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

Susan Weir & Catherine Ryan

April 2000

Educational Research Centre
St Patrick's College, Dublin

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The help and co-operation of school principals, teachers and pupils in the collection data are gratefully acknowledged. Special thanks are due to Maura Grant, Emer Egan, Colm Ó Maoláin, and the members of the Inspectorate for their assistance throughout the first three years of the evaluation. Thanks are also due to staff at the Post-Primary Database Section of the Department of Education and Science for their assistance with student tracking.

Many of the staff at the Educational Research Centre were involved in various aspects of the evaluation. Thanks are due to Mary Rohan, John Coyle, Berni Dwan, and Patricia Hanlon. Finally, thanks are due to Thomas Kellaghan for his help and guidance at all stages of the evaluation.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

A preliminary report on the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme in urban schools was presented to the Department of Education and Science in 1998 (Weir & Eivers, 1998). It contained data on participating schools, teachers and pupils prior to the introduction of the scheme, and thus, provides 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 and teachers 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 effects on pupils.

The third section of the report focuses on 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 a baseline 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.

The fourth section contains information from school and teacher questionnaires on teachers' perceptions of the scheme over the first few years of its operation. Data on home-school links, attendance rates and psychological assessments since the beginning of the scheme 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 URBAN SCHOOLS

A total of twelve schools were visited by two researchers during October and November of 1998. Six of these schools were in Dublin. Three of the Dublin schools were located in the inner city, two were on the north side of the city, and one was on the south side of the city. All three participating schools in Limerick city were visited, as were three of the five participating schools in Cork city. Two of the schools visited were junior schools, one was a senior school and the remaining nine schools had classes from Junior Infants through to 6th class.

The visits were designed to gain important feedback from school personnel about how the scheme was operating in practice. While a large body of data (mainly of a quantitative kind) had already been gathered from teachers using questionnaires, it was hoped that more qualitative information would be forthcoming in face-to-face meetings with school staff. The visits were informal in nature and involved talking to the principal, as well as to some teachers and pupils in their classrooms, and (usually) the staff as a whole in the staff room. It was also hoped that the visits would permit the researchers to get a sense of the atmosphere and ethos of the schools visited.

The feedback about the scheme from principals and teachers was generally very positive, although a minority of those interviewed identified drawbacks with certain elements of the scheme. Teachers were uniformly positive, however, about the extra funding for teaching materials and equipment, and many said that the funding had enabled them to equip their classrooms well with books and teaching materials. Teachers commonly reported that, prior to *Breaking the Cycle*, they tried to recycle things like paper for art classes, but now they could afford to buy coloured paper and use it as they needed without worrying. Several teachers mentioned that, before the scheme, they had devoted considerable amounts of time in the evenings to preparing materials (e.g., workbooks) for use the following day. The extra funding enabled them to buy good quality materials for pupils, and reduced the time they spend preparing materials after school hours. The wide variety of uses to which the funding had been put was evident in most of the junior classes visited, where toys, books and teaching equipment that had been purchased with *Breaking the Cycle* funding was on display. In senior classes,

teachers also pointed out the books and materials that had been purchased with the extra funding.

Teachers were also very positive about the out-of-school activities and special projects for pupils which were funded (either partly or wholly) by *Breaking the Cycle* grants. Teachers described a wide variety of out-of-school activities in which their pupils had participated. These included trips to concerts for pupils (such as *Music in the Classroom*), visits to zoos, farms, puppet shows, theatres and children's art centres (such as *The Ark*), as well as sporting outings (such as going to the local sports centre for swimming lessons). With the exception of one school (in which pupils misbehaved on an outing), pupils were perceived to have both enjoyed the activities and to have benefited from them. In several schools, staff members pointed out that out-of-school activities are particularly necessary in schools serving disadvantaged pupils, as pupils would not normally be brought on educational or cultural outings by their parents. Some schools used a proportion of the funding to bring specialist teachers (e.g., art, music, drama) into the school, and in most cases, this approach had been extremely successful. In one school, however, where there was a discipline problem with pupils, those brought in from outside to teach art and drama left before courses were completed, because they found it difficult to control the pupil groups.

Each of the areas served by the schools visited was characterised by one or (usually) more of the following social problems: poverty, high numbers of lone-parent households (or households where pupils' mothers had a series of male partners), drug abuse, alcoholism, suicide, crime and child neglect. In two schools, teachers told how they brought food into the classroom in the morning (ostensibly for themselves) and offered to share it with children they knew would not have had any breakfast. In other schools, teachers said that children are not punished for being late for school, as in many cases the lateness is not their fault. Indeed, some children get themselves up and ready for school each morning.

In relation to pupils' home environments, teachers frequently commented on the lack of verbal interaction between pupils and parents in the home. The majority of parents, they claimed, do not read stories to their children, nor do they engage in conversation with them, unless it is in the form of instructions or requests. Some teachers

attributed the lack of discussion and verbal interaction between parents and children to the failure of parents to limit their children's television viewing, or to an excessive dependence on television as a means of occupying the children. Also, the kinds of toys purchased by parents (while sometimes very expensive) were likely to take the form of computer games, rather than jigsaws, crayons or books.

It was common for teachers to say that pupils do not receive much encouragement in their schoolwork, or in educational activities, at home. For example, one teacher of Junior Infants said that the children do not know any nursery rhymes or fairy tales when they first come to school, and yet these are things that she would have, as a mother, taught her own children as a matter of course. The lack of readiness for school among some children is very marked, and this is particularly true of children who have not attended Early Start or any other kind of pre-school. [Early Start is available in only 5 of the 25 urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools that have junior classes.] Some children arriving in Junior Infants are not yet toilet trained, while the majority are perceived by teachers to have underdeveloped verbal and motor skills. This results in children being unable, for example, to put a few words together to form a simple sentence, or to hold a crayon. Indeed, when school personnel were asked to describe the most obvious manifestations of educational disadvantage in their pupils, there were two main responses. First, many teachers claimed that pupils (at all grade levels) were about one year below the standard of pupils in more mainstream, less disadvantaged, schools. Second, teachers specified the area of oral language as being the area in which their pupils had the most obvious deficits.

The drive to get parents more involved in school activities has been quite successful in most schools, although all of the schools visited were also participants in the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme, and, as such, would have had structures in place to encourage parental involvement prior to the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*. Courses of various kinds for parents (e.g., computers, cookery) were well attended, and in some schools parents had become involved in more educational (as opposed to leisure-oriented) activities such as reading and spelling schemes. The experience in one school, however, was that parental interest tapered off when participating parents began to resent the fact that they were helping the children of other non-participating parents to read.

In all schools visited, teachers reported good relationships with the majority of parents. However, there was universal agreement among teachers that there is a small core group of parents that cannot be reached. Such parents may ignore messages from principals to come to the school to discuss issues related to their child, may pretend to be out when the Home-School Liaison teacher calls to the house, or may leave the teacher on the doorstep during the conversation. Some teachers pointed out that no matter how hard teachers work to redress educational disadvantage during school hours, children only spend a small proportion of their day in school. Therefore, for initiatives aimed at tackling disadvantage to be maximally effective, the values teachers attempt to instil in pupils in school must also be promoted in the home.

The setting of the pupil-teacher ratio in the junior classes at a maximum of about 15:1 was the subject of much comment among school staffs. The views of senior class teachers, as well as those of junior class teachers, were sought. Teachers of junior classes were very positive, in the main, about the small class sizes. Some teachers had experience of teaching junior classes prior to *Breaking the Cycle*, and had interesting points of comparison to make. They felt that children now received a great deal more individual attention in class than they did formerly. This, they thought, was particularly important in a school serving disadvantaged families because many children crave the attention that they do not receive at home. Some teachers said that they are more likely to notice problems in individual children in the smaller class situation, and any difficulties experienced by children can be targeted immediately. Others pointed out that teaching some classes is like teaching in a multi-grade classroom because the children within a grade are at different ability levels. The smaller numbers, however, facilitate the setting of work for pupils which is geared towards a variety of levels.

Not only do smaller class sizes have a positive impact in the areas mentioned but they also permit activities such as “circle time”, which would be unworkable with large numbers. “Circle time” is an activity which represents ‘time out’ from school work. Usually, a small group of pupils leave their desks and sit in a circle, where they engage in teacher-led activities such as role-playing. Discussions which occur, and issues which are raised during “Circle time” are confidential, and are not discussed outside of the session. “Circle time” is an activity that teachers almost universally agree benefits pupils. Indeed,

it is considered to be particularly beneficial to pupils in disadvantaged schools because it provides children with an opportunity for self-expression in a safe setting, and is thought by many to improve pupils' self-esteem and language skills. Teachers also said that they get to know their pupils better in a small class.

In contrast, some activities are more conducive to larger groups (such as singing and recitation) and some teachers said they combine classes with others teaching the same level for these activities. Indeed, in one school visited, teachers were engaging in co-operative teaching, where two teachers taught a group of about 30 Junior Infant pupils together. The teachers involved thought that this approach worked very well for them, as one teacher's strengths were of an artistic and musical nature, while the other's were in the area of English, Irish and Mathematics. They also felt that pupils benefited from the variety associated with spending the school day with two adults, rather than one. In contrast, some teachers who had tried co-operative teaching had since reverted to the smaller group because they either felt uncomfortable with it as a method, or because they felt the children made more progress in a smaller group.

A number of teachers pointed out that the small classes made their life easier, and that their stress levels were lower than they had been when teaching larger groups. However, some of these teachers said that while their job was now less stressful, it was also more onerous on the teacher, because they had come to expect more of themselves. According to some teachers, there were other drawbacks with the smaller classes. For example, a disruptive pupil may exert a disproportionate influence in a small class, whereas his or her influence may be diluted in a larger group. Also, larger groups tend to contain a greater mix of ability than smaller groups, which means that small classes may not have any very good pupils from whom the weaker ones could learn. Some of the senior class teachers had noticed that when pupils who had been in small junior classes arrived in a larger 3rd class, they could not work on their own initiative, and were overly dependent on the teacher's attention. This sometimes resulted in disruptive behaviour, or in pupils simply not doing any work unless the teacher was helping them. Several teachers said that these problems were related to the high level of individual attention pupils had received up to the end of 2nd class. A large proportion of the teachers

interviewed believed that some of the benefits accrued by pupils in small classes were lost when pupils reverted to being in large classes.

Probably the most commonly heard comment expressed by teachers during the visits to schools was that the 15:1 pupil-teacher ratio should be extended up to 6th class. Alternatively, there could be a gradual increase in the pupil-teacher ratio beginning in 3rd class. For example, the increase in class size could be staggered so that 3rd classes would have about 20 pupils, while 6th classes would have about 30 pupils (the latter serving to prepare pupils for the experience of being in larger classes in post-primary school). Teachers felt that organising classes in this way would ensure a greater continuity of treatment for pupils over their primary school years. It was noticeable that in most schools teachers referred to the "*Breaking the Cycle* classes" (meaning junior classes), as though senior classes in the school were not participating in the scheme. In these cases, it was pointed out to staff that *all* classes in the school benefit from *Breaking the Cycle*, in terms of funding for equipment and out-of-school activities. During discussions with principals, several mentioned that they would welcome some discretion in assigning numbers of pupils to teachers. For example, if there are two 2nd classes with 12 pupils in each and there are 30 pupils in a 3rd class, principals would like to organise the deployment of personnel so that disparities between teachers in terms of the number of pupils allocated to them could be reduced.

In some of the schools visited, teachers raised the issue of the Department of Education and Science's promotion of a Multiple Intelligences approach to teaching disadvantaged pupils. They queried the rationale behind testing pupils in English reading and Mathematics when the Department's inservice for teachers promoted a view of pupil ability which encourages the development of pupils' individual strengths in a range of areas, only two of which (i.e., logico-mathematical and linguistic intelligence) could be considered equivalent to the traditional notion of scholastic aptitude. It was pointed out to teachers that encouraging pupils to maximise the potential of their various intelligences, rather than confining the emphasis to logico-mathematical and linguistic skills in the classroom should impact positively on pupils generally, and may, indeed, lead to enhanced performance in achievement tests.

When asked if they had any questions about the evaluation, the most common query from teachers concerned the future of the scheme (i.e., whether or not it would be continued after the pilot period). Specifically, they expressed concern that the scheme could be withdrawn should the evaluation fail to reveal any significant impact of the scheme on participants. Concern was expressed that, if this were to happen, all of the effort that had been put into planning, and into the establishment of various activities, would come to nothing. Those who enquired were informed that the evaluators did not have any knowledge of future plans for the scheme, but that it is expected that the Department of Education and Science will use reports on the evaluation to inform future policy. For example, if some provisions in the scheme are found to be successful and others are not, the scheme may be modified to take account of such findings. Some teachers felt that the effects of the scheme would not become apparent for some time, possibly not until the next generation. Therefore, if the evaluation is conducted over the first five years of the scheme, it would not be possible to assess any of its long-term effects. Many teachers expressed a concern that the evaluation of the scheme hinged on an improvement in pupils' performance in reading and Mathematics. While teachers were reassured that this was not the case (and that evaluation data were being collected at many different levels, including school and teacher, as well as pupil level), it was pointed out that poor achievement is a key correlate of educational disadvantage. Therefore, the evaluation of a scheme aimed at addressing disadvantage would not be valid without assessing its impact, if any, on pupil achievement.

Principals and teachers also had some comments to make on the level of administration and paperwork associated with the scheme. Several teachers commented on the length of questionnaires they were asked to complete, complaining that they found it very time consuming. A couple of principals also raised this as an issue, but the principals were more concerned about the level of administration and accounting associated with the scheme. Indeed, it did seem that a good deal of time was spent on record keeping and accounting for the expenditure associated with *Breaking the Cycle*, and that no provision had been made by the Department of Education and Science for additional secretarial assistance.

In two schools visited, the principals had responsibility for classes, in addition to their administrative role. In both cases, the individuals involved felt that they should have been appointed as 'walking principals' because their schools have larger staffs than normal schools (due to additional concessionary posts), and a heavier than normal administrative workload. However, the Department of Education and Science does not take these factors into account when deciding such appointments, and 'walking principals' are appointed solely on the basis of pupil numbers. Both principals said that it was impossible give fully of themselves in either a teaching or administrative capacity. One principal was considering resigning due to pressure of work.

Some schools took the opportunity of the visits to raise difficulties associated with their own particular schools. Among the issues raised were the loss (or threatened loss) of teaching posts due to falling enrolments. This is a problem experienced by several schools in *Breaking the Cycle*. Staff in the affected schools held very strong views about this, and felt that the effects of losing a teacher would cancel out any beneficial effects produced by the scheme. They also expressed concern that the evaluation would be confounded by changes occurring in schools (including lost posts) while the scheme is being piloted. A different staffing issue, related to difficulties in attracting applicants for advertised teaching posts, was raised in one of the schools visited. Indeed, at the time, recently advertised posts in the school had to be readvertised due to lack of interest. One teacher in the school suggested that this was because potential applicants are put off by the fact that the school is in *Breaking the Cycle*, serves the disadvantaged, or is perceived to be located in a "troubled" area. On the basis of this, he suggested that the Department of Education and Science introduce a special payment, similar to the one which applies in Gaeltacht schools, for teachers in schools designated as disadvantaged, so that teachers would be encouraged to take up posts.

In two schools, teachers pointed out that they had a large intake of children of refugees and asylum seekers. This, they maintained, makes the job of teaching very difficult because some children have little or no English. Furthermore, some pupils have been traumatised by their experiences in their home country and have various psychological difficulties and special needs. One of these schools had taken strike action in protest over the loss of a teaching post. Members of staff in the school said

that basing teacher allocations on pupil numbers at the *start* of the year is unfair because the school accepts these additional pupils throughout the year (as the families arrive in the country), and the children's language difficulties and other problems pose extra problems for teachers in the classroom. They were also of the opinion that a more sympathetic view should have been taken of their case because they were participants in *Breaking the Cycle*, and thus, were working in one of the most disadvantaged schools in the country. While catering for children of non-nationals led to some difficulties, teachers were keen to point out that there were benefits also. For example, multiculturalism in the classroom was perceived to be a positive thing, and something from which all pupils benefited. Also, some of the non-national pupils are very bright academically, and, indeed, many learn to speak the Irish language better than do native Irish children.

Finally, while there was some variation between schools in terms of the quality of their physical accommodation and their atmosphere, the atmosphere in most schools was positive and there was a good sense of discipline. For example, when visiting classrooms in most schools, pupils continued working quietly when the visitors were speaking with the teacher. In some schools, there was evidence of recent building work, and several schools visited had installed new windows in the recent past. Other schools had brightened up the school grounds by planting gardens, which had been funded by *Breaking the Cycle*. The situation in some schools, however, was not as good, and in one of the schools visited, the children's toilets were located outside the school building. Other schools had experienced vandalism and had erected fencing of various kinds in an attempt to protect the buildings. The interiors of most of the schools, however, were brightly decorated, and the walls were covered with children's art and photographs.

3. JUNIOR CYCLE COMPLETION RATES AMONG A COHORT OF URBAN 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 urban 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.

3.1 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 urban 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 School Attendance 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 his/her achievements in the examination.

Information supplied by principals or School Attendance Officers indicated that some pupils were known not to be enrolled in any school (Table 3.1). 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 3.1 shows that, of the original population of 1,000 pupils, 32 pupils were confirmed as not being enrolled in any post-primary school (although 3 were enrolled in special schools). Of the remainder, 11 had valid reasons for not being enrolled (i.e., one was deceased and 10 had emigrated).

Table 3.1. Number of pupils in the urban population (*N*=1,000) 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 urban *Breaking the Cycle* primary schools in 1993/94	**1,000**	**100%**
— Not enrolled in any school	14	1.4%
— Emigrated	10	1.0%
— Deceased	1	0.1%
— In prison	1	0.1%
— In a special school	3	0.3%
— Pursuing Youthreach/Fás course	3	0.3%
Total number of pupils whose names were not sent to PPDBS for ID assignment	**32**	**3.2%**

As Table 3.2 shows, 97.2% of pupils were successfully matched to their ID numbers at the Department of Education and Science.

Table 3.2. 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 urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools in 1993/94 whose details were sent to PPDBS for ID assignment	968	100%
Of total sent, number successfully matched to ID numbers	941	97.2%
Of total sent, number ***not*** successfully matched to ID numbers	27	2.8%

The failure to locate 27 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 careers.

3.2 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 3.3 shows that the overall percentage of urban students who sat the JCE in 1997 or in 1998 was 75.88%. However, this figure does not include the 27 pupils (2.8% of the total cohort) for whom no ID numbers could be found.

Furthermore, while it is certain that 730 of the 941 students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools completed the Junior Certificate Examination in either 1997 or 1998, it is not possible to say with certainty that all of the remainder did *not* complete the JCE (excluding the 21 students who were confirmed by the Attendance Dept as not having sat the JCE). Although 211 of the students in the urban cohort who had IDs assigned appeared not to have taken the JCE because there were no results associated with their IDs in either year, it is possible that a small proportion of these may, indeed, have taken the JCE. This possibility is raised because in the database which contained results for all students nationally in 1997 there were 160 students that had results but for whom there were no student IDs. Some of these 'anonymous' results may have belonged to students in the urban cohort, but, in the absence of an ID number in the national database, it was impossible to match them. Thus, it is perhaps advisable to think of the JCE completion rate among the urban cohort as 75.9% at worst; it could be somewhat higher for the reasons just outlined. This caveat should be borne in mind also in relation to descriptions of overall completion rates among boys and girls which are given later in this section.

Table 3.3. Numbers and percentages of students from urban 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*=941) added to the number of pupils known not to be in school (*N*=21*)	**962**	**100%**
Students who took the JCE in 1997	719	74.74%
Students who took the JCE in 1998	11	1.14%
Students who did **not** take the JCE in1997 or 1998	232	24.12%
Students who took the JCE in either 1997 or 1998	**730**	**75.88%**

*Excludes students who could not have sat the JCE because they are deceased or have emigrated.

Among students who originated in urban *Breaking the Cycle* primary schools (for whom information is available), the non-completion figure of 24.12% is much higher than the recent (1993-1997) national average completion rates reported in Table 3.4. Indeed, the non-completion rate among the urban cohort is six to seven times as high as the latter estimates. 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, but even when this is taken into account, the Junior Cycle completion rates among urban students from schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented may be considered to compare extremely unfavourably with those of students nationally.

Table 3.4. 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 1 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 male school leavers and 2.3% of 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 greater proportion of boys than of girls left school prior to completing Junior Cycle (Table 3.5). Of the urban pupils that were tracked to Junior Certificate, 28.1% of boys and 19.9% of girls appear to have left school at some time between the end of 6th class in primary school and before completing the Junior Certificate Examination. Thus, the ratio of boys to girls in urban schools who left school without any formal qualifications, while not as high as 2:1, is approaching ratios reported elsewhere.

Table 3.5. Numbers and percentages of male and female students who were in 6th class in 1993/94 in urban 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*=1,000)	**519**	**(100.0%)**	**481**	**(100.0%)**
[1]Pupils ineligible for tracking (e.g., deceased, emigrated) (*N*=11)	8	1.5%	3	0.6%
[2]Pupils for whom no ID could be found (*N*=27)	16	3.1%	11	2.3%
[3]Pupils confirmed as not enrolled in any school (*N*=21)	16	3.1%	5	1.0%
[4]Pupils for whom IDs were found (*N*=941)	479	92.3%	462	96.0%
[5]Total eligible pupils (sum of [3] and [4] above) (*N*=962)	495	95.4%	467	97.1%
Of eligible pupils (*N*=962), total that took the JCE in 1997 or 1998 (*N*=730)	356	71.9%	374	80.1%
Of eligible pupils, total that did not take the JCE in 1997 or 1998 (*N*=232)	**139**	**28.1%**	**93**	**19.9%**

While the Junior Cycle completion rates found among urban students compare very unfavourably with students nationally, it should be noted that data on both student groups were gathered using different techniques. In the case of urban 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 much greater proportion of the cohort of urban students than students nationally left school prior to completing Junior Cycle. Furthermore, the ratio of male to female urban students who left school without any qualifications resembles the ratio reported in other studies of early leaving among students nationally.

4. ACHIEVEMENTS OF A COHORT OF URBAN 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 urban students (*N*=11) 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 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 4.1 shows the numbers and percentages of males and females in the sample that originated in urban primary schools that are now participating in *Breaking the Cycle*, and in the total population of candidates in the 1997 JCE. In our 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 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 4.1. Numbers and percentages of male and female 1997 JCE candidates nationally, and numbers and percentages of male and female candidates from urban schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented.

	Urban students (*N*=719)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,757)**	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Number	354	365	33,081	32,676
%	49.2%	50.8%	50.3%	49.7%

4.1 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 4.2 shows, on average, urban students took slightly fewer subjects (8.31) than did candidates nationally (8.92).

Table 4.2. Numbers of subjects taken in the 1997 JCE by students from urban schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented, and by all students nationally.

	Urban students (*N*=719)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,758)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
12 Subjects	-	-	31	0.0%
11 Subjects	-	-	829	1.3%
10 Subjects	15	2.1%	11,877	18.1%
9 Subjects	371	51.6%	39,288	59.7%
8 Subjects	233	32.4%	11,037	16.8%
7 Subjects	68	9.5%	1,694	2.6%
6 Subjects	19	2.6%	444	0.7%
5 Subjects	4	0.6%	175	0.3%
4 Subjects	-	-	62	0.1%
3 Subjects	1	0.1%	52	0.1%
2 Subjects	3	0.4%	74	0.1%
1 Subject	5	0.7%	195	0.3%
Mean	8.31		8.92	
Mode	9		9	

When the number of subjects taken is examined according to gender of candidate, it is found that female students from urban schools, on average, took slightly more subjects than did their male counterparts (8.38 vs 8.24) (Table 4.3). 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 4.4).

Table 4.3. Numbers and percentages of male and female students from urban schools in which *Breaking the Cycle* is now being implemented that took varying numbers of subjects in the 1997 JCE (*N*=719).

	Male (*N*=354)		**Female (*N*=365)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
12 Subjects	-	-	-	-
11 Subjects	-	-	-	-
10 Subjects	4	1.1%	11	3.0%
9 Subjects	173	48.9%	198	54.2%
8 Subjects	125	35.3%	108	29.6%
7 Subjects	33	9.3%	35	9.6%
6 Subjects	13	3.7%	6	1.6%
5 Subjects	1	0.3%	3	0.8%
4 Subjects	-	-	-	-
3 Subjects	-	-	1	0.3%
2 Subjects	1	0.3%	2	0.6%
1 Subject	4	1.1%	1	0.3%
Mean	8.24		8.38	
Mode	9		9	

Table 4.4. Numbers and percentages of male and female students nationally that took varying numbers of subjects in the 1997 JCE (*N*=65,757).

	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	

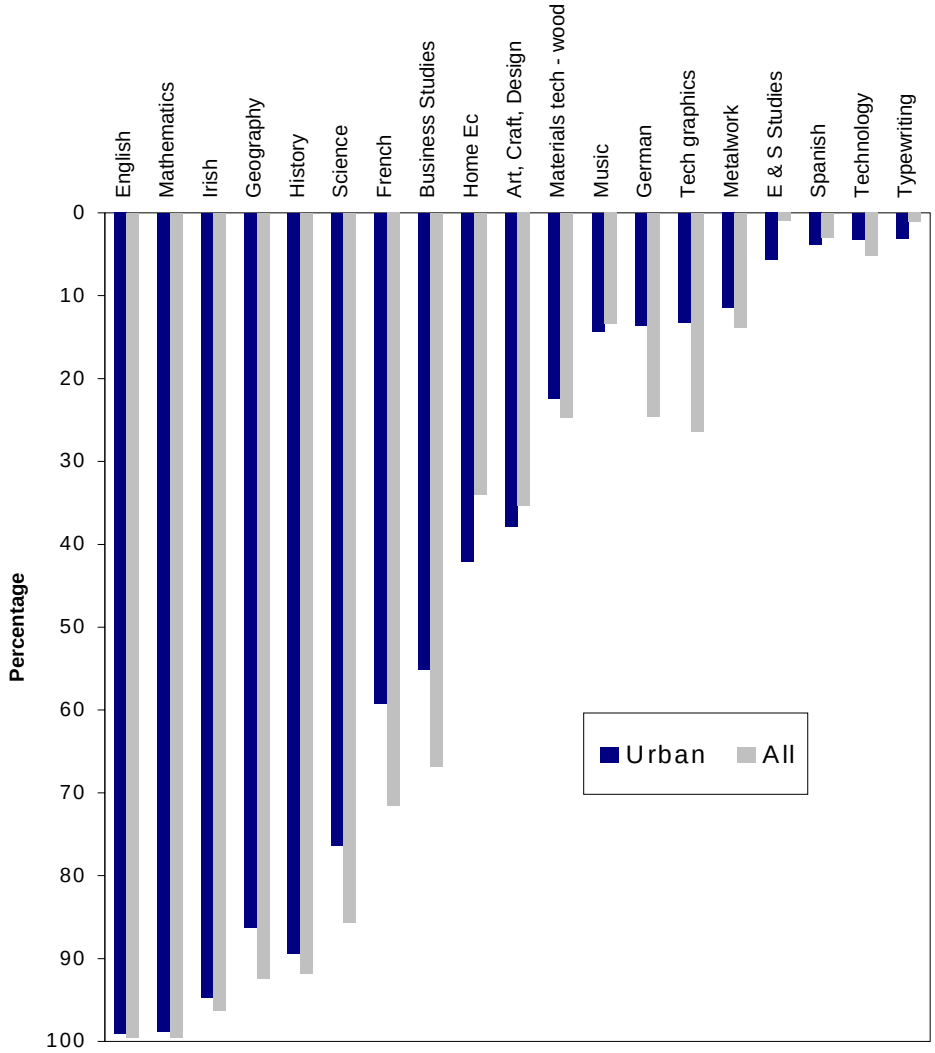
4.2 POPULARITY OF EXAMINATION SUBJECTS TAKEN BY STUDENTS

Mathematics and English were equally popular among candidates nationally, with 99.5% of students taking these subjects (Table 4.5 and Figure 4.1). A similar level of uptake of English was found among students in the urban cohort, while slightly smaller percentages of these students took Mathematics and Irish.

