INTERIM REPORT ON THE EVALUATION OF THE BREAKING THE CYCLE SCHEME IN RURAL SCHOOLS

Susan Weir & Catherine Ryan

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Educational Research Centre
St Patrick's College, Dublin

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

A preliminary report on the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme in rural schools was presented to the Department of Education and Science in 1998 (Eivers and Weir, 1998). It contained data on participating schools, teachers and pupils prior to the introduction of the scheme, and thus, presented baseline data against which the scheme's impact on participants could subsequently be assessed.

In contrast, the main purpose of this interim report is to present data obtained from schools, teachers and cluster co-ordinators on the operation of *Breaking the Cycle* over the first three years of its existence. Data for this report were gathered in a variety of ways using interviews and questionnaires, as well as archival methods. Informal interviews conducted with school personnel during visits to schools provided the information contained in Section 2 of the report. The focus of the interviews was on principals' and teachers' perceptions of how the scheme was operating in practice and on its effect on pupils.

Section 3 is based on questionnaire responses provided by cluster co-ordinators. In a series of multiple-choice and open-ended items, co-ordinators were asked for their views on the scheme as a whole and its administration, on their own work, and on the 'role' of co-ordinator. The fourth and fifth sections focus on the Junior Cycle completion rates and Junior Certificate Examination performance of pupils who received their primary education in *Breaking the Cycle* schools prior to the introduction of the scheme. These data provide baseline data with which the Junior Cycle completion rates and performance of pupils who have participated in the scheme will be compared. Data for this section were collected using archival methods: every pupil who was in 6th class in a *Breaking the Cycle* primary school in 1993/94 was matched to the Department of Education and Science's Junior Certificate databases in 1997 (and 1998) (a) to ascertain whether they sat the JCE, and (b) to examine their achievements.

Sections 6 and 7 contain information from school principals and teachers on their perceptions of the scheme over the first few years of its operation. Data on home-school links, attendance rates and psychological assessments since the scheme's inception are also presented in this section. The final section contains conclusions derived from the present report and outlines future activities of the evaluation.

2. VISITS TO RURAL SCHOOLS

Six of the 25 rural school clusters were selected for school visits during May 1998. Twenty-one of the 29 schools in the clusters were visited. In selecting clusters and schools to visit, an attempt was made to represent different geographical areas within the rural component of *Breaking the Cycle*. To this end, the clusters were composed of one inland landlocked cluster, two coastal clusters in the West, and three border clusters. The schools also represented schools of various sizes, from single-teacher schools to four-teacher schools.

When visiting each cluster, contact was first made with the co-ordinator, and his or her opinions on the scheme were sought. Following this, the researchers met the school principal and (typically) all of the teachers in the school. In a small number of schools, the researchers were introduced to the pupils, who were asked about activities they had engaged in that were funded by the special projects grant.

2.1 FEEDBACK FROM CO-ORDINATORS

In general, co-ordinators were positive about *Breaking the Cycle*. They felt that the scheme was worthwhile and was having a positive effect on the educational experiences of pupils. The most frequently mentioned positive points were the extra finances allocated (allowing the purchase of equipment) and increased home-school links. Most also thought that pupils were benefiting from the small group and individual attention that the co-ordinator was able to provide. The main negative features of *Breaking the Cycle* mentioned were lack of organisation (particularly at the initial stages) of the scheme, lack of role definition for co-ordinators and, in a small number of schools, lack of support from principals, teachers, or the Board of Management. All co-ordinators mentioned lack of time as a problem. The issues raised are explained in more detail in the next few paragraphs.

Most co-ordinators felt that the extra equipment and materials purchased with *Breaking the Cycle* funds were particularly helpful. Equipment purchases were quite varied (e.g., Letterland, toy libraries, Mathematics games, paired reading books) but

tended to be aimed at junior, and even pre-school, classes. In general, co-ordinators reported that the new equipment was helping to get parents more involved in their children's education: encouraging children to bring home books and games at the weekend had resulted in parents having a better understanding of their children's schoolwork, and a greater involvement in their children's schooling. Indeed, the co-ordinators felt that the children's enthusiasm for the new equipment and games meant that *they* were making their parents become involved in their education.

Many schools had initiated a paired reading programme, but the success of these programmes varied considerably. In some schools it had proven very popular, and there was a perception that reading skills had improved. However, in other schools, parental interest had tapered off very quickly and the programme had virtually ceased. Co-ordinators believed that the programme was not successful in schools where principals and/or teachers did not give it their full support, or where parents were insufficiently trained in paired reading skills.

In an attempt to get parents more involved in school activities and their children's education, many schools had run some courses for parents (often the first time such a course was organised in the school). The majority of these courses were organised (and sometimes presented) by the co-ordinator. Typical courses included 'Fás le chéile' (a parenting course), basic computer skills, paired reading and anti-drugs advice. On average, these courses were well attended, and usually included a small number of parents who had not previously involved themselves in school activities. Fathers were likely to have attended such courses, but did not participate in courses such as craftwork and art. Courses were often run at night, as many schools had no space to accommodate parents during the school day. Due to falling enrolments, some schools had an empty classroom that they had converted into a general purposes and a parents' room, while other schools had converted cloakrooms or blocked off a section of the hallway to create space for parents. However, many schools found it difficult to bring parents into the school, as they had no available space.

Home visits were an important feature of the co-ordinator's work. All (with the exception of one co-ordinator, who was employed as a substitute) had visited

homes of pupils. Co-ordinators reported that they tended to visit all homes, and some visited the disadvantaged homes more frequently than other homes. None focused exclusively on homes of disadvantaged pupils. All co-ordinators emphasised that home visits in rural areas are quite different from those in urban areas. There was a perception that singling out the parents of disadvantaged pupils would further marginalise the family within the community (as neighbours would know the houses visited by the co-ordinator). Most co-ordinators made a distinction between 'poor' and 'educationally disadvantaged' families. Some of the pupils that were considered educationally disadvantaged were from reasonably well-off families, yet their families placed little value on education and had a history of early school leaving.

In general, home visits were seen as worthwhile. Parents were typically polite and willing to discuss their children with the co-ordinator. The co-ordinators felt that the majority of parents were more willing to come to the school following home visits. A minority of parents had proven difficult to contact, and had not made themselves available for home visits. In such cases, co-ordinators had tried to talk to the parents when they dropped their children at school. Overall, co-ordinators had established contact with the majority of parents. Some co-ordinators felt that home visits were not particularly helpful, as parents in their cluster were already quite involved in their children's education. Furthermore, in smaller schools (e.g., with five or six sets of parents), spending a large proportion of time at home visiting would be perceived as overly intrusive. These co-ordinators felt that their time would be better spent working with pupils.

Apart from organising courses and home visits, much of co-ordinators' time was spent in small group or individual activities with children. While in some cases this consisted of special classes (e.g., where the aim was work on pupils' self-esteem), much of the time was spent on remediation. Co-ordinators were aware that this was not intended to be the main feature of their role, but were also conscious of the expectations of teachers, and of the fact that the schools had little or no access to a remedial teacher. Some mentioned that they felt uncomfortable engaging in remedial teaching, given that they were not trained as remedial teachers. Despite this, they felt that almost all pupils had made significant improvements due to the extra attention.

Most co-ordinators thought that their role had been inadequately defined at the start of the scheme. They felt that the role was too broad and that one person could not fulfil all the features of the role for four or five schools. Most importantly, they felt that principals and teachers were expecting a remedial-type post (co-ordinators were initially told they were not to engage in remedial teaching, then told that they could do *some*). Many wondered if they were doing the right type of work and would have welcomed more guidance. There was a perception that where differences of opinion arose with principals or teachers as to what work was appropriate for co-ordinators, the co-ordinator would be in a stronger position if they had a more defined role. A small number of co-ordinators were unsure about the flexibility of their working hours. Some of the work they did could only be done after school hours, yet some teachers were unhappy if the co-ordinator was not in a school for the duration of the normal school day.

According to co-ordinators, principals and teachers had not all been welcoming at the beginning of the scheme, as they would have preferred more remediation or an extra assistant. However, over the course of the school year, appreciation for the work of the co-ordinator seemed to grow. A small number of principals were proving difficult to deal with, and were perceived as being unsupportive of the co-ordinator's work. In a few cases, the Board of Management had blocked initiatives planned by the co-ordinator.

The other main complaint raised by co-ordinators was lack of time. They felt that much of their time after school hours was taken up with their job (e.g., courses and meeting parents) and that they had too many schools in their cluster. Many wondered how effective it was to spend only one day per week in a school, and thought that smaller clusters would be more effective. Finally, as some schools had no extra space, it was difficult for co-ordinators to work in these schools. In extreme situations, co-ordinators worked in school hallways or cloakrooms. Despite these difficulties, the co-ordinators were enthusiastic about the scheme, and showed great energy and commitment to their work.

2.2 FEEDBACK FROM PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

In the majority of schools visited, the principals appeared to be very pleased that the researchers had chosen to visit their schools. Most principals and teachers were happy to be participating in *Breaking the Cycle*. In particular, the extra equipment grant and the special projects grant were viewed as greatly beneficial. Most also described the co-ordinator as a great asset, and a small number stated that the development of a school plan was very beneficial to the school. A majority were unhappy with both the frequency and content of incareer development days, and some felt aggrieved that co-ordinators had more incareer development days than did teachers and principals. Some expressed considerable annoyance that, having been recognised as a disadvantaged school, they then lost (or are threatened with losing) a teacher. A small number of principals felt that they were not sufficiently aware of, or involved in, their co-ordinator's activities, while all complained about limited or nonexistent access to remediation. These opinions are described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Teachers and principals all expressed satisfaction with the extra funding they received due to participation in *Breaking the Cycle*. Many said they could already see improvements in children as a result of new equipment such as Mathematics games and more interesting reading material. A good deal of the equipment and materials grant was spent on books, as many schools had a very small supply of books prior to the scheme. However, teachers frequently indicated that the extra equipment only brought them up to the normal equipment levels for schools. Due to the disadvantaged nature of the families served, small school size and geographical isolation, schools did not have equipment that would be standard in most schools. For example, a number of the schools were so isolated that they were not served by a mobile public library facility. As a result, much of their equipment grant was spent on library books. In general, schools used the extra materials to benefit all pupils, not just ones considered to be disadvantaged.

Teachers indicated that the special projects and out-of-school activities were very popular among pupils and that the funding for this purpose provided pupils with opportunities that many would otherwise never have had. Usually activities were

subsidised for the entire school as teachers did not want to single out disadvantaged pupils from their classmates. Most teachers commented that if they had organised out-of-school activities prior to this, disadvantaged pupils were unlikely to participate, whereas with activities subsidised, participation rates were much higher. The types of out-of-school activities most frequently organised were swimming lessons, dance or music lessons and theatre visits or school trips. Almost all pointed out that due to geographical isolation, out-of-school activities were extremely expensive to organise (due to high transport costs) and would not have been feasible without *Breaking the Cycle* funding. Teachers indicated that those activities that took place outside the school were particularly beneficial, as they allowed pupils to mix with people from outside their normal circle. This was perceived to be important because pupils from small schools had a very limited social circle.

Similarly, some teachers welcomed the presence of the co-ordinator in the school, as it provided the opportunity for pupils to work with an adult other than their normal teacher. This was perceived as particularly important in single-teacher schools. A number of teachers mentioned that where they had difficulty with a pupil, it was a great help to have another teacher take a fresh approach to the pupil and offer another perspective. In general, the co-ordinator was perceived as a welcome addition to the school. The home-school links were seen as having improved since the start of *Breaking the Cycle*, primarily as a result of the co-ordinator's efforts.

Many teachers welcomed the remedial work being done by co-ordinators. However, almost all teachers complained about lack of remedial assistance for their pupils. Many of the schools had no access to a remedial teacher, while none felt their remedial service was adequate to meet the needs of their pupils. A number of teachers said that while they appreciated the work of the co-ordinator, they would have preferred adequate levels of access to the services of a remedial teacher. A small number of principals indicated that they did not feel sufficiently informed of the co-ordinator's activities. They would have preferred if a co-ordinator's plan of action had been developed for their school, rather than deciding on a week-by-week basis (as they perceived it) what was to be done.

Almost all teachers emphasised the difficulties in targeting disadvantaged pupils when engaging in multi-grade teaching. Most felt quite strongly that the scheme did not make adequate provision for multi-grade classes. Reference was frequently made to the reduction of class sizes in junior classes in urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools. Teachers felt it was unfair that, while urban junior class sizes were at a maximum of 15 pupils, they were teaching up to double that number of pupils, and in a multi-grade situation.

Class size was the issue about which most discontent was expressed. Most principals had hoped, when applying for selection, that class sizes would be reduced, and that they would become designated as disadvantaged schools (with lower pupil-teacher ratios). Instead, some schools had actually lost a teacher since the introduction of the scheme because their enrolment had fallen below the minimum required to retain a teacher. It is hardly surprising that teachers in these schools had some strong comments to make about the perceived lack of logic in the Department of Education and Science's handling of their situation.

Almost all teachers complained about the extra paperwork resulting from participation in *Breaking the Cycle*. They felt that this work had to be done after school hours and that no allowance had been made for this. Neither had time been allocated for ongoing school planning, or even for meeting with the co-ordinator to discuss their work. Some made the point that the co-ordinator was less likely to be effective if the teachers never met with him or her. In some clusters, teachers had meetings once a term with all the other teachers in the cluster, and all found the meetings very helpful. However, the meetings were not initiated as a result of *Breaking the Cycle*, but preceded the introduction of the scheme. Many of the teachers outside these clusters expressed the wish to have cluster meetings, but again, did not feel they should be held after school hours.

A common complaint related to the lack of inservice training for teaching staff in *Breaking the Cycle* schools. Some co-ordinators had organised courses for teachers within their clusters, and while these were popular, some teachers felt that their weekends should not be taken up with work-related courses. Most felt that they would benefit from more inservice, particularly if the content were more relevant to a rural model. There was a feeling among many that the material presented on disadvantage

during *Breaking the Cycle* inservice courses was based on an urban model and that, therefore, it was not relevant to rural teachers.

Most teachers felt that the scheme was not fully thought through before it began. They felt they were not given a full understanding of what participation meant (e.g., pupil-teacher ratios were not to be decreased). Most thought that the role of co-ordinator was ill-defined at the start of the scheme. Initially, the co-ordinators were instructed not to do remedial work with pupils, but this was soon changed to allow some remedial work. Many thought that the time allocated to home visits by the co-ordinator was excessive, and that they would have been better utilised in schools. There was a degree of uncertainty about how extra money could be spent, and some complained that they were told not to buy computers (often the main piece of equipment they wished to purchase). Other schools simply purchased computers and hoped that it would be accepted by those in charge of the scheme.

Teachers wanted to know if what they were doing was correct, and also, how the scheme was faring in other areas of the country. Many asked if they could get a copy of the evaluation report. A common grievance was that there was no information about what was happening in the scheme as a whole. A few commented that when they telephoned the Department and said that they had a query about the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme, the telephonists did not know where to direct their calls. For them, this typified the perceived lack of information about, and awareness of, the scheme. In general, teachers wanted more support and information from those in charge of the scheme. The most commonly asked questions were about the future of the scheme (whether or not schools would lose the extra funding at the end of the pilot phase) and about how the scheme as a whole was faring.

2.3 FEEDBACK FROM PUPILS

In some schools, pupils were asked for their opinions about the extra activities they took part in as a result of *Breaking the Cycle*. Pupils were overwhelmingly positive about the new activities. They enjoyed the activities themselves and the opportunities to meet new people. In general, pupils in the schools were polite and well disciplined, although

a little shy when faced with visitors. They seemed to enjoy school, and this was reflected in the high attendance rates in almost all of the schools. In the majority of schools, there was a positive and relaxed atmosphere and a feeling of being in a little community (although obviously, describing school atmosphere is very subjective and difficult to assess). A small number of pupils were described by teachers as being difficult, either behaviourally or because they were having great difficulty with their schoolwork. These pupils tended to stand out during class visits, and their classmates seemed to recognise that they were 'difficult'.

3. THE RURAL CO-ORDINATORS

Questionnaires were posted to all co-ordinators in the rural component of the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme (*N*=25) in early June 1998. The questionnaires were designed to elicit information on the co-ordinators' role, experiences, and views on the operation of the scheme. Interviews with co-ordinators during school visits (described in the previous section) helped to identify areas of enquiry for the questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 36 items, some of which had more than one part. While some of the questionnaire items could be readily answered, others required respondents to reflect on their attitudes and experiences. Sixteen items required the respondent to read a statement or question, and to respond by ticking one of a set of related response options. Eight further items required values to be entered in boxes (e.g., to indicate the percentage of time spent on various tasks). The remaining items were open-ended, and required the co-ordinator to provide a written response to a question. For economy of reporting, all responses to open-ended items have been grouped into categories based of the kind of response given. These categories are used in tables of results in this section, but are accompanied by examples of verbatim responses which serve to illustrate the kinds of answers given by individual co-ordinators.

Ten questionnaires were returned to the Educational Research Centre by the due date. Follow-up phone calls to those who had not returned questionnaires resulted in all co-ordinators eventually returning completed questionnaires, providing 25 questionnaires for analysis.

3.1 THE ROLE AND WORK OF THE CO-ORDINATOR

The first questionnaire item required co-ordinators to indicate the number of schools in their cluster. The vast majority of co-ordinators had five schools (*n*=19), while four had four, and two had six schools. Responses to an item asking when co-ordinators commenced their work on *Breaking the Cycle* revealed that all 25 co-ordinators had taken up their posts in January 1997. Thus, each of the respondents had about one and a half years of experience in the co-ordinator's role.

The next set of items related specifically to the co-ordinator's role. First, co-ordinators were asked to indicate, by ticking one of five response options (from "very clearly" to "not at all clearly"), how clearly they thought their role was defined at the start of the scheme. Only one co-ordinator agreed that the role had been very clearly defined, while 15 respondents indicated either that it was not very, or not at all, clearly defined (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Number and percentage of co-ordinators indicating the extent to which they thought that their role was clearly defined at the start of the scheme (*N*=24).

Very clearly	**Fairly clearly**	**Unsure**	**Not very clearly**	**Not at all clearly**
n=1 (4.2%)	*n*=5 (20.8%)	*n*=3 (12.5%)	*n*=11 (45.8%)	*n*=4 (16.7%)

Co-ordinators were asked to indicate the extent of the difference (if any) between their own perception of their role and that of the principal in each of the schools in their cluster. The majority reported that there was not a major discrepancy between their perception and that of principals (Table 3.2). However, while 51.6% of the responses indicated that the perceptions of the principal and co-ordinator were not different, one response in three (33.6%) indicated that the role was perceived differently by principals and co-ordinators.

Table 3.2. Co-ordinators' ratings of the extent of the difference between their perception of their role and that of the principals in each of the schools[1] in their cluster.

	Very different	**Fairly different**	**Unsure**	**Not very different**	**Not at all different**
School 1 (*N*=25)	*n*=1	*n*=8	*n*=2	*n*=6	*n*=8
School 2 (*N*=25)	*n*=3	*n*=6	*n*=2	*n*=11	*n*=3
School 3 (*N*=25)	*n*=3	*n*=5	*n*=6	*n*=10	*n*=1
School 4 (*N*=24)	*n*=1	*n*=7	*n*=5	*n*=7	*n*=4
School 5 (*N*=21)	*n*=2	*n*=4	*n*=2	*n*=7	*n*=6
School 6 (*N*=2)	——	*n*=1	*n*=1	——	——
Total (across all schools)	*n*=10 (8.2%)	*n*=31 (25.4%)	*n*=18 (14.8%)	*n*=41 (33.6%)	*n*=22 (18.0%)

[1]The numbering of schools from 1 – 6 is arbitrary, and was designed to encourage co-ordinators to think of each of their schools in turn when completing the item.

The response patterns of individual co-ordinators were examined to check for the operation of response sets (i.e., to see if some respondents consistently replied that their perceptions were either the same or different from those of the principal in each of their schools). This revealed that 7 co-ordinators consistently reported that their perception was not at all, or not very, different from principals, 5 co-ordinators consistently responded that their perception was fairly, or very different, while the responses of the majority of co-ordinators (*n*=13) were mixed. It seems, therefore, that in 18 of the 25 clusters, co-ordinators reported that principals' perceptions of the co-ordinator's role were different from theirs. This signals a breakdown or failure in communication, the source of which may be at Departmental, co-ordinator or principal level.

In an open-ended item which followed, co-ordinators were asked to describe the nature of the differences, if any, between their perception of their role and that of principals. Twenty co-ordinators completed this item. The most common source of difference concerned the co-ordinators' work with parents: nine co-ordinators believed that principals thought that they spent too much time with parents (Table 3.3). A further seven reported that one or more principals in their cluster expected them to fulfil the role of resource teacher. For example, one co-ordinator wrote:

> **"Two of my principals are adamant that they wanted 'resource teachers' for their schools. They insist on making me fulfil that role by making me work with groups of children all day long."**

Other differences mentioned by co-ordinators include the fact that principals wanted a remedial teacher rather than a co-ordinator (*n*=3), and that principals placed little or no value on the co-ordinator's work (*n*=3). Seven attributed the discrepancies between their own perception of their role and that of principals to a lack of understanding of the role of co-ordinator on the part of principals.

Table 3.3. Number and percentage of co-ordinators indicating the nature of the differences between their perception of their role and that of the principals in their cluster (*N*=20[1]).

Type of response	**Number**	**%**
Principals think that the co-ordinator spends too much time doing work with parents	9	45.0%
Principals expect the co-ordinator to be a resource teacher / to fill in for absent teachers	7	35.0%
Principals' lack understanding of the co-ordinator's role	7	35.0%
Principals expect co-ordinators to be remedial teachers	3	15.0%
Principals place low or no value on the work of the co-ordinator	3	15.0%
Other (e.g., principals expect immediate results from home visits by the co-ordinator)	5	25.0%

[1]Numbers sum to greater than 20 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response

To assess whether differences in role perception existed between *teachers* and co-ordinators, co-ordinators were also asked to rate the extent of the difference between their own perception of their role and that of the teachers in their cluster (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Co-ordinators' ratings of the extent of the difference between their perception of their role and that of the teachers in each of the schools[1] in their cluster.

	Very different	**Fairly different**	**Unsure**	**Not very different**	**Not at all different**
School 1 (*N*=25)	——	*n*=6	*n*=2	*n*=10	*n*=7
School 2 (*N*=25)	*n*=1	*n*=3	*n*=5	*n*=13	*n*=3
School 3 (*N*=25)	*n*=2	*n*=6	*n*=5	*n*=10	*n*=2
School 4 (*N*=25)	*n*=2	*n*=5	*n*=4	*n*=10	*n*=4
School 5 (*N*=21)	*n*=1	*n*=4	*n*=3	*n*=10	*n*=3
School 6 (*N*=2)	——	*n*=1	*n*=1	——	——
Total (across all schools)	*n*=6 (4.9%)	*n*=25 (20.3%)	*n*=20 (16.3%)	*n*=53 (43.1%)	*n*=19 (15.4%)

[1]The numbering of schools from 1 – 6 is arbitrary, and was designed to encourage co-ordinators to think of each of their schools in turn when completing the item.

Just over one-quarter of co-ordinators' responses across all schools indicated that teachers' perceptions were considered to be different from their own. However, more than half (58.5%) of responses suggested that teachers' perceptions were not very, or not at all different, from those of the co-ordinators themselves. The response patterns of individual co-ordinators were examined to check for the operation of response sets. This revealed that 11 co-ordinators considered their perception to be not at all, or not very, different from teachers in each of their schools, 2 co-ordinators consistently responded that their perception was fairly, or very different, 1 was unsure in each case, while the responses of 11 co-ordinators were mixed. It seems, therefore, in 13 of the 25 clusters, co-ordinators reported that teachers' perceptions of the co-ordinator's role were different from theirs. While this is not as dramatic a discrepancy as that between co-ordinators and principals, it could serve as further evidence of communication failures at the level of the Department of Education and Science, the co-ordinator or the school staff.

Co-ordinators were asked, where appropriate, to briefly describe the nature of differences. Fourteen respondents provided answers to this question. Six of the answers were individualistic and difficult to classify, and so the "other" category was used to categorise these responses. For example, one co-ordinator wrote:

"I like to think of myself as a support to teachers, not a threat. I hoped that I would have been seen as an extra help, not someone who highlights another's shortcomings."

Aside from such responses, the most common type of answer related to teachers' failure to understand the co-ordinator's role. According to one co-ordinator:

"Teachers do not fully understand the [co-ordinator's] role due to lack of inservice".

As was the case with some principals, some teachers also expected co-ordinators to be resource teachers:

"The teachers in multiple class situations want me to take, for example, infant groups, while they work with 1st and 2nd, or to teach art, music etc. while they do, for example, maths, with the other half of the room."

Table 3.5. Number and percentage of co-ordinators indicating the nature of the differences between their perception of their own role and that of the teachers in their cluster (*N*=14[1]).

Type of response	**Number**	**%**
Teachers lack understanding of the co-ordinator's role	5	35.7%
Teachers expect the co-ordinator to be a resource teacher and to fill in for absent teachers	3	21.4%
Teachers expect the co-ordinator to be remedial teachers	2	14.3%
Teachers feel threatened by parental involvement	2	14.3%
Other (e.g., teachers view co-ordinator as a threat)	6	42.9%

[1]Numbers sum to greater than 14 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response

Overall, it appears that co-ordinators differed less from teachers than they did from principals in their perception of the co-ordinator's role: while 33.6% of principals were judged by co-ordinators to hold different views of the role from themselves, only 25.2% of teachers did so (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6. Numbers and percentages of co-ordinators indicating the extent of the differences between their perception of their own role and that of principals and teachers across all schools in their cluster.

Co-ordinators' ratings of….	**Very different**	**Fairly different**	**Unsure**	**Not very different**	**Not at all different**
Principals' perceptions of role (*N*=122)	*n*=10 (8.2%)	*n*=31 (25.4%)	*n*=18 (14.8%)	*n*=41 (33.6%)	*n*=22 (18.0%)
Teachers' perceptions of role (*N*=123)	*n*=6 (4.9%)	*n*=25 (20.3%)	*n*=20 (16.3%)	*n*=53 (43.1%)	*n*=19 (15.4%)

Co-ordinators were asked to describe what they considered to be the main purpose/s of their role. Their responses were coded according to the type of response given (Table 3.7). A universal response among co-ordinators was that they saw their role as facilitating the involvement of parents in their children's education. The next most common type of response related to supporting teachers in their work (56.0%) and developing home-school links (52.0%). Eleven co-ordinators (44.0%) saw enabling

marginalised children to derive the maximum benefit from education as a key feature of their role. Two co-ordinators indicated that they had difficulty describing the main purpose of their role due the changing nature of the role itself. Various individualistic responses were assigned to an "other" category, for example:

"To radiate hope and to be genuine and sincere in all my dealings with parents, teachers and children."

"I am there to help out and encourage people in difficult situations and to acknowledge and affirm them when things are going well."

"To develop a programme and policy of self-esteem and positive attitudes towards work / peer group / teachers in pupils and remind teachers to note and praise all positive behaviour."

Table 3.7. Number and percentage of co-ordinators specifying various main purposes of their role (*N*=25[1]).

Type of response	**Number**	**%**
To facilitate / support parents' involvement in their children's education	25	100%
To support teachers	14	56.0%
To foster home-school links	13	52.0%
To ensure that marginalised children get the maximum from education	11	44.0%
To provide information / organise inservice / administer the scheme in schools / liaise with outside agencies	10	40.0%
Difficult to say due to the changing nature of the co-ordinator's role	2	8.0%
Other (e.g., to help develop targeted skills in children)	9	36.0%

[1]Numbers sum to greater than 25 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response

As the co-ordinator's role involves liaising with outside agencies, respondents were asked to list some of the local / national organisations with which they had been in contact during the 1997/98 school year. The item was open-ended and all co-ordinators gave at least two responses. However, 24 co-ordinators gave three

responses, 20 gave four, 11 gave 5 and three gave six. Thus, it was decided to include up to six responses in the analysis, and the breakdown of responses may be seen in Table 3.8. Twenty-two of the 25 co-ordinators had been in contact with the local Health Board (e.g., to organise parenting courses), 19 had contacted one of their Local Area Partnerships or Local Development Authorities (e.g., to seek financial support for school activities), while almost half of the co-ordinators had approached local theatres, artistic or musical organisations, museums or factories to arrange visits for pupils. Other commonly mentioned contacts were with local teachers' centres (to organise inservice courses for school staffs in the cluster), and with local sporting organisations to arrange training for pupils, or to arrange for pupils to use sporting facilities.

Table 3.8. Number and percentage of co-ordinators listing various local and national agencies with which they had been in contact during the 1997/98 school year (*N*=25[1]).

Agency	**Number**	**%**
Local health board	22	88.0%
Local Development Authority / Area Partnership	19	76.0%
Local theatres / arts and music centres / museums / factories	12	48.0%
Local teachers' Centre	10	40.0%
Local / national sporting organisations	8	32.0%
Local libraries	6	24.0%
VEC	5	20.0%
FÁS	5	20.0%
Local tourist board	3	12.0%
Local / national charities	3	12.0%
Other (e.g., Gardaí to arrange drugs awareness seminar)	15	60.0%

[1]Numbers sum to greater than 25 as up to six responses were coded for each respondent.

To examine how they allocate their time to various activities, they were asked to indicate the approximate percentage of time they spend on each of a variety of activities during a typical school week. As well as giving percentages for the *actual* amount of time, co-ordinators were asked to give the percentage of time they would *ideally* like to spend on each type of activity (Table 3.9).

Table 3.9. Mean percentage of time in a typical week spent by co-ordinators on each of a variety of activities (Actual %), mean percentage of time that co-ordinators would ideally like to spend on each activity (Ideal %), and results of paired sample *t*-tests (*p*-values) between ideal and actual percentages (*N*=23).

Co-ordinator activities	***Actual %*** **(**Mean and *SD*)	***Ideal %*** **(**Mean and *SD*)	***df ; p***
Home visits	14.2% (10.1)	24.9% (9.9)	*df=22; p*<.001
Releasing teachers for home visits	0.4% (0.95)	1.9% (2.1)	*df=22; p*<.005
Devising / implementing extra-curricular activities for pupils	10.2% (7.3)	10.2% (5.0)	*df=22; ns*
Assisting with the development / review of a school plan	4.0% (3.9)	6.4% (4.4)	*df=22; p*<.01
Working with parents to enable them to support their children's educational needs	11.3% (7.6)	16.6% (7.5)	*df=22; p*<.001
Preparing materials for use by teachers	4.3% (5.8)	4.9% (5.1)	*df=22; ns*
Working with teachers to identify their in-career development needs	5.4% (5.0)	6.3% (4.3)	*df=22; ns*
Advising on use of new and existing teaching resources	4.4% (5.0)	4.6% (2.6)	*df=22; ns*
Remedial work with pupils	30.2% (17.8)	13.5% (8.8)	*df=21; p*<.001
School administrative tasks	3.2% (3.8)	1.8% (2.2)	*df=21; ns*
Administrative tasks specific to your work as co-ordinator	6.5% (8.0)	8.4% (5.2)	*df=21; ns*
Total % of time[1]	94.1%	99.5%	

[1]Percentages do not sum to 100 as co-ordinators may engage in activities that are not listed.

An examination of the average actual and ideal percentages furnished by co-ordinators serves to highlight not only the activities to which most time is devoted, but also highlights cases where there is a large discrepancy between the actual amount of time spent on activities and the amount of time perceived as ideal. As Table 3.9 shows, co-ordinators, on average, spent more than twice as much time doing remedial work with pupils as they spent on any other activity. Indeed, almost one-third (30.2%) of their working week was spent doing remedial work with pupils. Furthermore, the actual time spent on this activity is more than double the time thought by co-ordinators to be ideal, and the difference between actual and ideal time spent on remedial teaching is statistically significant.

The next most time-consuming activity for co-ordinators was visiting pupils' homes. While co-ordinators spend an average of 14.2% of their time on this activity, it is significantly less than the collectively suggested ideal of 24.9%. A further 11.3% of time was spent working with parents to enable them to support their children's educational needs, and this too is significantly less than the ideal of 16.6%. About one-tenth of the total time available (10.2%) was spent devising and implementing extra-curricular activities for pupils, which is equal to that which co-ordinators consider to be the ideal. Administrative tasks associated with the role of co-ordinator, on average, occupied a further 6.5% of time, even though co-ordinators have been advised by the Department of Education and Science that they should not engage in such tasks during school hours. However, four respondents added notes to the effect that any administrative tasks associated with their role were undertaken in their own time.

Proportionately smaller amounts of time were spent on other activities. However, comparisons of the actual and ideal percentages of time furnished by respondents reveal that co-ordinators feel that they are spending too little time on certain activities: significant differences exist in relation to time spent assisting with the development or review of the school plan (4.0% of actual time versus the ideal of 6.4%) and time spent releasing teachers for home visits (0.4% of actual time versus the ideal of 1.9%).

In a related question, co-ordinators were asked, in the event of their actual and ideal working being dissimilar, to indicate the main reasons for the disparity. The factors by which co-ordinators were most adversely affected tended to be practical in nature. A

huge majority (96.0%) agreed that time constraints adversely affected their work (Table 3.10). There was also a high level of agreement (with 84.0% of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing) that a lack of flexibility in working hours contributed towards the disparity between their actual and ideal working week. Sixteen co-ordinators agreed that lack of space, or an absence of adequate workspace for themselves, was a problem. Finally, half of all respondents (*n*=12) agreed that lack of access to resources (e.g., telephone, photocopier, computer) contributed towards the disparity between their actual and ideal working week.

Table 3.10. Number and percentage of co-ordinators indicating the extent of their agreement that various factors contributed towards the disparity between their actual and ideal working week.

Disparity exists due to…	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Unsure**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Time constraints (too much to do in the time allotted) (N=25)	*n*=16 (64.0%)	*n*=8 (32.0%)	*n*=1 (4.0%)	_____	_____
Lack of flexibility in working hours (tasks to be done after school hours) (N=25)	*n*=11 (44.0%)	*n*=10 (40.0%)	*n*=2 (8.0%)	*n*=1 (4.0%)	*n*=1 (4.0%)
Financial considerations (not enough money available) (N=25)	*n*=1 (4.0%)	*n*=7 (28.0%)	*n*=8 (32.0%)	*n*=7 (28.0%)	*n*=2 (8.0%)
Parental opposition (N=24)	_____	*n*=3 (12.5%)	_____	*n*=12 (50.0%)	*n*=9 (37.5%)
Too much time spent dealing with concerns of principals and teachers (N=25)	*n*=4 (16.0%)	*n*=4 (16.0%)	*n*=4 (16.0%)	*n*=10 (40.0%)	*n*=3 (12.0%)
Lack of access to resources such as telephone, photocopier, computer (N=24)	*n*=9 (37.5%)	*n*=3 (12.5%)	*n*=1 (4.2%)	*n*=7 (29.2%)	*n*=4 (16.6%)
Lack of space (absence of adequate workspace for you) (N=25)	*n*=13 (52.0%)	*n*=3 (12.0%)	_____	*n*=8 (32.0%)	*n*=1 (4.0%)
One (or more) principals disagrees with your methods (N=25)	*n*=1 (4.0%)	*n*=8 (32.0%)	*n*=7 (28.0%)	*n*=5 (20.0%)	*n*=4 (16.0%)

Although co-ordinators most commonly attributed the disparity between their actual and ideal working week to practical factors, more than one-third agreed that interpersonal factors impacted negatively on their work. Eight co-ordinators (32.0%) agreed that too much of their time was spent dealing with the concerns of principals and teachers, while nine (36.0%) agreed that one or more principals was opposed to their methods.

The next item required co-ordinators to indicate the extent to which they believed each of a variety of factors contributed to, or hindered, the success of *Breaking the Cycle* in the schools in their cluster (Table 3.11).

Table 3.11. Numbers and percentages of co-ordinators indicating the extent to which each of a variety of factors contributed to, or hindered, the success of *Breaking the Cycle* in the schools in their cluster.

	Contributed greatly	**Contributed somewhat**	**No effect / unsure**	**Hindered somewhat**	**Hindered greatly**
Level of support from principals (N=25)	*n*=12 (48.0%)	*n*=8 (32.0%)	_____	*n*=4 (16.0%)	*n*=1 (4.0%)
Level of support from teachers (N=25)	*n*=12 (48.0%)	*n*=9 (36.0%)	*n*=2 (8.0%)	*n*=2 (8.0%)	_____
Flexibility of working hours (N=25)	*n*=3 (12.0%)	*n*=3 (12.0%)	*n*=7 (28.0%)	*n*=9 (36.0%)	*n*=3 (12.0%)
Pupils' response to scheme (N=25)	*n*=21 (84.0%)	*n*=4 (16.0%)	_____	_____	_____
Parental response to scheme (N=25)	*n*=12 (48.0%)	*n*=11 (44.0%)	*n*=2 (8.0%)	_____	_____
Availability of facilities (N=25)	*n*=4 (16.0%)	*n*=6 (24.0%)	*n*=4 (16.0%)	*n*=6 (24.0%)	*n*=5 (20.0%)
Availability of funding (N=24)	*n*=14 (58.3%)	*n*=6 (25.0%)	*n*=2 (8.3%)	*n*=1 (4.2%)	*n*=1 (4.2%)
Co-ordinator training (N=24)	*n*=8 (33.3%)	*n*=13 (54.2%)	*n*=3 (12.5%)	_____	_____
Co-ordinator workload (N=25)	*n*=2 (8.0%)	*n*=1 (4.0%)	_____	*n*=14 (56.0%)	*n*=8 (32.0%)
Overall administration of the scheme (N=25)	*n*=2 (8.0%)	*n*=3 (12.0%)	*n*=4 (16.0%)	*n*=11 (44.0%)	*n*=5 (20.0%)

There was unanimous agreement among co-ordinators that pupils' response to *Breaking the Cycle* contributed to its success (Table 3.11). Twenty-three of the 25 co-ordinators indicated that the response of parents contributed greatly or somewhat to its success, while teachers' and principals' responses were seen as a contributory factor to its success by 21 and 20 respondents respectively. Other factors which were considered to have contributed to the success of the scheme were co-ordinator training (21 respondents) and the availability of funding for the scheme (20 respondents).

There were factors, however, which were seen to hinder the success of the scheme. Twenty-two co-ordinators thought that their workload hindered the success of the scheme, 16 thought the scheme's overall administration was a hindrance, and 12 thought the lack of flexibility of working hours was a hindrance. Eleven co-ordinators indicated that the success of the scheme was hindered by a shortage of facilities. Finally, some respondents elected to specify factors additional to those presented to them in the item. Four co-ordinators mentioned a lack of interest or support for the scheme as a hindrance, although it is unclear from their responses whether the lack of support was experienced at local or departmental level. A further two respondents mentioned the number of schools in the cluster as a hindrance. Lack of access to the national co-ordinator was mentioned by one respondent, and another indicated that the success of the scheme was hindered by a lack of time for planning.

3.2 CO-ORDINATORS' VIEWS ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF *BREAKING THE CYCLE*

Co-ordinators were asked to indicate how clearly they thought the proposed operation of the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme was explained to schools when they joined the scheme (Table 3.12).

