



Looking at Action Planning for Improvement in DEIS Post-Primary Schools

Inspectorate Evaluation Studies



INSPECTORATE

Promoting the Quality of Learning

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CHAPTER 1: THE DEIS ACTION PLAN AND DEIS EVALUATIONS

1.1 An overview of the DEIS action plan

Introduction

A new action plan for educational inclusion, the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) action plan, was launched in 2005 by the Department of Education and Skills. The DEIS action plan was based on the findings of the Educational Disadvantage Committee and was grounded in the belief that every child and young person deserves an equal chance to access, participate in and benefit from education.

Aims of DEIS

The aim of the DEIS action plan was to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities were met. To this end, it sought a more integrated, co-ordinated, and effective delivery of the full range of school-based educational inclusion measures. At its core was a standardised system for identifying and regularly reviewing levels of disadvantage, and an integrated *School Support Programme* (SSP) that would bring together and build upon existing interventions for schools. The interventions included the following:

- Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme
- School Completion Programme (SCP)
- Support Teachers Project
- Giving Children an Even Break
- Breaking the Cycle
- Disadvantaged Area Scheme
- Literacy and Numeracy Schemes

Among the key measures to be implemented under the DEIS action plan were: the streamlining of existing measures for addressing education disadvantage, targeted measures to tackle problems of literacy and numeracy, and measures to enhance student attendance, educational progression, retention and attainment. It was expected that the integration of the HSCL Scheme and the SCP services into the SSP framework would be effected over a five-year period. Schools were expected to place a renewed emphasis on the involvement of parents and families in children's education by incorporating the HSCL function into their three-year action plan.

Additional supports for DEIS schools

Primary and post-primary schools participating in DEIS receive significant additional supports and resources including additional staffing to assist them in achieving the aims of the initiative. The level of additional supports and resources allocated to schools participating in DEIS varies according to the level of disadvantage in the school community. Post-primary schools receive an additional allocation of teaching hours, along with specific additional funding by way of a DEIS grant and a book grant. Each DEIS school also receives support from a home-school-community liaison coordinator and from the School Completion Programme.

Undertakings by DEIS schools

Schools that receive additional support and resources through participation in DEIS are expected to support the DEIS action plan through a systematic planning and monitoring process at individual school level and at school cluster/community level. The involvement of students, parents, local communities and agencies operating at local level is considered

an important dimension of the planning process. Schools are expected to develop action plans focusing on the following areas: attendance, retention, educational progression, literacy and numeracy, examination attainment (at second level), parent and community partnership, partnership between schools and links with external agencies. Within this framework, participating schools are responsible for tailoring their own action planning to meet the specific needs of their students. Progress in the implementation of these action plans should be kept under review and adjusted in light of experience.

A tailored planning template was developed by the support services to facilitate DEIS schools in developing their own individual three-year action plans. By using these templates for action planning, schools could supplement and extend established school development planning practices. Principals, boards of management and in-school management teams, who were already responsible for leading the planning process in their schools, were expected to support the implementation of the DEIS action plans. It was intended that the planning template developed by the support services would assist schools to include targets at school level under each of the agreed areas of focus, referred to in this report as the DEIS themes. The targets were to be agreed at whole-school level, with all staff members then taking them into account as appropriate in their planning for teaching and learning.

1.2 The DEIS evaluation framework

DEIS evaluations, 2007-2013

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) was commissioned in 2007 by the Department of Education and Skills to conduct an evaluation of the School Support Programme in primary and post-primary schools. This work is ongoing and has led to a number of reports, which are available on the ERC website. Some of the ERC findings are referred to in the present report and have informed some of its recommendations.

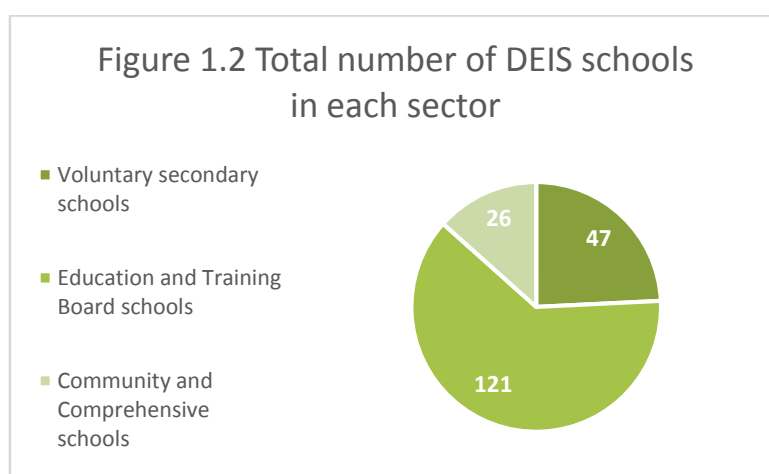
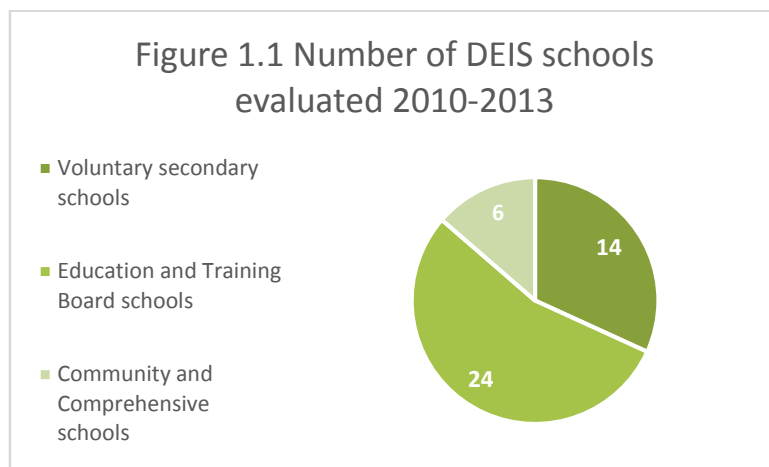
In 2010, the Inspectorate conducted an evaluation of the school-based action planning processes underpinning the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative in post-primary schools within the School Support Programme. The purpose of the evaluation was: to ascertain the extent to which schools were engaging in the planning process and devising action plans; to assess the quality of the action plans; and to establish the extent to which schools could indicate the impact of the action plans on the learning outcomes for students. The findings of the evaluation were compiled and published in *An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Post-primary Schools*¹.

Further evaluations were conducted in DEIS schools in 2011 and were issued to schools but not compiled or published. In 2013, the Department Inspectorate carried out evaluations in ten DEIS post-primary schools, using the same evaluation model as in 2010 and 2011. Forty-four DEIS evaluations have now taken place in post-primary schools: eighteen in 2010, sixteen in 2011, and ten in 2013. This report considers the findings of all forty-four evaluations.

The charts below show the number of schools evaluated and the total number of DEIS schools in each of the three sectors²: voluntary secondary schools; schools maintained by Education and Training Boards (formerly vocational education committees); and community and comprehensive schools. The forty-four schools represent 22.7% of all DEIS post-primary schools

¹ Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2011.

² The three sectors originally had differing emphases in their educational provision. All three now offer a broadly-based national curriculum, delivered through a range of programmes.



Focus of the evaluations – DEIS themes and DEIS planning processes

The evaluations focused on school planning processes with regard to each of the following DEIS themes:

- **Attendance**
Attendance is fundamental to students' progress and attainment in school. When dealing with this theme, schools need to look at patterns of full-day absences, part-day absences, late arrival at school, and the rate of suspensions.
- **Retention**
The theme of retention focuses on the importance of keeping children in school, identifying those at risk of early leaving, and taking action to reduce or eliminate factors that cause students to drop out.
- **Progression**
Progression is very closely linked to attendance and retention. It puts a spotlight on the key moves from one stage of education to the next: from primary to post-primary; from junior cycle to senior cycle; and from post-primary to continuing education and the world of work.
- **Examination Attainment**
Examination attainment focuses on attainment in the certificate examinations, and also includes target-setting, strategies and monitoring of progress with regard to students' outcomes in school-based assessments and examinations.
- **Literacy**
Improvements in literacy and numeracy skills have been a key objective of the DEIS action plan from the beginning. The Department's national literacy and numeracy

strategy³ sets out a very broad definition of literacy that includes ‘the ability to use and understand spoken language, print, writing, and digital media’.

- **Numeracy**

The national literacy and numeracy strategy offers a broad definition of numeracy: ‘the ability to use mathematical understanding and skills to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living in complex social settings’.

- **Partnership with parents and others**

The DEIS action plan supports schools to develop partnerships with parents and with the community. Schools are also expected to develop links with other schools and colleges, for example in transfer programmes from post-primary school to third-level colleges.

Each of the above themes was examined with reference to the quality of the planning process in each of the following four key aspects:

- **Target-setting**

Setting targets is an essential element of effective DEIS planning. Typically, target-setting involves gathering data and evidence, analysing it, and using the information to formulate targets that are SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound.

- **Selection of strategies**

Once targets are set, the focus of planning is on how the targets will be attained. An effective planning process makes clear links between target-setting and the selection of strategies and interventions to achieve the targets set.

- **Implementation of strategies**

In this aspect of the planning process, the focus is on how the strategies and interventions selected are put into practice. Where planning is effective, those involved directly in implementation understand the purpose of each strategy, and a whole-school approach to implementation is evident.

- **Impact and progress**

The DEIS planning process requires schools to monitor the effectiveness of the strategies they are implementing. Schools should be able to show that outcomes have improved, or that they have adjusted targets or strategies having reviewed the progress made.

DEIS evaluation criteria and the quality continuum

The Inspectorate’s DEIS evaluation criteria, in the form of quality descriptors, are given in Appendix 1. Inspectors used a four-point quality continuum to evaluate the quality of the schools’ planning processes in relation to each DEIS theme. This involved assigning one of the following quality descriptors to each aspect of the planning process in the context of each DEIS theme:

- Significant strengths
- Strengths outweigh weaknesses
- Weaknesses outweigh strengths
- Significant weaknesses

Use of this continuum is recommended as part of the school self-evaluation process and is therefore becoming increasingly familiar to schools. For the purposes of this report, findings of significant strengths and of strengths outweighing weaknesses were grouped together as ‘Strengths predominate’. Findings of significant weaknesses and of weaknesses outweighing strengths were grouped together as ‘Weaknesses predominate’. These terms are used in the charts relating to each theme, and those relating to DEIS planning processes.

³ *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life*, DES, 2011

The quantitative terms used in this report and the percentage range they pertain to are given in the table below.

Quantitative term	Approximate percentage of occurrence
Almost all	More than 90%
Most	75-90%
Majority	50-74%
Less than half / A significant minority	25-49%
A small number / less than a quarter	16-24%
A few	Up to 15%

Evaluation activities in 2010, 2011 and 2013

DEIS evaluations were carried out in each school by a team of two inspectors. Evaluations occurred in a one-week timeframe. In the first three days, inspectors reviewed the documented DEIS planning process, conducted meetings, and observed lessons and interventions. They then prepared and delivered feedback on their findings to the school.

The sources of information included:

- A school information form
- Interview with principal or senior management team
- Meetings with a focus group of parents, relevant teachers and support personnel
- Student Questionnaire
- Parent Questionnaire
- Document Review
- Observation of at least twelve lessons and interventions, such as the homework club or literacy programme
- Feedback to the principal or senior management team and a representative group from the staff
- Information gathered from schools' internal retention and attendance records
- State Examinations Commission data
- National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) data⁴

Following their analysis of the data and information gathered, inspectors prepared a draft report of the key findings in relation to the school's engagement in the planning process. On the fifth day of the evaluation, oral feedback was provided and the key strengths and areas for development were discussed with the principal or senior management team and a number of teachers in each of the schools. Subsequently, each school received a draft written report of the evaluation. Following procedures outlined in *Publication of School Inspection Reports* (Inspectorate 2006), each school was invited to inform the Inspectorate of any errors of fact in the draft reports. The written reports were then issued to the schools for school response.

In the preparation of this composite report, the following sources of evidence were used:

- the forty-four individual evaluation reports themselves, representing over 500 observations of lessons and interventions, and over 150 meetings and interviews
- the collated findings relating to strengths and weaknesses
- the responses to the student questionnaire (4034 in total)
- the responses to the parent questionnaire (3059 in total)
- data from various DEIS-related reports published by the Department and other agencies.

