

AN EVALUATION OF PLANNING PROCESSES IN DEIS PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Inspectorate Evaluation Studies



PROMOTING THE QUALITY OF LEARNING



AN ROINN DE
UIDEACHAIR AGUS SCHEIDANN
EDUCATION AND SKILLS

INSPECTORATE

AN EVALUATION OF PLANNING PROCESSES IN DEIS PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The Inspectorate wishes to thank Talbot Senior National School, Bawnogue, Clondalkin, Dublin 22, for permission to use the cover photograph.

© 2011 Department of Education and Skills

Published by

Inspectorate
Department of Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

This report and others in the series may be accessed at

www.education.ie



INSPECTORATE

| | |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1. EVALUATING THE PLANNING PROCESS IN DEIS SCHOOLS | 2 |
| 1.1 <i>Background</i> | 2 |
| 1.2 <i>Focus of evaluation</i> | 2 |
| 1.3 <i>Evaluation framework</i> | 3 |
| 1.4 <i>Procedure</i> | 3 |
| 1.4.1 <i>Evaluation activities</i> | 3 |
| 1.4.2 <i>Feedback</i> | 4 |
| 1.5 <i>Findings</i> | 4 |
| 2. OVERALL FINDINGS: ATTENDANCE | 4 |
| 2.1 <i>Target-setting for attendance</i> | 4 |
| 2.2 <i>Strategies and interventions for attendance</i> | 4 |
| 2.3 <i>Progress regarding attendance</i> | 5 |
| 2.4 <i>Pupils' perspectives on attendance</i> | 5 |
| 2.5 <i>Conclusion: attendance</i> | 6 |
| 3. OVERALL FINDINGS: RETENTION | 6 |
| 4. OVERALL FINDINGS: PROGRESSION | 7 |
| 4.1 <i>Target-setting for progression</i> | 7 |
| 4.2 <i>Strategies and interventions for progression</i> | 7 |
| 4.3 <i>Parents' and pupils' perspectives on progression</i> | 7 |
| 4.4 <i>Conclusion: progression</i> | 8 |
| 5. OVERALL FINDINGS: LITERACY | 9 |
| 5.1 <i>Target-setting for literacy</i> | 9 |
| 5.2 <i>Strategies and interventions for literacy</i> | 10 |
| 5.3 <i>Progress in literacy</i> | 11 |
| 5.4 <i>Pupils' perspectives on literacy</i> | 11 |
| 5.5 <i>Conclusion: literacy</i> | 13 |
| 6. OVERALL FINDINGS: NUMERACY | 13 |
| 6.1 <i>Target-setting for numeracy</i> | 13 |
| 6.2 <i>Strategies and interventions for numeracy</i> | 14 |
| 6.3 <i>Progress in numeracy</i> | 15 |
| 6.4 <i>Pupils' perspectives on numeracy</i> | 15 |
| 6.5 <i>Conclusion: numeracy</i> | 17 |
| 7. OVERALL FINDINGS: PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND OTHERS | 17 |
| 7.1 <i>Target-setting for partnership with parents and others</i> | 17 |
| 7.2 <i>Strategies and interventions for partnership with parents and others</i> | 17 |
| 7.3 <i>Progress in partnership with parents and others</i> | 18 |
| 7.4 <i>Parents' perspectives on partnership with parents</i> | 18 |
| 7.5 <i>Principals' perspectives on partnership with parents</i> | 18 |
| 7.6 <i>Conclusion: partnership with parents and others</i> | 18 |
| 8. SUMMARY | 18 |
| 9. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS | 21 |
| 9.1 <i>Effectiveness of the DEIS planning framework</i> | 21 |
| 9.2 <i>Target-setting challenges and supports</i> | 21 |
| 9.3 <i>Coordination and integration of DEIS strategies and interventions</i> | 22 |
| 9.4 <i>Availability of data</i> | 23 |
| 9.5 <i>Responsibility and accountability</i> | 23 |
| Appendix 1: DEIS themes and planning processes | 24 |
| Appendix 2: Guide to quality descriptors | 25 |

An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Primary Schools

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. 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. Where the level of disadvantage is greatest, primary schools are classified as participating in Band 1 of DEIS and these schools receive the highest level of supports and resources. The remaining participating primary schools also receive significant levels of supports and resources and are classified as participating in Band 2 of DEIS. Along with other resources, primary schools in Band 1 of DEIS receive additional teaching staff to ensure a maximum class size of 20:1 in all junior classes (junior infants to second class) and 24:1 in all senior classes (third to sixth class).

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. 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 individual planning for teaching and learning.

1. EVALUATING THE PLANNING PROCESS IN DEIS SCHOOLS

1.1 Background

In 2010, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills undertook an evaluation project to report on the quality of school-based action planning processes in primary and post-primary schools participating in DEIS. The purpose of the project 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 evaluate the impact of the planning, including the targeted initiatives, on the learning outcomes for pupils. This report presents the findings from the evaluation of planning processes in 18 primary schools participating in DEIS. A further report will present findings from a similar evaluation in post-primary schools.

In their planning process, schools are expected to develop three-year cyclical plans in which the DEIS themes are prioritised according to the needs of the school. The three-year plans should therefore be based on an assessment of the school's current situation, involving the school's own reflection on and assessment of how it is doing in relation to the themes of:

- Attendance
- Retention (ensuring pupils stay in school from junior infants to sixth class)
- Progression (the transfer of pupils from primary level to second-level education)
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Partnership with parents and others.

Devising the cyclical plans is only part of the planning process. Of equal importance is the attention the school gives to the implementation, review and adjustment of plans in light of the pupils' changing priority educational needs. The guidance given to schools emphasised that the planning process should include:

- Target-setting
- The identification and implementation of strategies and interventions to achieve the targets set
- Ongoing review of the extent to which the targets are being achieved.

The support services engaged with schools to support them in the practical implementation of planning processes in individual DEIS schools.

1.2 Focus of evaluation

The evaluation of the DEIS planning process was undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in April and May 2010 in 18 primary schools. All 18 schools were urban schools participating in Band 1 of DEIS. They varied in size from schools with fewer than 140 pupils enrolled to schools with an enrolment of over 475 pupils. Ten of the 18 schools had classes from junior infants to sixth, two had classes from first to sixth, three were junior schools with classes from junior infants to second and three were senior schools with classes from third to sixth. The total enrolment of the 18 schools was 5261 and the number of teaching posts allocated to the schools was, in total, 477 which represents an overall pupil-teacher ratio of 11:1.

1.3 Evaluation framework

The evaluation focused on school planning processes with regard to each of the DEIS themes: attendance, retention, progression, literacy, numeracy, partnership with parents and others. Each theme was examined with reference to the quality of the schools' planning processes.¹

In judging the quality of schools' planning processes in the context of each DEIS theme, inspectors used a four-point quality continuum. This involved assigning one of the following quality descriptors to the aspect of the planning process (target-setting, strategies and interventions, progress) being evaluated:

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

An elaboration on the types of practices to which the above descriptors refer is contained in *Appendix 2*. It should be noted that, in evaluating DEIS planning processes, inspectors took account of the particular context of each school and, related to this, the fact that schools, in prioritising items in their DEIS action plan, might have selected some or all of the DEIS themes depending on the particular needs and context of the school.

1.4 Procedure

1.4.1 Evaluation activities

The evaluation in each school was undertaken by two inspectors over the course of one week. Three days were allocated to school-based evaluation activities during which data relevant to various aspects of the DEIS planning process in the school were collected. The activities each day focused on particular themes as follows:

- Day 1: attendance, retention, progression
- Day 2: literacy, numeracy
- Day 3: partnership with parents and others

Data were collected by means of the following activities:

- Review of a school information form completed by the principal of each school
- Interviews with the school principal
- Discussions with teachers and others (for example, personnel from the School Completion Programme)
- Review of school documents and records (including the school's DEIS action plan, plans prepared by individual teachers, attendance records, and records of assessment including standardised test results)
- Observation of pupils' learning (including their learning through literacy and numeracy interventions in a range of learning settings in the school)
- Observation of other activities during and after school (for example, breakfast clubs and homework clubs)
- Inspection of pupils' work
- Questionnaires for the pupils in sixth class
- Questionnaires for the parents of pupils in second and sixth class
- Focus group meetings with parents

¹ See *Appendix 1* for an illustration of the evaluation framework.

1.4.2 Feedback

Following their analysis of the data collected in individual schools, the inspectors prepared a draft record of the evaluation that set out the key findings with regard to the school's engagement in the DEIS planning process in the context of the DEIS themes. The positive features of the DEIS planning process in each school were identified as were aspects of the process that required development in the school.

