1.224	10.2	1.224	28.9
	Two	91.2	1.222	8.8	1.222	31.0
	Three	88.8	1.485	11.2	1.485	22.0
	Four or more	82.9	1.415	17.1	1.415	18.2
Parental education	Tertiary level	92.6	0.900	7.4	0.900	46.3
	Below tertiary level	85.5	1.154	14.5	1.154	53.7
Frequency of absenteeism (past two weeks)	None	92.7	0.832	7.3	0.832	60.2
	Once or twice	87.8	1.348	12.2	1.348	29.8
	Three times or more	71.1	3.087	28.9	3.087	10.1
Hours of paid work per week	None	91.7	0.916	8.3	0.916	39.5
	One to four	93.3	1.229	6.7	1.229	22.0
	Four to eight	88.2	1.894	11.8	1.894	19.4
	More than eight	80.8	2.040	19.2	2.040	19.1
School type	Community/comprehensive	87.8	1.750	12.2	1.750	17.4
	Secondary	91.9	0.915	8.1	0.915	61.0
	Vocational	81.3	2.566	18.7	2.566	21.6
School enrolment	Small	71.7	5.359	28.3	5.359	4.0
	Medium	85.7	2.064	14.3	2.064	27.0
	Large	91.4	0.891	8.6	0.891	69.0
Population density of school location	Low (rural)	87.9	2.067	12.1	2.067	27.2
	Medium	88.0	1.373	12.0	1.373	46.4
	High (city)	91.0	1.458	9.0	1.458	26.4
Parental pressure for academic achievement	Low	81.8	3.868	18.2	3.868	10.2
	Medium	87.9	1.389	12.1	1.389	46.2
	High	91.5	1.255	8.5	1.255	43.6
Use of ability grouping	No/some classes	89.2	1.003	10.8	1.003	92.9
	All classes	81.6	5.116	18.4	5.116	7.1
Academic selectivity	Academic record not considered	88.5	0.985	11.5	0.985	84.8
	Academic record considered	90.3	1.713	9.7	1.713	15.2

In the case of school variables, early school leaving intent is highest in vocational schools (18.7%) compared with community/comprehensive (12.2%) and secondary schools (8.1%); early school leaving intent also increases as school enrolment size decreases, and increases as parental pressure on academic achievement decreases. Use of ability grouping for all classes is associated with higher rates of early school leaving intent (18.4%) compared with less widespread ability grouping (10.8%).

Early school leaving intent does not vary appreciably by academic selectivity, or population density (urban/rural location).

4.10. Results Section Three: Multilevel Models of Student Early School Leaving Intent

Table 9a shows the odds ratios and significance levels for each student-level variable tested separately. Readers are again reminded to place greater weight on the final model (Table 9c), which excludes non-significant school and student characteristics. Two examples of how to interpret the figures in this table follow. Table 9b and 9c can be interpreted in the same manner as Table 9a.

The odds ratio for gender, 0.33, indicates that girls are one-third as likely as boys to express an intent to leave school early, and this difference is statistically significant ($p < .001$). Students whose first language is not English or Irish are about twice as likely to intend to leave school early, but this difference is not significant, due to the small number in this group and the resulting large standard error ($p = .092$).

Most student variables are significant with the exceptions of student age and home language. However, when tested simultaneously using the procedures described in Appendix 3, the only student variables to retain significance are gender, low reading achievement²¹, home educational resources, and books in the home.

²¹ Due to multicollinearity (i.e. the fact that the three achievement outcomes are highly related to one another), it is feasible (and sensible) to include only one of the three achievement outcomes in the model that tests all student variables simultaneously.

Table 9a. Odds ratios and significance tests for each student-level variable tested separately (PISA 2006)

Variable/Comparison		Odds ratio	95% CI of odds ratio	p
Gender	Female-Male	0.332	(0.230, 0.481)	<.001
Country of birth	Born outside Ireland-Born in Ireland	1.548	(1.006, 2.383)	.047
Home language	Other-English/Irish	2.028	(0.890, 4.623)	.092
Number of siblings	None/one-two	1.157	(0.855, 1.566)	.027
	Three-two	1.164	(0.844, 1.606)	
	Four or more-two	1.879	(1.380, 2.559)	
Parental education	Below tertiary ed.-Tertiary ed.	1.913	(1.527, 2.397)	<.001
Frequency of absenteeism	None-One or two	1.826	(1.450, 2.298)	.009
	None-three or more	4.836	(3.515, 6.654)	
	Absenteeism missing indicator	2.778	(1.476, 5.226)	
Hours paid work per week	One to four hours-No paid work	0.794	(0.571, 1.105)	<.001
	Four to eight hours-no paid work	1.499	(1.054, 2.131)	
	More than eight hours-no paid work	2.344	(1.659, 3.313)	
	Paid work missing indicator	2.694	(1.632, 4.450)	
Low reading achievement		4.671	(3.414, 6.391)	<.001
Low mathematics achievement		3.399	(2.606, 4.434)	<.001
Low science achievement		3.906	(2.965, 5.146)	<.001
Occupation	Parental occupation	0.651	(0.580, 0.730)	<.001
	Parental occupation missing indicator	3.242	(1.762, 5.965)	
Material possessions		0.824	(0.735, 0.924)	.001
Home educational resources		0.545	(0.482, 0.617)	<.001
Books in the home		0.577	(0.478, 0.696)	<.001
Cultural capital		0.704	(0.620, 0.800)	<.001

Table 9b shows the odds ratios and significance levels for school-level variable tested separately. Results should be interpreted in the same way as described for Table 9a. School location (population density), ability grouping and academic selectivity are not significant, while sector, size, parental pressure for academic achievement, and school average fee waiver are significant when tested alone. As with the student variables, however, fewer variables retain significance when tested together, i.e., school sector, size, and fee waiver.

The next step in the modelling process was to test all student and school variables simultaneously, and then remove non-significant variables in turn. Once the final variable set was established, tests for the following were conducted:

- Interactions between gender and each other student variable (i.e., whether the processes influencing early school leaving intent differ for boys and girls)
- Tests for curvilinearity for each continuous variable (i.e. whether each is associated with floor or ceiling effects)
- Tests for the significance of random slopes for each student variable (i.e. whether each behaves in the same manner across schools)
- Tests for the significance of interactions between each student and school variable.

Table 9b. Odds ratios and significance tests for each school-level variable tested separately (PISA 2006)

Variable/Comparison		Odds ratio	95% CI of odds ratio	p
Sector	Comm/comp-Secondary	1.524	(0.994,2.336)	<.001
	Vocational-Secondary	2.556	(1.747,3.739)	
Size	Small-Medium	2.272	(1.106,4.668)	<.001
	Large-Medium	0.569	(0.397,0.814)	
Population density of school location	Rural (low)-suburban	0.947	(0.635,1.412)	.133
	City (high)-suburban	0.725	(0.470,1.120)	
Parental pressure for academic achievement	High-Medium	0.667	(0.466,0.954)	<.001
	Low-Medium	1.514	(0.902,2.541)	
Use of ability grouping	No/some classes-All classes	1.665	(0.829,3.342)	.133
	Ability grouping missing indicator	0.865	(0.358,2.091)	
Academic selectivity	Academic record considered-Academic record not considered	0.891	(0.581,1.365)	.593
School average JCE fee waiver		1.644	(1.403,1.927)	<.001

The final model is shown in Table 9c. Considerably fewer variables remain significant when tested simultaneously than when tested separately. These are student gender, low reading achievement, home educational resources, and books in the home; at the school level, fee waiver is the only variable to retain significance. There is, in addition, an interaction between home educational resources and fee waiver. There are no significant gender interactions, indicating that the student variables operate in the

same manner for boys and girls. Nor are there any random slopes associated with the student variables; i.e. the student variables operate in the same manner across schools.

Table 9c. Final (best-fitting) model of student early school leaving intent (PISA 2006)

Variable/Comparison		Odds ratio	95% CI of odds ratio	p
Gender	Female-Male	0.371	(0.263,0.525)	<.001
Low reading achievement		2.993	(2.193,4.087)	<.001
Home educational resources		0.577	(0.501,0.664)	<.001
Books in the home		0.731	(0.617,0.867)	.001
School average JCE fee waiver		1.391	(1.169,1.655)	<.001
Home educational resources*School average fee waiver		1.154	(1.041,1.279)	.007

In summary, the model shows the following:

- Girls are about a third as likely as boys to intend to leave school early.
- Students with low reading achievement are three times more likely to intend to leave school early than students with average or high levels of reading achievement.
- Students with high levels of home educational resources (i.e. one standard deviation above the mean) are about three-fifths as likely to intend to leave school early compared with students with low levels.
- Students with high numbers of books in the home (i.e. one standard deviation above the mean) are about three-quarters as likely to intend to leave school early as students with low numbers of books in the home.
- Students in schools with high JCE fee waiver (i.e. one standard deviation above the mean) are 1.4 times more likely to intend to leave school early than students with a low JCE fee waiver.

It should be noted that this model does not fully account for differences between schools in rates of student early school leaving intent ($\chi^2 = 216.782$; $df = 163$; $p = .003$); in other words, there are characteristics that have not been included in the model that are relevant to explaining the remaining differences in rates of early school leaving intent. It is estimated that the model explains in the region of 17% of the variation in individual student early school leaving intent. In other words, the explanatory power of the model is on the weak side, since the majority of variance in

early school leaving intent is unexplained, and hence due to characteristics not included in the model.²²

To assist in the interpretation of the interaction between home educational resources and fee waiver, odds ratios for various values of home educational resources and fee waiver are shown in Table 10. Not surprisingly, the group at most risk of early school leaving (odds ratio = 2.2) are students with poor home educational resources (one standard deviation below the mean) in schools with high rates of fee waiver (one standard deviation above the mean), and conversely those least at risk have good levels of home educational resources in schools with low rates of fee waiver (odds ratio = 0.4). It is noteworthy that the odds ratios of students in schools with the same (average) fee waiver rates differ substantially depending on the level of educational resources in the home. These are marked in bold in Table 10. Students with high levels of these resources are 0.6 times as likely to intend to leave school early, while those with low levels are 1.7 times as likely to intend to do so.

Table 10. Example odds ratios for interaction between home educational resources and fee waiver (PISA 2006)

Home educational resources	JCE Fee waiver	Odds Ratio
Good	Low	0.448
Good	Average	0.577
Average	Low	0.777
Poor	Low	0.860
Good	High	1.163
Average	High	1.287
Poor	Average	1.734
Poor	High	2.232

Note. Reference group (OR = 1.0) is students with average levels of home educational resources and in schools with average rates of JCE fee waiver.

²² This was estimated in SPSS rather than HLM, and is the Nagelkerke R² statistic.

4.11. Results Section Four: Reasons for Intending to Leave School Early

In PISA 2003, of students expressing intent to leave school early (i.e., 20.9% of the sample)²³, the most commonly cited reasons were wanting to earn their own money (63.8%), wanting to do an apprenticeship (56.9%), not liking school (42.3%), and not doing well at school (29.8%). Less commonly cited reasons were that friends were leaving (16.2%), the school not offering the right course or subjects (14.5%), parents thinking students should leave (8.8%), and teachers thinking students should leave (4.6%). On average, students picked 1.95 reasons. It should be noted that wanting to leave school to do an apprenticeship, if achieved, is a positive outcome, though with the current economic climate, the availability of apprenticeships is severely curtailed.

Table 11 shows the percentages of students intending to leave school early overall and by gender, sector and location in PISA 2003. Results are broadly consistent with the descriptive analyses shown in section 4.9 for PISA 2006. The standard errors and confidence intervals can be used to determine whether the percentages differ across these the sample as a whole compared with the subgroup intending to leave school early.

In brief, Table 11 shows that, in PISA 2003, boys were significantly over-represented in the group intending to leave school early while girls were significantly under-represented; students in secondary schools were significantly under-represented in the early school leaving group, while students in vocational schools were significantly over-represented, and students in community and comprehensive schools are neither under- nor over-represented; finally, there were no significant differences in terms of percentages of the population and percentages of the early school leaving group with respect to school location (population density).

²³ It is important to note that the wording of the questions in 2003 and 2006 were somewhat different so this partly explains why the percentage for 2003 (20.9%) is somewhat higher than for 2006 (10.8%).

Table 11. Percentages of students intending to leave school early by gender, school sector, and school location, compared with percentages of the sample as a whole (PISA 2003)

Females	%	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Share of sample	49.6	0.9	47.8	51.4
Share of those intending to leave school early	33.9	1.5	30.9	36.9
Males	%	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Share of sample	50.4	0.915	48.6	52.2
Share of those intending to leave school early	66.1	1.069	64.0	68.2
Comm/Comp	%	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Share of sample	17.3	0.6	16.1	18.5
Share of those intending to leave school early	19.0	1.8	15.4	22.6
Secondary	%	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Share of sample	61.0	0.5	60.0	62.0
Share of those intending to leave school early	50.5	1.4	47.7	53.2
Vocational	%	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Share of sample	21.7	0.805	20.1	23.3
Share of those intending to leave school early	30.5	1.251	28.1	33.0
Low density (rural)	%	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Share of sample	23.1	3.2	16.7	29.5
Share of those intending to leave school early	27.1	2.0	23.1	31.1
Medium density (suburban)	%	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Share of sample	46.3	4.5	37.4	55.2
Share of those intending to leave school early	48.1	1.4	45.4	50.8
High density (urban)	%	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Share of sample	30.6	3.695	23.4	37.8
Share of those intending to leave school early	24.8	1.596	21.7	27.9

Table A3.2 (Appendix 3) shows the incidence of reasons for intending to drop out by gender. (Again, the standard errors can be used to ascertain whether the differences are statistically significant.) Two significant differences are apparent. Boys more frequently indicated that they wanted to do an apprenticeship (62.9%) than girls (45.3%); boys were also more inclined to indicate that they did not like school (45.8%) than girls (35.5%). Differences in response patterns for the remaining six reasons are not statistically significant.

Table A3.3 shows the same information, this time across school sectors. In general, differences across sectors are not as marked as for gender and none is statistically significant. Table A3.4 shows reasons for intending to leave school early by school

location. Responses are similar across various locations, and again, none is statistically significant.

Another way to examine these data is to identify and combine the most common response sets. A total of 101 response combinations was evident in the data. Analyses suggested the following five categories, which can then be compared across subgroups:

- Wanting to do an apprenticeship and/or work
- Wanting to do an apprenticeship and/or work, and not doing well at school and/or not liking school
- Not doing well at school and/or not liking school
- Peer influences combined with working (apprenticeship) and/or not liking/not doing well in school
- Issues in the availability of subjects or courses.

Table A3.5 (Appendix 3) shows these results overall, and also by gender, school sector, and school location. The most commonly cited reason across the early school leaving group as a whole was the wish to leave to do an apprenticeship or work. Overall, 36.7% of respondents providing one or more reasons indicated this reason. Also, 21.2% of students indicated that they wanted to leave to do an apprenticeship or work *and* indicated that they did not like school and/or were not getting on well in school. About 7% of students indicated *only* not liking and/or not getting on well in school. Peer influences, combined with factors relating to work and/or disengagement from school, were indicated by 4.7% of respondents. A small percentage (2.7%) mentioned a lack of availability of subject or course choice. Finally, given the large number of response combinations, 27.4% of responses were classified as ‘other’.

Figures 3, 4 and 5 shows the results by gender, school sector and school location. The standard errors shown in Table A3.5 can be used to determine whether the percentage of each set of reasons differs significantly across these subgroups.

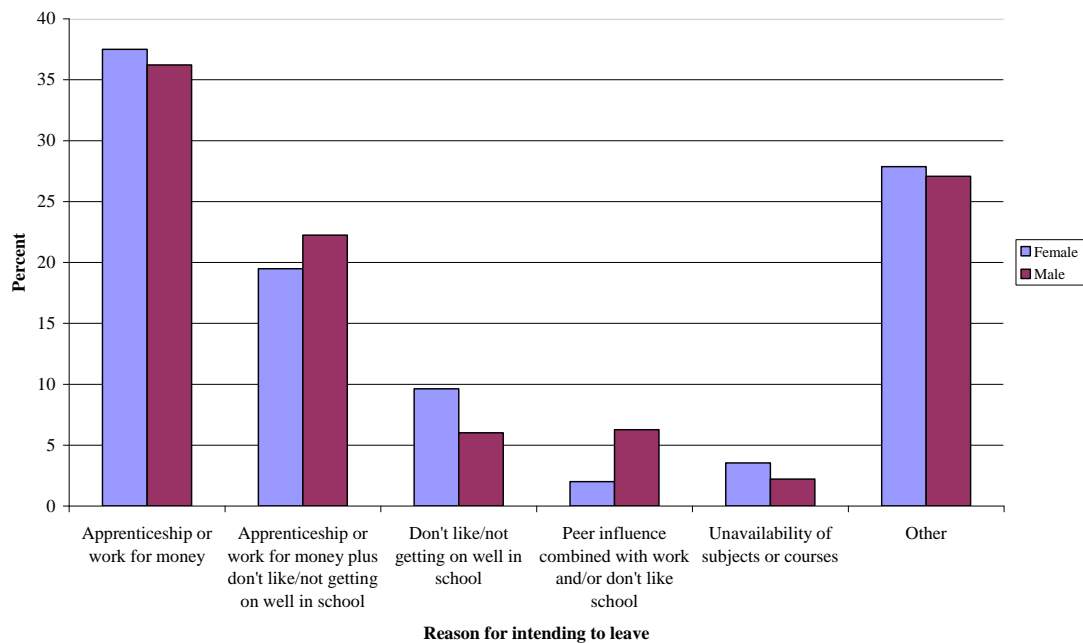


Figure 3. Percentages of students who intend to leave school early citing different sets of reasons, by gender (PISA 2003)

With reference to Figure 3, males were significantly more likely than females to indicate that they wanted to leave school to do apprenticeship or work for money *as well as* didn't like/were not getting on well in school. Males were also significantly more likely to cite peer effects than females. Females on the other hand were significantly more inclined to indicate simply that they did not like school or were not getting on well in school than males. Females also cited unavailability of courses or subjects significantly more frequently than males.

Turning now to Figure 4 (Table A3.5), students in vocational schools were significantly more likely than those in secondary schools, but not community/comprehensive schools, to indicate that they wanted to leave school to do an apprenticeship or earn money. Also, students in vocational schools were significantly more likely to indicate peer influences relative to both secondary and community/comprehensive schools. Finally, students in vocational schools were significantly less likely than students in the other two sectors to indicate unavailability of subjects or courses.

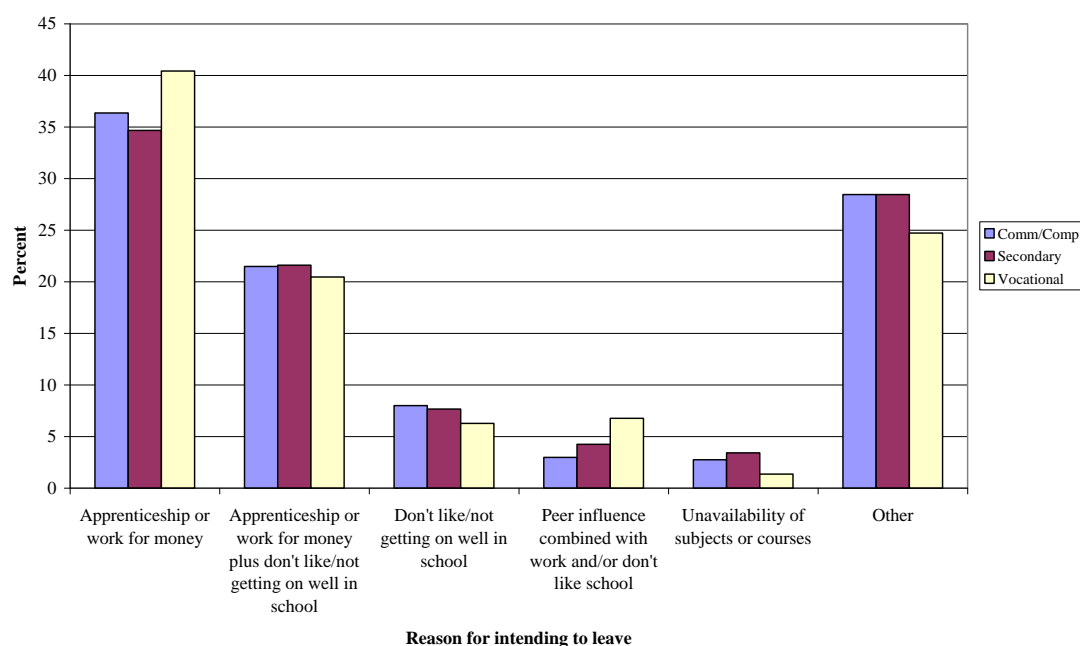


Figure 4. Percentages of students who intend to leave school early citing different sets of reasons, by school sector (PISA 2003)

Figure 5 (Table A3.5) shows first, that students in urban areas were more likely than those in both rural and suburban areas to indicate that they wanted to leave school to do an apprenticeship or earn their own money. Students in suburban areas indicated significantly less frequently than those in both urban and rural areas that they did not like school or were not getting on well in school. Peer influences in suburban areas were significantly more widespread compared to both urban and rural areas.

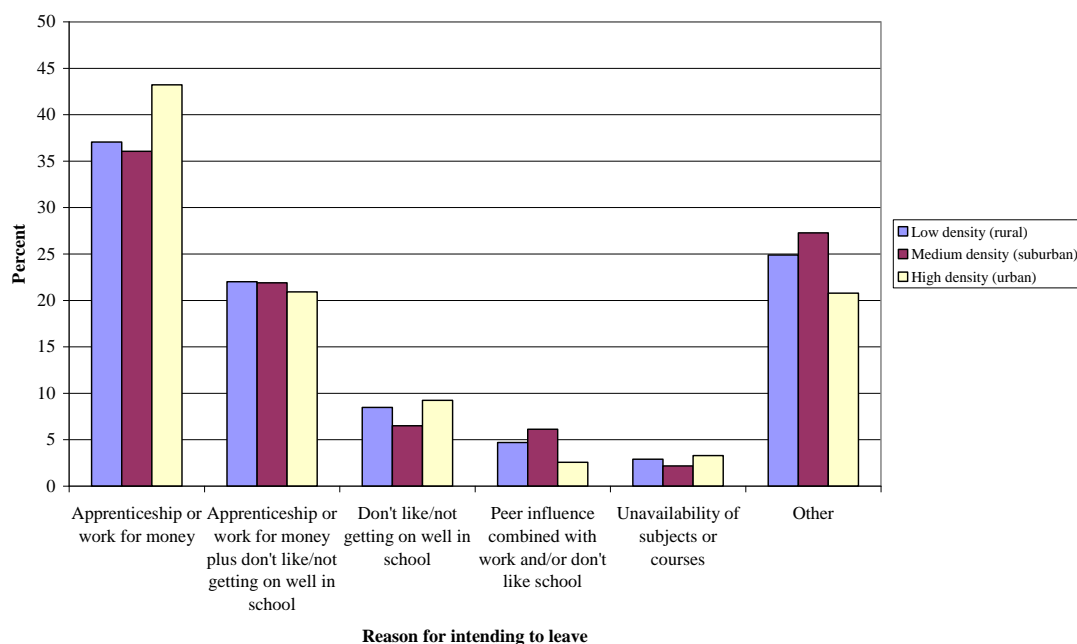


Figure 5. Percentages of students who intend to leave school early citing different sets of reasons, by school location (PISA 2003)

4.12. Summary and Conclusions

4.12.1. Summary

The results of three sets of analyses were presented in this chapter. These are school characteristics associated with retention rates, school and student characteristics associated with students' intent to leave school early, and reasons given by students for wanting to leave school.

School retention rates were examined in the context of information collected in the OECD PISA study, implemented in 2006. Multiple linear regressions were used to examine whether retention rates varied by school sector, size, location (in terms of population density), parental pressure for academic achievement, use of ability grouping, academic selectivity at intake, and the proportion of students in the school entitled to a Junior Certificate fee waiver. We examined retention rates at both Junior and Leaving Certificate levels.

The model for Leaving Certificate retention has good explanatory power, accounting for 60% of the variance in retention rates. The model for Junior Certificate retention

explained 44% of the variance. The characteristics associated with retention in the final models of Junior and Leaving Certificate levels were very similar, i.e. school sector (lower rates in vocational and to a lesser extent community/comprehensive schools compared to secondary schools, whether single or mixed sex), location (lower rates in cities compared to suburban and rural areas, for the Leaving Certificate mode only), and fee waiver (lower retention rates were associated with higher rates of fee waiver).

An interaction between location and fee waiver was found in both models and indicates that retention rates in rural schools did not change with increasing rates of fee waiver, whereas increasing rates of fee waiver were associated with similar rates of decline in retention rates in both urban and suburban schools.

A comparison of the Junior and Leaving Certificate models also indicated that the effects of the variables on retention rates were larger at Leaving Certificate level.

The second set of analyses examined characteristics associated with student early school leaving intent among third years, initially one variable at a time, and then within a logistic multilevel regression model that permitted the estimation of the simultaneous effects of several school and student variables.

The final model contained relatively few variables and many identified in the literature review, such as participation in paid work and high absenteeism, did not remain significant and so were excluded. This may be due to the fact that the model included measures of home educational climate not previously available in analyses of student early school leaving intent.

The final model included gender, home educational resources, books in the home, reading achievement, and school average fee waiver for the Junior Certificate (a close proxy for medical card entitlement). Its explanatory power, at around 17%, is fair.

Results were reported in terms of odds ratios. The model indicated that boys were about three times more likely to intend to leave school early than girls; students with low achievement were three times more likely to intend to leave school early than

students with higher levels of achievement; low levels of home educational resources and higher numbers of books at home were associated with a higher likelihood of early school leaving intent; and students in schools with high fee waiver (i.e. one standard deviation above the mean) were 1.4 times more likely to intend to leave school early than students in schools with low rates of fee waiver.

Hence, results confirmed the presence of a social context effect, whereby early school leaving intent was more likely as concentrations of low-income families increased. Furthermore, many school variables, including location and sector, were not significant when all characteristics were considered together. Results also indicated that there were no gender interactions, meaning that low achievement, home educational resources and books at home predicted early school leaving intent in the same manner for boys and girls. However, an interaction between home educational resources and fee waiver was found. This suggests that homes where parents were able to provide higher levels of home educational resources might be operating in a protective manner against student early school leaving intent in schools where fee waiver rates are high (i.e. with higher concentrations of students from low-income families).

The third set of analyses drew on information gathered in PISA 2003 and examined reasons for wanting to leave early for the group intending to as a whole, as well as by gender, school sector, and school location. Consistent with the model of early school leaving intent based on the PISA 2006 dataset, some sub-groups were over-represented in the students who intended to leave early in 2003, namely boys and students in vocational schools.

Results indicated that the most frequently cited reasons for students' wanting to leave school were to do an apprenticeship, to earn their own money, not liking school, and not doing well at school. Fewer students, although still a substantial minority, indicated the following reasons for wanting to leave school: teachers or parents wanting them to leave, their friends leaving, and the school not offering the right course or subjects for them.

The combinations of reasons for wanting to leave school early were analysed and five combinations of responses were identified:

1. for work or apprenticeship reasons (37% of respondents intending to leave school early)
2. for work/apprenticeship reasons and not liking/not doing well in school (21%)
3. not liking/not doing well in school (7%)
4. peer influences combined with work reasons and/or not liking school (5%)
5. limitations regarding subject or course choice (3%).

(The remaining 27% of responses did not readily fall into the five categories.)

There were some differences by student gender, school sector and location in reasons given, but overall, the differences were not as marked as one might expect.