Table 4.5. Numbers and percentages of urban students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects in the 1997 JCE.

	Urban students (*N*=719)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,758)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
English	712	99.1%	65,447	99.5%
Mathematics	710	98.8%	65,423	99.5%
Irish	681	94.7%	63,328	96.3%
Geography	620	86.2%	60,728	92.4%
History	643	89.4%	60,379	91.8%
Science	549	76.4%	56,308	85.6%
French	426	59.2%	47,107	71.6%
Business Studies	396	55.1%	43,950	66.8%
Home Economics	303	42.1%	22,369	34.0%
Art, Craft, Design	273	37.9%	23,293	35.4%
Materials technology	161	22.4%	16,220	24.7%
Music	103	14.3%	8,787	13.4%
German	98	13.6%	16,165	24.6%
Technical graphics	94	13.2%	17,349	26.4%
Metalwork	83	11.5%	9,099	13.8%
Environmental & Social Studies	41	5.7%	648	1.0%
Spanish	28	3.9%	1,974	3.0%
Technology	23	3.2%	3,409	5.2%
Typewriting	22	3.1%	725	1.1%
Classical Studies	8	1.1%	603	0.9%
Italian	3	0.4%	242	0.4%
Science (local)	-	-	1,957	3.0%
Latin	-	-	711	1.1%
ESP – Geography	-	-	38	0.1%
Greek	-	-	30	0.0%
Hebrew	-	-	4	0.0%
History - Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-
ESP – History	-	-	-	-
Geography - Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-

Figure 4.1. Percentages of urban students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects in the 1997 JCE (with the exception of Classical Studies, Italian, Science (local), ESP Geography, Greek, Hebrew and Latin, which were all taken by less than 1% of urban students).



As can be seen from Table 4.5 and Figure 4.1, there are some differences between urban 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 students in our sample than students nationally sat examination papers in Home Economics (42.1% vs 34.0%), and in Art, Craft and Design (37.9% vs 35.4%). On the other hand, greater percentages of students nationally took French (71.6% vs 59.2%),

Business Studies (66.8% vs 55.1%), Science (85.6% vs 76.4%), and Geography (92.4% vs 86.2%).

There were some differences in the percentages of male and female urban students taking particular subjects (Table 4.6). Home Economics was the subject in which the male-female disparity was greatest among former students of *Breaking the Cycle* schools, with 65.2% of female students taking this subject compared with only 18.4% of males. Other subjects with a greater proportion of female candidates were Art, Craft and Design (42.5% of females vs 33.3% of males), and Music (17.3% vs 11.3%). Conversely, male students from urban schools took Science with much greater frequency than did females (90.7% and 62.5%). Other subjects which showed large discrepancies favouring males were Materials Technology (30.2% of males vs 14.8% of females) and Technical Graphics (20.9% of males vs 5.6% of females). Since the latter two 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.

Gender differences in subject choice were also observed in the national sample of JCE candidates, and the observed differences mirror largely those found among urban students (Table 4.7). 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 larger than that observed in our sample, where the difference between the percentage of males and the percentage of females taking Home Economics is 46.8%. In male-typed subject areas in which the percentage of male candidates outnumbers that of females (such as Technical Graphics and Materials Technology), the gender differences in subject uptake are not as large among urban students as in the national population. This may suggest that urban students are less 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.

Table 4.6. Numbers and percentages of urban male and female students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools taking various subjects in the 1997 JCE.

	Male (*N*=354)		**Female (*N*=365)**		**Total number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
English	349	98.6%	363	99.5%	712
Mathematics	349	98.6%	361	98.9%	710
Geography	305	96.2%	315	86.3%	620
Irish	329	92.9%	352	96.4%	681
History	321	91.0%	322	88.2%	643
Science	321	90.7%	228	62.5%	549
French	202	57.1%	224	61.4%	426
Business Studies	183	51.7%	213	58.4%	396
Materials technology	107	30.2%	54	14.8%	161
Art, Craft, Design	118	33.3%	155	42.5%	273
Technical graphics	74	20.9%	20	5.6%	94
Home Economics	65	18.4%	238	65.2%	303
Metalwork	64	18.1%	19	5.2%	189
German	46	13.0%	52	14.2%	98
Music	40	11.3%	63	17.3%	103
Technology	13	3.7%	10	2.7%	23
Spanish	5	1.4%	23	6.3%	28
Environmental & Social Studies	20	5.6%	21	5.8%	41
Italian	3	0.8%	-	-	3
Typewriting	3	0.8%	19	5.2%	22
Classical Studies	-	-	8	2.2%	8
Science (local)	-	-	-	-	-
Latin	-	-	-	-	-
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	-	-	-	-	-
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	-	-	-	-	-
Greek	-	-	-	-	-

Table 4.7. 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**	**%**	
Irish	31,578	95.5%	31,749	97.2%	63,327
English	32,922	99.5%	32,524	99.5%	65,446
Mathematics	32,920	99.5%	32,502	99.5%	65,422
Geography	29,959	90.6%	30,768	94.2%	60,727
History	29,706	89.8%	30,672	93.9%	60,378
Science	29,688	89.7%	26,619	81.5%	56,307
French	21,415	64.7%	25,691	78.6%	47,106
Business Studies	19,690	59.5%	24,259	74.2%	43,949
Technical graphics	15,596	47.1%	1,753	5.4%	17,349
Materials Technology	14,555	44.0%	1,665	5.1%	16,220
Art, Craft, Design	9,375	28.3%	13,918	42.6%	23,293
Metalwork	8,539	25.8%	560	1.7%	9,099
German	7,215	21.8%	8,950	27.4%	16,165
Home Economics	2,533	7.7%	19,835	60.7%	22,368
Technology	2,451	7.4%	958	2.9%	3,409
Music	1,916	5.8%	6,871	21.0%	8,787
Science (local)	1,145	3.5%	812	2.5%	1,957
Spanish	854	2.6%	1,120	3.4%	1,974
Latin	455	1.4%	256	0.8%	711
Environmental & Social Studies	376	1.1%	272	0.8%	648
Classical Studies	368	1.1%	235	0.7%	603
Typewriting	92	0.3%	633	1.9%	725
Italian	89	0.3%	153	0.5%	242
Greek	30	0.1%	-	-	30
ESP – Geography	13	0.0%	25	0.0%	38
Hebrew	3	0.0%	1	0.0%	4
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-

4.3 LEVEL OF EXAMINATION SUBJECTS TAKEN

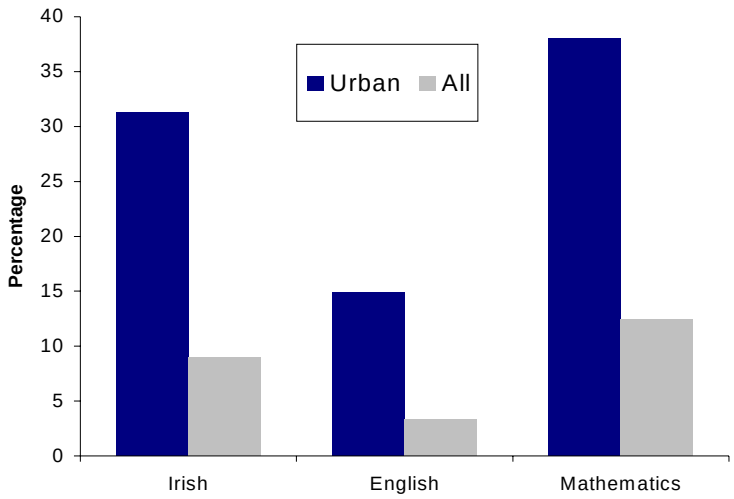
While the aggregate achievements of former students of schools now in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme and students nationally in each subject area will be described later in this section, performance according to the percentage of students taking examination papers at various levels will be considered 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 4.8 and Figure 4.2 show that in the case of English, Irish and Mathematics, the percentages of *Breaking the Cycle* students taking Foundation Level papers was much higher than among students nationally. This was particularly true in the case of Mathematics, with more than one-third of all students in our sample taking Mathematics at Foundation Level.

Table 4.8. Numbers and percentages of urban students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking English, Irish and Mathematics at Foundation Level in the 1997 JCE.

	Urban students (*N*=719)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,758)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Irish	225	31.3%	5,940	9.0%
English	107	14.9%	2,200	3.3%
Mathematics	273	38.0%	8,134	12.4%

Figure 4.2. Percentage of urban students and all students nationally taking Irish, English and Mathematics at Foundation level in the 1997 JCE.



When the proportions of students in our sample taking papers at Foundation Level is examined according to student gender (Table 4.9), indications are that about the same proportion of males as females took Irish and English at Foundation Level, while proportionately more females than males took Foundation Level Mathematics (43.8% of females and 31.9% of males respectively). It is noteworthy that the uptake of Foundation Level Mathematics is four times as high among female students in our sample as it is among female students in the national population (Table 4.10). Further, the direction of the gender difference in the uptake of Mathematics at Foundation Level contrasts with that found in the national population, where a greater proportion of males took Mathematics at Foundation Level. Furthermore, more than twice as many males as females in the national population took Foundation Level Irish and English, while there were only slight gender differences in uptake of these subjects among urban students. It seems, therefore, that female students who originated in *Breaking the Cycle* schools have higher than expected rates of uptake of subjects at Foundation Level compared to females nationally.

Table 4.9. Numbers and percentages of male and female urban students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools taking English, Irish and Mathematics at Foundation Level in the 1997 JCE (*N*=719).

	Males (*N*=354)		**Females (*N*=365)**		**Total number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
Irish	107	30.2%	118	33.5%	225
English	56	15.8%	51	14.0%	107
Mathematics	113	31.9%	160	43.8%	273

Table 4.10. 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

There are also differences between students in the urban cohort and students nationally in the percentages taking examination subjects at Ordinary Level (Table 4.11 and Figure 4.3).

Table 4.11. Numbers and percentages of urban students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects at Ordinary Level in the 1997 JCE.

	Urban students (*N*=719)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,758)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Irish	389	54.1%	31,645	48.1%
English	422	58.7%	23,136	35.2%
History	377	52.4%	16,121	24.5%
Geography	348	48.8%	13,394	20.4%
Mathematics	345	48.0%	33,779	51.4%
Science	332	46.2%	18,411	28.0%
French	269	37.4%	14,172	21.6%
Business Studies	225	31.3%	13,216	20.1%
Art, Craft, Design	195	27.1%	10,075	15.3%
Home Economics	194	27.0%	4,788	7.3%
Materials technology	121	16.8%	5,472	8.3%
Technical graphics	73	10.2%	8,218	12.5%
Metalwork	42	5.8%	3,119	4.7%
German	38	5.3%	3,274	5.0%
Music	36	5.0%	1,726	2.6%
Environmental & Social Studies	30	4.2%	479	0.7%
Typewriting	20	2.8%	458	0.7%
Technology	16	2.2%	947	1.4%
Spanish	11	1.5%	538	0.8%
Classical Studies	5	0.4%	84	0.1%
Italian	2	0.3%	84	0.1%
Science (local)	-	-	1,247	1.9%
Latin	-	-	59	0.1%
ESP – History	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	-	-	1	0.0%
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	-	-	1	0.0%
Greek	-	-	2	0.0%

With the exception of Mathematics (in which a very high proportion of urban students took Foundation Level papers), greater percentages of former students of *Breaking the Cycle* schools took papers at Ordinary Level than did students nationally in the most popular subject areas (i.e., in Irish, English, History, Geography, Science,

French, Business Studies, Art, Craft, and Design, Home Economics and Materials Technology). The difference in the percentages of students in both groups taking Ordinary Level papers ranges from 28.4% more urban students taking Ordinary Level Geography to 8.5% more taking Materials Technology at Ordinary Level.

Figure 4.3. Percentages of urban 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, Italian, Science (local), ESP- Geography, Latin, Hebrew and Greek, which were all taken by less than 0.5% of urban students).

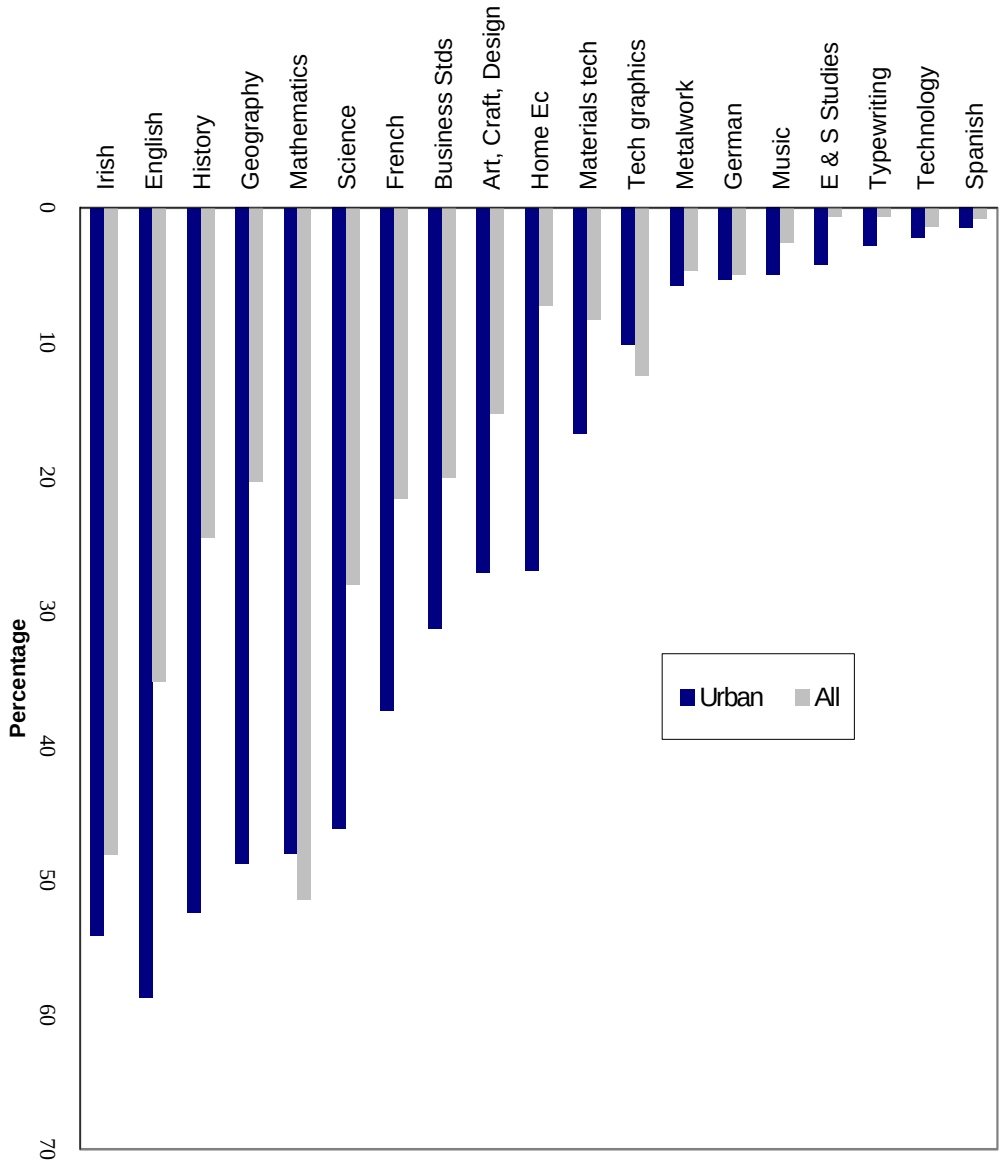


Table 4.12 shows the numbers and percentages of male and female urban students who took papers at Ordinary Level in the 1997 JCE. Proportionately more male than female students took Ordinary Level Mathematics, Science, Materials

Technology, and Technical Graphics, while proportionately more female students took English, History, Geography, French, Business Studies, Art, Craft and Design, and Home Economics at Ordinary Level.

Table 4.12. Numbers and percentages of male and female students from urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools taking various subjects at Ordinary Level in the 1997 JCE (*N*=719).

	Males (*N*=354)		**Females (*N*=365)**		**Total number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
English	194	54.8%	228	62.5%	422
Irish	191	54.0%	198	54.2%	389
History	175	49.4%	202	55.3%	377
Mathematics	182	51.4%	163	45.2%	345
Geography	156	44.1%	192	52.6%	348
Science	196	55.4%	136	37.3%	332
French	122	34.5%	147	40.3%	269
Business Studies	104	29.4%	121	33.2%	225
Art, Craft, Design	76	21.5%	119	32.6%	195
Home Economics	47	13.3%	147	40.3%	194
Materials technology	82	23.2%	39	10.7%	121
Technical graphics	58	16.4%	15	4.1%	73
Metalwork	34	9.6%	8	2.2%	42
Music	4	1.1%	32	8.8%	36
German	19	5.4%	19	5.2%	38
Environmental & Social Studies	14	4.0%	16	4.4%	30
Typewriting	3	0.8%	17	4.7%	20
Technology	6	1.7%	10	2.7%	16
Spanish	5	1.4%	6	1.6%	11
Classical Studies	-	-	5	1.4%	5
Italian	2	0.6%	-	-	2
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	-	-	-	-	-
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	-	-	-	-	-
Latin	-	-	-	-	-
Science (local)	-	-	-	-	-
Greek	-	-	-	-	-

Among students nationally (with the exception of Mathematics), proportionately fewer female students than males took Ordinary Level papers in the more popular subject areas (Table 4.13). This contrasts somewhat with the pattern of subject uptake among male and female urban students, among whom, at Ordinary Level, the most

popular subjects were taken by greater percentages of female students. However, there is some commonality between the two student groups: in both groups, gender differences in subject uptake at Ordinary Level are in the same direction for Science, Business Studies, Art, Craft and Design, Home Economics, and Materials Technology.

Table 4.13. 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 4.14 and Figure 4.4 show, in the 15 most popular subject areas, fewer urban students than students nationally took Higher Level papers. The largest discrepancy arose in the area of English, where 61% of candidates nationally took the Higher Level paper, while only 25.5% of candidates in our sample did so. Other

subjects which showed large discrepancies were Geography (in which 72% of candidates nationally took the Higher paper compared with 37.8% of urban students), History, (67.3% vs 37%), Irish (39.1% vs 9.3%), and French (50.1% vs 21.8%).

Table 4.14. Numbers and percentages of urban students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects at Higher Level in the 1997 JCE.

	Urban students (*N*=719)		**All students nationally (*N*=65,758)**	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Geography	272	37.8%	47,334	72.0%
History	266	37.0%	44,258	67.3%
Science	217	30.2%	37,897	57.6%
English	183	25.5%	40,111	61.0%
Business Studies	171	23.8%	30,734	46.7%
French	157	21.8%	32,935	50.1%
Home Economics	109	15.2%	17,581	26.7%
Mathematics	92	12.8%	23,510	35.8%
Art, Craft, Design	78	10.8%	13,218	20.1%
Irish	67	9.3%	25,743	39.1%
Music	67	9.3%	7,061	10.7%
German	60	8.3%	12,891	19.6%
Metalwork	41	5.7%	5,980	9.1%
Materials technology	40	5.6%	10,748	16.3%
Technical graphics	21	2.9%	9,131	13.9%
Spanish	17	2.4%	1,436	2.1%
Environmental & Social Studies	11	1.5%	169	0.3%
Technology	7	1.0%	2,462	3.7%
Classical Studies	3	0.4%	519	0.8%
Typewriting	2	0.3%	267	0.4%
Italian	1	0.1%	158	0.2%
Science (local)	-	-	710	1.1%
Latin	-	-	652	1.0%
ESP- Geography	-	-	37	0.0%
Greek	-	-	28	0.0%
Hebrew	-	-	3	0.0%
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-
ESP- History	-	-	-	-

Figure 4.4. Percentages of urban students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and all students nationally taking various subjects at Higher Level in the 1997 JCE (with the exception of Classical Studies, Typewriting, Italian, Science (local), ESP- Geography, Greek and Hebrew, which were all taken by less than 0.5% of urban students).

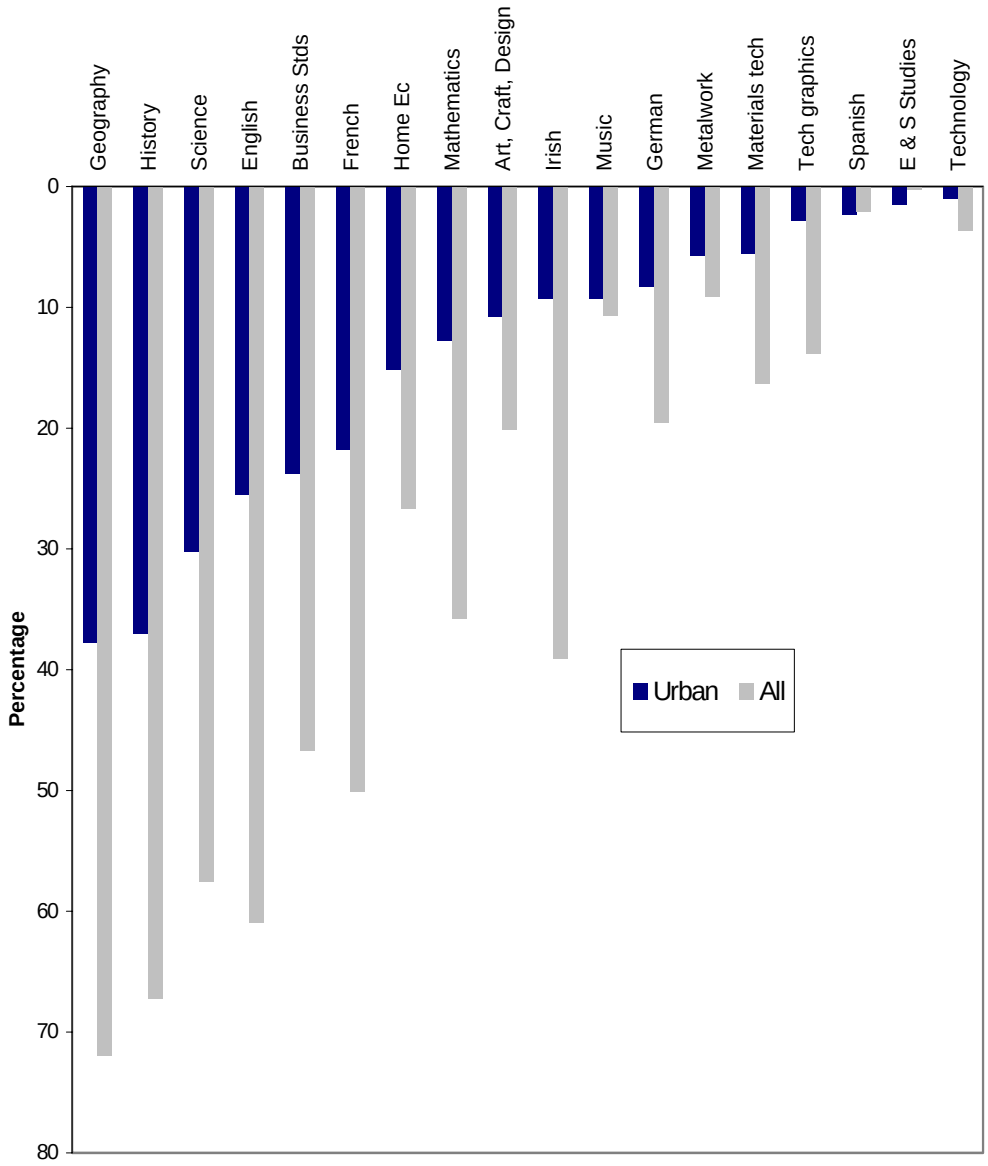


Table 4.15 shows that more male than female students in the urban cohort took Higher Level papers in the most popular subject areas. Exceptions to this were Business Studies, Irish, German, and the more traditionally female-oriented area of Home Economics. This contrasts with the picture nationally, where greater proportions of female students than males took Higher papers in all of the most popular subject areas (Table 4.16).

Table 4.15. Numbers and percentages of urban male and female students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools taking various subjects at Higher Level in the 1997 JCE (*N*=719).