On the fifth day of the evaluation the inspectors held a meeting with the principal and a group of teachers with particular responsibilities for school planning and support for pupils in order to provide feedback and to discuss the findings. Subsequently, each school received a draft written record of the evaluation. Following the procedures outlined in *Publication of School Reports* (Inspectorate 2006), each school was invited to inform the Inspectorate of any errors of fact in the draft record. The written records were then issued to the schools and each school was provided with an opportunity to respond to the record of the evaluation.

1.5 Findings

The evaluation had a two-fold purpose. It aimed to provide feedback to schools to affirm good practice and, where improvements were required, to provide guidance on aspects of planning (including monitoring and implementation) in relation to the DEIS themes. It also aimed to gather and collate data that would inform the Department's policy development in the area of disadvantage in the future.

The information gathered from each school was recorded to facilitate overall analysis of data from the eighteen schools. The findings under each of the DEIS themes are outlined in the following sections.

2. OVERALL FINDINGS: ATTENDANCE

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is the key body with responsibility for school attendance. Analysis carried out by the NEWB in 2004 showed that schools serving disadvantaged communities had significantly higher levels of non-attendance than other schools. Since there is a clear link between pupils' attendance levels and their educational attainment, strategies for improving school attendance are an important element of the planning process.

2.1 Target-setting for attendance

The theme of attendance featured as one of the priorities in the DEIS planning process of all 18 schools inspected. In all cases, targets for the improvement of pupil attendance were included in the school's DEIS action plan. In most schools, those targets were clear, realistic and measurable and were based, to varying degrees, on the analysis of attendance records over previous years. Examples of such targets include:

- ...to improve attendance by 3% in year one, 7% in year 2 and 12% in year 3*
- ...to reduce the number of pupils absent on Mondays*
- ...to reduce absenteeism by 10% on an annual basis*

2.2 Strategies and interventions for attendance

In all schools but one there was evidence of appropriate and effective strategies and interventions to achieve the identified targets. Common among those interventions and strategies were:

- breakfast clubs and homework clubs (frequently organised as part of the School Completion Programme [SCP])
- individual awards for good attendance
- prompt contacting of parents/guardians after a defined period of non-attendance by text, letter and/or home visits

A number of schools timetabled activities popular among pupils for particular days every week (generally Mondays and Fridays) in order to reverse negative attendance trends previously observed on such days. Examples of those activities were swimming, the visual arts, cookery, gardening, robotics lessons and prize-giving.

A systematic approach to the implementation of attendance strategies and the monitoring of their effect was evident in most of the 18 schools inspected. In practically all of them there was a person or persons (usually but not exclusively the HSCL coordinator) with particular responsibility for attendance matters in the school. The involvement and collaboration of the HSCL coordinator and SCP personnel in relation to the promotion of attendance was a feature of the vast majority of the schools. In addition, a number of schools had set up committees, frequently including personnel from external agencies, in order to examine the attendance of targeted pupils and to take relevant action. Most, but not all schools reported good communication with the NEWB in relation to their particular attendance issues and interventions.

2.3 Progress regarding attendance

Significant measurable improvement in attendance rates, based on their own attendance data, was reported by all schools but one. For example, in one senior primary school the number of pupils absent for more than 20 days decreased by over one third during one school year while the number of pupils absent for between 45 and 60 days was also dramatically reduced. In another school, a 2.3% improvement in overall attendance was recorded over three years, with a seven-fold increase in the number of pupils with full attendance during the same period. The one school in which significant improvement in attendance was not evident also had significant deficiencies with regard to how it set attendance targets and its use of strategies and interventions to promote attendance.

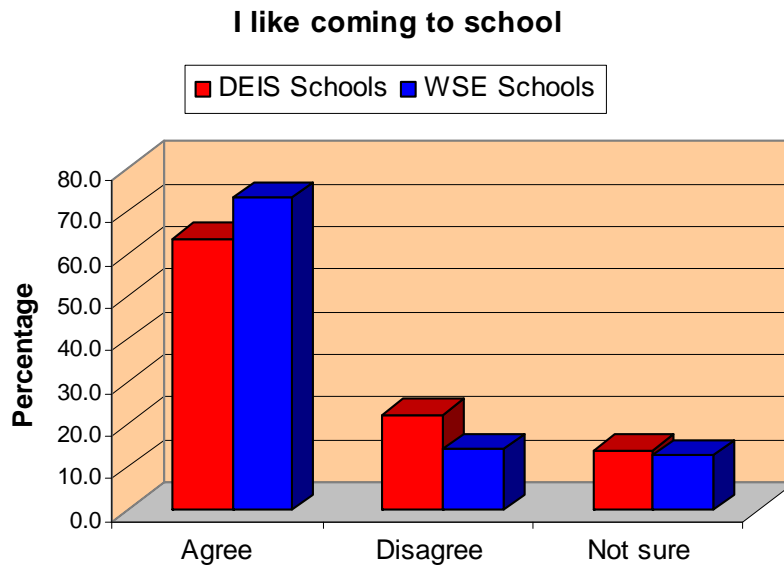
An example of the work of a school with several significant strengths in its action planning process in relation to attendance was reported by an inspector as follows:

Initial targets for improving attendance have been revised to a more realistic level after a review by the school of its first year of participation in DEIS. A particular focus has been placed on pupils with significant levels of non-attendance. Attendance levels for these pupils and for pupils generally, are improving. Integral to this improvement is the collaborative and co-ordinated approach adopted between the school and agencies such as the NEWB and the SCP. Immediate contact with parents has proved to be a helpful strategy with regard to these pupils. School meetings with parents and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) are organised when pupils have missed twenty days...Other effective strategies include a class-based reward system and an individualised reward system in the case of specific pupils.

2.4 Pupils' perspectives on attendance

Pupils' attitudes to attending school, as reflected in an analysis of sixth-class pupils' agreement or otherwise with the questionnaire statement, "*I like coming to school*", were, when viewed collectively, mixed. Some 63.7% of the 571 sixth-class pupils surveyed across 15 of the 18 schools² agreed with the statement; 22.2% disagreed and 14.0% indicated that they did not know. This finding is not quite as positive as that emerging from a similar survey of pupils' attitudes undertaken as part of the whole-school evaluations conducted in 103 primary schools (including DEIS and non-DEIS schools) during the period September to December 2010. In the latter survey, 73.1% of the 6348 pupil respondents agreed with the statement, "*I like coming to school*"; 14.2% disagreed and 12.7% did not know.

² Pupils in the three junior schools were not surveyed.



Analysis of pupil responses in the DEIS schools on a school-by-school basis shows considerable variation among the schools in terms of the attitudes of their pupils towards attending school. Pupil agreement with the statement, “*I like coming to school*” ranged from 40% to 87% across the schools. This suggests that some schools have more work to do to make the learning environment more attractive for pupils.

2.5 Conclusion: attendance

Overall, the schools have acted effectively in setting attendance targets and in implementing suitable interventions and strategies to achieve those targets. Practically all of the schools reported significant improvements in pupil attendance, according to their own data. Notwithstanding these positive findings, the pupil questionnaire outcomes point to a need for pupils’ perspectives on attendance matters to be explored and considered more fully by schools as they work to bring about and maintain optimal attendance through their DEIS planning processes.

3. OVERALL FINDINGS: RETENTION

The School Completion Programme (SCP) provides a wide range of targeted supports on an individual and group basis to children and young people who may be at risk of early school leaving. The SCP works with clusters of schools and coordinators are expected to engage in action planning at cluster level.

For most of the 18 schools evaluated, retaining pupils in school from junior infants to sixth class was not, in their view, problematic and was generally not a central part of the school’s DEIS action planning process either in terms of target-setting or the implementation of particular strategies or interventions. In one school where a difficulty with retaining a small number of pupils from migrant backgrounds was identified and reported to the inspectors, the school had a suitable system in place for retaining data on those pupils and for making the necessary referrals to the NEWB. A second school with a similar problem did not have formal procedures for communication with the NEWB in place. In another school, although retention of pupils was not, in its view, an issue of immediate concern, the school nonetheless had a range of effective strategies to prevent retention problems arising. They included the ascertaining of pupils’ destinations if their enrolment in the school ended, the maintenance of strong links with the social services, and a form of partnership with local primary and post-primary schools that included the sharing of good practice in relation to supporting pupil retention.