As examples, males were significantly more likely than females to indicate that they wanted to leave school to do apprenticeship or work for money *as well as* didn't like/were not getting on well in school, and they were also significantly more likely to cite peer effects. Females were significantly more likely to indicate simply that they did not like school or were not getting on well in school than males. Students in vocational schools were significantly more likely than those in secondary schools, but not community/comprehensive schools, to indicate that they wanted to leave school to do an apprenticeship or earn money; also, students in vocational schools were significantly more likely to indicate peer influences compared to both secondary and community/comprehensive schools. Students in urban areas were more likely than those in both rural and suburban areas to indicate that they wanted to leave school to do an apprenticeship or earn their own money.

4.12.2. Conclusions

Variations in school-level retention rates at both Junior and Leaving Certificate level were largely accounted for by school sector, location (population density), and fee waiver for the Junior Certificate. Similar to Smyth (1999), retention rates varied significantly by sector even after differences in the socioeconomic composition of schools are taken into account. However, it should be noted that the fee waiver measure, which is analogous to medical card entitlement, does not fully capture socioeconomic characteristics.

In both models, it was found that fee waiver was unrelated to retention rates in rural schools but not schools in cities or suburban areas. This finding confirms the observation made previously that the impact on poverty/deprivation in rural areas is different than in urban areas (e.g., Weir & Archer, 2005). Weir, Archer and Millar (2009) have compared urban-rural differences in achievement in primary schools in DEIS, and how these relate to socioeconomic contexts, school size, and various other relevant characteristics. Two of their conclusions are of note with respect to the rural-urban differences reported in this chapter. First, they comment that the ‘relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and pupil achievement is quantitatively and qualitatively different in rural and urban areas [at primary level]’ (p. 3) and second, the findings do ‘not yet represent an adequate basis for policy decisions, including those about the allocation of resources’ (p. 3). Findings here suggest that this issue needs to be examined at post-primary level also.

Furthermore, the effects of sector, fee waiver, and location were all larger in the model of Leaving Certificate retention compared with the Junior Certificate. This may be indicative of a magnification of differential educational outcomes (i.e. retention rates) as one progresses further up the system, but it is not possible to conclude why this might be so or how it operates. Essentially, the analyses of school retention rates serve merely to confirm that they are associated with social inequality and sectoral differences (again, we cannot infer from the model what the differences are), whose impact appears weaker in rural areas.

The final model of student early school leaving intent only included one school-level variable, i.e. fee waiver. At the student level, many of the variables identified as important in the literature review, such as parental education and occupation, absenteeism, engaging in paid work, are not significant. The student-level variables that remained were student gender, reading achievement, home educational resources, and books in the home.

The main conclusions that can be drawn from these findings are that economic deprivation impacts on early school leaving (i.e. the reproduction of social inequalities is confirmed), and also that a positive and supportive home educational environment,

rather than measures of parental income or education, may be a key factor in protecting against early school leaving. This aspect of home environment mediates the effects of other variables such as student absenteeism and doing paid work. It also accounts for the differences between school sector and size. In policy terms, this finding suggests that students who do not enjoy supportive home environments need to receive additional appropriate support from an early age to engage them with their education and learning. If they are to achieve the same potential as their more advantaged peers, support for their parents is also needed.

The final model of early school leaving intent also showed that boys are three times more likely to intend to leave school early. An examination of the reasons that students gave for wanting to leave school early showed that boys were more likely to cite apprenticeships, not liking school, and peer effects than girls. From the literature review (e.g., Smyth et al., 2004, 2006, 2007; see also Chapter 2 of this report), we are aware of a gender difference whereby boys disengage more from schooling than girls, and this is mediated in some cases by school processes, e.g. streaming practices.

Indeed the disengagement effect further magnifies social inequalities since students of a lower socioeconomic status are over-represented in the ‘bottom’ stream. It is also an example of a practice that discriminates against boys more than girls, since streaming is more common in schools attended by boys. Also, that the observed gender difference in early school leaving intent is largely unrelated to the other characteristics considered suggests that this issue needs to be understood better by drawing on information in Phase 2 and 3 and the material reviewed in Chapter 2. The analyses of reasons for wanting to leave school early did reveal some differences by gender, sector and location, but these are not sufficient to explain the disproportionate numbers of boys relative to girls that leave school prior to the Leaving Certificate. For example, similar percentages of boys and girls cited wanting to do an apprenticeship or work and/or not liking or doing well in school. Boys cited peer influences somewhat more frequently than girls but again this is not sufficient to explain the gender gap in early school leaving.

While the findings regarding socioeconomic characteristics are not new, two new key insights have been shown in this chapter. First, the importance of a supportive home

educational climate is underlined as a factor protecting against early school leaving. Second, the differential impact of socioeconomic background in rural and urban contexts indicates a need to examine why this is occurring.

On a final note, readers are reminded that many potentially relevant school and student characteristics were not included in the analyses presented in this chapter. Also, some of the student population (low attenders generally) are likely to have been absent on the day of the assessment; others (students with special educational needs and students with less than one year of instruction in the language of the assessment) are exempt from participating and so are not represented in the results.

4.12.3. Key Areas for Further Research Raised in Chapter 4

These findings suggest several key areas that merit further research:

- The need to search outside these empirical analyses to gain a better understanding of the educational outcomes of students with special educational needs, low attenders, newcomer students, young Travellers, and young people who are outside the mainstream education system.
- The need to gain a better understanding as to why boys more frequently disengage from the education system than girls, i.e. the need to examine the issue as a systemic rather than an individual problem.
- The need to gain a deeper understanding of what quantitative indicators of home environment are actually measuring.
- The need to gain a better understanding of the differential impacts of poverty on educational outcomes of post-primary schools in urban and rural settings.

Chapter 5: Phase 2 Results: Themes Arising from Interviews

5.1. Introduction

This chapter contains a summary of comments and suggestions arising from the seven groups that were interviewed during Phase 2.

The groups are:

- Parents of early school leavers
- Young Travellers
- Individuals recovering from heroin addiction
- Young lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered individuals
- Young people with special educational needs
- Young women who experienced rape or sexual assault
- Young men and women in prison.

In some cases focus groups were conducted; in others, individual interviews.

Decisions as to which format to use were guided by discussions with the people who have helped us to convene the interviews (Appendix 4) as well as time constraints.

The conclusions focus on themes and issues that add to the information presented in Chapter 4.

5.2. Participants and Interview Methods

Interviews were conducted during May to early July, 2009. Table 12 shows details of the participants, dates, and interview method used. In total, 41 individuals participated. In the case of focus groups, tailored interview schedules were used (Appendix 5). For individual interviews, these were guided by an interview schedule, but were semi-structured in format, so as to allow participants as much freedom as possible to identify themes and issues (Appendix 6). The content of the interview schedule was guided by the work of Finn (2001), Malone (2003) and Stokes (2003), along with the main findings of the literature review (in Chapter 2).

Focus groups and individual interviews ranged from about 30 to 90 minutes.

As soon as possible after the interview, notes were compiled. The audio files were subsequently transcribed verbatim. Manual content analysis was applied, since the material was deemed too complex to be subjected to automated (software) analysis. The files were gone through several times, iteratively building on a set of key themes that appeared to the authors to represent a comprehensive and coherent set. It is possible, as with any qualitative social research, that different researchers would have established a somewhat different set of themes and this should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

Table 12. Details of Phase 2 interview participants

Group	Interview	Location	Method	Age(s)	Date
Parents	Seven mothers and two daughters	Galway	Focus group	Mothers mainly in their 40s, daughters in their early 20s	01/05/2009
Travellers	Six boys and four girls	Tuam	Focus groups, males and females separately	Age range 17-20	01/04/2009
Recovering heroin users	Four women and one man	Neilstown, Dublin	Individual	Age range 30-50	01/05/2009
LGBT Youth	Six men and three women	Central Dublin	Focus group	Age range 18-21	01/06/2009
Women Experiencing Rape	Two women	Mayo, Galway	Individual, by phone	Early 20s	17/06/2009 and 02/07/2009
Individuals with SEN	One man and one woman	Kildare	Individual	Early 20s	01/06/2009
Individuals in prison	Two men and two women	Mountjoy, Dublin	Individual	Age range mid-20s to mid-30s	01/06/2009

As with any social survey interview, participants were first fully briefed on the nature and aims of the study. They were encouraged to voice their experiences and opinions freely. They were asked permission by the interviewers to use excerpts of the interviews for illustrative purposes in this report. They were informed that all identifying information would be removed prior to including the excerpts in the report. Following the interview, they were asked for feedback on their experiences of the interview. They were supplied with contact details in case they had any follow-up comments, questions or concerns. In all cases, participants regarded the experience as positive, although it is clear from some of the participants, particularly those

describing traumatic experiences in their lives, that they put considerable emotional investment into the process.

5.3. Strengths and Limitations of the Analyses

A major strength of the results presented in this chapter is that they paint a subtle, nuanced picture of the lives of individuals, allowing for a deeper understanding of issues that is not possible to glean from empirical data. Second, the participants, although by no means representing all the relevant groups, allow us to probe a wider range of issues than is possible with the analyses presented in Chapter 4. Third, the participants have varied life experiences and come from various sectors of society.

It should be noted, however, that a relatively small number of individuals took part in these interviews on the basis of assistance with members of the Expert Group (and, in the case of the LGBT group, BelongTo), so caution should be exercised in the extent to which their views and comments are generalisable. That is, it is not possible to use this information to quantify needs and target supports. Rather, the information is intended to identify needs and suggest supports. Furthermore, not all of the participants interviewed left school early. Specifically, not all of the parents we interviewed had left school early, but in all cases, they had a child who had left school early or who, they felt, was at risk of early school leaving. Also, the LGBT group did not generally consist of early school leavers, but it was nonetheless felt important to include this group on the basis of research reviewed in Chapter 3 in that bullying, frequent absenteeism and early school leaving by some were attributed directly to an LGBT identity. It should be borne in mind that comments on their own schooling by respondents of a slightly older age may not be of as much relevance as comments from younger participants. Finally, this chapter does not cover the views of teaching staff. However, Chapter 6 includes commentary from written submissions provided by a number of teaching unions and other education partners such as the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA).

5.4. Main Themes

In conducting the interviews, considerable overlap in the themes and issues emerging across groups. This section considers results by theme, rather than group, under two broad headings: school-based issues and broader issues. These two headings intersect

somewhat, but this classification is intended to be useful for policy purposes (as is followed up in Chapter 7). Themes and sub-themes are included here on the basis of being discussed by two or more individuals or groups, and in the case of some themes, these were mentioned by all or nearly all individuals or groups.

School-based themes identified are as follows:

- School management and structure
- Transition from primary to post-primary
- Curriculum, teaching and assessment
- Teachers' needs and further professional development requirements
- Discipline
- Inclusivity
- Special educational needs
- School climate and staff expectations
- School and work.

Broader themes identified are:

- Counselling and support for students
- Trauma and addiction
- Family support

We suggest that a consideration of the processes of *interaction* and *transition* are important in reflecting on the results. These can represent critical periods in the life of an individual: for example, the interaction of an individual with his or her local community, of the parent with school staff; the transition from primary to post-primary or from formal (mainstream) education to non-mainstream education (e.g. from post-primary to Youthreach).

5.5. School-Based Themes

5.5.1. School Management and Structure

This section considers a couple of the issues made by participants regarding the management and structure of the education system in general. However, there is no evidence that these suggested changes might serve to reduce early school leaving.

A number of participants were in favour of having mixed-sex schools, though views at what stage mixed-sex schools should be implemented differed. For example, some wanted mixed-sex schooling the whole way through; others wanted mixed-sex schooling introduced at an older age. One young Traveller woman commented:

There was no boys in primary as well (laughter) ... obviously it was all girls.

Would you prefer a mixed school where you had boys and girls?

Yeah.

At primary and secondary or just primary?

Secondary.

Why is that now?

Because obviously in primary you're very childish like but in secondary you're older and wiser.... And more feelings of a personal nature. Like not saying boyfriend girlfriend, saying friends. Like used to talking to a boy or whatever.

Some participants, notably the LGBT youth, were not in favour of denominational schools. It should be noted that this theme is unique to the interview participants and not prominent in other parts of this report. They were of the view that that type of management was at odds with the diverse reality of contemporary Ireland.²⁴ One young gay man commented:

I think the idea of denominational schools needs to go because there is such a wide variety anyway, and this is just a basic reason, but because we are getting Polish people and Czech people, Chinese people we need to have schools that are non-denominational...

Another young man (also gay) was of the view that schools had no role in the religious upbringing of children:

That is the responsibility of the parent. That is not the responsibility of the school. ... if we don't stop it now and say religion is for church and it's for home and it's for families who believe in that and want to carry those traditions with them and whatever and school is for educational purposes where you can learn things that you need to learn to (a) get a good job and (b) survive in the real world and if you were to do that and make that the basis of the education system in Ireland I think you would

²⁴ This theme underlines a shortcoming of Phase 2, i.e. the fact that newcomers were not interviewed.

get a lot more stable and happy people coming out of the education system and you will have less school leavers.

5.5.2. Transition from Primary to Post-Primary

Generally speaking, respondents reported that little preparation or support was provided to first years to help support them beginning secondary school. Enhanced induction process for all first years and more preparation in sixth class were suggested to smooth this transition. The interviews, however, did not provide direct evidence that the transition process led to leaving school early. One woman in her early 20s discussed this:

There was just that [an induction day]. Nothing else like that in the school no.

Do you think that was sufficient for you?

Well it would have been helpful if you were shown around a bit better it was just kind of fairly fast ran through.

Comments on the change in structure of school and the pressure that brought such as the following from one of the mothers were relatively common:

... the amount of books the amount of things they have to remember when they start. I mean they are actually going from one teacher to whatever, four, five, six teachers whatever it is. And they have to have their books for every class, they have to have their locker, they have to remember to go and bring their books and remember to bring their books home too to do their homework. I mean some of these kids are only 12 and it's a lot of pressure.

It was suggested that transition from primary to secondary could be improved if pupils had more responsibility in sixth class and/or less responsibility (or an induction period) in first year. It was also felt that better preparation for secondary school is needed while still at primary. The group of mothers discussed this, pointing out that the ages of 10 and 11 were critical for their children, at the time when puberty began. They spoke about the difficulty in the transition process to secondary, coupled with the changes going on within the children themselves. They observed that it was a challenge for both parents and their children. For example, one commented:

I think certainly to prepare them more for going into secondary school for that transition because it is huge.... Certainly in sixth class. ... I think from that age, because their hormones are changing and all that.

5.5.3. Curriculum, Teaching and Assessment

This section considers comments made by participants regarding their views on the curriculum, assessment and on their experiences of teaching more generally.

Many participants were of the opinion that the curriculum needs to be rebalanced to include more practical subjects, and skills directly relevant to everyday life. For example, when asked how school might be improved, one woman in her early 20s commented:

Probably to try and divide up school, not have it all in books. Have a bit of a practical side and have life skills as well for when you go out working. ...like what you need in general life like. To get through every day not all in books and learning and remembering stuff.

And another participant (male, early 20s) commented, somewhat tongue-in-cheek:

I mean there is nothing in school that teaches you about real life, like you are never going to use a quadratic equation walking down the street.

One young Traveller woman (18) commented (again, somewhat tongue-in-cheek) about the irrelevance of foreign languages to her own situation:

Did you not want to learn French?

No. Sure what would I be doing going over to France?

Some participants were critical of the way in which Religion was taught and were in favour of a more diverse approach to this subject. One young man (aged 20) commented:

... I think everyone has an experience in religion class where they talk about issues, like world issues and things like that and they often come up in religion books but they are so salted with religious propaganda, if you will, I think it needs to be ridded of that because that leads way to a lot more open-mindedness and I think religious teachers need to be not religious. Almost like theologians or something like that as in opening your mind and teaching about the world.

Some participants also spoke of the importance of SPHE and were of the view that it should be promoted and standardized more. For example, one female participant

(aged 19) commented:

The problem with SPHE is each school can edit it. So they can decide what they want to teach or not. It would definitely need to be like a set course.

Many of the participants spoke of the negative aspects of an examination-driven system. One mother (early 40s) commented in the context of the transition from primary to post-primary:

I think the secondary school curriculum is very exam orientated also. So he [Son] doesn't have the time to give to the personal stuff, it's pressure, pressure, pressure.

Comments on the examination-driven system frequently emerged in comparisons of Youthreach and mainstream school. For example, one mother (late 30s) commented on the merits of continuous assessment:

There's an awful lot of pressure on kids in secondary education as well. I think there is huge pressure on them. And like even with Youthreach [they] judge them over the three years rather than a test at the end. I think that why he [Son] is finding it more enjoyable, Youthreach, they are judging him on what he is doing over the three years rather than what he is just writing on a bit of paper at the end of the year like other kids that are still in school.

The Youthreach model was perceived in positive terms by all participants that had experienced it. For example, one mother commented, when asked about Youthreach:

Right, your boy is in Youthreach?

He is yes, he is very happy.

Does he have plans?

He wants to go to college. He wants to go into carpentry, he loves doing things with his hands. In Youthreach they ask you what do you enjoy and they are focusing on [Name] with Youth Reach. [Name] has come home and he has made drawers, he has made shelves, cabinets, because they have asked him what does he enjoy doing what is his interests what does he hope to do.

Regarding in-house assessments, one participant suggested that there needed to be better co-ordination across subject departments so that students are not overloaded with multiple tests on particular days.

A number of comments were made regarding the influence that an individual teacher can have in the life of a young person. A number of participants mentioned individual teachers as having had a significant and positive influence on their lives. One man (in his mid-20s) serving a prison sentence and expressing a strong determination to turn his life around commented:

Oh yeah, like I still remember some of things he [Teacher] said to me over the years. A lot of people that I am after meeting in here from our old area they were all thrown [out]. There was one or two that was thrown out of primary school and I could have been like them. I was never in [Detention Centre Name] because I didn't start getting locked up until I was 18 or 19 but fellas that I grew up and lived around the estate with, they got thrown out of primary school and they were in [Detention Centre Name] from the age of 16 and 17. I still say that it's down to [Teacher Name] that I wasn't locked up so early because of him.

A young Traveller man (aged 19) recalled specific teaching methods of a science teacher that he liked:

If we were learning about electricity and stuff he'd make us into a chain... he wouldn't just do it out of books he'd do everything, you know?

In the focus group with LGBT youth, two contrasting pictures of teachers emerged. One was characterised by warmth and a caring, approachable attitude, while another was depicted as a more restricted and 'cold' role. Again this is indicative of the importance of the teacher's own perception of his or her role and how this interacts with individual students to serve to engage or disengage them:

Well in my school ... everyone really liked the teachers and the teachers were really friendly and you could talk to them about anything!

....

Generally the group of teachers that are unapproachable take the kind of stance that OK they are there to teach not to interact with the students not to be their counsellors and whatever. Most of the teachers don't have that outlook, some do, so that's kind of what makes them unapproachable sometimes. They seem kind of cold towards the students.

Some of the participants mentioned ability grouping, generally in negative terms. One mother (in her 40s) described an incident that illustrates how messages of low expectations can be transmitted to students in the 'bottom' class. This woman was against ability grouping because she felt it made those in the lower streams feel inferior to other students:

Now I have a son in [School Name] and I had a row, well not a row a debate with one of the teachers. I brought it up, not only me a few other parents. My son is in a lower grade [lower ability class]. He is in first year.... He is doing excellent.... But there was a trip organised for all the first year classes to go to see either UCD or Trinity and one of the teachers made a comment that there is no point in bringing that grade [class] because they are never going to go to college. So me and the parents kicked up and went up so therefore they brought them two weeks ago to an IT college up in [Place Name].

Were you happy with that?

Oh no I was disgusted. I was disgusted that that teacher had made that remark and they knew straight away they were in the wrong.

Had the plan originally been to have all of the classes go to the universities?

No they hadn't all been arranged, only all the other first years bar the class my son is in, bar that grade.

Do you feel your son is in the right class for him?

I feel he is in the right class for his capabilities but I don't think they should be graded [grouped] the way they are. I don't think they should put all kids that are say struggling with some subjects all together in the one class. I think then they realise then that they are all the same and then there are people that are a lot brighter than them in other levels so that's where it is again, that I don't agree with at all.

Some participants felt that being educated in a democratic and interactive manner rather than being told what to do is much better, particularly if they also tended to be rebellious and disruptive. This theme emerged particularly in comparisons of mainstream schooling and other educational settings. For example, one man in his mid-20s serving a prison sentence who described himself as having a problem with authority figures commented in response to the following question:

And what's the most important thing you have learned from the prison school?

That they talk to you, they don't talk down to you, they talk to you, they have respect for you. The teacher I have up there [Teacher Name], the English teacher, she is a great teacher. She actually sat down with us and asked us what we wanted to do for our Leaving Cert whereas in school she even told us when she was a teacher she used to have to tell, say she had 30 pupils, she would say to them, 'We are doing this poem and we are doing this film', up there she asked us what we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it.

One man (20) described how the combination of a didactic teaching style coupled with the style of the textbook acted material acted as a strong disincentive for his learning:

Yeah, just if you get, you know the way, you look at a Geography book and you get everything and it shows all arrows and everything; that does my head in so it does.

Does it?

Yeah, if you get it showed like in an easier way, if you get it done in an exciting way that a student wants to learn... she [Teacher] used to get us to underline everything like and going back, if I see something underlined like that ... you could look at the book and say 'Oh, I am going to be here for ages' but if ... you could show one thing then and then show another thing instead of a whole load of things in one go. If it was done in sections it would be a lot easier I think.

Some of the participants, notably the Traveller men and women, expressed a desire to be more physically active. One woman from this group commented:

[Did not like] Waiting in the classroom... do you know like... I'm kind of like the person that likes to move around and having to sit still was annoying, you know.

Similarly, one of the men commented:

There was only one sports day a week and if it was raining you'd miss it and the teachers wouldn't bring it back.

5.5.4. Teachers' Needs and Further Professional Development Requirements

This section considers a number of comments made by participants on the needs of teachers, particularly as they relate to professional development.

Participants clearly recognized the pressure that teachers were under. For example, one young Traveller man (19) commented:

Teachers put up with an awful lot though don't they?

A few participants were of the view that class sizes were too big for teachers to manage effectively and that this was affecting children's learning. One woman in her 30s spoke about this, emphasising the need for smaller class sizes in primary school in particular:

They are putting too much pressure on the teachers to get around to all the kids ... I don't think she's going to get around 30 something kids.

What do you think a perfect class size is?

10, that's me.

Do you think that's right across the board like going into secondary school?

No, I would say mostly in primary.

Participants commented on the need for teachers to be supported by non-teaching staff. One woman, who described her behaviour in secondary school as disruptive (due to a bereavement and alcoholism in the home) commented:

Like I understand I was very distractive for them, but like then again, maybe the teachers need support themselves and be able to refer me to the likes of a guidance counsellor in the school, so that they can carry on teaching the other children.

Many participants said that they thought that teachers needed more professional development to observe and question behaviour of children. One mother commented:

I think that it would be definitely need more training there in place even to pinpoint what if just because if somebody say is acting up in class it could be another underlying problem Or to be able to say pull them aside and know the right way, if there was more training in place to be able to ... just know that there is something else wrong with this student.

The need for this type of observational skill coupled with active intervention is pointed to in one young woman's case. She was raped at the age of 15 (and was 22 at the time of the interview) and was bullied and excluded by people in the school as a result. Asked whether the staff did anything, she commented:

I don't think my principal or any of the teachers were like it was nearly you felt as if you deserved it or something or you know it was I don't know there was definitely they didn't have a clue how to deal with bullying either. If they couldn't have seen it for themselves like for me to actually you know take it for so long to actually have to go and tell somebody. That they don't actually see what is going on in classrooms, they didn't have a clue and I don't think they dealt with it at all correctly.

Many other participants wanted more education/professional development for teachers to identify and deal with bullying, and professional development supports that would help teachers in tackling sensitive issues. For example, one participant in the LGBT group commented:

If the teachers were trained to deal with homosexual bullying or homophobia. Like half the time probably one of the problems is they don't know how to deal with it when it occurs like some people might sit down with them but a lot of them wouldn't and they need to be able to deal with this. ...and make sure that they are open-minded about it themselves because it's going to get worse if someone hears a teacher mouthing off about it. If they feel that way they shouldn't be teaching kids.

One 20-year-old man who described himself as being very disruptive in school was asked whether teachers needed particular skills or training. He responded:

Yeah definitely because like we are not there for no reason like, they might be getting paid for it, they might think it's a job and I am going in just to do this but like they're there to make our lives better as well. I know we can that we are not there to make their lives a misery but like they should be trained not to make us make their lives a misery.

The type of teacher education/professional development was clearly articulated by one young woman (aged 19). Her comments also highlight one of the 'at-risk' groups – those who withdraw:

Do you have any particular areas of [teacher] training that you would suggest?

I think more like a youth worker kind of training. That they need to have some sort of, that sort of model done with them. Because they are dealing, I mean I know a lot, I've heard a lot of stories and I've seen it a lot that teachers think they are just there to teach. But for a lot of young people they are the only people that they see. I was never in a youth group when I was in primary or secondary so the only adults that I saw were my teachers and my parents. I couldn't talk to either group. I never felt like I could talk to anybody. I was bullied in primary school and bullied through isolation in secondary school and I went the entire time I never talked to anybody. I

couldn't talk to anybody. Now they did pick me out for bad grades and they asked me occasionally was I OK but it was never anything that helped. So I think that sort of training does need to be done. Picking up on things, symptoms that kids show. Definitely there needs to be a caring kind of role because there are some teachers that fall into it naturally but it is not nearly enough.

Finally, a theme of 'not being listened to' came out quite strongly. This had, for many students, an effect of disengagement, and again suggests the need to provide more educational supports to teachers to listen, observe and question behaviour. For example, one male participant (early 20s) commented in response to a question about positive and negative experiences in post-primary school:

[A negative aspect of school was] Lack of respect from the teachers. That's something that spans across all age groups. Teachers just, they are there to do a job but you know!

How does that translate into your not getting a positive experience?

I used to hate PE with a passion, I hated it, I just despised it and it really actually stressed me out physically, mentally I would actually have panic attacks every time I walked into that building. I tried to tell my teachers about it and they just wouldn't listen at all.

5.5.5. Constructive Discipline Approaches

Authoritarian discipline was seen to be a factor in losing students' interest and motivation. One of the Traveller men put this well when he said:

Some teachers think that by shouting at a student that they'll get through but when they're nicer to the student when they talk to them normal that's when you start getting things done faster.

It was felt at times that the punishment did not fit the crime. One mother (late 30s) commented on the unintentional effect that even negative attention can have on students' behaviour:

I have a son that was rocking on the chair as well when he was in third class, he is now in fourth, he actually fell back of the chair. Now rather than giving out to him the teacher just laughed. And see, he never done it again. If he was given out to, and checked off and in trouble I'd say it would keep happening. ... The more you give them that attention the more they are going to play up.

Sending students home for relatively minor breaches of discipline was mentioned by a number of participants and felt to be unfair and ineffective. For example one young man (19) commented:

If you had a genuine reasons like your uniform was in the wash and came in one day wearing your uniform top with a different pants he'd [Teacher] send you home for the day. And they wouldn't let you come back without your uniform.

A common observation made was that sanctions for certain behaviours were both inappropriate and ineffective. One woman (in her late 30s) commented, with respect to her son's school:

... they're so strict about the stupidest things in school. Like [Son's Name] has been sent home and put out for a week for not having his tie on. ... and then in his school, like if you don't have a tie on or if you don't have your shoes shined, you're fined €2. That's only breaking my pocket. ... And the effects of that, I don't understand. Because the child is just going to say, 'Well, me Mam's going to pay it.'

What would you do if you were making school rules...?

Certainly wouldn't ask them for money. I would encourage them that it's best, like as I said to them, if you work, you're going to have to have a uniform. ... There's always a code of dress in certain jobs. So this is your code of dress for school.