	Males (*N*=354)		**Females (*N*=365)**		**Total Number**
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	
Geography	149	42.1%	123	33.7%	272
History	146	41.2%	120	32.9%	266
Science	125	35.3%	92	25.2%	217
English	99	28.0%	84	23.0%	183
Business Studies	79	22.3%	92	25.5%	171
French	80	22.6%	77	21.1%	157
Home Economics	18	5.1%	91	25.0%	109
Mathematics	54	15.3%	38	10.4%	92
Art, Craft, Design	42	11.9%	36	9.9%	78
Irish	31	8.8%	36	9.9%	67
Music	36	10.2%	31	8.5%	67
German	27	7.6%	33	9.0%	60
Metalwork	30	8.5%	11	3.0%	41
Materials technology	25	7.1%	15	4.1%	40
Technical graphics	16	4.5%	5	1.4%	21
Spanish	-	-	17	4.7%	17
Environmental & Social Studies	6	1.7%	5	1.4%	11
Technology	7	2.0%	-	-	7
Classical Studies	-	-	3	0.8%	3
Typewriting	-	-	2	0.5%	2
Italian	1	0.0%	-	-	1
Latin	-	-	-	-	-
Science (local)	-	-	-	-	-
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
ESP – Geography	-	-	-	-	-
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Hebrew	-	-	-	-	-
Greek	-	-	-	-	-

Table 4.16. 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**	**%**	
Geography	22,905	69.2%	24,428	74.8%	47,333
History	21,143	63.9%	23,114	70.7%	44,257
English	17,782	53.8%	22,328	68.3%	40,110
Science	18,615	56.3%	19,281	59.0%	37,896
French	13,596	41.1%	19,338	59.2%	32,934
Business Studies	13,383	40.5%	17,350	53.1%	30,733
Irish	10,529	31.8%	15,214	46.6%	25,743
Mathematics	11,547	34.9%	11,963	36.6%	23,510
Home Economics	1,261	3.8%	16,319	49.9%	17,580
Art, Craft, Design	4,782	14.5%	8,436	25.8%	13,218
German	5,282	16.0%	7,609	23.3%	12,891
Materials technology	9,875	29.9%	873	2.7%	10,748
Technical graphics	8,298	25.1%	833	2.5%	9,131
Music	1,363	4.1%	5,698	17.4%	7,061
Metalwork	5,689	17.2%	291	0.9%	5,980
Technology	1,843	5.6%	619	1.9%	2,462
Spanish	540	1.6%	896	2.7	1,436
Science (local)	333	1.0%	377	1.2%	710
Latin	425	1.3%	227	0.7%	652
Classical Studies	327	1.0%	192	0.6%	519
Typewriting	31	0.1%	236	0.7%	267
Environmental & Social Studies	90	0.3%	79	0.2%	169
Italian	45	0.1%	113	0.3%	158
ESP – Geography	12	0.0%	25	0.1%	37
Greek	28	0.1%	-	-	28
Hebrew	2	0.0%	1	0.0%	3
ESP – History	-	-	-	-	-
History -Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-
Geography- Syllabus 2	-	-	-	-	-

4.4 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 analysis 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 achievement (Table 4.17). 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 his/her 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 4.17. 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 719 former students of *Breaking the Cycle* schools who sat the JCE in 1997, 687 (95.5%) 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 4.18 shows that there is a considerable difference in the overall mean achievement in the 1997 JCE of students who originated in urban schools that are now participating in *Breaking the Cycle* and students in the national population. The former, as a group, performed more poorly in the JCE (mean OPS=53.7) than did students in the national population (mean OPS=65.3). When expressed in terms of grades achieved in the JCE, the mean OPS score achieved by students nationally could be described as slightly better than an average of seven "D" grades on Higher Level papers, or 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 students in the urban cohort and students nationally is derived from a range of grades achieved at Foundation, Ordinary and Higher Levels. In the urban cohort, the mean OPS score achieved by the students could be described as an average of seven "E" grades on Higher papers or seven "B" grades on Ordinary Level papers, as both of these patterns of results would attract an OPS score of 56. In fact, the achievements of the students are slightly lower than this, as their mean OPS is 53.7.

Table 4.18. Mean OPS score achieved by students from urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools and by all students nationally in the 1997 JCE.

Group	**Mean OPS score**
Urban *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=687)	53.7 (11.8)
All students nationally (*N*=64,756)	65.3 (11.4)

Table 4.19 shows that, among the national population of students, females achieved higher mean OPS scores than did males. However, there is no discernible difference between the mean OPS scores achieved by males and females who had attended *Breaking the Cycle* schools.

[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*=719).

Table 4.19. Mean OPS score achieved by male and female students from urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools and by male and female students nationally in the 1997 JCE.

Urban students (*N*=687)		**All students nationally (*N*=64,755)**	
Males (*N*=335)	Females (*N*=352)	Males (*N*=32,475)	Females (*N*=32,280)
53.6 (11.8)	53.9 (11.9)	63.7 (11.6)	66.9 (11.0)

Student achievement also differs on the basis of school type: a examination of Tables 4.20 and 4.21 shows that, in the case of both urban students and students nationally, students in Secondary schools outperformed students in other school types in the 1997 JCE. It is clear from Tables 4.20 and 4.21 that female students enrolled in Secondary schools achieved the highest mean OPS scores, both among the national population and among the sample of students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools.

Table 4.20. Mean OPS score in the 1997 JCE achieved by students from urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools according to school type and gender (*N*=687).

	Mean OPS score		
Type of school	**Males**	**Females**	**Total**
Secondary	56.3 (12.0) (*n*=178)	56.4 (13.1) (*n*=182)	56.4 (12.6) (*n*=360)
Vocational	50.3 (9.9) (*n*=88)	51.9 (9.2) (*n*=107)	51.2 (9.5) (*n*=195)
Comprehensive	54.9 (12.0) (*n*=27)	45.3 (8.8) (*n*=15)	51.5 (11.8) (*n*=42)
Community	48.2 (13.6) (*n*=42)	51.4 (10.5) (*n*=48)	49.9 (10.9) (*n*=90)
	53.6 (11.8) (*n*=335)	**53.9 (11.9)** (*n*=352)	**53.7 (11.8) (*N*=687)**

Table 4.21. 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)
	63.7 (11.6) (*n*=32,475)	**66.9 (11.0)** (*n*=32,280)	**65.3 (11.4) (*N*=64,755)**

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 designated as disadvantaged. Table 4.22 shows the mean OPS scores of urban

students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools according to whether or not they were enrolled in schools that were designated as disadvantaged. For comparison purposes, the performance of the national population is also examined according to disadvantaged status of the school attended (Table 4.23).

Table 4.22. Performance of students from urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE, according to whether they attended post-primary schools that were, or were not, designated as disadvantaged (*N*=687).

	Designated status	
	Disadvantaged (*N*=604)	**Non-disadvantaged (*N*=83)**
Mean overall performance score (OPS)	53.4 (11.6)	56.2 (12.9)
Mean no. of subjects taken	8.4 (0.7)	8.7 (0.7)
Mean no. of subjects taken at Ordinary level	5.0 (2.4)	4.8 (2.7)
Mean no. of subjects taken at Higher level	2.6 (3.0)	3.4 (3.3)
Mean no. of subjects taken at Foundation level	0.8 (1.1)	0.6 (0.9)

Table 4.23. Performance of students nationally in the 1997 JCE, according to whether they attended post-primary schools that were, or were not, designated as 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 4.22 and 4.23 show, at the time of taking the JCE, almost one student in nine (87.9%) in the urban cohort was enrolled in a post-primary school that was 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 candidates depending on whether or not they were enrolled in schools that were designated as disadvantaged. Among both the urban cohort 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 *Breaking the Cycle* sample (53.4 vs 56.2 respectively). Students in designated and non-designated schools also

differed on other characteristics: students in schools that were designated as disadvantaged, on average, took fewer subjects in the JCE than did their non-disadvantaged counterparts. Furthermore, students enrolled in designated schools took a greater number of subjects at Foundation and Ordinary Level, and fewer subjects at Higher Level than did students in non-designated schools (see also Figure 4.5). However, it should be noted that, because the numbers of students in the urban cohort that were enrolled in non-designated post-primary schools are very small (*N*=83), conclusions drawn about their performance are, at best, tentative.

Figure 4.5. Mean number of subjects taken at Ordinary, Higher, and Foundation Level and all levels in the 1997 JCE by students from urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools, according to whether they were enrolled in schools that were, or were not, designated as disadvantaged.

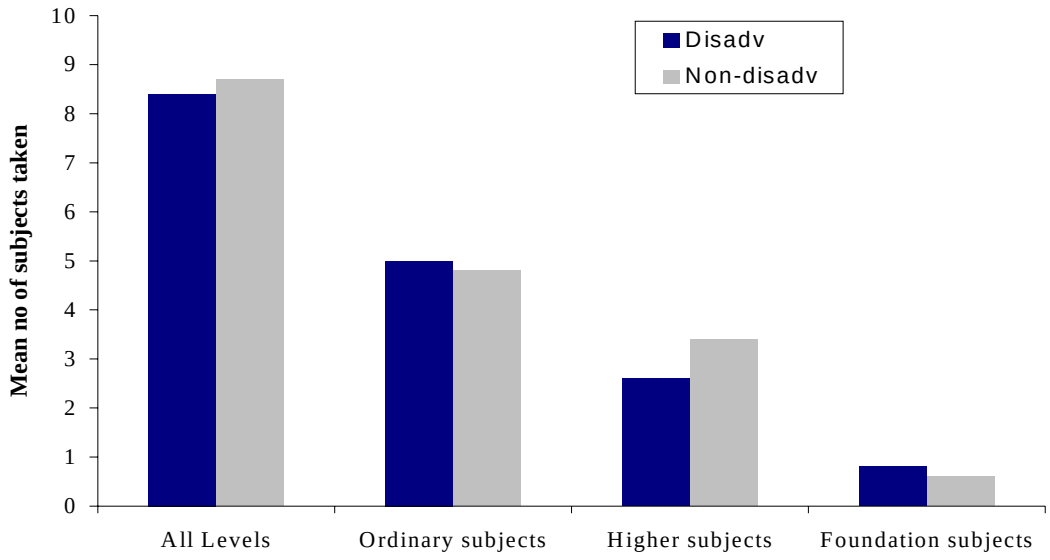


Table 4.24 summarizes the performance of urban students in both designated and non-designated post-primary schools, according to student gender. However, as already stated, the numbers of students in the urban cohort that were enrolled in non-designated post-primary schools are very small, and further subdividing them by gender reduces the numbers involved in any comparisons even further. This makes it difficult to compare the performance of male and female students within schools that were designated as disadvantaged and those that were not. However, it is possible to compare the performance of males and females in the *Breaking the Cycle* cohort who were enrolled in disadvantaged post-primary schools at the time of taking the JCE. Table 4.24 shows that females performed at about the same level as did males. This is at odds with the national pattern, where in designated (and non-designated) schools, female students outperformed males (Table 4.25).

Table 4.24. Performance of male and female students from urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools in the 1997 JCE, according to whether they attended post-primary schools that were, or were not, designated disadvantaged (*N*=687).

	Disadvantaged (*N*=604)		**Non-disadvantaged (*N*=83)**	
	Males (*N*=286)	Females (*N*=318)	Males (*N*=49)	Females (*N*=34)
Mean overall performance score (OPS)	53.3 (11.6)	53.5 (11.7)	55.4 (12.7)	57.4 (13.2)
Mean number of subjects taken	8.4 (0.7)	8.5 (0.7)	8.7 (0.6)	8.8 (0.8)
Mean number of subjects taken at Ordinary level	4.8 (2.4)	5.1 (2.4)	4.7 (2.6)	5.0 (2.8)
Mean number of subjects taken at Higher level	2.8 (3.0)	2.5 (3.0)	3.5 (3.3)	3.2 (3.4)
Mean number of subjects taken at Foundation level	0.8 (1.1)	0.9 (1.1)	0.5 (0.8)	0.6 (1.0)

Table 4.25. 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)

4.5 STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS IN INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTS.

The achievements of former students of *Breaking the Cycle* schools 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 4.17 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 students in the urban cohort and for the national population. The mean OPS of urban pupils in English is considerably lower than that of students nationally (Table 4.26).

Table 4.26. Mean OPS score of urban students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and of students nationally in English in the 1997 JCE.

Subject	**Urban students**	**All students nationally**
English	7.3 (2.0) (*N*=712)	8.75 (1.8) (*N*=65,447)

An OPS score of 8.75 (which describes the achievements of students nationally in Table 4.26) represents an average of a "D" grade on the Higher Level English paper, or an "A" grade on an Ordinary Level paper. Students in the urban cohort achieved a lower mean OPS of 7.3, which may be thought of as an average of an "F" grade on a Higher Level paper, or a "C" grade on an Ordinary Level paper. While the average 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 4.27 to 4.29 show the percentage of students in the two groups who were awarded each of the seven available grades at Foundation, Ordinary and Higher Levels in the JCE in English in 1997.

As may be seen from Table 4.27, the spread of grades in Foundation Level English is greater among the national population of students than among students in the urban cohort. Also, proportionately fewer students in the latter cohort achieved high grades ("A"s and "B"s) and proportionately more students achieved low grades ("D"s and "E"s) in Foundation Level English than did students nationally. At Ordinary Level, the achievements of urban students were only slightly below those of students nationally, although, again, there was a tendency for them to achieve slightly fewer high grades and slightly more low grades (Table 4.28). At Higher Level, students in the national population of candidates were awarded more "A", "B" and "C" grades and fewer "D" and "E" grades than were their counterparts in the urban cohort (Table 4.29). It should be also be remembered that a much smaller proportion of students in the urban

cohort took English at Higher Level (25.5% of all candidates) than did students nationally (61% of all candidates). If it is the case that only the most able of the urban students took English at Higher Level, then their achievements relative to candidates nationally appear fairly weak.

Table 4.27. Foundation Level English results, by grade, for all students nationally and for urban 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%
Urban *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=107)	4.4%	16.4%	33.9%	38.8%	6.6%	-	-

Table 4.28. Ordinary Level English results, by grade, for all students nationally and for urban 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%	-
Urban *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=422)	6.2%	22.3%	42.9%	26.5%	2.1%	-	-

Table 4.29. Higher Level English results, by grade, for all students nationally and for urban 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%	-
Urban *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=183)	4.4%	16.4%	33.9%	38.8%	6.6%	-	-

In the subject area of Irish, students in the national population clearly outperformed students in the urban cohort (Table 4.30). The mean OPS score achieved by students nationally corresponds most closely to an "E" grade on a Higher Level paper or a "B" grade on an Ordinary Level paper. However, the mean OPS achieved by students in our sample corresponds to slightly less than a "D" grade on an Ordinary Level paper or to an "A" grade on a Foundation level paper. The respective mean OPS scores achieved both by students in our sample and by students nationally also indicate

that their achievements in Irish were lower than was the case in the subject area of English.

Table 4.30. Mean OPS score of urban students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and of students nationally in Irish in the 1997 JCE.

Subject	**Urban students**	**All students nationally**
Irish	5.75 (2.1) (*N*=681)	7.90 (2.3) (*N*=63,328)

An examination of the derivation of mean OPS scores in Irish (Tables 4.31 to 4.33) shows that students in the national population achieved a greater proportion of high grades (i.e., "A" and "B" grades) at Foundation, Ordinary, and Higher Level than did students in the urban cohort. At Foundation Level, while there is virtually no difference in the proportions of students achieving "D", "E", and "F" grades: a greater proportion of urban students were awarded grade "C", while a greater proportion of students nationally were awarded grades "A" and "B" (Table 4.31).

Table 4.31. Foundation Level Irish results, by grade, for all students nationally and for urban 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%
Urban *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=225)	4.0%	19.1%	37.8%	24.9%	10.7%	3.6%	-

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 our sample (0.8% of students) (Table 4.32). At the other end of the scale, students in our sample were awarded more "D", "E", and "F" grades at Ordinary Level than were students in the national population. Indeed, more than one in three urban students was awarded a grade "D", and almost one in five was awarded a grade "E", in Irish at Ordinary Level.

Table 4.32. Ordinary Level Irish results, by grade, for all students nationally and for urban 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%
Urban *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=389)	0.8%	9.8%	30.1%	38.0%	17.5%	3.6%	0.3%

Proportionately fewer students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools (9.3%) than students nationally (39.1%) took Irish at Higher Level. However, the performance of those who did is weaker than that of students in the national population (Table 4.33). While differences in the proportions of candidates in both student groups achieving "C" and "D" grades is not great, there are quite large differences, which favour students nationally, in the proportions achieving "A" and "B" grades.

Table 4.33. Higher Level Irish results, by grade, for all students nationally and for urban 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%	-
Urban *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=67)	6.0%	16.4%	37.3%	23.9%	14.9%	1.5%	-

In the subject area of Mathematics, the performance of students in the urban cohort was, again, poorer than that of their national counterparts (Table 4.34). The mean OPS score achieved by students nationally corresponds most closely to an "E" grade on a Higher Level paper or a "B" grade on an Ordinary Level paper. However, the mean OPS achieved by students in the urban cohort corresponds to slightly less than a "D" grade on an Ordinary Level paper or to an "A" grade on a Foundation level paper. It is of interest that there are no discernible differences between students nationally and those in the urban cohort in terms of the proportions that were awarded grade "C" at Foundation, Ordinary and Higher Levels. Rather, differences in overall performance appear to be explained by the fact that greater proportions of students in the national population achieved high grades ("A"s and "B"s) and smaller proportions achieved low grades ("D"s, and "E"s) at all levels in Mathematics than did students in the urban cohort (Tables 4.35 to 4.37).

Table 4.34. Mean OPS score of urban students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools and of students nationally in Mathematics in the 1997 JCE.

Subject	**Urban students**	**All students nationally**
Mathematics	5.85 (2.1) (*N*=710)	7.92 (2.3) (*N*=65,423)

Table 4.35. Foundation Level Mathematics results, by grade, for all students nationally and for urban 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%	0.1%
Urban *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=273)	3.7%	30.0%	33.0%	24.5%	6.2%	2.6%	-

Table 4.36. Ordinary Level Mathematics results, by grade, for all students nationally and for urban 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%	0.2%
Urban *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=345)	2.6%	15.9%	29.9%	28.1%	18.6%	4.9%	-

Table 4.37. Higher Level Mathematics results, by grade, for all students nationally and for urban 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%
Urban *Breaking the Cycle* students (*N*=92)	3.3%	17.4%	31.5%	25.0%	17.4%	5.4%	-

To examine student performance in non-core (but, nevertheless, popular) subject areas, the Ordinary and Higher Level grades achieved by urban students and students nationally in the seven next most popular areas are reported in Tables 4.38 and 4.39. An interesting observation may be made from an examination of these tables: without exception, proportionately fewer students in the urban cohort were awarded "A" and "B" grades, and proportionately more were awarded "D" and "E" grades than were students in the national population at both Ordinary and Higher Levels in all subjects. However, performance among both student groups differed depending on the subject area. For example, Ordinary Level French was the subject which had the highest percentages of students failing to achieve a passing grade. Among students nationally, 14.3% did not pass Ordinary Level French, while in the urban cohort, the failure rate was more than double that at 29%. Ordinary Level French was also the subject in which students in both groups achieved the fewest high grades. Indeed, not one of the 269 urban students who took Ordinary Level French was awarded an "A" grade, and only 3.3% were awarded "B" grades. While "A" grades were also a relative rarity among students nationally (0.8% of students), proportionately more of these students (15.7%) achieved a "B" grade. The subject with the next highest failure rate at Ordinary Level was History, with 11.2% of students nationally and 17% of those in the urban cohort failing to pass this subject.

The strongest performances at Ordinary Level among students in both groups were recorded in Geography, Business Studies and Home Economics. Almost half of students nationally (44.7%) received "A" or "B" grades in Geography, as did almost one in three urban students (29.3%). Students also achieved well in Business Studies at Ordinary Level, where 42.9% of students nationally and 30.7% of urban students were awarded "A" or "B" grades. Finally, 41% of students nationally and 27.3% of urban students were awarded "A" or "B" grades in Home Economics. Home Economics had the lowest failure rate of all Ordinary Level subjects among both student groups, with only 3.8% of students nationally and 5.6% of urban students failing to achieve a passing grade in this subject.

Table 4.38. Percentages of grades awarded to all students nationally and to urban 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%
	Urban students (*N*=377)	4.0%	20.7%	28.4%	30.0%	9.0%	6.4%	1.6%
Geography	Students nationally (*N*=13,394)	9.1%	35.6%	34.5%	16.6%	3.4%	0.8%	-
	Urban students (*N*=348)	3.2%	26.1%	35.6%	27.0%	7.2%	0.9%	-
Science	Students nationally (*N*=18,411)	4.8%	27.9%	37.3%	22.1%	6.0%	1.8%	0.1%
	Urban students (*N*=332)	2.1%	24.4%	36.4%	23.5%	9.9%	3.3%	0.3%
French	Students nationally (*N*=14,172)	0.8%	14.9%	36.4%	33.6%	12.0%	2.3%	-
	Urban students (*N*=269)	-	3.3%	21.9%	45.7%	24.9%	4.1%	-
Business Studies	Students nationally (*N*=13,216)	7.9%	35.0%	33.8%	17.4%	4.3%	1.5%	0.1%
	Urban students (*N*=225)	1.8%	28.9%	33.3%	27.6%	4.9%	3.6%	-
Art, Craft, Design	Students nationally (*N*=10,075)	10.2%	21.3%	36.3%	23.6%	5.9%	2.4%	0.3%
	Urban students (*N*=195)	6.2%	15.9%	34.9%	26.2%	8.2%	7.7%	1.0%
Home Economics	Students nationally (*N*=4,788)	1.9%	39.1%	44.7%	10.5%	2.2%	1.2%	0.4%
	Urban students (*N*=194)	1.0%	26.3%	50.0%	17.0%	4.1%	0.5%	1.0%

As Table 4.39 shows, Home Economics is the area in which both urban students and those in the national population achieved the greatest proportion of top grades at Higher Level. Indeed, more than half (53.2%) of students nationally who took Home Economics at this level were awarded an "A" or "B" grade. The figure for candidates in the urban cohort is somewhat lower at 32.1%. 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 an "A" grade in this subject, while a smaller percentage (5.1%) of students in the urban cohort achieved "A" grades. In contrast,

some Higher Level subject areas had relatively large numbers of students that failed to achieve a passing grade: almost one-quarter of students in the urban cohort did not achieve a passing grade in French at Higher Level, while 15.6% did not achieve a pass in Higher Level Science. French and Science were also the subject areas in which the failure rate was highest among students nationally at Higher Level, with 7.5% failing to pass Science and 6.1% failing to pass French. Home Economics was the subject with the lowest recorded failure rate, with tiny percentages of students nationally and in the urban cohort failing to pass this subject (0.4% and 0.9% respectively).

Table 4.39. Percentages of grades awarded to all students nationally and to urban 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%	-
	Urban students (*N*=266)	4.9%	19.9%	32.0%	31.2%	10.5%	1.5%	-
Geography	Students nationally (*N*=47,334)	8.9%	36.6%	37.5%	15.6%	1.2%	0.1%	-
	Urban students (*N*=272)	3.7%	18.4%	44.9%	28.3%	4.0%	0.7%	-
Science	Students nationally (*N*=37,897)	13.6%	26.7%	30.2%	21.9%	6.1%	1.3%	0.1%
	Urban students (*N*=217)	7.4%	12.9%	27.2%	36.9%	9.7%	4.1%	1.8%
French	Students nationally (*N*=32,935)	8.3%	25.5%	35.3%	24.7%	5.3%	0.7%	0.1%
	Urban students (*N*=157)	3.8%	10.2%	22.9%	40.1%	17.8%	3.2%	1.9%
Business Studies	Students nationally (*N*=30,734)	9.4%	35.2%	37.0%	16.1%	1.9%	0.4%	-
	Urban students (*N*=171)	5.3%	19.3%	41.5%	29.2%	4.7%	-	-
Art, Craft, Design	Students nationally (*N*=13,218)	21.1%	26.9%	33.9%	15.2%	2.5%	0.4%	-
	Urban students (*N*=78)	5.1%	20.5%	34.6%	32.1%	6.4%	1.3%	-
Home Economics	Students nationally (*N*=17,581)	7.3%	45.9%	37.8%	8.5%	0.4%	-	-
	Urban students (*N*=109)	1.8%	30.3%	43.1%	23.9%	0.9%	-	-

Table 4.40 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 4.17). In terms of performance in individual subject areas, the strongest aggregate performance by students nationally was in the area of Home Economics, in which their achievements correspond to just below a Higher Level "C" grade. The average achievement of urban students in Home Economics corresponds to just above a grade "E" on a Higher Level paper, or a grade "B" on an Ordinary Level paper. The strongest performance by urban students was in Geography and Business Studies, in each of which they received an average of between a Higher Level "E" and a Higher Level "D" grade. Despite a strong performance relative to other subjects by urban students in these areas, their achievements are poorer than those of students nationally, whose achievements may be thought of as an average of between a grade "C" and a grade "D" on a Higher Level paper.

At the lower end of the performance scale, the poorest overall performances among both student groups were in Irish and Mathematics. Among students in the urban cohort, Irish, followed by Mathematics, attracted the lowest aggregate OPS score when compared with all other subjects, whereas students nationally performed at the same level in both subjects. The OPS scores of urban students in Irish and Mathematics correspond to an average of almost a grade "D" at Ordinary Level, or to an "A" grade at Foundation Level. Students nationally achieved an average of almost an "E" grade at Higher Level, or an "B" grade at Ordinary Level. It is in these subject areas that the largest discrepancies in performance between urban students and students nationally occurred. Another subject area in which the performance of students in both groups was weak relative to other subjects was French. It is of interest that two of the three subjects in which the lowest OPS scores were recorded among urban students and students nationally were in the area of languages.

Table 4.40. Mean OPS score for urban 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	**Urban students**	**All students nationally**
English	7.3 (2.0) (*N*=712)	8.7 (1.8) (*N*=65,447)
Irish	5.7 (2.1) (*N*=681)	7.9 (2.3) (*N*=63,328)
Mathematics	5.8 (2.1) (*N*=710)	7.9 (2.3) (*N*=65,423)
History	7.8 (2.1) (*N*=643)	9.4 (1.9) (*N*=60,379)
Geography	8.2 (1.8) (*N*=620)	9.7 (1.6) (*N*=60,728)
Science	7.8 (1.9) (*N*=549)	9.1 (1.9) (*N*=56,308)
French	7.1 (1.9) (*N*=426)	9.0 (1.9) (*N*=47,107)
Business Studies	8.2 (1.8) (*N*=396)	9.4 (1.7) (*N*=43,950)
Home Economics	8.1 (1.8) (*N*=303)	9.8 (1.6) (*N*=22,369)
Art, Craft & Design	7.5 (2.0) (*N*=273)	9.0 (2.1) (*N*=23,293)

4.6 OVERVIEW OF THE JUNIOR CERTIFICATE PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN THE URBAN COHORT

Students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools, on average, took a slightly smaller number of subjects in the 1997 Junior Certificate Examination than did students nationally. They also took, on average, more subjects at Foundation and Ordinary Level, and fewer subjects at Higher Level than their national counterparts. The proportion of female students from urban schools that took Mathematics at Foundation Level (43.8%) was much greater than that of males (31.9%), while similar proportions of males and females took Foundation Level English and Irish. This gender difference in uptake of subjects at Foundation Level contrasts with the picture at national level, where greater proportions of boys took the Foundation Level option in all three subject areas. At the

other end of the scale, greater proportions of male students from urban schools took subjects at Higher Level in comparison with female students. This pattern is also at odds with the national data, where female candidates took a greater number of subjects at Higher Level. Some subjects were more popular among urban students than among the national population of candidates. For example, Home Economics and Art, Craft and Design were taken by greater proportions of urban students than by students nationally, while smaller proportions of these students sat papers in French, Business Studies, Science, and Geography.