⁴ The NEWB role was incorporated into the Educational Welfare Service of TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency in 2014.

CHAPTER 2: THE FINDINGS OF DEIS EVALUATIONS 2010 – 2013

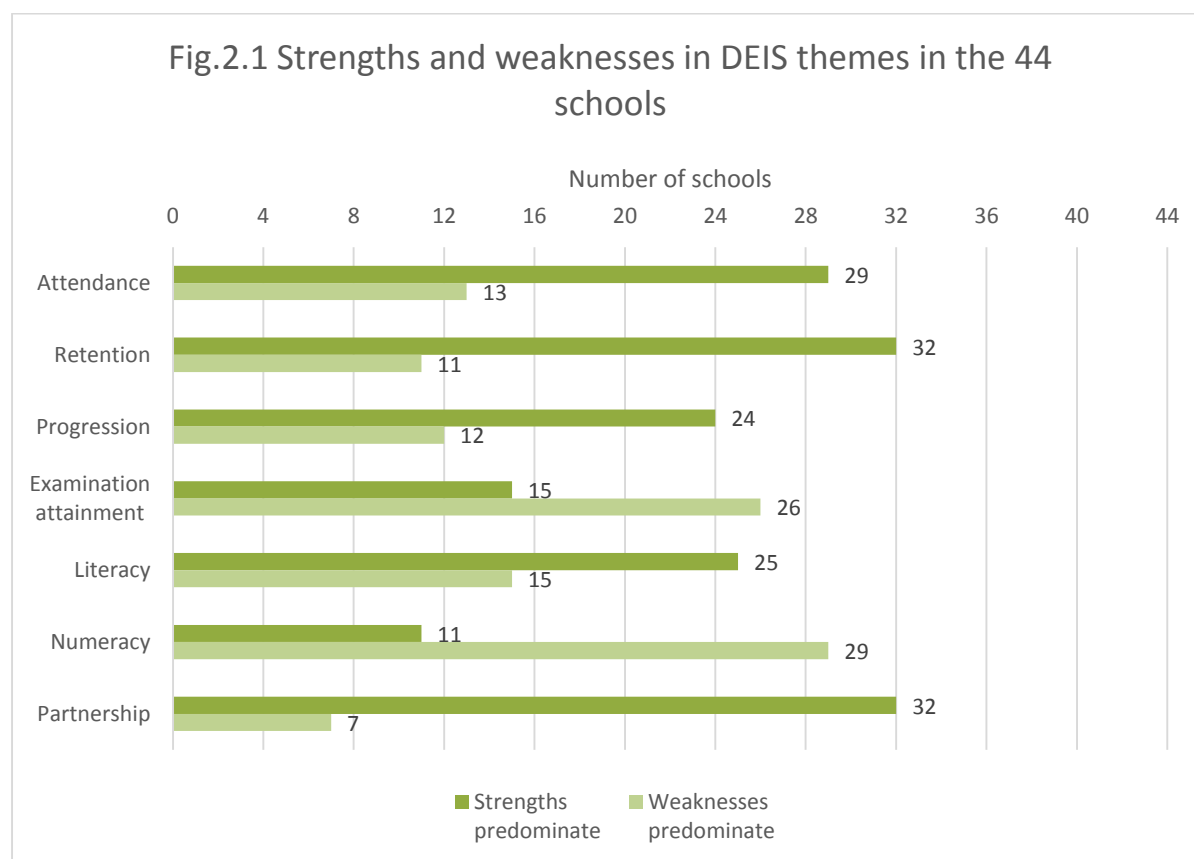
2.1 An overview of DEIS planning in the forty-four schools

2.1.1 Strengths and weaknesses in DEIS themes

Schools participating in DEIS are required to plan for improvement in each DEIS theme in a structured way. The school's improvement planning for each theme is expected to include four linked aspects:

- setting targets for improved outcomes
- selecting appropriate strategies to attain those targets
- implementing those strategies to improve outcomes for students
- measuring the impact of the strategies and the progress being made

In the forty-four evaluations, planning for each theme was considered with reference to these four linked aspects. Where planning for a theme showed consistent strengths or more strengths than weaknesses in these aspects, the theme was evaluated as one in which strengths predominate in that school. On the other hand, where planning for a theme showed consistent weaknesses or more weaknesses than strengths in these aspects, the theme was evaluated as one in which weaknesses predominate in that school. In a few cases, practice was too mixed to say that either strengths or weaknesses predominated.

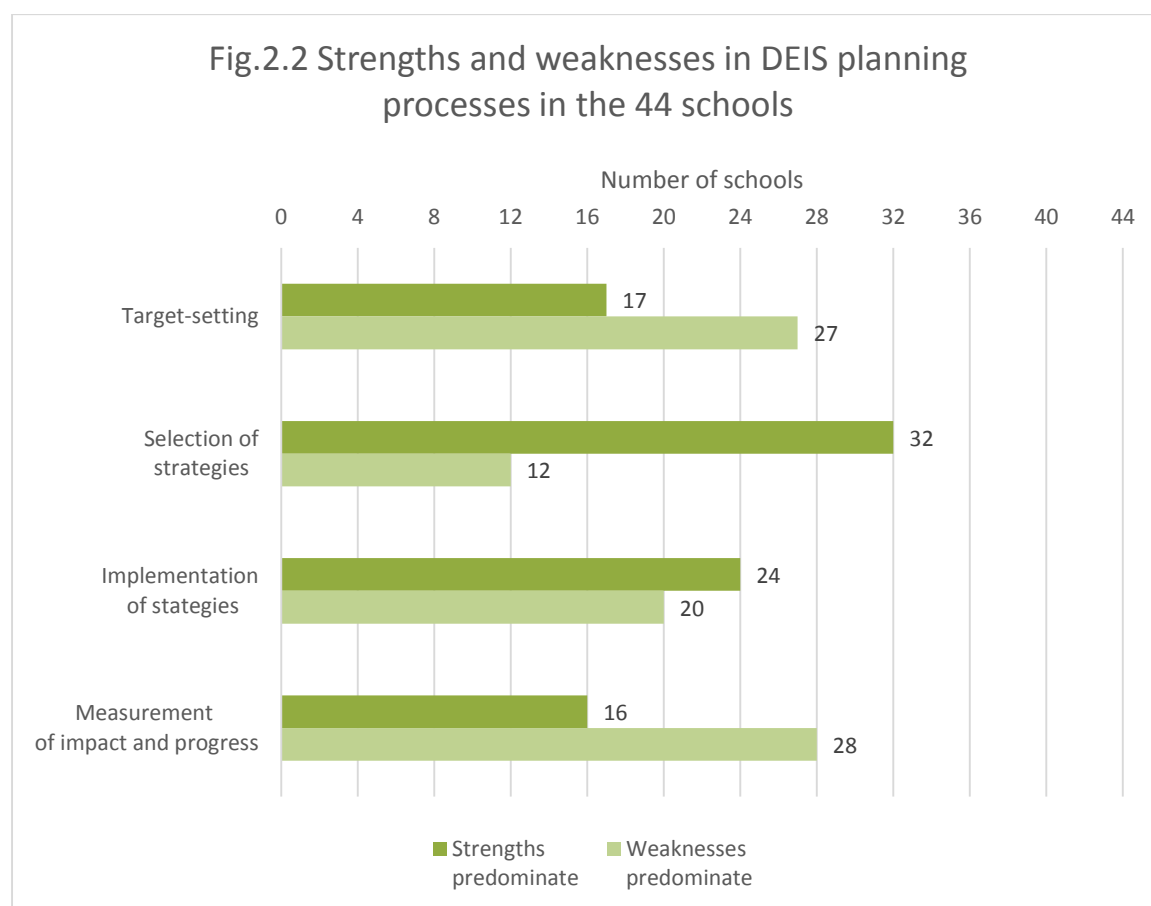


In the forty-four schools where DEIS planning was evaluated, strengths predominated in planning for five of the seven DEIS themes. The exceptions were planning for examination attainment and for numeracy (Fig. 2.1). The most widespread good practice was found in planning for the theme of partnership, where strengths predominated in thirty-two of the forty-four schools, with weaknesses predominant in just seven. Widespread good practice was

found also in planning for retention, although weaknesses predominated in eleven schools. The most widespread poor practice was found in planning for numeracy, with just eleven schools where strengths predominated, while weaknesses predominated in twenty-nine. Poor practice in planning for examination attainment was also widespread; weaknesses predominated in this area in twenty-six of the forty-four schools. Detailed findings for each theme are given in Section 2.2.

2.1.2 Strengths and weaknesses in DEIS planning processes

Moving the focus from the DEIS themes to the planning process itself, the evaluations revealed a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in the four aspects of DEIS planning in the forty-four schools. The selection of strategies and the implementation of strategies were found to be the strongest aspects of the planning process. More weaknesses than strengths were found in the aspects of target-setting and the measurement of impact and progress, to an almost equal degree.



As can be seen in the chart above (Fig.2.2), by far the strongest aspect of the DEIS planning process was the selection of strategies, where strengths predominated in thirty-two of the forty-four schools evaluated. The detailed findings in Section 2.2 give examples of some of the effective strategies schools had selected. Significant strengths in selecting strategies were evident in schools which had a sound basis for their choice along with reliable indications that the strategies chosen would be effective.

Despite the strengths found in the strategies selected, the incidence of strengths in target-setting was comparatively low. This finding suggests that more schools need to consider the focus and purpose of the strategies they have selected, and to ensure that strategies are

chosen with a view to achieving specific targets. Further understanding of setting SMART targets⁵ would assist schools to select appropriate strategies on an informed basis.

In evaluating the implementation of strategies, inspectors observed a range of lessons and interventions to see how plans to improve literacy, numeracy and examination attainment were being put into action in the classroom and elsewhere. Initiatives to improve attendance, retention and progression, and actions taken to deepen partnership with parents and others, were observed and discussed during the evaluations. Strengths predominated in the implementation of strategies in the majority of schools. However, the findings indicate an 'implementation gap' to some degree, where schools are selecting potentially effective strategies but are not as effective in carrying them through into practice. More recent evaluations indicate a lessening of this gap; this is most notable in the area of literacy where whole-school understanding of, and involvement in, literacy development has grown.

The final stage of the planning process –the measurement of impact and progress – was found to be relatively under-developed, with strengths predominating in just sixteen of the forty-four schools. This means that, even where schools were implementing strategies well, they were not always assessing their effectiveness through careful measurement of their impact. Again, more recent evaluations indicate that better practices in measuring impact and progress are becoming more widespread, as schools develop a more structured approach to the DEIS planning process.

Section 2.2 below presents the detailed findings for each of the seven DEIS themes evaluated. The section on each theme begins with a short account of context factors, then gives the findings with extracts from individual reports, includes some insights into student and parent views from the questionnaires administered, and has a brief concluding piece, summarising areas of strength and the main areas for development. The chart for each theme shows the percentage incidence of strong or weak practice for that theme in the four aspects of the planning process evaluated.

2.2 The findings on planning processes for the seven DEIS themes

2.2.1 Attendance

Context

Student attendance is of fundamental importance in all schools. Poor attendance affects students' progress and attainment, and limits their engagement with the full range of school-based activities. Schools focusing on improving attendance need to consider not only whole-day absences, but also part-day absences, including regularly arriving late to school. Poor attendance is more likely to occur where children are affected by social and economic disadvantage, and its negative consequences are more severe.

All schools are required to make returns to the Educational Welfare Service of TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency⁶ with regard to absences and suspensions. The most recent national analysis of attendance data found that the average number of students per school missing twenty days or more is roughly twice as high in DEIS schools as compared to other schools⁷. For this reason, attendance is rightly highlighted in the DEIS planning process, and many of the resources and services available to DEIS schools relate in some way to attendance.