4. OVERALL FINDINGS: PROGRESSION

Progression from primary to second level is recognised as a crucial transition period in a child's education. Pupils who fail to make this transition successfully are more likely to leave school early or to underachieve educationally. The development of effective transfer programmes, building on the work of the HSCL Scheme and the SCP, is emphasised in the DEIS action plan. For the purpose of this evaluation, progression refers to the extent to which pupils progress from one school level to the next. Most frequently this relates to pupil transfer from primary level to second-level education.

4.1 Target-setting for progression

For the vast majority of the schools, the progression or transfer of sixth-class pupils to second-level education in recent years was not a problematic issue. In the majority of cases 100% progression rates were reported. While the transfer of pupils to post-primary school was not generally problematic, progression matters were nonetheless a focus of the planning process of most of the schools although less than half of them had a specific written target for progression in their school action plan. Where a specific progression target was included in the school's action plan it usually took the form of the concise objective of ensuring that 100% of the sixth-class pupils transferred to post-primary school.

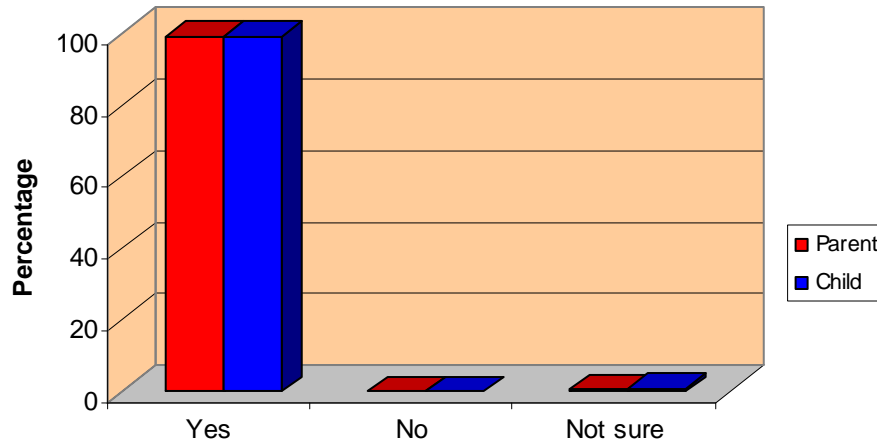
4.2 Strategies and interventions for progression

The strategies and interventions used by the schools to facilitate and maintain optimal progression of pupils were found to be effective in almost all cases. They generally took the form of a specific transition or induction programme for pupils, frequently with a practical dimension such as assistance with the completion and submission of application forms, making subject choices and becoming familiar with the new school site and personnel. Such programmes generally involved HSCL and SCP personnel in their delivery and, in some instances collaboration with other agencies such as *Youth Work Ireland* or with the National University of Ireland (NUI) through specific access programmes.

4.3 Parents' and pupils' perspectives on progression

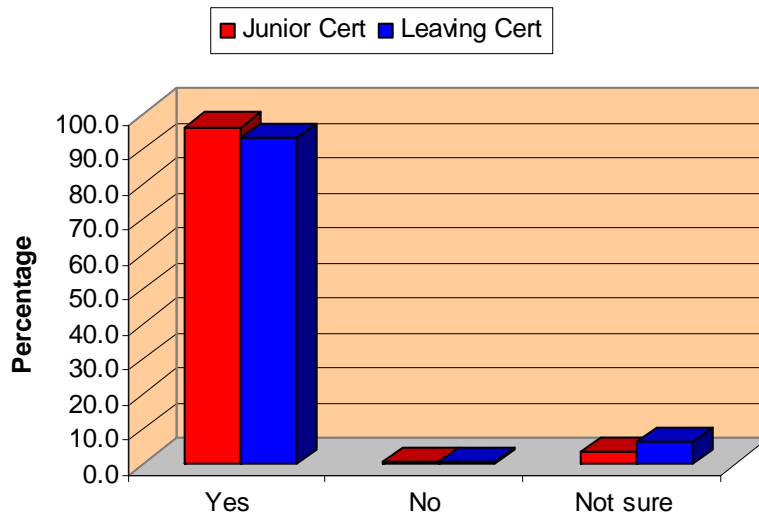
The intentions of parents in relation to the progression of their children to second-level education were, as indicated through questionnaires, positive overall. In 10 of the 18 schools, 100% of the parents sampled indicated that their child would go to post-primary school, with close to 100% of parents indicating this in all but one of the other 8 schools. Pupils' views generally accorded with this. In 10 of the 15 schools in which pupils were surveyed 100% of the respondents indicated that they would transfer. In the other schools, a small minority of the pupil respondents indicated that they were uncertain if they would be progressing to post-primary schools but no pupil indicated that he/she would not be progressing.

Will go to secondary school



Parents were similarly positive about their children remaining in school until at least Junior Certificate level with 96.2% of parents agreeing with the statement, “My child will do the Junior Cert examination”, only 0.4% disagreeing with the statement and the remaining 3.4% indicating that they were not sure. A high percentage (93.3%) of parents also indicated that their child would stay in school to do the Leaving Certificate examination; 6.1% were not sure about this and 0.6% responded that their child would not stay in school to do this examination.

My child will stay in school



4.4 Conclusion: progression

Overall, findings in relation to progression in the context of the DEIS planning process are positive. While more than half the schools did not set specific progression targets as part of their DEIS action plan, most of the schools nonetheless had definite and effective strategies in place to facilitate and support the transfer of all pupils to post-primary education. Furthermore, all of the schools had either formal or informal procedures in place to track the education destination of pupils following the completion of their primary education and, in the majority of cases, 100% progression was reported by the school. It should be noted, however,

that the school-reported data, on which this evaluation draws, has its limitations. It is evident that better availability of progress data at a national level, drawing on NEWB data, and better collection of data from schools by the Department of Education and Skills, would allow for further monitoring and analysis of pupil transfer from primary to second-level education.

5. OVERALL FINDINGS: LITERACY

Literacy, defined as the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language and printed text, as well as the skills of speaking and listening, is a fundamental set of skills required to derive benefit from education. Achieving proficiency in literacy is therefore a crucial objective of education. Unless children reach adequate literacy standards, they cannot adequately benefit from our literacy-based education system. A number of specific measures including intensive professional development programmes for teachers in literacy were available to schools participating in DEIS. Schools were advised to restructure the provision of reading instruction and support services, particularly for pupils in junior classes. Specific literacy programme such as *Reading Recovery* and *First Steps* were offered to schools and the HSCL Scheme supported and developed initiatives such as *Reading for Fun*. Examples of effective practice in literacy were reported by the Inspectorate in *Effective literacy and numeracy practices in DEIS schools* (2009). This evaluation focused on how effectively schools used data from their own assessment of reading to set targets and to monitor outcomes at individual pupil and/or group level.

5.1 Target-setting for literacy

Literacy was a priority in the DEIS planning process of all 18 schools. All schools had targets for literacy in their DEIS action plan. However, the quality of the target-setting process varied in terms of the specificity and measurability of the targets and how data were used to inform them. In the majority of schools there was scope for development of literacy target-setting practices, the most common shortcoming being that the targets tended to be too general in nature and/or inadequate use was being made of the outcomes of assessment in setting them. These shortcomings are illustrated in the following evaluative comments from a selection of reports:

The school's main target with regard to improving literacy is to improve standards of attainment in a standardised reading test. This target is very general and there are no criteria for monitoring its on-going implementation. In this regard, it is suggested that the school set more specific targets which are differentiated at each class level taking account of the weaknesses being exhibited in pupils' attainment on an on-going basis at that class level

...some of these targets are general in nature and target groups at individual class level are not clearly specified.

It is noted that systematic analysis ... of pupils' attainment levels in literacy has not yet been established. It would be important that outcomes for pupils be analysed and this analysis be incorporated into the school's internal audit process and inform target setting in action planning.

Good or very good target-setting practices in relation to literacy were evident in less than half the schools. Where such practice was evident, the schools, to varying degrees, used the outcomes of assessment to set specific, measurable and time-bound targets for specific target groups. Examples of best practice in this regard are described as follows:

*All members of the teaching staff worked collaboratively to set targets for literacy in the DEIS plan with the support of a *cuiditheoir*³ from the support services. These*

³ A *cuiditheoir* supports and advises teachers and schools in relation to curriculum implementation.

targets are specific and are informed by the outcomes of standardised tests, teacher observations and teacher-designed tests. The targets aim to reduce the number of pupils performing at or below the 10th percentile over three years and to reduce the number of pupils between the 20th and 40th percentile by 15%.