5.5.6. Inclusivity

This section draws on comments made by participants about feeling part of the school community, or outside of it. In contrasting these two view points, the importance of an overall inclusive school environment is evident. For example, one young gay man who had a positive experience in being out at school described his experience as follows, and his comments illustrate the positive impact of an inclusive and caring school environment:

I was really quiet and when I came out, I don't know why but I was just sort of in with the popular gang. I don't know why the girls really embraced gayness and the teachers, the guidance counsellor especially, I think she was a lesbian herself, she always discussed it openly like engaged that sort of thing like. There just wasn't an awful lot of prejudice in there, it was sort of unexpected. Before I came out I was terrified. ... I was out when I started in first year I never hid it like and it was grand it was sort of embraced nearly do you know that was because there was a lot of foreign nationals and a few Travellers in my school it ... had all kinds of everyone in it.

The more common experiences of LGBT youth were, however, to hear nothing about lesbian or gay issues at school. One young woman commented:

They should talk more about homosexuality. I knew almost literally nothing about homosexuality when I was in secondary school so when I did like a girl next to the class I didn't know what it was I just thought I really liked her because she was a really cool person. I did not know anything until literally I had left school. So if they brought that in. But I didn't know if they just didn't have it in because they were Catholic nun's school but literally I did not hear one word about homosexuality.

The importance of providing a language and a context in which to be able to discuss and understand sexuality is revealed in this same young woman's experiences during secondary school and after:

I knew the woman [student in her school] was gay but I didn't know what gay was and it was the same with one of the girls next to [me in] my class. I fancied her but I didn't know I fancied her ...I just thought she was a really good person or whatever. But I knew when I was in [Name of Gay Bar] I saw that girl there and I thought oh my god you are gay and I was like [Name] what are you doing here and then she told me that that she was gay too.

For many of the individuals in the LGBT group, feeling different resulted in them withdrawing themselves, particularly when homophobic attitudes and bullying were a problem in the school. There was also evidence of negative stereotyping of lesbians and positive stereotyping of gay men among female students. One young woman commented:

I know girls who have been bullied because people suspected they were lesbians and the teachers did nothing. So you knew even though you didn't know yourself what these feelings were, what it was you knew that if you came out you were fucked. ... Certainly, gay guys was like oh you have a gay best friend he is great he comes shopping with me, its deadly but lesbians are like you know. ...

Another lesbian woman commented on feigning mediocrity to protect herself by becoming invisible:

...because I was bullied in primary school I didn't want anything about me to stand out I kept my grades average, I never excelled at anything, I just wanted to blend into the background so I was the same I didn't want to think about sexuality.

The men in the group agreed, and even recalled wearing muted clothing so as not to stand out. One commented:

I went through a stage in primary where a grey and beige stage all my clothes turned out to be that colour. I wouldn't wear anything bright or colourful or anything like that because you know it would make you stand out.

Another man commented:

At one stage I was exactly the same I wouldn't wear anything other than black. Black all the time.

The theme of alienation also arose in the groups of Traveller men and women. This was manifest in the form of both bullying and exclusion (cf. the bullying incidents mentioned in Section 5.6). One Traveller boy described it as follows in response to being asked what he did not like about school:

When you're in school you're not really able to talk to the buffers [Settled people] ...

So do you feel that Settled people are somehow against Settled Travellers or ...?

No, they're alright, but if something went wrong, they'd all back up each other. Like one day I was in class and a young fella hit me in the back of a head with a book and I beat him like a dog. ... then a whole crowd of about eight heads were waiting for me by the bus stop.

Two of the Traveller women who were the only two Travellers in a primary school in the UK recall feeling particularly isolated:

I did not like school. I just didn't get on with most of the people. And me and [Sister's Name] were the only Travellers in there. Basically the students. They were all like snobby and stuff like.

Is that the real reason? That you felt that no-one understood you?

Yeah. Half of the students didn't like Travellers.

And would the students always know you were a Traveller?

Yeah.

And how would they know? Is it because you told them?

No I never told them it's just that the way that we talk and stuff they knew well we were Travellers.

Along with isolation, there was also a fear of 'losing face' within the tight-knit Traveller community. The Travellers were strongly against having teachers who were themselves Travellers. When asked this, the women responded as follows:

No... oh no way.

Why?

I wouldn't like it because to be honest with you if a young one came in here and was a teacher and taught me like I wouldn't get on with her I wouldn't do nothing for her.

Why though?

Because she'd be teaching me and be going home saying like 'oh she's a bit slow'.

What if it was a Traveller from another county?

But still if I had a disagreement with them... that they'd be backbiting me.

Some participants suggested that there should be better links between schools and local youth-based community services, to facilitate friendships and socializing, and experiencing a wider mix of peers, particularly for students who felt alone or alienated in their own peer group. For example, one young man (20) commented:

I joined a no-name club and that actually helped me make friends. ... It's stuff like that that schools should have. Stuff like that around would help people a lot especially if they were having trouble with friends or feeling powerless you know. ...It helped me. Especially if the only people you know is just your classmates and you hate your classmates like who else will you talk to.

5.5.7. Special Educational Needs

Participants in several of the groups were strongly of the view that more resources need to be put into special needs education and support. Details of two individuals' stories are provided here since they illustrate negative consequences of not providing support, or providing support after considerable delay.

One of the mothers had a son (aged 16 at the time of the interview) who was assessed as borderline mild general learning disability in terms of special educational needs and was later expelled from school.²⁵

...he had an accident when he was 8, he fell off a wall He was assessed in fifth class and they said he was only borderline and therefore he did not need the extra help. ... so he didn't get the extra help because there were people who were a lot worse than him. ... In fifth class he was 11 and his learning age was 9. ... He got expelled last January and I thought that was terrible it was his Junior Cert year and he had exams coming up in June and he was expelled in January of that year.

Why was he expelled?

Silly reasons; fiddling with papers, forgetting his books, homework not done. There was nothing serious in his file that, I felt, would warrant him being expelled.

Had you meetings with the principal about it?

I did and I explained to one of the teachers about his accident and ... Later on at the other meetings they said that they weren't aware of this that nobody told them. ... He had no problems really as such in primary school because they were well aware of his accident. The whole school knew. So they were kind of aware of it. I felt his secondary school was in one ear and out the other.

The above excerpt hints at a lack of continuity of information between primary and post-primary. It is not possible to infer, however, that this resulted directly in his being expelled.

Another of the mothers had a son (also aged 16) who was diagnosed in sixth class as having ADHD. She had been asking for him to be assessed and to receive extra support from much earlier on in his schooling. The current circumstances of this young man are not favourable and illustrate the complex interplay of individual characteristics, delays in assessment, and once-off events:

... his difficulty was only picked up in sixth class, when maybe it should have been picked up much earlier. ... I did tell them that he was having problems and that he wasn't happy I did actually tell them, every year I was telling them, I was nearly calling to a teacher every week just to say he can't do this can you help. ...The assessment process is very slow in the public system.

²⁵ It should be noted that up to 2005 these students were allocated specific hours of resource teaching support under DES Circular 8/99. From 2005, these pupils receive support under the general allocation model of DES circular 02/05.

Then, speaking about her son's transition to post-primary school:

When he was diagnosed with the ADHD and then he was told he was accepted in [Post-Primary School Name] I ... got a letter of the doctor and the psychologist and the school stating that he needed one to one teaching. So I brought them down straight away and they said they would have everything up and running by September. It was the following January before they got anything up and running. ...In the September he was fine, happy as Larry with everything going to school. In October he started dossing. In November come 12 o'clock Wednesday morning they'd ring me and tell me 'they can't handle them down at the school, take him home and we don't want to see him again until Monday' ...He got them [resources] in January but he had no interest in them because he didn't want to be in school. Because he was doing more homework at home when I had him. He just didn't want to go into the classes ... Everything we tried wouldn't work.

I see he is now in [Detention Centre Name], what happened?

He got blamed for taking a laptop from [School Name]. We were brought down to the Guard's barracks. ...they brought us in a video camera of what went on in the school. Another young fella, you could see everything that went on, you could see him taking it and putting it in his coat yet they arrested my young fella and the fella next [to him], ... and it had nothing to do with them. ... And after that then he just up and left. He freaked out; he just felt he might as well do it I'm getting blamed anyway.

But that's not why he is in [Detention Centre Name] is it?

No, ... from there on everything just went downhill after that. ...he said he wasn't going back to the school anymore you've seen the video, mammy, I didn't take that, I told them this morning I didn't take that. ... So he said I'm not going back to the school. Now, by this stage, I had been in touch with him [an Education Welfare Officer] because they should not have been sending him home ... for no reason.

...He is now 16 how did he end up in [Detention Centre Name] what happened?

He started robbing cars. He just didn't care. ... he was lost.

It was suggested that there may be resource-efficient ways to provide support in some cases. For example, parents may be willing to provide individual assistance to students. One of the mothers commented:

Is there any way though that parents could help? I mean I certainly would be willing to go in and sit with a child. ... I would be willing to spend an hour or two with a child who is just on borderline. ...I don't see why a parent shouldn't get involved.

One mother whose son was assessed for special educational needs expressed a difficulty in understanding the results of the assessment due to the technical nature of the language and reported feeling overwhelmed. If this reaction is representative of a number of parents, it suggests that improvements to the communication between parents and professionals are warranted:

I got results saying loads of these big words I couldn't even understand, he didn't know content, like most basic things and I was like 'Oh no'.

Another participant (a mother in her 40s) felt that more research is needed into ADHD, including links between ADHD and subsequent drug taking. She spoke negatively about the over-diagnosing and over-prescribing of ADHD medication:

There's a doctor in [Place Name] as well, Dr [Name] and shouldn't be there at all. She is throwing tablets at the kids for ADHD, she is diagnosing them with AD straight away, she gives them a form to fill out, they tick the boxes, they hand it back, 'Oh yeah you have ADHD' on the spot she tells the parents and then the following week she wants to put them on [Drug Name] it's called. ... it's not been proved, but I think and an awful lot of people think that if they are put on medication when they are young it can cause them to go on to be addicted to heroin.

One young man (in his mid-20s) who had had addiction difficulties with heroin and was serving a prison sentence made a link between his own ADHD and subsequent drug-taking:

... you said [that you felt] hyperactive and [had] low self-esteem, were you ever assessed when you were in primary school, did you ever have a special test with a psychologist through the school?

No I was down in a place in [Name], my brother was saying it was a speech therapist place or a place where my brother used to go and a counsellor was seeing me. At the time ADHD wasn't a known thing so the fella down there said just don't let me drink fizzy drinks or chocolate because that's what used to set me off. So at the time there was no medication for ADHD or anything because it wasn't recognised.

Do you feel the ADHD still affects you?

No, no because when I went onto drugs that sort of quietened me right down. The type when I was a kid but then when I went onto heroin and that I got more confidence but at the same time it killed me... I was a real hyperactive, I was always going out and all, I didn't want to go out anymore, I used to just sit in and watch the telly.

5.5.8. School Climate and Expectations

A number of participants commented that encouragement or expectation of early school leaving was not accompanied by any advice or information about educational or occupational options that could be pursued instead of the senior cycle. This seems to be suggesting both a 'push-out' in some schools for some students, as well as a lack of careers guidance.

However, some participants spoke positively of the efforts that the school made to keep them in. For example, a mother and daughter commented:

Mother: I felt supported because when I did go in there was a meeting called and we did discuss [Name of Daughter's] education and I found them, because like they helped her. They done as much as they could have. She just didn't want to be there.

Was there any kind of conflict between you and the staff?

No we got on alright.

[Questioning the Daughter] Did you feel they were looking out for your best interests?

I knew they were yeah.

Looking back would you do anything differently?

Probably not because I'm glad the way everything turned out. I started a course then and I got a job for the last couple of years or so.

This is also an example of a person leaving school early to experience positive consequences. The young woman is a qualified panel-beater and enjoys her work.

In other cases the disengagement appears to have been more on the part of the school than the student, at least in how participants described it. One mother commented:

I have a nephew there [in that school], he's doing his Junior Cert there; he has been told, he won't be 16 now until next February. He is doing his Junior Cert this year; he has been told he can leave. The principal told him straight up you can leave if you want to [when] your Junior Cert's done you don't have to be sixteen. So now he is playing up because he has no interest in school.

Similarly, another woman in her 30s, who had left school at the end of first year, and had come off heroin to try to raise her son and ensure he got a good education, commented about her son:

When he put in like to go back to fifth year after his Junior [Cert.], and the teacher said to him, 'Oh, you're coming back? I wasn't expecting you to come back.' I was like, 'How dare he say that to my child, that he didn't expect him to come back. That's not giving him any encouragement.'

A process of mutual disengagement by student and school was reported by a number of respondents. For example one woman (early 30s) when asked when she left school, responded:

Third year, I actually got thrown out. They wouldn't take me back.

So you got thrown out in third year why?

For not doing homework, messing around with the teachers, not doing what they were asking me to do, smoking in the toilets My ma tried to get me back in but when my ma tried to get me back in they called me into the office and I said, I started roaring and shouting back at the teacher, so it was just 'No way are we going to take her back in'.

5.5.9. School and Work

In a number of instances, paid work seems to have been a pull-out factor. However the manner in which work acts to lever students out of school seems complex, and peer influence, local or school norms, labour market climate, and individuals' own personality characteristics appear to interplay. The experiences described by one 30-year-old man serving a prison sentence at the time of the interview is a fairly typical illustration of the interplay of these various factors (although second year now seems early to expect to leave school):

I found secondary school very good. ... I got to second year ... [it] was the one to go to and that was it, after that it was where are you getting the money from to go out and what have you... what happened then was you are 15, you are starting wanting to go out and be with the lads and what have you and you couldn't afford to. So my mother's opinion of things was if you leave school you must have a job to leave school for. So what I done was I got the job. Yeah and then went and left school.

The same man went on later in the interview to discuss how having a more flexible combination of school and work may have encouraged him to continue with his education:

If I had been allowed, I would say, probably flexi-time in school, flexi-time where I could have worked or I could have went back and learned. Maybe an allowance might have helped.

Other participants expressed the same view. For example when asked how post-primary school could be improved, one Traveller man (19) responded:

[There should be] Half days. ... different people have different things to do like. It depends if you get a job. I think a lot of people want to earn money rather than trying to get an education like.

One 30-year-old father was strongly of the view that no child should be forced to leave school to earn money:

What should be different, how can we improve it [the education system]?

Well for starters if it's a case where the kids they have to leave school to make money that element should be taken out of the equation altogether. ... make it a level playing field for everyone. There's those who have and there's those who have not, so let's give it so everyone has it, every child has a chance of earning. No child should have to leave school to earn money for their family. ... There should be an alternative from leaving for money for staying for, some sort of reward. ... Like run camps where they can take sixth class students. ... something where education is involved and think 'We are getting paid for doing this' but they are still learning along the way.

5.6. Broader Themes

5.6.1. Counselling and Support for Students

This section considers care structures generally, and also some specific areas mentioned by respondents which they felt important to support and advise students on.

A particularly strong theme, perhaps the most salient theme to emerge in the interviews, was the perceived need for a formalized and professional counselling structure. For example one young woman commented:

I think there should be counsellors in school to deal with like say even a person losing a member of their family to anything really that they would be qualified so that you wouldn't have to be talking to a teacher that is actually going to be teaching you in class because you feel well they are looking at you as well what are they thinking.

Another young woman (aged 21) commented, differentiating between the role of careers guidance counsellors and a counsellor to provide psychological and emotional support:

Schools should have a good not just a career guidance counsellor but an actual counsellor there as well. One that knows a good deal about mental health and other issues that school kids will face. ... Someone who is good at mental health to deal with the whole depression thing as well would be good.

Some participants mentioned the HSCL Co-ordinator in this context:

...maybe to have a teacher that's not a teacher that the child could come to themselves. Someone to track that child. Or someone that you could say listen the behaviour has changed. Or that you could say would you like to go to such a person and have a talk to them. So really the Home School Liaison Officer that's in primary. We need the Home School Liaison badly in secondary and many of the schools now have lost them.

The mothers also discussed this issue, and their views are similar. Along with a number of other participants, they noted the difficulties that children have in concentrating and learning when there are difficulties in or outside of school, and the difficulties faced by parents and teachers in dealing with teenagers. The following extract, in which a number of the women spoke, illustrates this:

>>It does affect kids because I had a split up as well a couple of years ago and it affected my kids.

>>And I had deaths in the family as well and that affected my kids in school. School work, everything! Because they were all over the place grieving and everything.

So this teacher would need a lot of special skills wouldn't they? What would those skills be?

>>Psychology maybe.

>>Patience and understanding.

>>A psychology background yes.

>>Treat a child as a child. Try to understand what is upsetting them and where they are coming from.

>>You see at 13 they don't want to be treated like a child. They want to be treated like a young adult.

Bullying was mentioned as being a problem by a number of participants. Two of these individuals had special educational needs. Participants were of the view that bullying that is not followed up and sorted out is a problem. One participant (aged 19) described her experiences as follows:

I was bullied then in school and I just found that the teachers they didn't do overly there wasn't any support really there like there was a career guidance counsellor but she was of no help. She was a nun like that would have no experience, I didn't find that she was helpful at all they didn't really do an awful lot to try and actually keep me in school. I just found my principal was just you know, whatever he was doing it didn't actually help because he called the people into the office and then when they would come out they would tell everybody that my mum was gone into the school and that you know they were thinking that they weren't bullying me.

A theme to emerge from some of the interviews is that bullying can occur due to a limited experience on the part of students of the reality of diversity. For one young black lesbian woman (19 at the time of the interview), this multiple identity caused her considerable difficulty. Although not directly included as an interview group, her comments illustrate one example of the experiences of a newcomer student:

I hated my classmates so much!

Why?

They laughed at the teachers they were rude to you if you weren't in the popular gang they would be just, this was a girl's school so their form of bullying was to isolate a girl they didn't like and that was really bad. Second year 2002 I came to Ireland and ... everyone was like in Ireland so because they isolated me because I was the only black person there that was a really bad thing for me because I was like I thought this is what everyone in Ireland is like because of those girls from the class. ...it got so bad that I used to hide in the toilets sometimes just to get away from them and just wait for the day to be over so I could just go home.

This young woman did not feel able to seek help from the staff in the school. Her comments illustrate the need for teacher education/professional development to assist students in disclosing problems:

Did you ever go to a teacher about that?

No but there was a time when I was hiding in the toilets and I think the headmistress found out and she marched me out and sent me to the guidance counsellor ... And the guidance counsellor asked me are you friends with any of the girls in your class and I said oh yeah and I just made one of the girls names up and said oh yeah I'm friends with her. She said OK and how are you finding school in general and I said yes its fine its really cool and bla bla and I just left it at that because I didn't have the confidence back then either not like now so I was like yeah it's fine it's fine but I absolutely hated every single day I went there.

The group of young Traveller men spoke about the complexity of the power hierarchy in the school. This was sparked by the recollection of one young man (19) in the group of being bullied at the beginning of post-primary school, identifying the ringleader of the bullying group, and specifically targeting him as a strategy to defeat the power hierarchy that was being played out. This was an effective (if violent) strategy as the bullying stopped:

And my first week in school they were trying to bully me. About five or six of them there were. But there was one fella the head of them all and I beat him like a dog and they stopped after that then.

The provision of better sex education was noted by some participants as a need. The participants who spoke about sex education were aware of its many complex aspects, ranging from safe behaviour, to age-appropriate education delivered in a frank manner, to the need to look at sex and sexuality in the broader context of trust, relationships, and diversity.

One young woman (early 20s) commented:

...the education we did get in primary school was extremely advanced for our age as well. And I know that's a contradiction but there are certain things that a nine year old shouldn't see before they are ready for it. So there should be special sex education for specific age groups. Levelled out not all in one [go].

The experiences of sex education of some of the participants appear outdated. For example, one young woman (in her early 20s) who had an older teacher, commented:

...and it was very religious. They didn't explain about condoms, anything about STD prevention basically what she said was don't have sex and you won't get AIDS and you won't die. (laughter)

One woman, an only child, who had lost her mother at the age of eight and whose father became an alcoholic entered puberty early, and this put her in a vulnerable position in the absence of appropriate information about puberty and sex:

... and then I got my periods when I was nine. And not knowing what, I developed very young. And do you know, it wasn't nice because I was too young, do you know, and just remember going through all that and it was just horrible, not knowing what was wrong with me or do you know what I mean, not knowing.

The specific life experiences of participants shape their views on the education system. Women who had experienced rape or sexual abuse were strongly of the view that education was needed with respect to safety and disclosure. One woman in her mid-20s, in prison at the time of the interview, had a four-year-old daughter. Her childhood was marred by sexual abuse. She commented:

They need to get a Guard into each school either a woman or a man Guard and say about sexual abuse, someone anyway that knows about abuse.

You feel the Guard would be the best person do you?

Someone yeah. Someone anyway that knows about abuse. Or someone that has been abused.

Both of the rape victims spoke of difficulties they were still experiencing with trusting people and the need for education about safe behaviour, particularly for girls. For example, one commented:

I would actually seriously think about putting counsellors into schools.... I also think that the girls, that girls of 15 years of age should be aware of what actually can happen.

The group of LGBT youth expressed a perceived lack of education relating to LGBT issues. They tended to discuss this theme from a pro-diversity point of view, and were

in favour of including LGBT issues within the wider context of diversity and individuality.

It was also felt, particularly by those participants whose own lives had been affected by drugs, that there should be more real-life education with respect to drug use, ideally from fourth class upwards. One woman commented:

I suppose if more people went in and told them [pupils] about the dangers of drugs and all that type of stuff and what could happen if they leave school young. I would say it would make a big, big difference.

What do you think is a good age to be talking to and educating young people about drugs?

Personally I would say from, honestly from fourth class up, I honestly would, I would seriously.

Some participants were of the view that more needs to be done to combat suicide amongst young people. This theme came out in two ways. First, in the context of the perceived oppressiveness of some religious-run schools, and second, a link was made by some participants between being gay and suicide, particularly in the absence of positive role models to be able to have hope about the future. A judgemental and non-inclusive ethos was felt to impact negatively.

With respect to the first issue, one young man, about 20, contrasted the situation in two schools, one religious-run and one not:

Our school, it is in [Place Name], it's the only sort of co-ed school in the town. There is a Christian Brothers' school and what do you call the nuns' school [Name of School]. But one year in the Christian Brothers' school there were three suicides in the one year. There was about 1200 people in my school and there were none and there was only something like 400 or 500 in the Christian Brothers' and the one year, I don't know what the rates are like now but I remember thinking that Jesus things must be bad. I think it's very suppressed in Christian Brothers' [schools].

With respect to the second issue, one young man in the LGBT group commented:

I think that if there are suicide rates that are quite high in a school that maybe investigate like why it is going on. If someone of 13 or 14 believes in God and everyone is saying God hates gays, and then you find yourself identifying with those people It's like what do I have to live for?

5.6.2. Trauma and Addiction

These issues are discussed in a single section because almost all of the participants who had experienced addiction, heroin addiction in particular, had also experienced some type of trauma, such as bereavement or sexual abuse. The local areas that they live in can reinforce this pattern since drugs tended to be widely available in them. Drug-taking then frequently turned them to crime and other risk-taking activities, particularly in the men that we spoke with. It led to much poorer life outcomes. A feature common to all of the individuals experiencing addiction was that they tended to hang around with an older crowd, for reasons relating to self-esteem (wanting to be 'cool') which resulted in exposure to unsafe and/or antisocial patterns of behaviour. At a vulnerable age, peer influence seems to have been strong. An underlying pattern that is common to the cases discussed in this section is that the extent of personal difficulty mitigates strongly against engagement in schooling. Furthermore, multiple negative life events appear to have a multiplicative impact on disengagement from school, particularly so when the individual's initial circumstances are vulnerable. The cases discussed in this section also illustrate the need for an integrated, cross-agency response.

The first participant discussed here, in her mid-20s, was serving a sentence in Mountjoy women's prison for dealing drugs. Her mother is a Traveller and her father is Settled. When one considers her past it becomes clear that getting into drugs was a rational choice for her. Her early life set her on vulnerable footing since her parents were alcoholics. She was, as a result, sent to a foster home at the age of three. She was raped on multiple occasions aged 4, 8 and 13:

Why did you end up in the foster home?

My mother and father were alcoholics.

Okay so that's the reason you were in the foster home. You are saying it's in the foster home then that you were raped?

Yeah.

Did the three occasions that you were raped, did those three occasions happen –

In foster homes yeah. The social workers never done a thing about it....

So this foster home was it an institution or was it just a person's home?

No it wasn't a home with a mother and a father, it was people in it, like they were next door and we were here. It was a nun, a nun ran it.

Did she know?

Yeah she knew that happened yeah sure I was, you know what I mean bleeding and everything and they just hit me with a wooden spoon.

At age 5, her parents removed her from the home after discovering what had happened. However, she went back into the home from the age of 8 to 13. She then stayed with her uncle who also raped her. The mother is now a partner of the uncle. Her father was beaten up by the mother's family and is seriously head injured. The mother knows about the uncle's abuse but he has threatened to kill her if she takes action.

This participant would have had considerable difficulties in learning as a result of the abuse she suffered:

I was four and he was 16, he abused me, I was four years of age. ... then I got abused when I was eight and I got abused then, I got raped when I was eight and then I got raped when I was 13. So my head's been all over the place.

The school was aware of the abuse that the participant suffered, but the support provided seems to have been limited to additional assistance with reading:

There was one teacher, she gave me, she used to bring me in on her own and she would give me special reading classes, you know what I mean. She done special, she would bring me in for an hour or two...

Yes did you like her?

Yes she was very nice.

After being raped by her uncle, the participant took to the streets and began to take drugs to block out what had happened to her. She dealt drugs to maintain her own habit. There is a strong theme of betrayal by carer figures in her life – by her mother, the nun and the social workers. As a result of the lack of support by the social workers in particular, it is probable that her case was not dealt with in the best manner in the

courts. The participant indicated that she had not reported the abuse to the courts and it is likely that psychiatric care rather than imprisonment would have been more appropriate for her:

When you have gone into Court you have been here before, when you have gone into the Court have you ever told any of this to the Judge?

No.

Why?

Because too many people in the Courthouse.

How about the social worker on the case?

I don't go down with social workers, I actually hate them because they never done nothing, when I got abused they never done nothing. They never told my family, they never done nothing so I hate them.

The participants' siblings also experienced negative outcomes. Her brother died from being dealt rat poison and her sister was gang raped in the same foster home. Some of her seven siblings are on drugs also.

Like many recovering addicts, this participant did not want to go back on drugs and was strongly motivated to care for her four-year-old child, currently under the care of the child's grandmother, with whom she reported having a good relationship. She was also motivated to learn to read and write for her child's sake. She was very positive about the services provided in prison. She commented:

That's why I do feel bad... because I do be saying I can't read. Do you know they way like when she would come home to me and say 'Mammy will read this with me' I do be like, I can't read.

Another participant, also recovering from heroin addiction, recalled the effect that the death of her mother had on her at the age of eight and the reaction of the school:

Well, primary school is a bit of a blur for myself because my mother died when I had turned eight. ... I turned into, like my nanny has told me I wasn't like that before, but I don't remember, but I turned into a bully like because I was so angry. And like when they died, when my mother died, they sort of just said like 'We're sorry to hear that' but there was nothing after that. ... So I just turned into a bully.

Was there any teacher in the school that you could have talked to or gotten support that you can remember?

No, no, not at all. There was absolutely nothing. It was just one day, 'I'm terribly sorry to hear that your mother died.' And the next day, it was just as if it never happened. Yeah, just back to school. ... It was just about me behaviour and I was in trouble and that was it. I was an only child. So I'd no siblings to talk to and me Da turned into an alcoholic, so I was just went, turned wild.

...how could primary school have been better for you?

The only thing I can think of that it would have been better would have been like a red flag should have gone up immediately. This child's after losing her mother. She needs some sort of help. Do you know? And maybe taking the studies a bit slower and doing it at the child's pace because the brain was elsewhere and wasn't on the studies.

The story of this woman, as it continues, is illustrative of the multiplicative impact of trauma in the context of an existing vulnerability and precariousness. She said at the age of 11 that she had wanted to live with her grandmother but her (after effectively raising herself for three years) but her father insisted that she live with his sister:

... my dad decided that the best person to bring me up was his sister, who was strung out on drugs, and her boyfriend. So from then till I left, I was brought up with people stoned out of their head and that's the way I was left, so I sort of brought up her kids. ... I think it affected me a great deal because like I thought it was normal for people to take drugs. I didn't know any better. ... So automatically that's what I done. When I was like 12, like I would have been only there a year. I started taking drugs at 12.