As can be seen from Table 3.12, there was considerable agreement among co-ordinators that the operation of *Breaking the Cycle* was inadequately explained to school personnel at the outset of the scheme. Eighteen of the 25 respondents (or 72.0%) disagreed that the scheme was clearly explained. By way of explaining her answer, one co-ordinator

volunteered the following:

"I was not there for the first few meetings, but there appeared to be so much misunderstanding among the principals and teachers, that I can only assume that matters were not very clear."

Whether or not the scheme was clearly explained to participants, it is clear from the responses given by co-ordinators that there was a high level of confusion and misunderstanding about the scheme among staff in participating schools.

Table 3.12. Numbers and percentages of co-ordinators indicating the extent of their agreement that the operation of the scheme was clearly explained to schools when they joined the scheme (*N*=25).

Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
n=1 (4.0%)	*n*=3 (12.0%)	*n*=3 (12.0%)	*n*=9 (36.0%)	*n*=9 (36.0%)

Co-ordinators were also asked for their own views on the administration of *Breaking the Cycle*. In an open-ended item, they were invited to record any comments, positive or negative, on the setting up of the scheme and its administration. Comments made by respondents tended to be negative rather than positive in nature (Table 3.13). A common comment (given by 11 of the 23 who responded) related to lack of clarity about the co-ordinator's role, or about certain aspects of the role that co-ordinators found difficult. The following examples of responses from co-ordinators will serve as illustration:

"I feel strongly that terms of employment with regard to the co-ordinator should have been put in writing and given to manager and co-ordinator before scheme went ahead."

"(*Breaking the Cycle*) is such a new beginning that staffs and principals need yearly clarification of the role of co-ordinator vis-à-vis schools, home, community."

Eleven respondents mentioned a lack of communication from the Department of Education and Science as a negative feature of the scheme. For example:

"When setting up the scheme, those responsible should have done so in consultation with teachers in rural schools. Had this been done, they would now enjoy more co-operation from everyone concerned."

"Teachers were given very little inservice to explain to them how the scheme was to operate. Co-ordinators were given more inservice, but it was left to them to relay the 'inservice message' back to the principals and teachers of the cluster. This is not satisfactory – all teachers need to be on an equal footing with regard to *Breaking the Cycle*, its aims, objectives and how it is to be achieved."

Seven co-ordinators commented on the difficulties arising at the introduction stage of the scheme (e.g., its introduction was rushed) and four respondents suggested that the effectiveness of the scheme was compromised by the relatively large number of schools in each cluster.

Table 3.13. Number and percentage of co-ordinators commenting on various aspects of the administration of *Breaking the Cycle* (*N*=23[1]).

Type of response	Number	%
Lack of clarity / inadequate definition of co-ordinator's role	11	47.8%
Lack of / inadequate communication between Department of Education and Science and those participating in Breaking the Cycle	11	47.8%
Difficulties with the setting up of scheme (the setting up of the scheme was too rushed / scheme should have been introduced at the start of the year rather than mid-year)	7	30.4%
Too many schools per cluster	4	17.4%
Other	7	30.4%

[1]Numbers sum to greater than 23 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response

Finally, co-ordinators were asked three questions about the deployment of extra funding under the scheme. First, they were asked to indicate who had primary responsibility in the schools in their cluster for deciding how the Special Projects Grant was spent. Second, they were asked for any comments they might have on the manner in which the Special Projects Grant was spent, and third, they were asked for any comments they might have on the manner in which the extra capitation grant given to participating schools was spent. The most common response to the first question (*n*=9) was that the co-ordinator and principal had joint responsibility for deciding how to deploy the Special Projects Grant (Table 3.14). Five co-ordinators indicated that the decision-makers varied

depending on the school, and eight indicated that teachers had some involvement. It was unusual for parents or pupils to be involved, but four co-ordinators said that parents were consulted on how the money should be spent, while one said that pupils were also consulted. Finally, in two clusters, principals were considered to be the main decision-makers.

Table 3.14. Number and percentage of co-ordinators specifying the various agents involved in deciding how the Special Projects Grant was spent in the schools in their cluster (*N*=25).

Decision was made by…..	**Number**	**Percentage**
Co-ordinator, in consultation with principal	9	36.0%
Varied depending on the school	5	20.0%
Co-ordinator, principals and teachers	4	16.0%
Co-ordinator, principals, teachers and parents	3	12.0%
Principals, mainly	2	8.0%
Co-ordinator, mainly	1	4.0%
Co-ordinator, principals, teachers, parents and pupils	1	4.0%

A majority of co-ordinators (*n*=19) thought that the Special Projects Grant had been spent well, one co-ordinator thought that the grant had not been spent well, and another thought that too much of the grant had been spent on activities for parents. Four co-ordinators gave responses which were categorised as "other", for example:

> **"If we made mistakes (in one school, yes!) we learned, and hope to do a better job in the future, as we get the parents involved."**

Co-ordinators were less well informed about how the extra capitation grant had been spent, and while 15 said they thought it was well spent, three respondents said that they could not judge because they had no input, or were not aware of how the funding had been deployed. The responses of a further five respondents were categorised as "other", as their responses were

difficult to classify. For example:

> **"In three of my schools it was well spent and the school purchased a wide range of educational equipment and aids across the curriculum. In the others, I couldn't see any benefits."**

3.3 INSERVICE TRAINING

A large majority of co-ordinators (80%) agreed that they had learned a great deal from the inservice training provided for them by the Department of Education and Science (Table 3.15). However, when asked to indicate the proportion of principals in their cluster who believed that the co-ordinator's attendance at inservice had benefited their school, the modal response (56% of co-ordinators) was that *some* principals thought so (Table 3.16). A similar picture emerged in relation to teachers, with 62.5% of co-ordinators indicating that *some* teachers thought it had benefited their school.

Table 3.15. Number and percentage of co-ordinators expressing varying levels of agreement that they had learned a great deal from the inservice training provided for them.

I have learned a great deal from the Breaking the Cycle incareer development courses which were made available to co-ordinators (N=25)				
Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Unsure**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
n=8 (32.0%)	*n*=12 (48.0%)	*n*=3 (12.0%)	*n*=2 (8.0%)	_____

Table 3.16. Number and percentage of co-ordinators indicating whether all, most, a few, or no principals and teachers believe that the attendance of co-ordinators at inservice has benefited their school.

In your opinion, what proportion of** principals **in your cluster believe that your attendance at incareer development courses has benefited their school? (N=25)			
All	**Most**	**Some**	**Very few / none**
n=2 (8.0%)	*n*=6 (24.0%)	*n*=14 (56.0%)	*n*=3 (12.0%)
In your opinion, what proportion of** teachers **in your cluster believe that your attendance at incareer development courses has benefited their school? (N=24)			
All	**Most**	**Some**	**Very few / none**
n=2 (8.3%)	*n*=5 (20.8%)	*n*=15 (62.5%)	*n*=2 (8.3%)

Co-ordinators were also asked if they had any comments to make on the content or organisation of incareer development courses associated with their role. Responses to this open-ended item were assigned to one of eight categories depending on the type of response given, and responses which occurred only once were assigned to the category "other" (Table 3.17).

Table 3.17. Number and percentage of co-ordinators expressing various general comments on the inservice provided for *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinators (*N*=24[1]).

Type of response	**Number**	**%**
Content of inservice was excellent / informative	11	45.8%
Not enough training in specific areas (e.g., on practical issues such as planning and time management and in dealing with outside agencies)	6	25.0%
Inadequate response to co-ordinators' problems and queries	5	20.8%
Not enough input from co-ordinators	4	16.7%
The co-ordinator's role definition changes from one inservice session to the next	3	12.5%
Recent inservice has been characterised by a lack of support for the co-ordinator	3	12.5%
More on other schemes that address disadvantage would be useful (e.g., from HSCL co-ordinators in urban schools)	3	12.5%
Other (e.g., sharing of ideas with other co-ordinators at inservice is invaluable, some inservice is dominated by individual problems of co-ordinators)	6	25.0%

[1]Numbers sum to greater than 24 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response

The most popular comment on inservice was that the content of inservice was excellent or informative. However, one in four co-ordinators indicated that they would welcome more practical training in specific areas. For example:

> **"[There is] not enough work on practical issues such as planning and time management and too much emphasis on abstract theories of educational disadvantage that have little in common with life in my cluster."**

Other respondents (*n*=5) indicated that their individual queries and problems had not been adequately addressed at inservice sessions:

"Training provides very few solutions to problems that arise. The only answer provided is that you have to get on with the job in hand."

Three respondents felt that there was a lack of support for the co-ordinator during recent inservice:

"The initial inservice was very informative and supportive. Later inservice, I felt, lacked support for the co-ordinator."

A further four co-ordinators said that they would like to have more input into the kind of material covered during inservice training, and three said that they would welcome more material on other schemes aimed at addressing educational disadvantage. Various other comments were made in response to this question, which were categorised as "other", as they occurred only once. For purposes of illustration, two examples of such comments are given below:

"Some inservice days have become bogged down in the personal problems of individual co-ordinators which cannot be solved at inservice (e.g., access to a telephone)."

"I have found the ideas and opinions of other co-ordinators [at inservice] invaluable."

In general, while co-ordinators made many positive comments on the inservice training provided for them, they also made a variety of suggestions for improving its efficacy and content.

3.4 WORK WITH PUPILS AND PARENTS

The focus of this section is on the effects of the scheme on pupils, and the co-ordinators' work with parents. Co-ordinators were first asked if they thought that *marginalised* pupils had benefited from participation in the scheme. This was followed by an open-ended item asking them to explain their response. Only one co-ordinator indicated that she was not sure if marginalised pupils had benefited, and explained her answer by saying that she didn't have enough time in each school to really focus on marginalised pupils. The remaining 24, however, thought that such pupils had

benefited. The types of explanations furnished by these co-ordinators are presented in Table 3.18.

The most popular response (given by 11 co-ordinators) was that pupils had been exposed to activities and experiences that had previously been impossible. Another common response (*n*=7) was that marginalised pupils were deriving benefits from the improved materials and equipment available to them, and that pupils seemed happier in school and / or had increased self-esteem (*n*=7). Explanations which related to parents were less common, but four co-ordinators indicated that marginalised pupils had benefited due to an increase in their parents' interest in their schoolwork. The responses of seven co-ordinators were categorised as "other". Some examples of these responses are given below:

"In some instances the parents have acknowledged and thanked the school for their extra help and support during the past year."

"I think that teachers are targeting them [pupils] more as a result of my efforts to change teachers' attitudes to problem families."

"An understanding [among pupils] that if they have a problem, they will be taken care of. They have a link outside the classroom."

Table 3.18. Number and percentage of co-ordinators giving a variety of reasons for agreeing that marginalised pupils have benefited from participating in *Breaking the Cycle* (*N*=24[1]).

Response	Number	%
Exposure to new (previously impossible) experiences and activities	11	45.8%
Better materials and equipment available to children	7	29.2%
Children are happier in school / their self esteem has increased	7	29.2%
Parental interest in children's schoolwork has increased	4	16.7%
Parental sense of importance / self esteem has increased	2	8.3%
Other (e.g., parents have thanked the school for the extra help and support given to their children)	7	29.2%

[1]Numbers sum to greater than 24 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response

Co-ordinators were also asked to give an indication of the number of teachers they perceived to have changed their attitudes towards marginalised pupils as a result of *Breaking the Cycle* (Table 3.19).

Table 3.19. Number and percentage of co-ordinators indicating whether all, most, a few, or no teachers have changed their attitudes towards marginalised pupils as a result of *Breaking the Cycle* (*N*=24).

All	**Most**	**A few**	**None**
n=3 (12.5%)	*n*=9 (37.5%)	*n*=11 (45.8%)	*n*=1 (4.2%)

The modal response given by co-ordinators was "a few", which could be interpreted as indicating that the scheme was not having much impact on teachers' attitudes. However, in a related item which required respondents to give an explanation for their answer, four co-ordinators explained that the teachers in their cluster already had a very positive attitude towards their disadvantaged pupils prior to the introduction of the scheme (Table 3.20).

Table 3.20. Number and percentage of co-ordinators (*N*=25[1]) giving various reasons for agreeing that teachers have changed their attitudes towards marginalised pupils since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*.

Response	**Number**	**%**
Teachers have increased awareness of / empathy with the problems experienced by marginalised pupils	14	56.0%
Teachers realise that it is possible for them to help marginalised pupils	6	24.0%
There is less anxiety among teachers about parental involvement	6	24.0%
There is more willingness to change / openness to new ideas among teachers	5	20.0%
Teachers already had a positive attitude towards marginalised children / awareness of the problems experienced by them	4	16.0%
There is a better relationship between home and school	3	12.0%
Other (e.g., teachers are planning a programme to help marginalised children)	3	12.0%

[1]Numbers sum to greater than 25 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response

The most common response to this item (given by more than half of respondents) was that the scheme has led to an increased awareness among teachers of the problems of disadvantaged pupils. Other explanations given by co-ordinators suggest that teachers are

beginning to realise that they have the ability to actually help marginalised pupils, and that teachers are less anxious than they were previously about parental involvement. Others (*n*=5) noted that teachers were more open to new ideas, and that there was a better relationship between home and school (*n*=3).

Co-ordinators were asked a series of questions about their visits to the homes of the pupils in their cluster. There was wide variation between co-ordinators in the percentage of homes visited. One respondent indicated that only 15.0% of homes in total were visited (Table 3.21), which contrasts greatly with two other respondents who had visited every home in the cluster. The mean percentage visited was 67.6%, which indicated that the majority of pupils' homes had been visited. The average percentage of *marginalised* pupils' homes that were visited was somewhat higher at 81.6%. This suggests that marginalised families were specially targeted, which is consistent with the objectives of *Breaking the Cycle* (Table 3.22).

Table 3.21. Co-ordinators' (*N*=25) estimates of the percentage of pupils' homes in the cluster visited (percentages and frequencies).

% of homes visited	No. of co-ordinators	% of all co-ordinators	Cumulative %
15.0%	1	4.0%	4.0%
40.0%	2	8.0%	12.0%
45.0%	1	4.0%	16.0%
50.0%	3	12.0%	28.0%
60.0%	1	4.0%	32.0%
65.0%	1	4.0%	36.0%
70.0%	4	16.0%	52.0%
75.0%	5	20.0%	72.0%
76.0%	1	4.0%	76.0%
80.0%	2	8.0%	84.0%
85.0%	1	4.0%	88.0%
98.0%	1	4.0%	92.0%
100.0%	2	8.0%	100.0%
***M*= 67.6%**	***N*=25**	**100%**	**100%**

However, one co-ordinator had visited only 10% of homes of marginalised pupils, while a further 7 had visited between 50% and 75% of homes. This means that approximately one-third of co-ordinators have not visited the homes of a significant number of disadvantaged pupils in their cluster.

Table 3.22. Co-ordinators' (*N*=25) estimates of the percentage of *marginalised* pupils' homes in the cluster visited (percentages and frequencies).

% of homes visited	No. of co-ordinators	% of all co-ordinators	Cumulative %
10.0%	1	4.0%	4.0%
50.0%	1	4.0%	8.0%
60.0%	3	12.0%	20.0%
70.0%	2	8.0%	28.0%
75.0%	1	4.0%	32.0%
80.0%	1	4.0%	36.0%
85.0%	1	4.0%	40.0%
90.0%	6	24.0%	64.0%
95.0%	4	16.0%	80.0%
99.0%	1	4.0%	84.0%
100.0%	4	16.0%	100.0%
***M*= 81.6%**	***N*=25**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

The views of co-ordinators on the usefulness of home visits were also sought. All co-ordinators thought that visiting pupils' homes was a useful exercise, although 28.0% thought it only "somewhat" useful (Table 3.23). Similar levels of agreement were found for an item concerning the extent to which co-ordinators thought that parents appreciated their visits. Seventeen co-ordinators (68.0%) believed that their visits were very much appreciated by most parents, and eight (32.0%) believed that they were somewhat appreciated (Table 3.23).

Table 3.23. Number and percentage of co-ordinators indicating the extent to which they believe home visits to be a useful exercise, and indicating the extent to which parents appreciated home visits (*N*=25).

Do you believe that visiting pupils' homes was a useful exercise?				
Very much so	**Somewhat**	**Unsure**	**Not really**	**Not at all**
n=18 (72.0%)	*n*=7 (28.0%)	___	___	___
Do you think that most parents appreciated you visiting their homes?				
Very much so	**Somewhat**	**Unsure**	**Not really**	**Not at all**
n=17 (68.0%)	*n*=8 (32.0%)	___	___	___

To examine the main factors influencing decisions to visit marginalised pupils' homes, co-ordinators were asked to rate the importance of each of a variety of factors in making the decision to visit homes (Table 3.24).

Table 3.24. Number and percentage of co-ordinators indicating the importance of each of a variety of factors in influencing their decision to visit the homes of marginalised pupils (*N*=25).

Reason was to……	**Extremely important**	**Somewhat important**	**Unsure**	**Not very important**	**Not at all important**
Discuss issues related to their children	*n*=16 (64.0%)	*n*=8 (32.0%)	___	*n*=1 (4.0%)	___
Involve parents more in school activities	*n*=16 (64.0%)	*n*=8 (32.0%)	*n*=1 (4.0%)	___	___
Provide general support for families	*n*=22 (88.0%)	*n*=3 (12.0%)	___	___	___

All co-ordinators thought that the provision of general support for families was an extremely important (*n*=22) or a somewhat important (*n*=3) reason for home visits. However, other factors were also seen as important: 24 out of 25 co-ordinators indicated that their decision to visit homes was motivated by a need to discuss issues related to the children, and to involve parents more in school activities. Ten respondents elected to specify reasons for home visits additional to those specified in the item. In this "other" category, the most common type of response (*n*=7) was that the visits were designed to

create friendly relationships between home and school. Two co-ordinators said that the visits were designed to convey 'good news' from the school, one said they served to motivate uninterested parents, and one said the visits were made at the request of parents.

When asked about the effect of the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme on parental involvement in children's education, three out of four co-ordinators (76.0%) believed that the scheme has led to an increase in levels of involvement, but almost one quarter (24.0%) indicated that they were unsure if there had been any increase (Table 3.25). More than one co-ordinator in three (36.0%) indicated that they were unsure as to whether the attitudes of parents who are uninterested in their children's education can be changed. None of the respondents, however, disagreed that a change in parental attitudes could be brought about.

Table 3.25. Number and percentage of co-ordinators indicating the extent of their agreement that *Breaking the Cycle* has led to greater parental involvement in their children's education, and that the attitudes of parents who are uninterested in their children's education can be changed (*N*=25).

I believe that parents in my cluster have become more involved in their children's education as a result of Breaking the Cycle				
Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Unsure**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
n=4 (16.0%)	*n*=15 (60.0%)	*n*=6 (24.0%)	_____	_____
To what extent do you agree that the attitudes of parents who are uninterested in their children's education can be changed?				
Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Unsure**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
n=1 (4.0%%)	*n*=15 (60.0%)	*n*=9 (36.0%)	_____	_____

To build a better picture of the population served by the schools, co-ordinators were asked a series of questions about the families of the pupils in their clusters (Table 3.26).

Table 3.26. Co-ordinators' estimates (mean percentages and ranges) of the percentage of pupils' whose home background interferes with their ability to learn effectively, whose parents actively encourage and support their schoolwork, and whose parents have low educational expectations of their children.

Questionnaire item	**Mean**	**Range**
In your opinion, what is the percentage of pupils in your cluster whose home background seriously interferes with their ability to learn effectively?(N=23)	31.4%	5% – 100%
In your opinion, what percentage of parents in your cluster *actively* ***encourages and supports their children in their school work?(N=24)***	56.9%	5% – 100%
In your opinion, what percentage of parents in your cluster has low educational expectations of their children?(N=23)	26.6%	0 – 70%

According to co-ordinators, almost one-third of pupils in their cluster have home backgrounds that seriously interfere with their ability to learn effectively (Table 3.26). The range of responses, however, is large, with one respondent giving a figure of 5%, and another a figure of 100%. This suggests that there are large differences between co-ordinators' perceptions of pupils' home backgrounds depending on the cluster. The same range of response was found for an item asking for the percentage of parents who actively encourage and support their children in their schoolwork. While slightly more than half (56.9%) of parents overall were considered by co-ordinators to be supportive of their children, one respondent put the figure at only 5%, while another's estimate was 100%. Finally, co-ordinators were asked for the percentage of parents in the cluster with low educational expectations for their children. The average percentage given for this was 26.6%, although two co-ordinators said that there were no parents with low expectations, while at the other extreme, one co-ordinator gave a figure of 70%.

3.5 CO-ORDINATORS' GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE SCHEME

This section is concerned with co-ordinators' views on the scheme in general. In two separate open-ended items, co-ordinators were asked to describe their single most positive and single most negative experience as a *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator,

drawing on any aspect of their work. The responses to these items were extremely varied but it was possible to categorise all of the positive experiences described on the basis of whether they related to the co-ordinator's work with parents, school staffs, or pupils (Table 3.27).

Table 3.27. Number and percentage of co-ordinators expressing various general comments on their most positive experience as a *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator (*N*=25).

Type of response	**Number**	**%**
Work with parents / involvement of previously uninvolved parents in school activities or courses	19	76.0%
Positive change in school staff / bonds developed between schools in cluster	4	16.0%
Work with pupils / reaction of pupils to Breaking the Cycle activities	2	8.0%

Clearly, the experiences cited most frequently by co-ordinators as their most positive ones were those that related to their work with parents (76.0% of respondents). In contrast, only two co-ordinators described an experience with pupils as their most positive experience, while the experiences of a further four related to their work with school staffs. To better illustrate the range of responses given to this item, a sample of the individual verbatim responses of co-ordinators from within each category are presented below:

Parents

"An acknowledgement in the form of flowers and cards from the parents of my most disadvantaged school thanking the co-ordinator, principal, and staff member for all their help and support during the past year. Add to this the fact that the principal and staff member are now very much in favour of the scheme, despite a very reluctant and negative start."

"Showing how to help a mother assist her son with English reading at home. Both mother and son are happy with their progress".

"Finally having a group of young targeted mothers coming together for a Mother / Toddler pre-school Toy Library morning in the most disadvantaged school. Teachers, even though some of these parents have older children in the school, have never met these parents, so I hope to build on this next year."

"One parent, very negative re. school, came to help with paired spelling in third term. She is now very positive re. school. Principal is 'over the moon'."

School staffs

"When one principal told me that, since I came to her school she has begun to enjoy school, and I have brightened her life."

"Getting a 'sticky' principal to be a little more civilised towards me after almost two years of total battle."

Pupils

"Working with 3rd class pupils on reading and self-confidence. Behaviour improved and reading age jumped up by 3 years."

Responses to an item asking about co-ordinators' most negative experiences were similarly grouped into categories. These responses were grouped according to whether they related to negativity towards the scheme or towards the co-ordinator from others, to practical problems, or to lack of response or support from parents. An "other" category was used to categorise responses that did not clearly belong to any the former groups. The responses of 15 co-ordinators (60.0%) focused on negativity towards the co-ordinator or the scheme from principals, teachers or, less commonly, parents. The comments of four co-ordinators related to practical problems they had experienced in their work, while two respondents recounted experiences with parents which they had found disappointing (Table 3.28).

Table 3.28. Number and percentage of co-ordinators expressing various general comments on their most negative experience as a *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator (*N*=25).

Type of response	**Number**	**%**
Opposition / negativity from one or more principals, teachers, or parents towards the scheme or towards the co-ordinator	15	60.0%
Practical problems (space constraints, difficulty in accessing resources or funding)	4	16.0%
Lack of support from parents for activities initiated by co-ordinator	2	8.0%
Other (e.g., a misunderstanding with a teacher)	4	16.0%

Samples of individual responses from each of the four categories are presented below:

Negativity towards the co-ordinator or the scheme

"A principal who tells me on a regular basis that the scheme is a waste of time, that the educational standards of children are dropping on account of time spent on futile activities, and a principal who says 'We will do our own thing; the Department knows nothing about rural disadvantage'."

"Being told by a principal that the best place for parents is 'outside the school gate'."

"In one school the principal insisted that I bring parents to a meeting to initiate the scheme. At this meeting, he decried the scheme, negated everything I said, and downgraded the idea of "self-esteem."

Practical problems

"An abusive confrontation with a chairman of a Board of Management when I asked for some of the co-ordinator's funds (none of which he made available to me when needed)."

"Inadequate / non-existent space for the co-ordinator to work in. In Winter, working in cold draughty corridors is very unpleasant. All activities for parents are supposed to take place during the school day, but where?"

Problems related to parents

"Visiting parents and getting a very positive feedback about their child, and how they were keen to help him, but they never followed it up by actually helping."

"When large numbers of parents failed to turn up for courses having reserved places on them."

Other

"Difficulties with one teacher about how funding was being spent. This was because the Principal had not explained how the money was to be spent."

"Readjusting to the primary school experience – everyone working behind closed doors / ploughing own furrow! There is now more co-operative teaching and staff room discussion is now more focused on pupils' needs than on light-hearted gossip."

The final item in the questionnaire invited co-ordinators to make additional comments, if they desired, on the scheme as a whole. Twenty-two co-ordinators

volunteered one or more additional comments, up to five of which were coded for each respondent. More than half of those who responded (59.1%) made a positive comment of some kind (Table 3.29). For example:

> **"*Breaking the Cycle* has had many positive effects on the small cluster in which I work. The greatest benefits are obvious in the school where the disadvantage is high."**

> **"In general the scheme is working well in this cluster and principals, staffs and parents can see benefits in a very short time. In most of my schools (3) the principals are very supportive of the co-ordinator and a joy to work with. However, where this is not so, life can be hell for the co-ordinator for one or two days each week. The Department should indicate in a more forceful fashion what the scheme is about and elicit the support of Inspectors."**

Table 3.29. Number and percentage of co-ordinators expressing various general comments on *Breaking the Cycle* (*N*=22[1]).

Type of response	**Number**	**%**
General positive comment (e.g., "I am delighted to be involved in Breaking the Cycle", "The scheme has done a lot to address disadvantage")	13	59.1%
The co-ordinator's role definition is too broad	9	40.9%
Inadequate support for the co-ordinator from the Department of Education and Science	8	36.4%
Practical issues present problems (e.g., access to funding, lack of space in schools, lack of time for planning and administration)	7	31.8%
School staffs need more inservice	6	27.3%
Too many schools per cluster	4	18.2%
Difficulties are experienced when dealing with different personalities in a number of schools	3	13.6%
The negativity of some teachers / principals towards the scheme	3	13.6%
Other (e.g., schools in cluster too spread out, inservice for co-ordinator has been excellent)	3	13.6%

[1]Numbers sum to greater than 22 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response

The next most common kind of comment (made by nine co-ordinators) related to the breadth of the co-ordinator's role or to the perceived inadequacy of its definition. For example:

> **"The role of the co-ordinator is such that it is almost impossible to carry out. The job description is much too broad and five schools is far too many in which to attempt the myriad of tasks set out in the job description."**

Inadequate support for the co-ordinator was mentioned by more than one in three respondents. For example:

> **"I again say that we need to have someone we can ring 9 – 3 daily for information / clarification etc. I can't think of any job where an employee does not have access to the 'boss'."**
>
> **"I feel that had there been more direct communication between principals and the Department of Education from the beginning, and not via co-ordinators, anger from principals could have been avoided."**
>
> **"On the ground, co-ordinators do not have enough support from the Department of Education, or the National Co-ordinator, who is overloaded. Inspectors are not well enough informed on all aspects of the scheme."**

Seven co-ordinators commented on practical issues, typically mentioning difficulties in accessing funding, inadequate workspace in the school, and lack of time for planning:

> **"If the government / Department of Education are serious about "*Breaking the Cycle*", there should be fewer schools in each cluster. Also, accommodation in schools should be extended and improved. Asking children who are already experiencing learning difficulties to come out and work "amongst the coats" in the cloakroom, or at the edge of a desk with a photocopier on it in a 4' x 5' office, is not exactly sending the right message to them."**
>
> **"Money — money should be paid into co-ordinator's account to solve the problem of begging priests for cheques."**
>
> **"I think that inclusion in *Breaking the Cycle* has been great for all the schools in the cluster. For the schools to enjoy the full fruits of the scheme, teachers need to be given more inservice and time to plan with the co-ordinator on an individual and cluster basis."**

Other types of responses occurred less frequently, and some co-ordinators used this item as a forum for reiterating or stressing views that they had given in response to

earlier questionnaire items (e.g., on lack of inservice for teachers, negativity of school staffs towards the scheme).

3.6 SUMMARY

The majority of co-ordinators felt that there was insufficient information given to school staffs about the operation of the scheme at the time of its introduction. Many felt that it was left to them to explain the scheme to school staffs, and that this led to difficulties between themselves and some staff members. Another source of discontent was that the co-ordinator's role itself was ill-defined, with only one co-ordinator agreeing that their role had been very clearly defined at the start of the scheme. This possibly contributed to the differences in role perception which arose in some cases between co-ordinators, principals, and teachers. Where differences existed, most principals seemed to be expecting a resource teacher for their school. Furthermore, almost half of co-ordinators reported that principals in their cluster thought that too much time was being spent on work with parents, whereas all co-ordinators cited being a facilitator of parents' involvement in their children's education as one of the main purposes of their role.

Comparisons of the actual and ideal percentages of time co-ordinators reported spending on various tasks during a typical school week revealed discrepancies in a number of cases. For example, the activity that, on average, occupies more of the co-ordinator's time than any other is remedial work with pupils. However, co-ordinators believe ideally that only 13.5% of total time (as opposed to the *actual* time of 30.2%) should be spent engaged in remedial work. Further, while co-ordinators, on average, spend 14.2% of their time on home visits, they would ideally like to spend 24.9% of their total time visiting homes. These figures suggest that co-ordinators are making compromises between the time spent on what they consider to be the key activities associated with their role and the time spent on activities that are prioritised by school staffs.

Responses to a related item in which co-ordinators were asked to give reasons for disparities (where they existed) between their actual and ideal working weeks revealed that time constraints (n=16), lack of workspace (n=13), lack of flexibility in working

hours (*n*=11), and lack of access to resources (*n*=9) were the main factors considered to adversely affect their work. Co-ordinators were unanimous in their agreement, however, that the response of pupils to the scheme had contributed to its success, while 23 respondents believed parental responses had been a contributory factor, and 21 thought teachers' responses had contributed.

All but one co-ordinator (who was unsure) agreed that marginalised pupils had benefited from participation in the scheme. Specific effects mentioned were that pupils had benefited from activities and experiences that had been impossible prior to the scheme, that better materials and equipment were now available to pupils, and that pupils were noticeably happier in school and / or had increased in self-esteem.

While co-ordinators, on average, had visited almost 70% of all of the homes in their cluster, there was a good deal of individual variation between them in terms of the percentage of homes visited. For example, one co-ordinator had visited only 15% of homes, while two co-ordinators had visited every home. All respondents, however, believed that visiting pupils' homes was a useful exercise, and more than three-quarters believed that parents in their cluster had become more involved in their children's education as a result of *Breaking the Cycle*.

Co-ordinators, on average, estimated that 31.4% of their pupils have home backgrounds that seriously interfere with their ability to learn effectively. However, estimates of this differed greatly, with one co-ordinator putting the figure at only 5%, while the estimate of another was 100%. Co-ordinators' estimates of the percentages of parents in the cluster that had low educational expectations for their children were also varied: while the average percentage was 56.9%, two co-ordinators reported that no parents in the cluster had low expectations, while one put the figure at 70%.

While a huge majority of co-ordinators thought that the scheme was working well in terms of addressing the needs of the disadvantaged, respondents had several criticisms of the scheme's administration. Specifically, almost half felt that their role was unclear and that there was a lack of communication with, and support for, the co-ordinator from the Department of Education and Science. The latter applied at central level, as well as at the level of the local Inspectorate. More than one-quarter felt that the setting up of the scheme was rushed, and almost one-fifth thought that there were too many schools in a

cluster. For some respondents, accessing *Breaking the Cycle* funding from Boards of Management was problematic, and others had difficulty with the fact that there was no time provision for planning during the working week.

Co-ordinators, in the main, were very positive about the inservice provided for them, although several commented that they would like more training in specific areas (e.g., in time management). Others felt that queries raised at inservice had not been responded to adequately, while some felt that they would like more input into the content of inservice courses. More that one-quarter of respondents commented that school staffs needed more inservice, and several indicated that they found it unacceptable that they, as co-ordinators, were expected to relay inservice messages back to principals and teachers.

When asked to describe experiences by which they had been most adversely affected, the most common kind of response (given by 15 of the 25 respondents) related to the negativity of school staffs towards themselves or towards the scheme. This level of negativity is somewhat surprising given the benefits enjoyed by schools as a consequence of their participation in the scheme. When describing their most positive experiences, more that three-quarters of co-ordinators mentioned their work with parents, whereas experiences with pupils did not feature largely, and were cited by only two respondents. The final questionnaire item invited co-ordinators to give additional comments, and, in response, several strategies for improvements or modifications of the scheme were suggested. These included improving communication between those involved in implementing *Breaking the Cycle* at local level and the Department of Education and Science, extending the physical accommodation in schools (where necessary) to facilitate activities encouraged under the scheme (e.g., courses for parents), giving funding for co-ordinator-led activities directly to the co-ordinator (rather than to Boards of Management), and designating specific time periods during the school week for planning and administration. Such modifications would, according to co-ordinators, greatly enhance the operation of the scheme.

4. JUNIOR CYCLE COMPLETION RATES AMONG A COHORT OF RURAL PUPILS.

Baseline data were gathered on the rate of completion of the Junior Cycle, as well as on the performance in the Junior Certificate Examination (JCE), of students who had attended primary schools in which the rural dimension of *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented. The purpose of this phase of the evaluation is twofold. The first is to provide a general description the completion rates and achievements of students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools. Secondly, these data will be used (at a later date) to compare the Junior Cycle completion rates of those students, as well as their aggregate achievement levels, with those of students who had participated in the scheme.

4.1 SIXTH CLASS PUPIL TRACKING

In order to discover the proportion of pupils from *Breaking the Cycle* primary schools that completed the Junior Cycle (and to examine their aggregate performance), it was necessary to track each pupil to their post-primary school. Tracking pupils in this way is difficult because pupils in a given 6th class may enrol in any one of several post-primary schools. The tracking procedure itself is cumbersome because the Department of Education and Science does not assign identity numbers to pupils in primary school which could be used to track them to their post-primary school. Students are not assigned an identity number until they are in their first year of post-primary school, and the assigned number is linked to that of the post-primary school attended. Thus, any examination of the proportions of pupils from specific primary schools completing Junior Cycle requires the identification of their post-primary school.

At present, the only means of tracking pupils from a primary to their post-primary school is by contacting the primary school attended by the pupil: while primary schools keep records of the post-primary schools to which each of their pupils transfers, the Department of Education and Science does not hold this information centrally. For this reason, the principal of each school participating in the rural dimension of *Breaking the Cycle* was asked to give details (name, address, and date of birth) of all pupils in 6th class in his/her school in 1993/94. They were also asked to supply the name of the post-primary school to which each of their pupils transferred at the end of 6th class. In cases where the whereabouts of a pupil was unknown, or

where a pupil was known not to be in school, principals were asked to provide the name of the relevant Juvenile Liaison Officer so that their help could be sought with the tracking process. Principals were also asked to give additional information if they considered it relevant to the tracking process (for example, indicating that a pupil had emigrated). Details of pupils' names, addresses, dates of birth and post-primary schools attended were entered in a database which was forwarded to the Post-Primary Database Section (PPDBS) at the Department of Education and Science. Personnel at the PPDBS used the information in the database to match students to their Department of Education identity numbers. Once an identity number was assigned to a student, it was possible to link it to the student's Junior Certificate Examination number in the 1997 and 1998 Junior Certificate databases to discover (a) whether the student took the JCE in either year, and, if so (b) the level of her/his achievements in the examination.

Information supplied by principals or Juvenile Liaison Officers indicated that some pupils were known not to be enrolled in any school (Table 4.1). These pupils' details were not entered in the database that was to provide the basis for matching pupils to their post-primary ID numbers. Table 4.1 shows that, of the original population of 1,036 pupils, 40 pupils were confirmed as not being enrolled in any school, nine of whom had valid reasons for this.

Table 4.1. Number of pupils in the rural population (*N*=1,036) of 6th class *Breaking the Cycle* pupils in 1993/94 confirmed as having left formal schooling.

	Number	Percentage
Total number of 6th class pupils in rural Breaking the Cycle primary schools in 1993/94	**1,036**	**100%**
— Not enrolled in any school	31	3.0%
— Emigrated	7	0.7%
— Deceased	1	0.1%
— Being tutored at home (to take O-level examination)	1	0.1%
Total number of pupils whose names were not sent to PPDBS for ID assignment	**40**	**3.9%**

As Table 4.2 shows, 97.6% of pupils were successfully matched to their ID numbers at the Department of Education and Science.

Table 4.2. Numbers and percentages of students whose details were sent for ID assignment, numbers and percentages of students for whom ID numbers were found, and numbers and percentages of students for whom ID numbers were not found.

	Number	%
Total number of 6th class pupils in rural Breaking the Cycle schools in 1993/94 whose details were sent to PPDBS for ID assignment	996	100%
Of total sent, number successfully matched to ID numbers	972	97.6%
Of total sent, number ***not*** successfully matched to ID numbers	24	2.4%

The failure to locate 24 pupils in the Department's database may be due to the fact that the search for some pupils was based on inaccurate information from principals (e.g., failure to identify correctly the post-primary school attended by a pupil). Further, where pupils moved away from their post-primary school during their first year, they may have left prior to being assigned an ID number, and so would be difficult to trace. Finally, some pupils for whom IDs are missing may not have enrolled in *any* post-primary school, despite the fact that their primary school principals were given to understand that they had. This is clearly a problem for the investigation of the overall numbers and proportions of pupils from *Breaking the Cycle* primary schools that completed Junior Cycle. It should be noted that the method used in the current study to monitor the progression of pupils from primary to post-primary school was not only very labour-intensive, but also failed to account adequately for the movements of all pupils in the system. Therefore, it is suggested that the Department of Education and Science develop, as a matter of urgency, a system which is capable of tracking all pupils. One means of doing this would be to assign an identity number to students as soon as they enter the primary school system, which they would retain throughout their educational lives.

4.2 JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION COMPLETION RATES

The ID numbers of tracked pupils were matched to the Department of Education and Science's 1997 JCE database to link them to their JCE results. Those for whom no results were found were checked against the 1998 JCE database in case they had repeated a year in post-primary school and, thus, had taken the examination a year later than scheduled. This was done because the overall aim of this phase of the evaluation was to ascertain the *total percentage* of students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools who completed Junior Cycle, regardless of the year in which the JCE was taken. Table 4.3 shows that the overall percentage of rural students who sat the JCE in 1997 or in 1998 was 93.4%. However, this figure does not include the 24 pupils (2.4% of the total cohort) for whom no ID numbers could be found.

Table 4.3. Numbers and percentages of students from rural schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented that took the JCE in 1997 or 1998.

	Number	Percentage
Eligible pupils (i.e., all pupils for whom ID numbers were found (*N*=972) added to the number of pupils known not to be in school (*N*=31*)	**1,003**	**100%**
Students who took the JCE in 1997	930	92.7%
Students who took the JCE in 1998	7	0.7%
Students who did **not** take the JCE in1997 or 1998	66	6.6%
Students who took the JCE in either 1997 or 1998	**937**	**93.4%**

*Excludes students who could not have sat the JCE because they are deceased, have emigrated, or took O-levels.