The school has one clear, definite and shared aim with regard to literacy: to have its pupils performing at national norms. It engages in rigorous analysis of pupil attainment levels in oral language, reading, writing and related skills using both school-devised checklists and standardised tests to identify, define and inform its targets for literacy development across the school. The resultant targets are clear, specific and realistic and are known to all personnel working in classrooms and support rooms in the school. Differentiated targets are set for individuals and groups in accordance with assessed need and ability.

5.2 Strategies and interventions for literacy

Despite the shortcomings in target-setting evident in more than half the schools, almost all of them had effective strategies and interventions in place to improve the literacy levels of pupils.

All schools were availing of one or more of the following DEIS initiatives:

- *Reading Recovery*
- *Literacy Lift Off*
- *Reading for Fun*
- *First Steps Reading*
- *First Steps Writing*
- *First Steps Speaking and Listening*

Most schools were also using one or more of the following strategies in classrooms:

- peer-tutoring
- buddy/cooperative reading
- station teaching
- cooperative teaching
- a dedicated daily literacy hour
- particular commercial programmes designed to support literacy improvements

In the majority of schools, collaboration among teachers in the implementation of literacy programmes was evident, with mechanisms to share the expertise developed through training for particular initiatives a common feature of the schools. In a number of schools, responsibility for implementation of aspects of the school's literacy programme was assigned to specific staff members. An example of the work of a school with several significant strengths in its implementation of literacy strategies and interventions is reported as follows:

The school provides a range of appropriate literacy programmes and initiatives including First Steps Writing, Reading Recovery and Reading for Fun. Teacher training is also in progress for First Steps Reading and a second teacher is being trained in Reading Recovery. The teachers share their expertise willingly with other staff members. Teaching methodologies have been modelled by those with responsibility for leading the various initiatives and the school's computer system provides access to a wide range of resource materials. All teachers are reminded by e-mail each two months about the writing genre to be covered and they are provided with a helpful resource pack. Progress has been made in embedding the First Steps writing programme at whole-school level and a template has been designed to assist teachers in recording this element in the monthly progress record from September 2010...Station teaching has been introduced at infant level. The class teacher plans the implementation of this intervention collaboratively with two LS/RT⁴ teachers to ensure that resources are used effectively.

⁴ Learning support/ Resource teacher

5.3 Progress in literacy

Good or very good improvement in the literacy levels of pupils, as measured against the schools' own targets, plans or expectations, was achieved in 11 of the 18 schools inspected. The types of improvements in these schools are illustrated in the following extracts from the reports:

Standardised test results in 2009 compared to 2006 show that the percentage of the school population scoring below the 10th percentile has dropped by 7% and the percentage scoring above the 50th percentile has increased by 8% (vertical co-educational school, 197 pupils)

Excellent progress has been made in the development of the pupils' reading skills; their attainment is now approaching national norms (junior co-educational school, 233 pupils)

[There has been] a significant and sustained reduction in the number of pupils attaining scores less than the 10th percentile over the last 3 years (vertical boys school, 363 pupils)

Analysis of the school's data on pupil performance in literacy, including standardised test results, school-devised checklists, and the writing of pupils who are being specifically tracked as participants in the First Steps Writing programme, shows a very definite and significant improvement in literacy in terms of both the targeted pupils and the pupils more generally.

The school set a specific, time-bound objective for the cohort of pupils achieving between the 41st and 60th percentile in the MICRA T test. The stated target was to increase the number of pupils achieving in this percentile band from 16% to 18% initially, and to 20% in 2009. This target has been achieved, and surpassed. Furthermore, the number of pupils achieving below the 20th percentile has dropped by 5%. These improvements have been made despite the increase in the number of pupils with EAL⁵ (vertical co-educational school, 350 pupils)

The lack of significant improvement in the literacy levels of pupils in the other 7 schools was variously linked to factors such as:

- the school's literacy targets being too general
- insufficient or incomplete monitoring of pupils' written work
- lack of formative feedback to pupils on their writing
- inadequate analysis of the outcomes of assessment
- insufficient emphasis on the teaching of reading skills

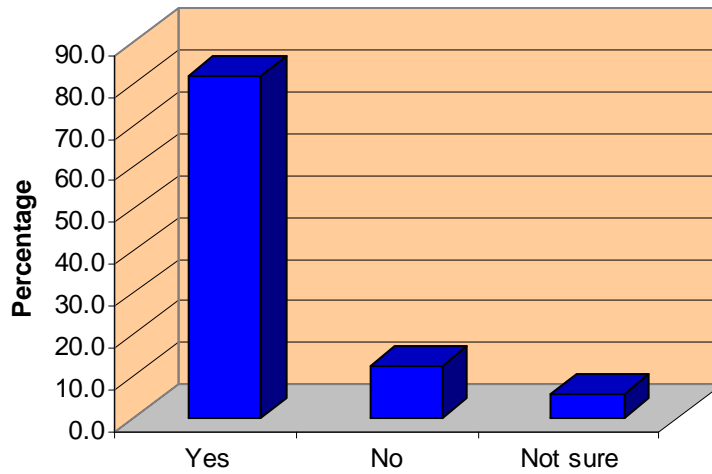
Further analysis of the data shows that, of the 7 schools with unsatisfactory improvement in literacy levels, 6 had weaknesses in their target-setting practices with 3 of these schools also showing deficiencies with regard to their use of literacy strategies and interventions. This contrasts in a striking way with the literacy planning processes of the majority of the 11 schools in which significant improvements were made. There were strengths in both the target-setting practices and the strategies and interventions used in 7 of these schools.

5.4 Pupils' perspectives on literacy

The findings regarding pupils' attitudes to English as measured by their responses to the questionnaire item, "I like English" are, in the majority of cases positive, with 82.0% of pupils agreeing with the statement, 5.6% indicating that they did not know and 12.4% disagreeing. The questionnaire data also provide some insight into pupils' home reading habits. While a high percentage (88.7%) of the total number of parents of pupils in second and sixth class agreed with the statement, "The school encourages my child to read books at home", only 77.9% of the sixth-class pupils indicated that they read at home.

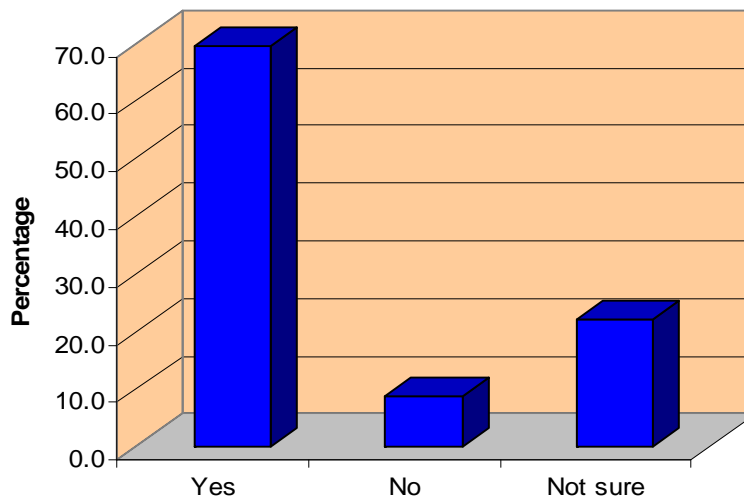
⁵ English as an additional language

I like English

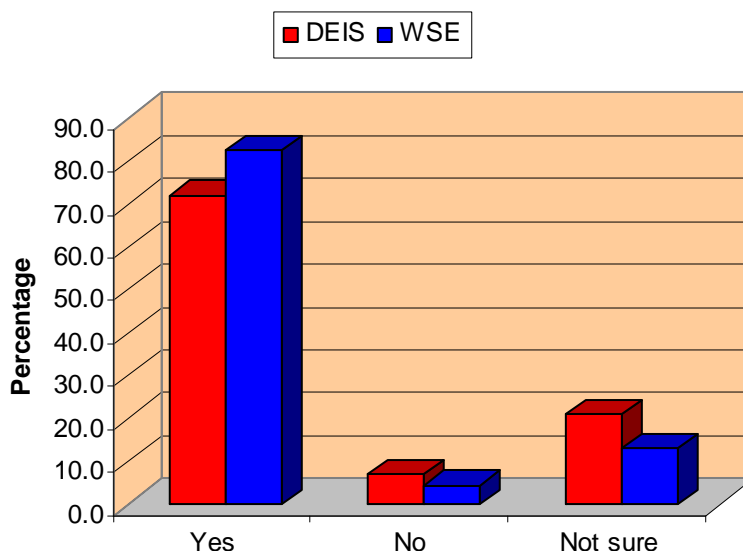


Analysis of pupils' views on how they were doing in reading, writing and spelling shows that more than 20% of the total number of pupils responded that they were not sure to each of the following questionnaire items: *"I am good at writing and spelling"* and *"I am a good reader"* (21.9% and 21.1% respectively). Findings for the latter item are considerably different from the findings for a comparable item in the whole-school evaluations conducted in 103 primary schools (including DEIS and non-DEIS schools) during the period September to December 2010 where 13.0% of pupils indicated that they did not know how they were doing at reading.