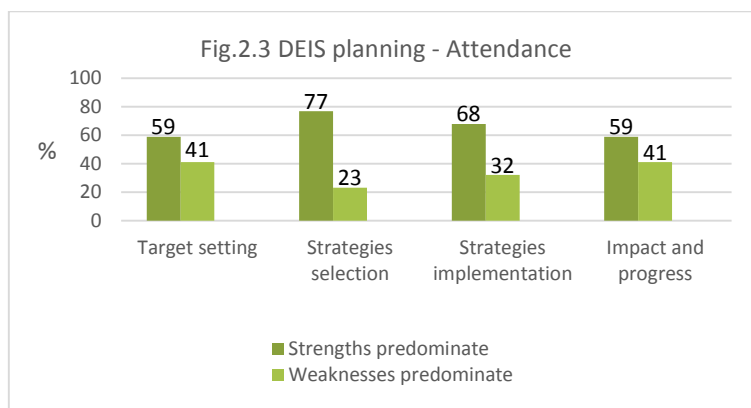
⁵ SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. See p.4 above.

⁶ Formerly NEWB, the National Educational Welfare Board.

⁷ Millar, D. *Analysis of School Attendance Data in Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2010/11* (2013)

Findings

Overall, in the forty-four schools evaluated, there was a predominance of strong over weak practice in all aspects of DEIS planning for attendance (Fig.2.3). Almost three-fifths (59%) had strengths in target-setting and in measuring impact and progress; most schools (77%) had selected effective strategies; and strategies were well implemented in 68%.



Effective strategies noted in the evaluations ranged from careful monitoring and record-keeping to interventions designed to encourage students to come to school. Schools that were very successful in the area of attendance clearly grasped the importance of maintaining accurate and consistent monitoring systems, while also putting in place incentives to improve students' disposition towards school and being in school. Initiatives pertaining to attendance and retention are covered in the sub-section on Retention.

Inspectors' observations on effective attendance monitoring included the following:

'Targeted students meet with the principal to see their attendance record...and to set realistic and achievable targets through the development of an Individual Attendance Plan.' (2010)

'An absence of ten days results in more focused action to prevent escalation of the problem...' (2011)

'The attendance team's own analysis has identified the need to target students in the senior cycle, where issues affecting attendance can be complex. The plan includes actions to raise awareness of attendance patterns among senior cycle students and parents.' (2013)

It is worth noting that these schools have generated reliable and specific data on student attendance which they can draw on when deciding on appropriate interventions. These are good, straightforward examples of the crucial link between gathering accurate information and selecting the interventions that are most likely to work.

In addition to these practical and evidence-based approaches to tackle poor attendance, schools have also looked at incentives to encourage better attendance and more positive attitudes among students. Many schools have awards for good and improved attendance; schools may need to give these a higher profile, as only 50% of students said in questionnaire responses that their school gave attendance awards. Inspectors regularly noted that schools provided a caring and calm environment for their students. Some schools strategically schedule activities that students are likely to find appealing.

Among the approaches noted to encourage better attendance were the following:

'...the welcoming, caring atmosphere in the school and the obvious concern for pupil welfare. 79% of students surveyed liked coming to school.' (2010)

'Activities that appeal to the students are organised for days when there could be high absenteeism. Examples include serving popular dishes in the canteen on Mondays and Fridays, and arranging fun activities on the day before a holiday break.' (2011)

'The school's Le Chéile music project is a wonderful intervention that promotes students' attendance, integration and participation.' (2013)

While the overall picture regarding DEIS action planning for attendance was positive, poor practice was also noted. At the most basic level, significant weaknesses in maintaining accurate attendance records were reported in a few instances, and obvious measures such as an afternoon roll call were not being taken. In some instances, schools were not using the attendance data to identify individuals or groups in need of targeted interventions. Although most schools made great efforts to be warm and welcoming places, practices such as locking students out at lunchtime were occasionally observed. Instances were also noted where the school's suspension policy resulted in very high suspension rates, and schools were not reflecting sufficiently on the policy's impact on student attendance.

In order to develop the good practices noted and to address weaknesses identified, all DEIS schools should ensure that they are maintaining accurate attendance records, and that the whole school understands and implements the record-keeping measures that the school has committed to in its DEIS action plan. Schools should use the attendance data they gather to identify specific causes for concern, with a view to early detection and intervention to ensure that students come to school, and remain in school. Codes of behaviour should follow the published *Guidelines*⁸ and strive to engender positive attitudes including good attendance.

Schools are showing an increasing awareness of the positive impact that stimulating and motivational approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment can have on attendance. The inclusion of such approaches in DEIS action planning for attendance would be a very significant step forward, and one that all DEIS schools should strongly consider.

Student and parent views

Some of the responses relating to attendance in the parent and student questionnaires are worth pondering. When asked if they only miss school when they are sick, most students said yes, and just 24% said no. However, a much higher percentage (56.4%) reported staying out of school for reasons other than illness when asked this directly. Asked if their child goes to school most days, just 2% of parents said no, yet 15.5% said their child missed a lot of days in the last year. These varying responses point up the need for schools to have accurate records to refer to when discussing attendance with students and their parents.

Question	Total	Yes	No	Not sure/don't know
Students: I sometimes stay out of school for other reasons [than sickness].	4034	2275 (56.4%)	1600 (39.7%)	159 (3.9%)
Parents: My child missed a lot of school days this/last year.	3059	475 (15.5%)	2540 (83.1%)	44 (1.4%)

⁸ *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools*, NEWB, 2008

Conclusions

What most schools are doing well

- Selecting and implementing effective attendance-monitoring systems
- Selecting and implementing effective incentives to encourage and reward good attendance

What schools could do better

- Ensure attendance data is reliable and is used effectively to inform targets and interventions
- Ensure that action planning to improve attendance takes into account all relevant areas of school life, including teaching and learning approaches and the school's code of behaviour

2.2.2 Retention

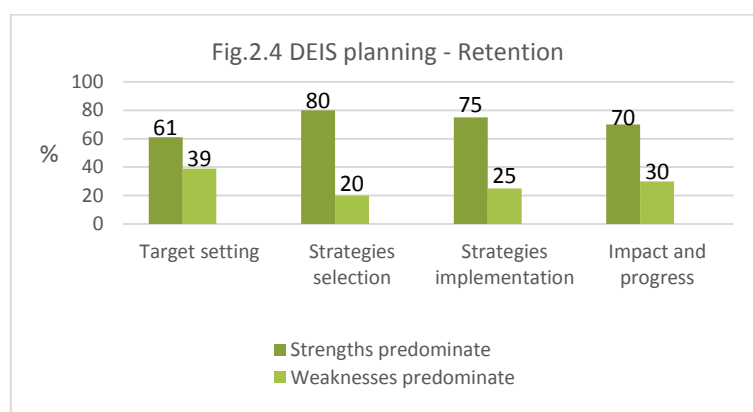
Context

The theme of retention focuses on the importance of keeping children in school, identifying those at risk of early leaving, and taking action to reduce or eliminate factors that cause students to drop out. Ireland has high student retention rates that compare well with those in other European countries. More significantly in the context of this report, the latest figures show that the average retention rate for DEIS post-primary schools continues to increase⁹. The retention-to-Leaving Certificate figure in DEIS schools for students who entered post-primary school in 2001 was 68.2%; the comparable figure for the students that entered post-primary school in 2007 is 80.4%.

While this is a very significant improvement, it is worth noting that the retention figure in non-DEIS schools for the 2007-entry cohort is 92.6%. This means that a considerable, although decreasing, gap remains between DEIS and non-DEIS rates of retention to the end of post-primary education. There is a much smaller gap (3.5%) in retention to the end of junior cycle between DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

Findings

Overall, in the forty-four schools evaluated, there was a predominance of strong over weak practice in all aspects of DEIS planning for retention (Fig.2.4). Over three-fifths (61%) had strengths in target-setting; most schools had selected effective strategies and were implementing them well (80% and 75% respectively); and strengths in monitoring the impact and progress of retention measures were noted in a significant majority (70%) of schools.



Where evaluations reported very good practice, the range of supports provided to increase attendance and retention were effectively co-ordinated and deployed. These included before-school and after-school activities funded through the School Completion Programme (SCP);

⁹ Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools, DES, 2014.

close monitoring of at-risk students; and support to them and their families, led by the HSCL co-ordinator, and involving in-school care teams and external agencies. In these schools, there were clear links between each aspect of the planning process for retention. It was notable, where planning was very effective, that schools had generated reliable data on retention, and were using it to inform actions and interventions. The most successful schools had set, and were achieving, very high retention rates: 100% in junior cycle and up to 95% in senior cycle.

Inspectors' observations on effective practice included the following:

'Impact [of retention strategies] was measured: there was real improvement; fluctuation or deterioration in retention was analysed to identify reasons with a view to taking corrective action where feasible and practicable.' (2010)

'The excellent pastoral care system and positive staff-student relationships in school, the one-to-one counselling for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties provided by the SCP, and curricular and social support provided for Traveller students are among some of the highly effective [retention] strategies.' (2011)

'The school's care team functions very effectively to support students at risk [of early school leaving] and their families. It ensures efficient co-ordination and communication between in-school and external supports. Very good interventions are in place to support identified students.' (2013)

The strengths identified in these instances relate principally to selecting, implementing and measuring the impact of strategies to improve retention. The link between the themes of attendance and retention was borne out in the way that schools addressed them through similar interventions. These included the provision of programmes such as the Junior Certificate School Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied, and of a range of activities before and after school: breakfast clubs, homework and study clubs, sports and leisure pursuits.

With regard to data-gathering and target-setting, good practice was less prevalent, though still found in a majority of the schools evaluated. Some very sound SMART targets based on good data were noted: for example in one school, increasing the senior cycle retention rate from 93.7% to 94.7%. In other instances, careful recording enabled an annual comparison of a year group's initial enrolment figure with its completion figures at the end of junior and senior cycle, so the school could track retention trends and set SMART targets for improvement. These examples illustrate fairly straightforward practices regarding data and targets. Where such practices are followed, data becomes real and useful information that allows schools to get an accurate picture of how they are doing in crucial areas.

While DEIS planning for retention was better than planning for attendance at each stage of the process, some poor practice was also noted. Inspectors noted instances where schools had failed to identify specific problems because of poor recording and monitoring of retention rates. In these cases for example, schools had not identified, and therefore had not addressed, high drop-out rates of students in the senior cycle. These findings underline the importance not only of gathering data but of analysing it carefully so that the school can take the corrective action necessary.

Student and parent views

The questionnaires administered as part of the DEIS evaluations asked parents and students about staying in school to complete the Leaving Certificate. The responses received were overwhelmingly affirmative, as shown in the table below.

Question	Total	Yes	No	Not sure/ don't know
Parents: My child will stay in school to do the Leaving Cert.	3059	2926 (95.6%)	17 (.6%)	116 (3.8%)
Students: I will do my Leaving Cert.	4034	3733 (92.5%)	57 (1.4%)	244 (6.1%)

Responses gave a less positive picture, however, with regard to levels of student participation in the activities before and after school that are intended to improve rates of attendance and retention. Parent and student questionnaires were very consistent in the responses to questions about participation in breakfast clubs and after-school clubs. Both reported very low participation (16%) in breakfast clubs, although most parents (80%) and a majority of students (69%) thought breakfast clubs were a good idea. Responses indicated that participation in after-school clubs was higher at 29.7%, but still disappointing, given that most schools offer homework and study clubs. It should be said that some very good practice was noted in recording attendance and participation rates for these interventions, and in planning for improved participation. Nonetheless, the questionnaire responses indicate that these extracurricular interventions to improve retention merit greater attention within the DEIS planning process in schools.

Conclusions

What most schools are doing well

- Selecting and implementing effective interventions to help students to stay in school, such as supportive curricular programmes and extracurricular activities
- Providing good and often well-co-ordinated support and counselling to individual students and groups of students identified as at risk of early school-leaving, including support to their families

What schools could do better

- Record and monitor retention rates carefully, so that areas of concern can be identified and addressed
- Monitor participation rates in all extracurricular activities, evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, and take action where necessary

2.2.3 Progression

Context

The DEIS theme of progression is very closely linked to attendance and retention. It puts a spotlight on the key moves from one stage to the next for all children in their educational journey: from primary to post-primary; from junior cycle to senior cycle; and from post-primary to continuing education and the world of work. Progression involves links between post-primary schools and their feeder primary schools to support students making this significant move. And, at the end of the post-primary stage, good progression planning requires links between schools and the higher and further education providers. Progression to continuing education is especially important because of the overarching aim of the DEIS action plan: to give all students equal educational opportunities. The tracking of students beyond their post-primary school careers is a crucial aspect of planning for progression.