Among students who originated in rural *Breaking the Cycle* primary schools (for whom information is available), the non-completion figure of 6.6% is higher than the recent (1993-1997) national average completion rates reported in Table 4.4. The national averages, however, do not include the 1,000 or so pupils annually who are thought not to transfer from primary to post-primary school at all (e.g., NESF, 1997). The *Breaking the Cycle* figures do include such pupils, and when this is taken into account, the Junior Cycle completion rates among rural students from schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented may be considered to compare slightly unfavourably with those of students nationally.

Table 4.4. Annual estimates (for the years 1990-1997) of the numbers and percentages of students leaving second-level schools without completing Junior Cycle[1].

1990	**1991**	**1992**	**1993**	**1994**	**1995**	**1996**	**1997**
N=4,500	*N*=3,600	*N*=5,200	*N*=3,400	*N*=3,300	*N*=2,200	*N*=2,700	*N*=2,200
6.7%	**5.4%**	**7.8%**	**5.3%**	**4.9%**	**3.3%**	**4.0%**	**3.2%**

[1]Figures for 1990-1996 are based on the ESRI's annual school leavers' survey data reported by McCormack and Archer (1998); Figures for 1997 from "The 1997 annual school leavers' survey" (Collins & Williams, 1998).

It is also of interest to examine the gender breakdown among those who leave school early, and there have been several published estimates of rates of early leaving according to gender. Available estimates indicate that boys are more likely than girls to leave school early. For example, the Area Development Management's (1999) document on strategies to counter educational disadvantage stated:

> In relation to the profile of those who leave school early without any effective qualifications 85% come from working class origins or small farms. There is also a higher proportion of young men than young women who leave school early – two out of every three early school leavers are male with 24% of young men leaving school at Junior Certificate or without sitting any official examination compared to a rate of 14% amongst young women (ESRI School Leavers Survey 1996). (ADM, 1999)

There are also estimates of the numbers of boys and girls who leave school without any formal qualifications whatsoever. For example, the NESF (1997) report on early school leaving and youth unemployment stated that during the period 1993-1995, 1,000 young people did not progress to second level school at all, while an average of 3,000 students annually left school without any qualifications. Furthermore, of those who left without qualifications, 1,970 were boys and 1,030 were girls. This represents a ratio of approximately 2 boys to one girl. Other surveys have shown that boys are more likely than girls to leave school without any formal qualifications: the most recently published survey of school leavers undertaken by the ESRI revealed that 4.3% of the male school leavers and 2.3% of the female school leavers sampled left second-level school with no qualifications during the 1995/96 school year (Collins & Williams, 1998).

Among the present cohort of disadvantaged pupils, a similar gender breakdown among early leavers was observed (Table 4.5). Of the rural pupils that were tracked to Junior Certificate, 8.7% of boys and 4.5% of girls left school at some time between the end of 6th class in primary school and prior to completing the Junior Certificate

Examination. Thus, the ratio of boys to girls in rural schools who leave school early is about 2:1, mirroring rates reported elsewhere.

Table 4.5. Numbers and percentages of male and female students who were in 6th class in 1993/94 in rural schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented that took the JCE in 1997 or 1998.

	Males		Females	
	Number	% (of all males)	Number	% (of all females)
Total pupils in 6th class in 1993/94 (*N*=1,036)	**515**	**(100.0%)**	**521**	**(100.0%)**
[1]Pupils ineligible for tracking (e.g., deceased, emigrated) (*N*=9)	6	1.2%	3	0.6%
[2]Pupils for whom no ID could be found (*N*=24)	13	2.5%	11	2.1%
[3]Pupils confirmed as not enrolled in any school (*N*=31)	21	4.1%	10	1.9%
[4]Pupils for whom IDs were found (*N*=972)	475	92.2%	497	95.4%
[5]Total eligible pupils (sum of [3] and [4] above) (*N*=1,003)	496	96.3%	507	97.3%
Of eligible pupils (*N*=1,003), total that took the JCE in 1997 or 1998 (*N*=937)	453	91.3%	484	95.5%
Of eligible pupils, total that did not take the JCE in 1997 or 1998 (*N*=66)	**43**	**8.7%**	**23**	**4.5%**

While the Junior Cycle completion rates found among rural students compare slightly unfavourably with students nationally, it should be noted that data on both student groups were gathered using different techniques. In the case of rural students, each student from the population of sixth class pupils in *Breaking the Cycle* schools in 1993/94 was tracked. In contrast, the data from the ESRI school leavers' surveys (e.g., Collins and Williams, 1998) was based on self-report surveys conducted with samples of students. For this reason, the data from both sources cannot be considered strictly comparable. However, it appears from the data that a slightly greater proportion of the cohort of rural students than students nationally left school prior to completing the Junior Cycle. In addition, the ratio of male to female rural students who left school without any qualifications resembles closely the ratio reported in other studies of early leaving among students nationally.

5. ACHIEVEMENTS OF A COHORT OF RURAL PUPILS IN THE 1997 JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION.

The analyses presented in this section focus on performance in the 1997 JCE of students who originated in schools which are now participating in *Breaking the Cycle*. The achievements of these students are compared with those of students nationally in the 1997 JCE. A small number of rural students (*N*=7) who were in 6th class in *Breaking the Cycle* schools in 1993/94 took the JCE in 1998. However, while these students contributed to the calculation of overall Junior Cycle completion rates, their JCE achievements are not described here.

Information in the JCE databases permits an examination of the percentages of students taking varying numbers of subjects, the percentages of students taking subjects at various levels, and the aggregate achievements of students in each subject area. It also permits an examination of the achievements of students according to gender. The results of the analyses reported in this section will serve as a baseline by which the JCE results of students who have participated in the scheme will be compared. Thus, it will be possible, at a later stage, to assess the impact of the scheme, if any, on Junior Certificate completion rates and achievements.

Table 5.1 shows the number and percentage of males and females in the sample who originated in rural primary schools that are now participating in *Breaking the Cycle*, and in the total population of candidates in the 1997 JCE. In the rural sample there is a slightly greater proportion of females than of males, while in the national population, there is a slightly greater proportion of males than of females. The gender of one pupil in the national population of JCE candidates is unknown, and so analyses involving gender are based on 65,757 cases rather than 65,758 (the total number of candidates in the population).

Table 5.1. Numbers and percentages of male and female 1997 JCE candidates nationally, and numbers and percentages of male and female candidates from rural schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented.

	Rural students (*N*=930)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,757)**	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Number	448	482	33,081	32,676
%	48.2%	51.8%	50.3%	49.7%

5.1 NUMBER OF EXAMINATION SUBJECTS TAKEN BY STUDENTS

A first step in the description of student performance in the JCE is to describe the number of subjects taken by candidates. As Table 5.2 shows, on average, rural students took a slightly greater number of subjects (9.05) than did candidates nationally (8.9).

Table 5.2. Numbers of subjects taken in the 1997 JCE by students from rural schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented, and by all students nationally.

	Rural students (*N*=930)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,758)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
12 Subjects	1	0.1%	31	0.0%
11 Subjects	24	2.6%	829	1.3%
10 Subjects	215	23.1%	11,877	18.1%
9 Subjects	516	55.5%	39,288	59.7%
8 Subjects	152	16.3%	11,037	16.8%
7 Subjects	16	1.7%	1,694	2.6%
6 Subjects	1	0.1%	444	0.7%
5 Subjects	1	0.1%	175	0.3%
4 Subjects	-	-	62	0.1%
3 Subjects	-	-	52	0.1%
2 Subjects	2	0.2%	74	0.1%
1 Subject	2	0.2%	195	0.3%
Mean	9.05	-	8.9	-
Mode	9	-	9	-

When the number of subjects taken is examined according to gender of candidate, it is found that female students from rural schools, on average, took slightly more subjects than did rural males (9.07 vs 9.02) (Table 5.3). This pattern is repeated in the national population, where female students took an average of 8.96 subjects and male students an average of 8.87 subjects (Table 5.4).

Table 5.3. Numbers and percentages of male and female students from rural schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented that took varying numbers of subjects in the 1997 JCE.

	Male (*N*=448)		**Female (*N*=482)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
12 Subjects	-	-	1	0.2%
11 Subjects	11	2.5%	13	2.7%
10 Subjects	108	24.0%	107	22.2%
9 Subjects	237	52.9%	279	57.9%
8 Subjects	79	17.6%	73	15.1%
7 Subjects	10	2.2%	6	1.2%
6 Subjects	-	-	1	0.2%
5 Subjects	-	-	1	0.2%
4 Subjects	-	-	-	-
3 Subjects	-	-	-	-
2 Subjects	2	0.4%	-	-
1 Subject	1	0.2%	1	0.2%
Mean	9.02		9.07	
Mode	9		9	

Table 5.4. Number and percentage of male and female students nationally that took varying numbers of subjects in the 1997 JCE.

	Male (*N*=33,081)		**Female (*N*=32,676)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
12 Subjects	8	0.0%	23	0.1%
11 Subjects	426	1.3%	403	1.2%
10 Subjects	5,792	17.5%	6,085	18.6%
9 Subjects	19,090	57.7%	20,197	61.8%
8 Subjects	6,126	18.5%	4,911	15.0%
7 Subjects	1,033	3.1%	661	2.0%
6 Subjects	292	0.9%	152	0.5%
5 Subjects	110	0.3%	65	0.2%
4 Subjects	39	0.1%	23	0.1%
3 Subjects	33	0.1%	19	0.1%
2 Subjects	43	0.1%	31	0.1%
1 Subject	89	0.3%	106	0.3%
Mean	8.87		8.96	
Mode	9		9	

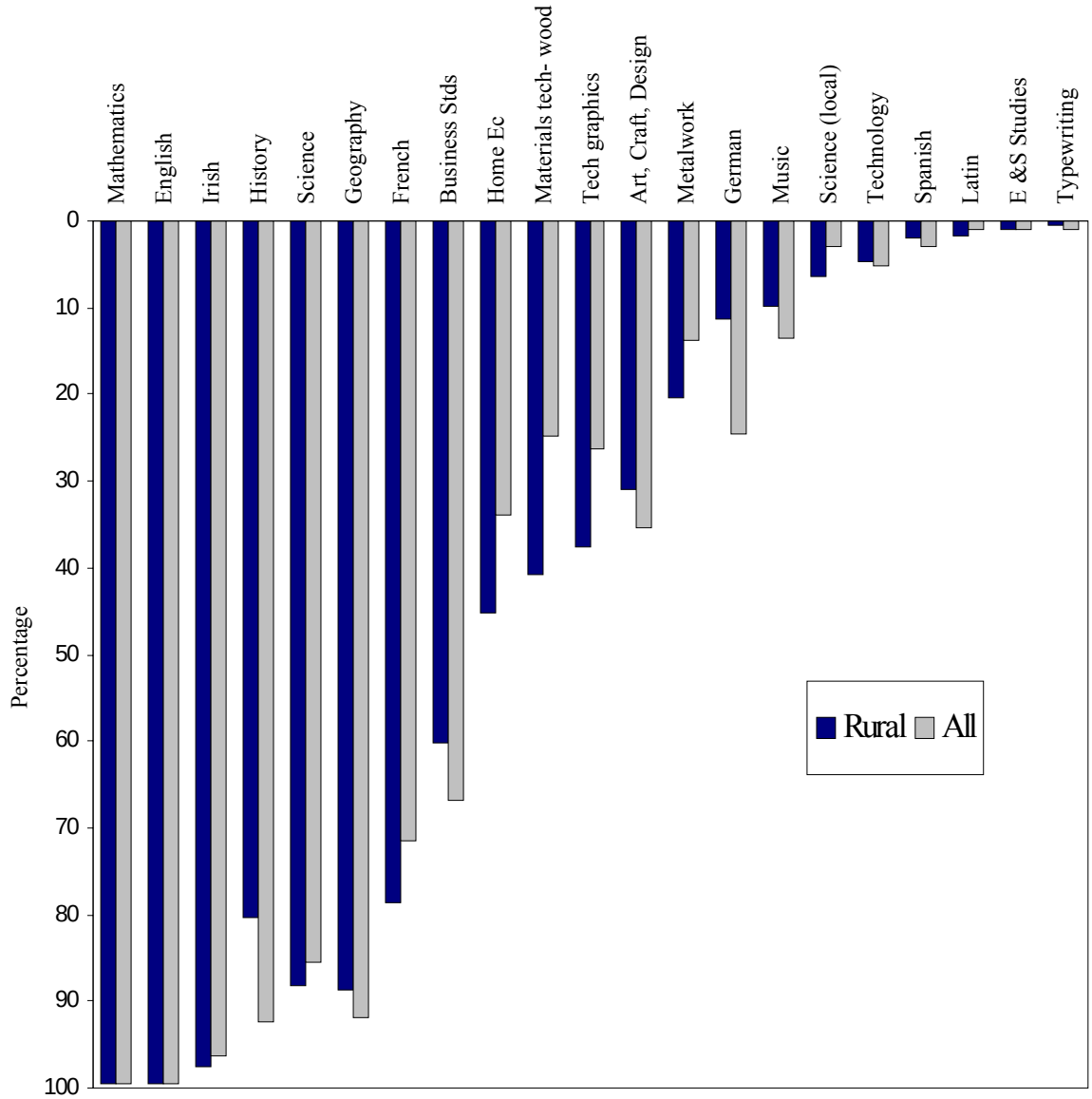
5.2 POPULARITY OF EXAMINATION SUBJECTS TAKEN BY STUDENTS

Mathematics and English were equally popular among candidates nationally, with 99.5% of students taking these subjects (Table 5.5 and Figure 5.1). Similar levels of uptake of these subjects were found among rural students.

5.5. Numbers and percentages of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects in the 1997 JCE.

	Rural students (*N*=930)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,758)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Mathematics	926	99.6%	65,423	99.5%
English	924	99.4%	65,447	99.5%
Irish	908	97.6%	63,328	96.3%
Geography	825	88.7%	60,728	92.4%
Science	821	88.3%	56,308	85.6%
History	747	80.3%	60,379	91.8%
French	732	78.7%	47,107	71.6%
Business Studies	561	60.3%	43,950	66.8%
Home Economics	421	45.3%	22,369	34.0%
Materials technology	379	40.7%	16,220	24.7%
Technical graphics	349	37.5%	17,349	26.4%
Art, Craft, Design	287	30.9%	23,293	35.4%
Metalwork	189	20.3%	9,099	13.8%
German	104	11.2%	16,165	24.6%
Music	92	9.9%	8,787	13.4%
Science (local)	59	6.3%	1,957	3.0%
Technology	43	4.6%	3,409	5.2%
Spanish	19	2.0%	1,974	3.0%
Latin	15	1.6%	711	1.1%
Environmental & Social Studies	8	0.9%	648	1.0%
Typewriting	4	0.4%	725	1.1%
Classical Studies	2	0.2%	603	0.9%
Italian	-	-	242	0.4%
ESP – History	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	-	-	38	0.1%
Greek	-	-	30	0.05%
Hebrew	-	-	4	0.0%
History - Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-
Geography - Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-

Figure 5.1. Percentages of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects in the 1997 JCE (with the exception of Classical Studies, Italian, ESP Geography, and Greek, which were all taken by less than 1% of students).



As can be seen from Table 5.5 and Figure 5.1, there are some differences between rural students and students nationally in terms of subject popularity in the 1997 JCE. While the observed differences may reflect the choices of individual students, they may equally reflect the courses of study available to students in different kinds of second-level school (e.g., single-sex, vocational). Proportionately more rural students than students nationally sat examination papers in Home Economics (45.3%

vs 34.0%), Materials Technology (40.7% vs 24.7%), and Technical Graphics (37.5% vs 26.4%). On the other hand, History and German are less commonly taken by rural students than by candidates nationally (80.3% vs 91.8%, and 11.2% vs 24.6% respectively).

There were some differences in the percentages of male and female rural students taking particular subjects (Table 5.6). Home Economics was the subject in which the male-female disparity was greatest, with 83.6% of all female students taking this subject compared with only 4.0% of all males. Other subjects with a greater proportion of female candidates were Business Studies (78.2% of females vs 41.1% of males), Art, Craft and Design (38.6% vs 22.5%), French (83.8% vs 73.2%), and History (84.2% vs 76.1%). Conversely, male students from rural schools took Technical Graphics with much greater frequency than did females (71.9% and 5.6% respectively). Other subjects which showed large discrepancies favouring males were Materials Technology (74.6% of males vs 9.3% of females) and Metalwork (41.3% of males vs 0.8% of females). Since the latter three subject areas could be thought of as traditionally male-typed areas, and Home Economics as a female-typed subject area, the observed gender differences are not unexpected. However, a surprising finding is that almost twice as many female rural students as males sat the Business Studies paper.

Gender differences in subject choice were also observed in the national sample of JCE candidates, and the observed differences mirror largely those found among rural students (Table 5.7). Home Economics (which is the subject associated with the largest gender difference among students nationally), was taken by 60.7% of female students and by only 7.7% of male students. However, this difference of 53.0% is smaller than that observed among the rural sample, where the difference between the percentage of males and the percentage of females taking it is 79.6%. In subject areas in which the percentage of male candidates outnumbers that of females (such as Technical Graphics, Materials Technology and Metalwork), the gender differences in subject uptake are not as large in the national population as among rural students. This may suggest that rural students are more susceptible to choosing gender-typed subjects in the JCE than are students nationally. However, as mentioned earlier, it may equally reflect the choices available to students in different types of schools.

5.6. Numbers and percentages of rural male and female students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools taking various subjects in the 1997 JCE.

	Male (*N*=448)		**Female (*N*=482)**		**Total number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
Irish	437	97.5%	471	97.7%	908
English	445	99.3%	479	99.4%	924
Mathematics	445	99.3%	481	99.8%	926
History	341	76.1%	406	84.2%	747
Geography	396	88.4%	429	89.0%	825
Latin	5	22.4%	10	2.1%	15
Classical Studies	2	0.5%	-	-	2
French	328	73.2%	404	83.8%	732
German	21	4.7%	83	17.2%	104
Spanish	3	0.7%	16	3.3%	19
Italian	-	-	-	-	-
Typewriting	-	-	4	0.8%	4
Art, Craft, Design	101	22.5%	186	38.6%	287
Business Studies	184	41.1%	377	78.2%	561
Science	394	87.9%	427	88.6%	821
Science (local)	34	7.6%	25	5.2%	59
Music	12	2.7%	80	16.6%	92
Materials technology	334	74.6%	45	9.3%	379
Technical graphics	322	71.9%	27	5.6%	349
Home Economics	18	4.0%	403	83.6%	421
Metalwork	185	41.3%	4	0.8%	189
Technology	28	6.2%	15	3.1%	43
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	-	-	-	-	-
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	-	-	-	-	-
Greek	-	-	-	-	-
Environmental & Social Studies	6	1.3%	2	0.4%	8

5.7. Numbers and percentages of all male and female students nationally taking various subjects in the 1997 JCE.

	Male (*N*=33,081)		**Female (*N*=32,676)**		**Total number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
English	32,922	99.5%	32,524	99.5%	65,446
Mathematics	32,920	99.5%	32,502	99.5%	65,422
Irish	31,578	95.5%	31,749	97.2%	63,327
Geography	29,959	90.6%	30,768	94.2%	60,727
History	29,706	89.8%	30,672	93.9%	60,378
Latin	455	1.4%	256	0.8%	711
Classical Studies	368	1.1%	235	0.7%	603
French	21,415	64.7%	25,691	78.6%	47,106
German	7,215	21.8%	8,950	27.4%	16,165
Spanish	854	2.6%	1,120	3.4%	1,974
Italian	89	0.3%	153	0.5%	242
Typewriting	92	0.3%	633	1.9%	725
Art, Craft, Design	9,375	28.3%	13,918	42.6%	23,293
Business Studies	19,690	59.5%	24,259	74.2%	43,949
Science	29,688	89.7%	26,619	81.5%	56,307
Science (local)	1,145	3.5%	812	2.5%	1,957
Music	1,916	5.8%	6,871	21.0%	8,787
Materials Technology	14,555	44.0%	1,665	5.1%	16,220
Technical graphics	15,596	47.1%	1,753	5.4%	17,349
Home Economics	2,533	7.7%	19,835	60.7%	22,368
Metalwork	8,539	25.8%	560	1.7%	9,099
Technology	2,451	7.4%	958	2.9%	3,409
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	13	0.0%	25	0.0%	38
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	3	0.0%	1	0.0%	4
Greek	30	0.1%	-	-	30
Environmental & Social Studies	376	1.1%	272	0.8%	648

5.3 LEVEL OF EXAMINATION SUBJECTS TAKEN

While the aggregate achievements of rural students and students nationally in each subject area will be described later in this section, performance according to the percentage of students taking examination papers at various levels will be considered first.

In all subject areas in the JCE, papers may be taken at either Ordinary or Higher Level. It is possible to take English, Irish and Mathematics at three levels: Foundation, Ordinary, and Higher. The Foundation Level option is intended to cater for students who are seeking a basic qualification in a subject area. Table 5.8 and Figure 5.2 show that in the case of English, Irish and Mathematics, the percentages of rural students taking Foundation Level papers were lower than among students nationally.

Table 5.8. Numbers and percentages of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking English, Irish and Mathematics at Foundation Level in the 1997 JCE.

	Rural students (*N*=930)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,758)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Irish	43	4.6%	5,940	9.0%
English	22	2.4%	2,200	3.3%
Mathematics	88	9.5%	8,134	12.4%

When the proportions of rural students taking papers at Foundation Level is examined according to student gender (Table 5.9), indications are that about four times as many males as females took Irish and English at Foundation Level, while twice as many males as females took Foundation Level Mathematics. This pattern is mirrored in the national data (Table 5.10), albeit in a less pronounced form: among students nationally, more than twice as many males as females took Foundation Level Irish and English, while the difference in Mathematics was of a lesser magnitude (14.1% of males vs 10.6% of females). It seems, therefore, that while the Foundation Level option was taken up less frequently among the sample of disadvantaged rural students, gender differences (in which males fared more poorly) were greater among the rural sample than among candidates nationally.

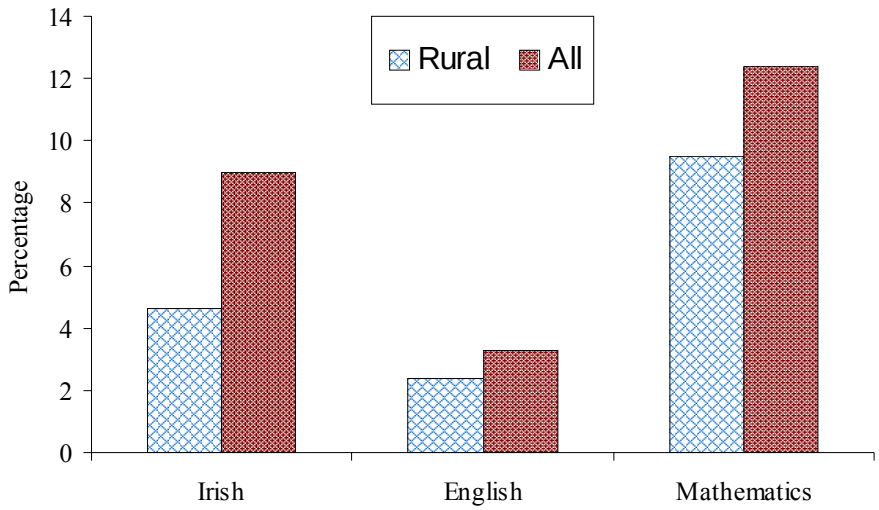
Table 5.9. Numbers and percentages of male and female rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools taking English, Irish and Mathematics at Foundation Level in the 1997 JCE (*N*=930).

	Males (*N*=448)		**Females (*N*=482)**		**Total number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
Irish	35	7.8%	8	1.7%	43
English	17	3.8%	5	1.0%	22
Mathematics	55	12.3%	33	6.9%	88

Table 5.10. Numbers and percentages of male and female students nationally taking English, Irish and Mathematics at Foundation Level in the 1997 JCE (*N*=65,757).

	Males (*N*=33,081)		**Females (*N*=32,676)**		**Total number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
Irish	4,058	12.3%	1,882	5.8%	5,940
English	1,531	4.6%	669	2.1%	2,200
Mathematics	4,657	14.1%	3,477	10.6%	8,134

Figure 5.2. Percentages of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking Irish, English and Mathematics at Foundation Level in the 1997 JCE.



There are also differences between students in the rural sample and students nationally in the proportions taking examination subjects at Ordinary Level (Table 5.11). In the most popular subject areas (Irish, English and Mathematics), greater percentages of rural students took papers at Ordinary Level than did students nationally.

Table 5.11. Numbers and percentages of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects at Ordinary Level in the 1997 JCE.

	Rural students (*N*=930)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,758)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Irish	465	50.0%	31,645	48.1%
English	438	47.1%	23,136	35.2%
Mathematics	596	64.1%	33,779	51.4%
History	241	25.9%	16,121	24.5%
Geography	221	23.8%	13,394	20.4%
Latin	3	0.3%	59	0.1%
Classical Studies	-	-	84	0.1%
French	308	33.1%	14,172	21.6%
German	22	2.4%	3,274	5.0%
Spanish	6	0.6%	538	0.8%
Italian	-	-	84	0.1%
Typewriting	4	0.4%	458	0.7%
Art, Craft, Design	144	15.5%	10,075	15.3%
Business Studies	209	22.5%	13,216	20.1%
Science	365	39.2%	18,411	28.0%
Science (local)	40	4.3%	1,247	1.9%
Music	15	1.6%	1,726	2.6%
Materials technology	83	8.9%	5,472	8.3%
Technical graphics	181	19.5%	8,218	12.5%
Home Economics	56	6.0%	4,788	7.3%
Metalwork	45	4.8%	3,119	4.7%
Technology	13	1.4%	947	1.4%
ESP – History	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	-	-	1	0.0%
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	-	-	1	0.0%
Greek	-	-	2	0.0%
Environmental & Social Studies	8	0.9%	479	0.7%

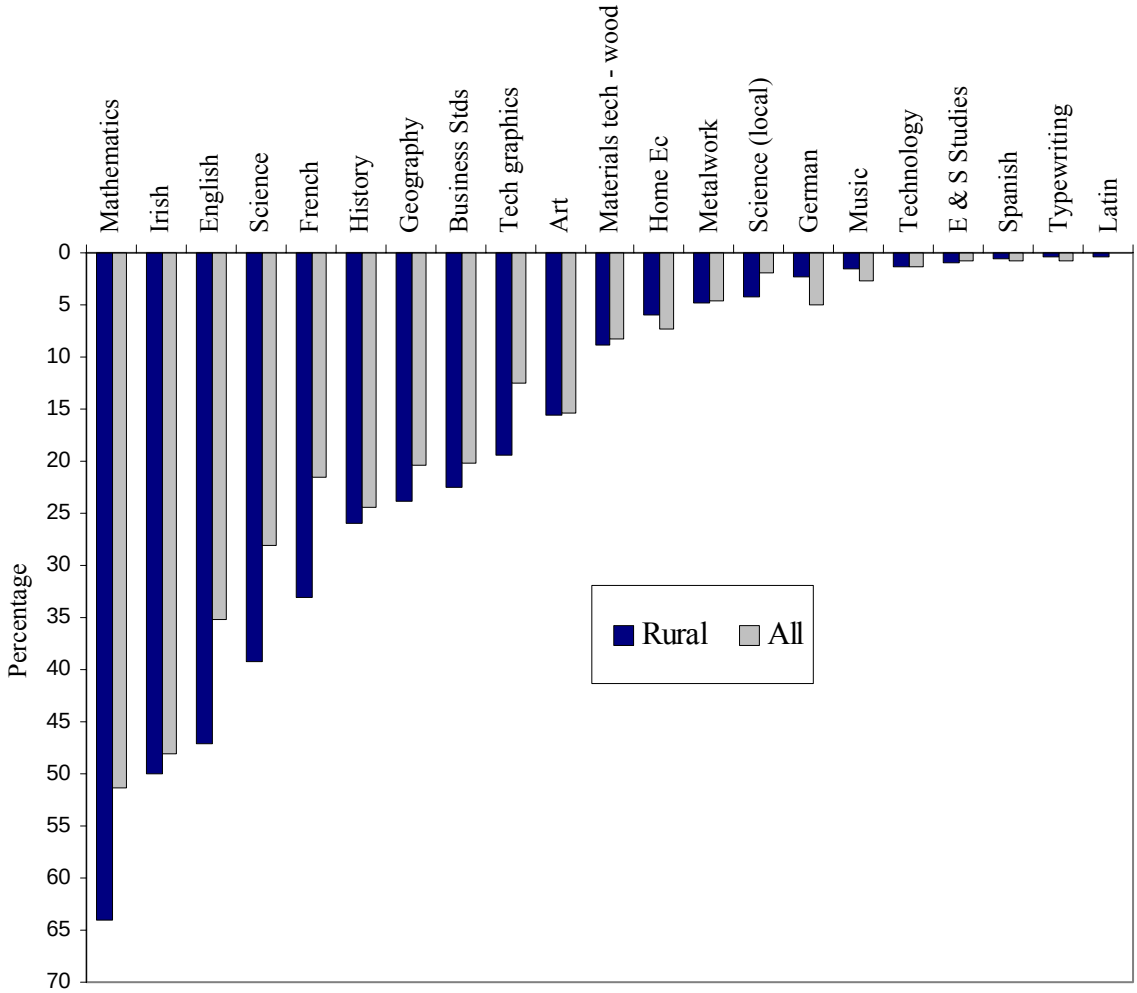
Table 5.12 and Figure 5.3 show the number and percentage of male and female rural students who took papers at Ordinary Level in the 1997 JCE. Proportionately more male than female students took Ordinary Level papers in the more popular

subjects. Exceptions arose in the areas of Mathematics, Art, Craft and Design, and Business Studies, where a greater percentage of females than males took Ordinary Level examination papers.

Table 5.12. Numbers and percentages of male and female students from rural *Breaking the Cycle* schools taking various subjects at Ordinary Level in the 1997 JCE (*N*=930).

	Males (*N*=448)		**Females (*N*=482)**		**Total number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
Irish	260	58.0%	205	42.5%	465
English	266	59.4%	172	35.7%	438
Mathematics	270	60.3%	326	67.6%	596
History	131	29.2%	110	22.8%	241
Geography	119	26.6%	102	21.2%	221
Latin	2	0.45%	1	0.2%	3
Classical Studies	-	-	-	-	-
French	187	41.7%	121	25.1%	308
German	3	0.7%	19	3.9%	22
Spanish	1	0.2%	5	1.0%	6
Italian	-	-	-	-	-
Typewriting	-	-	4	0.8%	4
Art, Craft, Design	59	13.2%	85	17.6%	144
Business Studies	85	19.0%	124	25.7%	209
Science	193	43.1%	172	35.7%	365
Science (local)	24	5.4%	16	3.3%	40
Music	1	0.2%	14	2.9%	15
Materials technology	65	14.5%	18	3.7%	83
Technical graphics	168	37.5%	13	2.7%	181
Home Economics	6	1.3%	50	10.4%	56
Metalwork	42	9.4%	3	0.6%	45
Technology	8	1.8%	5	1.0%	13
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	-	-	-	-	-
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	-	-	-	-	-
Greek	-	-	-	-	-
Environmental & Social Studies	6	1.3%	2	0.4%	8

Figure 5.3. Percentages of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects at Ordinary Level in the 1997 JCE (with the exception of Classical Studies, ESP- Geography, Hebrew and Greek, which were all taken by less than 0.2% of students).



There is a similar pattern among students nationally (Table 5.13), with fewer female students than males taking Ordinary Level papers in the more popular subject areas. As was the case with rural students, an exception arose in relation to Mathematics, in which males took the Ordinary Level paper in fewer numbers than did females.

Table 5.13. Numbers and percentages of male and female students nationally taking various subjects at Ordinary Level in the 1997 JCE (*N*=65,757).

	Males (*N*=33,081)		**Females (*N*=32,676)**		**Total Number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
Mathematics	16,716	50.5%	17,062	52.2%	33,778
Irish	16,991	51.4%	14,653	44.8%	31,644
English	13,609	41.1%	9,527	29.2%	23,136
Science	11,073	33.5%	7,338	22.5%	18,411
History	8,563	25.9%	7,558	23.1%	16,121
French	7,819	23.6%	6,353	19.4%	14,172
Geography	7,054	21.3%	6,340	19.4%	13,394
Business Studies	6,307	19.1%	6,909	21.1%	13,216
Art, Craft, Design	4,593	13.8%	5,482	16.8%	10,075
Technical graphics	7,298	22.1%	920	2.8%	8,218
Materials technology	4,680	14.1%	792	2.4%	5,472
Home Economics	1,272	3.8%	3,516	10.8%	4,788
German	1,933	5.8%	1,341	4.1%	3,274
Metalwork	2,850	8.6%	269	0.8%	3,119
Music	553	1.7%	1,173	3.6%	1,726
Science (local)	812	2.5%	435	1.3%	1,247
Technology	608	1.8%	339	1.0%	947
Spanish	314	0.9%	224	0.7%	538
Environmental & Social Studies	286	0.9%	193	0.6%	479
Typewriting	61	0.2%	397	1.2%	458
Classical Studies	41	0.1%	43	0.1%	84
Italian	44	0.1%	40	0.1%	84
Latin	30	0.1%	29	0.1%	59
Greek	2	0.0%	-	-	2
ESP – Geography	1	0.0%	-	-	1
Hebrew	1	0.0%	-	-	1
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-

As Table 5.14 and Figure 5.4 show, fewer rural students than students nationally took Higher Level papers in the more popular subjects (such as English, Mathematics, History, Geography, French and Science). However, exceptions arose in relation to Irish, Home Economics, and Materials Technology, where the percentage of rural students that took Higher Level papers exceeded that of students nationally.

Table 5.14. Numbers and percentages of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects at Higher Level in the 1997 JCE.

	Rural students (*N*=930)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,758)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Irish	400	43.0%	25,743	39.1%
English	464	49.9%	40,111	61.0%
Mathematics	242	26.0%	23,510	35.8%
History	506	54.4%	44,258	67.3%
Geography	604	64.9%	47,334	72.0%
Latin	12	1.3%	652	10.0%
Classical Studies	2	0.2%	519	0.8%
French	424	45.6%	32,935	50.1%
German	82	8.8%	12,891	19.6%
Spanish	13	1.4%	1,436	2.1%
Italian	-	-	158	0.2%
Typewriting	-	-	267	0.4%
Art, Craft, Design	143	15.4%	13,218	20.1%
Business Studies	352	37.8%	30,734	46.7%
Science	456	49.0%	37,897	57.6%
Science (local)	19	2.0%	710	1.1%
Music	77	8.3%	7,061	10.7%
Materials technology	296	31.8%	10,748	16.3%
Technical graphics	168	18.1%	9,131	13.9%
Home Economics	365	39.2%	17,581	26.7%
Metalwork	144	15.5%	5,980	9.1%
Technology	30	3.2%	2,462	3.7%
ESP- History	-	-	-	-
ESP- Geography	-	-	37	0.1%
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	-	-	3	0.0%
Greek	-	-	28	0.0%
Environmental & Social Studies	-	-	169	0.3%

Figure 5.4. Percentages of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects at Higher Level in the 1997 JCE (with the exception of Italian, Environmental and Social Studies, Greek, Hebrew and ESP-Geography, which were all taken by less than 0.4% of students).

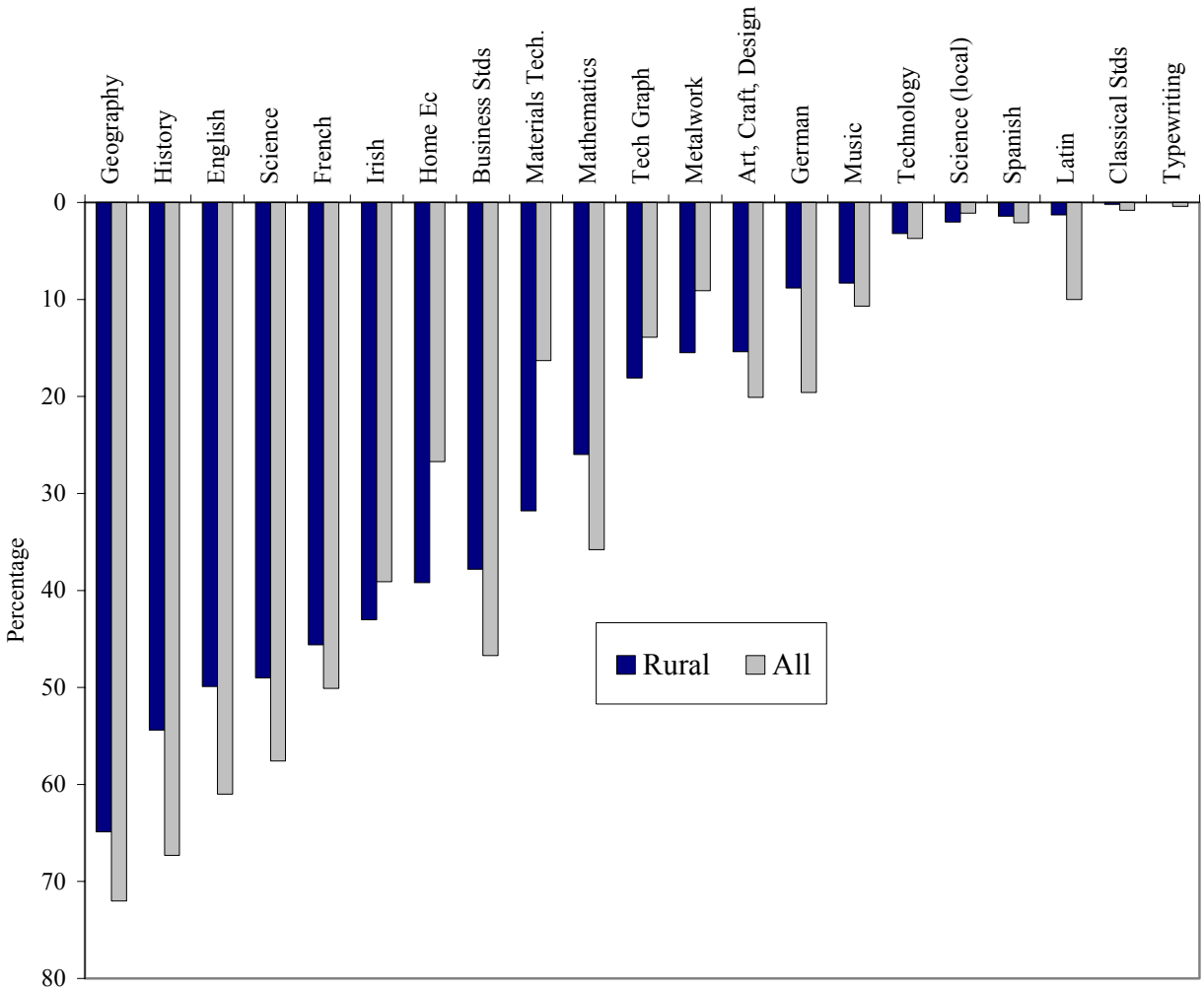


Table 5.15 shows that more female than male rural students took Higher Level papers in most subject areas, with the exception of the more traditionally male-oriented areas of Materials Technology and Technical Graphics. In the traditionally female-oriented area of Home Economics, 73.2% of female candidates took Higher papers, compared to 2.7% of males. A more surprising finding was that while 22.1% of male students took the Higher Level Business Studies paper, a much larger proportion of female students (52.5%) took this subject at Higher Level.