I am good at writing and spelling



I am a good reader



5.5 Conclusion: literacy

The overall findings in relation to literacy and the DEIS planning process are mixed. All schools prioritised literacy in their DEIS planning process and all included literacy targets in their DEIS plan. Effective strategies and interventions for bringing about improvements in pupil attainment levels in literacy were used by almost all schools. Good or very good improvements in literacy were made in the majority of schools. Clearly the work being done in those schools in the context of effecting improvements through the DEIS planning process is encouraging.

However, 7 of the 18 schools did not succeed in making significant improvements with regard to literacy. The evaluations show that generally there is a need for greater use to be made of assessment outcomes in target-setting for literacy and for the targets to be set out in more specific and more measurable terms with target groups clearly identified. This is especially required in the case of the schools in which adequate progress in raising literacy levels was not achieved. The findings also point to a need for pupils to be more involved in planning processes for literacy, specifically in terms of the sharing of realistic learning goals and the monitoring of progress.

6. OVERALL FINDINGS: NUMERACY

As with literacy, numeracy is highlighted as a fundamental set of skills in the DEIS action plan and the Inspectorate has reported on examples of effective practice with regard to numeracy in *Effective literacy and numeracy practices in DEIS schools* (2009). Numeracy encompasses the ability to use mathematical understanding and skills to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living. Supports to improve numeracy skills available to schools participating in DEIS include *Mathematics Recovery* and *Ready, Steady, Go Maths*. These programmes provide intensive and early intervention support to strengthen pupils' grasp of numeracy. *Maths for Fun*, implemented through the HSCL scheme is also available to schools participating in DEIS. The effectiveness of schools' planning processes to improve the numeracy skills of pupils, including the use of data to set targets and the monitoring of outcomes, was evaluated.

6.1 Target-setting for numeracy

Numeracy was one of the priorities in the DEIS planning process of all 18 schools. All schools had targets for numeracy in their DEIS action plan. However, the schools varied considerably

in terms of the competence they demonstrated with regard to target-setting. In just over half the schools good target-setting was evident with excellence in this area displayed by one school. In the remaining significant minority of schools, there were weaknesses in target-setting with two of these schools having significant weaknesses.

Where effective practice was evident, targets were informed by the outcomes of assessment and they were specific, measurable, realistic and time-bound, with target groups clearly identified. Examples of such strengths in target-setting are illustrated in the following excerpts from a selection of reports:

Assessment data from both standardised tests and the school's own checklists are analysed in detail and are used to determine specific, practical measurable and time-bound targets for classes, groups and individuals.

In 2006, specific, time-bound numeracy targets were set in relation to increasing the number of pupils performing between the 40th and 60th percentiles on standardised tests from 15% to 20%. 2006 test results were used to establish base-line data at individual, class and whole-school level. In 2007, after analysis of testing outcomes, specific strands of the curriculum were targeted for focussed intervention at different levels in the school.

An examination of the results of SIGMA-T tests along with teacher observation informed the development of the numeracy plan. Targets in the original three-year plan included: bringing the attainment levels of two targeted groups in sixth class in 2007/08 above the 10th and 20th percentiles....In the 2010 plan the targets were expanded to include...maintaining the annual decrease of 6% among pupils achieving at or below the 10th percentile.

The targets are set to reduce the number of pupils at or below the 10th percentile over 3 years, to reduce the number of pupils between the 20th and 40th percentile by 15% and to develop positive attitudes towards problem-solving. The targets were informed by the outcomes of standardised tests, teacher observations and teacher consultation.

Conversely, the shortcomings around target-setting for numeracy evident in just under half the schools usually included inadequate use of baseline data to inform targets and/or failure to set the targets out in specific terms.

6.2 Strategies and interventions for numeracy

Practices in 14 of the schools with regard to the implementation of a suitable range of strategies and interventions to improve numeracy standards were effective, with 4 of these schools demonstrating high levels of competence in this regard.

All schools were using one or more of the following DEIS initiatives:

- *Maths for Fun*
- *Maths Recovery*
- *Ready, Set, Go Maths*

Among the other strategies also used by one or more schools to improve numeracy standards were the following:

- team teaching
- station teaching
- increased emphasis on mental mathematics
- differentiation of lesson objectives for target pupils
- incorporation of "a problem a day" into the start of lessons
- standardisation of mathematical language throughout the school
- a focus on life skills as they relate to numeracy

Games, practical equipment, ICT, and commercial programmes to assist with particular aspects of numeracy were also used. Examples of best practice in the implementation of

strategies and interventions to improve numeracy achievements of pupils are described as follows:

...the wealth of baseline data available throughout the school...are used effectively to plan a range of useful whole-school interventions and strategies. These include early intervention, the use of practical equipment and games to emphasise real-life maths, a focus on mental arithmetic, the adoption of problem-solving strategies and the provision of maths-rich learning environments. Pupils in first and sixth class have been targeted for in-class support and team teaching, and this is effectively implemented. Teachers have availed of [continuing professional development] to ensure that they are competent in the use of all strategies and they work collaboratively to research lessons... A very useful DVD has been produced within the school and is available on the school's intranet. A rigorous approach is taken to reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of all strategies in use and this information is used to inform future planning.

The programmes, methods and interventions used to achieve the school targets for numeracy draw on best practice in this and other jurisdictions. Very good focus is placed on giving pupils the skills and strategies to do mathematics. In that regard, interventions such as Maths Recovery and Ready, Set, Go, Maths are very successfully used and textbooks at first-class and second-class levels have been replaced by a very good range of school-devised resources. The teachers engage cooperatively and in a very focussed way in highly structured mathematics lessons that follow closely the school's agreed instructional sequence for mathematics.

6.3 Progress in numeracy

Despite the positive practices generally evident among the schools with regard to the implementation of numeracy strategies and interventions, significant improvement in the numeracy levels of pupils, as measured against the schools' own targets, plans or expectations, was achieved in less than half (8 schools) of the schools. Factors variously linked to the less than satisfactory progress made by pupils in the other schools included:

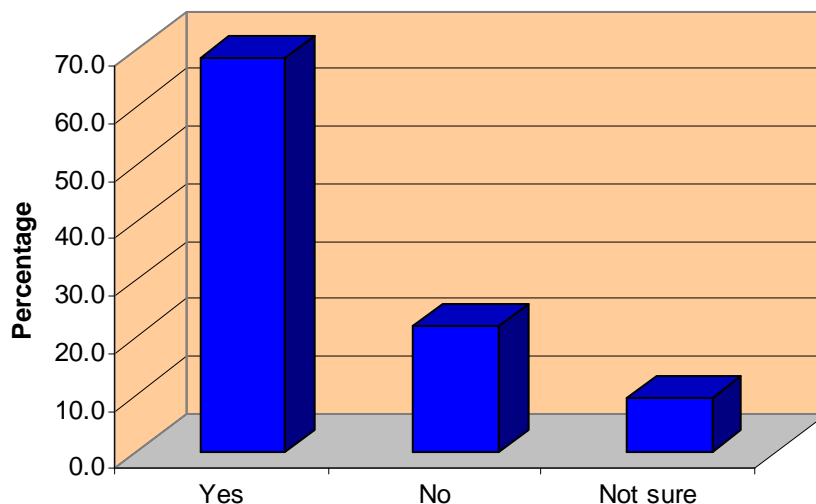
- inadequate analysis and use of assessment data in the target-setting process
- inadequate integration of numeracy interventions and strategies into the school plan for mathematics
- unsatisfactory coordination of strategies and interventions
- insufficient differentiation including failure to provide suitably challenging activities for more able pupils
- unclear teaching objectives

Of the 10 schools that did not succeed in bringing about significant improvements in the numeracy levels of pupils, 6 had weaknesses in their target-setting practices with 2 of these 6 schools exhibiting significant weaknesses in this regard. Conversely, 6 of the 8 schools in which significant improvements were made had good or better target-setting practices as well as effective strategies and interventions. This, when considered alongside the comparable findings for literacy, suggests that the quality of target-setting practices used is particularly relevant to the subsequent progress made by pupils in their learning.