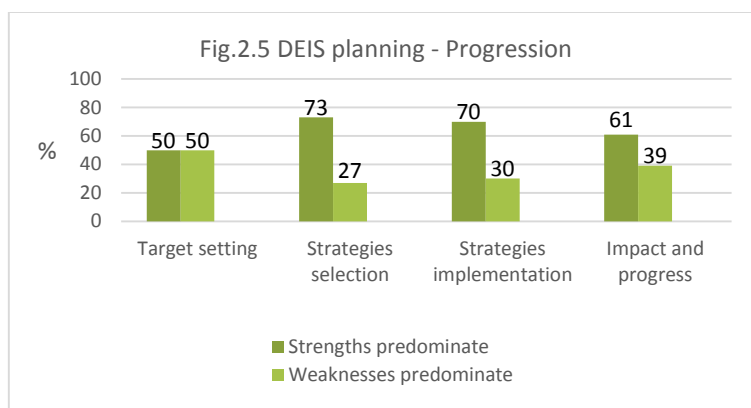
A 2013 Department report on the destination of students who completed the final year of the senior cycle in 2009/10 provides some comparisons between students from DEIS schools and other schools¹⁰. The rate of progression to higher education in Irish universities and institutes of technology was more than twice as high in non-DEIS schools (49.1%) as in DEIS schools

¹⁰ *School Completers – What Next?* Report on School Completers from Post-Primary Schools, DES, 2013

(24.2%). In the case of progression to Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, the picture is somewhat different. The rate of progression from non-DEIS schools is 18%, and from DEIS schools is 27.1%. Overall, the rate of progression to continuing education as measured in the 2013 report is 67.1% in non-DEIS schools and 51.3% in DEIS schools.

Findings

Overall, in the forty-four schools evaluated, good practice predominated with regard to selecting, implementing and measuring the impact of strategies and interventions (Fig.2.5). A significant majority of schools were selecting and implementing strategies effectively (73% and 70% respectively), and just over three-fifths (61%) were measuring impact and progress well. Half the schools had good practice in the area of target-setting for progression; half did not.



Where evaluations reported very good practice, data on progression was collected, logged and tracked so that SMART targets could be set, and progress towards them could be measured. The effective strategies selected included transfer programmes from primary to post-primary; educational guidance to assist students in making appropriate subject and programme choices, especially in the senior cycle, and in making appropriate choices with regard to further and higher education; and structures to give students opportunities to experience both the world of work and further education opportunities.

A factor that is harder to quantify than these interventions but identified by inspectors as very significant was the way that schools communicated to students a sense of high expectations and confidence in them to do well. The power of positive role models to 'raise the bar' for all students was noted and was used well in many schools, often by way of visits by successful former students, some of whom have sponsored specific initiatives to support retention and progression.

Inspectors' observations on effective practice included the following:

'Targets...were set for the rates of students progressing to higher education, further education, apprenticeship, and employment. Destination surveys were undertaken a few times a year. (2010)

'Parent and student questionnaires and the interview with the focus group of parents showed high expectations for school completion and continuing education. School tracking data shows significant numbers of past pupils in continuing education.' (2011)

'The school has had notable success in achieving high rates of progression to further and higher education. Initiatives and links with the access programmes of the nearest university and institute of technology were cited as being particularly successful,

while the 'Sport for Success' initiative for primary-school pupils is also effective in raising expectations and encouraging progress to third level.' (2013)

In all these instances, schools had gathered reliable information in a purposeful way, to help them set meaningful targets, choose interventions that were likely to work, and monitor impact and progress.

Poor practice was also identified, most often in the area of target-setting. Targets were not specific or not based on reliable data. Targets were expressed as actions in some instances, but without a specific rationale. While inspectors noted a high occurrence of good transfer programmes from primary to post-primary, these programmes were often not referred to in progression targets or actions. Schools are encouraged to include all transfer programmes in their DEIS planning, and to consider how they would know whether such programmes were working successfully. In addition to recommendations related to target-setting and measuring impact, inspectors also pointed to the need to provide students and their families with better information on the senior cycle options offered by the school.

Student and parent views

Questionnaire responses reflected a high level of aspiration towards continuing education or training, more emphatically on the part of parents than on students. It merits attention that more than one-fifth (20.4%) of student respondents said no or were uncertain when asked about proceeding to college or further training. It would be worthwhile for all DEIS schools to find out how their students would respond to this question. Schools could then consider the extent to which students' responses reflect lack of confidence, negative attitudes to education, or other factors.

Question	Total	Yes	No	Not sure/ don't know
Parents: It is likely that my child will go to college or further education and training.	3059	2589 (84.7%)	87 (2.8%)	383 (12.5%)
Students: I would like to go to college or further training.	4034	3213 (79.6%)	244 (6.1%)	577 (14.3%)

Conclusions

What the majority of schools are doing well

- Supporting students at key transition points through effective transfer programmes and appropriate guidance counselling
- Providing opportunities for students to experience continuing education options and the world of work

What schools could do better

- Gather and use data on the progression rates and paths of former students, and the dispositions of current students, in order to inform planning to improve progression
- Ensure that high expectations are communicated to students, and that students are supported to realise them

2.2.4 Examination attainment

Context

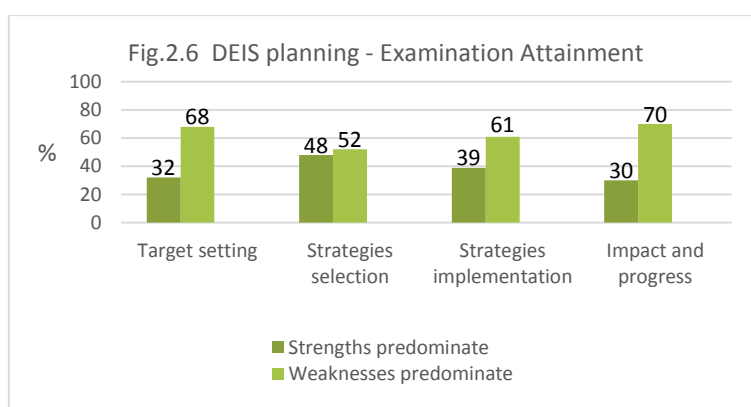
The aim of the DEIS action plan is to address disadvantage through providing a range of supports to students and schools and, by doing so, to improve educational outcomes for students. The theme of examination attainment is very significant in DEIS post-primary

schools, particularly because the Leaving Certificate remains the most common passport into continuing education and is also recognised by employers as a qualification in its own right. In addition to a focus on attainment in the certificate examinations, this theme also includes target-setting, strategies and monitoring of progress with regard to student outcomes in school-based assessments and examinations.

On behalf of the Department, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) has conducted an analysis of schools' implementation of the range of measures available through participation in DEIS, and of outcomes of these measures. As part of this work, the ERC analysed in detail Junior Certificate results, considering data prior to 2006/7 and data from 2007 to 2011, and comparing them for DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The preliminary findings indicate that the attainment of students in DEIS schools has improved to a greater extent than in non-DEIS schools between 2007 and 2011. This improvement coincides with the introduction and roll-out of DEIS. While the Inspectorate evaluations found that DEIS planning for examination attainment was one of the weakest areas, DEIS schools should take heart from the ERC research and view it as an encouragement to engage systematically and purposefully in improvement planning for examination attainment.

Findings

It should be said at the outset that findings in this area do not relate to examination attainment or students' results *per se*. The focus of the evaluation for this theme, as for all themes, was the DEIS planning processes that schools were engaging with. It is immediately noticeable in the above chart (Fig.2.6) that more weaknesses than strengths have been found in DEIS action planning for the theme of examination attainment. This negative pattern has persisted over the years during which the forty-four DEIS evaluations took place, and is a cause for concern.



Target-setting for examination attainment was weaker than for any other DEIS theme; only about one-third of schools had effective target-setting. In the area of selection of strategies, good practice was almost as widespread as poor practice. However, when it came to implementing those strategies, weak practice again predominated, with effective actions for improvement found in fewer than two-fifths of schools. The weakest aspect of DEIS planning for this theme was the measurement of impact and progress, with more weak than good practice in 70% of schools.

Although the overall picture is disappointing, the very good practice noted in some schools is worth highlighting. DEIS schools that feel they need to do better in this area may be encouraged to note that the effective measures described below are straightforward and manageable. An obvious link exists between the level of expectation that a school communicates to its students and a focus on student outcomes and examination attainment. For this reason, DEIS planning for progression and for examination attainment should work together to improve educational outcomes for students.

Inspectors' observations on effective practice included the following:

'Through higher expectations of examination achievement being articulated by the school, a dramatic improvement was noted in Junior Certificate English in 2010, with all students taking either ordinary or higher level.' (2010)

'The main attainment target is to have each student in both certificate examinations sit at least one higher level paper....There is structured intervention with students who are not meeting the target to identify a higher level subject to be taken. This intervention is consultative...and involves the subject teacher as appropriate. The target is further extended through students' personal goal-setting, facilitated by the guidance counsellor.' (2011)

'The school is increasingly gathering and analysing examination outcomes in order to inform and improve teaching and learning practices. The desire to build students' confidence and raise their expectations has been expressed in very practical ways, such as supervised study for examination students that provides active individual and group support.' (2013)

As these examples of good practice indicate, this theme lends itself to SMART target-setting based on data that is readily available. Targets can be set not only on a global basis but also an individual student basis, and this approach greatly encourages students to take ownership of and responsibility for their own learning. As well as the immediate benefits of this approach, students acquire the very valuable life skill of managing themselves. And it is clear from the above examples that concrete actions can be identified that will raise students' examination attainment in real and measurable ways.

Where observation of teaching and learning processes identified good practice, the focus on raising student attainment involved good use of formative assessment or assessment for learning. Inspectors commended teaching approaches that supported active learning and got students thinking about how they were learning. In these instances, teachers challenged students through well-planned learning activities, questions that required more than rote-learned answers, and feedback on homework and tests that gave students pointers for improvement. Unfortunately, these constructive practices were observed in only a minority of schools.

The poor practice noted included some very basic weaknesses, such as a failure to analyse the data available, to set any targets, or to identify concrete actions to raise students' – and teachers' – expectations. One of the most common recommendations relates to the need for subject departments to analyse their students' certificate examination results through comparisons from year to year, so that trends can be identified and ambitious but realistic targets can be set. The need for a whole-school and whole-staff commitment to raising examination attainment was frequently stated in the evaluations. Schools should use the analysis tools that are available on the PDST website¹¹ to assist them in turning available data into useful information to guide their DEIS planning in this area.

Student and parent views

Parent and student questionnaire responses throw some interesting light on their experience of practices related to assessment and attainment in DEIS schools. Most students (83.6%) agreed that teachers tell them how to improve their work but, when it comes to discussion of test results, a quarter of students (24.9%) responded negatively, or were unsure.

¹¹ Professional Development Service for Teachers, www.pdst.ie

Question	Total	Yes	No	Not sure/ don't know
Students: My teachers tell me how to improve my work.	4034	3373 (83.6%)	484 (12%)	177 (4.4%)
Students: My teachers talk to me about my test results.	4034	3030 (75.1%)	810 (20.1%)	194 (4.8%)

These responses suggest that student attainment, as measured in class tests and house exams, is not the focus of teacher/student discussion for a significant minority of students. This would be a worthwhile area for all DEIS schools to investigate. It is hard to imagine how examination attainment could be improved without such discussions being a regular aspect of student/teacher interaction.

Two items on the parent questionnaire are also relevant. Most parents (83.7%) said they get reports about their child's work, such as the end-of-term reports sent out by schools. Another means of communication about students' work and progress is the standard school journal, which has a space for parents to sign each week relating to homework.

Question	Total	Yes	No	Not sure/ don't know
Parents: I get reports from the school about my child's work.	3059	2561 (83.7%)	452 (14.8%)	46 (1.5%)
Parents: I have to sign my child's homework or homework journal.	3059	2176 (71.2%)	822 (26.8%)	61 (2%)

However, responses indicate that almost three-tenths of parents (28.8%) do not feel that this is something the school requires them to do, as indicated by the 'no' and 'not sure' responses above. Non-completion and non-production of homework are regularly mentioned as barriers to progress by teachers. Schools need to make it clear to parents that signing the homework journal will help students to develop good homework routines and will support their learning.