Table 5.15. Numbers and percentages of rural male and female students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools taking various subjects at Higher Level in the 1997 JCE (*N*=930).

	Males (*N*=448)		**Females (*N*=482)**		**Total Number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
Irish	142	31.7%	258	53.5%	400
English	162	36.2%	302	62.7%	464
Mathematics	120	26.8%	122	25.3%	242
History	210	46.9%	296	61.4%	506
Geography	277	61.8%	327	67.8%	604
Latin	3	0.7%	9	1.9%	12
Classical Studies	2	0.2%	-	-	2
French	141	31.5%	283	58.7%	424
German	18	4.0%	64	13.3%	82
Spanish	2	0.4%	11	2.3%	13
Italian	-	-	-	-	-
Typewriting	-	-	-	-	-
Art, Craft, Design	42	9.4%	101	21.0%	143
Business Studies	99	22.1%	253	52.5%	352
Science	201	44.9%	255	52.9%	456
Science (local)	10	2.2%	9	1.9%	19
Music	11	2.5%	66	13.7%	77
Materials technology	269	60.0%	27	5.6%	296
Technical graphics	154	34.4%	14	2.9%	168
Home Economics	12	2.7%	353	73.2%	365
Metalwork	143	0.2%	1	0.2%	144
Technology	20	4.5%	10	2.1%	30
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	-	-	-	-	-
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	-	-	-	-	-
Greek	-	-	-	-	-
Environmental & Social Studies	-	-	-	-	-

The tendency for greater percentages of female than male students to take Higher Level papers is also reflected in the national data (Table 5.16). Nationally, more females took Higher Level papers in popular subjects than did their male counterparts.

Table 5.16. Numbers and percentages of all male and female students nationally taking various subjects at Higher Level in the 1997 JCE (*N*=65,757).

	Males (*N*=33,081)		**Females (*N*=32,676)**		**Total number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
Irish	10,529	31.8%	15,214	46.6%	25,743
English	17,782	53.8%	22,328	68.3%	40,110
Mathematics	11,547	34.9%	11,963	36.6%	23,510
History	21,143	63.9%	23,114	70.7%	44,257
Geography	22,905	69.2%	24,428	74.8%	47,333
Latin	425	1.3%	227	0.7%	652
Classical Studies	327	1.0%	192	0.6%	519
French	13,596	41.1%	19,338	59.2%	32,934
German	5,282	16.0%	7,609	23.3%	12,891
Spanish	540	1.6%	896	2.7	1,436
Italian	45	0.1%	113	0.3%	158
Typewriting	31	0.1%	236	0.7%	267
Art, Craft, Design	4,782	14.5%	8,436	25.8%	13,218
Business Studies	13,383	40.5%	17,350	53.1%	30,733
Science	18,615	56.3%	19,281	59.0%	37,896
Science (local)	333	1.0%	377	1.2%	710
Music	1,363	4.1%	5,698	17.4%	7,061
Materials technology	9,875	29.9%	873	2.7%	10,748
Technical graphics	8,298	25.1%	833	2.5%	9,131
Home Economics	1,261	3.8%	16,319	49.9%	17,580
Metalwork	5,689	17.2%	291	0.9%	5,980
Technology	1,843	5.6%	619	1.9%	2,462
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	12	0.0%	25	0.1%	37
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	2	0.0%	1	0.0%	3
Greek	28	0.1%	-	-	28
Environmental & Social Studies	90	0.3%	79	0.2%	169

5.4 OVERALL PERFORMANCE IN THE JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

In this section, student performance is sometimes described using an overall performance scale (OPS) which has been adopted directly from that used by Kellaghan and Dwan (1995) in their review of the 1994 Junior Certificate results. The OPS scale involves the allocation of numerical values to the alphabetical grades awarded to candidates, which when summed, produce an index of a candidate's general scholastic ability (Table 5.17). The OPS score is based on a student's performance in the seven subjects in which he or she performed best. The maximum possible OPS score is 84 (which is achieved by a student who is awarded seven "A" grades on Higher Level papers), while the lowest possible OPS score is 0 (where a student fails to achieve at least a grade "F" on any of their best seven papers).

In the practical application of the scale, a student with an OPS score of 56 may have achieved seven "E" grades on Higher Level papers, or seven "B" grades on Ordinary Level papers. It should be noted that in the allocation of weights assigned to grades, it is assumed, for example, that the difference between an "A" and a "B" grade on a Higher Level paper is the same as the difference between an "A" and "B" grade on an Ordinary Level (or Foundation Level) paper. Another assumption is that an "A" grade on a Higher Level paper (which attracts a score of 12) is 12 times as meritorious as an "F" grade on a Foundation Level paper (which attracts a score of 1). Furthermore, all subjects are treated as equivalent, whereas, in reality, it may be more difficult to achieve a high grade in some subject areas than in others. In spite these considerations, the OPS score may be taken as a useful broad measure of a candidate's achievements in the JCE.

Table 5.17. Overall performance scale (OPS) scores corresponding to grade categories at each examination level.

Higher	Ordinary	Foundation	OPS score
A			12
B			11
C			10
D	A		9
E	B		8
F	C		7
	D	A	6
	E	B	5
	F	C	4
		D	3
		E	2
		F	1

Of the 930 rural students who sat the JCE in 1997, 924 students (99.4%) sat seven subjects or more. Thus, it was possible to compute OPS scores[1] for this group of students to compare their achievements with those of candidates nationally. Table 5.18 shows that there is little discernible difference between the overall mean achievement of rural students who originated in schools that are now participating in *Breaking the Cycle* and the national population of candidates in 1997. Thus, despite their disadvantaged backgrounds, rural students, as a group, did not perform more poorly in the JCE than did students in the national population. When expressed in terms of grades achieved in the JCE, the mean OPS scores achieved by the two groups could be described as an average of seven "D" grades on Higher papers, or an average of seven "A" grades on Ordinary Level papers (as both of these outcomes in the JCE would attract an OPS score of 63). In reality, of course, the OPS score of both groups is derived from a range of grades achieved at Foundation, Ordinary and Higher Level. There is little difference in the percentage of rural students and students nationally achieving maximum OPS scores: about one student in every hundred who took the JCE in 1997 in each of the groups achieved at least seven "A" grades on Higher papers (Table 5.19).

Table 5.18. Mean OPS score achieved by students from rural *Breaking the Cycle* schools and by all students nationally in the 1997 JCE.

Group	**Mean OPS score**
Rural *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=924)	64.6 (10.3)
All students nationally (*N*=64,756)	65.3 (11.4)

Table 5.19. Number and percentage of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and students nationally who achieved maximum[1] OPS scores in the 1997 JCE.

	Rural students (*N*=924)		**All students (*N*=64,756)**	
	N	%	*N*	%
Maximum OPS score (OPS=84)	10	1.1%	984	1.5%

[1] An OPS score of 84 is achieved when a student is awarded seven "A" grades on Higher Level papers.

While there are no appreciable differences between the performance of rural students and students nationally, it is of interest to examine performance as it relates to student gender. Table 5.20 shows that in both student groups, females achieved higher mean OPS scores than did males. The present finding that the JCE achievements of

[1] Where descriptions of student performance involve OPS scores, the analyses are based on data from students with at least seven subjects in the 1997 JCE. Descriptions of performance which do not involve OPS scores are based on the total sample (*N*=930).

female candidates exceeded those of males has been reported elsewhere (e.g., Kellaghan and Dwan, 1995). The present results show that the magnitude of the gender differences found in our sample of disadvantaged rural students is similar to that observed among students nationally. A comparison of the percentage of students in each group who achieved the maximum OPS score shows that female students in both the national population and in the rural sample outperformed their male counterparts by a ratio of more than 2:1 (Table 5.21). It should be noted, however, that numbers of cases in the rural sample (used in the comparison) are very small.

Table 5.20. Mean OPS score achieved by male and female students from rural *Breaking the Cycle* schools and by male and female students nationally in the 1997 JCE.

Rural students (*N*=924)		**All students nationally (*N*=64,755)**	
Males (*N*=445)	Females (*N*=479)	Males (*N*=32,475)	Females (*N*=32,280)
62.5 (10.8)	66.5 (11.9)	63.7 (11.6)	66.9 (11.0)

Table 5.21. Number and percentage of male and female rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and students nationally who achieved maximum[1] OPS scores of 84 in the 1997 JCE.

Rural students (*N*=924)				**All students (*N*=64,755)**			
Males (*N*=445)		Females (*N*=479)		Males (*N*=32,475)		Females (*N*=32,280)	
N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
2	0.4%	8	1.7%	304	0.9%	680	2.1%

[1]An OPS score of 84 is achieved when a student is awarded seven "A" grades on Higher Level papers.

It is also of interest to examine the performance of students on the basis of school type. A comparison of Tables 5.22 and 5.23 shows that, in the case of both rural students and students nationally, students in Secondary schools outperformed students in other school types in the 1997 JCE.

Table 5.22. Mean OPS score in the 1997 JCE achieved by students from rural *Breaking the Cycle* schools according to school type and gender (*N*=924).

	Mean OPS score		
Type of school	**Males**	**Females**	**Total**
Secondary	65.1 (9.7) (*n*=137)	69.8 (8.6) (*n*=193)	67.9 (9.3) (*n*=330)
Vocational	61.8 (10.5) (*n*=165)	63.8 (9.5) (*n*=120)	62.7 (10.1) (*n*=285)
Comprehensive	60.9 (12.1) (*n*=47)	64.1 (8.8) (*n*=65)	62.8 (10.4) (*n*=112)
Community	60.8 (11.6) (*n*=96)	64.7 (9.7) (*n*=101)	62.8 (10.8) (*n*=197)
Total	**62.5 (10.8)** (*n*=445)	**66.5 (11.9)** (*n*=479)	**64.6 (10.3) (*N*=924)**

Table 5.23. Mean OPS score in the 1997 JCE achieved by students nationally according to school type and gender (*N*=64,755).

	Mean OPS score		
Type of school	**Males**	**Females**	**Total**
Secondary	66.1 (10.9) (*n*=18,652)	68.3 (10.4) (*n*=22,381)	67.3 (10.7) (*n*=41,033)
Vocational	59.3 (11.7) (*n*=8,524)	62.5 (11.9) (*n*=5,471)	60.5 (11.9) (*n*=13,995)
Comprehensive	65.0 (10.8) (*n*=795)	66.0 (10.9) (*n*=766)	65.5 (10.9) (*n*=1,561)
Community	62.0 (11.7) (*n*=4,504)	65.2 (11.2) (*n*=3,662)	63.5 (11.6) (*n*=8,166)
Total	**63.7 (11.6)** (*n*=32,475)	**66.9 (11.0)** (*n*=32,280)	**65.3 (11.4) (*N*=64,755)**

It is clear from Tables 5.22 and 5.23 that female students enrolled in Secondary schools achieved the highest OPS scores, both among the national population and among the sample of students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools. Indeed, rural female students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools who were enrolled in Secondary schools at the time of taking the JCE outperformed all other subgroups. The lowest mean OPS score among the subgroups was achieved by male students in the national population attending Vocational schools, followed by rural male students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools who were enrolled in Community schools.

As it was deemed pertinent to the current study, performance in the JCE was also examined on the basis of whether the post-primary school attended by students had been as designated disadvantaged. Table 5.24 shows the mean OPS scores for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools according to whether they went on to attend post-primary schools that were or were not designated disadvantaged. For comparison purposes, the performance of the national population is also examined according to disadvantaged status of the school attended (Table 5.25).

Table 5.24. Performance of students from rural *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE, according to whether they attended post-primary schools that were, or were not, designated disadvantaged (*N*=924).

	Designated status	
	Disadvantaged (*N*=518)	**Non-disadvantaged (*N*=406)**
Mean overall performance score (OPS)	63.6 (10.3)	65.8 (10.2)
Mean no. of subjects taken	9.0 (0.7)	9.1 (0.8)
Mean no. of subjects taken at Ordinary level	4.0 (2.7)	3.4 (2.7)
Mean no. of subjects taken at Higher level	4.9 (3.0)	5.6 (3.1)
Mean no. of subjects taken at Foundation level	0.2 (0.6)	0.1 (0.5)

Table 5.25. Performance of students nationally in the 1997 JCE, according to whether they attended post-primary schools that were, or were not, designated disadvantaged (*N*=64,755).

	Designated status	
	Disadvantaged (*N*=16,547)	**Non-disadvantaged (*N*=48,208)**
Mean overall performance score (OPS)	60.6 (12.1)	66.9 (10.7)
Mean no. of subjects taken	8.8 (0.8)	9.0 (0.7)
Mean no. of subjects taken at Ordinary level	4.0 (2.7)	2.8 (2.7)
Mean no. of subjects taken at Higher level	4.4 (3.3)	6.1 (3.2)
Mean no. of subjects taken at Foundation level	0.4 (0.9)	0.2 (0.5)

As Tables 5.24 and 5.25 show, at the time of taking the JCE slightly more than half (56.1%) of all rural students were enrolled in post-primary schools that were designated as disadvantaged. In contrast, only 25.6% of students nationally were enrolled in schools which were thus designated. Furthermore, there are differences in the characteristics of JCE candidates depending on whether or not students were enrolled in schools that were designated as disadvantaged. Among both the rural sample and the national population of candidates, students in designated schools achieved lower mean OPS scores than did students in non-designated schools. The extent of the difference between the mean OPS score of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students was, however, greater among the national population (60.6 vs 66.9 respectively) than it was among the rural sample (63.6 vs 65.8 respectively). Students in designated and non-designated schools also differed on other characteristics: students attending designated schools, on average, took fewer subjects in the JCE than did their non-disadvantaged counterparts. Also, those enrolled in designated schools took a greater number of subjects at Foundation and Ordinary Level, and fewer subjects at Higher Level than did those in non-designated schools (see also Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5. Mean number of subjects taken at Ordinary, Higher, and Foundation Level and all levels in the 1997 JCE by students from rural *Breaking the Cycle* schools, according to whether they were enrolled in schools that were, or were not, designated disadvantaged.

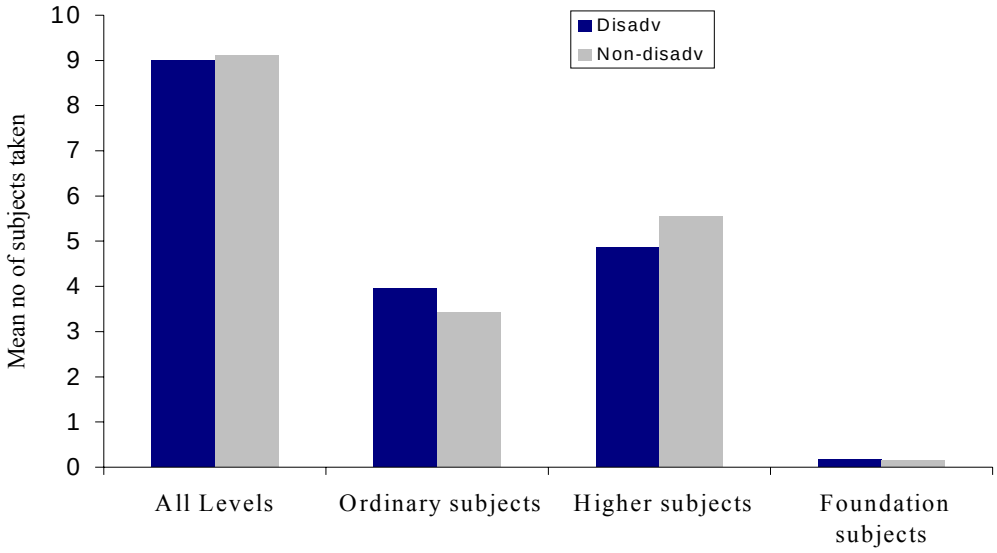


Table 5.26 summarizes the performance of rural students in both designated and non-designated post-primary schools, according to student gender. It is clear that the performance of students in designated post-primary schools compares unfavourably with that of students in non-designated schools in terms of mean achievement (mean OPS score), as well as in relation to the mean number of subjects taken at various levels. Also notable, however, is the fact that rural females outperformed rural males even when the comparison is between the achievements of males in non-designated schools and those of female students enrolled in schools that are designated disadvantaged. Table 5.27 reports the equivalent results for the national population. In both designated and non-designated schools nationally, female students outperformed males. The highest achieving subgroup were female students in non-designated schools, and the poorest performance recorded was among male students in schools that were designated as disadvantaged.

Table 5.26. Performance of male and female students from rural *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE, according to whether they attended post-primary schools that were, or were not, designated disadvantaged (*N*=924).

	Disadvantaged (*N*=518)		**Non-disadvantaged (*N*=406)**	
	Males (*N*=241)	Females (*N*=277)	Males (*N*=204)	Females (*N*=202)
Mean overall performance score (OPS)	61.6 (11.0)	65.4 (9.4)	63.6 (10.6)	67.9 (9.4)
Mean number of subjects taken	8.9 (1.0)	9.1 (0.9)	9.1 (1.0)	9.1 (0.8)
Mean number of subjects taken at Ordinary level	4.4 (2.6)	3.6 (2.7)	4.0 (2.7)	2.8 (2.6)
Mean number of subjects taken at Higher level	4.2 (3.1)	5.4 (3.0)	4.9 (3.3)	6.2 (2.9)
Mean number of subjects taken at Foundation level	0.3 (0.7)	0.1 (0.4)	0.2 (0.5)	0.0 (0.3)

Table 5.27. Performance of male and female students nationally the 1997 JCE, according to whether they attended post-primary schools that were, or were not, designated disadvantaged (*N*=64,755).

	Disadvantaged (*N*=16,547)		**Non-disadvantaged (*N*=48,208)**	
	Males (*N*=7,974)	Females (*N*=8,573)	Males (*N*=24,501)	Females (*N*=23,707)
Mean overall performance score (OPS)	58.6 (12.0)	62.4 (11.0)	65.4 (10.9)	68.5 (10.1)
Mean number of subjects taken	8.8 (0.8)	8.8 (0.8)	9.0 (0.7)	9.1 (0.7)
Mean number of subjects taken at Ordinary level	4.4 (2.6)	3.6 (2.7)	3.1 (2.8)	2.5 (2.7)
Mean number of subjects taken at Higher level	3.8 (3.2)	4.8 (3.4)	5.7 (3.2)	6.5 (3.0)
Mean number of subjects taken at Foundation level	0.6 (0.9)	0.3 (0.7)	0.2 (0.6)	0.1 (0.4)

5.5 STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS IN INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTS.

The achievements of rural students in individual subject areas are described in this section. In the same way that an overall OPS score can be computed for the best seven subjects taken by a student in the JCE, an OPS score is available for each student in every subject area. The individual subject OPS is computed by assigning the numerical value specified in Table 5.17 to the grade achieved by the student in an individual paper (for example, a "C" grade on a Higher paper attracts an OPS score of 10). The individual OPS scores can then be aggregated to produce an overall index of achievement in a given subject area for rural students and for the national population. The mean OPS of rural pupils in English is slightly lower than that of students nationally (Table 5.28), indicating that rural students did not perform quite as well in this subject as the national population.

Table 5.28. Mean OPS score of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and of students nationally in English in the 1997 JCE.

Subject	**Rural students**	**All students nationally**
English	8.46 (1.78) (*N*=924)	8.75 (1.84) (*N*=65,447)

An OPS score of between 8 and 9 (which describes the achievements of both groups of students in Table 5.28) represents an average of an "E" grade on the Higher Level English paper, or a "B" grade on an Ordinary Level paper. While the mean OPS score serves as a useful general indicator of student achievement, it is also of interest to examine student achievement by looking at the precise derivation of the OPS score. This may be done by examining the percentage of students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and the percentage of students nationally who were awarded various grades at Foundation, Ordinary and Higher Levels. Tables 5.29 to 5.31 show the percentage of students in the two groups who were awarded each of the 7 available grades at Foundation, Ordinary and Higher Levels in the JCE in English in 1997.

The numbers of students that took Foundation Level English are small, but it can be seen from Table 5.29 that the spread of grades is greater among the national population of students than among the rural sample. At Ordinary Level, rural students received more "A" and "B" grades, and fewer "C" grades in English than did students nationally (Table 5.30). However, at Higher Level, students in the national population

of candidates were awarded more "A" grades and fewer "D" grades than were their rural counterparts (Table 5.31).

Table 5.29. Foundation Level English results, by grade, for all students nationally and for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE.

	% A	**% B**	**% C**	**% D**	**% E**	**% F**	**% NG**
Students nationally (*N*=2,200)	7.9%	32.5%	35.4%	18.0%	3.5%	2.1%	0.5%
Rural *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=22)	-	36.4%	27.3%	27.3%	4.5%	4.5%	-

Table 5.30. Ordinary Level English results, by grade, for all students nationally and for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE.

	% A	**% B**	**% C**	**% D**	**% E**	**% F**	**% NG**
Students nationally (*N*=23,136)	6.3%	25.7%	43.8%	21.9%	2.1%	0.2%	-
Rural *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=438)	6.8%	29.9%	37.9%	23.5%	1.8%	-	-

Table 5.31. Higher Level English results, by grade, for all students nationally and for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE.

	% A	**% B**	**% C**	**% D**	**% E**	**% F**	**% NG**
Students nationally (*N*=40,111)	5.1%	21.0%	41.1%	29.7%	2.9%	0.2%	-
Rural *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=464)	3.7%	21.3%	38.8%	33.8%	2.2%	0.2%	-

In the subject area of Irish, students in the rural sample outperformed students in the national population (Table 5.32). The mean OPS score achieved by both groups of students corresponds most closely to an "E" grade on a Higher Level paper or a "B" grade on an Ordinary Level paper. An OPS score of about 8 also indicates that the achievements of both groups in Irish are lower than was the case in the subject area of English (Table 5.28).

Table 5.32. Mean OPS score of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and of students nationally in Irish in the 1997 JCE.

Subject	**Rural students**	**All students nationally**
Irish	8.25 (2.24) (*N*=908)	7.90 (2.33) (*N*=63,328)

An examination of the derivation of the OPS in Irish (Tables 5.33 to 5.35) shows that rural students achieved a greater proportion of "A" grades at Foundation and Higher Level than did students nationally. Among both student groups, "A" grades in Ordinary Level Irish were a relative rarity, but students in the national population achieved slightly more "A" grades (2.4% of students) than did those in the rural sample (1.9% of students). At the lower end of the scale, in general, rural students were awarded fewer "E", "F" and "NG" grades at each level than were students in the national population.

Table 5.33. Foundation Level Irish results, by grade, for all students nationally and for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE.

	% A	**% B**	**% C**	**% D**	**% E**	**% F**	**% NG**
Students nationally (*N*=5,940)	6.2%	24.7%	31.5%	24.7%	10.3%	2.5%	0.1%
Rural *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=43)	9.3%	20.9%	18.6%	39.5%	7.0%	4.7%	-

Table 5.34. Ordinary Level Irish results, by grade, for all students nationally and for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE.

	% A	**% B**	**% C**	**% D**	**% E**	**% F**	**% NG**
Students nationally (*N*=31,645)	2.4%	23.3%	37.2%	27.0%	8.2%	1.9%	0.1%
Rural *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=465)	1.9%	24.3%	41.7%	22.6%	8.0%	1.5%	-

Table 5.35. Higher Level Irish results, by grade, for all students nationally and for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE.

	% A	**% B**	**% C**	**% D**	**% E**	**% F**	**% NG**
Students nationally (*N*=25,743)	11.3%	28.0%	34.6%	21.8%	3.8%	0.4%	-
Rural *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=400)	16.0%	31.0%	30.0%	20.3%	2.8%	-	-

In Mathematics, the performance of rural candidates overall was slightly poorer than that of their national counterparts (Table 5.36). This appears to be explained by the fact that, while rural candidates and candidates nationally differed very little in the

proportions achieving each of the grades in Ordinary Level Mathematics (Table 5.38), greater proportions of students in the national population achieved upper grades (i.e., "A", "B", or "C" grades) and smaller proportions achieved lower grades (i.e., "D" or "E" grades) in Higher Level Mathematics than did the group of rural candidates (Table 5.39).

Table 5.36. Mean OPS score of rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and of students nationally in Mathematics in the 1997 JCE.

Subject	**Rural students**	**All students nationally**
Mathematics	7.62 (2.08) (*N*=926)	7.92 (2.29) (*N*=65,423)

Table 5.37. Foundation Level Mathematics results, by grade, for all students nationally and for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE.

	% A	**% B**	**% C**	**% D**	**% E**	**% F**	**% NG**
Students nationally (*N*=8,134)	7.5%	37.0%	33.4%	16.7%	3.9%	1.4%	0.12%
Rural *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=88)	10.2%	40.9%	34.1%	9.1%	4.5%	1.1%	-

Table 5.38. Ordinary Level Mathematics results, by grade, for all students nationally and for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE.

	% A	**% B**	**% C**	**% D**	**% E**	**% F**	**% NG**
Students nationally (*N*=33,779)	11.3%	31.8%	30.1%	19.3%	5.5%	1.8%	0.18%
Rural *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=596)	12.9%	27.7%	29.4%	21.6%	5.4%	2.3%	0.17%

Table 5.39. Higher Level Mathematics results, by grade, for all students nationally and for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE.

	% A	**% B**	**% C**	**% D**	**% E**	**% F**	**% NG**
Students nationally (*N*=23,510)	14.3%	28.9%	31.0%	20.6%	4.2%	0.9%	0.01%
Rural *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=242)	11.6%	25.2%	30.6%	26.9%	5.0%	0.8%	-

To examine student performance in non-core (but, nevertheless, popular) subject areas, the Ordinary and Higher Level grades achieved by rural students and students nationally in the seven next most popular areas are reported in Tables 5.40 and 5.41. An interesting observation may be made from an examination of these tables: with the exception of Home Economics, students in the national population achieved proportionately fewer Ordinary Level "A" grades in each of the subject areas than did rural students, while in Higher Level papers (again, with the exception of Home Economics), rural students were awarded proportionately fewer "A" grades in each subject than were students nationally.

Table 5.40. Percentages of grades awarded to all students nationally and to rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools who took Ordinary Level History, Geography, Science, French, Business Studies, Art, Craft and Design, and Home Economics in the 1997 JCE.

Subject	**Group**	**%A**	**%B**	**%C**	**%D**	**%E**	**%F**	**%NG**
History	Students nationally (*N*=16,121)	7.8%	25.5%	31.0%	24.5%	6.9%	3.5%	0.8%
	Rural students (*N*= 241)	12.9%	21.2%	29.9%	25.3%	6.2%	3.7%	0.8%
Geography	Students nationally (*N*=13,394)	9.1%	35.6%	34.5%	16.6%	3.4%	0.8%	-
	Rural students (*N*= 221)	16.3%	36.7%	33.5%	10.4%	2.7%	0.5%	-
Science	Students nationally (*N*=18,411)	4.8%	27.9%	37.3%	22.1%	6.0%	1.8%	0.1%
	Rural students (*N*= 365)	5.8%	31.0%	34.5%	21.1%	6.6%	0.8%	0.3%
French	Students nationally (*N*=14,172)	0.8%	14.9%	36.4%	33.6%	12.0%	2.3%	-
	Rural students (*N*= 308)	1.9%	20.1%	40.6%	30.5%	6.2%	0.6%	-
Business Studies	Students nationally (*N*=13,216)	7.9%	35.0%	33.8%	17.4%	4.3%	1.5%	0.1%
	Rural students (*N*= 209)	8.1%	32.5%	35.4%	17.7%	4.8%	1.4%	-
Art, Craft, Design	Students nationally (*N*=10,075)	10.2%	21.3%	36.3%	23.6%	5.9%	2.4%	0.3%
	Rural students (*N*=144)	11.8%	25.7%	38.9%	18.1%	4.9%	0.7%	-
Home Economics	Students nationally (*N*=4,788)	1.9%	39.1%	44.7%	10.5%	2.2%	1.2%	0.4%
	Rural students (*N*= 56)	1.8%	55.4%	37.5%	3.6%	1.8%	-	-

Of the Ordinary Level subjects described in Table 5.40, the subject in which rural students received the greatest number of high grades was Home Economics, in which 57.2% of candidates were awarded "A" and "B" grades. The subject in which rural students achieved the highest number of low grades (i.e., "E", "F" and "NG" grades) was History, with more than one-tenth of all students taking Ordinary Level History failing to achieve a passing grade. Among the national population, students received the greatest proportion of high grades in Geography, with 44.7% of students receiving "A" and "B" grades. The Ordinary Level subject area in which students nationally achieved the greatest number of low grades was French, with 14.3% of candidates failing to attain a passing grade.

Table 5.41. Percentages of grades awarded to all students nationally and to rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools who took Higher Level History, Geography, Science, French, Business Studies, Art, Craft and Design, and Home Economics in the 1997 JCE.

Subject	**Group**	**%A**	**%B**	**%C**	**%D**	**%E**	**%F**	**%NG**
History	Students nationally (*N*=44,258)	15.4%	30.5%	29.5%	18.8%	4.8%	0.9%	-
	Rural students (*N*=506)	10.7%	24.5%	33.4%	22.3%	7.3%	1.8%	-
Geography	Students nationally (*N*=47,334)	8.9%	36.6%	37.5%	15.6%	1.2%	0.1%	-
	Rural students (*N*=604)	5.1%	33.4%	40.7%	18.5%	2.0%	0.2%	-
Science	Students nationally (*N*=37,897)	13.6%	26.7%	30.2%	21.9%	6.1%	1.3%	0.1%
	Rural students (*N*=456)	9.6%	23.2%	33.8%	22.6%	8.1%	2.4%	0.2%
French	Students nationally (*N*=32,935)	8.3%	25.5%	35.3%	24.7%	5.3%	0.7%	0.1%
	Rural students (*N*=424)	5.0%	19.8%	42.0%	28.5%	4.7%	-	-
Business Studies	Students nationally (*N*=30,734)	9.4%	35.2%	37.0%	16.1%	1.9%	0.4%	-
	Rural students (*N*=352)	8.5%	35.5%	39.5%	13.6%	2.3%	0.3%	-
Art, Craft, Design	Students nationally (*N*=13,218)	21.1%	26.9%	33.9%	15.2%	2.5%	0.4%	-
	Rural students (*N*=143)	18.9%	23.1%	35.7%	21.0%	1.4%	-	
Home Economics	Students nationally (*N*=17,581)	7.3%	45.9%	37.8%	8.5%	0.4%	-	-
	Rural students (*N*=365)	8.2%	51.0%	36.7%	6.0%	0.8%	0.3%	-

As Table 5.41 shows, Home Economics is the area in which both rural students and those in the national population achieved the greatest proportion of top grades at Higher Level. Indeed, almost six out of ten rural students (59.2%) who took Home Economics at Higher Level were awarded an "A" or "B" grade. The figure for candidates in the national population is somewhat lower at 53.2%. Also notable is the area of Art, Craft and Design, which is the subject in which the largest proportion of Higher Level "A" grades were awarded. Among the national population, over one-fifth of students (21.1%) were awarded "A" grades, while a slightly smaller percentage (18.9%) of students in the rural sample achieved "A" grades. In contrast, some Higher Level subject areas had relatively large proportions of students that failed to achieve a passing grade: 7.5% of candidates in the national population did not achieve a passing grade in Higher Level Science, while slightly more than 10% of rural students failed to achieve at least a grade "D" in this subject.

Finally, Table 5.42 provides a summary of the performance of both student groups using the aggregate OPS score in each of the most popular subject areas (i.e., overall performance is described without reference to level at which the examination was taken, but by using the numerical system of ascribed values described in Table 5.17). In terms of performance in individual subject areas, the strongest aggregate performance by rural students was in the area of Home Economics, in which they outperformed students nationally, and in which their average achievement corresponds to just above a Grade "C" on a Higher Level paper. The next strongest performance by rural students was in Geography, in which they received an average of between a Higher Level "D" and "C" grade. Coincidentally, Home Economics, followed by Geography, were the subjects in which students nationally also achieved their highest average grades: their achievements correspond to just below a Higher Level "C" grade in Home Economics and between a Higher Level "D" and "C" grade in Geography.

At the lower end of the performance scale, the poorest overall performances among both student groups were in the areas of Irish and Mathematics. Among rural students, Mathematics, followed by Irish, attracted the lowest aggregate OPS score when compared with all other subjects, whereas the ordering of these subjects was reversed in the case of students nationally. The OPS scores of rural students and students nationally in these subject areas correspond to somewhere between a grade "C" and "B" at Ordinary Level, or between an "E" and "F" grade at Higher Level.

Table 5.42. Mean OPS score for rural students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and for all students nationally, taking English, Irish, Mathematics, History, Geography, Science, French, Art, Craft and Design, Business Studies, and Home Economics in the 1997 JCE.

Subject	**Rural students**	**All students nationally**
English	8.46 (1.78) (*N*=924)	8.75 (1.84) (*N*=65,447)
Irish	8.25 (2.24) (*N*=908)	7.90 (2.33) (*N*=63,328)
Mathematics	7.62 (2.08) (*N*=926)	7.92 (2.29) (*N*=65,423)
History	9.30 (5.01) (*N*=747)	9.38 (1.94) (*N*=60,379)
Geography	9.49 (1.50) (*N*=825)	9.68 (1.58) (*N*=60,728)
Science	8.65 (1.88) (*N*=821)	9.11 (1.90) (*N*=56,308)
French	8.60 (1.80) (*N*=732)	8.98 (1.94) (*N*=47,107)
Business Studies	9.15 (1.81) (*N*=561)	9.39 (1.74) (*N*=43,950)
Art, Craft & Design	8.78 (1.91) (*N*=287)	8.96 (2.08) (*N*=23,293)
Home Economics	10.13 (1.26) (*N*=421)	9.80 (1.58) (*N*=22,369)

5.6 OVERVIEW OF THE JUNIOR CERTIFICATE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN THE RURAL COHORT

Rural students, on average, took a slightly greater number of subjects in the 1997 Junior Certificate Examination than did students nationally. However, they took fewer subjects at Foundation and Higher Level, and proportionately more subjects at Ordinary Level than their national counterparts. The proportion of male students from rural schools that took English, Irish and Mathematics at Foundation Level was much greater than that of females. This gender difference in uptake of subjects at Foundation Level was also observed among students nationally, albeit in a less pronounced form. At the other end of the scale, greater proportions of female students from rural schools took subjects at Higher Level in comparison with male students. This pattern was also

reflected in the national data. Some subjects were more popular among rural students than among the national population of candidates. For example, Home Economics, Materials Technology, and Technical Graphics were taken by greater proportions of rural students than by students nationally, while smaller proportions of rural students sat papers in History and German.

There is little discernible difference in the overall examination performance (based on the best seven subjects) of rural students and those in the national population, with the groups respectively achieving mean Overall Performance Scale scores of 64.6 and 65.3. The difference in mean OPS score, although it is in favour of candidates nationally, is clearly very small. Therefore, despite the fact that students in the rural cohort originated in primary schools which currently cater for disadvantaged pupils (i.e., the schools are now participating in *Breaking the Cycle*), their performance could not be considered poorer than that of the national population. However, it is acknowledged that the proportion of rural students taking the JCE is slightly lower than the national figure.

Gender differences in overall performance were observed in both student groups: female students nationally, as well as in the rural sample, achieved higher mean OPS scores than did males, and the difference in overall OPS scores favouring females was of a similar magnitude among rural students and students in the national population. Achievement levels were also related to the type of post-primary school attended by students at the time of taking the JCE. Students enrolled in Secondary schools achieved higher mean OPS scores than did students in Vocational, Comprehensive and Community schools. This finding applied equally to rural students and those in the national population. Furthermore, within each school type (and among both student groups) females outperformed their male counterparts. Indeed, a surprising finding (given their disadvantaged backgrounds) was that female students attending Secondary schools in the rural sample outperformed male and female candidates in all other school types in both the rural sample and in the national population.

Finally, student performance in the JCE was related to whether or not the post-primary school attended by the candidate was designated disadvantaged. At the time of taking the JCE, 56.1% of the rural cohort, and 25.6% of students in the national population, were enrolled in post-primary schools that were designated as disadvantaged by the Department of Education. Among the rural cohort, as well as among candidates nationally, students enrolled in designated schools at the time of taking the JCE had lower mean OPS scores than those that were attending non-

designated schools. In addition, candidates attending designated schools took fewer subjects overall, took fewer subjects at Higher Level, took more subjects at Foundation Level, and took more subjects at Ordinary Level, than those enrolled in schools that were not designated. These characteristics that are associated with disadvantaged status of school attended applied equally to students in the rural cohort and to those in the national population.

6. SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL SCHOOLS OVER THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF THE SCHEME

Since the inception of the scheme in 1996, questionnaires have been distributed annually to principal teachers in the 123 participating schools, the purpose of which was to assess the impact of the scheme on a wide range of areas of school life. Of particular interest from the viewpoint of the evaluation were aspects of school organisation, attendance levels, rates of psychological assessment among pupils, schools' participation in other schemes designed to address disadvantage, the strength of links between the home and the school, and principals' views of the impact of the scheme on pupils. This section of the report focuses on these issues, and is based on data collected annually. The response rate in each year was high, at 99.2% in 1997, 97.6% in 1998, and 95.1% in 1999. In reporting the data, particular emphasis is placed on establishing whether or not there is an association between participation in the scheme and perceived improvements and benefits to schools and pupils in important areas of school life.

6.1 SCHOOL ORGANISATION

The section on school organisation in annually distributed questionnaires asked principals for details about their school's administration practices, such as staff meetings, school development planning, and the availability and organisation of remedial teaching.

Staff Meetings

Principals reported the frequency with which staff meetings were held in their schools in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99. Table 6.1 shows the percentage of schools with two or more teachers which held staff meetings at varying frequencies each year. The single-teacher schools in the scheme were excluded from analysis (11 schools in 1995/96 and 1997/98 and 6 schools in 1998/99), as they could not have had staff meetings. In each of the years, staff meetings were most commonly held once a term. There was an increase in the frequency with which meetings were held following the introduction of the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme, as a higher proportion of schools held meetings once a term / once a month / once a week in 1997/98 (75.2%) and 1998/99 (77.1%) than in 1995/96 (55.46%) (Table 6.1). There was a corresponding decrease in the number of schools which never

held staff meetings, 19.8% of schools never arranged staff meetings during 1995/96, compared to only 9.2% of schools in 1997/98 and 3.1% in 1998/99.

Table 6.1. Percentage of schools in which staff meetings were held with varying frequency in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	Never	Once or twice a year	Once a term	Once a month	Once a week
1995/96 (*n*=111)	19.8%	24.3%	37.8%	8.8%	8.8%
1997/98 (*n*=109)	9.2%	15.6%	48.6%	11.0%	15.6%
1998/99 (*n*=96)	3.1%	27.1%	54.2%	7.3%	15.6%

*Data are not available for 1996/97 as the baseline data collected in the first year of the scheme related to 1995/96 and information collected in the second and third years of the scheme referred to the current situation in the schools that year, (i.e., in 1997/98 and 1998/99).