She commented several times on her perceived naivety in the absence of any stable caring figure in her life, for example with the drug-taking:

... sitting like in a room and it was just being passed around and I just took it, do you know what I mean. Really not even knowing what it would do to you or like I hadn't got a clue like.

Did they leave stuff lying around?

Yeah. I drank like their methadone and things like that. ... I was then sort of opened up to me auntie's boyfriend's family, and they were all on drugs. And his sister, who was three years older than me, I was 12, she was 15. And all the family was on drugs, and so she would take, rob her brother's roach, DFs, GGs, everything. ... And then when I was 14, my auntie's partner asked me would I go up and see someone in prison because he had been in and out of prison. So I went up and seen him and of course, he was real nice to me. He was like I was 14 – and he was like 26, 27. And of course, I was google-eyed, madly in love, you know. So that's when I ended up taking

heroin. ... I just wanted a family, so I got pregnant. And the baby died. So then I went really sort of bad on the heroin and then I got pregnant again at like 15, 15 and a half, about. And I had like me first son then. I'd came off the heroin and so he was like born grand and all.

At what point did you leave school or stop going to school?

I didn't even do second year.

One young man, also a recovering heroin user, described how the school reacted to the death of his father when he was in second year. There are commonalities between the school's reaction here and the reaction of the woman who lost her mother, described above:

Did they acknowledge his death?

Barely, barely, they acknowledged it in a very bad way which I didn't like. I had been out of school for quite a while and it was over the intercom 'We would like to welcome back [Name] after his father dying, we would all like to acknowledge' ... I am sitting there in school trying to fight back the tears. That's the only acknowledgment I got from the school.

This same man commented on the devastating effects that drugs can have in communities:

[During the 90s] There would have been ecstasy, kids going out to dance parties, raves whatever and then heroin was creeping in. People were coming down off it and basically I remember out of school I would say, first year, second year and third year right there would have been say 12 young fellows that would have been in the class and an awful lot more were female and out of them 12 there's four of us alive. Some of them are dead through being shot dead over drugs and some of them suicide and some of them have done it just out of drugs.

Participants who had experienced heroin addiction emphasised the importance of how they were treated in the drug treatment centres. One woman commented:

I'd been on a few different centres throughout me being on drugs, but this one was different. This one was, it was more... It wasn't a textbook recovery centre. It was very, you know, you could go in and a cup of tea. You can get acupuncture for free, reiki healing, massages, all of that and it was a community-based not all like these in suits and looking down on you. They looked at you as a person, not as a scumbag, basically. Do you know what I mean? Because that's the way other centres made me feel, like I was just another junkie, just another scumbag.

Recovery from addiction was seen as a matter of willpower, and a key factor in coming off drugs was having a central meaning, focus or goal in the lives of these individuals, such as children:

Nobody wants to be on drugs. Do you know what I mean, but actually getting up and doing it and getting off them is another thing. I mean no one wakes up and says, 'I love being on drugs.' Do you know what I mean? There's a thing that happened to say, 'I don't like it and I'm going and I'm to change it'. So there's a big difference than wanting and doing.

A man serving a prison sentence for drug dealing was managing to stay off heroin because he wanted access to his children. There was a court case pending on his rights to see his children:

Oh my head's wrecked over it. At the time now I can understand why she [ex-partner] stopped me seeing them because I was on heroin and that but then since I've come in that's the reason I am after spending the last two years changing my life, I am after doing my Leaving Cert and there two weeks ago.

In discussing the stories of the women who have been raped, it needs to be emphasized that this is just one of a multitude of possible traumas; bereavement being another, as already discussed above.

The first rape case discussed here seems to have been a particularly violent attack. The victim was 15 and her attacker was 16. She described him as being her best friend at the time. The rape occurred in her home in December. She, the attacker and three female friends were hanging out in the house and the three female friends left at about six. Her brother and mother were not there. A couple of hours later, unprovoked, the attacker raped her:

... he got me in a headlock and he put me unconscious and I fell to the floor and then he proceeded with what he wanted to do and then I woke up in the middle of that and I pushed him off me and I went for the sitting room door. The sitting room door was locked... and I was saying to him that I was going to call the guards, to get out and I got up and I ran for the sitting room door. He got me and he got me up against the door, he had one hand on my neck and the other hand was punching me repeatedly in the face and then I went unconscious again and the next time I woke up I was out of the sitting room down the hallway and I was at the fridge door, the back door and I went unconscious again and he dragged me outside my mam's house... around to the neighbour's house... you can imagine at Christmas time, it was pitch black, at quarter

to nine that would've been. He got me over as far as my neighbour's and I fell to the ground and he kicked me for 20 minutes and he just kept circling me and circling me even though I was crying and... eventually then he just left, he was gone, he just left.

The school's reaction was not supportive. She was told to stay out of school until her injuries from the attack healed:

The school wouldn't let me come back because my face was all bruised –

And ... how long was this?

Well I still had them doing my mocks and I was doing my mocks in February. ... Yeah, you see all the bloodshot burst in my eyes.... they were glad when I left school.

There was a meeting in the principal's office with the victim, the attacker (who went to the same school), a social worker and counselor from the RCC. A theme of blaming the innocent and letting the wrongdoer off the hook is evident here. Furthermore, the lack of understanding of the situation coupled with the school's decision not to let her back in for two months caused significant isolation and resulted in the attacker being viewed as innocent and popular. Although staff at the school clearly made some attempts to put supports in place, these were not sufficient and not implemented in an integrated and proactive manner:

And he [Principal] pretty much said that the school was open to both parties. That he was welcome to walk back in the gates if he wanted to.

This is despite a documented police statement and medical report I presume?

Yeah. Despite everything and there was meetings with the liaison officer of the school. He said that he would like to get the man out of the school but he hasn't got the right to, he hasn't got any power behind him it's up to [Principal Name] and [Principal Name] wouldn't do it. My vice-principal at the time said that they were going to have a meditation room for me that if I ever felt upset in the school that I had to go to the room and wait there until another teacher came and got me. I remember I actually went to that room once and the only person that actually could come and get me was mam. Mam had to leave work which was half an hour away and come and get me. Because none of the teachers would come in and talk to me. I think the teachers should have been a little bit more supportive, the principal and the vice-principal. ...

So did they treat him as if he was as innocent?

As innocent yeah. He was brand new, he came back into the school and everything and nothing was ever said to him. Like everyone thought he was great, everybody

hung around with him; I lost all my friends but he gained more friends. I had no friends at all; they had all just left me.

The situation of having both victim and attacker back in the same school resulted in a potentially unsafe environment for the victim, and possibly others:

You know, he was going to put me in danger again is how, is the way I saw it. There was nothing stopping him from doing anything to me in the corridors, if I walked into the bathroom there was nothing stopping him walking in behind me.

One can see a fairly clear causal link between the experience of rape and early school leaving in this case. And the trauma was multiplied through the reaction of the school, parents and students:

The summer holidays were after the Junior Cert and then I went back and I done fifth year and I lasted from September to I would say the start of March.

So you lasted another year and a quarter after the rape?

Yeah, saying that I arrived in one day a week maybe, I didn't get out of bed for a long time after it and then ... when you have got no friends in school there is no point.

The attacker was sentenced and did go to prison but this was not until 2006 and he did not serve the full term:

He got five years and 18 months' probation and he served three years, two years and 11 months.

Did the school react when he got that conviction?

No, not a thing, it was still pretty much the same, I was still an outcast.

It was only after the conviction that the local community changed their views about the victim. The participant had moved out of the county and describes her first time going back after leaving:

I went back about six months later and everybody says hello to you now and everybody thinks you are great but there was all sorts of rumours going around saying that they sent around a petition saying that he wasn't allowed back into town.

But it took the conviction to convince them that you were the innocent one?

Correct, for three years [there were] false allegations and I was pregnant with his child ... whatever was going around...

Do you feel as though justice has been done for you at this stage?

Not really no, I would have actually preferred if his sentence, if he done the crime why couldn't he have served the whole time.... I blame the school to an extent, I got no education there and I have got no qualifications.

The victim spoke very positively about the medical care she received and also about the manner in which the Gardaí handled the incident and took her statement. She also praised the RCC counsellor and identified her mother's support as a key factor in helping her. Also on a positive note, she now has a young child and a supportive partner.

In the second rape case, the victim was raped by her stepfather at the age of 16 in her home. This results in quite a different set of issues, yet there are commonalities with the first case discussed above. Again, the victim commented that she did not feel that the school staff were appropriately trained or experienced to deal with her situation:

I remember actually going into the school with my mum and having to tell my principal and I just, I never felt so bad like saying it to him. He obviously isn't trained or qualified to deal with situations like that because I felt even worse having told him because you knew that he knew and you just felt completely singled out or different to everybody else.

This victim's mother was also supportive of her, although like the first case, it took some months for the victim to begin to recover:

Can you remember how much school you missed?

Oh months, I missed an awful lot of time I couldn't literally leave the house, I actually had to sleep in the bed beside my mum. I couldn't bear dark; I always had to have lights on. ... You can hardly remember things, you block things out.

Again, similar to the first case, the school did attempt to put some supports in place but these do not appear to have been adequate or appropriate. In particular, there seems to have been a lack of sensitivity towards privacy and confidentiality:

How did the school try and support you or did they?

I would be taken out of class ... by the career guidance counsellor like she would come down to my door or she would see me on the corridor and she would pull me up and she would be asking how I am and like there would be people walking by and obviously listening and they would be going well why is she getting to go up. I'm sure they were thinking [why is she] up to her office so much.

She went on to say:

There was another actually teacher told and she pulled me into a room I don't remember how or how it was set up or that but I remember talking to her and like she actually knew my dad's family let's say. She was not qualified she was my History teacher and she wanted me to talk to her about it. I felt so uncomfortable as well because her wanting me to kind of say she was saying 'well if you want to talk to me I'm here' ... but I just found that she wasn't they weren't qualified to deal with you... so it felt really pointless having to open up to someone and that they couldn't really help you as such.

Also, some of the students turned against the victim, similar to the first case. One in the group of girls that she spent time with had stayed in her house a few times and this resulted in rumours being spread and bullying to begin:

This [staying over in the participant's house] happened a few times ... and then one day we walked up to town and there was all the other girls up town and they were all acting really really weird and then ... I found out that that girl had said that I was trying to take her away from the other girl, that she was say best friends with. So then she started going around spreading loads of rumours about me telling everyone I was on the pill oh what she didn't tell and saying I was doing this, that and the other and I wasn't doing anything.

And, once again, the experience of rape combined with the spreading of rumours seems to have caused this participant to leave school:

I'd get up in the mornings and I would be in tears I wouldn't want to go in because having to deal with what I dealt with and then to be trying to come around to getting back into school ... I thought no way I'm not doing this anymore. ... Like their parents would be called in ... and it never made anything any better it just kept getting worse and worse and worse and then half way through I had done some of my mocks and I left I just couldn't hack it. I just found that they didn't do an awful lot to keep me in the school because I would have been still, you know I would have stuck it out but I just found that they didn't.

5.6.3. Family Support

This section considers comments made by parents in facing difficulties with their children's education. Some specific suggestions to provide support for parents were also made by a few of the participants.

Parents spoke of the difficulties they were experiencing in trying to get their child to stay in school. It can be a stressful, tiring and difficult time:

You have a big lot of emotions in your own head. You're disappointed that this is not what you want for your child. ... But there's not an awful lot you can do when they keep coming up to you and saying no I'm not going, I'm not going. What can you do?

Another parent commented:

My son didn't decide to leave he got kicked out he got expelled and if he had had his way, even though things were difficult, he would still be in school.... I was heart broken, my child is out of school, I thought it was the end of the world. I didn't know where to go from that point.

All participants expressed an awareness of the value of education. In particular, parents who had left school early and who had children all, without exception, expressed a strong desire for their children to complete the Leaving Certificate, and many also wanted their child to pursue further education. Without exception, these individuals were highly aware of the value of education. The value was expressed both in utilitarian ways (i.e. to secure a job with good pay) and in recognition of the intrinsic value of literacy (e.g. as a means of being independent).

For example, one 30-year-old man who had left school after second year commented about his son aged 11:

His education is very important. He is in school and any extracurricular stuff that can be done he is doing and if there is any help needed he is put into the class to do it. There's no 'Oh you are not putting my son in any of them classes', he is in there; there's no ifs or buts. If it needs be, he's in them.

Do you have much input in his education now?

I have all the input in his education.

How far into the education system would you like to see your son stay?

Oh third level, all the way, third level.

One woman in her 40s emphasised the need to support mothers, particularly those who themselves had not been educated or supported growing up:

I already had all my social skills from the way I was raised thank God so I was blessed. But there is women out there my age, younger, older that weren't reared, wouldn't have a clue and they need to be taught all over again.

Sorry by social skills you mean as well parenting skills?

Parenting skills, good housekeeping skills, coping skills all that kind of stuff. You know and even some of them wouldn't even know what it's like to open a bank account ... but if you start by helping the mothers then the mothers will automatically know how to help if they are still with their partners or whatever, given them encouragement and then it spills out, it's the ripple effect around the whole family then.

One man identified the needs of parents who are unable to read or write, and the effects that this has on their children:

... then there's the parents who can't read or write. So who's supporting them? If they get undermined by the child when he comes home with homework their attitude is going to be 'As soon as he is old enough he is going out of that school'. It's planting the wrong seeds straight away because the parents have no more interest because they don't know what they are on about or they don't know what's going on. ... so if the parent is going to give 110%, the child takes the vibes from the parent 'Oh well me ma or me da is not interested', they will hide the homework and not do it and then they fall back, back, back.

The group of mothers spoke in very positive terms about A RAPID-funded parent-child course for providing support to families undergoing transition, separation, bereavement, etc. As noted previously, they unanimously felt that the ages of 10 or 11 were seen as critical and a possible intervention point for such a course:

They pay for taxis, child care a meal and all. So a lot of funding went into it but they could only fund 10 families [out of 30 that applied]. ... I just find it absolutely brilliant cause you are going and you are with people who are in the same situation.

Are you bringing him [Son] with you?

Oh he comes with me yeah. So the parents meet first and the kids are all together and we discuss similar topics. ... I think what is good about it is the kids are learning and doing what we are doing. So they are coming from, they understand or try to understand more of where we're coming from and as to why we want to get them to school. You see you are showing them how interested you are, and you are in it together. ... We come together for the last 40 minutes or so.

And what type of things are discussed?

Oh God, everything. Anything from being a good parent, arguments at home through to drugs, sex and alcohol. They are all life learning [topics]. And to get the parents, maybe we don't listen enough. ... Even though I've always said it to both my kids don't ever think anything is too big. Always come to me. We will try and sort something out.

5.7. Conclusions

The views of 41 individuals described in this chapter gave rise to a variety of issues, many of which are not capable of being identified through empirical analyses. The themes and issues that were identified were grouped under two broad headings – school-based and other. It is acknowledged that these areas overlap somewhat.

Since a relatively small number of participants took part in the interviews, caution in generalising the results should be exercised. Also, it should be borne in mind that not all individuals left school early, though many did. In considering the results, caution should also be exercised in establishing causal links between themes and early school leaving. Rather, the issues should be viewed as factors that serve to engage or disengage individuals from education and can be used to identify needs and suggest supports. Given these constraints, it is notable, nonetheless, that the majority of themes emerging are supported by the literature review, and there is also considerable overlap in the themes identified in this chapter and Chapter 6 (analysis of written submissions).

5.7.1. School-Based Issues

Some suggestions were made about the *structure of the education system* itself. Of the participants who discussed the role of religion in the education system, they were strongly of the view that the system should be non-denominational. Religious education and values, they felt, are the role of parents, not the school. Some

participants expressed a preference for mixed-sex schools. However, in considering these suggestions, the possibility of school choice should be retained in the system.

Consistent with research cited in Chapter 2, many of the participants were of the view that *transition from primary to post-primary* was a difficult and potentially critical period. Some participants suggested ways to smooth this transition, for example through the provision of a more enhanced induction in first year, or increasing the level of responsibility in the senior classes of primary school. In the experience of some participants, there was a lack of information flow between primary and post-primary, for example with respect to individual children's circumstances, which would be relevant to their education.

It was quite common for participants to be critical of both *curriculum and assessment* in post-primary schools. There was consensus that a more balanced, practical, and real-life curriculum was needed, and also a preference for continuous assessment over terminal examinations. Some of the participants suggested that religion should be re-focused to a study of comparative theology. It was also suggested by a couple of participants that some components of SPHE should be compulsory. A strong preference for teaching styles associated with non-mainstream settings emerged (e.g., prison school, Youthreach), and these were characterised by democratic, interactive processes. Some participants had quite strong negative views of grouping in terms of how messages of low expectations were transmitted by teachers and the effects of grouping on the views of the students about their own abilities and aptitudes. Some participants expressed frustration at sitting still for much of the school day and wanted more physical activity.

There was widespread recognition that *teachers* are under considerable pressure. Some of the participants were of the view that class sizes are too big to allow teachers to give adequate individual attention. It was suggested that teachers are in need of additional support personnel, such as counsellors. A strong theme to emerge with respect to teachers' needs was that initial education and professional development were required to tackle a number of difficult issues, including the identification of behaviours indicative of an underlying problem, whether these take the form of acting out or acting in; bullying; and sensitive issues such as homosexuality.

Several general school-based factors were identified by participants as facilitating disengagement from school. Many of the participants had negative views on *authoritarian discipline* and cited examples of sanctions that they felt to be inappropriate such as being sent home for minor ‘offences’ such as incorrect uniform, or being fined for incomplete uniform. It was also common for participants to express the importance of listening to and respecting students’ views, and there were some examples of the negative impact on individual students when they felt that they were not listened to. There were a few cases where schools appeared to transmit the message to students that they *expected them to leave* prior to the Leaving Certificate, e.g., expressing surprise to see them back in school at the beginning of the senior cycle, or telling them that they can leave school after the Junior Certificate. In some cases, *work* was seen as a factor influencing disengagement from school and this seems to be strongly influenced by peer group norms and teacher expectations. Some participants suggested having a more flexible timetable to facilitate participation in part-time work and it was also suggested that it may be possible to combine educational activities with payment, such as older students running summer camps for younger students.

Two specific groups mentioned issues relevant to an *inclusive school climate* – LGBT youth and Traveller youth. Contrasting experiences of the LGBT youth in school (being ‘out’ or not) illustrate the importance of an inclusive and accepting school environment. The experiences of Travellers were commonly linked to bullying and retaliation. Interestingly, Travellers were not in favour of having Traveller teachers in schools, due to the small and close-knit nature of their communities.

Two of the cases discussed in this chapter suggest that there are potentially significant negative consequences of not addressing *special educational needs* in a timely manner, and of the lack of provision for special educational needs that are ‘borderline’. The parents that we interviewed were keen that the lack of provision that they perceived be addressed, and suggested that parents could assist children with mild learning disabilities. Some were of the view that emotional/behavioural difficulties (including attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; ADD/ADHD) are not well understood or treated in Ireland and it was

suggested that this an area that needs further investigation in the Irish context. In this respect, the current work of the NCSE on emotional and behavioural disturbances/difficulties noted in Chapter 2 is noted.

5.7.2. Broader Issues

Perhaps the strongest theme to emerge in the area of support was the perceived need for access to a *counsellor* or key staff with appropriate skills to provide the relevant support to students. Respondents noted that students with difficulties cannot learn. The importance of privacy, respect and confidentiality emerged in comments made by participants. In some instances, for example bereavement or other difficult experiences, such as bullying and rape, there is evidence from the comments made by individuals that the school staff were simply not equipped to respond appropriately.

Some respondents had *specific suggestions for topics* to be included in schools' overall education programmes. These included mental health education including bullying and suicide; age-appropriate, holistic sex education, including personal safety and diversity in sexuality; and drugs education. These comments may be interpreted in the context of the potential for a more uniform and integrated delivery of SPHE and RSE.

Addiction and trauma co-occurred in some of the respondents' stories. It is reasonable to say that for these cases in particular, integration of services and agencies and a timely response are important. In discussing various traumas, including bereavement, sexual abuse, and rape, there is evidence that school staff lacked the appropriate education/professional development, resources and/or linkages with relevant agencies to respond in a consistent, maintained, and appropriate manner. This issue provides further support for the comments regarding teacher education described in section 5.7.1. In the case of bereavements, for example, two respondents indicated that the school acknowledged the death of a parent on a single occasion with no further support, and in the case of two young women who experienced rape, the response of the school was viewed as damaging, inappropriate and at times inconsistent. It is also reasonable to suggest that when individuals who to start off from a vulnerable base (e.g. low-income family; in a community with a heavy drugs culture) experience

further negative life events have a multiplicative and potentially causal link with early school leaving.

A number of participants discussed the need for *family support*. The group of parents were very positive about a RAPID-funded parent-child course particularly as it facilitated communication and understanding between parent and child, and suggested that this type of course should be available particularly for families undergoing various difficulties when the child is around 11 years of age. Some respondents also recognised the intergenerational transmission of poverty and low of education and suggested both general life skills courses to be targeted at mothers in particular, and also literacy courses for parents.

5.7.3. Key Areas for Policy Raised in Chapter 5

The themes raised in Phase 2 suggest a number of key areas that merit policy attention:

- Smoothing the transition from primary to post-primary.
- Improvements to planning for pupils/students with special educational needs, and the potential for improvements in relation to communication between schools and parents.
- Addressing teachers' needs and professional development, particularly in content areas relating to sexuality, mental health, and bullying; and methodological areas such as behaviour management strategies and mixed-ability teaching methodologies.
- Issues regarding the relevance and appropriateness of post-primary curriculum and assessment.
- The need for more flexibility in combining education and work for some students.
- The perceived need for better developed and integrated emotional/therapeutic support structures.
- The importance of an inclusive school environment.

Chapter 6: Phase 3 Results: Themes Arising from Written Submissions

6.1. Introduction

This chapter considers the key points made in the written submissions to the Expert Group. In doing so, we take an approach that is similar to that taken in the previous chapter, i.e., grouped according to themes as they arose in the submissions.

We received submissions from the groups shown in Table 16.

Table 13. List of groups providing written submissions

List of Submissions
Association for Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)
Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI)
Carers Association
Children's Research Centre, Trinity College (CRC)
Children's Rights Alliance (CRA)
Combat Poverty Agency (CPA)
Disability Federation Ireland (DFI)
Education Disadvantage Centre (EDC)
Integration Unit, DES (IU)
Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)
Irish Rural Link (IRL)
Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)
Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS)
Joint Managerial Body (JMB)
JSCP Support Services
National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)
St Vincent de Paul (SVP)

Note. The Combat Poverty Agency, formerly a statutory body, has now been amalgamated with the Office for Social Inclusion.

In total, 18 submissions were received. We also received information and advice from a number of groups and organisations which assisted in the drafting of parts of the report, namely the DES, BelongTo, CHOICE, the Irish Prisons Service, the NBSS, the NCSE, NEPS the OMCYA, the Teaching Council, the TES, and from various individuals on the Expert Group. The submissions and advice from additional sources have contributed significantly to this study. It should be noted that although the

submissions cut across a range of bodies, these are not necessarily representative of the range of bodies that work with children. And, as with the results reported in Chapter 5,

The submissions were analysed in a manner analogous to the interview transcripts described in Chapter 5, i.e., iteratively building on a coherent set of themes by going through each submission several times and through manual content analysis, grouping related content under each theme. As with the findings reported in Chapter 5, it should be noted that an analysis of these submissions by different researchers may have resulted in somewhat different conclusions.

6.2. Main Themes

The comments in the submissions are grouped broadly under themes. Similar to Chapter 5, a distinction is made between school-based issues and broader issues. Insofar as possible, similar sub-headings are used in discussing the themes in Chapters 5 and 6, but, as expected, several new issues and themes emerged in the written submissions.

The following school-based themes are common to Chapters 5 and 6:

- School management and structure
- Transition from primary to post-primary school
- Curriculum and assessment
- Teachers' needs and further professional development requirements
- Constructive discipline approaches
- Inclusivity
- Special educational needs.

Also, two broader themes are common to both chapters:

- Counselling and support for students
- Trauma.

This chapter also included the following 'new' themes:

- Promotion of literacy in schools
- Importance of early intervention, care and education

- Provision of resources and the current social and economic climate
- Inter-agency, intra-community, and inter-personal co-operation
- General promotion of literacy
- Needs of specific groups of children
- Informational gaps
- The role of the media.

This chapter discusses each theme in turn and ends with some conclusions.

6.3. School-Based Themes

6.3.1. School Management and Structure

The submission from the IVEA includes a consideration of the historical context of schooling in the Irish State that is useful when considering how and why structures are currently in place. It notes that Irish post-primary education has developed from a Church-run school system that focused on the education of young people for the church, the professions and the civil service. Therefore the curriculum emphasised, almost exclusively, linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence. This in turn gave rise to a meritocracy. The IVEA comments that

... the old church-based education system was appropriate, in many respects, to the needs of young people and Irish society at a particular point in our history. However, in 21st Century Ireland, the context has been utterly transformed.

Thus, the emergence of free education and growth in VEC schools was seen as a significant development as they provide a valuable alternative with a practically-oriented curriculum. Nonetheless, the operation of VECs is constrained by DES rules such as compulsory subjects, length of the school day, and the examination system. Consistent with this, the ACCS argues that schools in general need greater flexibility in how they offer their curricula and that programmes and individual subjects must become more attractive and be more meaningful to individual students.

The ACCS discusses lack of flexibility in the system with respect to the role and contract of the teacher. It notes that the rigidity of the teacher contract, the manner in which it is interpreted, and the locus of control of how classes are typically organised

also present barriers to school management in delivering flexible of learning environments to students at risk of early school leaving.

Furthermore, the IVEA notes that as the vocational sector grew, so did the numbers of teachers teaching in them that had obtained their teacher education in colleges that trained teachers for second-level education generally, rather than vocationally-oriented education. This raises questions as to the match between teacher education/professional development and students' needs.

6.3.2. Transition From Primary to Post-Primary

The ACCS notes that there is a wide gap between the child-centred curriculum at primary level and the academic, subject-based, examination-driven system at post-primary level. It comments that making the transition from one level to the next is very difficult for many and this raises questions as to the necessity of such a disjuncture.

The INTO also recommends that a more smooth form of compulsory education is provided, particularly in terms of supports and resources:

We must ensure that prevailing support and resource services available at primary level transfers with the child as a matter of right, thus continuing the culture of nurture and care begun at primary level. Perhaps it is time to consider the seamless continuum of education during the compulsory school years. What cannot be allowed to continue is the constant loss of children from the educational system.

The IYJS submission also comments on the issue of transition, noting that a number of children make a poor transition from primary to post-primary level. The IYJS discusses this in the context of absenteeism at primary level. It notes:

Patterns of school absenteeism often occur well before second level and it will be important for the Joint Oireachtas Committee to incorporate this into its considerations. ... it is important that where a pattern of school absence is developing, effective intervention is expedited. This requires early notification and seamless action by agencies and organisations involved with the young person and their family.

This issue is taken up further in Section 6.4.8.

The EDC makes a number of recommendations specifically regarding the transition of young people with special needs from primary to post-primary. It suggests transferral of some of the practices associated with primary school (e.g. a small group of teachers responsible for all subject areas, mixed-ability classes), a student liaison officer that follows a child from primary to post-primary, and greater continuity in the standards applied when grading students' work. The IU has also highlighted migrant students as a group that are likely to require targeted support, particularly non-English-speakers, as the linguistic demands at post-primary level are increased. Doubtless that the EDC's and IU's recommendations apply to vulnerable students more generally.