Conclusions

What a minority of schools are doing well

- Setting SMART targets for raising uptake of subjects at higher or ordinary level as appropriate
- Selecting and implementing teaching and learning approaches – for example formative assessment or assessment for learning – that challenge and empower students

What schools could do better

- Use the information available from internal and external assessment outcomes to establish baseline data and set SMART targets for improving student attainment
- Encourage a culture of high expectations among teachers, which is then communicated to students
- Implement practical strategies to raise students' expectations and attainment, such as providing clear developmental feedback on assignments and tests, and establishing routines that support good homework practices

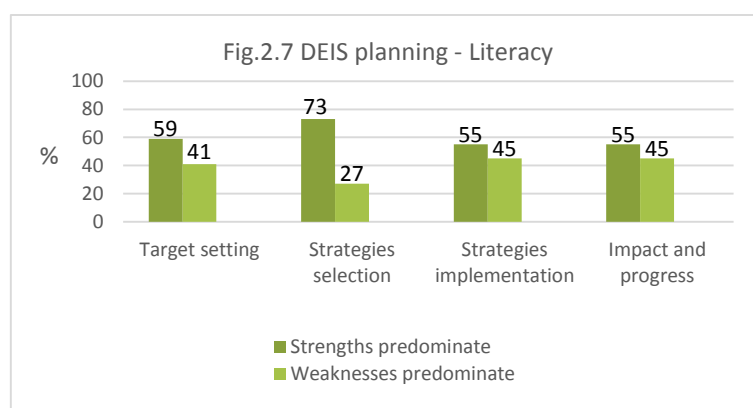
2.2.5 Literacy

Context

Improvements in literacy and numeracy skills have been a key objective of the DEIS action plan from the beginning. During the period when these DEIS evaluations were carried out, the Department devised and published a national literacy and numeracy strategy¹². It also issued a circular to all schools, giving directions and guidelines as to how the strategy was to be implemented¹³. In the case of literacy, the national strategy set out a very broad definition that referred to 'the ability to use and understand spoken language, print, writing, and digital media'. The support services for schools and teachers provided literacy resources and continuing professional development (CPD). One of the main aims of this CPD was to foster an understanding in schools that literacy development is a whole-school issue, and that all teachers are teachers of literacy. The findings in relation to the theme of literacy in DEIS schools should be placed in this national context of greater literacy awareness.

Findings

Overall, in the forty-four schools evaluated, strengths outweighed weaknesses in all aspects of DEIS planning for literacy (Fig.2.7). Almost three-fifths of schools (59%) had good practice in the area of target-setting, and almost three-quarters (73%) had selected effective strategies. Over half the schools were effective in implementing strategies and measuring impact and progress, but almost half were not. While the overall picture is quite positive, these findings point to considerable scope for development in key areas of DEIS planning for literacy.



Where good practice was noted in the area of target-setting, targets were specific and clearly stated, they were based on reliable information including test results, and they were reviewed and updated to reflect students' progress. In the strongest area, selection of strategies, inspectors noted whole-school actions related to vocabulary development across the curriculum; library-based interventions; and the selection of teaching and learning approaches that focused on developing students' skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. The 'implementation gap' evident in the findings relates to schools that are selecting effective strategies but not putting them into action as effectively. However, strategies including those mentioned above were observed in a range of lessons and interventions in a majority of schools.

Inspectors' observations on effective practice included the following:

'An extensive range of literacy initiatives is in place, including Drop Everything and Read, which is school wide; the Reading Challenge and the Readathon; the

¹² Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life, DES, 2011

¹³ Circular 25/2012, Implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, DES, June 2012

celebration of World Book Week; the Spelling Challenge; and the use in classrooms of book boxes, dictionaries, thesauruses, and key word notebooks.' (2010)

'Whole-school literacy initiatives include the development of the library, book clubs and paired reading. Literacy materials were in evidence in almost all classrooms. Subject departments have been asked to identify one literacy target and, in some lessons observed, literacy development was a significant feature of student support. Student questionnaires showed that the school encourages them to read at home and that many do.' (2011)

'[Strategies] include the use of instructional tactics such as placemat, fishbone and Venn diagrams, all of which facilitate students to organise their information and, in the case of placemat, to share and discuss learning. In lessons observed, students were encouraged to use subject-specific terminology and asked to describe what they saw in specific pictures. This approach assists in developing students' oral literacy.' (2013)

Other instances of good practice reflected an increasing awareness of the usefulness of the DEIS planning process for identifying, planning for and bringing about improved outcomes for students. Although instances of very good practice have been noted in each round of DEIS evaluations, more recent evaluations in DEIS schools have noted a more systematic approach to evaluating the strategies selected, and to measuring students' progress in literacy. Good practices relating to target-setting and measuring progress and effectiveness include the following examples:

'Clear targets in relation to literacy are formulated in the DEIS plan. These targets relate to the mastery of key words per subject area as well as oral and written expression. There is also a measurable target in relation to students with low reading ages. Very good records, with frequent testing and retesting of students, are in place in this area.' (2010)

'The impact of the accelerated reading programme is twofold: students are encouraged to read books appropriate to their reading ability while simultaneously their progress is tracked.' (2011)

'Standardised tests are used to measure progress in literacy attainment for first years and all JCSP students. Commendably, percentiles rather than reading ages¹⁴ are now being used [as a measurement]. Reflective practice is evident in evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.' (2013)

Where poor practice was noted, the weaknesses were predictable: poor gathering and analysis of baseline data; no, or inadequate, target-setting; limited selection and implementation of strategies; poor attention to measurement of progress; and, more generally, a failure to establish a whole-school literacy improvement plan involving all teachers and subject departments.

Student and parent views

Student and parent questionnaires provided some interesting insights. 71.6% of students responded that they were good at writing and spelling, and 69.5% said they were good readers. Since lack of confidence would be a barrier to aspiration, it is good that the majority

¹⁴ The use of reading ages is discussed on the Special Education Support Service website. See <http://www.sess.ie/dyslexia-section/understanding-reading-test-scores>

of students see themselves as able writers and readers. However, responses to questions about reading habits are less reassuring.

Question	Total	Yes	No	Not sure/ don't know
Students: I read at home.	4034	1629 (40.4%)	2294 (56.9%)	111 (2.7%)
Parents: The school encourages my child to read books at home.	3059	1803 (58.9%)	743 (24.3%)	513 (16.8%)

Just two-fifths of students said that they read at home, and a similar proportion of parents were not aware of any efforts by schools to encourage this practice. Schools are clearly doing a great deal to establish reading as an enjoyable activity in school. The need for a greater focus on reading at home, involving parents and others at home as much as possible, is indicated by these findings.

Conclusions

What a majority of schools are doing well

- Selecting whole-school interventions and using resources such as the library to support students' vocabulary and reading skills development
- Selecting whole-school approaches to teaching and learning that support the development of students' literacy skills

What schools could do better

- Address the 'implementation gap' by ensuring that the strategies and interventions selected to improve literacy skills are understood at whole-school level and used effectively in teaching and learning practices
- Set SMART targets that are based on reliable data, with a view to improving the measurement of the impact of literacy interventions and the progress made by students

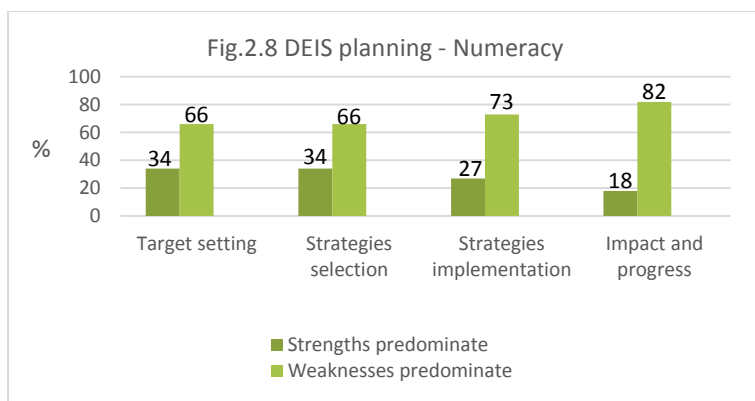
2.2.6 Numeracy

Context

The development and improvement of students' numeracy skills has been a key objective of the DEIS action plan from the beginning. The national literacy and numeracy strategy, already referred to in the literacy section above, offers a broad definition of numeracy: "the ability to use mathematical understanding and skills to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living in complex social settings". Being numerate means being able "to think and communicate quantitatively, to make sense of data, to have a spatial awareness, to understand patterns and sequences, and to recognise situations where mathematical reasoning can be applied to solve problems". This broad view of numeracy takes it much further than just being good at Maths. However, numeracy still occupies 'the Maths space' in DEIS planning, whereas literacy has broken out of the confines of English and learning support to a greater extent.

Findings

It is immediately noticeable in Fig.2.8 (below) that, overall, more weaknesses than strengths have been found in evaluating the theme of numeracy in the forty-four schools. Indeed, it is the theme that shows the weakest practice of all. While good target-setting for numeracy (34%) is not as low as good target-setting for examination attainment (32%), in all other aspects of the DEIS planning process numeracy is weakest. The selection of strategies to improve numeracy is significantly weaker than for any other theme, with only 34% of schools showing predominant strengths. It is of particular concern that good practice in the implementation of strategies (27%) and measurement of their impact and progress (18%) was found to be at such a low level.



Although the predominance of weak practice is evident, some good strategies and approaches were observed. Some of the clearest target-setting was related to increasing by a specific percentage the number of students taking Mathematics at ordinary instead of foundation level. Schools were commended for supporting this target through more flexible teacher deployment and class formation. Efforts to extend numeracy beyond 'the Maths space' were also noted, and some imaginative practice to create numeracy-rich environments in classrooms and circulation areas was observed.

Inspectors' observations on effective practice included the following:

'The second [target] is clear and measurable: "all students to follow ordinary or higher level for Junior Certificate as preparation for transition to senior cycle". Its achievement is reflected in the college's use of mixed-ability grouping throughout the junior cycle and the fact that only two or three students sit the foundation level maths paper.' (2010)

'A number of interventions have been put in place to support progress in numeracy: Maths for Fun; celebration of Maths Week; first-year parents' mathematics course; Helping Your Child with Maths Homework; resource mathematics teaching; and additional maths lessons for specific students.' (2011)

'Most of the numeracy targets are SMART. Baseline data was gathered from a number of sources including surveys. A target to create visual awareness of social numeracy is being implemented throughout the school. An excellent example of a cross-curricular approach was noted when Gaeilge and social numeracy were linked.' (2013)

As these extracts from evaluation reports indicate, the good practice observed often reflected strategic use of available data, and a creative approach to extending students' experience of Mathematics. However, DEIS plans for numeracy where there were clear links between data analysis, target-setting, and selection and implementation of strategies were found only in a minority of schools. The very marked predominance of weak practice in the area of measurement of impact and progress may be due in part to the fact that numeracy was a 'late starter' in most of the schools evaluated, so that there was very little progress to measure.

DEIS planning for numeracy showed more strengths than weaknesses in only twelve of the forty-four schools (27%). The weaknesses found could be described in most cases as 'too little done' rather than 'the wrong things done'. Inspectors regularly noted that no numeracy targets had been set, or that planning for numeracy was in its infancy. The scope for development is therefore very considerable, but schools should now be able to work on this theme with a better understanding of DEIS planning generally, and in a context where numeracy skills have a higher profile. It is heartening that the more recent evaluations have

found a greater, though still low, incidence of good practice with regard to DEIS planning for numeracy.

Student and parent views

The questionnaires asked students whether they liked what they studied, and singled out English and Maths. While 73.6% responded that they liked English, just 53.6% said that they liked Maths. Interestingly, the percentage of students that liked English was marginally higher than the percentage that said they were good at reading, writing and spelling. However, the percentage of students that liked Maths was considerably lower than the percentage that said they were doing well at it. It is also worth noting that more than one student in eight (13.6%) was unsure of their progress in Maths. These findings suggest that a greater use of formative assessment or assessment for learning is required, to give students a sense of improving and making progress. This would create more positive attitudes to Maths, and to numeracy in general.