6.4 Pupils' perspectives on numeracy

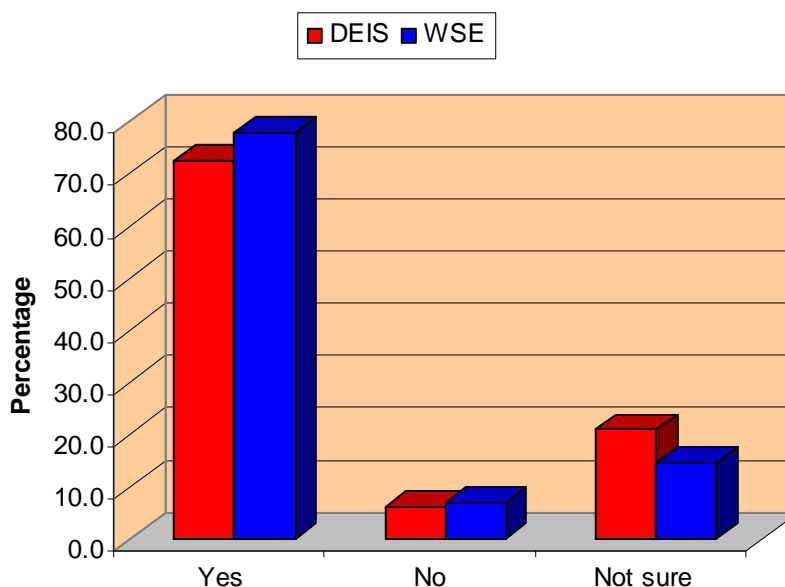
Pupils' attitudes to mathematics, as indicated through their agreement or otherwise with the questionnaire statement, "*I like mathematics*", are, when viewed collectively, significantly less positive than their attitudes to English. Only 68.7% of pupils agreed that they liked mathematics, 9.3% indicated that they did not know while a worrying 22.0% indicated that they did not like mathematics.

I like maths



Analysis of pupils' perspectives on how they were doing in mathematics shows, as in the case of English, that considerable numbers of pupils (21.1%) did not know how they were doing. Again, as with English, this aggregated finding for the 15 DEIS schools in which pupils were surveyed is somewhat different from the finding for a similar item in the 103 schools (including DEIS and non-DEIS schools) evaluated by means of WSE between September and December 2010. In those WSEs 14.7% of the 6348 pupils surveyed indicated that they did not know how they were doing in mathematics. As with English, these findings highlight a need for teachers to share learning goals with pupils and to involve them in the process of monitoring their attainment.

I am doing well at maths



6.5 Conclusion: numeracy

The overall findings in relation to numeracy and the DEIS planning process are mixed. There was scope for development in the approach to target-setting used by more than half the schools. While good or very good work was evident in the majority of schools in relation to the strategies and interventions used to bring about improvements in the numeracy attainment levels of pupils, the fact that only 8 of the 18 schools have so far succeeded in making such improvements in a significant way is disappointing. The evaluations suggest that the quality of a school's target-setting practices in numeracy can have a bearing on the subsequent improvements in pupils' numeracy attainments. Accordingly, for a considerable number of the schools, improving target-setting practices in numeracy should be a priority goal.

7. OVERALL FINDINGS: PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND OTHERS

One of the main objectives of the DEIS action plan is to build on the successful work of the HSCL Scheme. Schools are required to incorporate the HSCL function into their three-year action plans. They should involve and support parents in developing children's literacy and numeracy skills. They should have strategies in place to improve involvement of parents at particular stages of their children's education such as with pupils in middle and senior classes at primary level and with students at second level. Schools participating in DEIS are also expected to have strategies to increase the level of partnership with local communities and relevant agencies. The inspectors examined the quality of planning processes used by the schools to improve levels of involvement of parents in their children's education and to enhance partnerships with others.

7.1 Target-setting for partnership

The promotion of partnership with parents featured as an aspect of the DEIS planning process in all schools. Most schools had set targets for the involvement of parents in the school. As written in the DEIS action plan of the schools, those targets tended to be framed in relatively broad terms but were, in the vast majority of schools, linked in practice to clearly identifiable and effective interventions and strategies. Examples of some of the broad targets set include:

...to improve the involvement of parents in their children's learning
...to make parents more aware of their child's school life and learning
...to build capacity among lesser-represented ethnic groups in the school
...to encourage reading for enjoyment at home

In a small number of schools, more specific targets such as the following were set:

...to introduce Maths for Fun in third class
...to improve communication between home and school by providing more regular opportunities to meet, by using the diary to inform about class work and by inviting parents to work in selected classrooms

7.2 Strategies and interventions for partnership with parents and others

Common among the strategies and interventions to increase parental involvement were:

- personal development courses for parents
- FETAC accredited courses
- curriculum information sessions
- language lessons for parents of EAL pupils
- involvement of parents in literacy and numeracy work in classrooms through reading and mathematics activities such as paired reading and *Maths for Fun*
- the provision of a parents' room in the school.

Less frequently, schools established links and partnerships with a range of civic, statutory and voluntary service providers in order to support parents from ethnic minority backgrounds. In

most schools, the HSCL coordinator played an active part in the organisation or facilitation of the partnership interventions provided.

7.3 Progress in partnership with parents and others

In the case of the vast majority of schools, the progress made by them in furthering partnership with parents and others was difficult to ascertain given the broad nature of the partnership targets set. Nonetheless, overall findings show that the work of the vast majority of schools in promoting partnership with parents and others was positive. While there was some scope for development of the work of 3 schools with regard to partnership, no school had significant weaknesses in this area.

7.4 Parents' perspectives on partnership with parents

Focus groups with parents and questionnaire data indicate broadly positive levels of satisfaction among parents in relation to the extent to which they were involved in their children's education. All or almost all parent respondents in all schools but one indicated that the school was welcoming of parents. Some 94.1% of the 760 parents surveyed across the 18 schools indicated that they usually attended parent-teacher meetings. Their perceptions of whether or not the school advises parents about how to help their children were more mixed. More than 90% of parents in 6 schools indicated that parents were so advised while the figure for the other 12 schools ranged between 74% and 89%.

7.5 Principals' perspectives on partnership with parents

Principals' views on the involvement of parents, as noted by inspectors during open-ended interviews at the conclusion of the school-based evaluation activity, were similarly positive. When asked the question, "*What are the main successes of DEIS?*" several principals identified more positive engagement with education on the part of parents as one of the main successes. However, in their consideration of the biggest challenges facing schools in the implementation of DEIS, principals also identified parental literacy levels and the engagement of marginalised and disaffected parents in the work of the school as major challenges.

7.6 Conclusion: partnership with parents and others

The evaluation findings suggest that while much positive work involving parents is undertaken by schools, there is a need for schools to have clear objectives guiding the development of partnership with parents. The general challenge for schools in this area in the context of DEIS action planning is to ensure that targets are, at a minimum linked to, and ideally based on, the identified needs of the learners, that they are set out in practical terms and that appropriate mechanisms are devised for monitoring the extent to which they are being achieved.

8. SUMMARY

The following summary provides an overview of the findings of the evaluation in the 18 DEIS schools in relation to the DEIS themes. It outlines some implications of the findings.

Attendance: The theme of attendance was the one most effectively addressed by schools in their DEIS planning processes, according to their own data. Significant, measurable improvements in pupil attendance were reported to have been achieved in practically all of the schools. Overall, the schools acted effectively in setting attendance targets and in implementing suitable interventions and strategies to achieve those targets. Given these very positive findings regarding the planning processes used by schools in relation to attendance, it is somewhat surprising to find that less than two-thirds of the pupils surveyed indicated that they liked attending school. This points to a need for schools to take greater account of pupils' perspectives on attendance-related issues in their DEIS planning processes as they strive to improve pupil attendance levels.

Retention: The theme of retention generally did not feature in a specific way in the planning processes of the schools. It is of course arguable that in addressing attendance in their DEIS action plan, schools were, in effect, also addressing issues related to the retention of pupils in school for the full primary cycle.

Progression: The overall findings regarding planning processes in the context of the progression of pupils to post-primary school were positive. In the majority of cases, 100% progression was reported by the school. While over half the schools did not include a specific target or targets for progression in their DEIS action plan, most schools had effective strategies and interventions in place to facilitate and support progression. The intentions of parents regarding the progression of their children to second-level education were positive overall. Pupils' views were similarly positive. The evaluation methodology did not provide for a tracking of pupils progression from primary to post-primary school; the conclusions regarding the progression of pupils are based on the schools' own recording and/or reporting of progression rates.