There is a substantial difference in the overall examination performance (based on the best seven subjects) of urban students and those in the national population, with the groups respectively achieving mean Overall Performance Scale (OPS) scores of 53.7 and 65.3. This difference is quite large. An OPS of 65.3 (achieved by students nationally) may be thought of as slightly better than an average of a "D" grade at Higher Level, or an "A" grade at Ordinary Level, on each of a student's best seven papers. The average OPS score achieved by students in the urban cohort, on the other hand, corresponds to slightly less than an average of an "E" grade at Higher Level (or a "B" grade at Ordinary Level), on each of their best seven papers. Therefore, there is an average difference of more than one grade between students nationally and those in the urban cohort on each of a student's best seven papers. This finding is consistent with the view that students in the urban cohort originated in primary schools which cater for pupils who were educationally disadvantaged. The finding also serves to validate the notion that the schools currently participating in *Breaking the Cycle* serve high concentrations of disadvantaged pupils.

Gender differences in overall performance were observed in the national population of candidates, where female students achieved a higher mean OPS score based on their best seven subjects (OPS=66.9) than did males (OPS=63.7). However, there was no discernible difference between the mean OPS score of female students (OPS=53.9) and male students (OPS= 53.6) in the urban cohort. Thus, while the relatively weak performance of these students as a group is acknowledged, it seems that females who originated in *Breaking the Cycle* schools may be under-performing when their Junior Certificate performance is compared to females 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 students from *Breaking the Cycle* schools 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 as disadvantaged. At the time of taking the JCE, 87.9% of students who had attended *Breaking the Cycle* schools, 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. In both groups, 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 students enrolled in schools that were not designated. These characteristics that are associated with disadvantaged status of school attended applied equally to students who had attended *Breaking the Cycle* schools and to students in the national population.

5. SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF URBAN SCHOOLS OVER THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF THE SCHEME

Since the inception of the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme in 1996, questionnaires have been distributed annually to principal teachers in the 33 participating urban schools, 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 home and school, and principals' views of the impact of the scheme on pupils. This section of the report focuses on theses issues, and is based on data collected annually. The response rate in each year was very high: all school principals in 1997, 96.9% in 1998, and all principals in 1999 returned questionnaires. In reporting the data, particular emphasis is placed on establishing whether or nor there is an association between participation in the scheme and perceived improvements and benefits to schools and pupils in important areas of school life.

5.1 SCHOOL ORGANISATION

The section on school organisation in annually distributed questionnaires asked principals for details about various administration practices, such as staff meetings, school development planning and communication structures in their schools. Information was also sought on the availability and organisation of remedial teaching and the number of sub-committees established in schools for various purposes.

Staff Meetings

Principals reported the frequency with which whole staff meetings were held in their schools in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99. Table 5.1 shows the percentage of schools that held meetings at varying frequencies each year. All schools held staff meetings which were most commonly held once a month (66.7% of schools in 1995/96, 84.4% in 1997/98 and 84.8% in 1998/99). There was an increase in the frequency with which meetings were held following the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle* scheme, as a higher proportion of schools held meetings once a month/once a week in 1997/98 (84.8%) and 1998/99 (90.3%) than in 1995/96 (66.7%).

Table 5.1. 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*=33)	0	6.1	27.3	66.7	0
1997/98 (*N*=31)	0	0	9.7	87.1	3.2
1998/99 (*N*=33)	0	0	15.2	84.8	0

*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 year and third years of the scheme referred to the current situation in the schools that year (i.e. 1997/98 and 1998/99).

The average duration of staff meetings was approximately 1.86 hours (1hr 52 mins) and the most common duration was two hours (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2. Mean duration of staff meetings (in hours) in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	Mean	*SD*	Mode
1995/96	1.81	0.34	2
1997/98	1.87	0.35	2
1998/99	1.92	0.36	2

Principals were asked to indicate the percentage of staff meeting time devoted to administrative/management matters and pedagogical matters. In 1995/96, staff meeting time was divided approximately equally between administrative (48.48% of time) and pedagogical matters (54.48% of time). By 1997/98 (the second year of the scheme), on average, more time was devoted to pedagogical matters (55.23%) than to administrative matters (44.45%) (Table 5.3). Similarly in 1998/99, pedagogical issues took up 54.59% of meeting time, while administration and management issues took up 45.41% of time.

Table 5.3. 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	48.48	(22.01)	44.45	(20.74)	45.41	(20.74)
Pedagogical Matters	51.48	(21.99)	55.23	(20.59)	54.59	(20.74)

Sub-committees

Principals were asked to give details of any sub-committees or working groups which were established to address specific needs within their school. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 present details

of the number and purpose of the working groups, as well as the number of teachers involved in each group and the modal frequency with which meetings took place.

In total, 26 schools had set up at least one such working group, which consisted of various members of the school staff (Table 5.4). Twenty-two schools (66.7%) had curricular planning groups (37 groups in total) that were concerned with the development of programmes in areas such as language, art and craft, and music. There were six teachers, on average, in these groups, which typically met once or twice a month. Nine schools (27.3%) (12 groups in total) had also set up sub-committees to deal with management and administration matters and school planning. The management groups had an average of five members and meetings took place as required or once or twice a month. A further seven schools had committees to address individual school problems, such as discipline, bullying, educational disadvantage and the weight of school bags. The majority of these groups met on a monthly basis. Several schools had groups of teachers that met to assist the implementation of various programmes such as Stay Safe and P.A.L. (Parent Assisted Learning). The specialised teachers in two other schools (remedial teachers and HSCL co-ordinators) had formed working groups to address their specific needs. Finally, other sub-committees were concerned with issues such as pupil profiling.

Table 5.4. Numbers and percentage of schools that had sub-committees established for various purposes and the average number of teachers in each type of committee and the frequency with which meetings took place in 1998/99 (*N*=26).

Category	**No of schools**	**% of schools**	**No of groups**
Curricular planning (e.g., language development programmes, Art & Craft, music) / class teachers meeting	22	66.7	37
Admin/ management matters/ school planning / facilities / policy making group	9	27.3	12
Committees to address other specific problems / (discipline, assessment, educational disadvantage)	7	21.2	9
R.S.E/ Stay Safe / P.A.L.	6	18.2	7
Specialised personnel (remedial teachers, HSCL co-ordinators)	2	6.1	2
Other	7	21.2	7

Table 5.5. The mean number of teachers in various categories of sub-committees and modal frequency with which committees met (*N*=26).

Category	Average number of members	Modal frequency of meetings
Curricular planning (e.g. language development programmes, Art & Craft, music) / class teachers meeting	6	Once or twice a month
Admin/ management matters/ school planning / facilities / policy making group	5	As req'd or once or twice a month
Committees to address other specific problems / (discipline, assessment, educational disadvantage)	4	Once a month
R.S.E/ Stay Safe / P.A.L.	2	Once or twice a month
Specialised personnel (remedial teachers, HSCL co-ordinators)	3	As req'd or weekly
Other	5	Once a month

Remedial Teaching

All urban schools had access to a remedial teacher in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99. Table 5.6 presents details of how remedial teaching of pupils was organised in schools over this period. In the majority of schools, pupils were withdrawn from their classes for remedial education (57.6% in 1995/96, 78.2% in 1997/98 and 87.8% in 1998/99). In 1995/96 and 1997/98, pupils were most likely to have been withdrawn for individual remedial instruction, while in 1998/99 pupils were more likely to have received instruction in small groups.

In no schools in 1995/96 and 1997/98 and in only two schools (6.1%) in 1998/99 had remedial teachers worked exclusively with pupils in their regular classes. Remedial teachers in 28.1% of schools in 1995/96 and 30.3% in 1997/98 used a combination of working with pupils in their regular classes and withdrawing them from the classroom for individual instruction. However, only one school (3.1%) in 1998/99 indicated that remedial education in their school was organised this way.

A higher proportion of principals in 1998/99 than in 1995/96 or 1997/98 reported that pupils from their schools were withdrawn from classes for instruction in small groups, while fewer indicated that individual instruction took place both within and outside the classroom (Table 5.6). However, in 1998/99, principals were specifically asked whether pupils were withdrawn for group instruction, whereas in previous years this option was not available, and the response option 'a combination of withdrawing pupils from regular classes and working

in regular classes' was subsumed under the "other" category. Therefore, the differences shown may reflect the extent to which principals' answers to items were affected by the response options available to them, rather than a change in the organisation of remedial teaching in 1998/99.

Table 5.6. Percentage of principals indicating how the remedial teaching of pupils was organised in their schools in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1995/96	**1997/98***	**1998/99**
	% schools (*N*=33)	**% schools** (*N*=32)	**% schools** (*N*=33)
Pupils are always withdrawn from classes for: -individual instruction	48.5%	68.8%	9.1%
-instruction in small groups	9.1%	6.3%	63.6%
-combination of individual and group work	-	3.1%	12.1%
Remedial teacher works with pupils in their regular classes	0	0	6.1%
A combination of individual instruction *inside* and *outside* the classroom	30.3%	28.0%	3.1%
Other	0	3.1%	9.1%

* Columns sum to greater than 100% as 3 principals chose 2 options.
- this 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 important priority areas in their school were identified. In 1998/99, principals were asked to indicate the frequency with which they and their staff developed the action plan for their school. Overall, school staffs worked on their plan on a regular basis (Table 5.7). Seventy percent of staffs worked on their plan either once a term or once a month, while 9.1% referred to it at least once a week. However, a fifth of schools developed their plan only once or twice a year.

Table 5.7. Frequency with which principals and staff work on / develop the action plan for their school which was developed under *Breaking the Cycle* (*N*= 33).

	Never	Once or twice a year	Once a term	Once a month	Once a week	More than once a week
Number	0	7	10	13	2	1
%	-	21.2	30.3	39.4	6.1	3.0

The vast majority (97%) of principals and staff referred to their school development plan during formal staff meetings. Sixty percent of schools also had working groups that referred regularly to the school's action plan and a further 70% consulted their plan during informal meetings such as staff room discussions. Other schools referred to their development plan during inservice planning days and during other prearranged meetings (e.g., at meetings between the principal and vice-principal) (Table 5.8).

Table 5.8. Context in which principals and staff refer to their school action plan for *Breaking the Cycle* during 1998/99 (*N*=33).

	Number of schools	Percentage of schools
During formal staff meetings	32	97.0
At working group level	20	60.6
At an informal level (e.g. staff room discussions)	23	69.7
Other	8	24.2

Communication System

One important characteristic of a school's organisation is the quality of the school's communication system and the extent to which information is disseminated efficiently. To evaluate the communication structures in *Breaking the Cycle* schools, principals were asked to rate the system of communication in their school as it had been prior to the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle* and at the time of completing the questionnaire in 1998/99. Overall, principals reported an improvement. As shown in Table 5.9, only 12.5% of principals reported that communication in their school prior to *Breaking the Cycle* had been 'very good' and 25% stated that it had been 'quite good'. A further 15.6% of principals actually recalled that communications had been 'quite poor' before the introduction of the scheme. In contrast, over one-third (36.4%) perceived the system of communication in their school in 1998/99 to be 'very good', with a further 25% reporting that it was 'quite good'. Notably none of the principals reported that communication systems in their school in 1998/99 were 'quite poor' or 'very poor' (Table 5.9).

Table 5.9. Numbers and percentages of principals who rated the system of communication in their school from very poor to very good, prior to the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle* and in their school in 1998/99.

How would you rate the system of communication in your school *prior to the introduction of Breaking the Cycle* ? *(N*=32).					
	Very poor	Quite poor	Moderate	Quite good	Very good
Number	0	5	15	8	4
%	-	15.6	46.9	25.0	12.5
How would you rate the system of communication in your school *currently*? (*N*=33).					
	Very poor	Quite poor	Moderate	Quite good	Very good
Number	0	0	4	17	12
%	-	-	12.1	51.5	36.4

5.2 ATTENDANCE

School attendance data were analysed to determine whether 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 attenders, and the number of pupils referred to officials for poor attendance each year.

In total there were 7,835 pupils enrolled in all 33 urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools in 1995/96, 6,897 in 1996/97, 7,180 in 1997/98, and 6,704 in 1998/99 (Table 5.10). Schools had an average enrolment of 221 pupils on 30/9/95, 209 pupils on 30/9/96, 217 pupils on 30/9/97, and 203 pupils on 30/9/98 (Table 5.10). There were considerable variations in the sizes of schools; for example, on the 30/9/98 there were 30 pupils in the smallest school compared to 507 in the largest school.

Table 5.10. Total and mean school enrolment on 30/9/95, 30/9/96, 30/9/97 and 30/9/98 (*N*=33).

	Total school enrolment	Mean	SD	Mode	Range
30/9/95	7,835	221.1	150.8	103	36 - 590
30/9/96	6,897	209.0	138.4	67*	26 - 517
30/9/97	7,180	217.0	147.6	86	31 - 544
30/9/98	6,704	203.2	139.7	108*	30 - 507

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

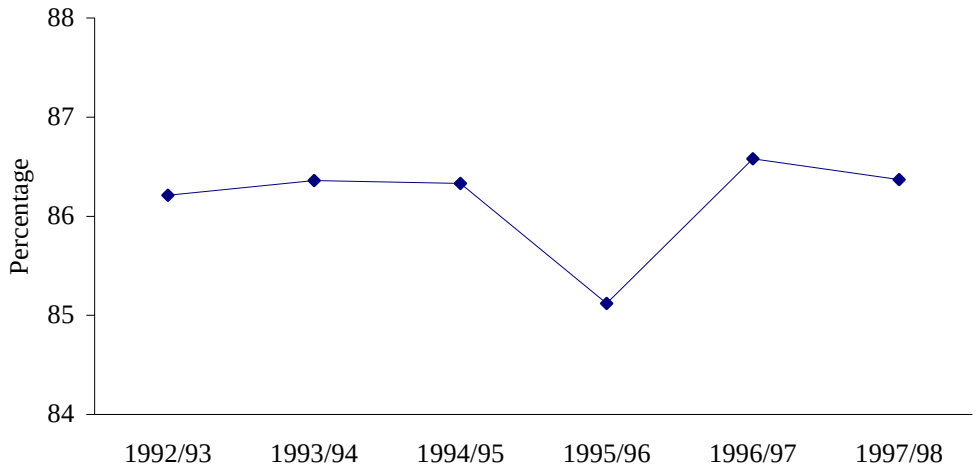
Principals were asked to report the mean attendance rate in their schools for the years 1992/93 to 1997/98. Over the six-year period the average attendance remained relatively stable at approximately 86% (Table 5.11 and Figure 5.1). Since the introduction of the scheme in 1996, the annual attendance rate has increased slightly, from 85.12% of pupils in 1995/96 to 86.37% in 1997/98, and was at a peak in 1996/97 at 86.58%.

The daily attendance rates in all Dublin City schools in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98, as compiled by the School Attendance Committees, were 91%, 90%, and 91% respectively (Ireland, 1994, 1995, 1996). Hence, the average rate of attendance in urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools from 1994 to 1998 was consistently below the average rate of attendance in Dublin schools during this period.

Table 5.11. Mean annual percentage school attendance rates in urban schools from 1992 to 1998.

	1992/93	**1993/94**	**1994/95**	**1995/96**	**1996/97**	**1997/98**
Mean Annual Percentage Attendance	86.21%	86.36%	86.33%	85.12%	86.58%	86.37%
SD	4.92	4.72	3.64	4.54	3.74	4.09
Mode	85.0	89.0	88.0	84.0	89.0	85.0

Figure 5.1. Mean annual percentage attendance in schools from 1992/93 to 1997/98.



School principals were asked to indicate the number of pupils in their school who were brought to the attention of School Attendance Officers (SAO)/Gardaí for non-attendance at school and the number of pupils against whom legal proceedings were brought for poor attendance each year. Schools had referred 566 pupils (approximately 7% of total pupil population) to School Attendance Officers or Gardaí for low attendance in 1995/96

(Table 5.12). In 1996/97, only half that number, 216 pupils (3.32%), were referred to officials for absenteeism. The following year, however, the number had increased to 359 pupils (5.25%).

Table 5.12. 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	566	7.22
1996/97	216	3.32
1997/98	359	5.25

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

Only 40 pupils (0.51% of total school population) in 1995/96, 29 pupils (0.44% of population) in 1996/97, and 46 pupils (0.67%) in 1997/98 had legal proceedings instituted against them under the School Attendance Act of 1926 (Table 5.13).

In all three years, there were considerable differences between the number of pupils referred to school attendance officers and the number of pupils against whom legal proceedings were brought. There were 566 referrals and 40 legal proceedings in 1995/96, 216 referrals and 29 legal proceedings in 1996/97, and 359 referrals and 46 legal proceedings in 1997/98 (Table 5.13). When pupils are referred to attendance officers their parents are issued with a statutory warning, which informs them that continued failure to ensure regular attendance of their children at school may result in the initiation of legal proceedings under the School Attendance Act (School Attendance Department Report, 1997). Apparently oftentimes this caution leads to an improvement in attendance and no further action is necessary.

Table 5.13. Number of pupils who had legal proceedings instituted against them under the School Attendance Act (1926) and the number of pupils who were referred to SAO / Gardaí for low attendance during 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

	Legal Proceedings		Referrals	
	Number	%*	Number	%*
1995/96	40	0.51	566	7.22
1996/97	29	0.48	216	3.32
1997/98	46	0.67	359	5.25

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

LOW ATTENDERS

Tables 5.14, 5.15, 5.16 and 5.17 present data on the number of very low attenders in schools during the four quarters of 1995/96, 1996/97, and 1997/98. Table 5.14 shows details of the number of pupils who attended less than 10 days during the first quarter of each school year, while Tables 5.15 to 5.17 give the total number of pupils who attended less than 25 days during the other three quarters of each year. 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 transferred to or from another school.

During the first quarter of 1995/96, 207 pupils in total attended less than 10 school days (Table 5.14). The following two years, 126 pupils and 129 pupils attended less than 10 days during the first term of the year. After subtracting the number of ill pupils and transferees during the period from the total number of very low attenders, it is possible to gauge the number of pupils who were absent from school without permission. Over the three years, the total number of pupils who were absent without consent and attended less than 10 school days decreased considerably, from 107 pupils in 1995/96, to only 51 pupils in 1996/97 and 69 pupils in 1997/98. The mean number of chronic low attenders per school also fell from 2.66 pupils in 1995/96, to only 0.93 in 1996/97, but increased again to 1.58 pupils the following year (1997/98) (Table 5.14).

Table 5.14. Number of all pupils, transfers and ill pupils who attended 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*=33)	Total	6.27	207
	-less transfers	2.69	78
	-less ill pupils	0.92	23
	Remainder	**2.66**	**107**
1996/97 (*N*=32)	Total	4.06	126
	-less transfers	2.25	54
	-less ill pupils	0.88	21
	Remainder	**0.93**	**51**
1997/98 (*N*=33)	Total	4.30	129
	-less transfers	1.86	41
	-less ill pupils	0.86	19
	Remainder	**1.58**	**69**

From Tables 5.15, 5.16, and 5.17 it can be seen that, in total, between 195 and 242 pupils in 1959/96; between 148 and 190 pupils in 1996/97, and between 78 and 84 pupils in 1997/98 attended less than 25 school days during the second and third quarters of each school year. Low attendance was higher during the last quarter of each year, when 217 pupils, 200 pupils and 156 pupils in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98 respectively, attended school for less than 25 days (Table 5.17).

Table 5.15. Number of all pupils, transfers and ill pupils who attended 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*=33)	Total	8.07	242
	-less transfers	3.93	114
	-less ill pupils	0.82	18
	Remainder	**3.32**	**110**
1996/97 (*N*=32)	Total	6.13	190
	-less transfers	2.58	80
	-less ill pupils	1.16	36
	Remainder	**2.39**	**74**
1997/98 (*N*=33)	Total	4.36	144
	-less transfers	1.33	44
	-less ill pupils	0.48	16
	Remainder	**2.55**	**84**

Over the three years the rate of absenteeism decreased marginally. Furthermore, when one takes into account those pupils who were absent without permission the rate of absenteeism is lower. Table 5.18 shows the number of pupils who attended less than 25 school days, who did not transfer and were not ill, during the last three quarters of school years 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98. In 1995/96, between 2.61 and 3.88 pupils per school (depending on the quarter) attended less than 25 school days during the last three quarters of the school year. In comparison, between 1.97 pupils and 3.42 pupils per school in 1996/97 and between 2.36 and 3.42 pupils in 1997/98 were frequently absent from school.

Table 5.16. Number of all pupils, transfers and ill pupils who attended 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*=33)	Total	6.29	195
	-less transfers	3.07	92
	-less ill pupils	0.61	14
	Remainder	**2.61**	**89**
1996/97 (*N*=32)	Total	4.77	148
	-less transfers	2.06	64
	-less ill pupils	0.81	25
	Remainder	**1.90**	**59**
1997/98 (*N*=33)	Total	4.30	142
	-less transfers	1.70	56
	-less ill pupils	0.24	8
	Remainder	**2.36**	**78**

Table 5.17. Number of all pupils, transfers and ill pupils who attended 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*=33)	Total	7.23	217
	-less transfers	2.27	59
	-less ill pupils	1.08	27
	Remainder	**3.88**	**131**
1996/97 (*N*=32)	Total	6.45	200
	-less transfers	2.19	68
	-less ill pupils	0.84	26
	Remainder	**3.42**	**106**
1997/98 (*N*=33)	Total	4.73	156
	-less transfers	1.06	35
	-less ill pupils	0.39	13
	Remainder	**3.28**	**108**

Table 5.18. Number and percentages of pupils who attended less than 25 days of school, who did not transfers or were not ill during the last three quarters of school years 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98, in schools.

	2nd Quarter	**3rd Quarter**	**4th Quarter**	**Mean**
	Total number	Total number	Total number	
1995/96	110	89	131	110
1996/97	74	59	106	80
1997/98	84	78	108	90

In summary, average annual attendance rates in *Breaking the Cycle* urban schools remained relatively stable (at 86%) following the introduction of the scheme. The rate of attendance was approximately 4% below the rate of attendance in Dublin City schools during 1996 to 1998. However, only a minority of pupils each year was referred to School Attendance Officers for non-attendance. Furthermore, the number of pupils referred to officials decreased from 7% of pupils in the year before the introduction of the scheme (1995/96), to 3% in 1996/97 and 5% in 1997/98. The number of pupils against whom legal proceedings were brought also decreased, and each year only a small proportion of pupils referred to officials had proceedings instituted against them.

The rate of low attendance improved, however, during the two years following the commencement 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 5.18). 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 and 1997/98 compared to 1995/96.

5.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS

Principals were asked about the use of, and need for, psychological assessment of their pupils. 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 schools may be inadequate due to factors such as availability of assessments and the length of time between referral and assessments, principals were also asked to estimate the percentage of pupils whom they believed were in need of psychological assessment.

Principals reported that 6.69% of pupils on the 1996/97 school rolls, 7.13% of pupils on the 1997/98 school rolls, and 10.91% of pupils in 1998/99 had been assessed by a psychologist (Table 5.19). However, the percentage of pupils that principals believed were in need of assessment (16.9% in 1996/97, 18.69% in 1997/98 and 20.73% in 1998/99) was approximately 10% greater than the percentage who had been actually assessed in each year. Furthermore, despite an increase in the percentage of pupils who were assessed each year, the difference between the percentage of pupils principals believed were in need of assessment and the percentage who were actually assessed remained stable over the three-year period.

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. Hence, pupils in *Breaking the Cycle* schools had a relatively high rate of assessment compared to the national average.

Table 5.19. Percentage of pupils in 1996/97,1997/98 and 1998/99 who were psychologically assessed and the percentage principals believed need assessment.

	% Assessed		% Needing assessment	
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
1996/97	6.69	5.38	16.90	12.90
1997/98	7.13	5.31	18.69	13.89
1998/99	10.91	13.23	20.73	16.26

In 1998/99, principals were asked to indicate the three main reasons (in order of importance) pupils from their schools had been referred for psychological assessment. As shown in Table 5.20, the three most common reasons were poor academic performance, behavioural problems and a specific learning disability. Over 70% of school principals indicated a main reason for referring pupils was poor academic performance (over 50% indicated that this was the most important reason). Seventy percent of principals also reported that pupils were referred for assessment when they exhibited behavioural problems or were disruptive or withdrawn in class (39% indicated that this was the second most important reason for referral).

Almost 60% of schools referred pupils for psychological consultation to diagnose a specific learning difficulty or to identify an appropriate intervention (30% of schools reported that this was the third most important reason for referral). A further fifth of schools reported that pupils in their school who were emotionally disturbed were referred for assessment. In other schools pupils were referred if they had poor language skills, if their parents had requested an assessment or to determine an appropriate placement in a special school or class (Table 5.20).

Table 5.20. Percentages of schools who gave various reasons why they referred pupils for psychological assessment in 1998/99 (*N*=33).

Category	1st Reason %	2nd Reason %	3rd Reason %	Total %
General low academic performance / lack of progress / below class standard	51.5	18.2	3.0	72.7
Behavioural problems / disruptive child/ withdrawn child	18.2	39.4	12.1	69.7
Specific learning difficulty / to diagnose specific learning difficulty / identify appropriate intervention	15.2	12.1	30.3	57.6
Emotionally disturbed	-	6.1	15.2	21.2
Poor language / verbal ability / reading problems	3.0	6.1	3.0	12.1
To identify an appropriate placement in a special school or class	6.1	6.1	0	12.1
Parents requested assessment	0	3.0	3.0	6.1
Other	0	0	9.1	9.1

Principals were asked to give details of pupils referred for assessment in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98, by grade and by gender (Tables 5.21 and 5.22). Referrals and assessments are presented as a percentage of the total (male and female) class population at each class level. Almost five percent of the total school population were referred for psychological assessment in 1995/96, compared to only 3.86 in 1996/97 and 4.08% in 1997/98 (Table 3). Referrals were most common in junior classes. They were most frequent in first class (7.67% of the total class population) and second class (8.11%) in 1995/96; in second (5.86%) and third class (6.69%) in 1996/97; and in first (6.4%) and second class (6.6%) in 1997/98.