Question	Total	Yes	No	Not sure/ don't know
Students: I am doing well at Maths.	4034	2469 (61.2%)	1018 (25.2%)	547 (13.6%)
Students: I like Maths.	4034	2164 (53.6%)	1678 (41.6%)	192 (4.8%)

Efforts to improve outcomes in Mathematics are fully in line with DEIS aims and are crucial to the success of the DEIS action plan. However, one possible misapprehension that needs to be checked and corrected is the over-identification of numeracy with Mathematics as a subject. The numeracy skills described in the national literacy and numeracy strategy require schools to adopt a broader approach. Facility with number, understanding of mathematical concepts and, above all, problem-solving skills are relevant not only to a very wide range of academic disciplines but also to students' preparedness to be life-long learners. For this reason, inspectors have commended schools' efforts to think 'outside the box' in relation to numeracy, and to develop numeracy skills on a cross-curricular and co-curricular basis. The roll-out of Project Maths should help to create many opportunities for such initiatives.

Conclusions

What a minority of schools are doing well

- Setting targets to reduce numbers taking foundation level Mathematics and increase numbers taking ordinary and higher level
- Supporting the raising of attainment in Mathematics through strategic teacher deployment and class formation

What schools could do better

- Use the better understanding of the need to develop students' numeracy skills that now exists to drive an increased focus on planning in this area
- Engage in improvement planning for numeracy with a focus not only on Mathematics but also on numeracy skills across the curriculum

2.2.7 Partnership

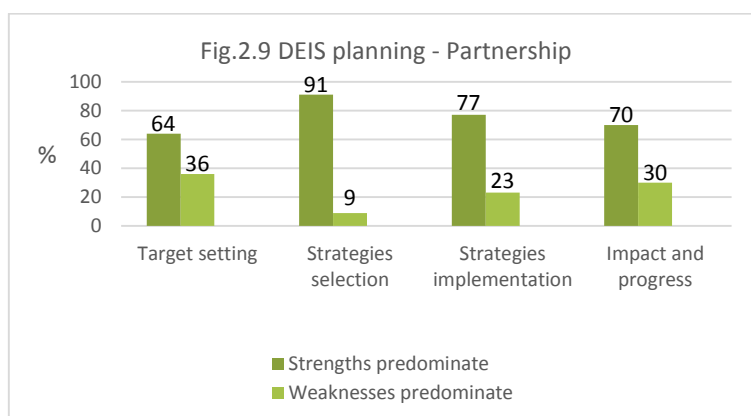
Context

Schools supported through the DEIS action plan are expected to develop partnerships with parents and with the community. They are also required to develop links with other schools and colleges, for example in developing transfer programmes from primary to post-primary school or to third level colleges. The findings from the evaluation in these areas were collated under the heading of partnership. The area of partnership appears to have been embraced by schools, with regard both to enhancing the role played by parents and improving

the links with other educational providers. The role of particular initiatives including the HSCL service and the SCP was found to be significant in engaging parents as partners.

Findings

It is clear that, overall, strengths predominated to a very significant degree in DEIS planning for the theme of partnership in the forty-four schools evaluated. Although target-setting was the aspect of partnership planning with the lowest incidence of strengths (64%), target-setting for this theme was stronger than for any other. In fact, each aspect of DEIS planning was stronger for partnership than for any other theme. Strengths were far more frequently noted (91%) in the selection of strategies to promote partnership than was the case for any other theme. The implementation and monitoring of strategies were also predominantly strong, although an 'implementation gap' is evident to some degree in the findings.



Inspectors' observations on effective practice included the following:

'Primarily through the efforts of the HSCL co-ordinator, the school has developed good links with parents and very good links with outside agencies. The targets set in the area of partnership are clear with effective measures selected to help in their achievement.' (2010)

'The school maintains extensive links with parents and has established a range of methods to communicate effectively with them...Regular contact is made with the parents of at-risk students to promote their retention and progression in school.' (2011)

'The partnership team has selected targeted actions to promote partnership with parents, with specific measures to involve fathers, and joint parent-student activities promoting health and wellbeing.' (2013)

The majority of schools reported good attendance rates at parent-teacher meetings, although not quite so high as the figures suggested by parent questionnaire responses, which were over 90% affirmative. However, it was apparent that schools and parents' associations shared concerns about the minority of parents who do not engage at any level with their children's education. There were instances of highly commended practice where schools targeted parents who did not attend parent-teacher meetings for follow-up action through the HSCL service or other routes.

The theme of partnership includes links with other education providers, especially those offering continuing education. While evaluation reports placed most emphasis on partnership with parents, they also reflect a positive picture of strong links that DEIS schools have forged with their nearest third-level institutions. Access programmes and events that provide students with opportunities to visit these institutions were frequently commended, in particular where

schools were taking a 'joined-up' view of planning for progression and for this area of partnership.

The evaluations underlined the importance of an active HSCL service to ensure that supports from other agencies working in the community were available to students and their families. The overall picture with regard to the HSCL service was very positive; in a few instances, more systematic co-operation and communication between the school and other agencies through the HSCL service was recommended.

Student and parent views

Over the three years in which DEIS evaluations took place, parent questionnaires have consistently reported a very high affirmative response (95%) to the statement "The school welcomes parents." Parents were also asked whether the school has a parents' room and whether the school runs courses for parents.

Question	Total	Yes	No	Not sure/ don't know
Parents: The school has a parents' room.	3059	1423 (46.5%)	664 (21.7%)	972 (31.8%)
Parents: The school runs courses for parents.	3059	2052 (67%)	326 (10.7%)	681 (22.3%)

The provision of a dedicated parents' room is difficult where schools are under pressure for space, and parents clearly do not take this as a sign that they are not welcome. However, the comparatively high rate of 'not sure/don't know' responses to these questions (see table above) points to some lack of knowledge on the part of parents of supports and services that the school may have to offer them. Schools could consider aspects of communication as well as provision when reflecting on these responses to the parent questionnaire.

Conclusions

What most schools are doing well

- Selecting and implementing a wide range of interventions to build and maintain strong links with parents and to encourage parental involvement
- Forging helpful links with other education providers and with external agencies

What schools could do better

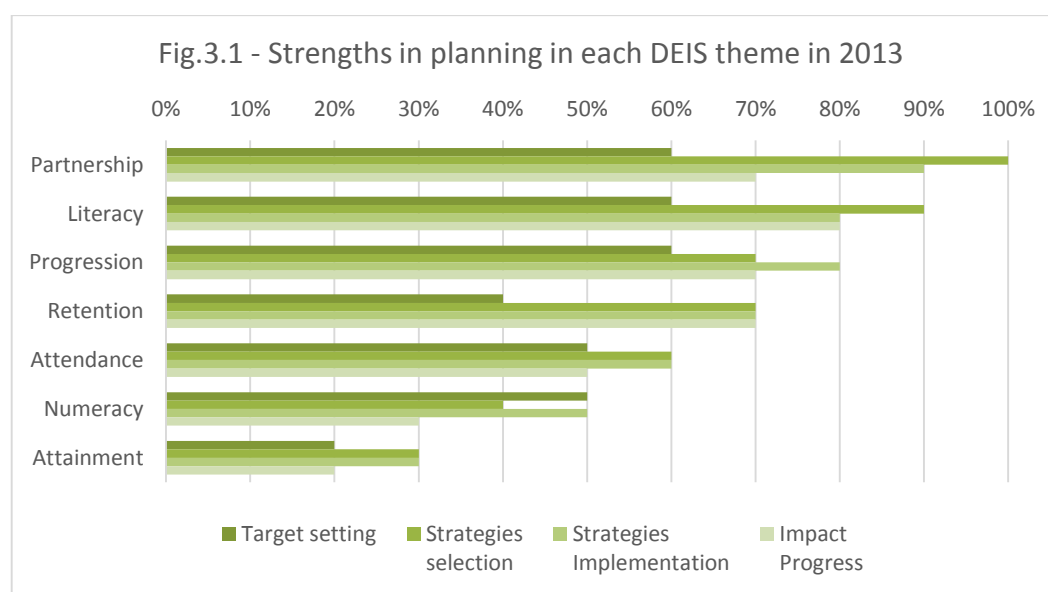
- Ensure systematic co-operation and communication between the school and other agencies working to support students and their families

CHAPTER 3: AN OUTLINE OF THE 2013 DEIS EVALUATION FINDINGS

The 2013 findings provide the most recent snapshot of planning processes in DEIS schools. It must be remembered that they arise from a small number of evaluations, and that direct comparisons cannot be made with any statistical robustness between these findings and those of earlier evaluations. With this important caveat, the overall picture is of improved DEIS planning processes. There are some specific points worth noting, including suggestions of positive trends in relation to two themes – literacy and numeracy – and a persistently negative pattern, in the case of planning for examination attainment.

DEIS planning can be considered from two perspectives. It can be viewed as it impacts on each of the seven DEIS themes. It can also be viewed as a process with four linked aspects. Both perspectives are valuable and necessary when evaluating the overall quality of DEIS planning in any school. The chart below gives the areas of strength for each theme and each aspect of the process, and is followed by a brief summary of the findings of the 2013 evaluation from these two perspectives. The themes are listed from strongest to weakest with regard to the practice noted. The quality continuum ratings given on page 4 may be a useful reference point.

3.1 The findings



Partnership

Action planning for partnership was found to have the greatest strengths in 2013. Schools were especially commended for their selection and implementation of strategies to improve co-operation and communication with parents, and for utilising the personnel provided through DEIS to support links between school and home. Partnership with the community was also generally strong. Very little poor practice was observed in this area. Aspects of planning for partnership worth noting include the uniform strength of the process of selecting strategies. All aspects of planning for partnership displayed more strengths than weaknesses. The strongest aspect was selection of strategies (100%). The weakest was target-setting (60%), as was the case for almost all themes.

Literacy

Action planning for literacy was almost as strong as partnership in 2013. Inspectors noted the effectiveness of interventions and the embedding of a whole-school approach as particular areas of strength. Literacy was found to have a high profile in most schools, with strategic use of resources such as the library, and a focus on reading for pleasure. In many cases, good baseline data had been gathered and schools were attuned to the need to measure progress. As was the case for partnership, there was a preponderance of strengths in all aspects of planning for literacy. Notably, the aspect of measuring impact and progress was stronger in 2013 for literacy (80%) than for any other theme.

Progression

Action planning for progression showed strengths with regard to levels of awareness of relevant issues, good information and tracking systems, and interventions designed to raise students' expectations, including a range of curricular programmes. Also noted were good transfer programmes from primary to post-primary, and strong links with higher and further education providers. Planning for progression was characterised by good evidence-based selection and implementation of strategies in the majority of cases. There were more strengths than weaknesses in all aspects of planning for progression, although instances of significant strength were relatively low. Implementation of strategies was the strongest aspect of planning (80%).

Retention

Action planning for retention evinced good practice in supporting targeted students at risk of early school-leaving, and in broader initiatives to increase participation in school activities. Half of the evaluated schools recorded high retention rates, and school-based personnel and external agencies were used effectively in retention-focused interventions. Planning for retention was generally good in the selection, implementation and monitoring of strategies. Target-setting and use of data showed more weak (60%) than strong practice, however. Greater focus on senior cycle retention and on the impact of high rates of suspension was recommended.

Attendance

Action planning for attendance showed mixed practice. The fact that consistently effective practice was found in only half the schools is disappointing, given the fundamental importance of attendance to all other DEIS themes, and the supports available to DEIS schools to address poor attendance. Some excellent analysis of data was noted at the top end of the quality continuum; at the lower end, even basic recording of attendance was not reliably carried out. Target-setting and monitoring of progress in planning for attendance showed strengths in half the schools and weaknesses in the other half. It is likely that improved record-keeping and data analysis processes would considerably increase the effectiveness of DEIS planning for this theme.