6.3.3. Curriculum and Assessment

The ACCS has noted that many students take as many as fourteen separate subjects for the Junior Certificate and that the necessity of this should be examined. It comments that the rigid nature of the system does not suit many children, particularly those who are disengaging from schooling and those with special educational needs and disabilities. It comments that there is not sufficient allowance made for those at risk of early school leaving in the form of reduced curricula and programme choice.

The ACCS makes some additional points on the curricular and structural challenges facing the system. It notes that the terminal examination of the Junior Cert. is extremely challenging for many students. This suggests the need to move more towards continuous, school-based assessment. Furthermore, students who may benefit from the JCSP and LCA may be in a school where these programmes are not available and the financial costs of implementing these programmes in smaller schools is high. Also, even with the provision of the LCA, students must make the choice about which Leaving Certificate programme to follow from an early stage²⁶. Greater flexibility is required, whereby students might follow a modular approach but also study more 'traditional' subjects.

The ACCS recommends a modular approach to the Junior Certificate and a drastic reduction in the dependence on a terminal examination. Linked with this, the IVEA

²⁶ Indeed, evidence cited in Chapter 2 (e.g. Malone, 2006) raises some questions as to the extent to which students themselves choose between the LCA and other programmes.

comments on the prescriptiveness of the DES when it comes to the academic part of the curriculum, which stands in contrast to the lack of prescription when it comes to practical aspects. Related to the latter point made by the IVEA, SVP highlights the need to formally recognise children's non-academic achievements in order for all children to experience success and confidence in the classroom.

In the view of the IVEA, the breadth and depth of the curriculum for many Leaving Certificate subjects (e.g., when compared with the UK) is preventing meaningful engagement and real learning from occurring and promotes instead mechanical and rote learning. Indeed, significant numbers of students with different or 'non-academic' intelligences will find it extremely challenging to engage with large chunks of the curriculum. The IVEA comments:

Improving student outcomes at second level for all students demands a serious reform of the curriculum and a concomitant reform of the way teachers teach and students learn. Such reform is particularly relevant to improving the outcomes of students at risk of seriously underachieving or leaving school early.

The IVEA goes on to comment that while the LCA is indicative of a real attempt at addressing some of the issues with the LC, the LCVP is not a significant departure from the LC. Unlike other countries, Ireland has no separate vocational stream, and this results in over-valuing of the LC and an under-valuing of courses such as the LCA. The IVEA cites the Norwegian system as contrasting strongly with the Irish system, where over half of students opt for a vocational track. Importantly, after just one year's additional study, students in Norway can re-enter the more academic track at third level, unlike students in Ireland who, having completed the LCA, must do the entire two-year LC if they want to attend third level.

The IVEA calls for the implementation of vocational educational programmes that are capable of attracting and engaging 40-50% of the cohort. It argues that these should offer Level 4 and 5 FETAC qualifications that provide clear progression paths to further education. The IVEA suggests that a Level 4 qualification should be obtained after two years, Level 5 after one further year, and that Level 5 qualifications be capable of generating CAO (Central Applications Office) points and direct access to third-level education. The IVEA also comments that Level 4 courses should provide a

range of different specialisms, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach. The IVEA recommends, consistent with the Norwegian approach, that the State expands the apprenticeship system.²⁷

The IVEA makes a number of suggestions regarding specific subjects. First, it observes that one in five students do not sit the Leaving Certificate Irish examination (either due to being exempt or failing to turn up on the day). It recommends the introduction of an Irish studies syllabus, perhaps as a short course compulsory subject (like SPHE) as an alternative to the existing subject of Irish. Second, it recommends against providing ‘bonus’ points for taking higher level mathematics. Instead, it suggests bringing the difficulty levels, both real and perceived, more in line with other subjects. It also recommends revising the chemistry and physics syllabi to make them more attractive and amenable to students with an interest in science.

6.3.4. Teachers’ Needs and Further Professional Development Requirements

The ASTI emphasises the importance of teacher quality and the importance of teacher participation in ongoing professional development in maintaining and enhancing this quality:

Teachers’ knowledge, classroom skills and expertise determine the quality of the learning environment for students. Teachers must be enabled to upgrade their skills and knowledge bases through ongoing professional development.

The JCSP Support Service makes a number of recommendations as to how to engage low achievers. These may not be taken as solely specific to students who are in the JCSP but rather pertain to low achievers in general. It will be seen that the recommendations have a number of implications for teacher education, professional development, support and innovation with respect to classroom practices.

First, according to the JCSPSS, funded initiatives need to be available to support teachers to try new strategies and methodologies especially in schools where there is a high concentration of disadvantaged and/or disengaged students, and where there are frequently entire classes of students presenting with challenging behaviour.

²⁷ Something that would seem to prove challenging in the current economic climate.

Second, team teaching and the place of classroom assistants in classes other than special needs ones need to be supported and developed since, as noted by the JCSPSS, they have positive impacts on classroom climate and activities when they are put in place in a planned and supported way.

Third, the role of class tutor in the view of the JCSPSS, needs to be supported and developed at order to ensure that a personal relationship is fostered in schools between teachers and students. In this way every student has a chance of developing a sense of belonging, succeeding and progressing.

Fourth, students should be trained as peer mentors both at Junior and Senior Cycle. Evidence from some of the JCSP initiatives suggests that the Junior Cycle students benefit from tutoring primary pupils as well as their own peers. Peer mentoring also impacts positively on students' sense of belonging in school.

The IVEA discusses teacher education, induction and mentoring in a more general sense. Its starting point is that a didactic teaching approach is no longer capable of engaging students in a technological and information-rich age, nor does it ensure that the learners acquire the knowledge, skills and competences appropriate to making the most of their lives, at work, in the family or in the community, in the 21st century.

The IVEA acknowledges the review of teacher education in 9 countries conducted by the Teaching Council²⁸ and that it is shortly to conduct a programme review process on a pilot basis. However, in IVEA's view this process will take some time and it suggests that, pending the outcome of the work of the Teaching Council, that teacher education institutions work together to reform their education programmes in line with best international practice:

After all, the whole issue of reforming teacher training has been a live issue for nearly two decades yet many of the criticisms that attended teacher training in the early 90s are still prevalent today. In the meantime, however, the whole context in which the

²⁸ http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/fileupload/Publications/LearningToTeach-ConwayMurphyRathHall-2009_10344263.pdf

second level teacher operates has been transformed and this transformation continues at a pace.

In the view of the IVEA, the induction process for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) is inadequate on a number of counts. In order to register with the Teaching Council, an NQT merely has to complete one year's teaching experience. During this year they are required to carry a full teaching load, and there is no requirement on school management to provide support for NQTs. The IVEA therefore recommends that professional registration of teachers be conditional upon successful completion of a one- to two-year induction programme, and that during the induction process, teachers should not carry a full teaching load. It further recommends that making the renewal of a teacher's registration dependent on the teacher undertaking a certain amount of professional development each year would be likely to 'incentivise' this upskilling.

The IVEA calls, in addition to the education and induction of teachers to be aligned with the changed, and changing, school context, for a review and revisions of the role and contract of teachers.

It acknowledges potential industrial relations consequences to some of the points raised, and suggests that the Teaching Council could play a useful role in directing and facilitating its recommendations.

6.3.5. Constructive Discipline Approaches

The EDC has noted that the disciplinary procedure of suspension is highly ineffective. In fact, for those students who are already disengaged from school, being suspended is a 'dream come true' since being told to stay out of school is precisely what many disengaged students want to hear according to research conducted by the EDC.

With respect to disciplinary policy, particularly the practice of suspending students, the EDC has made a number of recommendations. These include the implementation of a time out room in which disruptive students can continue with learning activities rather than being sent home, a move away from authoritarian teaching and classroom management styles, more engagement with relevant service providers, a more flexible approach to delivering tailor-made programmes, small target group work (e.g. for

students with acute problems such as substance use), adoption of elements of Youth Work approach, restorative justice practices, and possibilities for small group tuition. These points are linked to those made by the JCSP Support Service in Section 6.3.4. The EDC also recommends having a Key Worker in schools where youth are at risk of early school leaving. The Key Worker could play a role in the implementation of IEPs, provide support for students if they fall behind, act as a mentor regarding future educational and employment options, and act as a mediator between students, parents and the school.

The EDC cites a model of good practice with regard to a positive code of discipline from the SCP from the Dublin North Region: a social and personal development programme that includes a garden for time out for disruptive students during school time, as well as being available during lunchtime and after school.²⁹

Also on the theme of discipline, the JMB suggests that education and professional development to support progress in the attitudes of teachers requires investment, particular regarding student behaviour management:

Our support services such as the NBSS and SESS offer professional and accessible CPD but we need to make progress in terms of teacher attitudes. In particular the NEWB Guidelines on Codes of Behaviour must begin to take root in schools, particularly on the issues of suspension and expulsion.

6.3.6. Inclusivity

The IVEA discusses enrolment policies of post-primary schools, citing a DES audit carried out in 2008 in approximately 440 schools³⁰. The audit confirmed that in some communities, particular schools are required to assume a disproportionate responsibility for enrolling students with some kind of special need. However, an important omission of the report was that the level of socioeconomic disadvantage was not included. The IVEA comments:

The continuance of this practice is neither in the best interest of the schools required to carry the disproportionate burden nor to the benefit of the students that attend

²⁹ See SCP Support Unit (2005).

³⁰ http://www.education.ie/insreports/des_enrolment_audit_report.pdf. As examples of findings in the report, the average percent of students with a first language other than English or Irish was 4.8% and this ranged from 0% to 31.8%; the average percent of students with a special educational need (not clearly defined) was 9.0%, and this ranged from 0% to 44.8%.

these schools. Rather, this is a practice that both perpetuates and amplifies disadvantage, underachievement and early school leaving.

In the view of the IVEA, the approach to inclusive enrolment is incomplete:

...if the State, as is currently the case, simply prescribes inclusivity without appropriately addressing the incentives-disincentives issue, schools will inevitably find ways of circumventing the State's prescription – no matter what warnings adorn the tin.

The IVEA notes that school staff will need to be convinced on two points if more inclusive enrolment is to be achieved. First, all State-funded schools should be legally obliged to comply with minimum criteria relating to enrolment policies. Second, all students requiring additional supports should receive them to ensure that they get the most from their schooling and/or to ensure that their enrolment will not negatively impact on the education of other students automatically get the supports that they require.

The IVEA makes a number of recommendations regarding inclusive enrolment. First, it recommends that the DES consults widely with the education partners, since the more partners can agree about how inclusive enrolment procedures and practices can be achieved across second-level education, the greater the probability that they will be implemented.

Second, to facilitate local agreement among clusters of schools, structures that it terms School Admission Forums (SAFs) be set up. In the medium to long term, it envisages that this will facilitate collaborative and trusting relationships among schools, and assist schools in realising that there is nothing to be gained in seeking to avoid enrolling 'more needy' students. The IVEA suggests that local EWOs could play a role in the SAFs.

Third, it recommends that an appellate body be set up to deal with complaints, request formal responses from schools, seek the views of education partners, including NEWB and the NCSE, where appropriate, deal with legal implications, and make recommendations to the Minister on changes that may be required to a schools' enrolment policies. This last point in turn implies that the Minister would have to put

regulations in place to govern enrolment policies and practices, including clear and effective sanctions for non-compliance.

Finally, the IVEA recommends discontinuing the practices of retaining lengthy waiting lists for enrolment, giving preference to family members, etc., and also that guidelines on enrolment policies should cover hidden forms of exclusion, e.g. expensive uniform, equipment, or the expectation that parents can pay for a school trip abroad. The former puts migrant students and families at a disadvantage, and the latter puts students from poorer families at a disadvantage. With regard to migrant students, the IU concurs, underlining the importance of monitoring and supporting this group.

6.3.7. Special Educational Needs

The DFI notes that the increase in participation of people with disabilities at third level demonstrates that major change is possible. It argues that the education system at primary and post-primary levels needs to follow the trend at third level and replace the existing charitable or medical models of disability with the social model.

It is recommended by the DFI and the CRC to ensure implementation of the EPSEN Act (2004). The Act states that children should be educated in an inclusive setting but, in the view of the DFI, this is still far from having been achieved. The DFI comments:

...the Government's priority for tackling early school leaving amongst disabled children must be to ensure that the school system is inclusive. It must enable people with disabilities to realise their potential by recognising the scale of the challenge involved and engaging all stakeholders, as envisaged by the National Disability Strategy, Towards 2016 and other Government commitments. ... The full implementation of the EPSEN Act needs to be put into a transparent management plan with milestones so that people with disabilities can be confident of Ireland's commitment to equal learning opportunities for all children.

Furthermore, to implement the Disability Act (2005) implies that the accessibility of many schools must be improved (both the CRC and DFI make this point).

To overcome barriers to full implementation of the Acts, the DFI recommends teacher professional development and peer education in this general area. Also, transport

services for young people with disabilities need improvement. Information on various entitlements across educational sectors needs to be much more easily available.

Disability agencies in the voluntary sector are restricted in their capacity to provide support due to lack of resources and better resources are desirable. Despite the clear need for more resources for schools to implement the Acts and for voluntary agencies to support the work of schools in this area, funding has been drastically cut.

The ASTI also draws our attention to the inadequacy of support for children's learning needs and recommends a reduction in the student-teacher ratio for Learning Support teachers from 600:1 to 300:1.

In discussing ADD/ADHD, the EDC recommends a number of strategies to better address the needs of children with ADD/ADHD, their parents, and teachers who work with these children³¹. Continued support for teachers (focusing on behaviour management) is needed, and a short (e.g. one-day) education programme is not sufficient in the view of the EDC. Also, it recommends that behaviour management programmes for children should involve the parents since participation of parent(s) and child is shown to be beneficial. The EDC further suggests a need for more widespread education and support for teachers and parents in implementing cognitive-behavioural strategies with the child.

6.3.8. Promotion of Literacy in Schools

As already noted in this report, the JCSP Literacy and Numeracy Strategy is the most significant investment for the promotion of literacy and numeracy in the SSP (DEIS). The Demonstration Library Project is part of this strategy. The JCSP Support Service comments that it had been planned to extend the Demonstration Library Project to the 50 SSP schools with the highest levels of disadvantage over five years with an extension to further SSP schools considered subsequently and recommends that the extension to the 50 schools continues as planned and that the existing provision in schools be maintained and protected from cutbacks.

³¹ Downes (2004).

The JCSP Support Service has also highlighted the lack of appropriate textbooks for students in JCSP (and of course others who have lower literacy levels) as a barrier to the promotion of literacy and numeracy, and engagement with subject material more generally:

The average readability of Junior Cycle textbooks is 14 years, with many technical subject areas reaching 17 and 18 years. The average reading age of the JCSP student is 9 years, on average 4 years behind their chronological age. Basic textbooks are not available. Book publishers regard this market too small in Ireland and so do not produce any suitable materials (many textbooks in the UK for example are differentiated). It should be encouraged that the JCSP students are supported in accessing the junior cycle textbooks and a large part of the current in-service programme explores strategies that teachers can employ to support the student in accessing them. However, there is a need for materials to be produced to support students in putting in place foundations of the basic skills within a subject area without which progression is very difficult.

Linked with this, the EDC has suggested that where possible, the teacher needs to meet the child where he or she is ‘at’. For example, many children live in homes where there are few if any books, yet there is a tradition of reading magazines and newspapers, and the use of these text types in class may act as a useful strategy to engage students with texts.

The ASTI has noted that current class sizes can act as indirect barriers to the promotion of literacy and numeracy. Particularly in the core subject areas, class sizes can undermine teachers’ willingness to diversify their teaching methodologies, and this means that students with literacy and numeracy problems will be particularly disadvantaged.

6.4. Broader Themes

6.4.1. Counselling and Support for Students

The IVEA discusses the findings of its Student Welfare Task Group in evaluating the adequacy of supports available in schools. The main findings were that the service lacks integration and is too driven by educational considerations to the detriment of social and emotional difficulties. Also, where students had to be referred to HSE-provided services lengthy waiting lists were at times problematic. With respect to assessment, the Group noted that the requirement for students with special needs to be assessed prior to supports

being made available to them is unnecessarily inflexible and that too much of the work of NEPS revolves around the psychometric testing of students in the absence of the provision of therapeutic supports.

The IVEA cites the student welfare/support service in place in Northern Ireland as a model of good practice. The Belfast Education Library Board (BELB) which is similar to a VEC, provides an integrated support service to all schools in the greater Belfast area, whether under BELB management or not. Each school is provided with the services of a psychologist and an outreach teacher one day per week. Students with more acute needs attend a 12 week programme (two days per week) in a centre in central Belfast. The centre has access to a wide range of integrated support services. Moreover, schools do not need to have an assessment completed to access support up to a particular level of severity, and each school has a dedicated special needs budget.

The IVEA suggests that consideration should be given to assigning responsibility to VECs for the provision of an integrated support/welfare service to all schools in their catchment area. In conjunction with a BELB-type model, it recommends that school guidance counselors are upskilled in order to reduce the need to refer students to services external to the school. The ratio of guidance counsellors to students also needs to be significantly improved and the role of the guidance counsellor probably needs to be redefined in the view of the IVEA.

The EDC has raised bullying and mental health as serious issues that require attention.³² It notes a link between ‘otherness’ and bullying (and, specifically, newcomer status/ethnicity is mentioned by the IU), and also between bullying and both school non-attendance and the prevalence of students indicating an intention to leave school early.

The EDC comments that while a majority of students experiencing problems did report having someone to talk to in its 2004 study, there is a significant minority who do not. Furthermore research cited by the EDC indicates that those seeking support

³² Downes (2004); Downes and Maunsell (2007).

were far more likely to do so from friends. They also point to a lack of information about local emotional support services for young people. There is a lack of co-ordination regarding referrals.

The EDC comments that interventions aimed at increasing students' self-esteem are complementary to anti-bullying interventions, and that both should be developed alongside one another. It recommends a psychological service to improve school environment and covering bullying, self-esteem, teacher-pupil interaction, and social and emotional support. Furthermore, its 2004 research findings that even within a school, variations between classes in the incidence of bullying occur, suggests that some teachers are successful in tackling bullying. The EDC therefore recommends that a specific member of staff co-ordinates a dissemination strategy for tackling bullying. Peer mediation is also suggested as an alternative means of dealing with conflict.

In the case where a child needs to engage in therapeutic work, the EDC is of the view that this should take place outside the context of the school (or at least, that the student be given a choice). Having the service in the school may mean that issues of trust and confidentiality may act as barriers to accessing the service.

6.4.2. Trauma

The RCNI has made the following recommendations specifically with respect to trauma experienced as a result of sexual violence. First, stay safe should be taught in every school; in 2006 about one-fifth of schools did not teach it. This programme is a curricular provision of personal safety skills and is an element of a school's responsibility under *Children First*, a child protection policy that should be in every primary and post-primary school. According to the RCNI, a core and compulsory programme of awareness on healthy relationships and sexual violence needs to be continued through second level as part of the SPHE programme. The rape crisis sector have developed and evaluated education programmes to meet this need. A national roll-out of such a programme would require professional development for teachers in delivery. Second, the RCNI maintains that school culture needs to be such that it offers a safe place for disclosure, a proactive approach in tackling bullying, a positive and supportive response to acting-out behaviour, educational supports for teachers in

recognising signs of sexual abuse and in how to seek disclosure, and an effective system of appropriate referral. Third, the RCNI recommends that there needs to be a clear support policy when a student is known or thought to have been abused (in addition to *Children First* guidelines). Fourth, the RCNI holds that there should be clear support structures for survivors of abuse (including partnership and referral to the local RCC) who wish to return to education.

It should be emphasized that rape is only one of a number of different kinds of trauma, but many of the recommendations made by the RCNI, particularly the promotion of a safe and inclusive school culture, teacher education/professional development, and referral, can be seen to apply to an appropriate and effective school response to children's experiences of trauma more generally.

6.4.3. Provision of Resources and the Current Social and Economic Climate

Some of the submissions focussed on the reality of impoverished circumstances and placed this at the heart of the problem of early school leaving. The key theme coming from these submissions is that much deeper changes to the structures and supports both within and outside of the education system are needed in order to genuinely effect change. The message underlying these comments is that this is an inter-agency and inter-departmental issue.

Some of the comments emphasised the generational transmission of poverty and its association with poorer educational outcomes. For example, the INTO comments:

Many initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage at all levels of education have failed, not because of poor effort by schools and teachers, but because they have neglected to tackle the root cause of poverty and, in particular, child poverty which still remains a blight on our society. They have failed because, in the main, they were introduced as stand alone pilot initiatives in a very limited number of schools. They have also failed because some structures and practices in our educational system and in our child welfare system have not changed sufficiently to make a real impact on the lives of those people living on the edge of poverty.

Not surprisingly, the majority of submissions referred to the difficulties posed within the current economic climate, and also specifically on funding structures and the provision of resources for educational disadvantage.

For example, the CPA has observed that the current economic climate is likely to reveal the ‘true’ extent to which problems of educational disadvantage affect individuals and society, since this is likely to have been masked during the economic boom. The current economic situation creates considerable difficulties since (as noted by the ASTI) promoting an inclusive school climate requires adequate care structures, specialist teachers, and quality external support, such as NEWB, NEPS and other supports for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Some submissions (ACCS, ASTI, CPA, CRC, JMB and SVP) raised serious concerns about the potential damaging consequences of the cutbacks to the most vulnerable children. As an example, the JMB comments:

This year’s Budget cuts have been highly effective at wiping out the very inclusion/participation structures we have been struggling to achieve and develop in schools for decades: HSCL, JCSP, LCA, SEN provision, SNAs, the Book Grant, restrictions on DEIS, PTR cuts, the Moratorium on PORs, teacher professional development ... the list goes on. ... If this study did nothing other than point out what we’ve lost in less than a year, it will have been truly worthwhile.

As a matter of principle, the CPA, CRA and DFI comment that any proposed cuts should be vetted to protect the needs of the most vulnerable children, in order to obtain the best outcomes within existing resources. The CPA and CRA comment that in order to tackle the challenges identified in this report, there is a need to be strategic with respect to funding. Some of the solutions are not costly, such as changes in approaches to administration, education/professional development, and awareness-raising.

Also in the context of funding structures the INTO has noted a ‘skew’ in spending on education which does not promote equality and that this issue should be reviewed:

Ireland’s educational expenditure as a percentage of GDP is 4.5%, while the European average is closer to 6%. This places us in the bottom third of spenders on education. In addition, we must examine how we allocate what we do spend on the education of our young people. It is fair to say that spending at third level does not benefit the vast majority of disadvantaged children. They have dropped out of the system long before entry to third level, either literally left the system or mentally and emotionally disengaged from formal education.

The INTO further suggests that the resources within the DES be refocussed, recommending the allocation of at least 15% of its total budget in tackling educational disadvantage.

Some submissions commented on the funding of the DEIS initiative. The ACCS comments that many schools have lost DAS status, and have not been included in the SSP. This poses difficulties for schools who perceive the social and economic context of the school remains the same, yet changes in retention rates have resulted in a loss of resources. Furthermore, there is a view that the HSCL teacher is a valuable resource, but is now confined only to DEIS schools (this was commented on by the ACCS, INTO and JMB). For example, the ACCS is of the view that, since disadvantaged schools are in every school, some provision should be made to create and maintain strong links between the schools, families and parents of these students. The views of the ASTI and SVP are consistent with those of the ACCS on this issue.

NALA points out that one of the aims of DEIS is to develop family literacy initiatives, and in 2009, there were 19 family literacy projects at a cost of €200,000. However, this amount is seen as inadequate by NALA, which amounts to only 0.3% of the overall education budget, and it compares this figure to school completion projects costs of €30 million per annum.

Although not directly referring to DEIS, the comments of the INTO are nonetheless highly relevant to allocation issues. The INTO recommends a support allocation model for socio-economically disadvantaged students that operates in a manner analogous to the allocation model for children with disabilities. That is, staffing would be allocated on the same basis as operates for children with disabilities, helping to ensure an automatic allocation of resources once entitlement is established. The INTO suggests the establishment of an Educational Disadvantage Support Service and principals to become administrative on the same basis as for special schools.

6.4.4. Importance of Early Intervention, Care and Education

It was noted elsewhere in this report that the long term benefits of early education and care with a focus on prevention are well known, particularly for children in

disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable positions. As a corollary, the long term benefits of early childcare education and care are well known. In this context, the proposal to introduce a free pre-school year is welcomed in some submissions (ASTI, IYJS, and SVP). In addition, the IYJS notes the importance of engaging parents early in the child's life.

The CRA comments that such an initiative will not work unless it is implemented in line with the SÍOLTA national standards developed by the Centre for Early Childhood and Education (CECDE). Quality must be the core focus of this provision. If this is achieved then it can be expected that pre-school education will be able to play a role in long-term outcomes including early school leaving.

However, that is not to say that early intervention is the only intervention needed. Relating both to this and the previous section, the CRA comments that there is, naturally, a tension between investing for crisis management and for early intervention and prevention. It recommends a more structured balance between these two foci of investment if early school leaving is to be successfully addressed. The ASTI comments in a similar vein, i.e.

...research demonstrates that interventions work best when they are introduced early in a child's development and where they are sustained over time.

6.4.5. Inter-Agency, Intra-Community and Inter-Personal Co-operation

This section discusses comments made in the submissions on the need for inter-agency co-ordination and co-operation at both macro and community levels, as well as co-operation between individuals within the system at a micro level.

Several submissions (including the ACCS, INTO and SVP) commented on need for integration and co-ordination among many different bodies. For example, SVP comments:

To end early school leaving there needs to be much closer partnership working between the various health and education bodies in particular National Educational Psychological Service, National Educational Welfare Board and Child and

Adolescent Mental Health Teams, as well as voluntary organisations working in this area, to ensure that children at risk do not slip through the net.

The INTO calls for better cohesion between government departments and agencies, particularly in the area of health, and also in co-ordinating the various schemes that provide financial assistance to low-income families. The DFI notes that voluntary disability agencies have potential to support the work of schools and is of the view that that stronger linkages need to be established in order to realise this potential.

Some submissions commented on the importance of integration of services within the local community. That is, well-integrated supports from health, social welfare, the Gardaí, the school, and others, can provide models of good practice in order to identify ways to promote the most efficient and easily accessed supports for students. The ACCS notes that this model of the *integrated services school* is successfully implemented in the UK and elsewhere³³. A similar point is made by the INTO, which comments:

There is a growing recognition that all family services have to be delivered in a co-ordinated way. What is required in disadvantaged communities is a 'one stop shop' where the services of social workers, health professionals, carers, gardaí are co-ordinated so that any one service can be made available to a family or child at a time of greatest need. The establishment of a family support service, available to all families in disadvantaged communities, is essential if we are to provide a holistic response to children in disadvantaged areas. Disadvantaged children need an integrated support service that can co-ordinate Education, Health and Social Services.

The ACCS notes that Youthreach has been very successful in many settings but that there is a lack of linkage between this sector and mainstream schools. It comments that there needs to be a more widespread recognition by staff in mainstream schools that this programme is appropriate for some students. Clear and ongoing lines of communication between schools and local Youthreach centres need to be established.

SVP advises caution, however, in that it is important to ensure that Youthreach is not being used simply to remove underachieving or 'problematic' students from mainstream education. Furthermore, SVP is of the view that more should be done to

³³ See, for example, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/welfare/Integrated-Services>

support Youthreach participants back into mainstream education if this was felt to be appropriate to their needs.

Within the school context, the JCSP Support Services has noted that a key challenge is to organize the time for individuals within schools to meet. This is important, since when teachers are facilitated to meet, consistency in approaches emerges. The JCSP Support Service comments:

The approach can only be effective when teachers are facilitated to meet in a planned and structured way as outlined in the JCSP. Time is required for planning, implementation and evaluation of activities undertaken. They also allow schools scope to build on their own strengths and develop responses that will be long lasting and embedded in the school culture and the community.

Time is also required, according to the JCSPSS, for the various staff who co-ordinate the JCSP Support Service to meet:

Co-ordination and integration of the existing initiatives in the schools is an essential part of that response [to educational disadvantage] but this will only happen if the key people – management, JCSP co-ordinator, Home School Community Co-ordinator, School Completion Programme Co-ordinator, learning support teachers, primary school teachers, etc. – have time to come together.