The average duration of meetings was 1.65 hrs (1hr 38 minutes) and the most common duration was two hours (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2. Mean duration of staff meetings (in hours) in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	Mean	*SD*	Mode
1995/96	1.64	0.97	2
1997/98	1.64	0.85	2
1998/99	1.68	0.80	2

Principals were asked to indicate the percentage of staff meeting time devoted to administrative / management matters and to pedagogical matters. In 1995/96, 42.27% of time was devoted to administrative matters and 53.49% of time to pedagogical matters (Table 6.3). In 1997/98 there was a slight shift towards spending more time on pedagogical matters (57.93% of time) than on administrative matters (41.95% of time). However in 1998/99, pedagogical issues took up just over half of meeting time (53.21%).

Table 6.3. Mean percentage of time at staff meetings devoted to administrative or pedagogical matters in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1995/96		1997/98		1998/99	
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
Admin/Management Matters	42.27	(19.78)	41.95	(20.00)	40.28	(20.31)
Pedagogical Matters	53.49	(21.44)	57.93	(20.01)	53.21	(22.43)

Remedial Teaching

Principals were asked whether their school had access to a remedial teacher. In 1995/96, less than half the schools (47.25%) had (Table 6.4). By the second year of the scheme (1997/98), 60% of schools (72 schools) indicated that they had remedial education in their school, and by 1998/99 the vast majority of *Breaking the Cycle* schools (94.8%) could avail of the services of a remedial teacher.

Table 6.4. Number and percentage of schools that had access to a remedial teacher in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1997/98.

	Number	Percentage
1995/96 (*n*=120)	58 schools	47.5%
1997/98 (*n*=120)	72 schools	60.0%
1998/99 (*n*=116)	110 schools	94.8%

Table 6.5 gives details of how remedial teaching was organised in the schools in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99. In the majority of schools, pupils were withdrawn from their classes for remedial education. In 1995/96 and 1997/98, most pupils who were withdrawn were given individual remedial instruction. In contrast, principals from 60% of schools in 1998/99 reported that pupils were given instruction in small groups, outside the classroom. However, in 1998/99, principals were specifically asked whether pupils were withdrawn for group instruction, whereas in previous years this option was not available. Therefore, the differences shown in Table 6.5 may reflect the extent to which principals' answers to items are affected by the response options available to them, rather than to a change in the organisation of remedial teaching in 1998/99.

Only two schools, in all three years, arranged for remedial teachers to work with pupils in their regular classes. However, several schools (12.9% in 1995/96 and 16.67% in 1997/98) arranged that pupils receive a combination of individual remedial instruction inside and outside the classroom. No principals in 1998/99 reported that remedial teachers worked in this way in their school.

Table 6.5. Percentage of principals indicating how remedial teaching of pupils was organised in their schools in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1995/96	**1997/98**	**1998/99**
	% of schools (*N*=70)	**% of schools *** (*N*=72)	**% of schools** (*N*=106)
Pupils are always withdrawn from classes for:			
- individual instruction	72.9%	73.6%	14.2%
- instruction in small groups	11.4%	8.3%	59.4%
- combination of individual and group work	0	0	18.9%
Remedial teacher works with pupils in their regular classes	2.9%	2.8%	1.9%
A combination of individual instruction *inside* and *outside* the classroom	12.9%	16.7%	-
Other	0	0	5.7

* Column sums to greater than 100% as 1 principal chose 2 options.

- the option was not included in the item or responses were not classified into this particular category.

Action Plan

As part of the *Breaking the Cycle* selection procedure, each school prepared a 5-year development plan in which they identified priority areas in their school. In 1998/99, principals were asked to indicate the frequency with which they and their staff developed or worked on the action plan for their school. Responses from the six one-teacher schools were excluded from analysis. Overall, school staffs did not devote time to their action plan on a regular basis (Table 6.6). Half of the schools worked on their plan once a term, with a further 25% of school staffs only referring to it once or twice a year. Sixteen staffs worked on their plan once a month, and only 9% worked on it at least once a week or more frequently.

Table 6.6. Frequency with which principals and staff work on / develop the action plan for their school which was developed under *Breaking the Cycle* (*N*=109).

	Never	Once or twice a year	Once a term	Once a month	Once a week	More than once a week
Number	0	28	55	16	7	3
%	-	25.7%	50.5%	14.7%	6.4%	2.8%

6.2 ATTENDANCE

School attendance data were analysed to determine whether school attendance had improved since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle.* Principals were asked to refer to their school records and to report the total number of pupils enrolled in their school at the beginning of each year, the average annual attendance rate, the number of chronic low attendees and the number of pupils referred to officials for poor attendance per year.

Rural *Breaking the Cycle* schools averaged an enrolment of 59.58 pupils on 30/9/95, 57.56 pupils on 30/9/96, 55.32 pupils on 30/9/97 and 53.76 pupils on 30/9/98 (Table 6.7). The total school enrolment decreased considerably during this period from 7,328 pupils on 30/9/95, to 7,080 pupils on 30/9/96, to 6,804 pupils on 30/9/97 and only 6,613 pupils on 30/9/98.

Table 6.7. Total and mean school enrolment on 30/9/95, 30/9/96, 30/9/97 and 30/9/98 (*N*=123).

	Total school enrolment	Mean	*SD*	Mode
30/9/95	7,328	59.58	29.99	32
30/9/96	7,080	57.56	28.91	34
30/9/97	6,804	55.32	28.08	67
30/9/98	6,613	53.76	26.74	30*

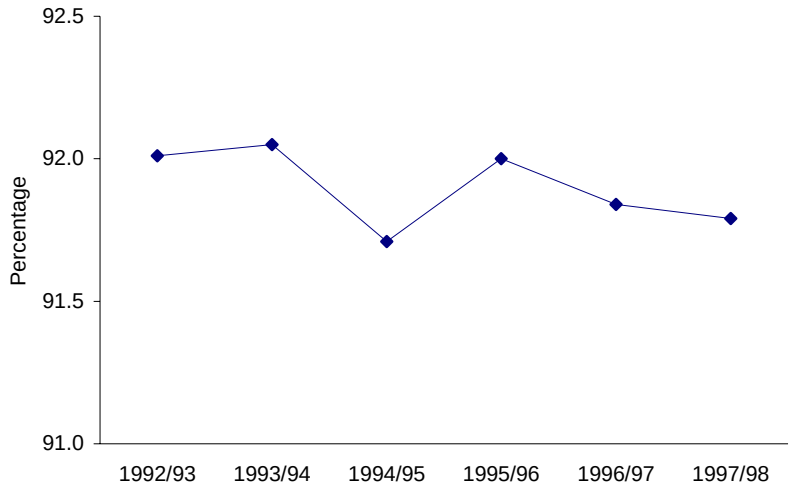
* As multiple modes occurred, the smallest mode is shown.

Table 6.8 presents the mean annual percentage attendance rate in schools, for the years 1992/93 to 1997/98. Over the six-year period, the attendance rate was relatively stable at approximately 92%, and was at a peak in 1993/94 at 92.05%. Since the introduction of the scheme, the average annual percentage attendance decreased marginally from 92% in 1995/96 to 91.84% in 1996/97 and 91.79% in 1997/98 (Figure 6.1). However, as 0.2% of the average school enrolment in schools in 1996/97 and 1997/98 was equal to one pupil, the decrease in attendance was not significant.

Table 6.8. Mean annual percentage school attendance rates in rural schools during the period 1992-1998.

	1992/93	**1993/94**	**1994/95**	**1995/96**	**1996/97**	**1997/98**
Mean annual percentage attendance	92.01%	92.05%	91.71%	92.0%	91.84%	91.79%
SD	3.15	3.34	3.18	3.20	4.81	4.0
Mode	92.0%	93.0%	93.0%	93.0%	93.0%	94.0%

Figure 6.1. Mean annual percentage attendance in rural schools from 1992/93 to 1997/98.



School principals were also asked to indicate the number of pupils in their school who had been brought to the attention of School Attendance Officers (SAO) / Gardaí for non-attendance at school. Only 5 pupils (.07% of the total population) in 1995/96, 13 pupils (0.19%) in 1996/97, and 3 pupils (0.06%) in 1997/98 were referred to an SAO/ Gardaí for absenteeism (Table 6.9). None of these referred pupils (or their parents) had legal proceedings instituted against them under the School Attendance Act.

Unfortunately no national or rural school attendance rates are available for school years 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98. The only figures available from the School Attendance Committees refer to attendance in Dublin City schools, where the average daily attendance rates for 1995/96, 1996/97, and 1997/98 was 91%, 90%, and 91% respectively (Ireland, 1996, 1997, 1998). As these figures are collected from urban schools, they are not directly comparable to rural schools in the scheme.

Table 6.9. Number of pupils who were brought to the attention of Gardaí / SAO for poor attendance during 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

	Number of pupils	% of total population
1995/96	5	0.07%
1996/97	13	0.19%
1997/98	3	0.06 %

* Percentage of total population in schools in which principals answered the item.

Low Attenders

Tables 6.10, 6.11, 6.12 and 6.13 present data on the number of very low attendees for each of the four quarters of 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98. Table 6.10 shows details of the number of pupils who attended for less than 10 school days during the first quarter of each school year, while Tables 6.11 to 6.13 give the total number of pupils who attended less than 25 days during the other three quarters of each year.

Table 6.10. Number of all pupils, transfers and ill pupils who attended for less than 10 days during the first quarter of school years 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

		Mean number	Number of pupils
1995/96 (*N*=122)	Total	0.33	40
	-less transfers	0.11	14
	-less ill pupils	0.09	11
	Remainder low attendees	**0.13**	**15**
1996/97 (*N*=120)	Total	0.18	22
	-less transfers	0.04	5
	-less ill pupils	0.08	9
	Remainder low attendees	**0.06**	**8**
1997/98 (*N*=116)	Total	0.31	36
	-less transfers	0.09	10
	-less ill pupils	0.03	4
	Remainder low attendees	**0.19**	**22**

To ascertain the number of pupils who had genuine reasons for low attendance, principals were asked how many pupils were low attenders because they were ill during the period and how many were absent because they had transferred to or from another school. Only 40 pupils in 1995/96, 22 pupils in 1996/97 and 36 pupils in 1997/98 from all rural schools, attended less than 10 days during the first quarter of each of the school years (Table 6.10). After subtracting the number of ill pupils and transferees during the period

from the total number of very low attendees, only 15 pupils in 1995/96, 8 pupils in 1996/97 and 22 pupils in 1997/98 could be classified as chronic low attenders. The mean number of genuine low attendees per school decreased from 0.13 pupils in 1995/96 to only 0.06 pupils in 1996/97, but increased to 0.19 pupils per school the following year (1997/98).

As shown in Tables 6.11, 6.12 and 6.13, only a small minority of pupils attended school infrequently during the other three quarters of 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98. In fact, the majority of schools had no low attendees: 80 schools in 1995/96, 87 schools in 1996/97 and 91 schools in 1997/98 had no pupils attending for 25 days or less during the last three quarters of each school year. During the second and third quarters of 1995/96, 1996/97, and 1997/98, fewer than 0.35 pupils per school attended less than 25 school days a quarter. Although low attendance was slightly higher during the last quarter of each year, when a mean of 0.47 pupils per school in 1995/96, 0.36 pupils in 1996/97 and 0.32 pupils in 1997/98 attended less than 25 school days.

Table 6.11. Number of all pupils, transfers and ill pupils who attended for less than 25 days during the second quarter of school years 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

		Mean number	Number of pupils
1995/96 (*N*=122)	Total	0.25	30
	-less transfers	0.11	14
	-less ill pupils	0.04	5
	Remainder	**0.10**	**11**
1996/97 (*N*=120)	Total	0.24	29
	-less transfers	0.08	10
	-less ill pupils	0.05	6
	Remainder	**0.11**	**13**
1997/98 (*N*=116)	Total	0.23	27
	-less transfers	0.11	13
	-less ill pupils	0.06	7
	Remainder	**0.06**	**7**

When one takes into account pupils who were absent due to illness or because they had transferred to another school, the rate of absenteeism was even lower. Fewer than 0.12 pupils per school could be classified as chronic low attendees during the second and third terms of 1995/96, 1996/97, and 1997/98. Furthermore, only 0.28 pupils per school, on average, in 1995/96, 0.15 pupils per school in 1996/97 and 0.13 pupils in 1997/98 were absent without permission during the last quarter of each year (Table 6.13). Table 6.14

shows the number of pupils who attended less than 25 days school who did not transfer and were not ill, during the last three quarters of school years 1995/96, 1996/97, and 1997/98.

Table 6.12. Number of all pupils, transfers and ill pupils who attended for less than 25 days during the third quarter of school years 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

		Mean number	Number of pupils
1995/96 (*N*=122)	Total	0.34	42
	-less transfers	0.21	26
	-less ill pupils	0.07	9
	Remainder	**0.06**	**7**
1996/97 (*N*=120)	Total	0.25	30
	-less transfers	0.10	12
	-less ill pupils	0.06	7
	Remainder	**0.09**	**11**
1997/98 (*N*=116)	Total	0.15	17
	-less transfers	0.05	6
	-less ill pupils	0.04	5
	Remainder	**0.06**	**6**

Table 6.13. Number of all pupils, transfers and ill pupils who attended for less than 25 days during the fourth quarter of school years 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

		Mean number	Number of pupils
1995/96 (*N*=122)	Total	0.47	58
	-less transfers	0.21	26
	-less ill pupils	0.07	9
	Remainder	**0.28**	**23**
1996/97 (*N*=120)	Total	0.36	43
	-less transfers	0.16	19
	-less ill pupils	0.05	6
	Remainder	**0.15**	**18**
1997/98 (*N*=116)	Total	0.32	37
	-less transfers	0.13	15
	-less ill pupils	0.06	7
	Remainder	**0.13**	**15**

Table 6.14. Number of pupils who attended for less than 25 days of school, (who did not transfer or were not ill) during the last three quarters of school years 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

	2nd Quarter	**3rd Quarter**	**4th Quarter**	**Mean**
	Total number	Total number	Total number	
1995/96	11	7	23	13.7
1996/97	13	11	18	14
1997/98	7	6	15	9.33

In summary, average annual attendance rates in rural schools remained relatively stable (at 92%) since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle* (1996-1998). As a result, few pupils per year were referred to officials for poor school attendance during this period. Indeed, chronic low attendance is not prevalent in rural schools; on average, less than 0.5% of pupils per school in 1995/96, 1996/97, or 1997/98 could be classified as low attendees. Furthermore, the rate of low attendance has improved since the beginning of the scheme, as fewer pupils in 1996/97 and 1997/98 than in 1995/96, attended less than 25 school days a quarter (Table 6.14). There was also a decrease in the number of pupils who attended school for less than 10 days in the first quarter of 1996/97 compared to 1995/96, although the number of very low attendees increased the following year (1997/98).

6.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS

Principals were asked about the use of, and need for, psychological assessments for pupils in their school. They were asked to indicate the percentage of pupils on their school rolls, in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99 who had been psychologically assessed at some stage in their schooling. Since the psychological service offered to a school may have been inadequate due to factors such as availability of assessments and the length of time between referral and assessment, principals were also asked to estimate the percentage of pupils whom they believed were in need of psychological assessment.

Principals reported that 4.08% of pupils on the 1996/97 school rolls, 4.72% of pupils on the 1997/98 school rolls, and 5.91% of pupils in 1998/99 had been assessed at some stage (Table 6.15). In a survey conducted for the Special Education Review Committee, Martin and Hickey (1993) found that 2% of pupils in all ordinary classes in

primary schools in 1992 had been assessed by a psychologist. Thus the rural rate of assessment is approximately double the national average.

Furthermore, the percentage of pupils that principals believed were in need of assessment (9.40% in 1996/97, 9.02% in 1997/98 and 8.04% in 1998/99) was considerably greater than the percentage that had been actually assessed each year (Table 6.15). However, the difference between the percentage of pupils believed to be in need of assessment and the percentage who actually were assessed decreased marginally over the three-year period, possibly indicating that there had been an improvement in the provision for psychological assessment.

Table 6.15. Mean percentage of pupils who were psychologically assessed and percentage of pupils principals believed needed assessment in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	% Assessed		% Needing assessment	
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
1996/97	4.08	4.64	9.40	9.07
1997/98	4.72	4.14	9.02	7.83
1998/99	5.91	5.08	8.04	7.47

In 1998/99, principals were asked to indicate the main reasons (in order of importance) why their pupils were referred for psychological assessment. As shown in Table 6.16, there were many reasons. Two-thirds of school principals indicated that the main reason was that pupils' academic performance was poor or below class average, or that they had poor concentration skills (35% of schools stated that this was the most important reason for referring pupils). Over fifty percent of schools referred pupils who were exhibiting behavioural problems or were withdrawn or lacking in social skills (23% of schools reported that this was the second most important reason for referring pupils). Over 50% of principals also indicated that assessments were requested in order to diagnose a specific learning difficulty or to identify an appropriate intervention. Several principals reported that pupils were referred for psychological consultation if they had poor language skills or were emotionally disturbed, especially following a specific traumatic event (such as a bereavement). In other cases, pupils were referred if they had low self-esteem, were unhappy in school, or if their parents or teachers had requested an assessment. Pupils were also sent for assessment to ascertain their level of intellectual functioning or to address

other individual problems such as a lack of co-ordination or an inability to respond to commands (Table 6.16).

Table 6.16. Percentages of schools who gave various reasons why they referred pupils for psychological assessment in 1998/99 (*N*=94).

Reason for psychological assessment	1st Reason %	2nd Reason %	3rd Reason %	Total %
General low academic performance / lack of progress / below class standard / poor concentration	35.1	24.5	6.4	66.0
Behavioural problems / disruptive child/ withdrawn child / poor social skills	23.4	23.4	8.5	55.3
Specific learning difficulty / to diagnose a specific learning difficulty / identify appropriate intervention	24.5	17.0	9.6	51.1
Poor language / verbal ability / reading problems	6.4	4.3	4.3	14.9
Emotionally disturbed / help cope with specific event (e.g. bereavement) / low self-esteem	2.1	4.3	6.4	12.8
Child unhappy in school/ negative attitude to school / restless / unable to work in class	3.2	2.1	2.1	7.5
Parents requested assessment	2.1	2.1	3.2	7.5
To identify an appropriate placement in a special school or class	0	1.1	0	1.1
Other	3.2	3.2	9.6	16.0

Principals were asked to give details of pupils referred for assessment in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98. Tables 6.17 and 6.18 present details of the total numbers of referrals and assessments, by gender and grade level, each year. Referrals and assessments are also presented as a percentage of the total (male and female) class population at each class level. In total, 2.25% of the total school population in 1995/96, 2.11% of the total population in 1996/97, and 2.11% of the total population in 1997/98 were referred for psychological assessment (Table 6.17). Referrals were most frequent in first class (3.04% of pupils) and fourth class (3%) in 1995/96, in first class (2.85%) and third class (3.57%) in 1996/97 and in Senior Infants (3.06%) and fourth class (3.26%) in 1997/98. In all three years, referrals rates for sixth class pupils were lower than for all other classes (1.32%; 0.86%; 0.98%) (Table 6.17).

Table 6.17. Number of boys and girls and percentage of the total class population *referred* for assessment by grade in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

	1995/96 (*N*=122)			**1996/97 (*N*=119)**			**1997/98 (*N*=115)**		
	Total no of referrals		% Total pop**	Total no of referrals		% Total pop**	Total no of referrals		% Total pop**
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls	
JI	12	2*	1.78	11	5	1.74	7	3	1.49
SI	17	5*	2.72	11	5	1.82	17*	5	3.06
I	19	6*	3.04	21*	5	2.85	12	6	2.38
II	20	4*	2.65	18*	2	2.48	13	6	2.51
III	14	8	2.44	23*	9	3.57	15*	3	2.37
IV	26	3*	3.0	8	5	1.50	20*	8	3.26
V	8	7	1.5	12	6	1.86	10	3	1.49
VI	10	4	1.32	6	2	0.86	7	2	0.98
Total	**126**	**39**	**2.25**	**110**	**39**	**2.11**	**101**	**36**	**2.11**

** percentage of total class populations in schools for which there is information.
* significantly more boys than girls from these classes were referred.

From Table 6.18 it can be seen that 1.66% of the total school population in 1995/96, 1.41% of the total school population in 1996/97, and 1.38% of the total school population in 1997/98 were psychologically assessed following referral. At each grade level, assessment rates were lower than referral rates, and, in total only 67.87% of referred pupils in 1995/96, 67.11% of referred pupils in 1996/97, and 65.69% of referred pupils in 1997/98 were subsequently assessed.

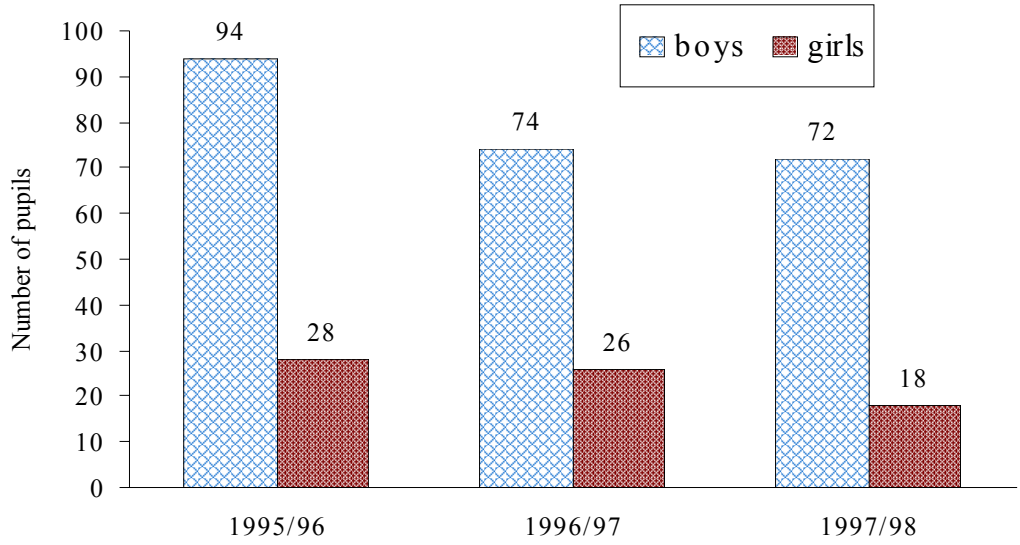
Table 6.18. Number of boys and girls and as a percentage of the total class population *assessed* by grade, in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

	1995/96 (*N*=122)			**1996/97 (*N*=119)**			**1997/98 (*N*=115)**		
	Total no of assessments		% Total pop**	Total no of assessments		% Total pop**	Total no of assessments		% Total pop**
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls	
JI	9	0*	1.14	6	3	0.98	2	2	0.59
SI	8	2	1.23	8	2	1.13	14*	2	2.13
I	15	5*	2.43	6	5	1.21	9	4	1.72
II	18	3*	2.32	17*	0	2.11	12*	1	1.72
III	13	3*	1.77	13	7	2.23	10*	1	1.45
IV	16	4*	2.07	9	4	1.48	14	6	2.33
V	8	7	1.5	9	4	1.34	7	2	1.03
VI	7	4	1.04	6	1	0.75	4*	0	0.98
Total	**94**	**28**	**1.66**	**74**	**26**	**1.41**	**72**	**18**	**1.38**

** percentage of total class populations in schools for which there is information.
* significantly more boys than girls from these classes were assessed.

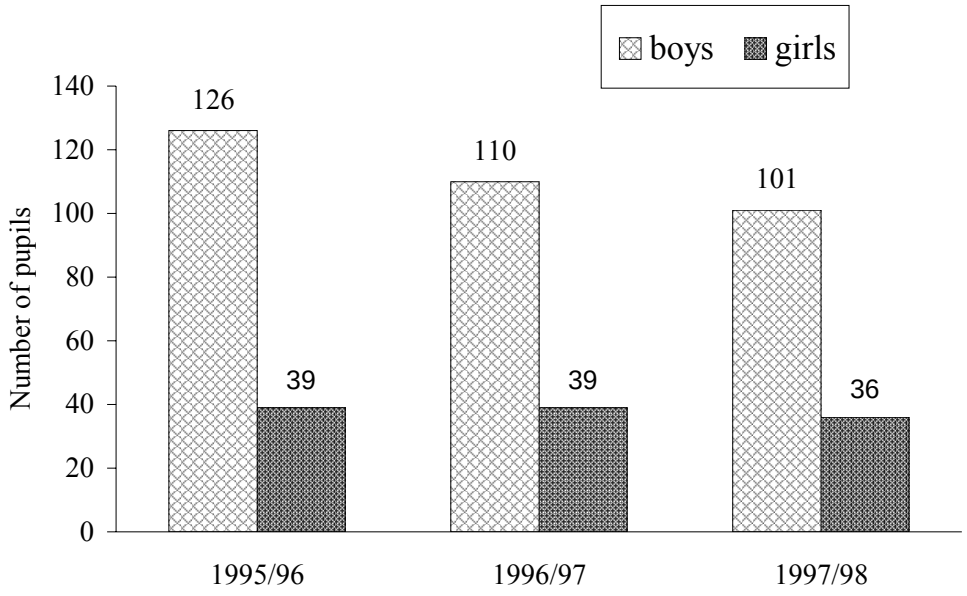
Each year the number of boys referred for assessment and subsequently assessed far exceeded the number of girls at all class levels (Figures 6.2 and 6.3). Further analysis revealed that the mean number of boys referred was significantly greater than the mean number of girls referred in 1995/96 (t = 4.8 ; df=242; p< .001), 1996/97 (t = -3.07; df=238; p< .01) and 1997/98 (t = 4.28; df=228; p<. 001) (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2. Number of boys and girls from *Breaking the Cycle* schools referred for assessment in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.



Similarly, the mean number of boys assessed was significantly greater than the mean number of girls assessed in 1995/96 ($t = 4.13$; df=242; $p< .001$), 1996/97 (t =-3.07; df=238; $p< .01$), and 1997/98 (t =4.39; df=228; $p< .001$) (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3. Number of boys and girls from *Breaking the Cycle* schools who were psychologically assessed in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.



Analysis at class level showed that in 1995/96 significantly more boys than girls from Junior Infants, Senior Infants, first, second and fourth classes were referred for assessment (t =2.59; df=242; p< .02 t =2.37; df=242; p< .02and t =2.29; df=242; p< .05 respectively). Likewise in 1996/97, significantly more boys than girls from first, second and third class were referred for psychological assessment (t =2.46; df=238; p< .05, t =3.17; df=236; p< .002 and t =2.04; df=236; p< .05 respectively). In 1997/98, significantly more boys than girls from senior infants, third class and fourth class were sent for assessment (t =2.29; df=228; p< .05, t =2.67; df=228; p< .05, t =2.05; df=228; p< .05).

Analysis also showed that more boys than girls from junior infants, first, second, third and fourth class were assessed in 1995/96. The mean number of second class boys assessed was significantly greater than the mean number of second class girls assessed (t =3.73; df=236; p< .001) in 1996/97. In 1997/98 the mean number of boys actually assessed from senior infants, second, third and sixth class, was significantly greater than the mean number of girls assessed from these classes (t =2.65; df=228; p< .01, t =2.76; df=228; p< .01, t =2.57; df=228; p< .05, t =2.03; df=228; p< .05).

In the Special Education Review Committee survey, Martin and Hickey (1993) also reported that at all stages of psychological assessment, from initial referral to enrolment in a special school or class, boys outnumbered girls by a ratio of approximately two to one. As shown in Figures 6.2 and 6.3, the number of boys referred and assessed outweighed girls by a factor of approximately three to one in *Breaking the Cycle* schools in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99. Considering that the three most common reasons referring pupils for assessment are poor performance in school, behavioural problems, and specific learning disabilities, it seems likely that significantly more boys than girls in schools in the scheme are experiencing these difficulties.

As outlined above, approximately one-third of pupils referred for psychological assessment in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98 were not subsequently assessed. Principals were asked to explain why these pupils had not been assessed. The most common reason for non-assessment each year, was that pupils were still on waiting lists (56% of pupils in 1995/96, 83.05% in 1996/97 and 50% in 1997/98). A further two-fifths (44%) of pupils in 1995/96, 17% in 1996/97, and 43.33% in 1997/98 were not assessed because their parents had refused permission (Table 6.19). Only four pupils in 1997/98 had not been assessed

because the clinic or agency had refused to assess them. Several schools mentioned that there were restrictions on the service; one school reported that only children with emotional/behavioural problems may be referred for assessment, another reported that their school did not have a service except for extreme cases, while another principal highlighted the fact that the local psychologist would only accept referral of pupils aged 7 years or over.

However, some principals may have misunderstood the item, as the total number of pupils not assessed for various reasons exceeds the number of pupils reported to have been referred but not assessed in 1996/97 and 1997/98. It is possible that principals included those pupils whose parents had refused to have them assessed even before they were referred. Alternatively, principals could have under-reported the number of referrals made by their school each year.

Martin and Hickey (1993) also reported that pupils were frequently accepted for assessment but were then placed on waiting lists (2,000 pupils in ordinary classes in primary schools in 1992). It was also estimated that 1,000 pupils referred for psychological assessment in 1992 were not assessed because their parents or guardians had refused consent.

Table 6.19. Number of pupils who were referred for psychological assessment but did not undergo assessment for varying reasons in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

Reason for not being assessed	1995/96		1996/97		1997/98	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Their parents/guardians refused permission	16	2	5	5	24	2
The clinic/agency refused to assess them	0	0	0	0	4	0
They are still on a waiting list	18	5	39	10	21	9
Total	**34**	**7**	**44**	**15**	**49**	**11**

Finally, principals were asked to indicate the outcome of assessments. The most common outcome was that pupils were referred back to their existing class (56.54% of assessed pupils in 1995/96, 37.18% in 1996/97 and 51.67% in 1997/98). The next most

common outcome was that pupils were referred to a special school/class but transfer did not take place and they actually returned to their ordinary class with support from a remedial or resource teacher (Table 6.20). Of all possible outcomes, pupils were least likely to have been sent to a special school/class following psychological assessment. In 1997/98, other recommendations following psychological assessments included sessions with a speech therapist, visit to a clinic, extra support from a classroom assistant, drama workshops and treatment from a neuro-therapist.

There are some discrepancies in the data, as the total number of pupils assigned to various treatments (191 pupils in 1995/96, 156 pupils in 1996/97 and 180 pupils in 1997/98) exceeds the number who were psychologically assessed (122 pupils in 1995/96, 100 pupils in 1996/97 and 90 pupils in 1997/98). One possible explanation is that principals incorrectly included pupils who were referred back to their existing class twice, once in option one (referred back to existing class) and once in option two (remain in ordinary class with specialised help).

Table 6.20. Number of pupils who underwent various treatments following psychological assessment, by gender, in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

Treatment	**1995/96**		**1996/97**		**1997/98**	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1) Referred back to existing class	84	24	49	9	76	17
2) Referred to a special school / class, but remain in an ordinary class with:						
a) help from a remedial teacher	35	10	31	9	60	17
b) help from a resource teacher	15	5	27	7	32	10
c) no specialised help	5	6	11	5	2	1
3) Sent to a special school/class	5	2	7	1	2	1
4) Assigned some other treatment (e.g., speech therapy)	-	-	-	-	12	6
TOTAL	144	47	125	31	108	72

Over the three years, the rate of referral and assessment from rural schools was relatively low. Between 40% and 60% of schools (depending on the year) did not refer any

pupils for psychological assessment, while between 55% and 60% of schools did not have any pupils assessed during this period. It seems likely that at least some of the pupils from these schools would have required psychological assessment, considering that principals estimated that between 8% and 9% of their pupils were in need of psychological assessment.

Many principals in 1998/99 were clearly unhappy with the psychological service being offered to their schools. Several principals reported there was no psychological service in their area. For example one principal remarked that:

> **"We find it impossible to have pupils psychologically assessed because the service is not available."**

Another stated that:

> "**Once again, all our assessment are privately arranged as we are unable to have our pupils assessed otherwise. The waiting lists are too long and the few who are finally assessed were not given proper assessment by the Health Boards."**

Indeed, at least five rural schools in total had paid for pupils to be assessed privately due to the inadequate service. Other principals reported that there were restrictions on the service offered. For example, the psychologist in one area would only accept referrals of pupils aged seven years or over. However, even when a service was available to schools, approximately 30% of referred pupils were not assessed because the service could not meet the demand. The majority of pupils referred but not assessed were placed on clinic waiting lists. The service is particularly lacking considering that the Special Education Review Committee (1992) specifically highlighted students who are educationally and socially disadvantaged as having special educational needs.

6.4 PARTICIPATION IN OTHER SCHEMES

In 1998/99, principals were asked whether their school was involved in various other Departmental schemes to combat educational disadvantage, namely the Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage, the Home School Liaison Scheme and the 8-15-year old Early School Leavers Initiative (Pilot Project areas). Five schools were involved in the Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage and one was participating in the 8-15 year old Early School Leaver Initiative.

However, none of the rural schools participating in *Breaking the Cycle* was taking part in the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme (Table 6.21).

Table 6.21. Numbers and percentages of schools involved in the Scheme of Assistance, the HSCL scheme and the Early School Leavers initiative in 1998/99 (*N* = 116).

Name of scheme	Number of schools	% of schools
Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage	5*	4.3%
Home School Community Liaison Scheme	0	-
8-15 Year Old Early School Leavers Initiative (Pilot Project Areas)	1	0.86%

* One other *Breaking the Cycle* school, whose principal did not return a questionnaire in 1998/99, is in the Scheme of Assistance to schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage.

Principals were also asked whether their school was participating in any other local or national schemes, initiatives or pilot projects aimed at disadvantaged pupils. Although asked specifically to describe schemes aimed at disadvantaged pupils, some principals may have included schemes that are not aimed specifically at disadvantaged pupils, but at all children in the school. In total, 13 rural schools (11.2%) were involved in other schemes. Table 6.22 describes the purpose of each scheme, the number of schools involved, the length of the school's involvement in the scheme, and the approximate value of the annual grant.

Three rural principals indicated that pupils in their schools attended local homework clubs, which were set up to encourage and help marginalised pupils with their homework. Pupils in another school took part in community-based art and music activities. One *Breaking the Cycle* school was participating in the pilot project for the teaching of Modern Languages (French) in primary schools, while another provided Irish language classes for parents and pupils in conjunction with Údarás na Gaeltachta.

Table 6.22. Number of schools involved in other types of initiatives aimed at disadvantaged children, the purpose of each initiative, the length of school's involvement and the value of the annual grant (*N*= 116).

Name of Initiative	**Purpose of Initiative**	**No of Schools***	**Length of school's involvement**	**Annual grant**
Modern Languages Pilot project	The school is one of four in the area which pilots French at primary school	1	1 year	£33 per week
Computer Centre	Provision of computer buildings, trainers, training programme. To enhance the skills of pupils, adults and young school leavers	1	Not specified	£109,000
Art and Music	Extra curricular community based activity for children	1	9 months	Not specified
Údarás na Gaeltachta	Promotion of Irish language, provide Irish classes for children and adults	1	1.5 years	Not specified
Peace and Reconciliation	To facilitate transfer of 6th class to second level	1	1 year	£4,000
Homework supervision	To help weak children in educationally deprived homes	1	2 years	£800
Local Area Partnership Club	To help children who do not have help with homework at home	1	2 years	£ 400
VTOS	Parents encouraged to return to education	1	1 year	Nominal pay
FÁS	Provide and improve school facilities	1	1 year	£3,000
Book Rental Scheme	To provide school books at less cost to parents	1	1 year	£100
Homework scheme	To encourage and help children with homework	1	1 year	Not specified
Assessment of children with learning disabilities	Local partnership board funded remedial workshop for six pupils in the school.	1	1 year	£700 (approx)
Youth in Action	Adolescent intervention programmes, self-esteem etc.	1	3 years	None
Pre-school playgroup	Encouraging parents and children to see school as non-threatening environment. Get parents involved	1	2 years	£2,000 one grant
Transfer programme for Early School Leavers	To lower the drop out rate among pupils	1	Two months	Not specified

* The number of schemes is greater than 12 as two schools were involved in two schemes.

One principal reported that FÁS provided support to improve facilities in their school, while another school had received a substantial grant to set up a computer centre for parents and pupils. A preschool play-group was set up in one rural school with the aim of involving parents in their children's education and another was actively encouraging parents to attend VTOS (Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme) courses. Principals also indicated that their schools were involved in the Book Rental scheme, Youth in Action programmes aimed at adolescents, and transition programmes for sixth class pupils. Finally, one principal reported that six pupils in the school attended educational workshops, which were funded by the local area partnership.

6.5 HOME-SCHOOL LINKS

In annually distributed questionnaires, principals were asked about formal and informal contacts between the schools and parents through Parent's Associations, and through pre-arranged one-to-one and group parent-teacher meetings. Principals were also asked about parental involvement in various school activities and for details of educational and extra-curricular courses organised for parents and other school events to which parents were invited. Several of the items do not include data for 1996/97 as the baseline data collected in the first year of the scheme related to 1995/96, and information collected in the second and third years of the scheme referred to the current situation in the schools that year (i.e., 1997/98 and 1998/99).

Parents' Associations

Almost one-third of principals reported that their school had a Parents' Association in 1995/96. By 1997/98, the second year of the scheme, two fifths of schools had set up Parents' Associations. However, no new associations were established in schools the following year (1998/99) (Table 6.23).

Table 6.23. Numbers and percentages of schools which had a Parents' Association in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	Number	Percentage
1995/96 (*N*=122)	37	30.3
1997/98 (*N*=120)	48	40.0
1998/99 (*N*=116)	47	40.5

One-to-One Meetings

One indication of the extent of contact between schools and parents is the frequency with which schools organise formal one-to-one meetings between parents and teachers to discuss the scholastic progress of individual pupils. The proportion of parents who actually attend these meetings is also relevant.

Table 6.24 shows the numbers and percentages of schools in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99 that held one or more one-to-one meetings between parents and teachers, for various grade levels. In 1995/96, between approximately 83% and 87% of schools held one-to-one meetings for various grade levels. The class least likely to have had meetings was Junior Infants and the classes most likely to have had meetings were third and sixth classes.

In 1997/98, between approximately 62% and 71% of principals (depending on grade level), indicated that one-to-one parent teacher meetings were arranged in their schools during the year. Schools were least likely to have arranged meetings for third class and most likely to have arranged them for fourth class. Similarly in 1998/99, between 63% to 70% of schools held one-to-one meetings. Meetings were most frequently arranged for teachers and parents of third class pupils and least frequently for Junior Infants that year.

Table 6.24. Numbers and percentages of schools that had one or more one-to-one parent-teacher meetings, by grade, in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1995/96		**1997/98**		**1998/99**	
	No. of schools	% of schools*	No. of schools	% of schools*	No. of schools	% of schools*
JI	87	83.3%	77	69.4%	70	62.5%
SI	90	85.0%	78	69.0%	73	67.6%
I	90	85.0%	80	69.0%	74	66.7%
II	91	85.1%	77	68.8%	76	67.3%
III	92	86.8%	67	61.5%	78	70.3%
IV	91	85.9%	82	71.3%	75	67.6%
V	91	85.9%	79	69.3%	76	67.3%
VI	92	86.8%	81	70.4%	76	67.3%

*percentage of schools that had pupils at each grade level, for which information was available.