Table 5.21. Numbers of boys and girls and as a percentage of total class population *referred* for assessment by grade in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

	1995/96			**1996/97**			**1997/98**		
	Total No of Referrals		% Total Pop**	Total No of Referrals		% Total Pop**	Total No of Referrals		% Total Pop**
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls	
ES	0	0	-	0	0	-	1	0	0.39%
JI	22	10	3.04%	10	5	1.55%	12	7	2.42%
SI	26	17	5.05%	32*	2	4.08%	16	13	3.8%
I	45	24	7.67%	30*	14	5.55%	35	19	6.4%
II	58	15*	8.11%	31	11	5.86%	32	18	6.6%
III	39	10*	5.21%	32	16	6.69%	21	24	6.3%
IV	30	13	4.59%	27	17	5.50%	14	22	5.2%
V	17	14	3.46%	21*	4	3.21%	9	18	3.6%
VI	9	6	1.65%	11	3	1.85%	4	9	1.6%
Other	2	4	15.38%	0	0	0	3	2	1.6%
Total	**248**	**113**	**4.98%**	**194**	**72**	**3.86%**	**147**	**132**	**4.08%**

**percentage of total class population in schools for which principals had completed the item and that had classes at the relevant level.

*significantly more boys than girls from these classes were referred for assessment

Table 5.22. Numbers of boys and girls and percentage of total class population *assessed* by grade in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.

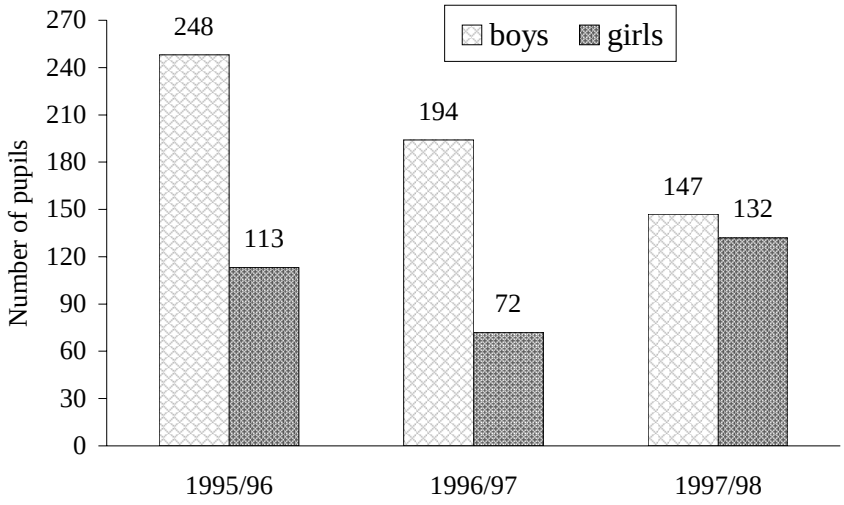
	1995/96			**1996/97**			**1997/98**		
	Total No of Assessments		% Total Pop**	Total No of Assessments		% Total Pop**	Total No of Assessments		% Total Pop**
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls	
ES	3	0	1.8%	0	0	0	0	0	0
JI	10	4	0.28%	9	2	1.14%	7	3	1.3%
SI	14	9	2.70%	20	2	2.64%	12	4	2.1%
I	27	18	5.01%	23	13	4.54%	24	9	3.9%
II	33	8	4.55%	25	8	3.89%	27	13	5.3%
III	32	12	4.68%	27	12	5.44%	70	15	11.9%
IV	12	9	2.24%	21	14	4.38%	9	23	4.6%
V	9	11	2.23%	13*	3	2.05%	9	15	3.2%
VI	5	5	1.1%	7	2	1.19%	4	9	1.6%
Other	0	3	7.69%	0	0	0	3	2	1.6%
Total	**145**	**79**	**2.94%**	**145**	**56**	**2.91%**	**165**	**93**	**2.87%**

** percentage of total class population in schools for which principals had completed the item and that had classes at the relevant level.

* significantly more boys than girls from these classes were referred for assessment

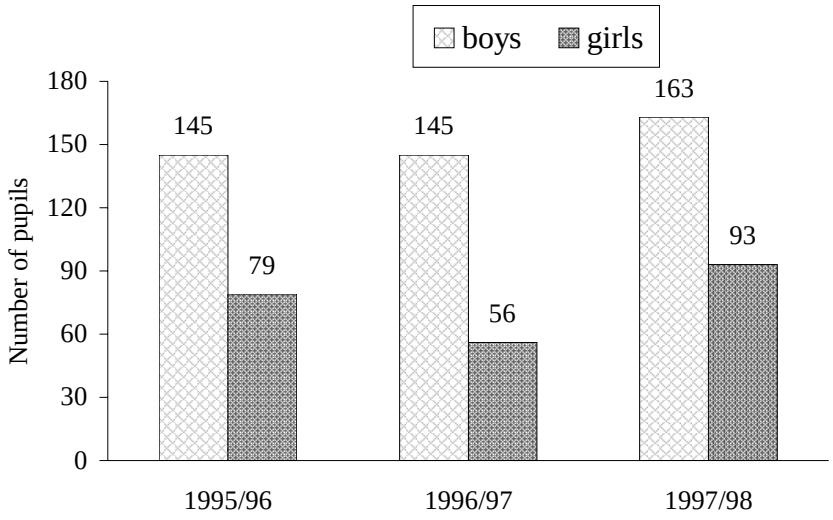
The number of boys referred to a psychologist far exceeded the number of girls in 1995/96 and 1996/97 (248 boys and 133 girls in 1995/96; 194 boys and 72 girls in 1996/97) (Figure 5.2). However in 1997/98, there was only a marginal difference between the mean number of boys and girls referred for assessment (147 boys; 132 girls). Further analysis revealed that the mean number of boys (7.5) referred was significantly greater than the mean number of girls (3.4) in 1995/96, (t = 2.23, df = 64, p<.05). Similarly in 1996/97, the mean number of boys (4.53) referred was significantly greater than the mean number of girls (1.75) (t= -2.52, df = 62, p< .05) (Figure 5.2). However, as mentioned above, the difference between the number of boys and girls referred for assessment in 1997/98 was not statistically significant.

Figure 5.2. Total numbers of boys and girls from *Breaking the Cycle* schools who were referred for psychological assessment in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.



Similarly, the number of boys assessed far exceeded the number of girls in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98 (145 boys and 79 girls in 1995/96; 145 boys and 56 girls in 1996/97; and 163 boys and 93 girls in 1997/98). The mean number of boys was found to be significantly greater than the mean number of girls assessed in 1996/97, (t = 2.72, df=62, p< .01). The differences between the number of boys and girls assessed in 1995/96 and 1997/98 were not (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3. Total number of boys and girls from *Breaking the Cycle* schools assessed by a psychologist in 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98.



Analysis at class level showed that in 1995/96 significantly more boys than girls from second and third class were referred for assessment (t = 2.38, df = 64, p<.05; t = 2.08, df = 64, p<.05). Likewise in 1996/97, significantly more boys than girls from Senior Infants, first

and fifth classes were referred for psychological assessment ($t = 3.15$, $df = 62$, $p<.01$; $t = 2.07$, $df = 62$, $p<.01$; $t = 2.05$, $df = 62$;,$p<.05$). Analysis also revealed that significantly more boys than girls from fifth class were assessed in 1996/97 ($t = 2.57$, $df = 62$, $p<.05$).

In the Special Education Review Committee survey, Martin and Hickey (1993) 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. Considering that principals indicated the three most common reasons from referring pupils for assessment were poor performance in school, behavioural problems and specific learning disabilities (Table 5.20), it seems likely that significantly more boys than girls in schools in the scheme are experiencing these difficulties.

As outlined above, approximately two-fifths of pupils referred for psychological assessment in 1995/96, a quarter referred in 1996/97, and 30% of in 1997/98 were not subsequently assessed. Principals were asked to give reasons for this. The most common reason was that pupils were still on waiting lists (85.5 % non-assessed cases in 1995/96; 89.7% cases in 1996/97; and 91.0% cases in 1997/98) (Table 5.23). A further 14% of pupils in 1995/96, 10.3% in 1996/97, and 4.5% in 1997/98 were not assessed because their parents/guardians had refused permission. However, only one pupil in 1995/96 and four pupils in 1997/98 were not assessed because the clinic or agency had refused to assess them. Several principals reported that pupils were not assessed because there was no educational psychologist appointed to their area or that the service could not meet the demand. Five principals indicated that the school had paid to have pupils assessed privately due to the inadequate service. Other schools mentioned restrictions on the psychological service; for example, one school had a quota of only four assessments per year. Martin and Hickey (1993) also reported that pupils were frequently accepted for assessment but 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 assessment in 1992 were not assessed because their parents or guardians had refused to give consent.

It appears from Table 5.23 that principals may have misunderstood the item regarding the reasons for non-assessment, as the total number of pupils not assessed for various reasons exceeds the number reported to have been referred but not assessed each year (5.21 and 5.22). It is possible that principals included 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 schools each year.

Table 5.23. 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 parent/guardians refused permission	19	7	2	6	2	2
the clinic/agency refused to assess them	1	0	0	0	3	1
they are still on the waiting list	107	52	49	21	37	44
Total	**127**	**59**	**51**	**27**	**42**	**47**

Principals were asked to indicate the outcome of assessments. The most common outcome in 1995/96 was that pupils were referred to a special school/class (47% of assessed pupils) (Table 5.23). Over three-tenths were referred back to their existing class. A further 15% were sent to a special school or class, but transfer did not take place and pupils actually returned to their ordinary class with support from a remedial teacher (Table 5.24). In 1996/97, over half the assessed pupils (51%) were referred to a special school/class but remained in their regular class and received specialised help from a remedial teacher. Another third (31.4%) were placed in a special school/class and the remaining pupils were referred back to their existing class.

Finally, in 1997/98, almost two-fifths (38%) of assessed pupils were referred to a special school or class but received support from a remedial teacher in their ordinary class. Almost 30% of pupils were sent to a special school or class and a further 30% were sent back to their regular class with no specialised help. Seven pupils were assigned to other treatments such as family counselling, residential care or help from a support teacher.

Over the three years there was a greater tendency for pupils to be receive specialised help within the classroom: 51% and 38% of pupils received help from a remedial teacher in their classroom in1996/97 and 1997/98 (respectively), compared to only 15% of assessed pupils in 1995/96. There was a corresponding reduction in the number of pupils placed in special schools or classes: 47% of assessed pupils in 1995/96, compared to 31% of pupils in 1996/97, and only 29.7% in 1997/98 (Table 5.24).

There are some discrepancies in the data, as the total number of pupils assigned to various treatments exceeds the number who were psychologically assessed. One possible explanation is that principals under-reported the number of referrals and assessments.

Another explanation is that principals incorrectly included pupils who were referred back to their existing class twice, once in option two (referred back to existing class) and once in option one (referred to a special school/class but remain in ordinary class with specialised help) which is a more detailed variant of option two.

Table 5.24. 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 to a special school/class, but remain in an ordinary class with: a) help from a remedial teacher	28	31	84	32	57	57
b) help from a resource teacher	2	48	6	1	3	2
c) no specialised help	7	5	0	0	2	0
2) referred back to existing class	53	31	20	14	42	41
3) sent to a special school/class	80	48	50	22	64	25
4) assigned another treatment*	-	-	-	-	3	4
TOTAL	**170**	**103**	**160**	**69**	**171**	**129**

* this option was not included in the item or responses were not classified into this particular category in 1995/96 and 1996/97.

Although the rate of psychological assessment of pupils in *Breaking the Cycle* schools from 1996 to 1999 was higher than the national average, the present psychological service being offered to the schools appears to be inadequate. In total, six *Breaking the Cycle* schools (18.2%) in 19995/96, 14 (42.4%) in 1996/97 and 5 (15.2%) in 1997/98 had no pupils psychologically assessed. Furthermore, differences between the proportion of pupils principals perceived to be in need of psychological assessment and the proportion who had been actually assessed each year were considerable. Moreover, it appears that the service cannot meet the demands imposed on it, as many pupils referred for assessment are placed on waiting lists. In fact, a number of principals indicated that there was no educational psychologist appointed to their area. Consequently, several schools are paying for pupils to be assessed by psychologists in private practice.

The psychological support service seems to be inadequate given the observation of the Special Education Review Committee (1992) that students who are educationally and socially disadvantaged (including children from travelling families) are likely to have special educational needs.

5.4 PARTICIPATION IN OTHER SCHEMES

In 1998/99, principals were asked whether their school was involved in various other schemes of the Department of Education and Science to combat educational disadvantage, namely the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme, the Early Start programme, the Teacher Counsellor Scheme and the 8-15-year old Early School Leavers Initiative (Pilot Project areas). Thirty-one schools were taking part in the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, 15 were involved in the Teacher Counsellor / Support Teacher scheme, and 12 were participating in the 8-15-year old Early School Leaver Initiative. However, only five urban *Breaking the Cycle* schools had an Early Start programme (Table 5.25).

Table 5.25. Numbers and percentages of schools involved in the HSCL scheme, the Early Start programme, the Teacher Counsellor scheme and the Early School Leavers initiative in 1998/99 (*N*=33).

Name of scheme	Number of schools	% of schools
Home School Community Liaison Scheme	31	93.9
Early Start	5	15.2
Teacher Counsellor/ Support Teacher Scheme	16*	48.5
8-15 Year Old Early School Leaver Initiative (Pilot Project Areas)	7	21.2

* Sixteen principals indicated that they were involved with the teacher Counsellor scheme, although Departmental records show that only fifteen *Breaking the Cycle* schools are participating in the scheme.

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 they were asked to describe schemes aimed at disadvantaged pupils, some may have included more general schemes.

In total, 20 schools (60.6%) were involved in other local or national schemes. Fifteen schools participated in one other scheme, the remaining five schools participated in two or more schemes. Table 5.26 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. In cases where principals did not describe the initiatives in sufficient detail, the relevant agencies were contacted for further information.

Nine principals (21.2%) said that their schools were involved in early school leaving prevention projects aimed at educationally disadvantaged pupils in their schools. Other agencies (e.g., Department of Justice, Barnardos, Gardaí) and Area Partnerships (e.g., Tallaght Partnership) were involved in many of these projects.

Third and fifth class pupils in one school, who had been identified as being at risk of early school leaving, participated in a scheme which was co-ordinated by a multi-disciplinary team. As part of the scheme, a support teacher engaged in one-to-one and co-operative tuition with participating pupils and a psychologist was available for counselling sessions. In addition, a youth worker organised after-school activities for pupils and visited pupils' homes regularly. In cases of prolonged absenteeism the youth worker worked with children in their home.

The prevention project in another *Breaking the Cycle* school involved potential early school leavers pupils in fifth class. This initiative was primarily concerned with providing marginalised children with a range of supports that would increase the likelihood of their remaining in school. Parents were seen as a key element in the project and were encouraged to participate fully in the education of their children. For example, parents were contacted when pupils did not attend school. Activities for pupils included a homework club, summer programmes and additional P.E., computer, art and craft, and art therapy classes.

Fifth class pupils in another school who had been identified as having the potential to succeed in school took part in an early school leavers prevention project. The aim of the project was to raise pupils' aspirations and to provide them with the extra support they needed to do well in school. Parents of participating pupils were encouraged to help their children in their transition from primary to secondary school. Various courses and social activities were arranged for both pupils and parents.

One principal reported that a crime prevention programme had been established in the school. Fifth and sixth class pupils with a history of crime in their families and who were at risk of early school leaving took part in the programme. A reward system for improvements in attendance, behaviour and homework was in operation in the school. Participants also took part in various extra-curricular activities such as drama and cooking, and the co-ordinator of the project visited the pupils' homes regularly to deal with specific problems. Three other principals indicated that there were early school leavers prevention schemes in operation in their schools, but did not specify the nature of the schemes.

Two schools were involved in projects that were concerned with the personal development of pupils. One aimed to develop the social and personal skills of sixth class pupils and their parents. The other focused on developing the emotional skills of first class pupils. In particular, this scheme sought to develop pupils' ability to understand how their behaviour affects others, to expand their emotional vocabulary and to improve their self-

esteem. A local clinic provided the services of a consultant psychologist free of charge to participating pupils. It also provided training and support in the implementation of the project.

Three 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 one of these schools also attended an after-school activities club. Two other *Breaking the Cycle* schools were participating in computer pilot projects. One of the projects was designed to introduce pupils to all aspects of Information Technology and to develop their computing skills. The other project was concerned with integrating the use of computers into the school curriculum. As part of this project, the participating school was equipped with state of the art computer equipment and various educational software titles. Ongoing technical and administrative support was also available to the participating school and pupils, and teachers attended specialised I.T. training courses.

Two principals reported that they were involved in local environmental projects, while another indicated that their school had been involved in a community forum to evaluate educational needs in the area. A pre-school had been set-up in another *Breaking the Cycle* school, in conjunction with the Eastern Health Board.

One school was involved in a community-based scheme which aimed to combat educational disadvantage and to improve home, school, and community working relationships in the locality. More specifically, the scheme sought to address the problem of school absenteeism, to develop basic literacy skills among young people, to broaden the school curriculum and to provide parents with support to enable them to be involved in their childrens' education and to provide schools with additional resources.

Finally, three schools were participating in the Dublin Inner City Primary Schools Initiative. The Primary Schools Initiative was established to improve the experience of school for pupils and to broaden the curriculum to meet pupils' needs. The initiative also attempted to reduce the isolation encountered by inner-city schools and to pool resources and experiences of the ten participating schools in a network. As part of the initiative, training programmes were organised for teachers and principals, who were given an opportunity to meet with one another to share ideas and good practice. Schools also received grants to improve facilities and purchase new equipment (e.g., computers).

Table 5.26. List of 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*=33).

Purpose of Initiative	No. of years	Annual grant
Early school leaver schemes		
Preventative early school leavers scheme for 2nd, 3rd and 5th class pupils. Activities include co-operative teaching, counselling sessions, after school events and home visits.	2	£20,000 - several schs
Pupils in 5th class are given extra support homework club/ after school activities, summer programmes, extra P.E., computers, drama and art therapy, employment of part-time parent support worker, organised events for parents.	1	£50,000
Targeted at 5th and 6th class pupils with a history of crime in their families. Co-ordinator meets weekly with pupils and engages in various activities. A reward system in operation. Co-ordinator visits homes frequently.	5	£500 from the Dept of Justice
Pilot project targeted at 5th class pupils who have the potential to succeed in school.		N/S*
To encourage pupils to remain in school	1	None
To work with children at risk of early school leaving.	1	None
To encourage pupils who are likely to leave school early	1.5	N/S
Personal development		
Project to enhance the personal development of 6th class pupils and their parents	2	N/S
Project aims to develop childrens' social and emotional skills of 1st class pupils through work with class teacher. A local clinic provides training and support in the implementation of the project.	1	N/S
Homework / after school activities clubs		
Children in need of extra assistance are identified and attend the homework and after school clubs. 3 schools	1-2	£3,200-£50,000
Information Technology Projects		
Aims to introduce pupils to I.T. to develop their computing skills and to enhance the school education programme	1	Initial grant £26,000
Aims to equip schools with multi-media computer equipment. Grant for computers and technical support	1.5	£2,000
Environmental projects		
Not specified	0.5	N/S
Parks/ landscaping project	1.5	N/S
Other		
Community forum - to evaluate and monitor the educational needs of the area	1	None
Pre- school established in school	12	£25,000 - £40,000
Network of inner-city schools - formed with the aim of improving the school experience for pupils in participating schools. Training, additional resources, pooling ideas contacts. 3 schools involved.	2	£5,000
Community based initiative to combat educational disadvantage. Aims to addresses absenteeism in schools, broaden the curriculum, improve literacy skills and provide support to parents and additional resources for schools.	2	CPA* pay for co-ordinator

* N/S - not specified. CPA - Combat Poverty Agency

5.5 HOME-SCHOOL LINKS

In annually distributed questionnaires, principals were asked about formal and informal contact between their schools and parents through Parents' 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 year 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

Only two-fifths (39.4%) of school principals reported that their school had a Parents' Association in 1995/96. By 1997/98 and 1998/99, parents' associations had been set up in over half the schools (17 schools each year) (Table 5.27).

Table 5.27. Numbers and percentages of schools which had a Parents' Association, in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	Number	Percentage
1995/96	13	39.4
1997/98	17	53.1
1998/99	17	51.5

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 5.28 presents details of 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 (including Early Start and 'Other' classes such as special or remedial classes). The percentages were calculated from the total number of schools that had pupils in the various grade levels and for which information was available.

The majority of schools in 1995/96, 1997/98, and 1998/99, held one-to-one meetings between parents and teachers of pupils in ordinary classes (Table 5.28 and Figure 5.4). In 1995/96, between approximately 76% and 91.7% of schools (depending on class level) had organised one-to-one parent-teacher meetings for ordinary classes. In 1997/98, between 75% and 87% of schools held pre-arranged parent-teacher meetings, while in 1998/99 between 75% and 91.3% of schools held such meetings. Meetings were most often arranged for parents of pupils in first class in 1995/96, third or fifth class in 1997/98 and first class in 1998/99.

The percentages of schools holding one-to-one parent teacher meetings for pupils in Early Start (40% in 1997/98 and 1998/99) and 'Other' classes (46.2% and 20% in 1995/96 and 1998/99) were considerably lower than for ordinary classes. However, it should be noted that these percentages are proportionate to the relatively few *Breaking the Cycle* schools that have Early Start or 'Other' classes. In total, only five schools in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99 had Early start classes and only 13 schools in 1995/96 and ten schools in 1997/98 and 1998/99 had special or remedial classes.

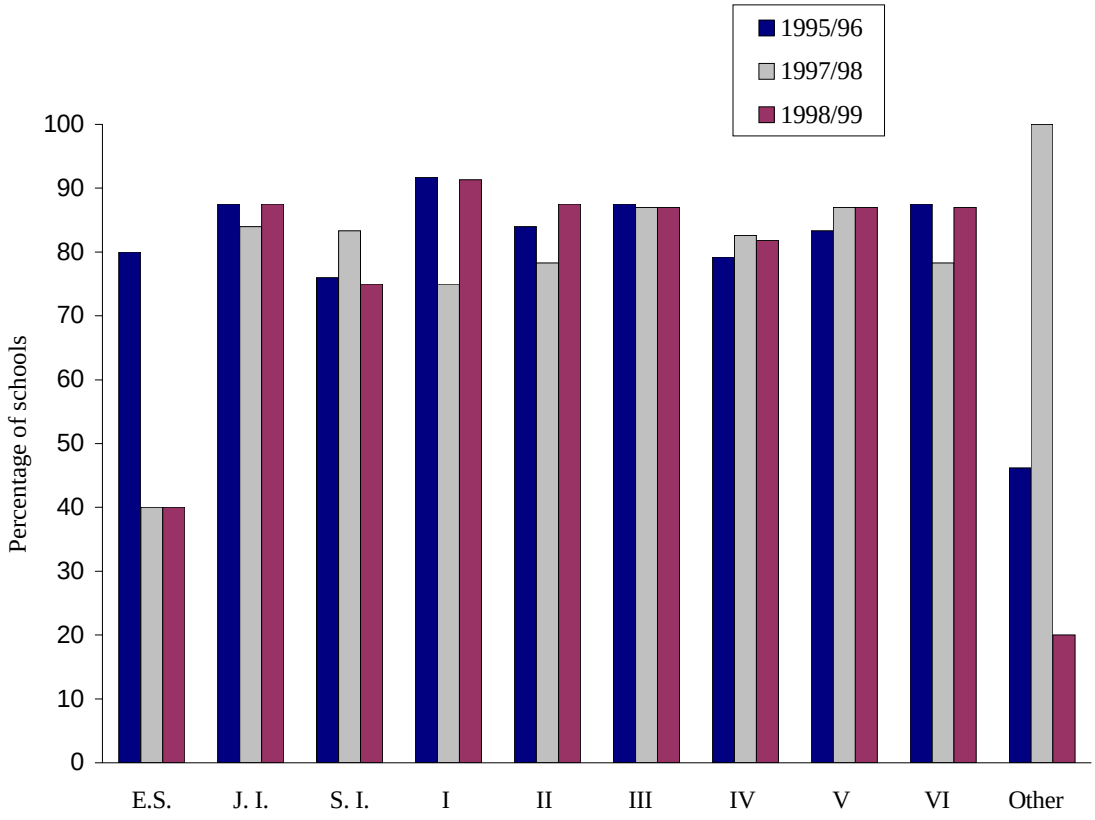
Table 5.28. Numbers and percentages of schools that had one or more one-to-one parent-teacher meetings, by grade, in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1995/96		**1997/98**		**1998/99**	
	No. of Schools	% Schools*	No. of Schools	% Schools*	No. of Schools	% Schools*
E.S.	4	80.0%	2	40.0%	2	40.0%
J. I.	21	87.5%	21	84.0%	21	87.5%
S. I.	19	76.0%	20	83.3%	18	75.0%
I	22	91.7%	18	75.0%	21	91.3%
II	21	84.0%	18	78.3%	21	87.5%
III	21	87.5%	20	87.0%	20	87.0%
IV	19	79.2%	19	82.6%	18	81.8%
V	20	83.3%	20	87.0%	20	87.0%
VI	21	87.5%	18	78.3%	20	87.0%
Other	6	46.2%	5	100%**	2	20.0%
Mean		78.0%		70.55%		73.74%

* Percentage of schools that had pupils at each grade level, for which information was available.
** Only five of the ten schools that had 'Other' classes completed the item.

Overall, the percentage of schools that held one-to-one meetings decreased from a mean of 84.58% across all standard grades (excluding Early Start and Other) in 1995/96 to 81.92% in 1997/98 and increased to 85.5% in 1998/99 (Table 5.28). However, the 1997/98 and 1998/99 figures were collected mid-year and so do not represent the told number of meetings held during the year.

Figure 5.4 Percentages of schools that held one-to-one meetings between parents and teachers, by grade, in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.



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 5.29, between 13% to 25% of those schools (depending on class level) that had not arranged meetings in the first half of 1997/98 indicated that they planned to do so before the end of the school year. Therefore, the number of schools that held, or were expecting to hold, parent-teacher meetings in 1997/98 (approximately 95%), was actually greater than the total number of schools that held these meetings in 1995/96 (84.58%). Likewise in 1998/99, between 4.2% and 29% 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.

In summary, approximately 84.58% of schools in 1995/96, 95% of schools in 1997/98 and 89.5% of schools in 1998/99 held, or were planning to hold, meetings between parents and teachers, where parents could discuss the progress of their children in school.

Table 5.29. 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*	Number	% of Schools*
Early Start	1	20.0	1	20.0
Junior Infants	4	16.0	7	29.2
Senior Infants	4	16.66	1	4.2
I	4	16.66	0	0
II	4	17.39	0	0
III	3	13.04	0	0
IV	4	17.39	0	0
V	3	13.04	0	0
VI	4	17.39	1	4.3
Other	0	0	0	0

* percentage of schools that had pupils at each grade level.