6.4.6. General Promotion of Literacy

The CRA comments that the ability to read and write is critical to success in school and beyond, but a significant minority – around 10% of children – leaves primary school unable to read or write properly. NALA highlights the fact that around 30% of children living in disadvantaged areas experience severe literacy problems.

Furthermore, it notes that overall reading standards have remained unchanged over the past 20 years. Despite these concerns, as well as the fact that literacy problems entail significant costs to individuals and the State, Ireland has no national-level literacy policy. NALA and the CRA state that policy needs to be developed in line with the goal outlined in *Towards 2016* that every child will leave primary school literate and numerate. The policy should be underpinned by realistic targets capable of being monitored using agreed indicators. It should be in the form of a comprehensive and integrated family literacy strategy. NALA highlights the comparatively low level of spending on adult literacy, which amounts to just 0.3% of the €9.3 billion annual

budget for education and argues that the benefits of such a strategy will far outweigh the costs.

The EDC has identified and documented models of good practice in the promotion of literacy. One such programme is Familiscope (www.familiscope.ie; already discussed in Chapter 3). The EDC notes that Familiscope is explicitly cited in the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) report on Child Literacy and Social Inclusion (2009) as an example of good practice in a range of areas – as an example of projects that incorporate broader developmental approaches of arts and culture activities, include customised literacy-based approaches through speech and language therapy, driven by systematic evidence-based planning, and as an example of an innovative area-based cross-sectoral approach. This model is consistent with NALA's descriptions of family literacy policy and the INTO's emphasis on establishing a multidisciplinary team 'one-stop shop'.

NALA's specific recommendations are first, that the DES takes a lead role in promoting an integrated national strategy for the development of family literacy, which should involve other Government departments including the Health and Children, the Social and Family Affairs and the Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Second, family literacy should be a significant part of a refreshed national adult literacy strategy. Third, NALA recommends that the DES should develop a dedicated and significant funding stream for family literacy work to be accessed on the basis of a partnership between families, communities and schools. This budget line should be through adult education to promote partnerships between families and schools.

6.4.7. Needs of Specific Groups

The CRC has identified three specific groups of children, i.e. children in homeless families, in care, and experiencing domestic violence, noting that the perspectives and experiences of these groups are, up until now, not well-represented in policy discussion on early school leaving. Similarly, the Carers' Association has noted that children in a caring role have not been the focus of much research or policy to date. Furthermore, the IRL has noted that the invisibility of rural poverty and disadvantage is highly problematic for children in rural areas.

This section discusses the issues pertinent to these five groups of children.

First, regarding homelessness/temporary accommodation³⁴, it is estimated that in 2008 there were 249 households including 576 children living in emergency accommodation. The challenges faced by children in this situation include getting to and from school, frequent changes in school, inadequate facilities in emergency accommodation for doing homework, and a lack of daily routine. The CRC recommends that homelessness risk is identified early. Local housing and social supports are important in this respect. Furthermore, homelessness should be resolved as early as possible. Other accommodation and support services are required, according to the CRC, particularly for families experiencing personal and social problems on top of accommodation difficulties. Funding for family support services such as Focus Ireland is essential.

Regarding children in care³⁵, it is estimated that more than 80% of children in care are in foster care, and 2,000 in State care. This amounts to some 5,000 children (2002 estimates). The CRC undertook research on children in foster care aged 13 and 14 years of age. They found that one-third of the 200 participants surveyed had a diagnosed special educational need. Furthermore, the number of foster placement changes had a negative impact on educational experiences since this resulted in disruptions in schooling. About 50% of these children experienced some form of bullying and this was commonly related to their foster care status. Children in State (residential) care faced problems similar to those in foster care. In addition, many of these young people had significant gaps in their learning as a result of long periods of absenteeism. There was also a perception that the care system was not well understood by school staff and students. The CRC notes that solutions cut across the education system, child protection and welfare systems. It recommends that children should be placed with birth siblings and fostered by relatives insofar as possible. The number of changes in placement needs to be minimised to reduce disruptions in schooling. Awareness-raising among school staff as to the issues facing children in care is also important. Care reviews for children should include educational planning. Promotion of maintaining links with birth families, friendship networks and hobbies

³⁴ Halpenny, Keogh & Gilligan (2002); Homeless Agency (2008).

³⁵ Daly and Gilligan (2005); Emond (2002).

are also recommended. Also, specific to children in State care, teaching staff need to be provided the opportunity to learn about the care system and receive support in managing children in care in the classroom.

Third, the CRC notes that in 2004, 6,229 incidences of domestic violence were reported, which is likely to be an underestimate³⁶. The issues faced by children experiencing domestic violence have only recently been subject to research and, in the view of the CRC, policy is lagging behind in this area. Existing research including a study of children and mothers in Mayo indicates that children living with domestic violence are at risk of poor educational outcomes because feeling responsible for a family member who is a victim of violence can result in erratic attendance patterns and early school leaving. Also their potential for learning may be hampered by tiredness, anxiety and competing demands for their attention. The results of the Mayo study indicated that children were frequently given out to by their teachers for not keeping up with their school work. Many children were bullied or feared being bullied and so kept their home situation secret. Mothers reported experiencing a lack of understanding from teachers when they tried to explain their situation. Consistent with this, teachers themselves indicated that they did not have the skills and knowledge to understand and deal with the connection between domestic violence and behavioural changes/difficulties in children. The CRC recommends including pre- and in-service education on domestic violence on the national teacher educational programmes. There needs, in the view of the CRC, to be an integrated service for families experiencing domestic violence that includes schools, the Gardaí and voluntary agencies. Teachers also have a potentially important role to act as referrers to the service.

Fourth, the Carers Association estimates that 5,433 carers are aged between 15 and 19³⁷. Young carers frequently experience absenteeism, lateness, tiredness, limited participation in extra-curricular activities, bullying, restricted peer networks, poor attainment, and anxiety³⁸. Furthermore, young carers are frequently not known to school staff. Many of these students experience stigma or bullying, particularly where

³⁶ Buckley, Whelan and Holt (2006).

³⁷ www.cso.ie.

³⁸ Dearden and Becker (2002).

some disabilities, mental health and/or addiction difficulties are present. Also many young carers are in situations where drug and alcohol problems are present and whose families/parents may be reluctant to accept that their children are acting in a caring role and so do not seek help. There is currently no dedicated support service for young carers in Ireland. The Carers Association has made a number of specific recommendations for young carers. These are as follows. Efforts need to be made to raise awareness of young carers amongst policy makers, teachers and students. For example, young care workers could be invited to give talks in schools. Early identification of young carers is important since, frequently, the situation of young carers only becomes apparent following a period of chronic absenteeism and/or under-attainment. For example schools could revise their enrolment policies to collect this information. There should be a named member of staff with lead responsibility of young carers (and other vulnerable students). Schools need to adopt a more flexible approach, such as allowing carers to make contact at home during break times. Ultimately, procedures are needed so that standard principles are applied in supporting young carers.

Fifth, regarding children living in rural areas, IRL comments that the invisibility of rural poverty and disadvantage is an issue. It results in a lack of recognition of rural specific factors in second level underachievement and a lack of appropriate and necessary investment. This is made more difficult to alleviate (as also noted by the ACCS) by virtue of the dispersal of disadvantage in rural areas together with high numbers of disadvantaged students in rural areas. IRL argues that the problem is compounded by gaps in the provision in three key areas. First, lack of infrastructure and personnel to support people with educational difficulties, including remoteness from service providers i.e. speech therapists, psychologists, and counsellors. Second, lack of infrastructure for recreational, arts and cultural activities. Third, the cost of school transport at post-primary level has doubled in some instances. There is a link between absenteeism and these difficulties with the school transport system. IRL recommends providing additional supports within the school and linking these into the wider community as well as increasing parental involvement and developing alternatives for those who have already left school. IRL mentions one example of a CDP that is an example of successful work between schools in the local community:

the ‘True Teens’ project operated by South West Wexford CDP³⁹, which supported children in transitioning from primary to post-primary. IRL asks for continued supports for CDPs and other local community groups working to address early school leaving. It calls for fast-track planning and construction of and repair of rural primary and secondary schools and that limits be placed on school transport costs. Finally, it recommends that concept of rural proofing should be operationalised to enable government and other policymakers ‘rural proof’ national, regional and local policies to ensure that they do not have a negative impact on rural areas and communities, as it was a key commitment the 1999 White Paper, again reiterated in *Towards 2016*.

6.4.8. Informational Gaps

The ACCS comments that, given that school attendance at primary level is an important indicator of engagement at school, it should be tracked and conveyed to staff working in post-primary level to promote appropriate interventions. It notes that, at present, there is no system for tracking attendance. Development and implementation of the Primary Pupils’ Database is therefore needed, according to the ACCS. The ACCS comments that this database also needs to be supported by increased sharing of time and resources by staff working in primary and post-primary schools. It welcomes work of the IPPN (Irish Primary Principals Network), NAPD (National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals) and NCCA in this regard.

The CRA and IU also note that there is no general system for tracking students, and no information on when a pupil leaves school during the year. This is despite estimates that around 1,000 children do not transfer to post-primary school. It comments:

The lack of a comprehensive, national level tracking system for children in education creates a barrier to finding effective solutions – we must understand the nature of the problem if we are able to solve it.

The IVEA comments, in the context of promoting inclusive enrolment policies and practices:

³⁹ See http://www.swwcdp.com/true_teens_group.html

The IVEA understands that such information [a database tracking children from primary to post-primary] is not currently available. Once such a data-base is available it would be easy to see whether or not individual schools are accepting a fair share of students with special needs of one kind or another.

There are additional, group-specific data gaps. For example, the Carers Association notes that there is no information on children under the age of 15 who may be providing care. The CRC notes that there are no data on the educational outcomes of children in foster or residential care. The IU notes that a tracking system should include data on students' ethnic status and language spoken.

6.4.9. The Role of the Media

The IVEA is critical of the media attention given to the Leaving Certificate 'points race'. It questions the value of this and argues that it creates a culture of winning and losing. It also detracts attention from what should be the function of the school system – i.e.

...to assist learners to commence a lifelong process of releasing their potential, in all areas of their lives – personal, family, community and work-related.

Furthermore, this focus acts as a barrier to invoking

...genuine discussion about how we might improve our education system to the benefit of Irish society and, in particular to the benefit of those at risk of underachieving and/or dropping out of education before completing either the Leaving Certificate or an equivalent qualification.

6.5. Conclusions

This chapter discussed the key points raised in 18 written submissions on early school leaving. As with the results presented in Chapter 5, these provide further insights to our understanding of the issues. Although some of the themes in Chapters 4 and 5 overlap, the points raised are, by and large, somewhat different in that the views in Chapter 5 tend to be immersed in the education system whereas those in this chapter are somewhat more distal. As with Chapter 5, the conclusions here summarise the main issues raised under the two headings of school-based issues and other issues.

6.5.1. School-Based Issues

Transition from primary to post-primary was raised in some of the submissions, both in terms of the significant disjuncture between the child-centred approach at primary level and the academic, examination-driven focus at post-primary level and also in terms of the need to improve continuity of resources and supports, particularly for more vulnerable students, e.g. students with a disability or special educational need.

A number of points were raised with respect to *curriculum and assessment*. First, it was felt that *the number of subjects* at both Junior and Leaving Certificates was not suited to a significant number of students and also acted as a barrier to more meaningful, in-depth learning experiences. Second, it was felt that the *Junior Certificate Examination* should be de-emphasised significantly or replaced with continuous assessment. Third, a *lack of flexibility* with respect to programme and subject choice was criticized at both Junior and Leaving Certificate levels. There were also calls to significantly *expand vocational programmes* at Leaving Certificate level to cater for up to half of the cohort and that these programmes be varied, flexible, and clearly aligned with the FETAC system. With respect to specific subjects, some recommendations were made with a view to making these more attractive. It was recommended to be more flexible with respect to *Irish* (in the form of a short course compulsory subject such as SPHE), to have better alignment of higher and ordinary level *mathematics* with other core subjects and no extra CAO points for higher level, and re-working of *physics and chemistry* to enhance engagement and uptake.

There were also a number of comments raised with respect to teacher professional development at post-primary level. It was noted that the *model of teacher education* at post-primary level is now outdated and not suited to developing skills in students that are needed for 21st century needs. Therefore, *reform* in this area is needed, and the work of the Teaching Council in this respect was welcomed, but it was also felt that change needs to occur as soon as possible. It was recommended to improve the *induction and accreditation* procedures for newly qualified teachers and to incentivize *continued professional development*. These suggested changes have wider implications for the very nature of the role and contract of the teacher and imply that

industrial relations issues may arise. In this regard, it was suggested that the Teaching Council could play a useful role.

It was also noted that *punitive discipline*, notably suspension, were ineffective and that there already exist models of good practice. Improvements to dealing with disciplinary problems were suggested, including a time out room, changes in class management policies, and appropriately trained support staff targeted to schools where disengagement and behaviour issues are significant.

Inclusivity was discussed particularly with respect to *enrolment practices*. It was noted that there are significant disparities between schools in terms of the proportions of ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at risk’ students and there was a view that this is unacceptable. It was recommended that there should be wide consultation on this issue and, through the Minister, to make inclusive enrolment policy a legal obligation. This would entail the formalizing of a number of procedures and the setting up of support structures. It was noted that inclusive enrolment policies might discourage the use of waiting lists, giving preference to family members, and that there should be transparency with respect to ‘hidden’ issues such as additional costs of schooling in a given school.

With respect to special educational needs, there were calls to provide the supports and resources to *implement the EPSEN Act (2004) and the Disability Act (2005)*. Key needs are staff professional development with respect to both special needs and teaching methodologies, improving accessibility of schools, ensuring adequate transport services, and developing strong links with voluntary disability agencies. There were also calls to provide further education to both teachers and parents in the area of behaviour management.

A number of recommendations with respect to the *promotion of literacy and numeracy in schools* were also made. It was recommended to proceed with the rollout of the Demonstration Library Project to 50 schools in the DEIS scheme as had originally been planned. A lack of suitable textbook material was identified as a barrier to promoting literacy and meaningful learning experiences and it was also suggested that teachers work with texts that are matched to the types of texts that might be found in students’ homes.

6.5.2. Broader Issues

The support of the emotional, psychological and mental health needs was perceived to be important, including bullying and other mental health issues. A model of good practice was described (BELB in Belfast), which is an *integrated support service*, and it was suggested by the IVEA that VECs might successfully adopt this type of model in providing counselling and support for all post-primary schools in each VEC catchment area.

With respect to *bullying*, it was recommended that a specific member of staff communicate and co-ordinate successful anti-bullying strategies within each school.

Furthermore, in the event of a *trauma*, it was recommended that an appropriate school response should comprise a safe and inclusive school climate, teacher professional development in the area of trauma, and swift and appropriate referral. Specifically in relation to trauma arising from rape, it was recommended that the Stay Safe programme be taught in every school, a clear policy in cases where a student is known or thought to have been abused, and support structures for survivors of abuse who wish to return to education.

Some comments on the current *social and economic climate* emphasized the continuing reality of poverty and the need for fundamental changes to be made to the structures and practices associated with education and child welfare. A number of submissions expressed considerable concern about the potential effects of the current economic climate and it was emphasized that budget cuts should not, in principle, further disadvantage those already in a vulnerable position. It was also suggested that the DES dedicate a budget of 15% or more specifically to tackle educational disadvantage, and, in the context of the overall budget, to increase the amount spent on education so that it is more in line with the OECD average.

Comments specific to the *allocation of resources within DEIS* concurred in that it was felt that provision of resources needs to be extended to include some supports for schools not in the SSP (notably, the HSCL and the amount of funds allocated to the promotion of literacy).

Some submissions welcomed the proposed *ECCE scheme* but emphasized that it must be properly implemented and complement other initiatives such as crisis management.

Co-operation and collaboration between agencies, groups and people were discussed in a number of senses in the submissions. It was acknowledged that linkages *between Government Departments* are fundamental to tackling educational disadvantage and early school leaving, particularly with respect to health and the need for improved co-ordination of schemes aimed to provide financial assistance. It was also noted that integrated services school model, which operates successfully in the UK (for example) should be rolled out in Ireland also and depends on *close ties* between the *school* and various support and other agencies within the *local community*. Better linkages were recommended between *mainstream and non-mainstream education* settings, in particular with respect to schools and local Youthreach centres and that the two-way movement of students between these two settings should be facilitated. Finally, it was noted that *time for individual teachers* within a school to meet and co-ordinate activities was essential to promote quality and consistency.

A lack of a *national literacy strategy* was noted as a significant gap, despite evidence of severe literacy problems in disadvantaged communities and the transmission of literacy difficulties from generation to generation. It was therefore recommended to develop and implement the strategy that is integrated and family-focused, and that the DES takes a lead role in co-ordinating the work of various Government Departments in this regard. It was noted that to facilitate this, a dedicated budget line would be required, perhaps accessed through the adult education sector.

Specific groups of children were highlighted as being *under-represented* or neglected in research in this area. The submissions identified five such groups: children in foster homes, experiencing domestic violence, in emergency accommodation, in a caring role, and living in rural areas. It was recommended that these groups be taken into account when developing educational policy in the interest of promoting genuine equity, and more research is recommended on two groups in particular – children in foster homes and children in caring roles.

Some of the submissions identified the *lack of a central database* capable of tracking students on to primary school as a barrier to developing policy in this area, particularly as it relates to retention, absenteeism, inclusive enrolment policies, and specific groups of children.

The *media* was criticized for its high focus on the ‘points race’ as this was seen to be acting as a barrier to promoting meaningful discussion in the promotion of more equitable outcomes.

6.5.3. Key Areas for Policy Raised in Chapter 6

The themes raised in Phase 3 suggest a number of key areas that merit policy attention:

- The need for reform of the teacher education sector, including the role of teachers, teacher induction, accreditation and the incentivisation of CPD.
- The need for restructuring to promote smooth transitions at all levels, flexibility in the delivery of educational programmes with clear paths of progression, more vocational programmes, and fluidity between mainstream and other settings.
- The potential for a more integrated support service that has school-based and out-of-school supports complementing one another.
- The need for a national, integrated literacy strategy.
- The need for full implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) and Disability Act (2005).
- The need to promote inclusive enrolment and the promotion of an inclusive learning environment (e.g. with respect to discipline, bullying).
- The need to track students via a centralized database from primary to post-primary.
- The potential role of the media in enhancing the debate on equality in education.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a set of recommendations arising from all parts of the study – the literature review and description of available supports, the empirical analyses, the interviews with various individuals and groups who have experience of early school leaving, and the written submissions received. Prior to presenting each recommendation, we provide a preamble that gives its rationale. We wish to be clear on the basis on which each recommendation is made, so we are explicit about whether the recommendation has arisen from the literature review (Chapter 2 and to a lesser extent, Chapter 1), the review of supports in place (Chapter 3), the statistical analyses (Chapter 4), the interviews (Chapter 5), and/or the written submissions (Chapter 6).

In making recommendations, we are mindful of the commentary by Kellaghan and McGee (2005) in the introduction to the report of the Your Education System process. Kellaghan and McGee note that on the one hand, one might conclude that there is already sufficient documentation to guide education policy and decision-making. However, according to Kellaghan and McGee, recommendations in previous reports were frequently idealistic, largely uncoded, and it was often unclear what principles guided the prioritisation of recommendations. Furthermore, some of the recommendations reflected the views of a small number of pressure groups rather than the general population. Kellaghan and McGee emphasised the importance of listening to the views of those that are not normally heard (something which influenced the selection of interviewees for this study).

As a response to Kellaghan and McGee's (2005) argument about the absence of an explicit statement of the principles on which recommendations were based, the authors of the present report and the Expert Group agreed that the eight principles outlined in Section 7.2 were to underpin the recommendations in this report. As such, Section 7.2 can be seen as an interpretative framework for what follows in Section 7.3.

It should be noted that the order in which the recommendations is presented is not in any way indicative of their relative level of importance; rather, they should be considered in a holistic manner as an integrated set. Ideally, *all* recommendations would be implemented within a short, medium and longer term sustained time-frame.

Overall, the recommendations should be viewed in the context of longer-term systemic change aimed at making the education system more suited to the needs of those categorised as potential early leavers (prevention) and other changes aimed at improving and assisting specific interventions that will always be necessary (remediation). It is hoped that this will result in more coherent implementation strategies and the further development of a culture of evaluation.

7.2. Principles Underlying the Recommendations

1. Early school leaving and its related problems of poverty, deprivation and exclusion should be understood in a holistic context that is much broader than the education system. Early school leaving is symptomatic of societal inequality in Ireland generally.
2. Current understandings of the concept of 'equality' imply the need for non-uniform treatment in terms of the provision of extra resources in favour of certain groups of children, families and communities (e.g. disadvantage; special educational needs, including borderline mild general learning disability).
3. Solutions to the problem of early school leaving and associated issues should prioritise a preventative approach that begins early in the child's life and will often involve his or her family.
4. Interventions to tackle the problem of early school leaving and associated issues need to be implemented on a long-term and sustained basis.
5. Groups experiencing social exclusion, poverty and deprivation as well as young people that leave school early are not homogenous. Therefore, interventions must be capable of being tailored appropriately to the specific needs of groups and individuals.
6. Interventions aimed at tackling the problem of early school leaving and associated issues require consistency and continuity, both within and across agencies.

7. Interventions aimed at tackling the problem of early school leaving and associated issues need to be monitored and evaluated objectively, and capable of being altered in response to changes in the individual or community, as well as in response to emergent knowledge about those aspects of interventions that are more and less effective.
8. Investing in solutions to the problem of early school leaving and associated issues is highly likely to result not only in greater social cohesion and individual and community well-being, but also in substantial returns to the State.

7.3. Recommendations

7.3.1. Early Childhood Education

Research cited in Chapters 2 and 3 indicates that (i) early parental involvement is of key importance in engaging children in their education, (ii) universal provision does not guarantee universal access, (iii) the benefits of quality early childhood education are significant and long-lasting, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and (iv) provision of early childhood education is challenging in rural areas. It was noted that from 2010, a new scheme (ECCE) aims to provide one year of early childhood education to all children aged 4. This is the first attempt in Ireland to provide such a scheme. In Chapters 2, 3 and 6 it was noted that investment in early childhood care and education is regarded as a particularly effective and efficient way to address problems relating to socioeconomic disadvantage and therefore better educational outcomes and life chances. However, there is a lack of a detailed cost-benefit analysis of such interventions in the Irish context, and no information on the likely outcomes for various combinations of interventions.

Recommendation 1a: *An evaluation of the ECCE scheme that focuses on indicators of uptake and quality of provision should be initiated immediately. Assessment of outcomes (e.g. possible improvements in achievement or educational attainment; language skills) should also be part of the evaluation, but will require a longer time-frame. Local Childcare Committees may be well-positioned to guide this evaluation.*

Recommendation 1b: *In the short term, strategies need to be designed and implemented that are targeted at maximising the uptake of ECCE by target groups, including children of families in disadvantaged and rural areas.*

Recommendation 1c: *Consistent with the principle of equality, provision within the universal ECCE model should be augmented to provide additional supports for children and their families in disadvantaged communities. This should involve, but not be limited to, linking local ECCE service delivery with relevant supports in other existing initiatives in local communities.*

Recommendation 1d: *The evaluation of the scheme under 1a should be used, insofar as possible, to plan changes to supports and services.*

7.3.2. Tracking, Targeting and Streamlining of Services

It was noted in Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 6 that the lack of a national system for tracking students poses difficulties in targeting resources and providing integrated supports. It was also noted in several of the submissions reported on in Chapter 6 that cross-Departmental and cross-agency work is, at times, fragmented, resulting in gaps and discontinuities in the provision of services. Three gaps in particular were identified – (i) between the DES and associated bodies such as NEWB and the NCSE and health bodies such as the HSE (although protocols for interagency collaboration amongst these are acknowledged), (ii) between and among services in the local community, and (iii) between mainstream and non-mainstream education settings (e.g. in the provision of supports such as those provided by NEWB, NCSE and NEPS to Youthreach centres). It was also argued (Chapter 3) that consideration should be given to improving the delivery of targeted resources that extends beyond learning support within DEIS. Specifically, it would be worth investigating the appropriateness and feasibility of introducing a sliding scale of supports that could be packaged into sub-groups; for example educational supports (e.g. access to JCSP and LCA); auxiliary supports (e.g. school books grant scheme; school meals programme); and general financial support (e.g. capitation allocation). Furthermore, evidence presented in Chapter 5 indicated that, despite difficult circumstances, the parents interviewed for this study were clearly concerned about their children’s educational welfare. Having

said this, a small minority of parents may not be proactive in their children's engagement in education.

Recommendation 2a: *A national tracking system needs to be put in place that is capable of following the educational and training pathways of all young people. The tracking system should be designed to collect quantitative data only (as opposed to qualitative indicators). In the medium term, the system can be expected to give rise to savings in the form of significantly enhanced efficiencies in targeted and integrated supports. This system could be set up by a working group from the DES, HSE, and OMCYA.*

The system should:

- *track children from pre-school through to primary, post-primary and further education on an individual basis*
- *include, where possible, individual-level information on policy-relevant target groups, i.e. gender, migrant/ethnicity status, socioeconomic status, membership of the Traveller community, and special educational needs*
- *be capable of tracking individual children who transfer in or out of mainstream education settings, including Youthreach, FÁS, and detention centres*
- *be accompanied by a policy for the provision of services such as those provided by NEPS and NCSE and supports offered within DEIS at transfer points in the system*
- *have the potential to track individual-level attendance in order to better inform the work of NEWB.*

Recommendation 2b: *In parallel with the development of the tracking system, the DES needs to develop a strategy for retention that focuses in the short term on maximising retention at Junior Certificate level, and in the medium term, on a strategy that aims to achieve a minimum educational qualification of Leaving Certificate or its equivalent.*

Recommendation 2c: *In parallel with the development of the tracking system, policy and strategy on inter-Departmental and inter-agency collaboration should be further*

developed in order to maximise the potential benefits of such a system and to target supports in as efficient manner as possible.

Recommendation 2d: *The prioritisation of services for 0- to 6-year-olds should receive dedicated attention in the work of the OMCYA in co-ordinating the efforts of all relevant bodies, developing strategy, identifying gaps, and minimising duplication of services.*

Recommendation 2e: *For the next round of DEIS, refinements to the methods used to identify schools for receipt of additional supports under the SSP should be made. For example a sliding scale could be identified, and the broad support packages provided through the SSP could be divided into sub-sets of supports and applied for separately by schools based on individual schools' needs.*

Recommendation 2f: *Youthreach centres should be included in the remit of the NEWB. The optimal manner in which to allow Youthreach centres to avail of supports similar to those provided by NEPS and the NCSE should be reviewed (e.g. by extending the Special Educational Needs Initiative; SENI) and this support enhanced, initially in a cost-neutral manner such as dissemination of best practices in SENI to all Youthreach centres, and in the medium term, through increased investment.*

Recommendation 2g: *Given the important role that parents play in their children's education, the extent to which parents may better support their children within a targeted, integrated system of incentives should be investigated.*

7.3.3. Special Educational Needs

Evidence in Chapters 2, 5 and 6 indicates that there are in some cases significant delays in the assessment and the provision of support for children with special educational needs and in the absence of supports, children run the risk of becoming disengaged and school staff are put under additional pressure. However, current data on this are lacking. Analysis suggests the need for schools to clearly communicate with parents and the importance of engaging in individualised planning for students with special educational needs. However, this will only come into effect with the full

implementation of the EPSEN Act (2004). Furthermore, there is a lack of research in the Irish context on how to appropriately respond to the needs of children with emotional/behavioural difficulties, and there is a lack of a prevention and early intervention strategy to engage children and parents in order to foster positive change. It was also noted that there has not as of yet been a formal evaluation of NEPS. Current research on the prevalence of special educational needs and emotional/behavioural difficulties and the development of the NCSE's database are acknowledged.