Numeracy

Action planning for numeracy was found to be the second weakest in the 2013 evaluation. Where good practice was noted, schools were commended for establishing soundly-based targets and for some creative interventions to improve students' numeracy skills. Awareness of the need for numeracy development was noted in most schools. However, while efforts to support targeted students were acknowledged, schools were cautioned against identifying numeracy only with attainment in Mathematics. Planning for numeracy also showed mixed practice. Target-setting and the implementation of strategies showed strengths in half the schools and weaknesses in the other half. Weak practice was somewhat more evident in the selection of strategies, and much more evident in the monitoring of progress and impact.

Examination attainment

Action planning for examination attainment was the weakest of the seven by a considerable margin. Consistently good practice was found in a minority of cases. One of the most disappointing findings was the general failure to use, for improvement planning, the very good and nuanced data available to schools from the State Examinations Commission. Low expectations were noted in many instances, hence the praise given where schools had set targets to decrease the number of students taking foundation level. Planning for examination attainment showed weaknesses in all aspects in a majority of cases (70 to 80%). The good practice noted in a few instances – detailed analysis of examination outcomes; the setting of measurable targets; and the strategic linking of interventions to actions for related DEIS themes – could be relatively easily initiated in all DEIS schools. Indeed, improvement in the analysis and use of examination data is a recommendation that applies to all post-primary schools.

3.2 Comparison with earlier evaluations

The 2010 evaluation found that DEIS planning was at an early and undeveloped stage in post-primary schools overall. Better practice was found generally in the schools evaluated in 2011, although numeracy and examination attainment remained areas where planning processes showed significant weaknesses. There was a reasonable expectation that by 2013 planning processes would have developed as a result of greater awareness in DEIS schools of the level of planning required, and the growing focus on accountability within the education system. This expectation was generally fulfilled and, in the best instances, inspectors could report that the DEIS planning process ‘is well developed’ and ‘functions at a high level’ in the schools evaluated in 2013.

In a minority of cases in 2013, however, inspectors found that DEIS planning was ‘still at an early stage’ or that ‘little formal planning has taken place’. This finding, while disappointing, does not mean that no effective actions are being taken in these schools. What it points to more reliably is a disregard for the value of evidence-based planning to achieve measurable targets. This fundamental difficulty is further teased out in the ‘Overall Conclusions and Key Recommendations’ section. Instances of poor school leadership resulting in lack of direction and co-ordination of DEIS planning were also noted.

As indicated in the outline of findings above, a much higher incidence of good practice in literacy planning was noted in 2013 than in earlier evaluations. For example, the incidence of good practice in selecting and implementing strategies in this area, and in measuring their impact, was twice as high in 2013 as in 2010. While the small number of evaluations in 2013 should be remembered, it is perhaps not surprising that improvements in literacy planning in DEIS schools would flow from the increased national awareness of literacy skills development as a whole-school issue.

Numeracy is still among the weakest areas of DEIS planning. However, the 2013 evaluations found improved practice, albeit from a low base. The most improved aspect of DEIS planning for numeracy in 2013 was in the area of implementing strategies. In the evaluations conducted in 2010, only 17% of schools were considered to have strengths in this area, and in 2013 the comparable figure was 50%. This is a heartening finding, given that earlier DEIS evaluations indicated that schools had no clear idea of effective actions to take to improve students’ numeracy skills. The national awareness of the importance of numeracy skills development has increased, and therefore there is reason to expect that improvement planning for numeracy in DEIS schools will grow in strength.

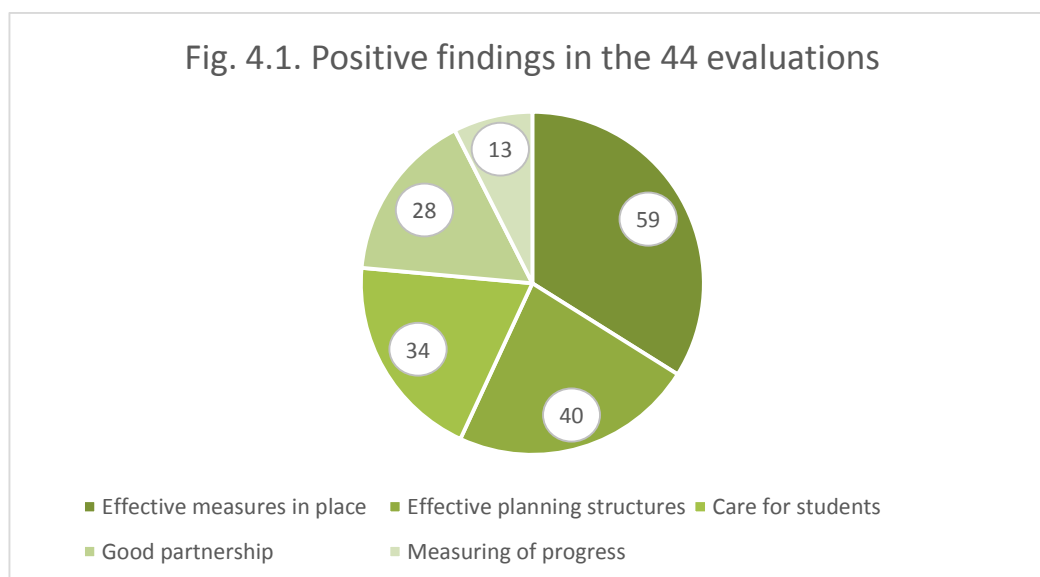
Of the less positive findings in 2013, those relating to planning for the theme of examination attainment are the clearest, and underline the need for this area to receive serious attention in DEIS schools. In this context, it is worthwhile mentioning again the preliminary findings of the ERC research which indicate a small but significant upward trend in overall performance in Junior Certificate in DEIS post-primary schools since the introduction of the School Support Programme¹⁵. It would appear that, despite the relatively low occurrence of good planning for examination attainment, outcomes for students in DEIS schools in the Junior Certificate have improved over the time that the DEIS action plan has been in force. DEIS schools should aim to strengthen this upward trend through a more deliberate and explicit focus on improvement planning for the theme of examination attainment in both junior and senior cycle.

¹⁵ See 2.2.4 above.

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY OF DEIS EVALUATION FINDINGS

4.1 Positive features identified in the forty-four evaluations

A total of 174 positive findings regarding the DEIS planning process in schools were made in the forty-four individual evaluations carried out in 2010, 2011, and 2013 (see fig. 4.1. below). Of these, fifty-nine commend measures in place to address some or all DEIS themes; forty relate to DEIS planning structures, including effective leadership of the DEIS planning process; thirty-four praise schools for their demonstrable care for students; twenty-eight commend good partnership with parents and others; and thirteen pertain to measurement of progress.



The evidence emerging from the forty-four DEIS evaluations conducted between 2010 and 2013 is that engagement with the DEIS planning process is having a positive impact in schools. The interventions and supports available are making a positive difference and, where these are well co-ordinated and monitored, their impact is increased. This impact is demonstrated most clearly in the improved outcomes in attendance, retention and progression in DEIS schools overall, which have been noted both in Inspectorate evaluations, and in statistical reports issued by the Department and other agencies.

The DEIS action plan requires, and promotes, collaborative planning. Where this has become embedded, it has created a shared understanding of the DEIS themes. In practical terms, this has led to more purposeful interventions to improve literacy and numeracy skills.

The evaluations have found that effective leadership is a crucial element of the DEIS planning process. It fosters a whole-school engagement with improvement and enables key members of staff to work more effectively and to take a lead role in their own areas of responsibility.

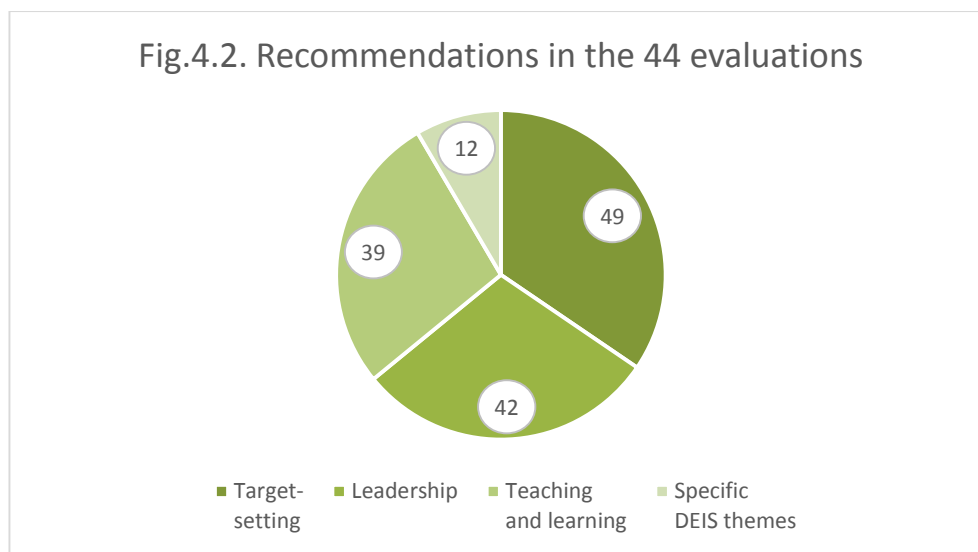
The evaluations reflect very positively overall on the caring and supportive environment that dedicated principals and staff have created in DEIS schools. Concern for students has been harnessed effectively as a driving force for purposeful and targeted interventions within the DEIS planning process. Participation in DEIS has also enabled a more systematic and targeted approach to partnership with parents and others.

Engagement with the DEIS planning process has led to a greater overall awareness of the importance of evidence-based planning to inform the selection of interventions. As schools are becoming more familiar with the DEIS planning process, they are taking a more targeted

approach, identifying specific strategies for specific groups. The evaluations indicate that this approach is effective in improving outcomes across the DEIS themes.

4.2 Areas for development identified in the forty-four evaluations

A total of 142 recommendations were made to schools in the forty-four individual evaluations carried out in 2010, 2011 and 2013 (see fig.4.2. below). Of these, forty-nine relate broadly to target-setting for some or all DEIS themes; forty-two relate to leadership of the DEIS planning process; thirty-nine relate to specific aspects of teaching, learning, and assessment; and twelve pertain to specific themes.



Recommendations regarding target-setting and aspects of teaching and learning occurred in almost all of the forty-four evaluations, even where otherwise very good practice was noted. Not surprisingly, recommendations regarding leadership occurred much more often where the DEIS planning process was weak.

Recommendations on target-setting included data collection and analysis. It is worth noting that recommendations relating to attendance and examination attainment often referred to the need to improve data collection and analysis in these areas. While much excellent practice in analysing attendance data to inform improvement planning was noted, findings of unreliable attendance data and monitoring merit serious attention. Similarly, although a few schools are exemplary in analysing student outcomes, the underuse of available data to inform improvement planning in the area of examination attainment is widespread and needs to be addressed.

Although it remains one of the weakest aspects of DEIS planning, practice appears to have improved in the area of target-setting. A comparison between the findings in 2010 and 2013 suggests progress has been made in this area, even if on a modest scale. It is also worth bearing in mind that target-setting has been identified as an area of difficulty in education planning in many jurisdictions.

Weaknesses in target-setting also led to weaknesses in the measurement of progress. Considerable scope for development still exists although, as is the case for target-setting, practice appears to have improved. The 2013 evaluations noted a generally more structured and co-ordinated approach to student support. This should lead to more consistent and

sustainable practice, while also recognising the role of the dedicated professional within the support structure.

Recommendations on teaching and learning frequently referred to the need to sharpen the literacy and numeracy focus in subject planning and classroom practice. They also advocated greater use of active and participative approaches in the classroom, and the use of formative assessment or assessment for learning as a means of informing students of their progress and enabling them to take ownership of their learning.