Parental attendance at one-to-one parent teacher meetings was quite high each year, with at least one parent attending for the majority of children. Principals reported that, on average, parents of 84% of pupils in 1995/96, 76.65% of pupils in 1997/98 and 82.55% in 1998/99 attended these meetings (Table 5.30). Attendance was considerably lower in 1997/98 than in 1995/96 or 1998/99. However, the average attendance in 1997/98, may have been skewed by the relatively low percentage of parents that attended Early Start (65%) and 'Other' class (50%) meetings. These low percentages are a function of the low number of schools that had these classes (only five schools had Early Start classes and ten schools had 'Other' classes). In fact, the average parental attendance by parents of pupils in the ordinary classes (excluding Early Start and other) was 81.44%, which is only slightly lower than the average attendance in 1995/96 (84%).

Table 5.30. 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**
	%	%	%
Early Start	92.75	65.0	82.5
Junior Infants	82.35	83.3	83.0
Senior Infants	80.39	83.0	85.5
I	79.33	80.17	83.1
II	83.6	79.44	84.8
III	80.75	81.35	76.9
IV	85.06	77.38	78.6
V	85.58	79.18	83.3
VI	85.35	87.67	93.8
Other	85.6	50.0	74.0
Mean	**84.07**	**76.65**	**82.55**

Group meetings

Principals were 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.

As shown in Table 5.31 and Figure 5.5, between 52% and 95.8% of school principals, depending on grade level (excluding Early Start and 'Other' classes), indicated that group parent-teacher meetings had taken place in their school in 1995/96. Parents of pupils from second and sixth classes were most frequently invited to attend these group meetings. In 1997/98, between 76% and 91.3% of schools arranged parent-teacher meetings for standard classes. Meetings were most often arranged for parents and teachers of second and fifth class pupils in 1997/98. Finally, in 1998/99, between 54.5% and 91.7% of schools held group parent-teacher meetings for ordinary classes. Group meetings were most frequently arranged for parents of second and fifth class pupils that year.

Table 5.31. Numbers and percentages of schools that had one or more group meetings of parents and teachers, by grade in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

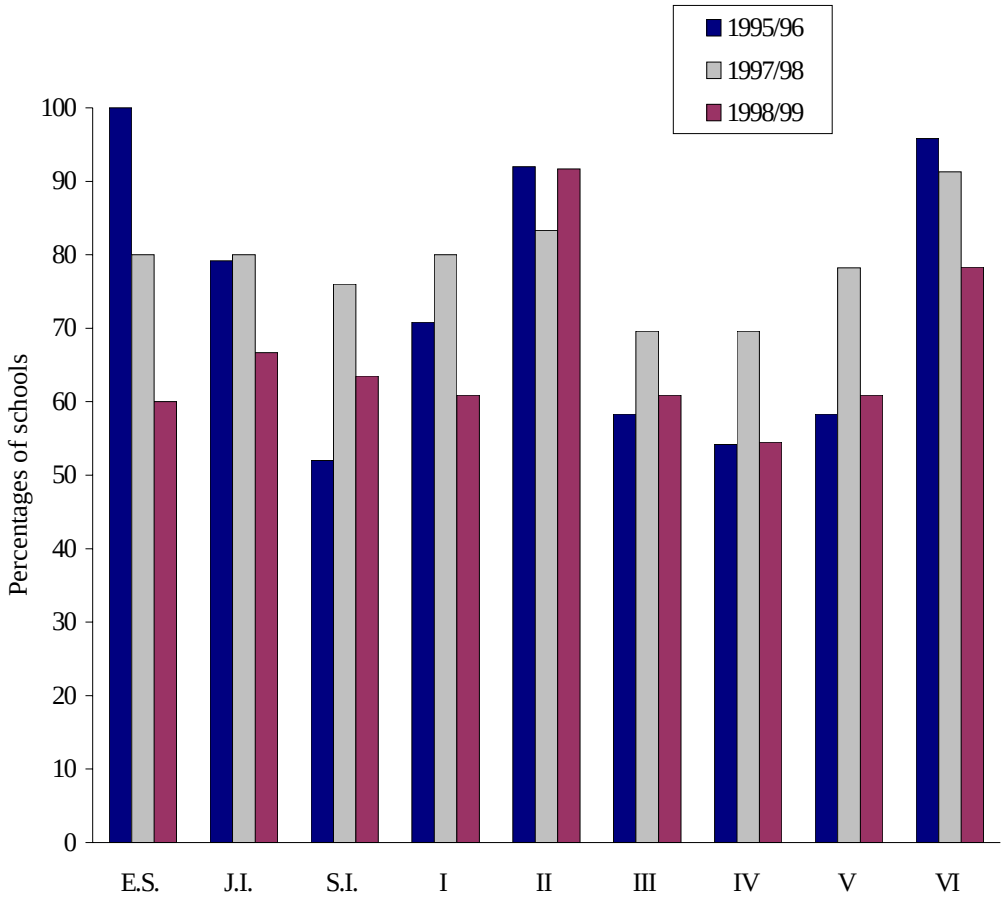
	1995/96		**1997/98**		**1998/99**	
	No. of Schools	% of Schools*	No. of Schools	% of Schools*	No. of Schools	% of Schools*
E.S.	5	100%	4	80%	3	60%
J.I.	19	79.2%	20	80%	16	66.7%
S.I.	13	52.0%	19	76%	15	63.5%
I	17	70.8%	20	80%	14	60.9%
II	23	92.0%	21	83.3%	22	91.7%
III	14	58.3%	16	69.6%	14	60.9%
IV	13	54.2%	16	69.6%	12	54.5%
V	14	58.3%	18	78.2%	14	60.9%
VI	23	95.8%	21	91.3%	18	78.3%
Other	7	53.9%	2	20%	3	30%
Mean		68.59%		74.80%		61.74%

* percentage of schools that had pupils at each grade level, that answered the item.

All five of the schools that had Early Start classes and all seven schools that had 'Other' classes held group meetings in 1995/96. In 1997/98, four of the five schools that had Early Start classes and 20% of schools that had 'Other' classes also held group parent-teacher meetings. In 1998/99, 60% of schools that had Early Start and 30% with special classes had organised group meetings (Table 5.31).

The average percentage of schools holding group meetings across all standard grades (excluding Early Start and other classes) increased from 68.59% in 1995/96 to 78.5% in 1997/98, but decreased the following year (1998/99) to 67.18% of schools. However, the number of schools that did or did not organise meetings in 1995/96 may have been under-reported, as many school principals did not complete this item.

Figure 5.5. Percentages of schools that held group parent-teacher meetings, at each grade level, in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.



Furthermore, the 1997/98 and 1998/99 figures are incomplete as they do not account for meetings that were held towards the end of the school year. Between 4% and 12% of schools that held no meetings during the first half of 1997/98 expected to do so before the end of the year. Similarly in 1998/99, between 9% and 13% of schools that had not held meetings during the beginning of the year expected to hold meetings before the end of the year (Table 5.32). These data suggest that approximately 82.5% of schools in 1997/98 and 76.18% in 1998/99 held or expected to hold group meetings between parents and teachers compared to only 68.59% of schools that held such meetings in 1995/96.

Table 5.32. 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 year.

Expected Meetings				
	1997/98		1998/99	
	Number of Schools	% of Schools	Number of Schools	% of Schools
Early Start	0	0	0	0
Junior Infants	2	8	3	12.5
Senior Infants	3	12	3	12.5
I	2	8.33	4	17.4
II	1	4.17	1	4.2
III	1	4.35	2	8.7
IV	1	4.35	2	9.1
V	0	0	3	13.0
VI	0	0	0	0
Other	2	20	1	10.0

On average, parents of 71.44% of pupils in 1995/96 attended these meetings, with parents of first class being most likely to attend (Table 5.33). Across all grade levels in 1997/98, parental attendance at group meetings was only 62.3%. Furthermore, excluding Early Start and 'Other' classes, which had substantially poorer attendance rates, the average attendance was just 61.87%. In 1998/99, the average rate of parental attendance was 64% across all classes and 67.9% for all ordinary classes. Therefore, there was a decline in the parental attendance at group meetings over the three years (Table 5.33).

Table 5.33. 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
	%	%	%
Early Start	74.0	68.0	51.0
Junior Infants	70.1	66.1	71.4
Senior Infants	70.8	59.0	64.5
I	78.8	54.2	70.3
II	80.3	68.3	74.7
III	65.0	55.8	60.8
IV	60.4	58.7	65.7
V	59.8	56.4	60.0
VI	81.8	76.6	76.4
Other	73.3	60.0	45.3
Mean	**71.43**	**62.3**	**64.0**

Education Programmes for Parents

The majority of schools offered education programmes to parents, which were designed to enable them to assist their children with their schoolwork. Twenty-seven schools (81.81%) in 1996/97, 25 schools (78.12%) in 1997/98 and 27 schools (81.8%) in 1998/99 provided some type of educational course for parents (Table 5.34).

The most common programmes offered in 1996/97 were English (57.6% of schools), followed by Mathematics and pre-entry programmes run by teachers (Table 5.34). Similarly in 1997/98, over two-fifths of schools provided courses in English, Mathematics and pre-entry programmes. However, in 1998/99, computer studies was the most frequently offered course: almost two-thirds of schools offered classes to parents. Paired reading and pre-entry programmes were also popular; over half the schools offered classes in these areas.

The range of educational programmes offered improved considerably from 1996/97 to 1998/99. Principals indicated in 1997/98 that in addition to the courses listed they also offered courses in French, writing, printing, homework meetings, infant education, computers and leadership. New courses arranged for parents in 1998/99 included parent-assisted learning classes, a course entitled 'helping your child through the school year', a transition programme, a pastoral care course and a post-entry programme run by the HSCL co-ordinator.

Table 5.34. Numbers and percentages of schools that provided education programmes for parents designed to enable them to assist their children with their schoolwork, in 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1996/97 (*N*=33)		**1997/98 (*N*=32)**		**1998/99 (*N*=33)**	
	No. of Schools	% of Schools	No. of Schools	% of Schools	No. of Schools	% of Schools
English	19	57.6	19	59.4	15	45.5
Mathematics	15	45.5	16	50.0	8	24.2
Irish	14	42.4	11	34.4	5	15.2
Pre-entry Programmes	17	51.5	14	43.8	17	51.5
Paired reading	0	0	-	-	20	60.6
Computers	0	0	-	-	21	63.6
Other	7	21.2	9	28.1	8	24.2
Total	72		69		94	

- denotes where category was not available to principals.

Extra-curricular Courses

Ninety percent of schools in 1996/97, 87.5 % in 1997/98 and 81.8% in 1998/99 provided some type of extra-curriculum course or activity for parents.

Table 5.35 shows the percentages of principals who said that their school offered various types of extra-curricular courses. The most common courses offered in 1996/97 were self-development (90.9% of schools) and home management (84.8%). Parenting and leisure classes were also offered in over 70% of schools.

In 1997/98, Art & Craft and parenting classes were the most frequently offered course; over two-fifths of schools provided these type of courses for parents. The range of classes offered to parents improved in 1997/98 and included such varied activities as cookery, health information talks, swimming, computer tuition, guitar lessons, community development, leadership training, parents' council training, bereavement support, and craftwork.

In 1998/99, the most common extra-curricular courses available in schools were Art & Craft and parenting classes, which were held in over a third of schools. Cookery classes and reading and literacy programmes were also common school activities in 1998/99. New activities included drama, R.S.E. and community relations classes, as well as a programme to train parents to be home visitors.

Table 5.35. Percentages of schools that provided courses / activities for parents in various extra-curriculum areas in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1996/97 (*N*=33)		**1997/98 (*N*=32)**		**1998/99 (*N*=33)**	
	No. of Schools	% of Schools	No. of Schools	% of Schools	No. of Schools	% of Schools
Home management	28	84.8%	-	-	5	15.2%
Self-development	30	90.9%	10	31.3%	12	36.4%
Parenting	24	72.7%	13	40.6%	12	36.4%
Leisure (incl. keep fit)	24	72.7%	-	-	4	12.1%
Continuing education	16	48.5%	-	-	-	-
Health Information	-	-	11	34.4%	9	27.3%
Art & Craft	-	-	15	46.95	13	39.4%
Cookery	-	-	8	25.0%	9	27.3%
Reading and literacy	-	-	-	-	6	18.2%
Other	7	21.2%	10	31.3%	13	39.4%

- denotes where responses were not classified into a particular category.

Parental Assistance in School Activities

The vast majority of schools involved parents in various school-related activities in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99 (31 schools in 1996/97, 32 in 1997/98 and 32 in 1998/99). Table 5.36 presents the percentages of schools where parents assisted teachers with a range of school activities.

Assisting with school outings was the most common activity in which parents were involved in 1996/97 (84.8% of schools). The next most popular activity was in assisting with paired reading, with parents in 70% of schools assisting in this activity. Parents in approximately half of schools also assisted with school libraries, or with craftwork in the classroom, or took small groups of children for reading. Over 30% of schools had parents assist with sports training. Other activities in which parents were involved in 1996/97 included informal classroom assistance, toy libraries, fundraising and extra educational programmes such as the Stay Safe programme.

Table 5.36. Percentages of schools where parents were involved with teachers in various school-related activities, in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	% of Schools		
	1996/97 (*N*=33)	**1997/98 (*N*=32)**	**1998/99 (*N*=33)**
Assisting with school outings	84.8%	84.4%	78.8%
Paired reading	72.7%	59.4%	51.5%
Assisting with school library	48.5%	28.1%	36.4%
Assisting with craftwork	48.5%	53.1%	42.4%
Taking small groups for reading	45.5%	46.9%	36.4%
Assisting with sports training	30.3%	25.0%	33.3%
Playground supervision	15.1%	25.0%	9.1%
Taking small groups for maths	10.1%	12.5%	6.1%
Assisting with school plays /concerts	0%	3.1%	51.5%
Fundraising activities	0%	3.1%	60.6%
Other (e.g., games, toy library)	36.4%	21.9%	39.4%

The most popular parent-assisted activities in 1997/98 (as in 1996/97), were school outings (84.4%) and paired reading (59.4%). Over half the schools also involved parents with craftwork, although a smaller percentage assisted with school libraries (28.1%). Over two-fifths of schools in 1997/98 took small groups of children for reading, while a quarter

used parents to help with sports training and playground supervision. A further 20% of schools involved parents in a range of other activities such as cookery, toy library, classroom assistance, an environmental project, helping with Christmas concert, preparation for a Communion party, Home/School policy group, attendance drive, the Stay Safe programme and anti-drugs projects.

Similarly, parents in over three-quarters of schools in 1998/99 assisted teachers with school outings. However, in 1998/99, unlike 1996/97 and 1997/98, over half of the schools indicated that parents assisted with school plays and concerts, while 60% reported that parents helped with various fundraising events during the school year. However, the differences may be due to the changes in the wording of the item as principals were specifically asked in 1998/99 whether parents assisted with these activities.

Parents in over half of schools in 1998/99 also took children for paired reading, while over two-fifths involved parents with craftwork and over a third had parents assist with school libraries. However, parents in fewer schools in 1998/99 (compared to 1996/97 or 1997/98) took small groups of children for reading (36.4%) and maths instruction (6.1%) or supervised them in the playground (6.1%). Other school events and activities in which parents were involved included tree planting, sandwich making, maths games, open days, producing a school newsletter and various health promotion weeks.

School Events

The final questionnaire 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 90.9% of schools in 1995/96, 96.9% in 1997/98 and 97% in 1998/99 (Table 5.40). Plays and concerts were also popular school events and were produced in over four-fifths of schools each year. In addition, four-fifths of schools hosted annual sports days. 'Open days' were less common in 1995/96 than in 1997/98 or 1998/99. They were held in only a third of schools but were more frequent the following years (72% of schools in 1997/98 and 51.5% in 1998/99).

Three-quarters of principals reported that fundraising activities took place in their schools in 1998/99. Several principals in 1995/96 and 1997/98 also indicated that fundraising events such as bazaars and cake sales were held in their school. However, these data are not directly comparable as principals were specifically asked in 1998/99 whether fundraising events were held in their school. 'Sports for all days' were held in over two-

thirds of schools in 1997/98 and 1998/99; a corresponding figure is not available for 1995/96.

Principals also reported in 1996/97 that other activities such as Smoke Busters presentations and medal ceremonies had taken place in schools during the year. Other events to which parents were invited in 1997/98 included swimming galas, coffee mornings, drama and parent-child workshops and parents' sports. In 1998/99, a number of schools organised health promotion talks, environmental projects, exhibitions and visits from dignitaries. Finally, three schools participating in the scheme collaborated in holding a joint award ceremony for parents who participated in courses run by their HSCL co-ordinator (Table 5.40).

Table 5.40 Percentages of schools which held different types of events during 1995/96, 1997/98 and 1998/99.

	1995/96	**1997/98**	**1998/99**
	% of schools (*N*=33)	% of schools (*N*=32)	% of schools (*N*=33)
Open days	36.4	72.0	51.5
Sports days	78.8	78.1	81.8
Plays/concerts	81.8	81.3	87.9
Religious ceremonies	90.9	96.9	97.0
'Sport for All' days	-	68.8	66.7
Fundraising events	-	-	78.8
Other -various displays/exhibits	-	-	12.1
-health / environment events	-	-	9.1
-visits from dignitaries	-	-	6.1
-other	36.4	43.8	21.2

- denotes where responses were not classified into a particular category or where categories were not available to principals.

In summary, principals' responses indicate that parental involvement in urban schools had increased since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*. The proportion of schools with Parents' Associations increased from 39% to 51% following introduction of the scheme in 1996/97. Furthermore, a greater number of schools in 1997/98 (95% of schools) and 1998/99 (89.5%) than in 1995/96 (84.58%) held, or were expecting to hold, formal one-to-one meetings, to discuss the scholastic progress of individual pupils. Likewise, a greater proportion of schools organised, or planned to arrange, group parent-teachers meetings, to discuss various school-related matters in 1996/97 (82.5%) and 1998/99 (76.18%) than in

1995/96 (68.59%). Parental attendance at one-to-one parent-teacher meetings was consistently high, with parents of 84% of pupils in 1995/96, 76% in 1997/98, and 82% in 1998/99 attending meetings. However, there was a decrease in attendance at group meetings over the same period, with parents of 71% of pupils in 1995/96, 62.3% in 1997/98, and 64% in 1998/99 attending these meetings.

The majority of schools offered educational and extra-curriculum courses for parents during the first three years of the scheme. Eighty percent of schools in 1996/97, 78% in 1997/98, and 81% in 1998/99 held educational courses for parents. The range of educational courses offered expanded considerably over this period: in addition to the traditional subject areas parents were offered courses in French, writing, computers, leadership and transition programmes. Similarly, extra-curriculum courses were held in 90% of schools in 1995/96, in 87.5% in 1997/98 and in 81% in 1998/99. Schools provided a wide range of extra-curricular courses including self-development, home management, health information talks, cookery classes, community development courses, and art and craft courses.

Another indication of parental involvement in schools is the extent to which parents participate in various school activities. The vast majority of schools (93% in 1996/97, 97% in 1997/98, and 97% in 1998/99) involved parents with a variety of school-related activities and events. The most common types of activities in which parents were involved were school outings, paired reading, craftwork, school libraries, and assisting with school plays and concerts. Principals also said 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.

5.6 PRINCIPALS' OPINIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF BREAKING THE CYCLE

Questions on *Breaking the Cycle* (included in the 1997/98 and 1998/99 questionnaire) were 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 the urban co-ordinator, the incareer development courses and the benefits of out-of-school activities. Three of the questions were open-ended and provided principals with an opportunity to give a written responses.

Principals were asked what effect they believed participating in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme had on their school in general and on teaching practices and morale in their

school in particular. All principals in 1997/98 and 1998/99 believed that participating in the scheme had either a very positive or positive effect on their school overall (Table 5.41). The vast majority also agreed that *Breaking the Cycle* had a very positive or positive effect on teaching practices in their school (96.9% in 1997/98 and 97% in 1998/99). However, the number of principals who believed that the scheme had a very positive effect on teaching practices decreased slightly from 1997/98 to 1998/99 (from 46.9% to 39.4% of principals) (Table 5.41). Finally, almost all principals thought that involvement in the scheme had a very positive or positive effect, on morale in their school, although the number who felt that the scheme had a very positive effect on morale decreased from 65.6% in 1997/98 to 48.5% in 1998/99. Notably none of the principals felt that the scheme had a negative, or very negative, effect on their school overall, on teaching practices, or on school morale.

Table 5.41. Numbers and percentages of principals who indicated that *Breaking the Cycle* had a positive or negative effect on their school, on teaching practices and on morale in their school.

Effect participating in *Breaking the Cycle* has had on school.						
		Very positive	Positive	Unsure/ None	Negative	Very negative
1997/98	Number	21	11	0	0	0
(*N* =32)	%	65.6	34.4	0	0	0
1998/99	Number	20	13	0	0	0
(*N*=33)	%	60.6	39.4	0	0	0
Effect participating in *Breaking the Cycle* has had on teaching practice in school.						
		Very positive	Positive	Unsure/ None	Negative	Very negative
1997/98	Number	15	16	1	0	0
(*N* =32)	%	46.9	50.0	3.1	0	0
1998/99	Number	13	19	1	0	0
(*N*=33)	%	39.4	57.6	3.0	0	0
Effect participating in *Breaking the Cycle* has had on morale in school.						
		Very positive	Positive	Unsure/ Negative	Negative	Very negative
1997/98	Number	21	10	1	0	0
(*N* =32)	%	65.6	31.2	3.1	0	0
1998/99	Number	16	17	0	0	0
(*N*=33)	%	48.5	51.5	0	0	0

Over four-fifths of principals (87.5% in 1997/98 and 90% in 1998/99) believed that 'marginalised' pupils in their schools had benefited from participating in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme (Table 5.42). None of the principals thought that disadvantaged pupils had not benefited from the scheme, and only four in 1997/98 and three in 1998/99 were unsure.

Table 5.42. Numbers and percentages of principals who indicated that marginalised pupils in their school had/had not benefited from *Breaking the Cycle*.

		Yes	**Unsure**	**No**
1997/98 (*N*=32)	Number	28	4	0
	%	87.5%	15.5%	0
1998/99 (*N*=33)	Number	30	3	0
	%	90.9%	9.1%	0

In an open-ended item, principals were asked to give their reasons for believing that 'marginalised' pupils had benefited from the scheme. Responses were classified into categories based on the kind of responses given in 1997/98 and 1998/99 (Tables 5.43 and 5.44). However, responses were grouped into different categories in 1998/99 and so not all of the categories are directly comparable.

Table 5.43. Numbers and percentages of principals who gave varying explanations as to why marginalised pupils had or had not benefited from *Breaking the Cycle* in 1997/98 (*N*=32*).

Category	**1997/98**	
	Number of schools	**% of schools**
More time for pupils / focus on disadvantaged pupils / improved PTR (15:1)	17	53.1%
Better behaviour / attendance rates	6	18.8%
Improved social skills / self-confidence / communication skills	6	18.8%
Early identification of problems	6	18.8%
Financial benefits / outings / equipment / poorer can participate	4	12.5%
Problems with larger senior classes	2	6.3%
Other (positive)	7	21.9%
Other (negative, e.g., no change)	3	9.4%

* Numbers sum to greater than 33 as principals were permitted to give more than one response.

Over half of principals in 1997/98 (53.1%) felt that disadvantaged pupils in their schools had benefited from the pupil-teacher ratio of 15:1 in junior classes. Several (6.1%),

however, also highlighted the problems experienced by pupils when they transferred from small junior classes into larger senior classes. One principal wrote:

"Pupils on transferring to the senior school are having great difficulty in reverting to full classes and not getting the attention they had been used to from the teacher."

Over one in ten principals (12.5%) felt that pupils benefited particularly from the new educational equipment, materials and out-of-school activities, purchased with *Breaking the Cycle* funds. The extra-curricular events gave children an opportunity to participate in activities that they would not otherwise have been able to experience. Almost a fifth of principals (18.8%) reported that, since the introduction of the scheme, pupils' attendance rates had increased and there were fewer discipline problems. A further fifth indicated that there had been a marked improvement in pupils' self-esteem, interpersonal and social skills and that they were more 'expressive and confident'.

Various positive comments were made in response to this question, which were assigned to an "other" category, for example:

" The remedial teacher informs us that test result profiles of the above (marginalised pupils) are very encouraging and positive."

Finally, three principals made negative comments on the scheme: one expressed concern with the lack of specialised English language teaching for refugee children and another noted that the scheme could not benefit pupils who were absent from school on a regular basis.

Over half of principals (54.4%) in 1998/99 (as in 1997/98) believed that the most beneficial aspect of the scheme was the reduced pupil-teacher ratio in Junior classes (Table 5.44). Principals reported that teachers in smaller classes could give more time and attention to individual pupils and could focus on their individual needs. One principal wrote:

"**Children have a more personalised relationship with teacher. They are given more time and individual needs are catered for. Individuality and uniqueness of each child is fully valued."**

Indeed, two principals said that as a result of the scheme they could identify pupils' problems easier. Over a quarter of principals perceived an improvement in pupils' self-esteem and social skills as a result of participating in the scheme.

" Their (the pupils') self-esteem has improved and hopefully their academic achievement will as well."

One principal attributed the improvement in the children's self-confidence to the extra attention they received from teachers in junior classes. A further 12.1% felt that

'marginalised' pupils had a more positive attitude towards school and that they were more content and motivated in school.

Table 5.44. Numbers and percentages of principals who gave varying explanations as to why marginalised pupils had or had not benefited from *Breaking the Cycle* in 1998/99 (*N*=33).

Category	**1998/99**	
	Number of schools	**% of schools**
Benefit from lower PTR / more individual attention / more time for pupils / focus on individual needs	13	54.4%
Pupil self-esteem / social skills / self-confidence improved (due to extra attention from teachers) / communication skills improved	9	27.3%
Financial benefits / outings / equipment / poorer can participate	9	27.3%
Children enjoy school / have a more positive attitude to school / more content / more interested and motivated	4	12.1%
Teachers benefit from extra inservice / morale improved / better relationship with pupils	3	9.1%
Better behaviour / attendance rates/ more self-disciplined	2	6.1%
Early identification of problems / focus on disadvantaged	2	6.1%
Problems with larger senior classes	1	3.0%
Too early to tell	1	3.0%
Other (positive)	11	33.3%
Other (negative, e.g., no change)	3	9.1%

* Numbers sum to greater than 33 as principals were permitted to give more than one response.

Other principals (6.1%) reported that pupils' attendance at school had improved and that they were better behaved overall. Several principals also referred to the general positive effects of the scheme on teachers. They felt that the incareer development days helped staff morale, and that pupil-teacher relationships had improved.

Over a quarter of respondents believed that the most beneficial aspect of the scheme was the new materials and equipment and out-of-school activities, which were funded from *Breaking the Cycle* grants (Table 5.44). A third mentioned other positive aspect of the scheme, for example:

" There is less a feeling of isolation in inner-city teaching and more a sense of unity and support."

"Children have a more pleasant and personalised learning experience."