Recommendation 3a: *The work of the NCSE on emotional/behavioural difficulties and of the prevalence of special educational needs should be prioritised, and actively used to inform policy and practice in this area.*

Recommendation 3b: *The continuing development of the NCSE's database should be prioritised.*

Recommendation 3c: *The sections of the EPSEN Act (2004) that deal with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) should be implemented in order to enhance the engagement of teachers and parents in children's learning.*

Recommendation 3d: *A formal evaluation of NEPS should be undertaken in order to identify and address gaps in provision. The evaluation should include all stakeholders, including children and their parents. A specific focus of the evaluation should be the provision of emotional/therapeutic supports as discussed under Recommendation 9 (below).*

7.3.4. Literacy

Strong associations between poor literacy and disengagement from schooling were evident in findings presented in Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. It was also noted that early parental involvement and an intergenerational approach to literacy development are effective for both children and their parents, and that gains in literacy persisted over time with this approach. The activities in DEIS relating to literacy development were noted, including the specification of literacy targets in the schools' three-year Plans that take the needs of students in the local context into account, additional support for

Continuing Professional Development, and the provision of guidelines on assessment by the NCCA. Some of the submissions (Chapter 6) argued that there is a need for a literacy strategy that applies to all schools.

Recommendation 4a: *The DES needs to develop policies and practices to enable schools to achieve the target that all children leaving primary school will be able to demonstrate at least basic literacy as appropriate to the local context of the school. ‘Basic literacy’ could be defined on the basis of a level of literacy that permits independent functioning and equitable participation in society. An approach to this might be based on proficiency levels which form objective measurements of specific skills that are capable of being monitored over time. This target needs to be achieved regardless of the level of support that children are receiving at home. This will have implications for teacher education/professional development, classroom practice, and strategies for teachers to engage with parents and vice versa. These supports will need, in some cases, to be extended beyond educational ones to include nutritional and emotional supports. In the medium term, progress towards this target in all schools could be monitored by the National Assessment of English Reading (NAER, conducted by the ERC), which assesses a representative sample of the population of primary schools, although it should be noted that NAER is a reading/writing assessment that does not include measures of oral and phonological skills.*

Recommendation 4b: *Recommendation 4a should be supported at post-primary level with the adoption of the JCSP’s numeracy and literacy strategy in schools in need of supports to promote literacy development. The Demonstration Library Project (DLP) should be prioritised and reinforced.*

Recommendation 4c: *In order to better support families with literacy needs, and given the evidence of substantial returns to the State, the annual budget for family literacy initiatives should be increased substantially from its current figure of 200,000 euro. An increase in budget will need to be accompanied by a national strategy for promoting family literacy and engaging families with literacy needs in local literacy initiatives. NALA could play a guiding role with respect to this strategy.*

7.3.5. Transfer to Post-primary School

Evidence cited in Chapters 2, 5 and 6 indicated that a small but significant minority of students find the transfer to post-primary difficult and subsequently disengage from education.

Recommendation 5: *National policy, drawing on best practices used currently in DEIS (particularly in schools participating in the SCP and HSCL schemes) on the transfer of children from primary to post-primary needs to be drawn up and widely disseminated. The availability of a tracking system (Recommendation 2a) may assist with this.*

7.3.6. Streaming

It was noted in Chapters 2, 5 and 6 that streaming is associated with negative outcomes and disengagement from school, particularly for students in the lower stream. Boys, Travellers, students with lower literacy levels and/or special educational needs, and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be in the ‘bottom’ stream and the likelihood that they will disengage is higher. Furthermore, the educational progress of these students is limited, for example in terms of the syllabus levels that they may take subjects at for the Junior Certificate examination.

Recommendation 6a: *The DES needs to develop policy that strongly discourages streaming, at least in first and second years. Policy should be targeted particularly at schools in disadvantaged communities and all schools where boys are enrolled.*

Recommendation 6b: *In the short to medium term, the DES will need to review the needs of teachers and students in supporting successful teaching and learning in mixed-ability settings, and design and implement appropriate supports.*

7.3.7. Review of Curricula

In Chapters 2, 3, 5, and 6, several issues relating to curriculum and assessment were noted and these were seen to act as barriers to engaging some students in their education. In short, these are curricular discontinuities between primary and post-

primary education, the perceived irrelevance of the content of many of the subjects for many students, curriculum and subject overload, the limited and discriminatory nature of a single written assessment, and a preference for more practical subjects and continuous assessment. The availability of the LCA and JCSP, which, although increasing, is still limited and this was identified as being problematic. It was also noted, however, that students participating in these programmes are stereotyped as ‘weak’. Current work of the NCCA in its reviews of Junior Cycle and the LCA are acknowledged. There is also evidence (Chapters 2 and 5) that a specific programme which is highly relevant to students’ development and self-esteem – SPHE – is not being delivered in a uniform manner to students and, in some schools, the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) module is not covered at all. Research has established associations between early school leaving and both teenage pregnancy and unsafe sexual behaviour.

Recommendation 7a: *The NCCA’s reviews of the Junior Certificate and the LCA should be expedited. The reviews should take into account the findings of this study, including the curricular discontinuities between primary and post-primary schools, the unsuitability of curricular content and assessment for a significant number of students, the lack of availability of appropriate and interesting instructional materials for students with lower levels of reading skills, the wish of some students to work while in education, and gender differences in disengagement from education. This should be accompanied by the DES taking a leading role in promoting the benefits of the JCSP and LCA programmes and working towards quashing the negative stereotyping of them.*

Recommendation 7b: *The NCCA should undergo a review of the current provision of SPHE in terms of whether it is meeting students’ needs, whether one class a week is sufficient, and whether teachers of SPHE are adequately supported. A particular focus of the review should be on the delivery of the RSE module. Both Junior and Senior Cycles should be included in this review. This recommendation is related to Recommendation 9 (below).*

7.3.8. Inclusivity: Boys, Bullying and Enrolment

Strong and consistent gender differences in patterns of early school leaving were noted in Chapters 1, 2, and 4 whereby boys more frequently leave school than girls. It was argued that this problem should be viewed as systemic rather than relating to individual-level characteristics and that it represents a significant barrier in providing equitable educational opportunities for males and females. It was also noted in Chapter 3 that the DES's anti-bullying policy has not been updated since 1993. Since then, a number of significant Acts⁴⁰ have been put in place. It was shown in Chapters 2 and 5 that bullying of some sub-groups, notably LGBT and Traveller students, was associated with emotional/mental health difficulties and disengagement from school. Research indicates that while school staff are generally aware of and concerned with homophobic bullying, a number of barriers prevented them from addressing it proactively (Chapter 2). It was also noted in Chapter 6 that enrolment policy could be more inclusive and there was a perception that the use of waiting lists and offering preference to students with siblings that had also attended the school act as barriers to certain groups of children. With expected increases in the school-going population and also in retention rates, further pressure can be expected to be put on schools' enrolment policies (Chapter 1).

Recommendation 8a: *A comprehensive and large-scale survey of the school-going population is needed to ascertain the views of boys in particular about the education system and what, in their view, serves to engage or disengage them. This survey should build on existing research such as material reviewed in Chapter 2 of this report. The findings of the survey should be used to design and implement a national strategy aimed at giving males and females equitable learning opportunities.*

Recommendation 8b: *The DES's policy on bullying needs to be updated and widely disseminated with reference to the relevant Acts. It should include clear guidelines on sensitive issues including sexuality, sexual harassment and ethnicity with reference to the findings of this study. The guidelines should include information on existing*

⁴⁰ Primarily but not limited to the Equal Status Act, Employment Equality Act, and EPSEN Act.

models of good practice in tackling bullying and the promotion of an inclusive, respectful, caring school environment.

Recommendation 8c: *The DES should develop ways of assisting teachers and school leaders, through continuing professional development and additional resources, in implementing best practice to address bullying.*

Recommendation 8d: *The DES should review its policies on enrolment practices and disseminate guidelines to schools. The role of NEWB in assisting families with finding places for their children should be promoted in these guidelines.*

Recommendation 8e: *To inform the review in Recommendation 8c, the DES should conduct a study of the extent to which enrolment policies may be considered inclusive, and identify the perceived barriers to inclusive enrolment.*

Recommendation 8f: *In the context of forward planning and further development of inclusive enrolment policy, the DES should enhance its review of population projections by area using the Geographic Information System.*

7.3.9. Mental health and Trauma

The scale of mental health difficulties amongst Irish youth was outlined in Chapter 3 and found to be quite widespread. Suicide rates among youth, particularly males, are high in Ireland compared to other countries. Evidence from Chapters 3 and 5 indicates that trauma (e.g., rape, bereavement) are linked with disengagement from education. There is also evidence in Chapters 3 and 5 that schools are not well-equipped to deal with issues relating to traumatic incidents and mental health issues, particularly in a society that is changing quite rapidly and posing new difficulties and challenges to young people. The role of schools in relation to mental health and trauma was clarified by distinguishing three levels: mental health promotion, stress prevention and therapeutic support. It was argued that the teacher has a direct role in the first two levels, but that the level of therapeutic support is beyond the scope of the teacher who needs to refer such students to other support services. However, the provision of therapeutic support is not included in the remit of NEPS or the NCSE.

Recommendation 9: *There is a need for the establishment of an accessible emotional/therapeutic counselling structure within schools or local communities, as distinct from supports provided by career guidance counsellors and the role of teachers more generally. Provision could involve, but not be limited to, NEPS. This is related to Recommendation 3d. Existing models of good practice such as Jigsaw and the Belfast Education Library Board (BELB) should be examined to guide implementation of emotional/therapeutic structures in/for schools.*

7.3.10. Careers Guidance

It was noted in Chapters 2 and 6 that the provision of careers guidance varies substantially across schools. It was also noted that, although the NCCA has reviewed this issue, resources are lacking for its implementation (Chapter 2). It was argued in Chapter 2 that the combination of guidance (informational) and counselling (emotional) supports represent a role conflict. Junior Cycle students who are already disengaged from their education were seen as a group at risk of poorer future educational and career outcomes, particularly if the school is the main source of information about education and training possibilities (Chapter 2).

Recommendation 10a: *The NCCA needs to revisit its review of the provision of careers guidance with respect to the findings of existing research. This could help schools deliver a comprehensive careers guidance programme at all stages of post-primary school, within an overall framework that allows schools to tailor provision to individual needs. The review should be clear about the types of support that a careers guidance counsellor is expected to provide to students, i.e. informational guidance as opposed to emotional counselling support as described under Recommendation 9. In this regard, the name of ‘careers guidance counsellors’ might be changed to ‘educational and careers advisors’ or similar.*

Recommendation 10b: *There are considerable resource implications if the provision of careers guidance is to be improved as envisaged in the work of the NCCA. In the short to medium term, it may be sufficient to publish specific guidelines on targeting provision where it may be most needed, e.g. at second- or third-year students who are perceived to be disengaging from school. In the medium to longer term, however, the*

full enhancement of the provision of careers guidance needs to be costed and a timeline for its roll-out specified.

7.3.11. Support for Teachers

Many of the recommendations made here have implications for teachers. The considerable pressure that teachers are under was acknowledged in Chapter 5. Findings from Chapters 2, 3, 5 and 6 along with many of the recommendations above suggest a need to enhance Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and facilitate teachers' attendance at CPD. Furthermore, there is a perceived need to provide teachers with CPD opportunities that address both content (specifically mental health, sexuality and bullying) and methodologies (specifically constructivist and mixed ability teaching and approaches to constructive behaviour management). It was also noted that access to CPD can be compromised through the competing demands of school staff. Further barriers to CPD include difficulties in attending CPD during school time, and a lack of incentive and accreditation.

Recommendation 11a: *The DES should develop a planning strategy to prioritise areas for CPD that are suggested in this report – in particular, content areas of mental health, sexuality, and bullying; and methods relating to constructive behaviour management and teaching in mixed-ability settings. This should be done in consultation with schools to obtain a match between needs and professional development opportunities.*

Recommendation 11b: *Linked with Recommendation 11a, schools should be encouraged to conduct audits of their own CPD needs and access support based on their own particular contexts. This audit could be conducted on an annual or periodic basis (e.g. every three years) and submitted to the DES.*

Recommendation 11c: *In the medium term, CPD needs to be incentivised and made more accessible by providing formal accreditation, establishing criteria for participation in CPD as a requirement for registration with the Teaching Council, and providing CPD outside of school hours.*

7.3.12. Measurement of Poverty in Urban and Rural Communities

It was noted in Chapter 4 that poverty, as indicated by school average Junior Certificate fee waiver (a proxy for medical card possession) is differentially associated with retention rates at post-primary level depending on the population density of the school's community – i.e. it was associated with retention in schools in urban and suburban communities, while it was not in the case of schools in rural areas. However, the analyses in Chapter 4 cannot inform the question as to why this is the case. It was also noted in Chapter 4 that research by the ERC as part of its evaluation of DEIS identified both qualitative and quantitative differences in urban and rural poverty, and that this issue requires further examination to gain a better understanding and make improvements to resource allocations.

Recommendation 12: *There needs to be further examination of how urban and rural poverty operate in order to improve the targeting of resources associated with DEIS by extending the ERC's examination of rural and urban poverty to include post-primary as well as primary levels, and, in the broader context, to examine the appropriateness of current welfare entitlements as a support for children to stay in school.*

7.3.13. Out of School Services in Rural/Disadvantaged Communities

As discussed in Chapter 2, the potential benefits of quality, appropriate and targeted out of school services is considerable for children and families in disadvantaged communities (such as those provided by the SCP and local drugs taskforces). Yet, there is no national strategy for out of school services. The establishment of the OMYCA's *Teenspace* policy is acknowledged, particularly its strategies for marginalised and disadvantaged communities; however, it was noted that *Teenspace* advocates, rather than reinforces, the development of leisure and recreational infrastructures across a range of Government Departments and local agencies. The establishment of the Quality Development of Out of School Services (QDOSS), a network of agencies advocating the promotion of out of school services in disadvantaged communities, is also acknowledged. In Chapter 6, three significant structural barriers with respect to the provision of educational supports to children in disadvantaged rural areas were identified. These are lack of infrastructure and support

personnel, lack of infrastructure for recreational and cultural facilities, and lack of transport and/or prohibitive transport costs.

Recommendation 13a: *The DES should undertake a review of out of school services and identify the characteristics of the models that are most effective in achieving their objectives.*

Recommendation 13b: *Within educational policy aimed at addressing educational disadvantage, it is recommended that the three barriers identified in rural areas (lack of support personnel, lack of leisure facilities, and lack of transport) be prioritised for interventions, possibly through the next round of DEIS.*

Recommendation 13c: *Arising from the major gaps in the provision of out-of-school services, such services should be budget priorities rather than cutbacks given their contribution to meaningful integration in local communities and success in diverting young people from antisocial behaviour.*

In conclusion, should it be the case that implementation of all recommendations set out above is not feasible, it is suggested that the following areas receive attention:

- early childhood education and the prioritization of the co-ordination services for children aged 0 to 6
- boys and early school leaving
- making post-primary education more interesting and meaningful for young people at risk of early school leaving
- development of mental and emotional health supports for students
- family literacy
- the establishment of a national tracking system supported by a cohesive and streamlined approach across Government Departments.

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APPENDIX 1

30th DÁIL

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

List of Members

Deputies

Ulick Burke (FG) (Convenor)
Frank Feighan (FG)
Beverley Flynn (FF) (Convenor)
Paul Gogarty GP) (**Chairman**)
Brian Hayes (FG)
Thomas McEllistrim (FF)
Michael Moynihan (FF)
John O'Mahony (FG)
Seán Ó Fearghail (FF)
Ruairí Quinn (Lab) (**Vice-Chairman**)
Mary Wallace (FF)

Senators:

Fidelma Healy Eames (FG)
Brendan Ryan (Lab)
Brian Ó Domhnaill (FF)
Cecilia Keaveney (FF)

APPENDIX 2

Orders of Reference

Dáil Éireann on 23 October 2007 *ordered*:

“(1) (a) That a Select Committee, which shall be called the Select Committee on Education and Science consisting of 11 members of Dáil Éireann (of whom 4 shall constitute a quorum), be appointed to consider -

- (i) such Bills the statute law in respect of which is dealt with by the Department of Education and Science;
- (ii) such Estimates for Public Services within the aegis of the Department of Education and Science;
- (iii) such proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 159, concerning the approval by Dáil Éireann of the terms of international agreements involving a charge on public funds; and
- (iv) such other matters

as shall be referred to it by Dáil Éireann from time to time;

- (v) Annual Output Statements produced by the Department of Education and Science; and
- (vi) such Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted and commissioned by the Department of Education and Science as it may select.

(b) For the purpose of its consideration of matters under paragraphs (1)(a)(i), (iii), (iv), (v) and (vi), the Select Committee shall have the powers defined in Standing Order 83(1), (2) and (3).

(c) For the avoidance of doubt, by virtue of his or her *ex officio* membership of the Select Committee in accordance with Standing Order 92(1), the Minister for Education and Science (or a Minister or Minister of State nominated in his or her stead) shall be entitled to vote.

(2) The Select Committee shall be joined with a Select Committee to be appointed by Seanad Éireann to form the Joint Committee on Education and Science to consider -

- (i) such public affairs administered by the Department of Education and Science as it may select, including, in respect of Government policy, bodies under the aegis of that Department;
- (ii) such matters of policy, including EU related matters, for which the Minister for Education and Science is officially responsible as it may select;

- (iii) such matters across Departments which come within the remit of the Minister of State with special responsibility for Lifelong Learning, Youth Work and School Transport as it may select;

Provided that members of the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment shall be afforded the opportunity to participate in the consideration of matters within this remit;

- (iv) such related policy issues as it may select concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by Members of the Government or by the Oireachtas;
- (v) such Statutory Instruments made by the Minister for Education and Science and laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas as it may select;
- (vi) such proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues as may be referred to it from time to time, in accordance with Standing Order 83(4);
- (vii) the strategy statement laid before each House of the Oireachtas by the Minister for Education and Science pursuant to section 5(2) of the Public Service Management Act 1997, and for which the Joint Committee is authorised for the purposes of section 10 of that Act;
- (viii) such annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of bodies specified in paragraphs 2(i) and (iv), and the overall operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of these bodies, as it may select;

Provided that the Joint Committee shall not, at any time, consider any matter relating to such a body which is, which has been, or which is, at that time, proposed to be considered by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to the Orders of Reference of that Committee and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993;

Provided further that the Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session, or publishing confidential information regarding, any such matter if so requested either by the body concerned or by the Minister for Education and Science; and

- (viii) such other matters as may be jointly referred to it from time to time by both Houses of the Oireachtas,

and shall report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

- (3) The Joint Committee shall have the power to require that the Minister for Education and Science (or a Minister or Minister of State nominated in his or her

stead) shall attend before the Joint Committee and provide, in private session if so desired by the Minister or Minister of State, oral briefings in advance of EU Council meetings to enable the Joint Committee to make known its views.

- (4) The quorum of the Joint Committee shall be five, of whom at least one shall be a member of Dáil Éireann and one a member of Seanad Éireann.
- (5) The Joint Committee shall have the powers defined in Standing Order 83(1) to (9) inclusive.
- (6) The Chairman of the Joint Committee, who shall be a member of Dáil Éireann, shall also be Chairman of the Select Committee.”

Seanad Éireann on 24 October 2007 ordered:

- “(1) That a Select Committee consisting of 4 members of Seanad Éireann shall be appointed to be joined with a Select Committee of Dáil Éireann to form the Joint Committee on Education and Science to consider –
- (i) such public affairs administered by the Department of Education and Science as it may select, including, in respect of Government policy, bodies under the aegis of that Department;
 - (ii) such matters of policy, including EU related matters, for which the Minister for Education and Science is officially responsible as it may select;
 - (iii) such matters across Departments which come within the remit of the Minister of State with special responsibility for Lifelong Learning, Youth Work and School Transport as it may select;
- Provided that members of the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment shall be afforded the opportunity to participate in the consideration of matters with this remit;
- (iv) such related policy issues as it may select concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by Members of the Government or by the Oireachtas;
 - (v) such Statutory Instruments made by the Minister for Education and Science and laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas as it may select;

- (vi) such proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues as may be referred to it from time to time, in accordance with Standing Order 70(4);
- (vii) the strategy statement laid before each House of the Oireachtas by the Minister for Education and Science pursuant to section 5(2) of the Public Service Management Act, 1997, and for which the Joint Committee is authorised for the purposes of section 10 of that Act;
- (viii) such annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of bodies specified in paragraphs 1(i) and (iv), and the overall operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of these bodies, as it may select;

Provided that the Joint Committee shall not, at any time, consider any matter relating to such a body which is, which has been, or which is, at that time, proposed to be considered by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to the Orders of Reference of that Committee and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act, 1993;

Provided further that the Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session, or publishing confidential information regarding, any such matter if so requested either by the body or by the Minister for Education and Science; and

- (ix) such other matters as may be jointly referred to it from time to time by both Houses of the Oireachtas,

and shall report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.

- (2) The Joint Committee shall have the power to require that the Minister for Education and Science (or a Minister or Minister of State nominated in his or her stead) shall attend before the Joint Committee and provide, in private session if so desired by the Minister or Minister of State, oral briefings in advance of EU Council meetings to enable the Joint Committee to make known its views.
- (3) The quorum of the Joint Committee shall be five, of whom at least one shall be a member of Dáil Éireann and one a member of Seanad Éireann.
- (4) The Joint Committee shall have the powers defined in Standing Order 70(1) to (9) inclusive.
- (5) The Chairman of the Joint Committee shall be a member of Dáil Éireann.

APPENDIX 3

Technical Details Relating to Chapter 4

A3.1. Overview

This Appendix provides the technical background to the statistical analyses relating to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data presented in Chapter 4, along with some additional tables, again relating to the analyses of PISA data. The information in Sections A3.2 to A3.5 is not intended for the more general reader; rather it is aimed at statisticians who may wish to evaluate the appropriateness of the analyses reported in Chapter 4.

A3.2. Descriptive analyses

Percentages and means are estimates that were computed using normalised population weights. To account for sampling error, standard errors for the PISA data were computed using a balanced repeated replication (BRR) method of variance estimation that took the sample design into account, using SPSS macros developed at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (see OECD, 2005; Westat, 2007).

A3.3. Multilevel Modelling: Background

A multilevel logistic model is appropriate for binary outcomes and produces a log-odds for each explanatory variable which may be converted to odds ratios through exponentiation. The difference in the log-odds of a variable corresponds to the probability of the variable occurring in the early school leaving group compared to the non-early school leaving group. Confidence intervals may be constructed around the odds ratios, and the overall significance of that variable may be evaluated by the t-statistic. In the case of a variable set, such categorical variables with more than one indicator are evaluated through a change in the χ^2 statistic with degrees of freedom equal to the number of parameters corresponding to the variable or dummy indicator set (see Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002, pp. 294-301).

The sampling model at level 1 (the individual student level) may be expressed as:

$$Y_{ij} / \phi_{mij} \sim (m_{ij}, \phi_{ij})$$

where Y_{ij} is the number of ‘success’ or ‘hits’ in m_{ij} trials, and ϕ_{ij} is the probability of success on each trial.

According to the binomial distribution the expected value and variance of Y_{ij} are

$$E(Y_{ij} / \phi_{ij}) = m_{ij} \phi_{ij}, \text{Var}(Y_{ij} / \phi_{ij}) = m_{ij} \phi_{ij}(1 - \phi_{ij}).$$

Although several link functions are possible with a binary outcome, the most convenient is the logit link, i.e.

$$\eta_{ij} = \log(\phi_{ij} / 1 - \phi_{ij})$$

where η_{ij} is the log-odds of success.

The level-1 or in this case student-level structural model takes the form

$$\eta_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_{1j}X_{1ij} + \beta_{2j}X_{2ij} + \dots + \beta_{pj}X_{pij}$$

The level-2 (school-level) structural model takes the form

$$\beta_{qj} = \gamma_{q0} + \sum \gamma_{qs}W_{sj} + u_{qj}$$

A3.4. Multilevel Modelling: Strategy

Modelling was conducted in a sequence of steps as follows.

- (1) All student-level variables were tested separately (evaluated using the χ^2 statistic as described previously). Non-significant variables (using the criterion of $p \leq .10$) were then removed with the exception of gender (as it would later be used in tests of interactions). The same procedure was applied to the school-level variables. The criterion of $p \leq .10$ was used at this stage in order to retain the largest possible set of variables.
- (2) All statistically significant school-level and student-level variables were tested simultaneously, with the stricter combined criterion of (i) $p \leq .05$ and (ii) a significant odds ratio applied for one or both comparisons.
- (3) Tests for significant curvilinear effects were conducted for each continuous variable by adding its squared term to the model.
- (4) Interactions between gender and each other student variable were examined, on the basis of the first plausible value, by adding each interaction term to the model.

- (5) Cross-level interactions were tested (e.g. does the student's intent to leave school early vary depending on their gender and some school-level characteristic, such as school sector?)
- (6) The appropriateness of fixing the effect of each level 1 variable across schools was tested by allowing each slope to vary randomly (or the slopes associated with each variable set in the case of dummy variables with more than one category) and evaluating its significance with reference to the change in the χ^2 statistic associated with the variance components for that variable or variable set. Again, if significant, it was re-evaluated as per (3), (4) and (5).

As recommended by Aitkin, Francis and Hinde (2005), and as with previously-reported hierarchical linear models of Irish students, no sampling weights are used (e.g., Shiel et al., 2001; Cosgrove et al., 2005).

A3.5. Detailed Description of Variables

Table A3.1 shows the manner in which specific variables have been recoded for the descriptive and multilevel models of student early school leaving intent, while Table A2 shows information about the variables used in the descriptive and multilevel analyses of pupil absenteeism. Where applicable, differences in the coding of the variables are noted. In cases where it does differ, this arises for two reasons: either the variable required a missing indicator in the multilevel models but not the descriptive analyses, or the variable must be entered as a set of dummy or indicator variables in the multilevel models, but is analysed as a categorical variable in the descriptive analyses.