Recommendations relating to leadership were wide-ranging, and often arose from findings of weakness in the co-ordination and monitoring of DEIS planning and interventions. Where the DEIS planning process is effective, the senior management teams understand the process and have taken responsibility for ensuring the most appropriate use of the supports and resources available through DEIS. Teams with clear responsibilities for specific areas have been established, and function in an environment where good communication is prioritised. By contrast, where DEIS planning is weak, leadership is lacking, and levels of understanding, accountability, and co-ordination are low. These findings point to the crucial nature of leadership in DEIS schools, in order that all the supports and resources available through DEIS can be fully exploited for the benefit of students.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

- Engagement with the DEIS planning process is having a positive impact overall. Statistical reports compiled by the Department and others over the lifetime of DEIS show improvements in attendance, retention and progression figures.
- Collaborative planning for improvement has increased whole-school engagement with, and understanding of, the DEIS themes. This is particularly evident in the increased incidence of whole-school approaches to literacy development.
- Consistently positive findings with regard to partnership testify to the extent to which DEIS schools have sought to welcome and engage parents, to forge supportive links between home and school, and to harness the resources of other agencies and educational providers to improve outcomes for their students. In most schools, the non-engagement of a minority of parents remains a concern. In some schools, co-operation with other agencies to support students and their families could be improved.
- While the overall picture with regard to the seven DEIS themes is positive, the themes of numeracy and examination attainment are generally not being addressed satisfactorily. The findings in relation to examination attainment are of particular concern since, unlike those relating to numeracy, they show no evidence of improved practice in the most recent evaluations.
- There is a positive correlation between effective school leadership and effective DEIS planning. Effective leaders in the DEIS schools evaluated demonstrated the ability to take overall responsibility for co-ordination and deployment, to distribute and assign responsibility carefully, and to build capacity strategically.
- The evaluations also highlighted the need for a greater level of leadership, to provide the vision and drive towards improvement and, at a practical level, to co-ordinate and be accountable for the effective and appropriate use of all the additional supports and resources available to DEIS schools.
- Good school self-evaluation processes support effective DEIS planning, and DEIS evaluations have shown a clear correlation between the two. However, only a minority of DEIS schools have advanced the school self-evaluation process to this level of effectiveness.
- Areas common to DEIS planning and the school self-evaluation process continue to present problems. The most widespread deficit is in the use of data to provide sound baseline information in order to set SMART targets and to measure progress reliably.

5.2 Key recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Build capacity in DEIS schools for improvement planning and self-evaluation

As a means of enabling planning for improvement, the 2010 DEIS evaluation report recommended that schools receive guidance with regard to effective self-evaluation practices. This recommendation has been addressed through Inspectorate visits and input from the support services. However, the level of uncertainty that still exists in schools with regard to the interface between school self-evaluation and DEIS planning warrants further guidance and clarification. The advantages of using the steps of the self-evaluation process, in particular in aspects of DEIS planning where further progress is necessary, merit a broader and deeper level of understanding than is currently evident. Therefore:

- It is recommended that all those charged with providing support for planning to DEIS schools heighten their awareness of the aspects of effective practice common to both DEIS planning and school self-evaluation (SSE). This will enable them to provide guidance on effective implementation of the requirements of both. Future inputs from the support services and advice from the Inspectorate should serve to clarify which aspects of SSE are already being addressed by DEIS schools and what additional elements are required as part of the SSE process.
- It is recommended that all stakeholders – the Department of Education and Skills; school managements and management bodies; school leaders and their organisations; and the support services – use the embedding of school self-evaluation processes as an opportunity to build the necessary capacity for improvement planning in DEIS schools, and to promote professional and collaborative practice.

Recommendation 2:

Address specific DEIS themes where weaknesses persist

Every school has a responsibility regarding the attendance of students on its roll book. While the overall improvements in attendance in DEIS schools deserve recognition, cases of persistent non-attendance need to be identified and addressed more strategically. The focus of educational welfare agencies to date has been on the attendance of students under sixteen, but poor attendance by older students is a problem area requiring specific action.

The theme of examination attainment merits considerable attention. This is especially true given the emerging indications of improved outcomes for students in DEIS schools. Since improved attainment is realisable, schools need to take a much more focused approach to improvement planning for this theme. This will entail a much greater recognition of the need to analyse current attainment outcomes, since the failure to use baseline data compromises the effectiveness of all other actions for improvement. The results of standardised ability and attainment tests need to be used judiciously. While they are a useful tool in identifying students that require specific support, their use can have the undesirable effect of labelling students so that teachers' expectations for them are too low. Greater awareness and use of formative assessment as a means of improving attainment is merited.

The theme of numeracy, unlike examination attainment, is showing improved practice in recent evaluations. However, numeracy skills are less well understood on a whole-school basis than literacy skills, and schools must be alert to the danger of numeracy being confined to 'the Maths space'.

Therefore, to address the persistent weaknesses in these specific themes:

- It is recommended that schools maintain accurate attendance records and analyse them robustly to identify individuals or categories of students whose attendance is poor or erratic, so that targeted action can be taken. The Department of Education and Skills and all relevant agencies should focus more sharply on the issues affecting the attendance of older students.
- It is recommended that the support services working with DEIS schools continue to build the capacity within schools to gather, use and analyse data effectively in order to enable them to set clear and specific targets for improvement, particularly in the area of student attainment. Schools should be encouraged to become familiar with data and tools that are available to them for this purpose and should increasingly use these in their school improvement process.

- It is recommended that standardised ability and attainment tests be used for the purpose of informing the selection of appropriate interventions and teaching approaches for targeted students; they should not have the effect of limiting expectations for them. All assessments of students' progress should be firmly grounded in the principles of formative assessment.
- It is recommended that schools build their capacity to support students' numeracy development on a cross-curricular and whole-school basis. Increased uptake of higher levels and improved outcomes in Mathematics are worthy and appropriate aims, but the broad definition of numeracy in the national strategy should be the reference point for improvement planning for this theme.

Recommendation 3: Build school leadership capacity

The DEIS planning process in high-performing schools is led effectively by the senior management team and by teachers with designated responsibilities. Where leadership is poor, interventions can only have limited impact. An increased focus on capacity-building for school leadership, and a greater understanding of how to distribute leadership effectively, are essential to school improvement in all schools, including DEIS schools. The crucial nature of effective leadership in DEIS schools, as evidenced in the DEIS evaluations, points up the lack of a structured route to school leadership positions in the present Irish educational landscape. This obviously affects all schools, although the requirements of DEIS planning present particular challenges as well as opportunities for school leaders. Therefore:

- It is recommended that all those responsible for supporting school leaders in DEIS schools critically appraise the level of support they are offering, given the crucial nature of the school leadership role. School patrons, trustees and boards should ensure that leadership roles are clear and that leadership responsibility is appropriately assigned, shared and supported.
- It is recommended that a structured route to school leadership positions be developed in the Irish educational system for the benefit of all schools, but especially for DEIS schools. This will require policy decisions about recruitment, professional development and employment of school leaders, in which the Department of Education and Skills should take a leading role.
- It is recommended that the Department, along with trustee and management bodies, put in place structures to ensure the availability of high-quality professional development for potential school leaders prior to appointment, for school leaders once appointed, and thereafter on a continuing basis to maintain and deepen skills. This will require a renewed focus on the education and professional development of school leaders by policy makers, colleges of higher education, the support services and the network of education centres. It will also require particular attention to the specific needs of DEIS schools.

Recommendation 4: Improve co-ordination and accountability in DEIS schools

Co-ordination and accountability are, in the first instance, functions of school leaders. The principle of subsidiarity, meaning that decisions are made at a level closest to where they will have an impact, underlies the way in which additional resources are directed to DEIS schools, and gives school managements a high level of autonomy. The evaluations have pointed to areas requiring better co-ordination of, and accountability for, the effective use of additional resources. For example, poor co-ordination of attendance-monitoring personnel and systems created overlaps and inefficiencies in a number of the DEIS schools evaluated.

Co-ordinating the range of supports available to DEIS schools requires a focus on both the supports provided to schools directly and those provided through structures such as the School Completion Programme (SCP) clusters. Considerable variation in the size of SCP clusters was noted, and the rationale for the composition of clusters was not always clear. Differing practices among SCP co-ordinators were also noted, especially with regard to the extent to which they were involved in delivering supports, as well as co-ordinating them. These findings have implications for the effectiveness of the delivery of supports through SCP, and merit further attention.

Therefore:

- It is recommended that the additional resources and personnel made available to DEIS schools be deployed for optimal effectiveness. School leaders should ensure the effective co-ordination of these resources to eliminate any duplication or gaps in provision.
- It is recommended that schools' DEIS plans clearly define and document the roles of both school-based and external personnel within DEIS, and that school leaders ensure that reliable reporting mechanisms are in place.
- It is recommended that principals use their participation in the local SCP steering committees to ensure that SCP-derived support is delivered in an effective, targeted and sustained manner. The steering committees should plan for various contingencies and take the actions they deem necessary to ensure the maintenance of support for targeted students.

APPENDIX 1: DEIS ACTION PLANNING - GUIDE TO QUALITY DESCRIPTORS

Levels	Data gathering and analysis, and target-setting	Selection of strategies	Implementation of strategies on whole-school basis	Monitoring and evaluating impact and progress
4	The school has gathered and analysed appropriate data. Conclusions have been drawn, identifying specific areas as priorities for improvement and development. Realistic and evidenced-based targets for improvement have been set. Roles and responsibilities for data gathering and analysis, and target setting, are clearly defined and assigned. Structures are in place to manage this process and to enable this to be a whole-school process. Timescales and success criteria have been named.	Suitable whole-school and relevant interventions or strategies are linked to the achievement of specific targets and are identified for all or targeted students. Roles and responsibilities for selection of strategies are clearly defined and assigned. Structures are in place to manage this process and to enable this to be a whole-school process. Timescales and success criteria have been named.	Effective planning has carried through to effective implementation on a whole-school basis. Implementation is clearly directed to achieving the set targets. Staff, students and parents are aware of interventions and strategies. Staff uses interventions and strategies appropriately. Appropriate CPD has been provided to ensure whole-school implementation of strategies and achievement of targets.	Staff understands how progress will be measured. Appropriate data is used to measure progress made towards the achievement of the targets. There is clear evidence of progress made in the targeted area. There has been ongoing monitoring of progress. Where necessary targets have been adjusted. Staff is informed about whole-school progress and is involved in revising targets and or strategies. Impact and progress are communicated to parents and students as appropriate.
3	In relation to data, while the processes and structures are generally sound and in line with those described at 4 above, certain gaps or deficiencies are evident. The targets set are generally sound. Certain linkages between targets, strategies and structures are lacking in some respects. There may be some lack of clarity regarding timescale or success criteria.	The strategies devised to achieve the targets are generally sound. Certain linkages between targets, strategies and structures are lacking in some respects. There may be some lack of clarity regarding timescale or success criteria.	Implementation is generally effective and focused on achieving targets. Communication, understanding and focus, on a whole-school basis, regarding interventions and strategies are generally sound. Certain gaps and deficiencies that impinge on effective implementation of strategies exist.	The measurement of progress is generally effective. There is evidence of progress in targeted areas. Certain gaps and deficiencies may exist in monitoring progress and or adjusting targets where necessary. Some gaps may exist regarding communication of progress.
2	While processes and structures exist in relation to data, their effectiveness is compromised to a considerable degree by, for example, a failure to engage in all areas prioritised in DEIS planning. A minority of the targets set are sound. Linkages between targets, strategies and structures are lacking in many respects. There is a lack of clarity regarding timescale, responsibility and or success criteria.	A minority of the strategies and structures devised to deliver targets are sound. Linkages between targets, strategies and structures are lacking in many respects. There is a lack of clarity regarding timescale, responsibility and or success criteria.	Considerable gaps and deficiencies in the implementation of strategies exist. There are considerable gaps in communication and or understanding and or focus on a whole-school basis regarding interventions and strategies.	There is limited evidence of progress in targeted areas. The measurement of progress is generally ineffective. Gaps and deficiencies exist in monitoring progress and adjusting targets where necessary. Gaps exist regarding communication of progress.
≤ 1	There are significant weaknesses in gathering and analysing appropriate data. Conclusions, where drawn are inadequate or unsound. Roles and responsibilities in relation to data are not defined and structures are unsound or absent. Few or none of the targets set are sound. There are no clear links between targets, strategies and structures.	Few or none of the strategies and structures devised to deliver targets are sound. There are no clear links between targets, strategies and structures.	There are significant gaps and deficiencies in the implementation of strategies. Communication and or understanding and or focus on a whole-school basis regarding interventions and strategies have significant weaknesses.	There is little or no evidence of progress made in targeted areas. The measurement of progress is ineffective. Monitoring of progress is defective or non-existent. There is little or no adjustment of targets. Communication of progress is poor or non-existent.

N.B. Planning at level 4 and level 3 will demonstrate clear links between each stage of the process.