Three principals in 1998/99, however, felt that there were many negative factors outside the school that affected the success of the scheme.

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. Over three-quarters of principals (77.4%) reported that tests had shown that pupils' performance at school had improved 'somewhat', while 6.5% reported that pupils' test performances had improved 'a lot'. The remaining 16.1% of principals, however, indicated that pupils' performance had remained unchanged or 'disimproved somewhat' (Table 5.44).

To determine whether teachers 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. As shown in Table 5.45, seven in ten (72.7%) principals estimated that pupils' performances had improved 'somewhat', while almost a quarter (24.2%) thought that pupils' performances had improved 'a lot'. Thus, according to principals, pupils' achievements had improved considerably since the introduction of the scheme, and to a greater extent than test results would suggest.

Table 5.45. Number and percentages of principals indicating the extent of improvements in pupils academic achievement, since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*, as measured by formal or informal tests and by principals or teachers opinions.

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*=31)					
	Disimproved a lot	Disimproved somewhat	Unchanged	Improved somewhat	Improved a lot
Number	0	1	4	24	2
%	0	3.2	12.9	77.4	6.5
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*=33)					
	Disimproved a lot	Disimproved somewhat	Unchanged	Improved somewhat	Improved a lot
Number	0	0	1	24	8
%	0	0	3.0	72.7	24.2

Two further items sought principals' perceptions of the effects of the scheme on pupils' self-esteem and the standard of pupils' social interaction. The vast majority of principals perceived an improvement in pupils' levels of self-esteem. Almost half believed that pupils' self-esteem had 'increased a lot', while 45.5% believed that it had 'increased somewhat'. Similarly, almost all of the principals felt that the standards of social interaction among their pupils had improved since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*. Over 90% of principals reported that standards of social interaction had improved 'a lot' or 'somewhat' (Table 5.46). Notably, none of the principals believed that pupils' self-esteem or social skills had decreased since the commencement of the scheme.

Table 5.46. Number and percentages of principals indicating the extent of change in pupils level of self-esteem and standard of social interaction, since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*.

Have levels of self-esteem among your pupils changed since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*? (*N*=33)					
	Decreased a lot	Decreased somewhat	Unchanged	Increased somewhat	Increased a lot
Number	0	0	2	15	16
%	0	0	6.1	45.5	48.5
Have the standards of social interaction of the pupils in your school changed since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*? (*N*=33)					
	Disimproved a lot	Disimproved somewhat	Unchanged	Improved somewhat	Improved a lot
Number	0	0	2	15	16
%	0	0	6.1	45.5	48.5

A total of 31 schools (93.9%) 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 three and five extra-curricular activities during the year. Table 5.47 provides details of the types of out-of-school activities undertaken.

Drama and music-related outings and activities were very popular in schools during the year. Four-fifths 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 perform in the school. Four-fifths of schools also organised various musical activities such as trips to concerts (e.g., Music in the Classroom), recitals and visits from musicians. Other schools used extra-curricular funds to pay for music lessons (e.g., tin whistle, guitar) or to purchase musical equipment. Art-related extra-curricular activities were also. Sixty percent of schools engaged in art activities, such as visiting

The Ark centre in Dublin, paying for an art and craft teacher and holding art workshops (e.g., working with clay, puppet-making and photography) in the classroom.

Pupils in over half of schools were taken on trips to places of cultural and historical interest such as galleries, e.g., Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), museums (e.g., Viking Museum) and historical houses and other trips outside school (e.g. trips to town). Half of schools (51.6%) also organised nature expeditions to zoos, farms, parks, beaches and mountains in the locality.

Over four-fifths of schools (48.4%) used out-of-school funds to pay for sports coaching (e.g., swimming, tennis and basketball) and trips to adventure centres. Swimming lessons were the most popular type of sport activity in schools during the year. Dance-related activities such as Irish dancing lessons were arranged in five schools, while four schools participated in local festivals including the Dublin Film Festival and Féile Luimní. Other extra-curricular activities and events arranged in 199899 included paired reading and chess. Several principals also mentioned that further educational tours and activities were scheduled for later in the school year.

Table 5.47. Numbers and percentages of schools holding varying types of out-of-school activities in 1998/99 (*N*=31).

Category	Type of activity	Number of schools	% of schools
Theatre-cinema	Going to a theatre or having a theatre group perform in the school, drama workshops, speech and drama classes, cinema trip (e.g. IMAX)	25	80.6%
Music	Going to concerts (e.g., music in the classroom), buying equipment, paying for music lessons, visiting musicians, participation in music festivals	25	80.6%
Art-related	Visiting The Ark, bringing in a crafts teacher, other craft activities or classes (e.g., puppet-making, photography)	19	61.3%
Outings-historical/other	Going to museums / galleries / castles / heritage centres / historical houses and other trips outside the school (e.g. trip to town)	17	54.8%
Outings-Nature	Going on a nature trip outside the school, e.g. visiting a park, zoo, farm, woods, beaches and caves.	16	51.6%
Sports	All types of sports, including hiring of a sports teacher, also visit to Croke Park and other sports arenas	15	48.4%
Dance	Going to performance / paying for lessons (e.g., Irish dancing)	5	16.1%
Festivals	Participation in festivals (e.g., film festivals)	4	12.9%
Other	Other / to be arranged	5	16.1%

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 their verbal and social skills and artistic expression. There was almost unanimous agreement that pupils' enjoyment of school had improved to 'a great extent' (61.3% of principals) or to 'a good extent' (35.5%) as a result of their involvement in out-of-school activities (Table 5.48). The majority of principals (87.9%) also believed that the extra-curricular events 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 half (51.5%) felt that attendance had improved to 'a good' or 'great' extent. Indeed, one in ten principals indicated that extra-curricular activities had not affected school attendance 'at all'. Even fewer principals (35.5%) felt that pupils' academic achievements at school had improved since participating in various *Breaking the Cycle* events. The remaining principals (64.5%) believed that academic standards in their schools had improved to 'some extent' (Table 5.48).

Principals were more positive about the benefits of these activities on pupils' verbal and artistic skills. Two-thirds felt that out-of-school activities had impacted on pupils' verbal skills, while almost 70% felt that pupils' artistic expression had improved to a 'good' or 'great' extent since taking part in the activities.

Table 5.48. 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*=31)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	0	1	11	19
%	0	3.2	35.5	61.3
In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *attendance* at school? (*N*=33)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	3	13	10	7
%	9.1	39.4	30.3	21.2
In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *academic achievements* at school? (*N*=31)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	0	20	9	2
%	0	64.5	29.0	6.5
In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *social skills?* (*N*=33)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	0	4	17	12
%	0	12.1	51.5	36.4
In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *verbal skills?* (*N*=32)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	0	12	12	8
%	0	37.5	37.5	25.0
In your opinion, to what extent has participating in out-of-school activities/ special projects impacted on pupils' *artistic expression and response?* (*N*=33)				
	Not at all	To some extent	To a good extent	To a great extent
Number	0	10	13	10
%	0	30.3	39.4	30.3

Principals were also asked in 1997/98 about their perceptions of the urban *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator. They were asked whether they agreed that the co-ordinator kept them informed about the scheme. They were also asked whether she was supportive when they were organising out-of-school activities, when engaging in school development planning, when purchasing new learning materials and when drawing up a new curriculum. Over nine out of ten principals (93.8%) agreed that the co-ordinator had kept them very much informed about the scheme (Table 5.49). The majority also very much agreed (71.9%) that the co-ordinator was supportive when they were organising extra-curricular activities, with a further quarter somewhat agreeing that this was the case. Similarly, when asked whether the co-ordinator was a good source of information and support when engaging in the school development planing process, 84.4% of principals agreed that the co-ordinator was very helpful to them in the planning process.

Principals were less certain that the co-ordinator was a good source of information and support when purchasing new learning materials. Only 37.5% very much agreed with this statement, with a further two-fifths agreeing that the co-ordinator was somewhat supportive in this regard. Finally, when asked whether the co-ordinator was a good source of information and support when drawing up a curriculum that promotes the holistic development of the child, just over half the principals (56.3%) agreed that this was very much the case, with a quarter agreeing that she was somewhat supportive (Table 5.49).

In summary, the vast majority of principals reported that the co-ordinator had kept them very much informed about issues relating to the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme. Most principals also found the co-ordinator to be supportive when they were organising out-of-school activities or engaging in school development planning. However, comparatively fewer principals thought that she was a very good source of support when purchasing new learning materials or when drawing up a holistic school curriculum.

Table 5.49. Numbers and percentages of principals who endorsed several statements on the *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator (*N*=32).

The *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator informed school about what was happening in the scheme.					
	Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
Number	30	2	0	0	0
%	93.8	6.3	0	0	0
The *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator was a good source of information and support when organising out-of-school activities.					
	Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
Number	23	8	1	0	0
%	71.9	25.0	3.1	0	0
The *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator was a good source of information and support when engaging in the School Development Process.					
	Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
Number	27	4	1	0	0
%	84.4	12.5	3.1	0	0
The *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator was a good source of information and support when purchasing new learning materials.					
	Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
Number	12	13	2	5	0
%	37.5	40.6	6.3	15.6	0
The *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator was a good source of information and support drawing up a curriculum which promotes the holistic development of the child.					
	Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
Number	18	8	1	5	0
%	56.3	25.0	3.1	15.6	0

In an open-ended item, principals were given an opportunity to make any other comments about the role of the *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator. Unfortunately, most principals incorrectly referred to the incumbent urban co-ordinator when answering this item, rather than to role of the *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator in general. Nevertheless, they were generally positive about the co-ordinator: 71.8% of principals made positive comments (Table 5.50). They described her as 'encouraging', 'approachable', 'enthusiastic', 'non-threatening' and 'well organised'. They also reported that she was sensitive to the needs of

children and individual schools, and offered both practical and helpful advice. Two principals, however, thought that the co-ordinator's workload was excessive. Others felt that the co-ordinator should visit their school more often and that input from her in relation to whole-school planning would be beneficial. Only one principal made a negative comment but it was not specifically related to the role of the co-ordinator.

Table 5.50. List of principals' comments about the role of the *Breaking the Cycle* co-ordinator (*N*=32).

Category	Number	%
Positive	23	71.87
Too much work to expect her to do	2	6.25
Negative	1	3.13
Other	2	6.25

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 satisfied than dissatisfied. Over 70% were either very satisfied (34.4%) or somewhat satisfied (37.5%), while only 15.6% indicated that they were dissatisfied (Table 5.51).

Table 5.51. Numbers and percentages of principals who expressed varying degrees of satisfaction with the organisation of *Breaking the Cycle* incareer development days (*N*=32).

	Very satisfied	Somewhat	Unsure	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Number	11	12	4	4	1
%	34.4	37.5	12.5	12.5	3.13

Principals were asked to explain why they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the incareer training provided for them. Good course content was the most common explanation given for satisfaction and was mentioned by over half of principals (53.1%) (Table 5.52). Two-fifths of principals (44.8%), however, felt that there was a need for more inservice training for all staff members and for more school-based courses. One principal stated:

" Incareer development for whole staff needs to be addressed."

One principal was dissatisfied with the lack of consultation on the content of development courses and six principals gave other reasons. For example,

"Teachers feel their views and expertise are taken into consideration."

"Inconvenience of attending inservice on the smooth running of the school."

Table 5.52. Numbers and percentages of principals who gave varying explanations for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with incareer development days (*N*=32).

Explanation	Number	Percentage
Good course content	17	53.1
Not enough courses / school-based courses / staff courses	14	44.8
Lack of consultation re content / poor content	1	3.1
Other	6	18.8

Finally, principals were invited, if they desired, to make additional comments on the scheme as a whole. Tables 5.53 and 5.54 list the various positive and negative comments made by school principals in 1997/98 and 1998/99. In 1997/98 a total of 28 principals made one or more additional comments. Over a third (31.3%) made general positive comments about participating in *Breaking the Cycle* indicating that they were pleased to be part of the scheme and believed it to be beneficial to both teachers and pupils. For example:

"It has been a very positive experience for the school, especially for the pupils."

Almost three in ten principals (28.1%) thought that the smaller junior classes were beneficial as they allowed for greater one-to-one attention and interaction between children and teachers. In fact, a quarter of principals thought that the reduced pupil-teacher ratio of 15:1 should be extended throughout the whole school. Several principals indicated, however, that children had particular difficulty adjusting to larger senior classes after receiving individual attention from teachers in the smaller junior classes:

"The pupils are finding it very difficult when put back into large classes in the senior school and have trouble adjusting to the fact that the teacher cannot give them the individual attention they received in the junior school."

A fifth of principals commented on the financial benefits of the scheme, for example:

"The extra money for equipment and out-of-school activities is very welcome and has enabled us to do many worthwhile activities that are encouraging children to come to school. They are also giving new enthusiasm to teachers."

Five mentioned the advantages of extra inservice courses for principals and teaching staff, although two principals felt there was a need for more inservice for class teachers and more school-based training. A quarter of principals (25%) complained of an increase in their workload as a result of participation in the scheme and the time involved in form-filling and questionnaire completion. As one principal wrote:

" Glad to be involved but workload seems to be ever increasing especially when you are a teaching principal."

Finally, 12 principals made more specific comments on the scheme (subsumed under 'other' in Table 5.53). Several mentioned that school planning was very time consuming but believed that it was a beneficial process for the school, for example:

"The school plan while rather frightening at first isn't quite so now. Staff see the benefits of it and feel more comfortable about it."

Others welcomed the recognition that their school was disadvantaged and reported that children's and teachers' needs were better catered for under the scheme.

One principal noted that an individual pupil's problems were more apparent in smaller classes, while another felt that the achievement of pupils on tests was over-emphasised. Finally one principal reflected on her experience of *Breaking the Cycle*:

"To date the experience has been uplifting. The identification and targeting of the schools involved has been seen as positive and allowed the staff to breathe a sigh of relief- in that it is official recognition that we do not play on an even pitch, that we will be allowed the benefit of our professionalism in identifying our own particular needs and will be supported in our endeavours. After years of being told it was our fault that the children were failing it comes as a welcome surprise to find that official thinking now recognises that not all children of the nation are cherished equally. It will take time to adjust to a new thinking- that we can use our own judgement and imagination in interpreting the curriculum. I feel we will be successful beyond our own expectations."

Table 5.53. Numbers and percentages of principals expressing various general comments on *Breaking the Cycle* in 1997/98 (*N*=32*).

Category	Number of schools	% of schools
General positive comment	10	31.3%
Reduction in class size	9	28.1%
Increase in workload / form and questionnaire filling	8	25.0%
Should be pupil-teacher ratio of 15:1 throughout school	8	25.0%
Financial benefits	7	21.9%
Morale booster	5	15.6%
Advantage of extra inservice	5	15.6%
Contact with other teachers	2	6.3%
More inservice (esp. for class teachers) / school-based inservice	2	6.3%
Other	12	37.5%

*Numbers sum to greater than 32 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response.

In 1998/99, 26 principals commented on the scheme in general. As shown in Table 5.54, many of the comments made were similar to those made in 1997/98. Two-fifths of principals mentioned the benefits of the scheme in general, while 15.2% referred specifically to the benefits of the reduced pupil-teacher ratio. For example:

"The interaction between teachers and pupils, possible in smaller groups, creates a stronger and more effective mutual understanding."

Several principals (15.2%) indicated, however, that they had difficulty implementing 15:1 in their school due to lack of space. Others reported that co-operative classes (30:2 pupil-teacher ratio) had been set-up in their schools, which they did not believe to be as effective as 15:1 in a single classroom. Several also mentioned the problems experienced by children when they enter large classes at senior level. For example:

"This year the bringing together of pupils in 3rd class from four different classes caused a lot of difficulty…They had much less physical space than they were used to and teacher was unable to provide as much group and individual attention for them."

A fifth of principals felt that the scheme was a morale booster for the school, that pupil-teacher relationships had improved and that there was more co-operation among staff members. A further fifth felt that the out-of-school activities were particularly beneficial for 'marginalised' pupils.

Principals also remarked on other benefits of the scheme, such as the grants for new equipment and materials, and extra inservice for participating schools. Others made more negative comments about the scheme or offered suggestions on how it could be improved. For example:

" Out-of-school activities should be more structured. More guidance needed on expertise available in drama, music etc."

" For teachers, their work is more rewarding but demanding and challenging."

" A frustrating aspect of *Breaking the Cycle* is absenteeism from small classes."

" Too many factors, for example drugs in the community, over which the school has no control."

Table 5.60. Numbers and percentages of principals expressing various general comments on *Breaking the Cycle* in 1998/99 (*N*=33*).

Category	No of schools	% of schools
General positive comment	14	42.4%
Benefits of reduced PTR in junior classes / more individual attention / improved children's self esteem	5	15.2%
Should be 15:1 throughout school / problems when children enter larger senior classes from smaller junior classes	8	24.2%
Difficulties implementing 15:1 / lack of space/ problems with teachers / problems with co-operative teaching	5	15.2%
Benefits of out-of-school activities/ children participate in activities not otherwise possible	7	21.2%
Morale booster / improved pupil teacher and parent teacher relationships / more planning/ team work/ evaluation / co-operation with other schools	7	21.2%
Increase in workload / form and questionnaire filling / administration of the scheme increases workload for principals	4	12.1%
Financial benefits extra equipment/ materials	3	9.1%
Advantage of extra inservice	3	9.1%
Improved home-school links	1	3.0%
More inservice (esp. for class teachers) / school-based inservice	1	3.0%
Other	12	36.4%

*Numbers sum to greater than 33 as respondents were permitted to give more than one response.

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

All class teachers in schools participating in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme were asked to complete teacher questionnaires in 1997, 1998, and 1999. Response rates for each year were 88.7%, 83.9%, and 83.6% respectively. In this section, selected data from these questionnaires are described. While the questionnaires varied somewhat in content from year to year, certain core items were asked each year. These 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*, their opinions of the effect of the small junior classes on pupils, and their views of how the scheme had impacted on the attitudes and achievements of their pupils.

6.1 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 urban 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 extent 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.

Teachers' responses indicated that there had been a somewhat positive atmosphere in their schools before the introduction of the scheme. Most teachers recalled that the atmosphere in their school had been friendly (80.5% of teachers), welcoming (74.4%), warm (70.2%) and pleasant (75.6%), to a 'good' or 'great' extent (Table 6.1 and Figure 6.1). However, teachers were less positive about the physical environment of their schools: only two-thirds reported that their school had been clean and only half described their schools as comfortable or colourful. Similarly only half

of teachers (49.4%) described their school as orderly to a 'good' or 'great' extent, while 58.6% reported that there had been an atmosphere of discipline in their school. Finally, less than a quarter of teachers (21.3%) said that there was a quiet atmosphere in their school before *Breaking the Cycle.*

From Figure 6.1 it can be seen that most teachers reported that the atmosphere and the physical environment in their schools had improved since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle.* By the third year of the scheme, over 90% of teachers perceived the atmosphere in their school to be welcoming (91.4%) and friendly (91.9%), with over four-fifths saying that the atmosphere was pleasant (88.2%) and warm (84.6%). In relation to the physical environment of the school, approximately one third of teachers reported that their schools were more colourful and more comfortable and one in ten thought that their schools were cleaner than before the beginning of the scheme. Approximately four-fifths of teachers described their schools as comfortable and colourful, with three-quarters reporting that their schools were clean to a 'good' or 'great' extent. A fifth of teachers also reported that the atmosphere in their schools was more orderly and disciplined than was the case before the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle.* Four-fifths described the atmosphere in their schools as disciplined and seven in ten indicated that it was orderly.

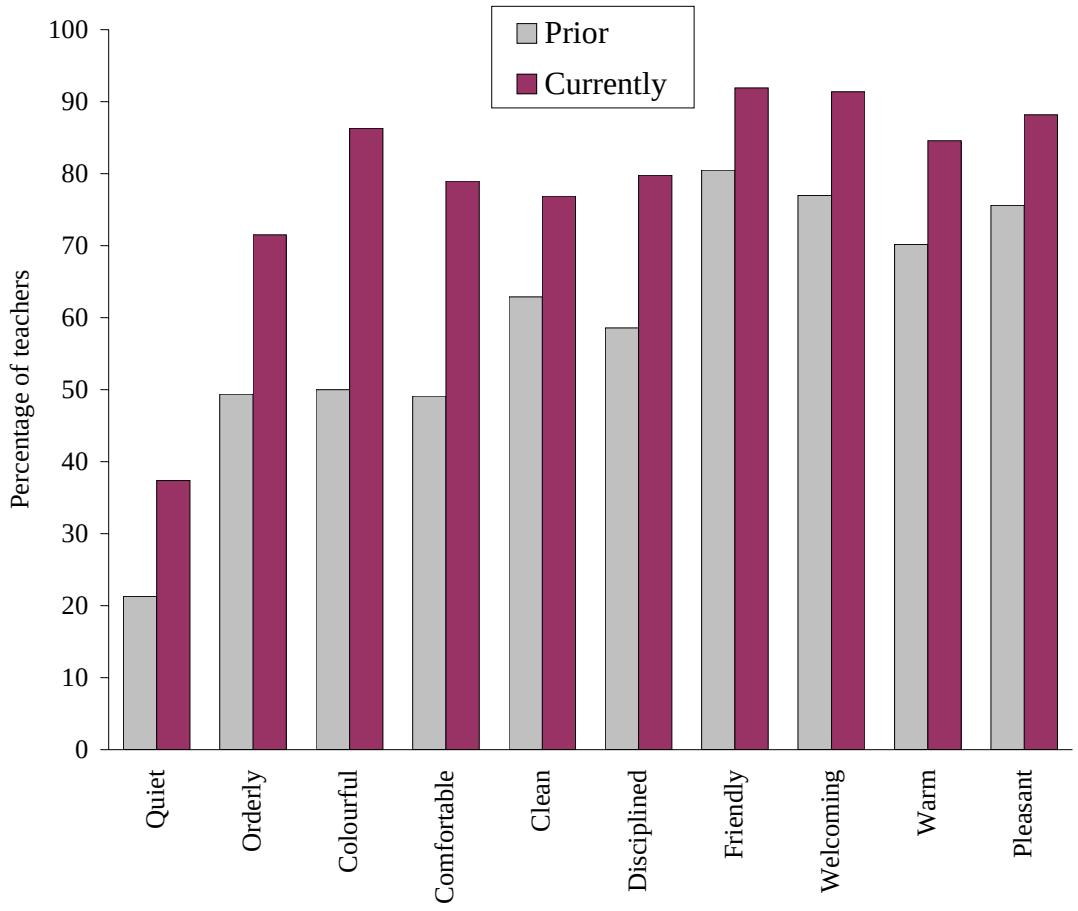
However, only 37.4% of teachers reported that their school was quiet, which represents only a slight increase in the proportion of teachers who indicated that their school was quiet before the introduction of the scheme (Table 6.1). This finding is particularly important considering that a quiet and orderly learning environment has been found to be a key feature of effective schools.

Table 6.1. 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*=216)	29.2%	49.5%	17.1%	4.2%
	Currently (*N*=214)	22.0%	40.7%	29.0%	8.4%
Orderly	Prior (*N*=221)	7.7%	43.0%	38.5%	10.9%
	Currently (*N*=221)	2.3%	26.2%	48.9%	22.6%
Colourful	Prior (N=220)	10.0%	40.0%	32.7%	17.3%
	Currently (*N*=219)	1.8%	11.9%	43.4%	42.9%
Comfortable	Prior (*N*=220)	10.5%	40.5%	36.4%	12.7%
	Currently (*N*=219)	5.05%	16.0%	43.4%	35.6%
Clean	Prior (*N*=221)	7.2%	29.9%	37.6%	25.3%
	Currently (*N*=221)	6.3%	16.7%	38.0%	38.9%
Disciplined	Prior (*N*=220)	5.0%	36.4%	43.6%	15.0%
	Currently (*N*=218)	4.1%	16.1%	53.2%	26.6%
Friendly	Prior (*N*=221)	1.4%	18.1%	41.6%	38.9%
	Currently (*N*=221)	0.9%	7.2%	36.2%	55.7%
Welcoming	Prior (*N*=221)	2.7%	20.4%	38.5%	38.5%
	Currently (*N*=221)	0.9%	7.7%	33.9%	57.5%
Warm	Prior (*N*=221)	5.9%	24.0%	38.5%	31.7%
	Currently (*N*=221)	2.7%	12.7%	33.0%	51.6%
Pleasant	Prior (*N*=221)	2.7%	21.7%	44.8%	30.8%
	Currently(*N* =221)	1.8%	10.0%	34.8%	53.4%

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

Figure 6.1. 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.



Teachers who were not in schools before the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle* described the atmosphere in their school at the time of completing the questionnaire in 1999. Overall, their responses were very similar to those of teachers who were in schools before *Breaking the Cycle* and who described the atmosphere in their school in 1999 as the 'after' part of the item (Table 6.2). This could be interpreted as indicating that the item is a valid measure of school atmosphere and that teachers who completed both the 'before' and 'after' parts of the item were accurate in their descriptions in 1998/99.

Over nine out of ten teachers in 1998/99 indicated that the atmosphere in their school was welcoming (93.7%), friendly (95.7%) and pleasant (90.4%), while over four-fifths described their schools as warm (88.3%), colourful (86%) and clean (84.9%) to a 'good' or 'great' extent. A further 79.6% of teachers described the atmosphere in their schools as comfortable. The majority of teachers (85.1%) felt that there was an atmosphere of discipline in their school, although a lower percentage

(71%) described the atmosphere in their school as orderly. Teachers were less positive about the level of noise in schools: only 30.4% perceived their schools as quiet in 1998/99 (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2. 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 (*N*=92)	Number	25	39	23	5
	%	27.2	42.4	25.0	5.4
Orderly (*N*=94)	Number	2	25	43	24
	%	2.1	26.6	45.7	25.5
Colourful (N=93)	Number	0	13	40	40
	%	0	14.0	43.0	43.0
Comfortable (*N*=93)	Number	4	15	36	38
	%	4.3	16.1	38.7	40.9
Clean (*N*=93)	Number	1	13	43	36
	%	1.1	14.0	46.2	38.7
Disciplined (*N*=94)	Number	1	13	53	27
	%	1.1	13.8	56.4	28.7
Friendly (*N*=94)	Number	0	4	27	63
	%	0	4.3	28.7	67.0
Welcoming (*N*=94)	Number	0	6	26	62
	%	0	6.4	27.7	66.0
Warm (N=94)	Number	2	9	22	61
	%	2.1	9.6	23.4	64.9
Pleasant (*N*=94)	Number	1	8	24	61
	%	1.1	8.5	25.5	64.9

Three further items 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 learning strategies, and support incareer development programmes (Kellaghan, 1994; Sammons, Stoll, Lewis & Ecob, 1988). Tables 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5 show teachers' responses to three statements related to this issue. Overall, teachers indicated that they were satisfied with the support and encouragement they received from their principals. Almost half (48.4%) strongly agreed and 40.8% agreed that their principal took an interest in what was going on in their classroom (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3. Numbers and percentages of teachers agreed or disagreed that their principal shows an interest in what is going on in their classroom (*N*=304).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	147	124	19	11	3
%	48.4	40.8	6.3	3.6	1.0

The majority of teachers also thought that principals introduced them to innovative teaching methods. A third strongly agreed and 44.4% agreed that principals brought them into contact with new ideas and approaches designed to improve pupils' academic performances (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4. Numbers and percentages of teachers who agreed or disagreed that their principal brings them into contact with new ideas and approaches which are designed to improve pupils' academic achievements (*N*=306).