It would appear from Table 6.24 that the percentage of schools that held one-to-one meetings decreased over the three years, from 83% - 87% schools in 1996/97 to 62% - 71% in 1997/98, and 63% - 70% in 1998/99. However, there may have been an under-representation of the number of classes that had no meetings in 1995/96, as approximately 10% of principals did not complete the item. It is possible that some of the principals who did not complete the item were from schools where no one-to-one meetings were held at various class levels.

Furthermore, the 1997/98 and 1998/99 data were collected mid-year and so do not represent the total number of meetings held during the year. To compensate for this, an additional item in 1997/98 and 1998/99 asked principals to indicate how many more meetings were planned for the remainder of the year. As shown in Table 6.25, between 10% and 13% of those schools that held no meetings during the first half of 1997/98 indicated that they planned to do so before the end of the school year. Likewise in 1998/99, between 8% and 11% of schools that had not arranged meetings in the first half of the year expected to hold one or more parent-teacher meetings before the end of the year.

Table 6.25. Numbers and percentages of schools that held no meetings in the first half of 1997/98 and 1998/99 that expected to hold one or more meetings before the end of the school year.

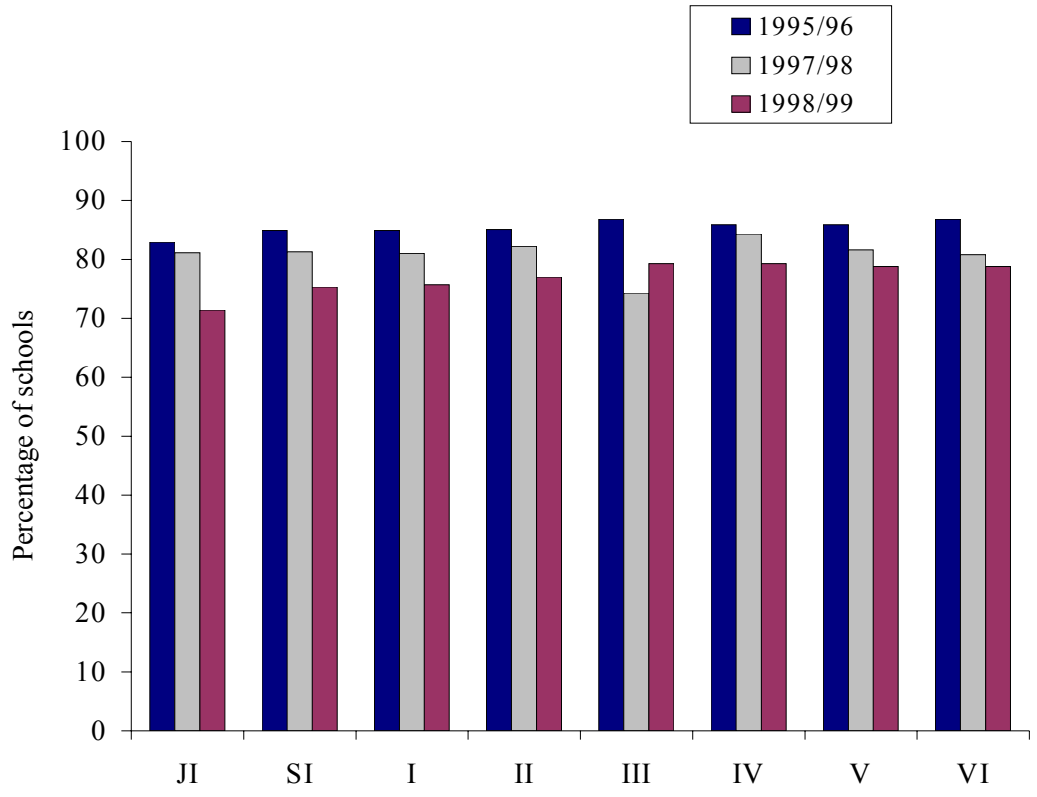
Expected Meetings				
	1997/98		**1998/99**	
	Number of schools	% of schools	Number of schools	% of schools
JI	13	11.7%	10	8.9%
SI	14	12.3%	9	8.3%
I	14	12.0%	10	9.0%
II	15	13.4%	11	9.7%
III	14	12.8%	10	9.0%
IV	15	13.0%	13	11.7%
V	14	12.3%	13	11.5%
VI	12	10.4%	13	11.5%

Hence, in total, between 74% and 84% of schools in 1997/98, and between 71% and 79% of schools in 1998/99 (depending on grade level) had arranged or expected to arrange one-to-one parent teacher meetings for various classes during the school year (Table 6.26 and Figure 6.4).

Table 6.26. Numbers and percentages of schools that held, or were expecting to hold one-to-one meetings during 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1997/98		**1998/99**	
	No. of schools	% of schools	No. of schools	% of schools
JI	90	81.1%	80	71.4%
SI	92	81.3%	82	75.3%
I	94	81.0%	84	75.7%
II	92	82.2%	87	77.0%
III	81	74.3%	88	79.3%
IV	97	84.3%	88	79.3%
V	93	81.6%	89	78.8%
VI	93	80.8%	89	78.8%
Mean		80.8%		76.9%

Figure 6.4. Percentages of schools that held one-to-one meetings between parents and teachers, by grade, in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.



These data suggest that fewer schools in 1997/98 (between 74% and 84% of schools) and 1998/99 (71% to 79%) compared to 1995/96 (83% to 87%) organised one-to-one meetings or had arranged (or expected to arrange) one-to-one parent teacher meetings for various classes during the school year. However, as mentioned above, many principals in 1995/96 failed to answer the item. Furthermore, many principals in 1998/99 indicated that one-to-one meetings took place on a more informal basis, as problems arose with individual pupils. One principal also mentioned that the *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator regularly carried out home visits.

Parental attendance at these meetings was reported to have been very high in all three years. In 1995/96, 92.94% of parents on average attended the one-to-one parent-teacher meetings. Principals reported that 92.52% of parents in 1997/98 and 94.6% in 1998/99 attended these meetings (Table 6.27). Highest attendance was found among parents of second class pupils in 1995/96 (99.3%), among parents of pupils in Junior Infants (93.9%) in 1997/98 and in fourth class (96.6%) in 1998/99.

Table 6.27. Mean percentage of pupils for whom at least one parent attended a one-to-one meeting, by grade, in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1995/96	**1997/98**	**1998/99**
JI	93.5	93.9	95.6
SI	93.9	92.9	93.5
I	92.1	92.1	95.6
II	99.3	93.4	94.9
III	91.9	93.7	95.3
IV	91.4	92.2	96.6
V	90.9	91.8	91.9
VI	90.4	90.1	93.5
Mean	**92.9**	**92.5**	**94.6**

Group Meetings

Principals were also asked to indicate the number of meetings between groups of parents and teachers which were held in their school in 1995/96, 1997/98, and 1998/99. Group meetings might be arranged to discuss general school issues or for specific purposes such

as to prepare for sacraments. Principals reported that group parent-teacher meetings were less common in their schools than one-to-one meetings.

As shown in Table 6.28, between 45% and 67% of school principals (depending on grade level) indicated that group parents-teacher meetings had taken place in their school in 1995/96. Meetings were most often arranged for teachers and parents of sixth class pupils during that year (66.7% of schools) and least often arranged for parents of Senior Infants pupils (45.3% of schools). A considerable number of school principals did not complete the item in 1995/96 (between 28 and 46 principals), so these figures may not represent the total number of group meetings held during the year. It seems likely that the some of the principals who failed to answer the item were from schools where no group meetings were held during the year.

The percentage of schools that held group meetings increased to between 60% to 69% of schools, depending on grade level, in 1997/98. Meetings were most often organised for parents of second class pupils; 68.7% of schools held group meetings for second class parents and teachers. Similarly in 1998/99, between 50% and 66% of schools arranged group meetings for parents and teachers of various grade levels to discuss school-related matters. Parents of pupils in sixth class were most frequently invited to attend these meetings (66.4% of schools).

Table 6.28. Numbers and percentages of schools that had one or more group parent-teacher meetings, by grade, in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1995/96		**1997/98**		**1998/99**	
	No. of schools	% of schools *Φ	No. of schools	% of schools *	No. of schools	% of schools *
JI	38	50.0%	77	68.8%	65	58.0%
SI	34	45.3%	72	64.3%	59	54.6%
I	48	60.0%	76	66.1%	57	51.8%
II	57	65.5%	79	69.9%	74	65.5%
III	36	50.7%	67	60.9%	56	50.5%
IV	35	48.6%	69	60.0%	57	51.4%
V	46	56.1%	69	60.5%	62	54.9%
VI	60	66.7%	78	66.7%	75	66.4%

* percentage of schools that had pupils at each grade level, for which information was available.
Φ between 28-46 schools depending on grade level did not complete the item.

Between 7% and 9% of schools that held no meetings during the first half of 1997/98 expected to do so before the end of the year (Table 6.29). Similarly in 1998/99, between 8% and 13% of schools that had not held meetings during the beginning of the year expected to hold group meetings before the end of the year. In summary, the total number of schools that held (or expected to hold) group meetings increased over the three years, from 45% of schools in 1995/96 to at least 67% in 1997/98 and 58% of schools in 1998/99 (Table 6.30 and Figure 6.5).

Table 6.29. Numbers and percentages of schools that held no group meetings in the first half of 1997/98 and 1998/99 that expected to hold one or more meetings before the end of the school year.

Expected Meetings				
	1997/98		**1998/99**	
	No. of schools	% of schools*	No. of schools	% of schools*
JI	8	7.1%	4	8.5%
SI	9	8.0%	4	8.2%
I	10	8.7%	6	11.1%
II	9	8.0%	8	20.5%
III	8	7.2%	7	12.7%
IV	9	7.8%	6	10.9%
V	10	8.7%	7	13.7%
VI	11	9.4%	5	13.2%

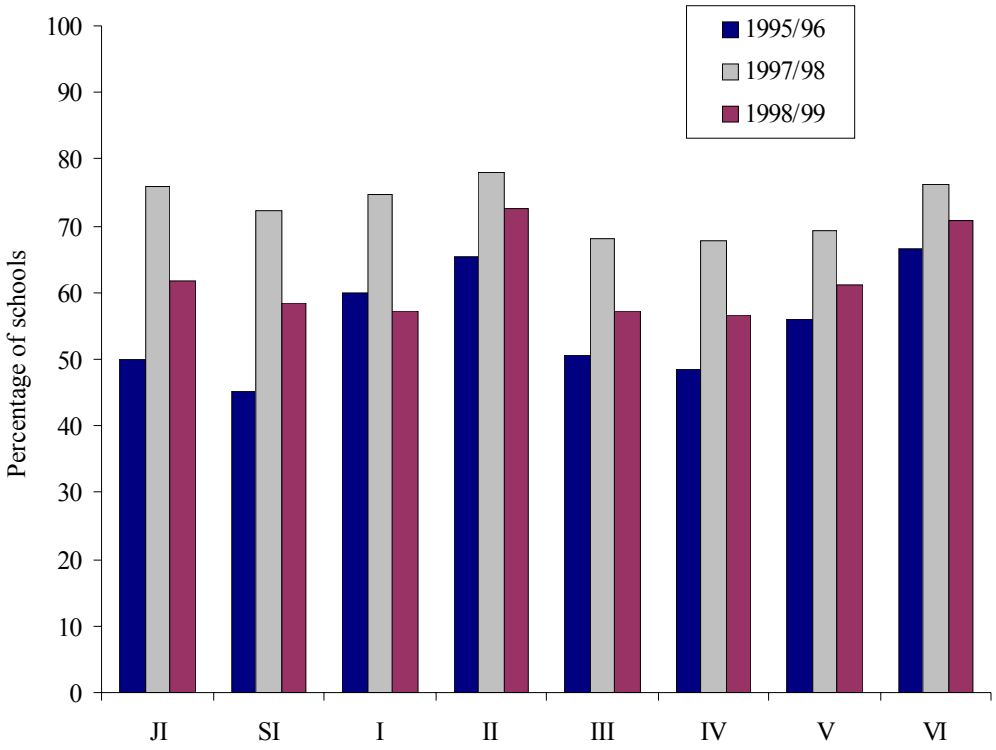
***** percentage of schools that had classes at a grade level

Table 6.30. Numbers and percentages of schools that held, or were expecting to hold, group meetings in 1997/98 and 1998/99.

Expected Meetings				
	1997/98		**1998/99**	
	No. of schools	% of schools*	No. of schools	% of schools*
JI	85	75.8%	69	61.6%
SI	81	72.3%	63	58.3%
I	86	74.8%	63	57.3%
II	88	77.9%	82	72.6%
III	75	68.2%	63	57.3%
IV	78	67.8%	63	56.7%
V	79	69.2%	69	61.1%
VI	89	76.1%	80	70.8%
Mean		72.8%		62.0%

***** percentage of schools that had classes at a grade level.

Figure 6.5. Percentages of schools that held, or were expecting to hold, group meetings between parents and teachers, by grade, in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.



Parental attendance at group meetings was high, according to principals, although lower than at one-to-one meetings of parents and teachers. On average, 82.14% of parents in 1995/96, 81.53% of parents in 1997/98, and 85.21% in 1998/99 attended group parent-teacher meetings (Table 6.31). Attendance was highest for parents of pupils in second class in 1995/96, Junior Infants in 1997/98 and Junior Infants and sixth class in 1998/99.

Table 6.31. Mean percentage of pupils for whom at least one parent attended a group meeting, by grade in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1995/96	**1997/98**	**1998/99**
JI	82.16	83.02	86.97
SI	80.47	82.66	85.3
I	84.18	82.99	86.9
II	85.38	81.84	87.76
III	78.67	80.2	83.08
IV	77.6	79.98	82.23
V	83.98	79.23	82.48
VI	84.68	80.11	86.97
Mean	**82.14**	**81.25**	**85.21**

Education Programmes for Parents

The number of schools offering education programmes to parents, which were designed to enable them to assist their children with their schoolwork, increased considerably from 1996/97 to 1998/99. In 1996/97, only 11schools (9.02%) indicated that they had organised any type of educational programme for parents. A pre-entry programme run by teachers was the most frequently offered course (8.2 %), followed by English (4.1%) and Irish (4.1%) (Table 6.32).

By 1997/98 however, 111 schools (92.5%) reported that they provided some type of educational course for parents. The most common course organised was a pre-entry programme run by teachers (45% of schools). English and Irish courses were also popular; 25% of schools offered English classes and 22.5% of schools offered Irish classes for parents. Nine percent of schools held classes in Mathematics, while 7% percent provided computer training or homework / shared reading classes (both categorised as 'other'). Almost one-third of principals indicated that they offered other types of educational courses to parents. However, many of the courses listed were leisure rather than educationally orientated, (e.g., cookery, art, dressmaking, and craftwork). Excluding courses that should have been placed under another category, 13 principals (7.5%) in total

offered other courses to parents. These included transition (transfer) and post-entry programmes and French classes.

In 1998/99, 99 (85.3%) schools arranged courses for parents to enable them to assist their children with their homework. Over half the schools provided a homework scheme or paired reading course, while over two-fifths of schools held pre-entry courses run by teachers. Computer classes were more popular than in previous years and were held in 37.9% of schools. However, the number of schools offering classes in English, Mathematics and Irish decreased considerably in 1998/99 compared to 1997/98. Only 7.8% of schools held English classes, 5.2% held Maths classes, and 12% provided Irish classes. Eleven principals reported that their school ran other courses (excluding leisure courses), such as a pre-school run by parents, 'DELTA' (Developing Early Listening Talking Activities), transition programmes, and post-entry programmes (Table 6.32).

Table 6.32. Numbers and percentages of schools that provided education programmes for parents in order that they could assist their children with their schoolwork, in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

Type of Course	**1996/97 (*N*=122)**		**1997/98 (*N*=120)**		**1998/99 (*N*=116)**	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Pre-entry programme	10	8.2%	54	45.0%	50	43.1%
English	5	4.1%	30	25.0%	9	7.8%
Irish	5	4.1%	27	22.5%	14	12.1%
Mathematics	2	1.6%	11	9.2%	6	5.2%
Computer	-	-	8*	6.7%	44	37.9%
Homework scheme / paired reading	-	-	8*	6.7%	64	55.2%
Other						
-transition programme	0	0%	3	2.5%	1	0.9%
-post-entry programme	0	0%	1	0.8%	1	0.9%
-other	1	0.8%	9	7.5%	9	7.8%

* categorised as 'other' as the category was not available.
- denotes where category was not available to principals.

Extra-curriculum Courses for Parents

Only eleven schools (9%) in 1996/97 provided 'extra-curriculum' courses for parents of their pupils. One school offered courses in home-management, self-development and leisure, while two schools offered courses in continuing education and nine provided parenting courses (Table 6.33).

There was a dramatic increase in the number of schools that offered extra-curricular courses in 1997/98, when a total of 96 schools (80%) organised some type of class for parents. Health information (30.8%) and parenting (27.5%) were the most common courses offered, followed by computer courses (categorised as 'other') which were held in a fifth of schools. Ten percent of schools offered home-management courses (including gardening), 13.3% provided Art and Craft classes, and a further 10% provided leisure classes such as swimming, beauty classes, set-dancing, yoga and aerobics. Finally, five schools offered cookery classes and seven schools organised various other extra-curriculum classes for parents.

In 1998/99, 68 schools (58.6%) held extra-curricular courses or activities for parents. Almost a third of schools provided parenting or Fás le Cheile classes, while sixteen schools (13.8%) offered classes in self-development, first aid or art and craft. Home management and cookery classes were less popular and were held in only 6% of schools. Other extra-curricular classes organised for parents in 1998/99 included a VTOS class (return to education scheme), a course in child development and a class in local history and local place names. Several principals in 1998/99 reported that extra-curricular courses had been arranged for parents in their schools but were cancelled due to lack of interest, while others mentioned that there was insufficient space in the school to hold parental courses. Finally, the principal of one school indicated that courses were not organised for parents in 1998/99, as the school had been without the services of a co-ordinator for a few months of the year.

Table 6.33. Percentages of principals who reported that their school provided courses / activities for parents in various extra-curriculum areas.

Type of Course	**1996/97 (*N*=122)**		**1997/98 (*N*=120)**		**1998/99 (*N*=116)**	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Parenting	9	7.4%	33	27.5%	35	30.2%
Home management	1	0.8%	12*	10.0%	4	3.5%
Self-development	1	0.8%	19*	15.8%	16	13.8%
Leisure	1	0.8%	12*	10.0%	0	0%
Continuing education	2	1.6%	0	0%	1*	0.9%
Health Information	-	-	37	30.8%	8	6.9%
Art & Craft	-	-	16	13.3%	16	13.8%
Cookery	-	-	5	4.2%	6	5.2%
First Aid	-	-	0	0%	15	12.9%
Other						
-computer	0	0%	24	20.0%	4	3.5%
-other	1	0.8%	7	5.8%	8	7.0%

* categorised as 'other'.
- denotes where category was not available to principals.

Parental Assistance

Over the three-year period, there was an increase in the proportion of schools where parents were involved parents in school activities: 84% of schools in 1996/97 compared to 95% of schools in 1997/98 and 96% in 1998/99. Table 6.34 shows the percentages of schools where parents assisted teachers with a range of school activities in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

The most common type of activity in which parents were involved in 1996/97 was sports training. Parents assisted teachers with sports training in over half of schools (53.3%) in 1996/97. The next most popular activity in which parents were likely to be involved was in assisting with school outings, with over two-fifths of parents assisting with school trips organised for junior, middle and senior class pupils. Paired reading and out-of school activities (such as art, swimming, dance and music lessons) were other activities in which many schools involved parents: approximately 17% of schools had parents participate in these activities. However, less than 10% of schools involved parents in the various other listed activities. Several principals, however, reported that many parents

participated in other activities such as fundraising (7.4%), drama classes (4.1%) and transport to and from out-of-school events.

Parents in 1997/98 were more likely to have been involved with school outings over other types of school activities. In 70% of schools, parents helped with school trips. Sports training (58.3% of schools) and paired reading (50% of schools) were the areas in which parents were next most likely to have been involved in 1997/98. Parents in over a quarter of schools in 1997/98 also assisted with craftwork classes and with the school library. A fifth of principals (20.8%) reported that parents participated in after-school activities, while over 10% indicated that parents helped teachers with play and concert productions during the year. Aside from the listed activities, principals also indicated that parents assisted teachers with other activities, including fundraising events, gardening, games library, fire drill, video recording, and language workshops.

In 1998/99, as in 1997/98, the most popular school activity in which parents were involved was in assisting with school outings; almost 70% of schools used parents to assist with school outings. Assisting with sports training was another popular activity with parents; over 55% of schools used parents to assist with sports training. Over a quarter of principals in 1998/99 reported that parents in their schools helped with the school library and with craftwork in the classroom. Over half of principals also indicated that parents were involved with school play and concert productions, with a further 68% reporting that parents assisted with fundraising activities. However, in 1998/99, unlike in 1996/97 or 1997/98, principals were specifically asked whether parents assisted with school productions and fundraising events. Therefore, the differences shown may be due to changes in the wording of the item, rather than an actual increase in the number of schools involving parents in these activities. Finally, other parent-assisted activities in 1998/99 included environmental projects (such as a beach clean-up), school magazine, book fairs, computer classes, and road safety educational programme.

Over the three years there was an increase in the number of schools involving parents in school outings and sports training (Table 6.34). The number of schools using parents to assist with paired reading, school libraries and craftwork also increased considerably; for example, only 16.4% of schools in 1996/97 involved parents in paired reading sessions, compared to half of schools in 1997/98 and 47% in 1998/99. Schools

were also more likely to have used parents to assist with fundraising activities and school plays and concerts in 1997/98 and 1998/99 than in 1996/97 although, as mentioned abov, this may be attributed to changes in the wording of the item in 1998/99.

Table 6.34. Percentages of schools where parents were involved with teachers in various school-related activities, in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

Type of Activity	**% of Schools**		
	1996/97 (*N*=122)	**1997/98 (*N*=120)**	**1998/99 (*N*=116)**
Assisting with sports training	53.3%	58.3%	55.2%
Assisting with school outings	47.5%	69.1%	69.8%
After school activities	17.2%*	20.8%*	0%
Paired reading	16.4%	50.0%	47.4%
Assisting with craftwork	8.2%	25.0%	25.9%
Fundraising activities	7.4%*	5.0%*	68.1%
Assisting with school library	5.8%	29.2%	25.9%
Assisting with school plays /concerts	4.1%*	12.4%*	58.6%
Playground supervision	2.4%	8.3%	2.6%
Taking small groups for reading	2.4%	13.3%	13.8%
Taking small groups for maths	0.8%	5.8%	0.9%
Other			
- sporting events	0%	0%	12.9%
- providing transport to school events	0%	0%	8.6%
- school tours	0%	0%	4.3%
- other	7.4%	15.9%	23.3%

*denotes where responses were classified as 'other' as category was not available.

School Events

The final item in the Home-School section asked about school events, which were likely to have been attended by parents. Religious ceremonies were the most common type of school event involving parents. They were held in over four-fifths of rural schools each year (82.8% in 1995/96, 89.2% in 1997/98 and 89.7% in 1998/99) (Table 6.35). Sports days were also popular in *Breaking the Cycle* schools; they were held in 60% of schools in

1995/96, 80% of schools in 1997/98, and 83.6% of schools in 1998/99. In addition, over half of schools in 1995/96 and two-thirds in 1997/98 and 1998/99 had 'Sports for all days'.

The number of schools producing plays and concerts increased considerably following the introduction of the scheme; over four-fifths held plays and concerts in 1997/98 and 1998/99, compared to only half in 1995/96. Similarly, a third of schools hosted 'Open days' for parents in 1997/98 and 1998/99, compared to only 18% of schools in 1995/96. Three-quarters of principals also reported that fundraising activities were held in their schools in 1998/99. Several principals in 1995/96 and 1997/98 indicated that fundraising events such as bazaars, cake sales, 'skipathons' and 'readathons' had taken place in their school. However, these data are not directly comparable as principals were specifically asked in 1998/99 if fundraising events were held in their school.

Finally, a fifth of principals in 1995/96 also reported that parents were invited to attend other types of school events such as Smoke Busters presentations and medal ceremonies. Other school events held in 1997/98 included visits from drama groups and story telling (6.7% of schools), book fairs (5.8%), swimming galas, coffee mornings, parent-child workshops and Seachtain na Gaeilge. In 1998/99 almost 30% of schools held other types of school events, such as parents' mornings (2.6%), parties and competitions (6.9%), book fairs (4.3%), health promotion talks, environmental projects, art exhibitions and visits from dignitaries.

Table 6.35. Percentages of schools which held different types of events during 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

Type of Event	**1995/96 (*N*=122)**	**1997/98 (*N*=120)**	**1998/99 (*N*=116)**
	%	%	%
Religious ceremonies	82.8	89.2	89.7
Sports days	61.5	80.0	83.6
Plays or concerts	56.6	82.5	81.0
'Sport for All' days	54.1	75.0	69.8
Open days	18.0	32.5	36.2
Fundraising events	-	9.2	69.8
Other			
-parents' morning	0	5.8	2.6
-book fair	0	0	4.3
-school tours	0	0	2.6
-Parties/festivals/competitions	0	6.7	6.9
-other	21.3	21.7	12.1

- denotes where category was not available.

In summary, principals' responses indicate that parental involvement in rural schools had increased since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*. The proportion of rural schools with Parents' Associations increased from 30% to 40%, following the introduction of the scheme in 1996/97. Furthermore, formal group meetings between parents and teachers, to discuss various school-related issues, were held in more schools in 1997/98 (between 68% and 78% of schools depending on grade level) and 1998/99 (57% to 73%) than in 1995/96 (45% to 67%). Parental attendance at group meetings was consistently high, with an average attendance of 82% of parents in 1995/96, 81% in 1997/98 and 85% in 1998/99. Principals indicated, however, that one-to-one parent teacher meetings were more frequent prior to the commencement of the scheme. At least four-fifths of schools in 1995/96, compared to 74% in 1997/98 and 91% in 1998/99, had held (or were expecting to hold) one-to-one meetings for parents and teachers at various grade levels, although many principals in 1995/96 failed to complete the item. The vast majority of parents attended these one-to-one meetings, 93% in 1995/96, 92% in 1997/98, and 95% in 1998/99.

Educational and extra-curriculum courses for parents were also held in an increasing number of schools during the first three years of the scheme. Eighty percent of schools (111 schools) in 1997/98 and 85% in 1998/99 (99 schools) held educational courses for parents, compared to only 9% (11 schools) in 1996/97. The range of educational courses offered also expanded: in addition to the traditional subjects areas, schools offered courses in computing, paired reading, French, and post-entry courses. Similarly, extra-curriculum courses were held in 80% of schools in 1996/97 and 59% of schools in 1997/98, compared to only 9% of schools in 1998/99. Schools provided a wide range of extra-curricular courses including parenting and self-development courses, leisure courses (such as yoga and set-dancing), health information talks, art and craft, cookery and first aid classes.

Another indicator of parental involvement in school is the extent to which parents are involved with teachers in various school activities. Over four-fifths of rural principals in 1996/97 and over 90% in 1997/98 and 1998/99 reported that parents of pupils in their school were involved with a variety of school-related activities. The most common types of activities in which parents were involved were sports training, school outings, out-of-school activities, paired reading, fundraising, and assisting with school plays and concerts.

Finally, principals reported that there were many other school events to which parents were invited such as religious ceremonies, sports days, open days, plays and concerts and various fundraising events.

6.6 BREAKING THE CYCLE

The section on *Breaking the Cycle* (included in the 1997/98 and 1998/99 questionnaire) was concerned with principals' opinions and experiences of participating in the scheme. They were asked for their views on the effects of the scheme on their school and their pupils, both academically and socially. They were also asked for their opinions of various aspects of the scheme, including the role and work of co-ordinators, the incareer development courses and the benefits of out-of-school activities. Three of the items in this section were open-ended and provided principals with an opportunity to give a written response.

Principals were asked what effect they believed participating in *Breaking the Cycle* scheme had on their school in general and on teaching practices and morale in their school in particular. The vast majority (95.8% in 1997/98 and 96.6% in 1998/99) felt that participating in the scheme had a very positive or positive effect on their school overall (Table 6.36). Similarly over four-fifths of principals each year (88.3% and 84.3% in 1997/98 and 1998/99 respectively) agreed that *Breaking the Cycle* had a very positive or positive effect on teaching practices in their school, although over 11% each year were unsure or believed that the scheme had no impact on teachers' working practices. Finally, over 90% of principals in 1997/98 and 87.8% in 1998/99 believed that involvement in the scheme had a very positive, or positive effect, on morale in their school.

Table 6.36. Numbers and percentages of principals indicating that *Breaking the Cycle* had a positive or negative effect on their school overall, on teaching practices, and on morale in their school, in 1997/98 and 1998/99.

Effect participating in *Breaking the Cycle* has had on your school.						
		Very positive	Positive	Unsure/ None	Negative	Very negative
1997/98 (*N*=120)	Number	50	65	5	0	0
	%	41.7	54.2	4.2	0	0
1998/99 (*N*=116)	Number	58	54	3	1	0
	%	50.0	46.6	2.6	0.9	0
Effect participating in *Breaking the Cycle* has had on teaching practice in your school.						
		Very positive	Positive	Unsure/ None	Negative	Very negative
1997/98 (*N*=120)	Number	35	71	14	0	0
	%	29.2	59.2	11.7	0	0
1998/99 (*N*=115)	Number	46	51	17	1	0
	%	40.0	44.3	14.8	0.9	0
Effect participating in *Breaking the Cycle* has had on morale in your school.						
		Very positive	Positive	Unsure/ None	Negative	Very negative
1997/98 (*N*=119)	Number	46	62	11	0	0
	%	38.7	52.1	9.2	0	0
1998/99 (*N*=115)	Number	52	49	13	1	0
	%	45.2	42.6	11.3	0.9	0

Over four-fifths of principals (82.5%) in 1997/98 and over 90% in 1998/99, believed that marginalised pupils in their school had benefited from participating in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme (Table 6.37). Notably fewer principals in 1997/98 (16%) than in 1998/99 (6%) were unsure whether disadvantaged pupils had benefited from the scheme.

Table 6.37. Numbers and percentages of principals indicating that marginalised pupils in their school had or had not benefited from participating in *Breaking the Cycle* in 1997/98 and 1998/99.

		Yes	Unsure	No
1997/98 (*N*=120)	Number	99	20	1
	%	82.5%	16.7%	0.8%
1998/99 (*N*=116)	Number	107	7	2
	%	92.2%	6.0%	1.7%

In an open-ended item that followed, principals were asked to give their reasons for believing that marginalised pupils had or had not benefited from the scheme. Responses were classified into categories based on the kind of responses given in 1997/98 and 1998/99 (Tables 6.38 and 6.39). However, responses were grouped into different categories each year and so are not directly comparable.

Table 6.38. Numbers and percentage of principals who gave varying explanations as to why marginalised pupils had or had not benefited from *Breaking the Cycle* in 1997/98 (*N*=120*).

Category	Number of schools	% of schools
Material benefits	59	49.2%
Benefits (experiential and social) associated with out-of-school activities	25	20.8%
Benefits associated with the activities / presence of co-ordinator	19	15.8%
More time for pupils / Learn to focus on disadvantaged pupils	20	16.7%
Improved pupil self-esteem / social skills	14	11.7%
Scholastic benefits	8	6.7%
Some parents unwilling	6	5.0%
Too early to tell	6	5.0%
Pupils meet outsiders	2	1.75%
Other		
- increased parental involvement in schools	15	12.5%
- other	8	6.7%

*Numbers sum to greater than 120 as principals were permitted to give more than one response.

Extra material resources were the most beneficial aspects of the scheme, according to almost half of principals (49.2%) in 1997/98 (Table 6.39). Principals reported that extra funds were used to purchase new equipment and educational materials such as books and games. A further fifth of principals (20.8%) felt that pupils had benefited from participating in the various out-of-school activities funded by *Breaking the Cycle* (such as swimming, dancing, story-telling, drama and music classes). The extra-curricular events gave children an opportunity to participate in activities that they would not have been able to experience otherwise.

Table 6.39. Numbers and percentage of principals who gave varying explanations as to why marginalised pupils had or had not benefited from *Breaking the Cycle* in 1998/99 (*N*=109).

Category	Number of schools	% of schools
Extra funding for resources/ equipment / materials	56	51.4%
Children benefit from out-of-school activities / experience activities not otherwise possible / broader curriculum	36	33.0%
Improved communication between teachers and parents / parents more willing to come to school / better home school links	16	14.7%
Funding for classes projects / trips / classes / school would not have been able to afford without BTC	15	13.8%
Co-ordinator/ resource teacher beneficial	12	11.0%
Early identification of problems / focus on disadvantaged / children with specific needs	10	9.2%
General positive comment	7	6.4%
Some parents unwilling to participate	3	2.8%
More co-operation among schools in cluster / joint activities	2	1.8%
Too early / difficult to say	1	0.9%
General negative comment	1	0.9%
Other	16	14.7%

Twenty principals (16.7%) believed that pupils had benefited from the activities of the *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinators, while 15.8% thought that teachers and principals were devoting more time and attention to disadvantaged pupils. Over 12% believed that marginalised pupils benefited from increased parental involvement in the school (coded as 'other' in Table 6.38), although six principals indicated that it was sometimes difficult to involve targeted parents in school activities. According to 14 principals (11.7%), pupils' social skills and self-esteem had improved through interaction with other schools, participating in out-of school activities, working with co-ordinators, and increased parental involvement in schools.

Eight principals gave responses which were categorised as 'other'. The majority of these comments were positive, for example:

> **"Can see a definite improvement in overall educational ambience in the school."**

"An awareness from the Department that the school is disadvantaged and needs extra resources."

However, a few principals made negative comments about the scheme. For example:

"Marginalised pupils cannot be identified directly as they would feel inferior."

"*Breaking the Cycle* has a positive effect generally but teaching practices are limited by the fact that this is a one-teacher school."

Over half of principals in 1998/99 (as in 1997/98) believed that the most beneficial aspect of the scheme was the new materials and equipment, which were funded by *Breaking the Cycle* grants (Table 6.39). One third of principals also felt the out-of-school activities provided disadvantaged children with new experiences and helped broaden the school curriculum. A further 14% perceived that the improved relationship between parents and teachers had been of benefit to pupils. Others (11% of principals) believed that the activities of the co-ordinators and resource teachers had helped marginalised children, and that schools were more focused on the needs of disadvantaged pupils (9% of principals).

Sixteen principals gave various other responses, which were grouped under the 'other' category. For example:

"Special programmes have improved the ability, confidence and self-esteem of these pupils."

"This year we have undertaken more events, dramas and trips. Marginalised children have benefited from the stimulation and imagination of these trips."

Two items contained in the 1998/99 questionnaire were related to the effect *Breaking the Cycle* had on pupils' academic performance. Principals were asked whether the academic performance of their pupils, as measured by formal and informal tests, had improved since the introduction of the scheme. Almost 60% of principals reported that tests had shown that pupils performance at school had improved 'somewhat', while 12.5% reported that pupils' test performances had improved 'a lot'. However, over a quarter of principals (28.6%) indicated that pupils' performance had remained unchanged (Table 6.40).

To determine whether staffs had noticed any other improvements in pupils' academic performances which were not measured in school tests, principals were also asked whether they, or their teachers, perceived a change in their pupils' general academic achievements. More than 6 out of ten principals (64.3%) reported that they (or the teachers in their school) believed that the academic achievements of their pupils had improved 'somewhat', while 15.7% estimated that pupils' performances had improved 'a lot'. Therefore, according to principals, pupils' achievements have improved considerably since the introduction of the scheme and to a greater extent than test results would suggest.

Table 6.40. Numbers and percentages of principals indicating the extent to which academic achievements of their pupils had disimproved or improved, as measured by achievement tests or by opinions of teacher, since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*.

Have the academic achievements of pupils in your school, as measured by formal or informal tests, changed since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*? (*N*=112)					
	Disimproved a lot	Disimproved somewhat	Unchanged	Improved somewhat	Improved a lot
Number	0	0	32	66	14
%	0	0	28.6%	58.9%	12.5%
Have the academic achievements of pupils in your school, on the basis of your own or teacher's opinions, changed since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*? (*N*=115)					
	Disimproved a lot	Disimproved somewhat	Unchanged	Improved somewhat	Improved a lot
Number	0	0	23	74	18
%	0	0	20.0%	64.3%	15.7%

Two further items sought principals' perceptions of the effects of the scheme on pupils' self-esteem and the standard of pupils' social interaction. The majority of principals perceived an improvement in pupils' levels of self-esteem since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*. One third (34.2%) believed that pupils' self-esteem had 'increased a lot', while 52.6% believed that it had 'increased somewhat'. Three-quarters of principals also believed that standards of social interaction among their pupils had improved. Forty principals (35.1%) perceived that pupils' social skills had 'improved a lot', while two-fifths thought that pupils' social skills had 'improved somewhat' (Table 6.41), although a quarter of principals felt that pupils' interpersonal skills had not changed as a result of the scheme.

Table 6.41. Numbers and percentages of principals indicating the extent to which they agreed that the self-esteem and standards of interaction among pupils had disimproved or improved since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*.

Have levels of self-esteem among your pupils changed since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*? (*N*=114)					
	Decreased a lot	Decreased somewhat	Unchanged	Increased somewhat	Increased a lot
Number	0	0	15	60	39
%	0	0	13.2	52.6	34.2
Have the standards of social interaction of the pupils in your school changed since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*? (*N*=114)					
	Disimproved a lot	Disimproved somewhat	Unchanged	Improved somewhat	Improved a lot
Number	0	0	29	45	40
%	0	0	25.4	39.5	35.1

A total of 112 schools (96.6%) organised out-of-school activities or special projects (funded by *Breaking the Cycle)* for their pupils in 1998/99. The majority of schools organised between two and four extra-curricular activities during the year (see Table 6.42).

Drama-related outings and activities were very popular in schools during the year. Seventy percent of schools took their pupils on trips to the theatre, held drama workshops in the school, produced school plays or invited a drama group to visit the school. Over half of schools used out-of-school funds to pay for sports coaching (e.g., soccer, basketball, athletics, swimming), sports competitions and transport to various sports events. Swimming lessons were the most popular type of sport activity in rural schools during the year. One-third of schools also organised various musical activities such as trips to concerts (e.g., Music in the Classroom) and recitals, music lessons and a visit from musicians.

Pupils were also taken on trips to places of historical interest such as museums and historical houses (35.7% of schools), and on nature trips to zoos, farms and parks in the locality (11.6%). Literary events, such as readings from poets and writers and trips to local libraries, were organised in a fifth of schools. Many schools also arranged for pupils to take part in dance-related activities (16.1%), computer classes (15.2%), art and crafts classes (17.0%) and local festivals (7.1%) (Table 12). Other extra-curricular activities and events

arranged during the year included gardening, open days, visits to activity centres and French classes .

Table 6.42. Numbers and percentages of schools holding varying types of out-of-school activities in 1998/99 (*N*=112).