Table A3.1. Variable name, type and value for all factors considered in the descriptive and multilevel analyses of student early school leaving intent

Description	Descriptive Variable Name	Multilevel Variable Name	Descriptive Values	Multilevel Values, if Different	Variable Type
Early school leaving intent	ESL	ESL	0=no, 1=yes		Binary
Student gender	SEX	SEX	0=male, 1=female		Binary
Native' status	NNATIVE	NNATIVE	0=born in Ireland, 1=born outside of Ireland		Binary
Language spoken	OLANG	OLANG	0=English or Irish, 1=other		Binary
Number of siblings	SIBSCAT	SIBS01, SIBS03, SIBS04	1=none or one, 2=2, 3=3, 4=4 or more	Three dummy variables, with two as reference category	Categorical
Parental education level	UNIVED	UNIVED	0=tertiary level, 1=below tertiary level		Binary
Frequency of absence in past two weeks	ABSENT	ABS01, ABS02	0=none, 1=once or twice, 2=three times or more	Two dummy variables, with none as reference category	Categorical
Hours spent per week in paid work	HRSWORK	HRS01, HRS02, HRS03	0=none, 1=one to four, 2=four to eight, 3=more than eight	Two dummy variables, with none as reference category	Categorical
Reading achievement level	pv1read to pv5read	READ01	mean=517.4, sd=86.1	0=above proficiency level 1, 1=at or below proficiency level 1	Continuous (descriptive); Binary (multilevel)
Mathematics achievement	pv1math to pv5math	MATH01	mean=500.5, sd=76.7		Continuous
Science achievement	pv1scie to pv5scie	SCIE01	mean=509.2, sd=89.4		Continuous
Parental occupation	ZHISEI	ZrHISEI	mean=0, sd=1		Continuous
Home educational resources	ZHEDRES	ZHEDRES	mean=0, sd=1		Continuous
Material possessions	ZWEALTH	ZWEALTH	mean=0, sd=1		Continuous
Books in the home	ZBOOKS	ZBOOKS	mean=0, sd=1		Continuous
Cultural capital	ZCULTPOSS	ZCULTPOSS	mean=0, sd=1		Continuous

Table A3.1. Variable name, type and value for all factors considered in the descriptive and multilevel analyses of student early school leaving intent (continued)

Description	Descriptive Variable Name	Multilevel Variable Name	Descriptive Values	Multilevel Values, if Different	Variable Type
Missing indicator - parental occupation		MHISEI		0=not missing, 1=missing	Binary
Missing indicator - hours in paid work		MHRSWORK		0=not missing, 1=missing	Binary
Missing indicator - frequency of absenteeism		MABSENT		0=not missing, 1=missing	Binary
School type or sector	SCHTYPE	COM, VOC	1=community/comprehensive, 2=secondary, 3=vocational	Two dummy variables, with secondary as reference category	Categorical
School enrolment (15-year-olds)	SCHSIZE	SIZE01, SIZE03	1=up to 40, 2=41 to 80, 3=81 or more	Two dummy variables, with 41-80 as reference category	Categorical
School location (population density)	LOCATION	RURAL, CITY	1=low (pop less than 3,000), 2=medium (pop between 3,000 and 100,000), 3=high (pop greater than 100,000)	Two dummy variables, with medium as reference category	Categorical
Parental pressure for student achievement	PRESS	HIPRESS, LOPRESS	1=largely absent, 2=some parents, 3=many parents	Two dummy variables, with some parents as reference category	Categorical
Use of ability grouping	GROUP	rGROUP	0=for no or some classes, 1=for all classes		Binary
Missing indicator - ability grouping		MGROUP		0=not missing, 1=missing	Binary
Academic selectivity	ASELECT	ASELECT	0=academic record not considered on admittance, 1=academic record considered on admittance		Binary
Average retention rate across Junior and Senior Cycles (percent)	RETENT		mean=87.8; sd=7.33		Continuous
Percentage of students entitled to a fee waiver for the JCE	PCFeeWaiver	zPCFeeWaiver	mean=23.8; sd=15.00	mean=0, sd=1	Continuous

Table A3.2. Percentages of students indicating various reasons for intending to leave school early, and number of reasons ticked in total, by student gender

Reason	Males		Females	
	%	SE	%	SE
Want to do apprenticeship	62.9	2.82	45.3	3.30
Not doing well at school	29.9	2.11	29.4	2.90
Want to earn my own money	64.6	2.39	62.3	2.94
Don't like school	45.8	2.33	35.5	2.93
Parents think I should leave	10.4	1.64	5.6	1.52
Teachers think I should leave	5.2	1.11	3.5	1.24
My friends are leaving	18.7	1.98	11.3	2.22
School didn't offer right courses/subjects	14.3	1.67	14.7	2.86
Total number of reasons ticked				
One	44.8	2.48	53.4	3.50
Two	21.0	1.71	24.8	2.86
Three	19.6	1.92	12.1	2.38
Four or more	14.6	2.00	9.7	2.34

Table A3.3. Percentages of students indicating various reasons for intending to leave school early, and number of reasons ticked in total, by school sector

Reason	Comm/Comp		Secondary		Vocational	
	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE
Want to do apprenticeship	64.5	4.02	53.9	3.46	51.2	2.88
Not doing well at school	26.3	2.81	29.9	2.63	31.6	3.51
Want to earn my own money	64.0	4.02	63.1	2.64	65.0	3.18
Don't like school	40.2	4.14	43.7	2.67	41.4	4.15
Teachers think I should leave	10.4	3.03	7.3	1.70	10.3	2.19
Parents think I should leave	3.8	1.39	3.8	1.08	6.4	1.94
My friends are leaving	15.0	3.33	14.5	1.85	19.6	2.63
School didn't offer right courses/subjects	12.7	2.69	16.9	2.31	11.5	2.43
Total number of reasons ticked						
One	45.2	3.11	48.6	2.93	48.6	2.93
Two	25.2	2.39	22.2	2.38	22.2	2.38
Three	16.5	2.69	16.5	2.20	16.5	2.20
Four or more	13.1	3.49	12.7	2.19	12.7	2.19

Table A3.4. Percentages of students indicating various reasons for intending to leave school early, and number of reasons ticked in total, by school location

Reason	Low density (rural)		Medium density (suburban)		High density (urban)	
	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE
Want to do apprenticeship	57.1	8.10	55.7	2.85	58.0	3.14
Not doing well at school	29.1	3.09	32.2	2.75	28.9	4.47
Want to earn my own money	63.4	3.86	65.7	3.19	58.4	3.96
Don't like school	44.5	4.56	43.5	2.82	64.2	4.16
Teachers think I should leave	13.0	2.43	8.3	1.87	7.0	2.42
Parents think I should leave	4.5	1.45	4.8	1.45	4.1	1.44
My friends are leaving	14.8	2.90	18.6	2.17	13.6	2.45
School didn't offer right courses/subjects	15.2	3.02	13.9	2.09	12.8	3.34
Total number of reasons ticked						
One	47.8	3.43	45.7	2.83	53.5	4.05
Two	22.6	2.00	21.1	2.28	23.6	3.90
Three	15.0	2.18	19.2	2.70	10.6	2.30
Four or more	14.6	3.31	14.0	2.24	12.3	3.10

Table A3.5. Percentages of students indicating various combinations of reasons for intending to leave school early, overall, and by gender, school sector, and school location

Reason	All	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)	Female	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)	Male	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Apprenticeship or work for money	36.7	0.511	35.7	37.7	37.5	0.585	36.3	38.6	36.2	0.788	34.7	37.7
Apprenticeship or work for money plus don't like/not getting on well in school	21.2	0.310	20.6	21.8	19.5	0.318	18.9	20.1	22.2	0.511	21.2	23.2
Don't like/not getting on well in school	7.3	0.207	6.9	7.7	9.6	0.306	9.0	10.2	6.0	0.320	5.4	6.6
Peer influence combined with work and/or don't like school	4.7	0.159	4.4	5.0	2.0	0.122	1.8	2.2	6.3	0.329	5.6	6.9
Unavailability of subjects or courses	2.7	0.121	2.4	2.9	3.5	0.168	3.2	3.9	2.2	0.176	1.9	2.6
Other	27.4	0.704	26.0	28.7	27.9	1.231	25.5	30.3	27.1	0.712	25.7	28.5
Share of sample	20.9	0.952	19.0	22.8	49.6	0.9	47.8	51.4	50.4	0.915	48.6	52.2
Share of those intending to leave school early	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	33.9	1.5	30.9	36.9	66.1	1.069	64.0	68.2
	Comm/Comp	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)	Secondary	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)	Vocational	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Apprenticeship or work for money	36.4	1.067	34.3	38.5	34.7	0.638	33.4	35.9	40.4	1.238	38.0	42.8
Apprenticeship or work for money plus don't like/not getting on well in school	21.5	0.853	19.8	23.2	21.6	0.357	20.9	22.3	20.5	0.747	19.0	21.9
Don't like/not getting on well in school	8.0	0.435	7.1	8.8	7.7	0.292	7.1	8.2	6.3	0.352	5.6	7.0
Peer influence combined with work and/or don't like school	3.0	0.362	2.3	3.7	4.2	0.145	4.0	4.5	6.8	0.512	5.8	7.8
Unavailability of subjects or courses	2.7	0.318	2.1	3.4	3.4	0.158	3.1	3.7	1.4	0.226	0.9	1.8
Other	28.5	0.783	26.9	30.0	28.4	1.058	26.4	30.5	24.7	1.136	22.5	26.9
Share of sample	17.3	0.6	16.1	18.5	61.0	0.5	60.0	62.0	21.7	0.805	20.1	23.3
Share of those intending to leave school early	19.0	1.8	15.4	22.6	50.5	1.4	47.7	53.2	30.5	1.251	28.1	33.0

Table A3.5. Percentages of students indicating various combinations of reasons for intending to leave school early, overall, and by gender, school sector, and school location (continued)

	Low density (rural)	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)	Medium density (suburban)	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)	High density (urban)	SE	95% CI (L)	95% CI (U)
Apprenticeship or work for money	37.1	1.336	34.4	39.7	36.0	0.800	34.5	37.6	43.2	1.142	41.0	45.5
Apprenticeship or work for money plus don't like/not getting on well in school	22.0	0.897	20.3	23.8	21.9	0.496	20.9	22.9	20.9	0.516	19.9	21.9
Don't like/not getting on well in school	8.5	0.595	7.3	9.6	6.5	0.301	5.9	7.1	9.2	0.438	8.4	10.1
Peer influence combined with work and/or don't like school	4.7	0.380	4.0	5.4	6.1	0.296	5.6	6.7	2.6	0.183	2.2	2.9
Unavailability of subjects or courses	2.9	0.285	2.3	3.5	2.2	0.161	1.9	2.5	3.3	0.260	2.8	3.8
Other	24.9	0.923	23.1	26.7	27.3	0.697	25.9	28.6	20.8	0.653	19.5	22.1
Share of sample	23.1	3.2	16.7	29.5	46.3	4.5	37.4	55.2	30.6	3.695	23.4	37.8
Share of those intending to leave school early	27.1	2.0	23.1	31.1	48.1	1.4	45.4	50.8	24.8	1.596	21.7	27.9

APPENDIX 4

Individuals Assisting with Phase 2 Interviews

- Yvonne Fahy and her colleagues Anne McGrath, Kitty O'Connor and Deirbhille Quinn in Galway
- Michael McDonagh and his colleagues in Youthreach Tuam
- Eddie D'Arcy and his colleagues in Ronanstown Youth Services, Neilstown
- Michael Barron, Glenn Keating and colleagues at BelongTo Youth Services, Dublin 2
- Ruth McNeely, Anne Whittle and colleagues at the Mayo Rape Crisis Centre
- Stephen Hartnett and colleagues at Rathangan VEC
- John Lonergan, Kathleen McMahon and Fiona Moran at Mountjoy Men's and Women's prisons; Séamus Beirne and the Prisoner-based Research Ethics Committee and Director General of the Irish Prison Service
- Anne Buggie and Jimmy Deenihan who conducted supplementary written interviews.

APPENDIX 5

Focus Group Interview Schedules

Focus Group Questions for Phase 2: Parents

At the beginning of the focus group for parents, ask each to introduce themselves, give the name of their son or daughter, the position of the son or daughter in the family, and how many children they have in total.

1. What did your son or daughter like and not like about primary school?
2. What would have made primary school better or more enjoyable for your son or daughter?
3. What was it like for your son or daughter changing from primary to secondary school?
4. What did your son or daughter like and not like about secondary school?
5. What would have made secondary school better or more enjoyable for your son or daughter?
6. What makes a person a good teacher?
7. When and why did your son or daughter decide to leave school?
8. How did you react to your son or daughter leaving school?
9. How did you get on with the school staff in your son or daughter's school?
(Amount of contact, did the parent feel supported, was there conflict between parent and school staff?)
10. How has life been for your son or daughter since leaving school?
(Are they working? Studying? Still living at home?)
11. In what ways might your son or daughter's life be better?
12. If you could tell the government to change anything to make school a better and more interesting place to be, what would you tell them to change?

Focus Group Questions for Phase 2: LGBT Youth

[Part 1]

Get background info on where went to primary and secondary school, number of brothers and sisters, place in family, living situation.

1. What did you like and not like about secondary school?
2. What would have made secondary school better or more enjoyable for you?
3. What was it like changing from primary to secondary school? What did you like and not like about this?
4. What makes a person a good teacher?
5. How far did you go in school? (For those who left early) When did you leave school? Why did you leave school?
6. How has life been for you since leaving school?
7. In what ways might your life be better?
8. If you could tell the government to change anything to make school a better and more interesting place to be, what would you tell them to change?
9. If someone you knew, like yourself, was thinking of leaving school, what would you say to them?
10. What are the most important things that you learned at school?
11. What are the most important things that you learned from life?

[Part 2 - focus groups]

1. Were you out in school? When did you come out? What was that like? How were the reactions of your friends, school staff, parents, brothers and sisters...?
2. Who did you find supportive in when coming out? Who was not so supportive?
3. What things help to make school a safe and welcoming place for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people? What things prevent a school from being a safe and welcoming place?
4. Do young gay men and lesbian women and trans people have different issues to deal with at school? Can you describe these?

Focus Group Draft Questions for Phase 2: Traveller Men and Women

1. What did you like and not like about primary school?
2. What would have made primary school better or more enjoyable for you?
3. What did you like and not like about secondary school?
4. What would have made secondary school better or more enjoyable for you?
5. What makes a person a good teacher?
6. When did you decide to leave school?
7. Why did you leave school?
8. How has life been for you since leaving school?
9. In what ways might your life be better?
10. If you could tell the government to change anything to make school a better and more interesting place to be, what would you tell them to change?
11. If someone you knew was thinking of leaving school, what would you say to them?
12. What are the most important things that you learned at school?
13. What are the most important things that you learned from life?

APPENDIX 6

Individual Interview Schedules

Interview Schedule for Phase 2: Youth with Special Educational Needs

OK, so we'll start with a bit about yourself.

- *Note gender*
- Would you mind telling me your age?

And thinking back to primary school – what was that like for you?

Try to get information about positive and negative aspects of school.

- How did you find the teachers?
- Were there subjects that you liked and didn't like?
- Did you feel like you fit in?
- Did you get on with your classmates?
- Can you remember if you were assessed for special educational needs?
- Did you receive extra support to help with your learning? Was the support the right kind of support?
- How might primary school have been better for you?
- Was there anything going on either inside or outside of school that was making you unhappy?

And now, moving on to changing from primary to post-primary school...

- What was it like when you were beginning post-primary school?
- Did the school give you information about things like school rules, timetables, where the different classes were?
- Is there anything that might have made starting in post-primary school better for you?

What was post-primary school like for you?

- How did you find the teachers?
- Were there subjects that you liked and didn't like?
- Did you feel like you fit in?
- Did you get on with your classmates?
- Did you receive extra support to help with your learning? Was the support the right kind of support?
- How might post-primary school have been better for you?
- Was there anything going on either inside or outside of school that was making you unhappy?

Was there more than one class group in each year level in post-primary school?

(If yes) **And how was it decided which students were in which class?**

What were the others in the class like?

What were the lessons like – can you describe them?

Were you ever taken out of your class for lessons on your own or in a smaller group? *(If yes)* How did you find that?

Did you ever get into trouble in school?

- Tell us a bit about that. What happened?
- Do you think you were treated fairly when you got into trouble?
- Did your parents get involved? What happened?

What makes a person a good teacher, in your view?

Did you sit the Junior Cert. Exams?

(If yes) **How did you find that?**

When did you decide to leave school?

What were the main reasons for leaving school?

What did your teachers think of your decision? Your mum/dad? Your friends?

How has life been for you since you left school?

Get some information about work, education, living arrangements, well-being.

Do you feel like your life is going the way you want it to go?

If you could tell the government to change anything to make school a better and more interesting place to be for someone like yourself, what would you tell them to change?

And if you knew someone who was thinking of leaving school, what would you say to them?

What's the most important thing you learned at school?

What's the most important thing you've learned from your life so far?

Is there anything else you'd like to say to me?

Interview Schedule for Phase 2: Individuals with Addiction Difficulties

OK, so we'll start with a bit about yourself.

- *Note gender*
- Would you mind telling me your age?

And a bit about where you went to school, that kind of thing...

- Where did you go to primary school? *(From now on, insert school name where reference is made to 'School X'.)*
- And tell me, where did you go to post-primary school? *(From now on, insert school name where reference is made to 'School Y'.)*
- Did you have to change from one school to another at any point? *(If yes)* Why was that? Did you move home for example? When was that? How did you feel about that?
- And did you ever have to repeat a year? *(If yes)* Why? When was that? What was it like having to repeat?

And thinking back to School X... What did you like and not like about School X?

If participant has attended more than one primary school, ask them to think about the one they spent most time in.

May need to prompt re: various aspects of school –

- How did you get on with your teachers in School X?
- Were there subjects you liked? Were there ones you didn't like – what were they?
- What were your friends like?
- What kind of things did you do during break time? *(If not sure prompt, big break or lunch time.)*
- Did you take part in any activities in the school after school was over? What were they? What were they like?
- Were you given much homework? How did you feel about that? Did you usually do it, or not bother?
- And how did you get to school? Did it take you long?

Did you feel different to the other kids in School X or left out, or did you feel like you fitted in well?

- *(If left out)* Can you tell me a bit about this?
- What made you feel left out?
- *Try to establish detailed info re: bullying if applicable – what happened? Was it reported? Was it sorted out?*
- *(If not left out)* What, do you think, made you felt like you fit in?

When you were in School X, was there stuff going on either in or outside school was making you unhappy?

- *(If yes)* Can you tell me a bit about this?
- How do you think it affected your life?
- Was there someone that you could talk to about this – who? Did it help?

Tell us a bit about how it was for you changing from School X to School Y...

Try to probe for various aspects of the transition –

- Did School Y put aside a day to show you around the school and explain things like school rules and the timetable to you?
- What was it like having different teachers for different subjects? Did it bother you or was it OK?
- How did you find having a school timetable and changing classes?
- Did you keep the same friends when you started in School Y or did you make mostly new friends? How did you feel about that?
- And looking back, is there anything you can think of that might have made starting in School Y better for you?

What did you like and not like about School Y?

If participant has attended more than one secondary school, ask them to think about the one they spent most time in.

May need to prompt re: various aspects of school –

- How did you get on with your teachers in School Y?
- Were there subjects you liked? Were there ones you didn't like – what were they?
- What were your friends like?
- What kind of things did you do during break time? *(If not sure prompt, big break or lunch time.)*
- Did you take part in any activities in the school after school was over? What were they? What were they like?
- Were you given much homework? How did you feel about that? Did you usually do it, or not bother?
- And how did you get to school? Did it take you long?

And what do you think would have made School Y better or more enjoyable for you?

Try to get views on a range of issues e.g. on –

- What about your teachers?
- Or the things you did in class?
- And the things you were asked to do for homework?
- What about activities after class time – were there any that you liked a lot? Any that you would like to have done that weren't offered?
- And did you feel that you could feel safe talking to your teachers about problems or worries if you needed to?

If necessary, engage the participant in an exercise such as describing the ideal post-primary school compared with their actual school.

Did you feel different to the other kids in School Y or left out, or did you feel like you fitted in well?

- *(If left out)* Can you tell me a bit about this?
- What made you feel left out?
- *Try to establish detailed info re: bullying if applicable – what happened? Was it reported? Was it sorted out?*
- *(If not left out)* What, do you think, made you felt like you fit in?

When you were in secondary school, was there stuff going on either in or outside school that was making you unhappy?

- *(If yes)* Can you tell me a bit about this?
- How do you think it affected your life?
- Was there someone that you could talk to about this – who? Did it help?

What were you good at in school?

- *Might need to prompt by saying not just school subjects, could also be sports, art, making the other people in the class laugh, being a caring friend, etc.*
- *Try to distinguish primary and secondary.*

And what were you not so good at in school? And why do you think you weren't so good at this?

- *Try to distinguish between internalised and externalised reasons*
- *If applicable, note factors relating to SEN, diet, sleep patterns/anxiety, allocation to a specific class, and prompt for these if relevant*
- *Try to distinguish primary and secondary.*

Was there more than one class group in each year level in School Y?

(If yes) **And how was it decided which students were in which class?**

What were the others in the class like?

What were the lessons like – can you describe them?

Were you ever taken out of your class for lessons on your own or in a smaller group? *(If yes)* How did you find that?

- *Identify changes over time if possible; e.g. first, second, third year.*

And did you enjoy school or did you find it a difficult place to be in?

(If difficult) **And how did you deal with that then?**

- Did you miss school or mitch off, or did you mess in class, ...? Or did you just switch off from it all? Can you describe this to me?
- Did your friends do the same kind of thing?
- *Try to distinguish primary and secondary.*

And did you ever get into trouble in school?

- Tell us a bit about that. What happened?
- Do you think you were treated fairly when you got into trouble?
- And did your parents get involved? What happened?

Did you like any of your teachers? Can you describe them?

- From your experiences, what do you reckon makes a person a good teacher?

I'm interested in the friends you had in School Y...

- Did you have a big gang of friends or just one or two?
- What kinds of stuff would you get up to when you would hang out?
- Did you ever get into trouble? Tell us a bit about that.
- Did you have a friend that you could talk about problems you might be having or was it more just hanging out talking general stuff?

Did you sit the Junior Cert. Exams?

(If yes) **How did you feel doing them?**

- *Try to get an impression of different subjects if possible.*
- *Try to get an impression of stress levels and coping mechanisms.*

When did you leave school?

And was this a sudden thing – did you just stop going – or were you gradually thinking of leaving anyway?

What did your teachers think of your decision? Your mum/dad? Your friends?

- *Five patterns may be identifiable: drift, polite request, suspension, expulsion, and in a minority, no idea why. This might influence the direction of the conversation.*

And what would you say are the main reasons that you left school?

Try to get to the core issue of *choice* –

- Did you make the decision for yourself or did the decision come from somewhere else? Can you tell me a bit more about that?
- How did you feel after you left? (*Regardless of Yes or No*) Can you tell me why? And did that change over time?

And how has life been for you since you left school?

- When did you start this course? And how are you finding it?
- And are you living with your parents or renting or...? And how is that for you?
- And how are you finding your home life?
- And how would you describe your social life? How do you spend your spare time and weekends? (Prompt re: hobbies, drink, drugs...)
- And how would you describe your diet and your health? (*If poor*) What might make that better for you?

Try to capture (in)stability over time, e.g. in living arrangements, work.

Do you feel like your life is going the way you want it to go?

- How could your life be better?
- *Prompt re: work, education, home, health and well-being if necessary.*

Do you have any children of your own?

- (*If yes*) What ages are they?
- How are they getting on?
- Do you think that they will manage to get an education, or will that be difficult?

How was life at home for you when you were growing up?

- Did you live with your ma and da (mum and dad)? How many brothers and sisters were at home with you?
- Were your parents strict, or were you allowed to do your own thing? (*Try to get a sense of order vs chaos*).
- Did you talk with your parents about what was going on in school much?
- Could you talk to your parents about your problems, or did you keep a lot hidden from them?
- Was there anything going on at home that made your life difficult? Can you tell me a bit about it? (Only if you want to, you don't have to tell me anything unless you want .)
- Would you be able to tell me about your experiences using heroin? Can you remember when it started and how? When did it become a problem for you? Why did it become a problem? How did you manage to kick the habit? What helped you?

If you could tell the government to change anything to make school a better and more interesting place to be for someone like yourself, what would you tell them to change?

And if you knew someone who was thinking of leaving school, what would you say to them?

What's the most important thing you learned at school?

What's the most important thing you've learned from your life so far?

Is there anything else you'd like to say to me?

Interview Schedule for Phase 2: Men and Women in Prison

OK, so we'll start with a bit about yourself.

- *Note gender*
- Would you mind telling me your age?
- How long is your sentence? And when did you first come in here?
- And do you have a partner?
- What about children? *(if yes)* What age?

And thinking back to primary school – what was that like for you?

Try to get information about positive and negative aspects of school.

- How did you find the teachers?
- Were there subjects that you liked and didn't like?
- Did you feel like you fit in?
- Did you get on with your classmates?
- Can you remember if you were assessed for special educational needs?
- Did you receive extra support to help with your learning? Was the support the right kind of support?
- How might primary school have been better for you?
- Was there anything going on either inside or outside of school that was making you unhappy?

And now, moving on to changing from primary to post-primary school...

- What was it like when you were beginning post-primary school?
- Did the school give you information about things like school rules, timetables, where the different classes were?
- Is there anything that might have made starting in post-primary school better for you?

What was post-primary school like for you?

- How did you find the teachers?
- Were there subjects that you liked and didn't like?
- Did you feel like you fit in?
- Did you get on with your classmates?
- Did you receive extra support to help with your learning? Was the support the right kind of support?
- How might post-primary school have been better for you?
- Was there anything going on either inside or outside of school that was making you unhappy?

Was there more than one class group in each year level in post-primary school?

(If yes) **And how was it decided which students were in which class?**

What were the others in the class like?

What were the lessons like – can you describe them?

Were you ever taken out of your class for lessons on your own or in a smaller group? *(If yes)* How did you find that?

Did you ever get into trouble in school?

- What happened?
- Do you think you were treated fairly when you got into trouble?
- Did your parents get involved? What happened?
- Did you get into other sorts of trouble?

What makes a person a good teacher, in your view?

Did you sit the Junior Cert. Exams?

(If yes) **How did you find that?**

When did you decide to leave school?

What were the main reasons for leaving school?

What did your teachers think of your decision? Your mum/dad? Your friends?

And how was your life after leaving school (before you came in here)?

Try to capture (in)stability over time, e.g. in living arrangements, work.

And how is your life at the moment?

- How could your life be better in here?
- Do you have others to support, like a partner or kids? *(If yes)* Are you managing to support your partner/children?

What do you think of the education in here?

- What activities do you take part in? What do you like best? Why is that?

Have you any plans for when you leave here?

- *Prompt re: study, work, etc. if needed.*

Do you have any children of your own?

- *(If yes)* What ages are they?
- How are they getting on?
- Do you think that they will manage to get an education, or will that be difficult?

If you could tell the government to change anything to make school a better and more interesting place to be for someone like yourself, what would you tell them to change?

And if you knew someone who was thinking of leaving school, what would you say to them?

What's the most important thing you learned at school?

What's the most important thing you've learned from your life so far?

Is there anything else you'd like to say to me?

Interview Schedule for Phase 2: Women who have Experienced Rape

OK, so we'll start with a bit about yourself.

- Would you mind telling me your age?

And thinking back to primary school – what was that like for you?

Try to get information about positive and negative aspects of school.

- How did you find the teachers?
- Were there subjects that you liked and didn't like?
- Did you feel like you fit in?
- Did you get on with your classmates?
- How might primary school have been better for you?
- Was there anything going on either inside or outside of school that was making you unhappy?

And now, moving on to changing from primary to post-primary school...

- What was it like when you were beginning post-primary school?
- Did the school give you information about things like school rules, timetables, where the different classes were?
- Is there anything that might have made starting in post-primary school better for you?

What was post-primary school like for you?

- How did you find the teachers?
- Were there subjects that you liked and didn't like?
- Did you feel like you fit in?
- Did you get on with your classmates?
- How might post-primary school have been better for you?
- Was there anything going on either inside or outside of school that was making you unhappy? **If it's ok with you, we can talk about how your experience of rape affected your schooling a little later. This question is about other things that might have been making you unhappy.**

Was there more than one class group in each year level in post-primary school?

(If yes) **And how was it decided which students were in which class?**

What were the others in the class like?

What were the lessons like – can you describe them?

Were you ever taken out of your class for lessons on your own or in a smaller group? *(If yes)* How did you find that?

Did you ever get into trouble in school?

- Tell us a bit about that. What happened?
- Do you think you were treated fairly when you got into trouble?
- Did your parents get involved? What happened?

What makes a person a good teacher, in your view?

Did you sit the Junior Cert. Exams?

(If yes) **How did you find that?**

Now, if you are OK to do this, I'd like you to ask you about your experience of rape, how it affected your schooling. Remember you don't have to answer a particular question if you are not comfortable to do so.

- At what point in your schooling did the rape occur?
- Where did this occur?
- Did you know the man that did this to you?
- How did this affect your schooling? How did it affect you in general?
- Who did you turn to for support? Was this helpful for you?
- How did staff at school react? Was this helpful for you?
- At what point did you leave school? How did you feel at this time? And how did people in your life react when you left – your family, friends, teachers...?

How has life been for you since you left school?

Get some information about work, education, living arrangements, well-being.

Do you feel like your life is going the way you want it to go?

If you could tell the government to change anything to make school a better and more interesting place to be for someone like yourself, what would you tell them to change?

And if you knew someone who was thinking of leaving school, what would you say to them?

What's the most important thing you learned at school?

What's the most important thing you've learned from your life so far?

Is there anything else you'd like to say to me?