Partnership: The data highlight shortcomings in the planning processes of schools with regard to partnership with parents and others. The objectives set by schools for such partnership tended to be broad and lacking in specificity. The lack of detail in the partnership targets set meant that it was, in many cases, very difficult for the schools themselves and indeed for the inspectors to establish the progress made. There was however, evidence of broadly positive levels of satisfaction among parents in relation to the extent to which they were involved in their children's education.

It is clear from the evaluation that it is time for many of the 18 schools to develop a more sophisticated approach to planning for partnership with parents and others. This will require the schools to ensure that partnership targets are based on the identified needs of their pupils, that they are clearly set out in the school's DEIS action plan and that appropriate systems are in place for monitoring the extent to which partnership goals are being achieved.

Literacy: The overall findings in relation to literacy and the schools' planning processes are mixed. Good or very good improvement in the literacy levels of pupils was achieved in 11 of the 18 schools. Almost all of the schools had effective strategies and interventions in place to improve the literacy levels of pupils. There was, however, scope for development of target-setting practices in the majority of the schools. The main shortcomings around target-setting for literacy were the framing of targets in very general terms and inadequate use of assessment outcomes to inform targets. Another finding of concern in the context of planning processes for literacy is the fact that many pupils did not know how they were doing in aspects of literacy such as reading, writing and spelling.

One of the key conclusions of this report is that target-setting for literacy and assessment practices in the area of literacy need to be improved in DEIS schools. There is a need for schools to make greater use of formative assessment in literacy teaching, that is, to use more fully the outcomes of assessment to inform the planning and delivery of literacy programmes in classrooms and other learning settings in the school. In particular, schools need to consider and purposefully use assessment data to set specific literacy targets for pupils and to decide on the strategies and interventions necessary to achieve those targets. In short, there should be a clear and meaningful link between the outcomes of assessment in literacy, the literacy targets set, and the teaching approaches, interventions and strategies evident in the learning settings in the school. The evaluation findings show that there is also a need to involve pupils in planning processes for literacy by sharing the learning targets with them and involving them in the monitoring of their own progress.

Numeracy: The overall findings in relation to numeracy and the schools' planning processes are also mixed. While all schools were using effective strategies and interventions to improve numeracy standards, only 8 of the 18 schools succeeded in bringing about a significant improvement in the numeracy levels of pupils. The data suggest that the failure by the other schools to effect such improvement was related, in most of these schools, to deficiencies in the schools' target-setting for numeracy and in the links between target setting and teaching and learning interventions. More than half the schools exhibited weaknesses in

how they set targets, the most common problems being inadequate use of baseline data to inform targets and failure to set the targets out in specific terms. As in the case of literacy, it emerged that considerable numbers of pupils did not know how they were progressing in mathematics. Furthermore, a sizeable minority of pupils indicated that they did not like mathematics.

The disappointing finding that only 8 of the 18 schools succeeded in bringing about significant improvements in the numeracy levels of pupils adds a particular urgency to the need for schools to improve target-setting and formative assessment practices and to take greater account of the perspectives and participation of pupils in planning processes for mathematics. As in the case of literacy, there is a need for schools to reflect on the extent to which numeracy lessons and programmes are linked to the information the school has on its pupils' performance and progress in numeracy. Fundamentally, schools need to ensure that the numeracy targets set and the teaching approaches, interventions and strategies used in classrooms and other learning settings in the school are those that are the most effective and most appropriate for bringing about improvements in pupils' learning. This requires schools to analyse and to take careful, practical account of assessment outcomes in setting numeracy targets in the first place and subsequently in deciding on the practical strategies and interventions to be used to achieve those targets. Fundamentally, it requires numeracy assessment outcomes, target-setting and the work of teachers in classrooms and other learning settings in the school to be linked in a coherent and practical way so that improvements in numeracy levels can be achieved.

Planning processes: The quality of the DEIS planning process engaged in by the 18 schools varied according to the DEIS themes. The evaluation highlighted the importance of leadership, particularly the leadership of the principal, in the DEIS planning process. There were many strengths evident in the schools' planning for the themes of attendance and progression and their work in these areas contributed to positive outcomes for their pupils in terms of improving attendance and ensuring high levels of transfer of pupils to post-primary school.

Findings in relation to the planning processes undertaken in respect of partnership, literacy and numeracy were not as positive. As the data clearly show, many of the 18 schools need to develop and improve their planning for partnership with parents as well as their planning for pupils' learning in the critical areas of literacy and numeracy. In particular, there is a need for many of the 18 schools to set more specific, measurable, realistic and time-bound targets in these areas and, in so doing to make more effective use of assessment data and other data (including pupils' perspectives) to inform this process. Fundamentally, schools need to be clear about how the strategies and interventions they use to achieve DEIS objectives fit together and, in particular, how they relate to the specific, clearly-defined learning needs of their pupils.

Schools need to integrate their DEIS action planning into robust school self-evaluation processes designed to bring about ongoing improvements in the areas of literacy, numeracy and partnership with parents and others. Through DEIS planning approaches grounded in school self-evaluation, schools can use information (including information on pupil attainment in literacy and numeracy) to set specific, evidence-based targets in their school improvement plans. These school improvement plans should include specific, customised strategies and interventions to be implemented to give effect to the targets set for the relevant DEIS themes. Schools can then, at intervals, evaluate their progress in achieving those targets in their school improvement plans with reference to a range of clearly defined success criteria. Future targets can in turn be informed by the schools' progress with regard to the relevant DEIS themes. Thus, school self-evaluation processes are critical to ensuring on-going school improvement in DEIS schools and schools generally.

The role of pupils in planning processes also needs to be explored and developed further by many of the schools, specifically with regard to accessing and taking account of pupils' perspectives on matters relating to the DEIS themes, the sharing of learning goals and targets with them, and involving them in a meaningful and appropriate way in assessing the extent to which their learning goals are being achieved.

9. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Effectiveness of the DEIS planning framework

- The findings of this evaluation indicate that a systematic planning process for school improvement comprising target-setting, the implementation of appropriate strategies and interventions to achieve the targets set, the monitoring of progress, and the review of targets in the light of progress is very necessary in DEIS schools. The findings also show that the DEIS planning framework is generally fit for purpose in the context of the DEIS action plan.
- Where there were strengths in each of the component DEIS planning processes, progress and improvements in relation to the relevant DEIS theme were generally made.
- There are components of the DEIS planning process of relevance to all schools, particularly in the context of literacy and numeracy. It is therefore recommended that the DEIS planning framework be made available to all schools (DEIS and non-DEIS) to assist them in their school development planning and school self-evaluation processes. Grounding the DEIS action plan within the school development planning and school self-evaluation processes enables the school improvement process to happen in a coherent, integrated way.
- To assist schools and teachers in implementing the component phases of the process, it is recommended that guidance be provided at system level through the Inspectorate, the support services and education centres. In addition, appropriate additional supports for school planning and school self-evaluation incorporating the DEIS planning framework should be developed. These supports should include hard-copy materials, on-line resources and multi-media presentations.

9.2 Target-setting challenges and supports

- There was evidence of some variation among schools in relation to how they approached target-setting, a particularly important component of the DEIS planning process. In many schools it was evident that improvements in target-setting, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy, were required.
- Effective target-setting practices in schools involve the following critical components:
 - close examination and analysis of literacy and numeracy information and data, including assessment records, to identify the needs of pupils at whole-school level, year and class level, specific group level and individual level
 - a clear link between information on pupils' learning and the targets set for their learning at individual, class and school level, taking account of pupils' attainment and progress, needs and abilities
 - the accommodation of the literacy and numeracy needs of all pupils throughout the range of ability levels
 - a clear and meaningful link between the targets set and what happens in classrooms and other learning settings in the school, a critical issue here being the extent to which curriculum delivery, teaching approaches, interventions and strategies are purposefully planned and used to give effect to the targets
- The variation evident in how schools approached target-setting suggests a need for clear guidance with regard to this component of the planning process. In this context, guidance in relation to assessment and the use of assessment information is important. The evaluation findings suggest, as was suggested in *Incidental Inspection*

*Findings 2010*⁶, that there is a weakness in school expertise in the monitoring of pupils' progress in learning and how information arising from the assessment of pupils' learning can be used to set learning targets and to plan and provide suitable learning activities and experiences. The findings point to the need for many schools to take greater account of the NCCA guidelines on assessment, including both summative and formative assessment. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, published in July 2011, provides a comprehensive framework for the development of much better assessment practice in schools.

- The DEIS action plan recognises the importance of parents' involvement in target-setting as well as the importance of their involvement in actions based on those targets in the context of improving their children's learning. This evaluation underscores the necessity for schools to achieve and maintain effective communication with parents so that practical, effective parental involvement in the component phases of the DEIS planning process can be maximised.
- At a system level, the provision of materials and supports to schools to enable them to collate, analyse and use assessment data effectively is important.