Category	Type of activity	Number of schools	% of schools
Drama	Going to a theatre / pantomime/ cinema, theatre group perform in the school, drama workshops, drama production or pageant, speech and drama classes	79	70.5%
Sports	All types of sports, including hiring of a sports teacher, sports competitions, swimming lessons	64	57.1%
Music	Going to concerts (e.g., music in the classroom), buying equipment, paying for music lessons or visiting musicians, musical workshops, participation in music festivals	41	36.6%
Historical or other outings	Going to museums / galleries / castles / heritage centres / historical houses and other unspecified trips outside the school	40	35.7%
Literary	Poet or author visiting school / Story-telling / trip to library	23	20.5%
Art	Craft class (e.g., puppet-making, photography)/ paying for an Arts and Crafts teacher.	19	17.0%
Dance	Going to dance performance or céilí / paying for dance lessons	18	16.1%
Computer	Computer classes for parents and children	17	15.2%
Nature Outings	Going on a nature trip outside the school (e.g., visiting a park, zoo, farm or woods)	13	11.6%
Festivals	Participation in festivals (e.g., Seachtain na Gaeilge)	8	7.1%
Other	Other	19	17.0%

Principals were asked what effect they believed participating in out-of-school activities had on pupils' enjoyment of school, their academic performance, school attendance and on their verbal and social skills and artistic expression. There was almost unanimous agreement that pupils' enjoyment of school had improved to 'a great extent' (67.9% of principals) or to 'a good extent' (30.4%) as a result of their involvement in out-of-school activities (Table 6.43). The majority of principals (86.3%) also believed that the

extra-curricular activities funded by *Breaking the Cycle* had improved pupils' social skills to a 'good' or 'great' extent.

However, principals were less certain that pupils' school attendance and academic achievements had improved as a result of their involvement in after-school activities. Only two-fifths of principals (41.7%) felt that attendance had improved to 'a good' or 'great' extent. Indeed a third indicated that extra-curricular activities had 'not at all' affected school attendance. Similarly, only 43.4% of principals felt that pupils' academic achievements at school had improved since participating in various *Breaking the Cycle* activities.

Only half of principals (52.6%) felt that pupils' verbal skills were enhanced considerably by their participation in out-of-school activities. However, principals were more positive about the benefits of these activities for pupils' artistic skills: two-thirds felt that pupils' artistic expression had improved to a 'good' or 'great' extent since taking part in these activities.

Table 6.43. Numbers and percentages of principals indicating the extent to which they believed their pupils had benefited from participating in out-of-school activities /special projects.

In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *enjoyment* of school (*N*=112)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	0	2	34	76
%	0	1.8	30.4	67.9
In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *attendance* at school? (*N*=115)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	37	30	25	23
%	32.2	26.1	21.7	20.0
In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *academic achievements* at school? (*N*=114)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	10	54	35	14
%	8.8	47.8	31.0	12.4
In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *social skills?*(*N*=114)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	1	26	52	35
%	0.9	22.8	45.6	30.7
In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *verbal skills?* (*N*=114)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	8	46	43	17
%	7.0	40.4	37.7	14.9
In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *artistic expression and response ?*(*N*=113)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	1	37	47	28
%	0.9	32.7	41.6	24.8

The 1997/98 questionnaire contained two items about the role and associated benefits of *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinators. Principals were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that a *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator would be an important asset in their school, in theory and in practice. These items were designed to determine whether there was a difference between principals' views on the potential benefits of co-ordinators and their experience of working with the co-ordinator appointed to their own school.

The vast majority of principals either strongly agreed (67.8%) or agreed (30.5%) that a co-ordinator could be an important asset to their school in theory (Table 6.44). In practice, the majority of principals also strongly agreed (53.8%) or agreed (31.9%) that their cluster co-ordinator was an important asset to their school. However, six principals (6.1%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the co-ordinator appointed to their school was beneficial compared to only one principal (0.9%) who disagreed that a co-ordinator could be beneficial in theory.

Table 6.44. Numbers and percentages of principals expressing varying levels of agreement that the *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator was an asset to their school, in theory and in practice.

In *theory*, a *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator could be an important asset to my school (*N*=118).					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Number	80	36	1	1	0
%	67.8	30.5	0.9	0.9	0
In *practice*, a *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator is an important asset to my school (*N*=119).					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Number	64	38	11	4	2
%	53.8	31.9	9.2	3.4	1.7

Principals reported that co-ordinators devoted an average of 5.38 hours (*SD* = 1.68) per week to work related to their school in 1997/98 (Table 6.45).

Table 6.45. Principals' reports of the mean number of hours cluster co-ordinators devote to their schools in 1997/98 (*N*=107).

Mean	*SD*	Mode	Median	Range
5.38	1.68	5.00	5.17	14.25

Principals also estimated the percentage of time co-ordinators typically allocated to various activities in their school in 1997/98. Table 6.46 shows the mean percentage of time co-ordinators spent on each of the activities listed and the proportion of time principals would like them to allocate to each. On average, co-ordinators devoted the most amount of their time (26.4% of time) to individual and small group activities with pupils who were experiencing difficulties in class (including remedial work). Home visits took up 15.8% of co-ordinators time, 12.2% of time was spent working with parents to enable them to support their children's educational needs, and 11.3% time was devoted to planning extra-curricular activities. Less than 5% of time, on average, was allocated to each of the remaining activities listed, the least amount of time (0.8%) being devoted to releasing teachers for home visits.

Principals reported that co-ordinators engaged in other activities (6.7% of time) such as group and circle work with children, group work on self-esteem, freeing principals and teachers to do administrative work, meeting staff and other agencies, and devising strategies with class teachers to alleviate disadvantage in individual cases. Co-ordinators also organised toy libraries, parents' courses and workshops, parent-toddler groups, out-of-school and inter-school activities.

Overall, there were no large differences between the percentage of time co-ordinators actually devoted to each of the activities listed and the percentage of time principals estimated they would have liked them to devote to each. The average difference was only 0.92%; the largest differences were between the actual and ideal percentage of time spent on releasing teachers for home visits (actual 0.8% and ideal 2.8%) and the actual and ideal percentage of time devoted to working with parents to enable them to support their children's educational needs (actual 12.2% and ideal 14.0%).

Table 6.46. Principals' estimates of the mean percentage of time co-ordinators spent on a variety of activities in 1997/98 and mean percentage of time principals reported that they ideally would like them to devote to each activity.

Activity	Actual % (*N*=113)	Ideal % (*N*=93)
Individual and small-group activities with pupils who are experiencing difficulties in class (including remedial work)	26.4	26.2
Home visits by co-ordinator	15.8	15.4
Working with parents to enable them to support their children's educational needs	12.2	14.0
Devising and implementing extra-curricular activities for pupils	11.3	10.5
Advising on use of new and existing teaching resources	5.9	5.3
Assisting with the development and review of a school plan	5.3	5.9
Preparing materials for use by teachers	4.8	5.5
School administrative tasks	3.7	2.3
Working with teachers to identify their in-career development needs	3.5	3.9
Releasing teachers for home visits	0.8	2.8
Other	6.7	5.3

In 1997/98, principals were asked if they were satisfied with the organisation of incareer development courses offered to schools participating in *Breaking the Cycle*. Overall, principals were more dissatisfied than satisfied with the organisation of inservice days. Over half of principals indicated that they were either very dissatisfied (21%) or dissatisfied (29.4%), while only 5% were very satisfied (Table 6.47).

Table 6.47. Numbers and percentages of principals expressing varying degrees of satisfaction with the organisation of incareer development courses for *Breaking the Cycle* (*N*=119).

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Number	6	32	21	35	25
%	5.0%	26.9%	17.7%	29.4%	21.0%

Principals were given the opportunity to explain why they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the incareer training provided for them. Half were dissatisfied with the number of courses offered to them under the scheme (Table 6.48). Many principals reported that they had attended only one incareer course a year, while others indicated that there had been no incareer development courses in their cluster during 1997/98. In fact, eight principals indicated that they had not attended any inservice days since the beginning of the scheme in 1996. One principal stated:

> **"Apart from the initial three day course, there haven't been any courses related to *Breaking the Cycle* for principals and staff."**

One in ten principals was dissatisfied with venue and time arrangements. Many principals would have preferred training to be held in local venues. A further nine principals (7.5%) felt that the content of inservice courses were irrelevant to them although 17 principals (14.2%) reported that they found the course content to be useful and relevant. Five principals also indicated that they found interacting with other teachers to be enjoyable.

One-fifth of principals offered suggestions for improving the content and organisation of the courses; these responses were categorised as 'other'. For example, one principal suggested that practical training sessions would be useful:

> **"Teachers need practical help from other teachers sharing their expertise in a particular curricular area."**

Others thought inservice days should cover topics such as computers and the use of resources. In relation to the administration of incareer development courses, one principal suggested that substitution should be offered to teachers attending courses. Two Gaeltacht school principals complained that their inservice courses were held in English and that recognition was not been given to Gaeltacht schools. Three principals expressed a need for more support from the Department to help implement changes in schools. Finally, several principals were dissatisfied with verbal rather than written dissemination of *Breaking the Cycle* information by the national co-ordinator:

> **"Communication with regards to the programme verbally from co-ordinator, not satisfactory."**

Table 6.48. Numbers and percentages of principals who gave various explanations as to why they were or were not satisfied with the organisation of incareer development courses for those participating in *Breaking the Cycle* (*N*=120).

Explanation	Number	Percentage
Insufficient number of courses	60	50.0%
Good / useful / relevant course content	17	14.2%
Venue / time problems	12	10.0%
Lack of consultation about course content / irrelevance of course content	9	7.5%
Good to have contact with other teachers	5	4.2%
Other		
-more support needed from Department	3	2.5%
-administrative issues	6	5.0%
- other	16	13.3%

Finally, principals were invited, if they desired, to make additional comments on the scheme as a whole. Tables 6.49 and 6.50 list the various positive and negative comments made by principals in 1997/98 and 1998/99. In 1997/98, a total of 97 principals made one or more additional comments. Over a third (35.1%) made general positive comments; they were pleased to be part of *Breaking the Cycle* and believed it was a huge benefit to the school. For example:

"I am delighted that my school is part of *Breaking the Cycle*."

Another third of principals (33.0%) referred specifically to the financial benefits associated with the scheme. A fifth (19.6%) found the co-ordinator to be an asset to their school and 10% reported that home-school links had improved since the introduction of the scheme. Four principals (4.1%) also noted that staff morale in their schools had improved and three mentioned the advantages of the inservice training days.

However, one-quarter of principals (25.8%) complained of an increase in their workload and the time taken to attend meetings and to complete accounts and questionnaires. Many principals thought that more inservice courses and school-based training were necessary (17.5%) and that the scheme should address access to remedial teaching (15.5%).

The responses of 38 principals were classified as 'other'. Several were dissatisfied with the administration and planning of the scheme: one found the Department unhelpful, while another was dissatisfied with the lack of written information about the scheme from the co-ordinator. Others felt that many aspects of the scheme were unclear and unplanned. For example, one principal commented:

> **"I don't think we had sufficient understanding of the thinking behind the scheme and how to undertake the work in a practical way."**

Several principals also felt that large multi-grade classes and the loss of a class teacher in the school had negated the benefits of the scheme. Another principal believed that the effect of the scheme was limited by lack of space in their school:

> **"My own difficulty with *Breaking the Cycle* is that we do not have the facilities / space to reap the rewards. Parents have nowhere to meet. A school should be a local resource. Schools should be given help to provide accommodation."**

Others believed that the design of the scheme was more suited to urban rather than rural schools and that the scheme was particularly difficult to implement in one-teacher schools. One principal suggested that schools should begin planning for the next five years and another thought that children should be targeted as infants and given extra help throughout their schooling. Another principal believed that:

> **"Children who need help should be singled out (quietly) and given special help throughout their time at school, even if we have to bring in outside specialists (e.g., elocution)."**

Principals felt that co-ordinators workloads were too demanding and that this limited the effectiveness of their work with disadvantaged children. Others thought that the co-ordinators role was undefined and inflexible and should permit the co-ordinator to teach ordinary classes. Finally, two principals commented on the evaluation; one thought that the achievement tests used to assess pupils did not reflect their true ability and another felt that many of the school questionnaire items overlapped.

Table 6.49. Numbers and percentages of principals expressing various general comments on *Breaking the Cycle* in 1997/98 (*N*=97*).

Category	Number of schools	% of schools
Financial benefits	34	35.1%
General positive comment	32	33.0%
Increase in workload (accounts / meetings / questionnaires etc.)	25	25.8%
Co-ordinator an asset	19	19.6%
More inservice or school-based inservice needed	17	17.5%
Scheme should address access to remedial teaching	15	15.5%
Improved home-school links	10	10.3%
Scheme administration / planning is disorganised	8	8.2%
Contact with other teachers beneficial	6	6.2%
Lack of time to communicate with the co-ordinator	6	6.2%
Benefits of scheme cancelled out by losing a teacher	5	5.2%
Benefits of scheme cancelled out by large multi-grade classes	5	5.2%
Morale booster	4	4.1%
Advantage of extra inservice	3	3.1%
Breaking the Cycle should be the same in rural as in urban (e.g., Pupil teacher ratio should be 15:1 in rural scheme)	3	3.1%
General negative comment	1	1.0%
Inservice / questionnaires should be available through Irish	1	1.0%
Other	38	39.2%

* Numbers sum to greater than 97 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response.

In 1998/99, 85 principals commented on the scheme in general (Table 6.50). Many of the comments made were similar to those made in 1997/98. Over a third of principals (37.6%) made general positive comments on the scheme. For example:

> **"The whole atmosphere in the school has become brighter."**

Almost a quarter of teachers (23.5%) referred to the advantages of the extra funds available to schools participating in the scheme. One principal commented:

> **"*Breaking the Cycle* has eased the burden on parents and teachers with regards to funding, as fundraising activities had not had to take place to the same degree."**

Fifteen principals described the new equipment and materials which had been funded by the scheme. For example:

> **"The extra funding has certainly helped, for example, the maths equipment increased the concept of the subject and the remedial books have showed a marked improvement in reading skills. The basketball frames bought and funding for tuition for basketball coach have helped. Children now feel more confident in competing with other schools in competitions."**

Fourteen principals (16.5%) felt that the out-of-school activities had been particularly beneficial to disadvantaged pupils. For example:

> **"Funding for projects and out-of-school activities that our pupils would not otherwise experience had been of tremendous benefit."**

Twenty-one principals (36.5%) made positive comments about the co-ordinators appointed to their school. They described the co-ordinators as 'helpful', 'supportive', 'a vital asset to their school', and as having the time and skill to deal with the problems of parents, teachers and pupils. Many principals also mentioned that the co-ordinator eased the burden of their workload. As one principal stated:

> **"The support of the co-ordinator on a regular basis is beneficial in the organising of school planning, curricular work and out-of-school activities."**

However, eleven principals thought that the role of the co-ordinator was ill-defined and too wide-ranging, and that there were too many schools in a cluster. One principal suggested that the co-ordinator should spend an extended amount of time in individual schools.

A fifth of principals complained about the extra work involved in the administration of *Breaking the Cycle*. Many principals found annual questionnaires to be particularly time consuming. One principal suggested that questionnaires should include more quantitative questions. Sixteen principals (18.8%) commented on the shortage of staff and remedial teachers in their school. Three indicated that their schools had lost a teacher since the beginning of the scheme, and that the success of the scheme in their school was being hindered by staff shortages.

Table 6.50. Numbers and percentages of principals expressing various general comments on *Breaking the Cycle* in 1998/99 (*N*=85*).

Category	Number of schools	% of schools
General (unspecific) positive comment (e.g., it is an excellent scheme)	32	37.6%
Co-ordinator (positive comment) (e.g., co-ordinator is supportive / helpful, an asset when planning, organising projects/events)	21	36.5%
Extra funds beneficial (unspecific)	20	23.5%
Increase in workload / administration /organisation of scheme time consuming for teachers and principals	17	20.0%
Loss of teacher / no remedial teacher available/ more teachers needed in school	16	18.8%
Extra equipment / materials beneficial	15	17.6%
Out-of-school activities (e.g., trips, visitors to school, sports) beneficial / experience children would otherwise never have	14	16.5%
More inservice needed / other problems with inservice	14	16.5%
Co-ordinator (negative comment) (e.g., co-ordinators role too varied / too many schools in cluster / should spent more time in each school)	11	12.9%
Parental involvement in school increased / parent friendly atmosphere / less mistrust of parents	8	9.4%
Extra staff beneficial (e.g., art teacher)	7	8.2%
General (unspecific) negative comment	5	5.9%
Cater for needs of individual children/ focus on disadvantaged	5	5.9%
Extra space needed to accommodate co-ord. / remedial teacher /other visitors	2	2.4%
Other		
- other benefits to teachers (e.g., incareer courses)	2	2.4%
- benefits to pupils (improved self-esteem / confidence)	2	2.4%
- problems with parents' attitudes	4	4.8%
- comments on questionnaire	3	3.5%
- low morale among teachers	3	3.5%
- other	20	16.5%

* Numbers sum to greater than 85 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response.

In relation to inservice training, the comments tended to be more negative than positive. Many principals were dissatisfied with the number and quality of incareer development courses offered.

Other types of responses were made by less than 10% of principals. For example, several perceived an increase in parental involvement in schools, while others felt that schools were better able to cater for the needs of individual children under the scheme. Finally 34 principals made more idiosyncratic comments which were placed in the 'other' category (Table 6.50). Some interesting comments were made on parents' involvement in schools. One principal said that older parents were slower to change their attitudes than younger families. Another commented that:

> **"In an effort by schools to involve parents, the more financially secure tend to dictate how and where funds are allocated, in some cases designating funds from projects which would be more beneficial to the less well off but least vocal."**

Several principals made other suggestions. One thought that local district inspectors should be more involved in the project; others felt that greater communication among schools in the scheme would be beneficial. Another principal was concerned that second-level schools were not continuing the work carried out in *Breaking the Cycle* primary schools:

> **"The one weakness we feel as a staff in our school with *Breaking the Cycle* is the failure of the second level to pick up on the sixth class pupils who will need the same care when they arrive at their door. We are building up confidence in these children and we would like this to be reciprocated in second level."**

Finally, several principals mentioned that the scheme had benefited teachers; they had greater insight into the development of the child, they were more interested in current educational theories, and the scheme provided them with an opportunity to discuss educational topics with other teachers.

7. TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SCHEME OVER THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF ITS OPERATION

All class teachers in participating schools were asked to complete teacher questionnaires in 1997, 1998, and 1999. Response rates for each year were 96.2%, 91.9%, and 88.5% respectively. The focus of this section is on describing selected data from these questionnaires. While the questionnaires varied somewhat in content from year to year, certain core items were asked each year. Core items covered teachers' perceptions of their pupils' home backgrounds and their pupils' attitudes to school. Other data described in this section relate to teachers' perceptions of the atmosphere in their school (prior to and following the introduction of the scheme), their perceptions of incareer development programmes associated with participation in *Breaking the Cycle*, and their views of how the scheme had impacted on the attitudes and achievements of their pupils.

7.1 TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

A positive school atmosphere has been identified as one of the characteristics of effective schools (Sammons, Hillman & Mortimore, 1995). Effective schools have been found to be orderly, quiet, disciplined, with a pleasant atmosphere and a physical environment that is clean, comfortable, attractive and colourful (Kellaghan, 1994; Purkey & Smith, 1983). The 1998/99 questionnaire for teachers included two items which sought to determine whether the atmosphere in rural schools had improved since the introduction of the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme. Teachers were asked to indicate, by ticking one of four options ('not at all', 'to some extent', 'to a good extent' or 'to a great extent'), the degree to which various adjectives described the atmosphere in their school prior to the introduction of the scheme and at the time of completing the questionnaire in 1999.

Overall, teachers recalled that there was a positive atmosphere in their school before the introduction of the scheme. Over four-fifths of teachers (who were teaching in the school at the time) indicated that the atmosphere had been disciplined (88.2% of teachers), friendly (85.3%), welcoming (87.7%), warm (86.5%), and pleasant (85.3%) to a 'good' or 'great' extent (Table 7.1 and Figure 7.1). Three-quarters also indicated that the atmosphere in their school had been orderly. However, fewer teachers reported that the atmosphere had been quiet (51.7% of teachers), colourful (56.5%), or comfortable (63.5%).

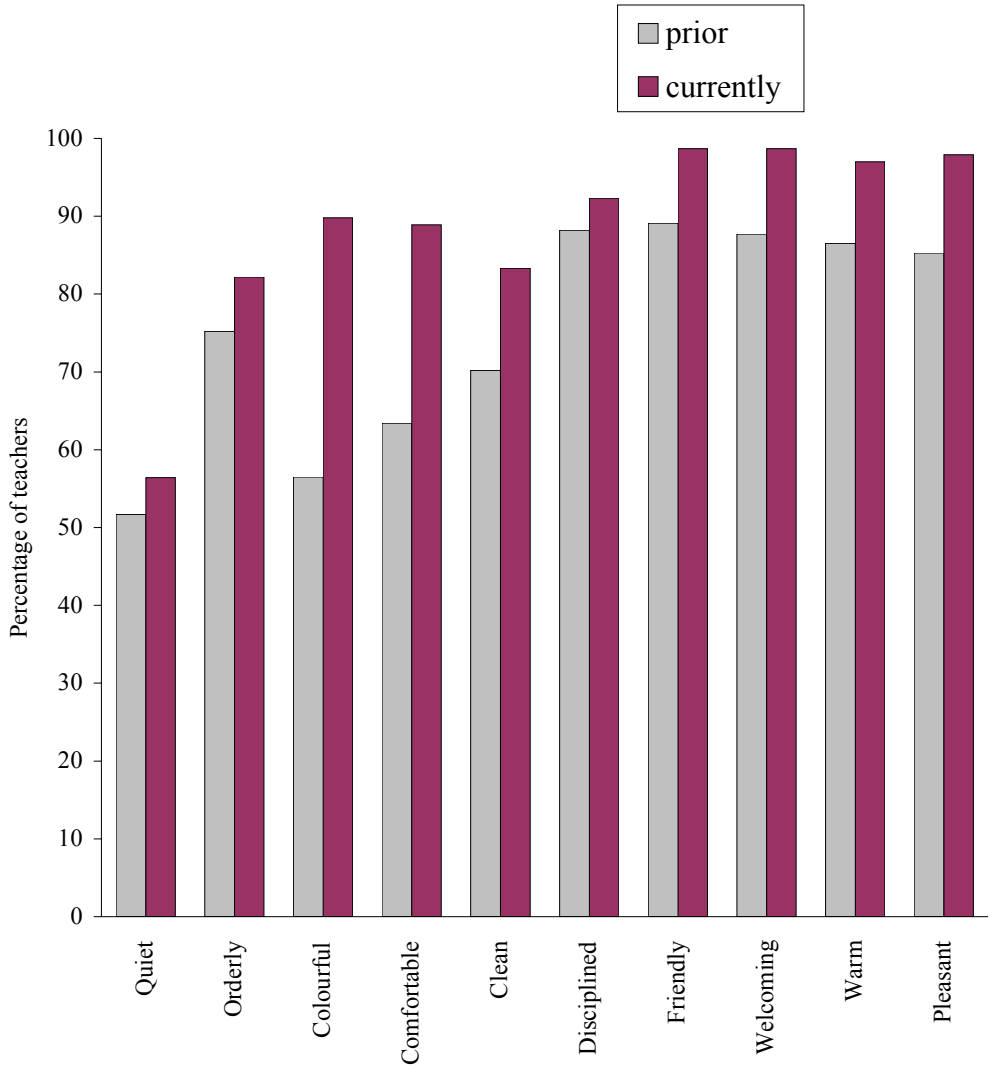
Table 7.1. Percentages of teachers* indicating the extent to which various adjectives described the atmosphere in their school, both prior to the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle,* and in 1998/99.

		Not at all	**To some extent**	**To a good extent**	**To a great extent**
Quiet	Prior (*N*=234)	10.3%	38.0%	41.9%	9.8%
	Currently (*N*=227)	15.0%	28.6%	42.3%	14.1%
Orderly	Prior (*N*=234)	2.1%	22.6%	52.1%	23.1%
	Currently (*N*=230)	1.7%	16.1%	52.2%	30.0%
Colourful	Prior (N=238)	7.2%	36.3%	39.2%	17.3%
	Currently (*N*=235)	0.9%	9.4%	43.0%	46.8%
Comfortable	Prior (*N*=238)	5.0%	31.5%	38.2%	25.2%
	Currently (*N*=234)	0.4%	10.7%	41.0%	47.9%
Clean	Prior (*N*=238)	3.4%	26.5%	39.5%	30.7%
	Currently (*N*=233)	2.1%	14.6%	39.5%	43.8%
Disciplined	Prior (*N*=236)	1.3%	10.6%	53.0%	35.2%
	Currently (*N*=232)	0.4%	7.3%	48.3%	44.0%
Friendly	Prior (*N*=238)	0.4%	10.5%	38.7%	50.4%
	Currently (*N*=234)	0%	1.3%	31.6%	67.1%
Welcoming	Prior (*N*=237)	0%	12.2%	40.9%	46.8%
	Currently (*N*=232)	0%	1.3%	30.6%	68.1%
Warm	Prior (*N*=237)	0.4%	13.1%	43.5%	43.0%
	Currently (*N*=231)	0%	3.0%	36.4%	60.6%
Pleasant	Prior (*N*=238)	0.8%	13.9%	38.7%	46.6%
	Currently (*N*=233)	0%	2.1%	30.9%	67.0%

* only responses from teachers who were in the school before the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle,* or who completed the 'prior' part of the item, were analysed.

From Figure 7.1 it can be seen that most teachers reported that the atmosphere and the physical environment in their schools had improved since the beginning of *Breaking the Cycle.* By the third year of the scheme, the vast majority perceived the atmosphere in their school to be pleasant (97.9%), welcoming (98.7%), friendly (98.7%) and warm (97%) (Table 7.1). Four out of five teachers (82.2%) described their school as orderly, with 92.3% reporting that there was a sense of discipline in their school.

Figure 7.1. Percentages of teachers who indicated that various adjectives described the atmosphere in their school, to a good or great extent, prior to the introduction of the scheme and in 1998/99.



In relation to the physical environment of the school, one-third of teachers believed that their schools were more colourful and one quarter thought that their schools were more comfortable, since the scheme's inception. Nine out of ten teachers reported that their school was colourful (89.8%) or comfortable (88.9%) to a 'good' or 'great' extent, in 1998/99. Similarly over four-fifths described their school as clean (83.8%) compared to 70.3% of teachers who reported that it had been so before *Breaking the Cycle.* However, only half of the teachers (56.4%) in 1998/99 reported their school was quiet, which represents only a slight increase in the proportion of teachers (51.7%) who indicated that their schools had been quiet before the introduction of the scheme (Table 7.1). This finding is particularly important considering that a quiet and orderly learning environment has been found to be a key feature of effective schools (Kellaghan, 1994).

Teachers who were not in schools before the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle* described the atmosphere in their school in 1999. Their responses were very similar to those of teachers who were in schools before *Breaking the Cycle* began and who described the atmosphere in their school in 1999 as the 'after' part of the item (Table 7.2). This could be interpreted as indicating that the item is a valid measure of school atmosphere and suggests that teachers who completed both the 'before' and 'after' parts of the item were accurate in their descriptions in 1998/99.

Over 90% of teachers described the atmosphere in their school as pleasant (90.2%), welcoming (90.1%) and friendly (92.7%), to a 'good' or great 'extent', while over four-fifths indicated that their school was warm (87.8%), disciplined (87.5%) and clean (80.5%). A further 77% of teachers reported that their school had an orderly atmosphere.

However, only 60% described their school as comfortable to a 'good' or 'great' extent. Indeed over a third (36.6%) perceived their schools to be only comfortable 'to some extent'. Teachers were even less positive about the level of noise in their schools: only 35% described the atmosphere in their school as quiet to a 'good' extent, and none of the teachers reported that there was a very quiet atmosphere in their school in 1998/99.

Table 7.2. Number and percentages of teachers, who were not in schools prior to *Breaking the Cycle*, indicating the extent to which various adjectives described the atmosphere in their school in 1998/99.

		Not at all	**To some extent**	**To a good extent**	**To a great extent**
Quiet	Number	4	22	14	0
(*N*=40)	%	10.0%	55.0%	35.0%	-
Orderly	Number	1	8	25	6
(*N*=40)	%	2.5%	20.0%	62.5%	15.0%
Colourful	Number	1	10	13	16
(N=40)	%	2.5%	25.0%	32.5%	40.0%
Comfortable	Number	1	15	9	16
(*N*=41)	%	2.4%	36.6%	22.0%	39.0%
Clean	Number	0	8	18	15
(*N*=41)	%	-	19.5%	43.9%	36.6%
Disciplined	Number	0	5	22	13
(*N*=40)	%	-	12.5%	55.0%	32.5%
Friendly	Number	0	3	12	26
(*N*=41)	%	-	7.3%	29.3%	63.4%
Welcoming	Number	0	4	9	27
(*N*=40)	%	-	10.0%	22.5%	67.6%
Warm	Number	0	5	10	26
(N=41)	%	-	12.2%	24.4%	63.4%
Pleasant	Number	0	4	10	27
(*N*=41)	%	-	9.8%	24.4%	65.9%

Three further items (which were included in the 1998/99 questionnaire for teachers) referred to the leadership abilities of school principals. Studies have shown that principals in effective schools are actively involved in classroom activities, introduce teachers to new teaching strategies, and support incareer development programmes (Kellaghan, 1994; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis & Ecob, 1988). Tables 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5 show teachers' responses to three statements related to this issue.

The majority of teachers indicated that principals were involved in classroom activities. Over a third (36.1%) agreed and almost 60% strongly agreed that their principal showed an interest in what was going on in their classroom (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3. Numbers and percentages of teachers indicating the extent to which they agreed that their principal showed an interest in what was going on in their classroom (*N*=169).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	100	61	4	2	2
%	59.2	36.1	2.4	1.2	1.2

Similarly over four-fifths of teachers either agreed (36.9%) or strongly agreed (48.2%) that principals brought them into contact with new ideas and approaches designed to improve their pupils' academic achievements. One in ten, however, disagreed that principals introduced them to innovative teaching practices (Table 7.4).

Table 7.4. Numbers and percentages of teachers indicating the extent to which they agreed that their principal brought them into contact with new ideas and approaches designed to improve pupils' academic achievements (*N*=168).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	81	62	5	18	2
%	48.2	36.9	3.0	10.7	1.2

Two-thirds of teachers also indicated that their principal encouraged their attendance at development programmes 'very much', with 28.3% indicating that principals supported their attendance 'somewhat' (Table 7.5).

Table 7.5. Numbers and percentages of teachers indicating the extent to which they believed that their principal encouraged their attendance at staff development programmes / inservice training (*N*=166).

	Very much so	Somewhat	Not at all
Number	111	47	8
%	66.9	28.3	4.8

In relation to staff development programmes, teachers were asked whether they believed development meetings were available to help them acquire new knowledge and ideas. Teachers were clearly dissatisfied with the provision of staff development programmes. Only 40.3% in 1996/97, 41.9% in 1997/98, and 50% in 1998/99 strongly agreed or agreed that staff development programmes were available to help them acquire new skills, although 38% in 1998/99, compared to 28.4% in 1996/97, indicated that they were satisfied with the development courses offered to them (Table 7.6).

Table 7.6. Numbers and percentages of teachers who expressed varying levels of agreement with the statement that staff development meetings were available to help them acquire new knowledge and skills in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

		Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1996/97 (*N*=310)	Number	37	88	53	97	37
	%	11.9%	28.4%	17.1%	29.7%	11.9%
1997/98 (*N*=279)	Number	26	91	63	76	23
	%	9.3%	32.6%	22.6%	27.2%	8.2%
1998/99 (*N*=271)	Number	35	106	56	65	12
	%	12.9%	38.0%	20.7%	24.0%	4.4%

The final item in this section referred to staff involvement in the decision-making process in schools. Consulting staff on major school decisions has been shown to facilitate the implementation of new programmes in a school (Purkey & Smith, 1983). The vast majority of teachers (95.3%) (excluding teaching principals who did not complete the item) felt very much, or somewhat, involved in the decision-making process in their school in 1996/97 (Table 7.7). Almost all of the teachers (98.3%) in the second year of the scheme (1997/98) felt part of the decision-making process to some extent. Similarly, in 1998/99, 94.7% of respondents indicated that they were consulted on school decisions.

The proportion of teachers who felt involved in the decision-making process in their school did not increase considerably following the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle* in 1996. However, teachers' responses indicate that the vast majority of rural schools actively involved teachers even before the beginning of the scheme.

Table 7.7. Numbers and percentages of teachers who felt very much, somewhat, or not at all involved in the decision-making process in their school, in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

		Very much involved	Somewhat involved	Not at all involved
1996/97 (*N*=188)	Number	123	59	6
	%	64.4%	30.9%	3.1%
1997/98 (*N*=181)	Number	132	46	5
	%	72.8%	25.4%	2.8%
1998/99 (*N*=169)	Number	115	45	9
	%	68.0%	26.6%	5.3%

7.2 PUPILS' BACKGROUND AND ATTITUDES

Teachers were asked for their perceptions of how pupils' home lives might affect their academic progress, and for their long-term expectations for their pupils. They were also asked if a pupil's background or a teacher's skill had a greater influence on pupils' academic achievements.

Teachers were specifically asked to indicate the percentage of their pupils whom they believed to have home backgrounds that interfered seriously with their ability to learn effectively. Most teachers thought only a minority of their pupils fell into this category. In the first year of the scheme, almost three-quarters of teachers thought that less than 40% of their pupils had home lives that interfered with their ability to learn at school, with only 10% believing that more than 60% of their pupils were seriously affected (Table 7.8). Similarly in 1997/98 and 1998/99, over four-fifths of teachers thought that home background was a problem for less than 40% of their pupils. Furthermore, only 5% of teachers in 1997/98 and 8.5% in 1998/99 thought that more than 60% of their pupils had home lives that negatively affected their success at school.

There was an increase from 1996/97 to 1998/99 in the percentage of teachers (from 74.6% to 81.4%) who believed that only a minority of pupils (less than 40%) were educationally disadvantaged by their home backgrounds.

Table 7.8. Numbers and percentages of teachers who indicated that various percentages of their pupils had home backgrounds that interfered seriously with their ability to learn effectively.

		< 20%	**20-40%**	**41-60%**	**61-80%**	**> 80%**
1996/97	Number	144	87	41	27	4
(*N*=310)	%	46.5%	28.1%	13.2%	8.7%	1.3%
1997/98	Number	123	107	39	12	2
(*N*=283)	%	43.5%	37.8%	13.8%	4.2%	0.7%
1998/99	Number	110	119	28	16	8
(*N*=281)	%	39.1%	42.3%	10.0%	5.7%	2.8%

Teachers were asked about their expectations for their pupils. Table 7.9 shows the number of teachers in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99 who estimated that various percentages of their pupils would continue in school beyond the Junior Certificate.

Overall, teachers had low expectations for their students, although responses indicate that expectations have increased since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*. In 1996/97, just over a quarter of teachers believed that more than 80% of their pupils would remain in school beyond the Junior Certificate, while over a third estimated that between 60% and 80% of their pupils would. One in eight teachers (12%) had low expectations: they expected less than 40% of pupils to continue in school after the Junior Certificate.

Teachers' expectations were marginally higher the following years. In 1997/98, over a third believed that more than 80% of their pupils would remain in school after the Junior Certificate, with a further third believing that between 60% and 80% of pupils would continue in school. However, 11.3% of teachers estimated that less than 40% of their pupils were likely to enter the Senior Cycle. The following year, almost two-fifths of teachers (38.9%) indicated that they expected over 80% of their pupils to enter the Senior Cycle. In addition, over a third thought that between 60% and 80% of pupils would do so (Table 7.9). Almost one teacher in ten predicted that less than 40% of pupils would continue in school beyond the Junior Certificate.

Unfortunately, the percentage of pupils nationally who remain in school beyond the Junior Certificate is not known. However, as described in Section 4.2 (Table 4.4), on average, 96% of all pupils nationally completed the Junior Cycle between 1990 and 1997. Furthermore, the Government White paper 'Charting Our Education Future' indicated that over 80% of those who entered secondary schools completed the Leaving Certificate (or Applied Leaving Certificate) in 1995 (Ireland, 1995). Therefore, it can be estimated that between 80% and 96% of pupils (approximately) continue in school beyond the Junior Certificate each year. Hence, despite a slight increase in teachers' expectations over the three years, the majority of teachers (72.3% in 1996/97, 63.6% in 1997/98, and 61.1% in 1998/99) expected the early school leaving rate among pupils in their school to be higher than the national average.

Table 7.9. Numbers and percentages of teachers who indicated various proportions of their pupils that they expected to continue in school beyond Junior Certificate.

		< 20%	**20-40%**	**41-60%**	**61-80%**	**> 80%**
1996/97	Number	2	36	63	117	86
(*N*=310)	%	0.6%	11.6%	20.3%	37.7%	27.7%
1997/98	Number	7	25	41	107	103
(*N*=283)	%	2.5%	8.8%	14.5%	37.8%	36.4%
1998/99	Number	4	21	49	97	109
(*N*=280)	%	1.4%	7.5%	17.5%	34.6%	38.9%

A teacher's acceptance of responsibility for the performance of his/her students has been identified as one of the class-level factors associated with school effectiveness (Kellaghan, 1994). Teachers were asked whether they believed pupils' home background affected their interest in school and their overall achievement in school. Two related items asked teachers whether they agreed that some children would never succeed at school, regardless of teachers' efforts and, conversely, whether they thought that all children could achieve a basic level of literacy, provided they were given proper tuition.

Most teachers thought that children's interest in school was strongly influenced by their parents' interest in education. In 1996/97, over four-fifths (82.2%) of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that without a parents' interest in their child's education, the

child would not be interested in school (Table 7.10). Only 8.7% strongly disagreed or disagreed that this was the case. In 1997/98, there was a slight change in attitude: fewer teachers (78.4%) strongly agreed or agreed that children's interest in school was influenced by their parents' concern with education. However, the number of teachers who actually disagreed with the statement remained low, at approximately 8%. Similarly, during the third year of the scheme, over three-quarters of teachers (77.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that children's attitude to school was determined by their parents' interest in education, with only 7% disagreeing.

Table 7.10. Numbers and percentages of teachers who expressed varying levels of agreement that if parents are not interested in their child's education, the child will not be interested in school.

If parents are not interested in their child's education, the child will not be interested in school.						
		Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1996/97	Number	125	130	28	25	2
(*N*=310)	%	40.3%	41.9%	9.0%	8.1%	0.6%
1997/98	Number	104	118	39	21	1
(*N*=283)	%	36.8%	41.7%	13.8%	7.4%	0.4%
1998/99	Number	103	118	44	19	1
(*N*=285)	%	36.1%	41.4%	15.4%	6.7%	0.4%

In contrast to the previous item, teachers were less certain that it was possible to tell from knowledge of pupils' homes how well they would do in school (Table 7.11). Only half of teachers (56.4%) in 1996/97 strongly agreed or agreed that pupils' home background determined their educational performance, while a quarter were uncertain. Similarly, in 1997/98 and 1998/99, only half of teachers (54.1% in 1997/98 and 55% in 1998/99) agreed that it was possible to predict children's level of educational achievement from their home background, with over 30% of teachers indicating that they were unsure of their opinion. The proportion of teachers who disagreed with the statement decreased, however, from 17.7% in 1996/97, to 15.9% in 1997/98, and to 13% in 1998/99 (Table 7.11).

Table 7.11. Numbers and percentages of teachers expressing varying levels of agreement about whether you can really tell from a pupil's home whether or not he/she will do well at school.

You can really tell from a pupil's home whether or not he/she will do well in school.						
		Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1996/97	Number	59	116	80	49	6
(*N*=310)	%	19.0%	37.4%	25.8%	15.8%	1.9%
1997/98	Number	39	114	85	43	2
(*N*=283)	%	13.8%	40.3%	30.0%	15.2%	0.7%
1998/99	Number	48	109	91	34	3
(*N*=285)	%	16.8%	38.2%	31.9%	11.9%	1.1%

To determine whether teachers accepted responsibility for the success or failure of their pupils, they were asked to respond to the statement 'you can try as hard as you like but some children will never do well in school'. Responses indicated that over half of teachers believed that their pupils' educational success was primarily beyond their control. As shown in Table 7.12, 53.9% in 1996/97, 55.7% in 19997/98, and 50.3% in 1998/99 believed that some children would never do well in school, regardless of teachers' efforts. However, over a fifth of teachers each year strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement, and between 21% and 24% of teachers were unsure.

Table 7.12. Numbers and percentages of teachers who agreed or disagreed that you can try as hard as you like but some children will never do well at school.

You can try as hard as you like but some children will never do well at school.						
		Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1996/97	Number	43	124	74	58	7
(*N*=310)	%	13.9%	40.0%	23.9%	18.7%	2.3%
1997/98	Number	25	131	60	60	4
(*N*=280)	%	8.9%	46.8%	21.4%	21.4%	1.4%
1998/99	Number	31	115	70	59	10
(*N*=285)	%	10.9%	40.4%	24.6%	20.7%	3.5%

Finally, teachers were asked whether they agreed that if taught properly, almost all children could learn to read and write satisfactorily. In contrast to the previous item, the majority of teachers believed that most children could achieve at least a basic level of

literacy in school. Approximately 70% in 1996/97, 1997/98, and 1998/99 believed that, given adequate teaching, all children could achieve a satisfactory level of literacy (Table 7.13). Only 11.6% of teachers in 1996/97, 12.8% in 1997/98, and 14.8% in 1998/99 disagreed with this, and between 15% and 18% were unsure.

Table 7.13. Numbers and percentages of teacher expressing varying levels of agreement with the statement that if taught properly, almost all children can learn to read and write satisfactorily.

If taught properly, almost all children can learn to read and write satisfactorily.						
		Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1996/97	Number	57	165	49	31	5
(*N*=310)	%	18.4%	53.2%	15.8%	10.0%	1.6%
1997/98	Number	51	143	51	33	3
(*N*=281)	%	18.2%	50.9%	18.2%	11.7%	1.1%
1998/99	Number	48	149	45	33	9
(*N*=284)	%	16.9%	52.5%	15.8%	11.6%	3.2%

In summary, over the three years there was a slight decrease in the proportion of teachers who believed that over 60% of their pupils were educationally disadvantaged by their home backgrounds, with a corresponding increase in the number of teachers who believed that only a minority of pupils (less than 40%) were disadvantaged. An increasing number of teachers had high expectations for their pupils: a greater proportion of teachers in 1998/99 than in 1996/97 expected more than 80% of their pupils to remain in school after Junior Cycle.

Teachers' acceptance of responsibility for the success of their pupils at school also improved slightly during the three-year period. Marginally fewer teachers agreed (from 82% to 77%) that parents' interest in their child's education influenced their interest in school. The number of teachers who were uncertain whether children's interest in school is determined by their parents also increased. There was also a slight decrease in the number of teachers who strongly agreed (from 19% to 16%) that pupils' home background determines their school performance, with a corresponding increase in the number of teachers who were unsure. There was little change in the number of teachers who believed that pupils' success at school was due to factors beyond their control: over half of teachers each year thought that some children would never succeed academically.

However, the proportion of teachers who disagreed that some children would never do well in school increased marginally. Finally, the same proportion of teachers (approximately 70%) each year agreed that all children could be taught to read and write satisfactorily, although there was also a slight increase in the number of teachers who disagreed that this was the case. The previous two items indicate that at least half of teachers participating in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme believed that pupils' background had a greater influence than their skills as a teacher on pupils' performance at school.

7.3 INCAREER DEVELOPMENT COURSES

The number of days teachers spent attending incareer development courses increased considerably following the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle* in 1996. From March 1995 to March 1996 (the year prior to the introduction of the scheme) teachers attended development courses for an average of 2.07 days (Table 7.14). In contrast, during the first year of the scheme (from March 1996 to March 1997), teachers attended incareer development courses for an average of 4.8 days. Similarly, during the second and third years of the scheme, teachers spent an average of 3.79 days (from March 1997 to March 1998) and 3.78 days (from March 1998 to March 1999) attending incareer courses. One explanation for the decrease in the number of days teacher spent attending incareer courses in 1997/98 and 1998/99 compared to 1996/97 is that the introductory course organised in the first year of the scheme was held over two or three days, while courses arranged during the following years were typically held over one or two days.

The proportion of teachers who spent no days attending courses also decreased considerably from 49.68% in 1995/96 to only 8.06% in 1996/97 and 13.31% in 1997/98. On average, over the three-year period, female teachers spent marginally more days per year than male teachers attending career development courses (Table 7.14). In 1997/98 and 1998/99, teachers were asked whether they found incareer development courses to be helpful to them in the classroom. Over three-quarters in 1997/98 reported that development courses were either 'very' helpful (28.2%) or 'somewhat' helpful (48.1%) on their return to the classroom (Table 7.15). Similarly in 1998/98, almost nine out of ten teachers (87.4%) indicated that they found *Breaking the Cycle* incareer courses to be of practical benefit. Two-fifths of teachers (39.9%) thought that the courses were 'very helpful', while almost a half (47.5%) thought that they were 'somewhat' helpful.

Table 7.14. Mean number of incareer development days attended by teachers in 1995/96, 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

Period		Mean	*SD*	Mode	Median	Range
1.3.95-1.3.96 (*N*=310)	Total	2.07	2.82	0	1	14
	Male	1.41	2.03	0	0	7
	Female	2.27	2.99	0	1	14
1.3.96-1.3.97 (*N*=310)	Total	4.80	3.38	3	4	22
	Male	3.74	2.68	4	3	11
	Female	5.10	3.51	3	5	22
1.3.97-1.3.98 (*N*=248)	Total	3.79	3.85	3	3	35
	Male	3.00	2.63	3	3	10
	Female	4.04	4.13	3	3	35
1.3.98-1.3.99 (*N*=210)	Total	3.78	3.54	0	3	20
	Male	3.73	2.69	2	3	14
	Female	3.79	3.72	0	3	20

Table 7.15. Number and percentages of teachers who agreed or disagreed that incareer development courses were helpful to them when they returned to the classroom, in 1997/98 and 1998/99.

		Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
1997/98	Number	61	104	18	19	14
(*N*=216)	%	28.2	48.1	8.3	8.8	6.5
1998/99	Number	79	94	4	12	9
(*N*=198)	%	39.9	47.5	2.0	6.1	4.5

Incareer development courses were organised for principals and teachers at national level by the *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator and at local level by the cluster co-ordinators. At national level, staffs (principals, teachers and co-ordinators) attended a 2-day or 3-day course on project development (e.g., school planning and implementation of the scheme) and professional development in the first year of the scheme (1996/97). This introductory course covered topics such as partnership, professionalism, school planning and evaluation. There were also modules on various teaching practices (e.g., individual versus group instruction) and understanding educational disadvantage. Teachers were taught how to identify the needs of marginalised pupils and how to respond to these needs.

The following year (1997/98), teachers in each cluster attended a 1-day module on developing the teaching and learning environment. The focus of this session was on improving classroom management and teaching practices. Finally, in the third year of the scheme (1998/99), a 2-day course on project development and remediation was organised for principals. This course was designed to teach principals how to identify the learning needs of individual pupils and appropriate methods to address them.

In 1997/98 and 1998/99, teachers were asked to describe the staff development courses attended, at local and national level, as a result of participating in *Breaking the Cycle*. This item was excluded from analysis, however, as many of the responses were not amenable to interpretation. For example, a considerable number of teachers did not specify the content of courses at all (e.g., by saying 'a *Breaking the Cycle* course'*)* or gave irrelevant details such as the location, duration and date of development courses attended. Several teachers described the content of courses attended in very vague terms (e.g., related to poverty and disadvantage), while others mentioned individual topics (e.g., dyslexia) that had been covered as part of a development course, without specifying the overall theme of the course attended (e.g., means of addressing learning difficulties).

Teachers' responses indicated, however, that a wide range of development courses were held in schools as a result of *Breaking the Cycle*. In 1997/98, courses in computers, Mathematics, English, learning difficulties and remedial education, discipline and multi-class management, art and craft, stress management, personal development and behaviour modification were offered to rural teachers. Incareer development, courses organised in 1998/99 included courses in computers, music, learning difficulties, art and craft, Mathematics, drama, and language development. Schools also held health-related development courses (e.g., stress management, drugs awareness, and first aid), self-development courses (e.g., the Enneagram) and a course on how to further develop pupils' self-esteem. In addition to courses held during term time, some teachers mentioned that they had attended summer courses in 1998/99.

7.5 BREAKING THE CYCLE

A section on *Breaking the Cycle* (included in the 1997/98 and 1998/99 questionnaires for teachers) was concerned with teachers' opinions and experiences of participating in the scheme. Teachers were asked for their views on the effects of the scheme on their teaching practices, their school and their pupils.

The first set of items (which were also included in the 1996/97 questionnaire for teachers) referred specifically to teachers' views on the effects of the scheme on their ability to understand and respond to the needs of educationally disadvantaged children. In the first year of the scheme (1996/97), a considerable number of teachers did not see participation in the scheme as having a major impact on their ability in this regard. However in the following years (1997/98 and 1998/99), an increasing number of teachers believed that the scheme was having a positive impact on their behaviour and teaching skills.

Most teachers believed that the scheme had increased their understanding of educational disadvantage. Over four-fifths in 1996/97 (86.5%) and more than nine out of ten teachers (93.3%) in 1997/98 thought that participating in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme had improved their understanding of the nature of educational disadvantage 'a lot' or 'somewhat'. The vast majority of teachers (94.2%) who completed the item in 1998/99 also believed that the scheme had increased their knowledge of educational disadvantage (Table 7.16).

In contrast, only two-thirds (68.1%) of teachers in 1996/97 saw an improvement in their ability to base their work on the needs of disadvantaged pupils as a result of participating in *Breaking the Cycle*. However, over four-fifths (88.6%) in the following year (1997/98) thought that the scheme had enhanced this ability 'a lot' or 'somewhat'. Similarly, nine out of ten teachers (90.7%) in 1998/99 thought that their ability to consider the needs of marginalised children, when organising their work, had improved to some degree.

In a related item, teachers were asked whether their ability to adopt teaching strategies that respond effectively to the learning needs of disadvantaged children had improved since the beginning in the scheme. Only two-thirds (66.3%) in 1996/97 responded that their ability to select appropriate methodologies when teaching educationally disadvantaged pupils had improved 'a lot' or 'somewhat'. By the second

year of the scheme, however, over four-fifths (86.1%) thought that their ability to respond to the learning needs of the disadvantaged had improved to some extent. Furthermore, in the third year of the scheme (1998/99), more than nine out of ten teachers (92.1%) saw an improvement in this skills area (Table 7.16).

Table 7.16. Percentages of teachers who believed that *Breaking the Cycle* had improved their ability to…….

Understand the nature of educational disadvantage.				
		A lot	Somewhat	Not at all
1996/97 (*N*=310)	%	20.3	64.2	13.5
1997/98 (*N*=282)	%	43.6	49.7	6.7
1998/99 (*N*=280)	%	44.6	49.6	5.7
Organise their work on the basis of knowledge and needs of disadvantaged children.				
		A lot	Somewhat	Not at all
1996/97 (*N*=310)	%	10.3	57.9	27.0
1997/98 (*N*=281)	%	33.1	55.5	11.4
1998/99 (*N*=280)	%	34.6	56.1	9.3
Adopt teaching strategies that respond effectively to the learning needs of disadvantaged children.				
		A lot	Somewhat	Not at all
1996/97 (*N*=310)	%	13.2	53.1	28.6
1997/98 (*N*=279)	%	29.8	56.3	14.0
1998/99 (*N*=278)	%	36.7	55.4	7.9
Review and record pupils' progress.				
		A lot	Somewhat	Not at all
1996/97 (*N*=310)	%	10.0	48.6	36.7
1997/98 (*N*=278)	%	21.7	58.72	19.6
1998/99 (*N*=277)	%	24.5	59.2	16.2

Finally, only 58.6% of teachers in 1996/97 saw an improvement in their ability to review and record pupils' progress since their involvement in the scheme. In contrast, four-fifths (79.4%) in 1997/98 felt that their ability to review and record pupils' progress at school had improved 'a lot' or 'somewhat'. Moreover, the following year, 1998/99, a total of 83.7% of teachers reported that they were better able to monitor pupils' academic performances, with only 16.2% responding that their ability to review pupils' progress had not improved 'at all' (Table 7.16).

Two further items required teachers to indicate the extent to which their teaching practices and their opinions and attitudes had changed as a result of being involved in *Breaking the Cycle.* Almost two-thirds of teachers (60%) in 1997/98 agreed that their teaching practices had changed 'somewhat' or 'very much' as a result of participating in the scheme. The remaining third, however, felt that their teaching methods had 'not really' or 'not at all' changed (Table 7.17). In 1998/99, a larger majority of teachers (69.2%) thought their teaching methods had changed, to some extent, since the beginning of the scheme, although a fifth (21.3%) disagreed that this was the case.

Table 7.17. Numbers and percentages of teachers who believed that their teaching practices and their opinions and attitudes had changed as a result of participating in *the Breaking the Cycle* scheme.

My teaching practices have changed as a result of being involved in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme						
		Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
1997/98 (*N*=284)	Number	21	146	31	60	24
	%	7.5	51.8	11.0	21.3	8.5
1998/99 (*N*=273)	Number	21	168	26	45	13
	%	7.7	61.5	9.5	16.5	4.8
My opinions and attitudes have changed as a result of being involved in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme.						
		Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
1997/98 (*N*=283)	Number	44	162	14	41	22
	%	15.6	57.2	5.0	14.5	7.8
1998/99 (*N*=274)	Number	55	158	20	29	12
	%	20.1	57.7	7.3	10.3	4.4

Teachers were more certain that their own opinions and attitudes had changed as a result of participating in *Breaking the Cycle.* More than seven out of ten (72.8%) in 1997/98 and over three-quarters (77.8%) in 1998/99 felt that their opinions and attitudes had changed 'somewhat' or 'very much' (Table 7.17), although over a fifth (22.2%) in 1997/98 and 14% in 1998/99 believed that their attitudes had not changed 'at all' as a result of their involvement in *Breaking the Cycle*.

The next set of items related to teachers' views on the effect of *Breaking the Cycle* on their school in general and on school morale in particular. More than nine out of ten teachers (91.8%) in 1997/98 and almost the same number (89.5%) in 1998/99 believed that *Breaking the Cycle* had a very positive or positive effect on their school overall. Only one teacher in 1998/99 felt that the scheme had a negative effect (Table 7.18). Over four-fifths of teachers each year (83.7% in 1997/98 and 81.7% in 1998/99) also reported that the scheme had a very positive or positive effect on morale in their school, although a sizeable minority (16%) were 'unsure' or believed that morale in their school had not changed since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle* (Table 7.18).

Table 7.18. Numbers and percentages of teachers who believed that participating in *Breaking the Cycle* had a positive or negative effect on their school overall and on morale in the school in 1997/98 and 1998/99.

Overall effect participating in *Breaking the Cycle* has had on school.						
		Very positive	Positive	Unsure/ None	Negative	Very negative
1997/98 (*N*=184)	Number	60	109	15	0	0
	%	32.6	59.2	8.2	0	0
1998/99 (*N*=181)	Number	76	86	16	2	1
	%	42.0	47.5	8.8	1.1	0.6
Effect participating in *Breaking the Cycle* has had on morale in school.						
		Very positive	Positive	Unsure/ None	Negative	Very negative
1997/98 (*N*=182)	Number	51	101	29	1	0
	%	28.0	55.5	15.9	0.5	0
1998/99 (*N*=180)	Number	68	79	30	3	0
	%	37.8	43.9	16.7	1.7	0

Finally, teachers were asked to indicate whether they believed that marginalised pupils in their school had benefited from the scheme. Over three-quarters (77.6%) in 1997/98 thought that such pupils had benefited. Only three (1.6%) believed that disadvantaged pupils had not, and the remaining teachers were unsure. The vast majority of teachers in 1998/99 (89.2%) agreed that disadvantaged pupils had benefited from their involvement in the scheme. Only 5 believed that pupils had not, and 15 were unsure (Table 7.19).

Table 7.19. Numbers and percentages of teachers who believed that marginalised pupils in their school had benefited from participating in *Breaking the Cycle*.

		Yes	Unsure	No
1997/98 (*N*=183)	Number	142	38	3
	Percentage	77.6	20.8	1.6
1998/99 (*N*=186)	Number	166	15	5
	Percentage	89.2	8.1	2.7

In a follow-up item, teachers were asked to explain why they believed children had, or had not, benefited from the scheme. Tables 7.20 and 7.21 list the various explanations given by teachers.

Table 7.20. Numbers and percentages of teachers who gave various explanations as to why marginalised pupils had or had not benefited from *Breaking the Cycle* in 1997/98 (*N*=169).

Category	**Number of teachers**	**% of Teachers***
Extra equipment / materials	92	54.4%
More parental interest	26	15.4%
Extra help from co-ordinator	23	13.6%
Benefits associated with out-of-school activities / Chance to do things not otherwise possible	23	13.6%
More time for the pupils / Learn to focus on disadvantaged pupils / Early identification of problems	14	8.3%
Financial benefits	11	6.5%
Improved pupil self-esteem / social skills	9	5.3%
Better behaviour / attendance rates	3	1.8%
Some parents unwilling	2	1.2%
Too early to tell	9	5.3%
Pupils need more attention/ reduce pupil-teacher ratio	5	3.0%
All children benefited	2	1.2%
More remedial teachers needed	2	1.2%
Other	5	3.0%

* percentage of teachers who gave one or more explanation.

Over half of teachers (54.4%) who completed the item felt that marginalised pupils had benefited from the extra equipment and materials funded by the scheme. One in ten thought that disadvantaged pupils benefited from increased parental involvement in schools, although two teachers noted that some parents were unwilling to participate in school activities.

Several teachers (14%) thought that the out-of-school activities provided children with an opportunity to partake in activities they would not ordinarily have been able to experience. Others thought that marginalised children benefited from activities they engaged in and the attention they received from the scheme co-ordinators. Teachers also mentioned that the work the co-ordinators had done in fostering home-school links (e.g., home visits) was particularly beneficial.

Fourteen teachers (8.3%) said that as a result of *Breaking the Cycle* they had more time for disadvantaged pupils and could identify individual problems earlier. One teacher stated:

"We are more aware of their problems and how to deal with them."

Nine teachers reported that they had perceived an improvement in pupils' social skills and a growth in their self-esteem, while three mentioned that there had been an increase in attendance among disadvantaged pupils.

The responses of over a fifth of teachers were categorised as 'other'. Some teachers used this opportunity to comment on the scheme in general. For example, several felt that it was too early to evaluate its effects:

"I believe that the success of Breaking the Cycle can only be measured in the long-term."

Others believed that marginalised pupils needed more individual attention and that the pupil-teacher ratio in rural classes should be reduced. For example:

"Not enough individual time available to work with marginalised pupils."

Two teachers believed that marginalised pupils needed better access to remedial teachers and others pointed out that all children (both marginalised and non-marginalised) benefited equally from the scheme:

"In a small rural school, one cannot publicly identify the marginalised. All children are equally sharing the benefits of the scheme."

Other teachers gave more individualistic responses:

"Better understanding of disadvantage and class work organised on that basis now."

"(I am) more aware of the right type of books and games to buy for children."

In total, 159 teachers in 1998/99 indicated the reasons they had for believing that marginalised pupils had, or had not, benefited from their involvement in *Breaking the Cycle.* Many of the responses made were similar to those made in 1997/98. Over half of teachers indicated that the extra equipment and materials had been of benefit to marginalised children in their school, with a further 10% referring to the financial benefits of the scheme in general (Table 7.21).

Table 7.21. Numbers and percentages of teachers who gave various explanations as to why marginalised pupils had or had not benefited from *Breaking the Cycle* in 1998/99 (*N*=159).

Category	Number of teachers	% of Teachers*
Extra equipment / materials	84	52.8%
Chance to partake in activities not otherwise possible / out-of-school activities	37	23.3%
More parental interest / increased home-school liaison	30	18.9%
Extra help from co-ordinator / one-to-one meetings between pupils and cluster co-ordinators	22	13.8%
More time for the pupils / individual attention / Learn to focus on disadvantaged pupils / Early identification of problems	20	12.6%
Financial benefits	17	10.7%
Improved pupil self-esteem / social skills / self-confidence	9	5.7%
Pupils' perception of school changed, (e.g., more interesting)	8	5.0%
Too early to tell	5	3.1%
No benefit / general negative comment	3	1.9%
Better behaviour / attendance rates	2	1.3%
Some parents unwilling to participate	1	0.6%
Other	12	7.5%

* percentage of teachers who gave one or more explanation.

A quarter of teachers thought that the out-of-school activities exposed them to new experiences, which were not previously available to them. Almost a fifth perceived an increase in parental involvement in school activities, although one mentioned that it was difficult to involve some parents in school events. Many teachers (13.8%) felt that pupils benefited from the extra help and attention they received from the co-ordinators. One teacher stated:

> **"The co-ordinator has been able to help some parents with behavioural problems their children have had which in turn has a positive effect on their work in school."**

Several other teachers (12.6%) mentioned that as a result of participating in the scheme they had could give more individual attention to marginalised pupils. Five percent perceived an improvement in children's social skills and self-confidence, while other noted that they had a more positive attitude towards school. However, a few teachers were unsure whether the scheme had been of benefit to disadvantaged pupils as they thought the benefits of the scheme could only be evaluated in the long-term. Finally fewer than 10% of teachers made other comments, although not all of these comments were directly related to the item. One teacher reported that the extra remedial help had helped morale in their school. Another did not believe that the scheme had been of benefit to marginalised children:

> **"I have always been aware of educational disadvantage and the amount of time and effort I put into working with the educationally disadvantaged in my class has not been alleviated by our participation in the scheme."**

Another teacher thought that:

> **"They (the pupils) are made to feel equal to their more affluent peers in so much as this is possible."**

Over the two years, there was little change in teachers' reasons for believing that marginalised pupils benefited from the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme. The most beneficial aspect of the scheme, according to half of teachers, was the extra equipment and materials that were purchased using *Breaking the Cycle* funds. However, slightly more teachers in 1998/99 than in 1997/98 believed that the out-of-school activities broadened children's experiences. A quarter of teachers in 1998/99 compared to 15.4% in 1997/98 mentioned the benefits associated with extra-curricular activities. There was also a marginal increase

in the number of teachers who reported that there had been an increase in parental involvement in the schools, 18.9% in 1998/99 compared to 15.4% in 1997/98. A further 13% of teachers in both years believed that marginalised children benefited from the activities of the scheme co-ordinators. Finally 5% of teachers in 1998/99 mentioned that pupils had a more positive attitude towards school as a result of participating in the scheme.

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This section contains a summary of the findings described in earlier sections relating to co-ordinators, schools, teachers and pupils. In order to make some statements about the impact of the scheme on participants over the first three years of its existence, features of the scheme which are perceived by the various stakeholders to have led to positive outcomes are highlighted. Elements of the scheme which have been problematic in their implementation, or which are perceived by those involved as shortcomings, are also described. The concluding part of the section outlines future activities of the evaluation as the scheme approaches the final year of its pilot phase.

8.1 THE RURAL CO-ORDINATORS

Feedback from cluster co-ordinators about the operation of the scheme in their schools was mainly positive in nature. The majority believed that pupils had derived educational benefits as a result of their participation in the scheme. Specific benefits mentioned included the extra equipment and educational materials purchased by schools with *Breaking the Cycle* funding, the out-of-school activities in which pupils participated, and increases in self-esteem and enjoyment of school among pupils. Three-quarters of co-ordinators thought that parents' involvement in their children's education had increased as a result of the scheme.

However, at the time of completing a questionnaire about their work (during the second year of the scheme), co-ordinators reported certain difficulties in carrying out their work. The majority said that there was a lack of clarity in relation to the role of co-ordinator itself. Indeed, only one of the 25 co-ordinators agreed that the role had been very clearly defined at the start of the scheme. In some cases, the lack of role clarity (combined with a lack of information from the Department of Education and Science to school staffs about the scheme at its inception), had led to difficulties between co-ordinators, principals, and teachers. Existing staff in some of the participating schools seemed to be expecting a resource or remedial teacher for their schools, whereas the co-ordinators saw their function as more concerned with raising levels of parental involvement in schools, supporting teachers in their work, and ensuring that marginalised children derived the maximum benefit from education.

Further evidence for such discrepant views of the co-ordinator's role comes from information supplied independently from principals. Principals' estimates of the percentage of time that co-ordinators spent on each of a variety of activities during a typical working week differed little from the percentage of time perceived by principals to be ideal. On the other hand, large discrepancies between the actual and ideal percentage of time spent on certain activities existed in the co-ordinators' accounts. Notably, co-ordinators reported that the amount of time they spent on remedial work with pupils was more than twice the ideal, and the actual percentage of time they spent visiting pupils' homes was only half of what it should have been ideally.

Other factors which co-ordinators claimed adversely affected their work were time constraints, lack of workspace, lack of flexibility in their working hours, and difficulties in accessing resources. A majority of co-ordinators (15 out of 25) cited negativity towards themselves or towards the scheme from school staffs as the factor by which they were most adversely affected. This is a somewhat surprising finding given the benefits enjoyed by schools as a consequence of their participation in the scheme. However, since the time the data were gathered, it is possible that such negativity has lessened as the scheme became more established in schools, and as staffs become more familiar with the idea of a co-ordinator.

When describing factors which had contributed towards the success of the scheme, there was unanimous agreement among co-ordinators that pupils had contributed to its success, and the vast majority reported that parents and teachers had also done so. While co-ordinators were, in the main, very positive about the inservice training provided for them, some commented that they would have liked more input into its content. Furthermore, several suggested that there was a greater need for inservice training (related to the scheme) for teachers in participating schools. An associated benefit of this would be that it would obviate the need for co-ordinators to relay inservice messages to teachers, a situation which many co-ordinators found unsatisfactory.

While the majority of co-ordinators reported that, in general, the scheme was working well in their cluster, several strategies for improvements or modifications to the scheme as it existed were suggested. These included improving communication between those involved in implementing *Breaking the Cycle* at local level and the Department of Education and Science, addressing physical accommodation needs in schools to permit activities encouraged under the scheme to take place (e.g., courses for

parents, work with individual pupils), allocating funding for co-ordinator-led activities directly to the co-ordinator (rather than to Boards of Management), and designating specific time periods for co-ordinators to devote to planning and administration.

8.2 THE IMPACT OF THE SCHEME ON SCHOOLS

There are many reasons for believing that the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme had a positive impact on participating schools, although positive changes were more evident in the first year of the scheme than in subsequent years. In relation to administrative practices in schools, principals reported that staff meetings were held with increasing frequency following the introduction of the scheme, and that proportionately more meeting time was spent on pedagogical, rather than administrative, matters. Furthermore, although it was not contingent on participation in the scheme, the number of schools with access to the services of a remedial teacher doubled in the first three years of the scheme (by 1998/99, 95% of schools had access to a remedial teacher for their pupils).

Overall, there was no discernible change in attendance rates in rural schools following the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*. The average annual percentage attendance rate of pupils remained stable at approximately 92% in the first two years of the scheme, although the number of low attenders (pupils attending fewer than 25 days per quarter) decreased during this period. However, it is worth noting that the rate of attendance in rural schools was slightly higher than the average rate of attendance (90.3%) in all Dublin City schools during this time (1996-1998). Furthermore, chronic absenteeism among rural pupils was not common: less than 0.5% of pupils per year could be classified as low attenders (i.e., attending fewer than 25 days per quarter). Indeed, very few rural pupils were referred to officials for poor school attendance and none had legal proceedings instituted against them.

The total number of rural pupils who were psychologically assessed increased in the first three years of the scheme, with schools referring approximately 2% of pupils each year for assessment and 1.5% of pupils undergoing assessment following referral. Principals indicated, however, that the psychological assessment service being offered to pupils was inadequate. In each of the years for which data are available, there were considerable differences between the number of pupils principals estimated to be in need of assessment and the number who were actually assessed. Furthermore, approximately two-thirds of pupils referred for assessment annually did not undergo

assessment. The most common reason for non-assessment in each of the years was that pupils were still on waiting lists. In addition, approximately half of schools did not refer any of their pupils for assessment, and many did not have any pupils assessed during the second and third years of the scheme. Principals reported that the main reasons for referring pupils for assessment were poor academic performance, behavioural problems, or the presence of a specific learning difficulty. Most pupils were referred back to their existing class following assessment and many received help from remedial teachers. Each year, the number of boys referred and assessed exceeded girls by a ratio of three to one.

Participation in other schemes designed to address disadvantage was relatively uncommon in rural schools. Only five schools were in the Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage, one was participating in the 8-15-year old Early School Leaver Initiative and none was taking part in the Home School Community Liaison scheme. Only thirteen rural schools were involved in other local or national schemes aimed at disadvantaged pupils. These initiatives ranged from homework clubs, to language classes, to play groups, return to education classes, and projects aimed at preventing early school leaving.

Parental involvement in the participating schools increased over the first three years of the scheme. Parents' Associations were established, and formal group meetings between parents and teachers were held in an increasing number of schools. The number of schools offering educational and extra-curricular courses for parents also increased considerably. Schools provided educational courses in English, Mathematics, paired-reading, computing, and French. Extra-curricular courses organised included parenting and self-development courses, health information talks, leisure courses (such as yoga and set-dancing), and art and craft and cookery classes. In the second and third years of the scheme, over 90% of schools involved parents with various school-related activities, such as sports training, school outings, out-of-school activities, paired reading, fundraising and assisting with school plays and concerts. Parents were also invited to many other school events such as religious ceremonies, sports days, open days, plays and concerts and various fundraising events.

Overall, principals were positive about *Breaking the Cycle* and the effects of the scheme on their school and on their pupils. In the second and third years of the scheme, the vast majority felt that the scheme had a positive effect on their school in general, on school morale, and on teaching practices in particular. Most principals also believed

that marginalised pupils had benefited from the scheme. The most beneficial aspects of the scheme, according to principals, was the extra funding for materials and equipment, the out-of-school activities, and the work undertaken by the cluster co-ordinators.

In the third year of the scheme, 70% of principals reported that formal or informal tests had shown that pupils' academic achievements had improved since the introduction of the scheme. The majority of principals also reported that pupils' self-esteem and standards of social interaction had improved, although a quarter thought that pupils' interpersonal skills had not improved at all. Nine out of ten schools organised out-of-school activities in 1998/99, with drama, music and sport-related activities being the most popular type of activity. Principals felt that these activities were beneficial to pupils in terms of enhancing their enjoyment of school and improving their social and artistic skills, but were less certain that they had led to improvements in pupils' attendance at school, academic achievements, or verbal skills.

In general, principals thought that the *Breaking the Cycle* cluster co-ordinators were an asset to their school. They indicated that co-ordinators devoted most of their time to individual and small group activities, home visits, working with parents, and planning extra-curricular activities. Principals were satisfied with the proportion of time co-ordinators devoted to each activity. However, they were not satisfied with the organisation of incareer development courses offered to them: over half felt that an insufficient number of courses had been offered to support their involvement in the scheme. Finally, principals made many positive comments about *Breaking the Cycle*, citing mainly the financial benefits associated with the scheme, the extra inservice training, the work of the cluster co-ordinators, the out-of-school activities, and the improved home-school links. When describing drawbacks of the scheme, some cited factors which were unrelated to the scheme *per se* (such as the loss of teachers due to falling enrolments, and the difficulties presented by large multi-grade classes in their school), and pointed out that the positive effects brought about by the scheme were being negated by these factors. Shortcomings specific to the scheme itself included the extra workload involved in the administration and organisation of the scheme, as well as the lack of school-based inservice.

8.3 TEACHERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHEME

Teachers reported that there had been an improvement in the atmosphere in their school since the commencement of *Breaking the Cycle*. In the third year of the scheme, teachers described the atmosphere as more pleasant, welcoming, friendly and warm, as well as more colourful and comfortable, than it had been before the introduction of the scheme. They also reported that there was a greater sense of order and discipline.

The majority of teachers were satisfied with the leadership abilities of principals in their schools. They felt that principals showed an interest in what was going on in their classroom, brought them into contact with new ideas and approaches designed to improve their pupils' academic achievements, and encouraged their attendance at staff development programmes. In the first three years of the scheme, the vast majority of teachers (approximately 96% each year) also indicated that they felt involved in the decision-making process in their school. However, teachers were dissatisfied with the provision of staff development programmes, although there is evidence that their satisfaction with inservice training had improved slightly since the introduction of the scheme.

There was a marked increase in the number of days teachers spent attending inservice training following the introduction of the scheme, with a corresponding decrease in the proportion of teachers who did not spend any days per year attending staff development courses. In the first year of the scheme, all staffs attended an introductory course on project and professional development. The following year, a course on developing the teaching and learning environment was organised for teachers, while in the third year, a course on project development and remediation was held for principals. Staffs also attended incareer courses organised at local level by cluster co-ordinators. The topics covered in these courses were wide-ranging, and included computers, remedial education, classroom management, health-related courses (e.g., stress management and drugs awareness) and self-development courses. The majority of teachers indicated that they found staff development courses to be beneficial on their return to the classroom.

Overall, teachers' long-term educational expectations for their pupils increased since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*. In the first year of the scheme, only 27% of teachers expected more than 80% of their pupils to remain in school beyond the Junior Certificate. This figure rose to 36% in the second year of the scheme, and

increased further to almost 39% by the third year of the scheme. However, the majority of teachers expected rates of early-school leaving among their pupils to be higher than the national average.

Over the first three years of the scheme, an increasing number of teachers believed that participating in *Breaking the Cycle* had improved their ability to respond effectively to the learning needs of disadvantaged pupils. Participating in the scheme had also improved their ability to organise their work based on the knowledge and the needs of disadvantaged pupils, and had enhanced their understanding of educational disadvantage. A sizeable majority also felt that their teaching practices, opinions, and attitudes had changed as a result of being involved in the scheme.

Over four-fifths of teachers in 1997/98 and 1998/99 believed that the scheme had an overall positive effect on their school, and on morale in particular. The vast majority also thought that marginalised pupils had benefited from the scheme. Teachers indicated that the most beneficial aspects of the scheme included the extra equipment and materials funded by the scheme, the increased parental involvement in schools, the engagement of pupils in out-of-school activities, and the work of the cluster co-ordinators. They also said they had more time for disadvantaged pupils, and that both pupils' social skills and self-confidence had improved as a result of participating in the scheme.

8.4 THE PUPILS

Sections 4 and 5 of this report contain baseline data on the Junior Cycle completion rates and Junior Certificate performance of a cohort of pupils in the selected schools prior to the establishment of the scheme. An examination of Junior Cycle completion rates among the cohort revealed that, of the 1003 pupils tracked from 6th class in 1993/94 to Junior Certificate, 937 (or 93.4%) took the Junior Certificate Examination. Unfortunately, is not possible to obtain directly comparable figures for students nationally. However, estimates of the percentage of students leaving second-level schools prior to completing Junior Cycle are available from annual school leavers' survey data (e.g., Collins & Williams, 1998). In recent years, the estimated percentage of those who leave second-level education without any qualifications has been relatively stable at between 3% and 4%. However, it should be noted that these figures do not include pupils who leave the school system without transferring to a post-primary

school, of whom there are an estimated 1,000 annually (NESF, 1997). Thus, the actual Junior Cycle completion figure nationally is probably around 95%, a figure which is slightly higher than that of 93.4%, which was observed among students who attended schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is currently being implemented. In terms of the gender breakdown of those who left school without completing Junior Cycle, the current study found that twice as many boys as girls in the rural cohort left school prior to completing the Junior Cycle, mirroring ratios found in other studies.

The mean performance of pupils in the rural cohort who took the Junior Certificate Examination in 1997 (N=930) did not differ greatly from that of the national population of students in that year (N=65,757). While students in the two groups differed on some characteristics (e.g., subject choice, levels at which papers were taken), the mean overall performance of students in the rural cohort (based on the best seven papers) was only slightly below that of the national population. When expressed in terms of grades achieved in the Junior Certificate Examination, the mean performance of students in the rural cohort and in the national population could be described as an average of seven "D" grades on Higher Level papers, or an average of seven "A" grades on Ordinary Level papers. In reality, of course, students in both groups achieved a range of grades at Foundation, Ordinary and Higher Level.

Gender differences in overall performance were observed in both student groups: the mean achievements of female students in the rural cohort, as well as among students nationally, were higher than those of males. Achievement levels were also related to the type of post-primary school attended by students: the mean achievements of students enrolled in Secondary schools were higher than those in Vocational, Comprehensive and Community schools. This finding applied equally to rural students and those in the national population. Finally, student performance in the JCE was related to whether or not the post-primary school attended by the candidate was or was not designated as disadvantaged. At the time of taking the Junior Certificate Examination, 56.1% of the rural cohort, and 25.6% of students in the national population, were enrolled in post-primary schools that were designated as disadvantaged by the Department of Education and Science. Among the rural cohort, as well as among candidates nationally, students enrolled in designated schools at the time of taking the JCE had lower mean achievements than those that were attending non-designated schools.

On the basis of testing carried out in 1997 in reading and Mathematics, the achievements of 3rd and 6th class pupils in the selected schools were shown to be comparable with those of the national sample of pupils on whom the test had been standardised. Data on the Junior Certificate achievements of students in the rural cohort also show that their achievements differ only slightly from those of students nationally. Furthermore, Junior Cycle completion rates among the rural cohort are only slightly lower than completion rates nationally. Therefore, all of the available data seem to suggest that, although pupils in the rural dimension of *Breaking the Cycle* are disadvantaged according to certain (mainly poverty-related) criteria, their achievements are not significantly lower than those of students nationally. It remains to be seen whether there will be a relative increase in Junior Cycle completion rates, or an improvement in Junior Certificate Examination performance, among pupils who have participated in the scheme. However, it will not be possible to assess this until 2008, when the first cohort of pupils who have had the full benefit of the scheme are due to sit the Junior Certificate Examination.

8.5 FUTURE ACTIVITIES OF THE EVALUATION

As the scheme approaches the end of the fourth year of its pilot phase, preparations are underway to administer reading and Mathematics achievement tests in May 2000 to 3rd and 6th class pupils in a sample of the selected schools. Performance on the tests will be compared with that of pupils in 3rd and 6th classes in 1997, with the aim of examining the effects (if any) of the scheme on pupils' achievements. We will continue to seek the views of teachers and principals on the operation of the scheme in annually distributed questionnaires. Data derived from these sources will be contained in a final evaluation report on the scheme, which is due for submission at the end of 2001. In 2008, pupils in the selected schools prior to the implementation of the scheme and pupils who have participated in the scheme will be compared for Junior Cycle completion rate and on Junior Certificate Examination performance.

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