9.3 Coordination and integration of DEIS strategies and interventions

- There is much evidence that schools are implementing interventions and strategies to support the DEIS themes. This indicates a willingness on the part of schools to engage with available supports. Although the evaluation model did not include detailed inquiry into the quality of delivery of interventions, the inspection evidence generally points to a need for greater integration and coordination of interventions within schools. Specifically, there is a need for many schools to consider more fully:
 - how appropriately strategies and interventions (including specific DEIS programmes, for example, *Reading Recovery*, *Maths for Fun*, *First Steps*) are used by them to realise their specific targets
 - the extent to which strategies and interventions are coherently integrated in classroom teaching programmes rather than being separate, disconnected, add-on measures that are simply provided for individuals or groups of pupils
 - the extent to which mainstream classroom personnel and support personnel work in an integrated and coordinated way to achieve literacy and numeracy targets
 - ways of customising or drawing on elements of programmes or initiatives to meet the school's particular DEIS targets and pupil learning needs
- It is timely to look very closely at how stand-alone literacy and numeracy strategies can be fully integrated into a whole-school literacy and numeracy approach. Further, there needs to be a clear focus on how the key role of the classroom teacher can connect with national and school objectives for literacy and numeracy and can ensure consistent delivery across the curriculum.
- Integration and co-ordination questions arise also at a system level. For example, in the context of promoting attendance and promoting partnership with parents, there is some overlap in the roles of SCP personnel and HSCL personnel. It is important that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and that unnecessary duplication is avoided. There may be opportunities to make one or more of these supports responsible for particular duties and, where appropriate, to promote cooperation and collaborative working to ensure that targets regarding attendance and partnership with parents and others are achieved as effectively and as efficiently as possible. The recent inclusion of SCP and HSCL services within the operational remit of the NEWB offers opportunities for the streamlining of the delivery of these services.

⁶ *Incidental Inspection Findings 2010: A Report on the Teaching and Learning of English and Mathematics in Primary Schools*, Department of Education and Skills 2010.

9.4 Availability of data

- The positive findings in relation to attendance, retention and progression are encouraging. Schools appear to be making good progress in improving the attendance levels of targeted groups of pupils. Schools reported very positive rates of retention throughout the primary school and of progression to second level. However, it must be noted that these findings are based on self reporting by schools. In order to facilitate further analysis of primary pupil attendance, retention and progression, the availability of data at system level drawing on NEWB data and data available to the Department generally would be beneficial.
- Further, the availability at system level, of data relevant to the DEIS themes of literacy and numeracy that would allow schools to benchmark their progress and effectiveness against other schools (both DEIS and non-DEIS) would help schools in bringing about school improvement through both the DEIS planning process and school self-evaluation processes more generally. The better availability of assessment data as provided for in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy will facilitate this development.

9.5 Responsibility and accountability

- The core elements of the DEIS planning process are fit for purpose. The process provides a mechanism for schools to identify the needs of learners and a mechanism to meet those needs. It is important that all DEIS schools recognise and accept responsibility for engaging in this process. Leadership in DEIS planning is critical to its success. The evaluation highlights the importance of school leadership in the DEIS planning process. This includes leadership at board of management, principal and in-school management levels. Professional responsibility for engaging in and supporting the DEIS planning process at individual teacher level is also critical.
- To ensure that all schools have purposeful planning processes in place and transparent accountability in respect of progress, there is a need for greater clarity about what the requirement to engage in DEIS planning means in the context of the whole-school and the individual classroom. In addition to the DEIS planning framework being made available to all DEIS schools, the accountability expectations regarding the requirement to engage in the DEIS planning process should be made clear. In particular, schools should be informed that planning for all DEIS themes is required and that planning for improvements in literacy and numeracy is core for all schools. Where specific initiatives are available to schools, including initiatives for literacy and numeracy, it is recommended that schools be required to outline how those initiatives will support the specific, clearly defined learning needs of their pupils and how they will be used to achieve the measurable targets they have set for improvement.
- Finally, lines of accountability in respect of DEIS need to be developed from school through to system level so that there is a clear oversight of the work of DEIS schools with regard to bringing about improvements in children's learning.

9.6 Appendix 1: DEIS themes and planning processes

| DEIS Evaluation Framework | | DEIS Planning Process | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| | | Targets and data | Strategies and interventions | Implementation and impact | Progress |
| DEIS Objectives | Attendance | | | | |
| | Retention | | | | |
| | Progression | | | | |
| | Literacy | | | | |
| | Numeracy | | | | |
| | Partnership | | | | |

Appendix 2: Guide to quality descriptors

| Ratings | Targets and data | Interventions and strategies | Implementation and impact | Progress |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Significant strengths | School has used available data very effectively to identify specific areas as priorities for improvement and development. Realistic and achievable targets have been set. Roles and responsibility for all targets have been suitably assigned. Appropriate timescale and success criteria have been named. | All interventions and strategies offered are assessed to ascertain their suitability to the target groups or school. Suitable whole-school or relevant interventions or strategies are identified and named for all or targeted pupils. All staff aware of interventions and strategies and familiar with their aims and purpose. Identified strategies and interventions are fit for purpose and very relevant to school population. | Appropriate CPD is provided for all relevant staff to ensure successful implementation of intervention or strategy and achievement of targets. There is evidence of a whole-school focus on achievement of targets and the implementation of interventions. Agreed strategies and interventions are familiar to all teachers, pupils and other relevant personnel and are effectively implemented. There is evidence of very good use of data to identify baseline measures and to determine success. | All relevant staff are familiar with how progress will be measured. Data is available and well used in measuring progress made towards targets. Expertise in data analysis is available and well used in the school or CPD provided in this regard. There is clear evidence of progress made in targeted area or target has been reviewed in light of experience and more realistic target set. All relevant staff are well informed about whole-school progress, including revised targets, in relation to targets, interventions or strategies. |
| Strengths outweigh weaknesses | Priorities have been identified and many are based on available data. Targets are realistic. Success criteria are available for most targets. Some roles have been assigned and timescales are included for most targets. | Relevant interventions and strategies have been identified or the school refers to the whole-school strategic plan when accepting interventions. Most staff are familiar with interventions and strategies. Strategies and interventions relevant to some target groups have been identified. | CPD has been provided to ensure implementation of most interventions. There is a whole-school approach to most interventions and strategies. Most relevant personnel are familiar with targets and strategies and these are clear to many pupils and parents. Data is used effectively in some instances for measuring progress. Interventions are well implemented and impact is checked at some class or group levels. | Some staff, including principal, are familiar with success criteria for set targets. Levels of progress are measured, noted and familiar to relevant personnel in almost all cases. Some pupils and parents are aware of their own levels of progress in targeted areas. Levels of progress are used to inform future planning and to alter targets if necessary. |
| Weaknesses outweigh strengths | Targets are not clear either because they have not been set or they are vague. Data are not used or not available and therefore targets are unrealistic. Little attention has been given to roles and responsibility. Only the three year timescale has been set but no success criteria has been identified. | School has too many or too few interventions and strategies to serve the needs of targeted groups or all pupils. Most staff are not familiar with specific purpose of each intervention and strategy. Principal has no overview of all interventions and strategies in use in the school. | Interventions and strategies are not clearly understood and therefore not correctly or appropriately implemented. Interventions and strategies are not serving the needs of targeted groups. Only specific teachers or personnel (e.g. SEN, SCP) are implementing strategy intended as a whole-school strategy. Little or no attention is paid to impact of strategy or achievement of target. | Little evidence of targets being measured or success criteria being applied. Any progress made is only familiar to teaching staff directly involved or those most closely involved. Progress on targets is not a whole-school issue. Principal is not familiar with progress made or with measures used to ascertain progress. |
| Significant weaknesses | Broad targets only (as listed for DEIS) or no targets have been set or identified. Data are not used or analysed, no named person has responsibility for monitoring implementation, and no timescales have been set. | Teachers use interventions and strategies to suit their own purpose or there is no evidence of any specific strategies for priority areas or target groups. Interventions are not being applied as required. | No evidence of strategies in classrooms of other settings (SCP, SEN, HSCL) to overcome elements of educational disadvantage associated with DEIS targets or interventions. Targeted groups are not identified by individual teachers. Little or no attention is paid to progress in any areas identified in the DEIS action plan. | No record or evidence of any progress in area prioritised or any area identified in the DEIS action plan. Targets for interventions are not known or identified. No progress has been made on any targets or with any interventions and yet no revised targets have been identified. |