	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Number	102	136	37	27	2
%	33.3	44.4	12.7	8.8	0.7

Similarly four-fifths of teachers reported that their principals encouraged their attendance at staff development courses, with 17.0% indicating that principals supported their attendance 'somewhat' (Table 6.5).

Table 6.5. Numbers and percentages of teachers who agreed or disagreed that their principal encouraged their attendance at staff development programme / inservice training (*N*=306).

	Very much so	Somewhat	Not at all
Number	250	52	4
%	81.7	17.0	1.3

In relation to staff development, teachers were asked whether they believed development programmes were available to them to help them acquire new knowledge and ideas. Table 6.6 shows teachers responses to this item in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99. Teachers' satisfaction with the provision of staff development courses increased considerably over the first three years of the scheme. In 1996/97, only 45.1% of teachers agreed that development programmes were provided to help them acquire new knowledge. The following years, 63.1% and 74.1% indicated that they were satisfied with the development courses offered to them.

Table 6.6. Numbers and percentages of teachers who agreed or disagreed that staff development programmes are available to help you acquire new knowledge and skills in 1997/98 and 1998/99.

		Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1996/97	Number	31	132	95	71	29
(*N*=329)	%	8.6	36.5	26.2	19.6	8.0
1997/98	Number	31	169	58	51	8
(N=317)	%	9.8	53.3	18.3	16.1	2.5
1998/99	Number	43	186	55	22	3
(*N*=309)	%	13.9	60.2	17.8	7.1	1.0

In 1998/99 teachers were asked whether they believed that their access to school-based information had improved since the beginning of the scheme. Most teachers felt that the dissemination of information had improved in their school, over a third felt that it had improved 'a lot', while 43.4% thought that it had improved 'somewhat'. Only 3.3% of teachers felt that their access to information had disimproved (Table 6.7).

Table 6.7. Numbers and percentages of teachers who believed that overall, their your access to school-based information disimproved or improved since the introduction of Breaking the Cycle (*N*=272).

	Disimproved a lot	Disimproved somewhat	Unchanged	Improved somewhat	Improved a lot
Number	0	9	45	118	100
%	-	3.3	16.5	43.4	36.8

The final item in this section referred to staff involvement in the decision-making process in schools. Consulting staff on major decisions has been shown to be facilitate the implementation of new programmes in a school (Purkey & Smith, 1983). Since the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*, an increasing number of teachers indicated that they felt involved in the decision making-process in their school. In 1996/97, over four-fifths of teachers (86.5%) felt 'very much' or 'somewhat' involved (Table 6.8). The following two years, more than nine out of ten teachers (91.5% in 1997/98 and 92.1% in 1998/99) felt involved in decision making to some extent.

Table 6.8. Numbers and percentages of teachers who felt very much involved, somewhat involved or not at all involved in the decision making process in your school in 1997/98 and 1998/99.

		Very much involved	Somewhat involved	Not at all involved
1996/97	Number	139	174	42
(*N*=313)	%	38.4	48.1	11.6
1997/98	Number	133	159	27
(*N*=306)*	%	41.7	49.8	8.5
1998/99	Number	158	127	21
(*N*=319)	%	51.6	41.5	6.9

*In the 1997/98 principals were inadvertently asked to answer this question. In 1996/97 and 1998/99 only class teachers were asked to complete the item.

6.2 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 whether pupils' background or a teacher's skill had the 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 believed that a large proportion of their pupils fell into this category. Over two-fifths each year, thought that over 60% of their pupils had home lives that interfered with their ability to learn in school, while just over a third thought that a minority of their pupils (less than 40%) were negatively affected (Table 6.9). Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of the influence of home background on pupils' ability to learn, changed only slightly in the three years following the introduction of the scheme: 44.8% of teachers in 1996/97, compared to 46.2% in 1997/98 and 42.8% in 1998/99 thought that more than 60% of their pupils were educationally disadvantaged by their home backgrounds.

Table 6.9. Number 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	29	98	69	111	51
(*N*=362)	%	8.0	27.1	19.1	30.7	14.1
1997/98	Number	32	74	63	85	60
(N=314)	%	10.2	23.6	20.1	27.1	19.1
1998/99	Number	28	80	70	79	54
(*N*=311)	%	9.0	25.7	22.5	25.4	17.4

Teachers were asked about their expectations for their pupils. Table 6.10 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. In 1996/97, less than 3% of teachers thought that more than 80% of their pupils would remain in school beyond the Junior Certificate, while 9.3% believed that between 60% and 80% would (Table 6.10). Over one fifth of teachers had extremely low expectations: they believed that less than 20% of their pupils would enter the senior cycle.

The following year (1997/98), 2.2% of teachers thought that over 80% of pupils would continue in school after the Junior Certificate, with a further 18.5% believing that between 60% and 80% would. However, 15.3% of teachers had low expectations: they estimated that less than 20% of their pupils would continue in school. Similarly in 1998/99, 2.3% of teachers estimated that over 80% of pupils would enter the senior cycle, with 13.5% believing that less than 20% of pupils would.

Over the three years, teachers' expectations changed marginally. The number of teachers with very low expectations (expecting less than 20% of pupils to remain in school) decreased from 21.7% in 1996/97 to 13.5% in 1998/99. Furthermore, the number of teachers who expected between 41%-80% of pupils to stay in school rose from 43.1% in 1996/97 to 48.5% in 1998/99. Nevertheless, 97.2% of teachers in 1995/96, 97.8% in 1997/98, and 97.7% in 1998/99 believed that less than 80% of pupils would continue 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 3.2 (Table 3.4), 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). Hence, it can be estimated that between 80% and 90% of pupils (approximately) continue in school beyond the Junior Certificate each year. Thus, despite a slight raising of teachers' expectations over the three years, the majority of teachers (97.2% in 1995/96, 97.8% in 1997/98 and 97.7% in 1998/99) expected the early school-leaving rate of pupils in their schools to be higher than the national average.

Table 6.10. Numbers and percentages of teachers who indicated various percentages of their pupils that they expected to continue beyond Junior Certificate.

		< 20%	**20-40%**	**41-60%**	**61-80%**	**> 80%**
1996/97	Number	77	115	120	33	10
(*N*=362)	%	21.7	32.4	33.8	9.3	2.8
1997/98	Number	48	105	96	58	7
(*N*=314)	%	15.3	33.4	30.6	18.5	2.2
1998/99	Number	42	111	113	38	7
(*N*=311)	%	13.5	35.7	36.3	12.2	2.3

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 that pupils' background affected their interest level in school and their overall achievement at 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 education was strongly influenced by their parent's interest. In 1996/97, over two-thirds of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that parents' interest in their childrens' education determined their child's interest in school (Table 6.11). Only 15.5% strongly disagreed or disagreed that this was the case. Likewise in 1997/98, over 60% of teachers agreed that without parental interest, children would not be interested in school. However, almost a fifth of teachers strongly disagreed or disagreed with this view and somewhat less than a fifth were uncertain. Similarly in the third year of the scheme, 61.2% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that parental interest affected a child's interest in school, with 17.8% disagreeing. Over the three years of the scheme, there was a slight shift in opinion, with fewer teachers agreeing, and more being uncertain or disagreeing that a child's attitude to school was determined by their parents' interest in school (Table 6.11).

Table 6.11. Numbers and percentages of teachers expressing varying levels of agreement with the statement that if parents are not interested in their child's education, the child will not be interested in school, in 1996/97,1997/98 and 1998/99.

If the 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	No	104	144	57	55	1
(*N*=362)	%	28.7	39.8	15.7	15.2	0.3
1997/98	No	78	118	58	62	0
(N=316)	%	24.7	37.3	18.4	19.6	-
1998/99	No	59	134	66	53	3
(N=315)	%	18.7	42.5	21.0	16.8	1.0

In a related item, teachers were asked whether they believed it was possible to tell from a child's home background how well the child would do in school. In 1996/97, almost 60% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that a pupil's home background determined educational performance. The following two years, fewer teachers agreed (51.1% in 1997/98 and 56.8% in 1998/99) that it was possible to predict a child's performance at school from home background, and more teachers were uncertain. However fewer teachers in 1998/99 (16.9%) than in 1996/97 (18.2%) or 1997/98 (22.4%) actually disagreed that a pupil's background was a good predictor of school performance (Table 6.12).

Table 6.12. Numbers and percentages of teachers expressing varying levels of agreement that 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 at school.						
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1996/97	No	57	153	83	62	4
(*N*=362)	%	15.7	42.3	22.9	17.1	1.1
1997/98	No	31	131	84	69	2
(N=317)	%	9.8	41.3	26.5	21.8	0.6
1998/99	No	33	144	82	51	2
(N=312)	%	10.6	46.2	26.3	16.3	0.6

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 half of teachers believed that their pupils' educational success was primarily beyond their control. As shown in Table 6.13, 56.1% in 1996/97, 56.1% in 1997/98 and 50.3% in 1998/99 strongly agreed or agreed that some children will never do well in school regardless of teachers' efforts. However, over a fifth of teachers each year disagreed that this was the case and a further fifth was unsure.

Table 6.13. Numbers and percentages of teacher expressing varying levels of agreement with the statement 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	48	155	77	74	7
(*N*=362)	%	13.3	42.8	21.3	20.4	1.9
1997/98	Number	30	146	70	66	2
(N=314)	%	9.6	46.5	22.3	21.0	0.6
1998/99	Number	41	116	76	71	8
(N=312)	%	13.1	37.2	24.4	22.8	2.6

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 agreed or strongly agreed that all children could achieve at least a basic level of literacy (Table 6.14). Approximately seven out of ten teachers in 1996/97 and 1998/99 and two-thirds in 1998/99 believed that all children could achieve a satisfactory level of literacy. Almost one in eight each year disagreed that this was the case, although a fifth in 1998/99 was unsure whether all children could learn to read and write satisfactorily.

Table 6.14. 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	No	78	172	65	45	1
(*N*=362)	%	21.5	47.5	18.0	12.4	0.3
1997/98	No	37	182	55	35	2
(N=311)	%	11.9	58.5	17.7	11.3	0.6
1998/99	No	39	170	64	41	2
(N=316)	%	12.3	53.8	20.3	13.0	0.6

In summary, over three years, the same proportion of teachers (over two-fifths) believed that over 60% of their pupils were educationally disadvantaged by their home backgrounds. However, an increasing number of teachers had high expectations of their pupils: a greater proportion of teachers in 1998/99 than in 1997/98 expected more than 60% of their pupils to remain in school after the Junior Cycle. Nevertheless, more than nine out of ten teachers each year thought that less than 80% of their pupils would continue beyond the Junior Certificate.

Teachers' acceptance of responsibility for the success of their pupils at school did increase slightly during the three-year period. Fewer teachers strongly agreed (18.7% in 1998/99 compared to 28.7% in 1996/97) and more teachers were uncertain that parents' interest in education primarily influenced their children's interest in school. There was also a marginal decrease in the percentage of teachers who strongly agreed or agreed (from 58% to 56%) that a pupil's home background determined school performance, with a corresponding increase in uncertain responses. In addition, fewer teachers agreed that a pupils' lack of success at school was due to factors beyond their control: 50% of teachers in 1998/99 compared to 56% in 1996/97 thought that some children would never succeed academically. Finally, the same proportion of teachers (approximately 70%) each year agreed that all children could be taught to read and write satisfactorily. However, at least half of the teachers participating in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme believe that pupils' backgrounds has a greater influence than their skills as teachers on pupils' performance at school.

6.3 INCAREER DEVELOPMENT COURSES

Teachers were asked to indicate the number of incareer development days they had attended each year. The number of days increased following the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle* in 1996. As shown in Table 6.15, from March 1995 to March 1996 (the year before the introduction of the scheme) teachers attended incareer development courses for an average of 1.07 days. In contrast, during the first year of the scheme, from March 1996 to March 1997, teachers spent an average of 2.92 days attending development courses. Similarly in the second and third years of the scheme teachers spent an average of 2.87 days (March 1997 to March 1998) and 2.69 days (from March 1998 to March 1999) attending courses. The proportion of teachers who spent no days attending courses decreased from 10% in 1996/97 to 3.11% in 1997/98 and to only 1.4% in 1998/99. On average, female teachers spent more days per year attending career development courses than did male teachers, over the four-year period.

Table 6.15. 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*= 345)	Total	1.07	2.07	0	0	15
	Male	0.63	1.35	0	0	7
	Female	1.18	2.19	0	0	15
1.3.95-1.3.96 (*N*= 345)	Total	2.92	2.65	2	2	14
	Male	2.03	1.74	2	2	9
	Female	3.12	2.78	2	2	14
1.3.97-1.3.98 (*N*=289)	Total	2.87	2.19	2	2	14
	Male	2.65	1.79	2	2	13
	Female	2.92	2.27	2	2	14
1.3.98-1.3.99 (*N*=286)	Total	2.69	2.32	2	2	23
	Male	2.6	1.39	2	2	8
	Female	2.71	2.46	2	2	23

In 1997/98 and 1998/99, teachers were asked whether they found incareer development courses to be helpful to them in the classroom. Over four-fifths in 1997/98 said that such courses were either ‘very’ helpful (20.7%) or ‘somewhat’ helpful (63.5%). Similarly in 1998/99, over 85% of teachers indicated that they found incareer days to be of practical benefit. Seventy percent thought that the courses were ‘somewhat’ helpful, with 16.6% describing them as ‘very’ helpful (Table 6.16).

Table 6.16. Number and percentages of teachers who agreed or disagreed that they found the incareer development courses to be helpful when they returned to the classroom in 1997/98 and 1998/99.

		Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
1997/98 (*N*=285)	Number	59	181	20	21	4
	%	20.7	63.5	7.0	7.4	1.4
1998/99 (*N*=283)	Number	47	199	19	16	2
	%	16.6	70.3	6.7	5.7	0.7

Incareer development courses were organised for principals and class teachers at national and local level by the urban co-ordinator. Table 6.17 shows details of the various types of development courses organised in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99. In the first year of the scheme (1996/97), three incareer courses on school planning and school review, SWOT analysis and school development were organised for principals. Principals also attended an introductory course on *Breaking the Cycle*. The following year, principals attended seminars on 'multiple intelligences' and on art appreciation, while in the third year principals attended two development courses, one on school reviewing and the other on evaluating and recording progress in schools. In addition, all schools closed for a Planning Day each year. Planning days provided principals and teachers with an opportunity to develop and review the school action plan. In 1998/99, the urban co-ordinator assisted principals and teachers with their preparation for the third annual planning day, which focused on the evaluation and reviewing process involved in school planning.

A workshop on developing the teaching and learning environment was organised for junior class teachers (infants to second class) in the first year of the scheme. The course was entitled "Creating a classroom environment where learning take place" and covered topics such as classroom organisation and circle time. The following year, senior class teachers (third to sixth class) attended a course entitled 'Encouraging positive behaviour in the classroom'. The focus of this course was on classroom management and discipline. Staffs also attended a school-based seminar on language development in 1997/98 and on multiple intelligences in 1998/99. In addition one -week summer incareer development courses were held for several *Breaking the Cycle* schools each year.

Table 6.17. Incareer development courses organised in 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99 for principals and staffs of urban schools.

	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99
Principals	Information day		
	School planning/ school review	School Planning	Taking stock / reviewing
	School review / SWOT analysis	Art Seminar	Recording progress
	School Development	Multiple Intelligences	
Class Teachers	"Creating a classroom environment where learning can take place"	"Encouraging positive behaviour in the classroom"	
Whole School Seminars			Preparation for planning day (principals and some teachers)
	All schools closed for planning day	All schools closed for planning day	All schools closed for planning day
		Language Development seminar	Multiple Intelligences seminar
Summer Courses	2 one-week summer courses held	1 one-week summer course held	1 one-week summer course held

6.4 TEACHERS' WORK

As part of the urban dimension of *Breaking the Cycle*, the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) in Junior classes (Junior Infants through to second class) was reduced to about 15:1 in participating schools in 1996. This section of the report describes teachers' views on the impact of the reduced PTR on their pupils and examines any changes in teaching practice that have taken place as a result of the smaller class sizes.

In 1998/99 there were a total of 203 Junior class teachers (Junior Infants through to second class), 50 middle class teachers (third and fourth class) and 57 senior class teachers (fifth and sixth class) teaching in *Breaking the Cycle* schools. In addition, two teachers taught both junior and middle classes and six taught both senior and middle classes that year (Table 6.18).

Table 6.18. Total number of Junior, Middle and Senior class teachers in schools in 1998/99 (*N*=316).

	Number
Junior teacher (only)	201
Junior and middle class teacher	2
Middle class teachers (only)	50
Senior class teachers (only)	57
Middle and senior class teachers	6
Total	316

In order to ascertain whether the teaching methods of Junior class teachers had been affected by the reduced class sizes, their responses to two items relating to their teaching practices were compared to those of middle and senior class teachers. Teachers were specifically asked to indicate the proportion of Irish, English and Mathematics class time they devoted to whole class, group and individual teaching. In relation to lesson structure, teachers were also asked to report the percentage of time they devoted to various activities during a Mathematics lesson. These items seemed to present some difficulty, as a considerable number of teachers supplied percentages which summed to more than 100. In analyses, cases with totals of over 110% were discarded.

Tables 6.19, 6.20 and 6.21 show the mean percentage of Irish, English and Mathematics time Junior class teachers and middle/senior class teachers devoted to whole class, small group and individual child teaching. Both junior and middle/senior class teachers indicated that they spent the majority of Irish class time in whole class teaching; Junior class teachers spent 87.66%; and middle and senior class teachers spent 84.3% of class time in this way. Indeed teachers indicated that they spent less than 7% of Irish time teaching individual children.

Table 6.19. Mean percentage of Irish teaching time spent in whole class, small group and individual child teaching, by Junior class teachers and middle and senior class teachers.

	Whole Class	**Small Groups**	**Individual children**
	Mean % (*SD*)	Mean % (*SD*)	Mean % (*SD*)
Junior class teachers (*N*=193)	87.66 (17.05)	6.01 (10.89)	6.07 (10.31)
Middle and senior class teachers (*N*=107)	84.3 (17.52)	8.62 (13.6)	7.08 (8.74)

In contrast, teachers spent relatively less English and Mathematics time engaged in whole class teaching and more time teaching small groups and individual pupils (Tables 6.20 and 6.21). Of particular interest in the fact that Junior class teachers said that they devoted more English time to individual child teaching and less time to whole class teaching that did middle/senior class teachers. Junior class teachers indicated that they typically spent 25.34% of English time instructing individual pupils and 46.87% of class time in whole class teaching. Middle/senior class teachers on the other hand, typically spent 14.63% and 55.37 % of English time engaged in individual and whole class teaching respectively.

Table 6.20. Mean percentage of English teaching time spent in whole class, small group and individual child teaching, by Junior class teachers and middle and senior class teachers.

	Whole Class	Small Groups	Individual children
	Mean % (*SD*)	Mean % (*SD*)	Mean % (*SD*)
Junior class teachers (*N*=191)	46.87 (21.33)	26.98 (19.8)	25.34 (16.54)
Middle and senior class teachers (*N*=108)	55.37 (25.56)	29.91 (23.55)	14.63 (15.19)

Similarly, Junior class teachers devoted proportionately more Mathematics class time to teaching individual children (25.34%) and less to whole class teaching (46.87%) compared to middle/senior class teachers (17.41% and 56.19% respectively) (Table 6.21). In summary, Junior class teachers, with the reduced PTR

in operation in their classes, typically spent more English and Mathematics class time engaged in individual child teaching and less in whole class teaching compared to middle/senior class teachers with ordinary class sizes.

Table 6.21. Mean percentage of Mathematics teaching time spent in whole class, small group and individual child teaching, by Junior class teachers and middle and senior class teachers.

	Whole Class		Small Groups		Individual children	
	Mean %	(*SD*)	Mean %	(*SD*)	Mean %	(*SD*)
Junior class teachers (*N*=191)	46.87	(21.33)	26.98	(19.8)	25.34	(16.54)
Middle and senior class teachers (*N*=108)	56.19	(25.39)	25.94	(23.64)	17.41	(13.76)

The second item on teaching practice related to lesson structure. Teachers were presented with a list of various classroom activities and asked to indicate the percentage of class time they devoted to each during a typical Mathematics lesson. Table 6.22 shows Junior class teachers' and middle/senior class teachers' response to this item in 1998/99. Junior class teachers (18.45% of a typical Mathematics class) were more likely than middle/senior class teachers (8.64%) to engage in group activities. They also spent proportionately more time introducing (18.24%) and developing a topic (21.49%). In contrast, Junior class teachers spent less class time (19.57%) on paper and pencil activities than did middle/senior class teachers (24.21%). They also devoted less class time to correcting homework (2.1% vs 7.65%) and less time assigning homework to their pupils (2.94% vs 6.68%).

Table 6.22. Mean percentage time spent on various activities during a typical mathematics lesson, by all Junior class teachers and middle and senior class teachers, in 1998/99 (*N*=291).

	Junior class teachers (*N*=187)*		Middle / senior class teachers (N=102)*	
	Mean % of class time	*(SD)*	Mean % of class time	*(SD)*
Review of previous lesson by -				
-short quiz/test	5.99	(5.97)	6.14	(4.85)
-by teacher alone	2.96	(3.75)	2.98	(3.91)
-correction of homework	2.10	(3.7)	7.65	(5.49)
Oral drill	7.62	(6.17)	7.03	(6.05)
Introduction of topic	18.24	(10.21)	14.31	(9.66)
Development of topic	21.49	(10.45)	19.99	(12.22)
Group activities	18.45	(13.18)	8.64	(9.11)
Paper and pencil activities	19.57	(13.49)	24.21	(14.39)
Homework assignment	2.94	(4.15)	6.68	(4.51)
Pupils doing homework in class	0.37	(1.95)	1.53	(3.69)

* only cases which summed to less than 105% are included.

Table 6.23 presents the mean percentage of time teachers reported that they spent on various activities in a typical Mathematics lesson in 1996/97. A comparison of Tables 6.22 and 6.23 reveals that since the reduction of Junior class sizes teachers spent considerably more class time engaged in group activities (10.75% of time in 1996/97 compared to 18.45% in 1998/99), more time introducing a topic (16.8% in 1996/97 and 18.24% in 1998/99) and more time developing a topic (18.95% in 1996/97 and 21.49% in 1998/99). In contrast, the proportion of time middle and senior class teachers devote to these activities changed little over this period.

Table 6.23. Mean percentage time spent on various activities during a typical mathematics lesson, by all Junior class teachers and middle and senior class teachers, in 1996/97(*N*=291).

	Junior class teachers (*N*=205)*	Middle/Senior Class teachers (*N*=114)*
	Mean % of class time *(SD)*	Mean % of class time *(SD)*
Review of previous lesson by -		
-short quiz/test	5.12 (4.47)	5.3 (5.63)
-by teacher alone	2.31 (3.67)	2.78 (4.18)
-correction of homework	2.33 (4.27)	7.75 (6.54)
Oral drill	6.6 (6.13)	5.89 (4.83)
Introduction of topic	16.81 (9.59)	13.75 (10.96)
Development of topic	18.95 (10.64)	19.35 (10.45)
Group activities	10.75 (10.27)	6.76 (8.89)
Paper and pencil activities	17.04 (11.23)	24.54 (15.75)
Homework assignment	2.3 (3.25)	5.75 (5.16)
Pupils doing homework in class	0.13 (0.78)	1.19 (3.0)
Practical or hands-on work**	18.36 (15.66)	5.62 (7.48)

*only cases which summed to less than 105% are included.
* this option was not available to teachers in 1998/99.

In 1998/99, junior and middle class teachers were asked whether they believed that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds had benefited from the reduced PTR in operation in junior classes. The vast majority of Junior class teachers (97.5%) believed that they had (Table 6.24). Only three teachers were unsure, and one believed that pupils had not benefited from smaller class sizes.

Table 6.24. Numbers and percentages of Junior class teachers who believed that marginalised pupils in their school had benefited from the reduced class sizes operating under *Breaking the Cycle* (*N*=197).

	Yes	Unsure	No
Number	192	3	2
Percentage	97.5	1.5	1.0

In an open-ended item that followed, teachers were asked to give their reasons for believing that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds had benefited from being taught in smaller classes. Their responses were coded according to the type of response given and are presented in Table 6.25. Junior class teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the reduced PTR in operation in their classes. Over 90% felt that pupils benefited from the extra individual attention they received from teachers in smaller classes. As one teacher remarked:

"Individual work is extremely beneficial and in many cases brings child on greatly."

Teachers also indicated that they had more time to devote to their pupils and that their ability to set schoolwork appropriate to the level of ability of 'marginalised' and weak children had improved. Over two-fifths of Junior class teachers believed that it was easier to identify and address pupils' problems and needs in smaller classes. A third of teachers (31.1%) reported that there was a more positive and friendly atmosphere in their classrooms, that they spent less time disciplining pupils and that pupil-teacher relationships had improved overall. Many teachers (30.2%) also reported that since the introduction of the reduced PTR, junior class pupils were more self-confident, had better social skills, were more motivated to learn and had a more positive attitude to school. For example, one teacher wrote:

"The positive attitudes they experience make them more confident, builds self-esteem and less behavioural problems."

Pupils in smaller classes also participated more in class, asked more questions, and were better behaved overall, according to teachers:

"Children in smaller classes feel less intimidated speaking out in front of classmates which is great for their self-esteem."

"Easier for pupils to get involved in and ask questions about classroom activities and seek help when needed."

Less than one junior class teacher in ten made other comments about the benefits of the smaller class sizes. Several reported that they found it easier to organise practical and group work. Others mentioned that additional classroom resources and concrete materials were available to them. Still others mentioned that it was easier to organise out-of-school activities for small class groups and that there was more opportunity to engage in other activities aimed at broadening the curriculum such as music, art and oral work. Finally, 28 teachers made other comments on

reduced class sizes. Several commented on the benefits of extra space in the classroom, while others remarked that there was greater contact with parents since the introduction of the reduced PTR. Some examples of other responses are given below:

"More opportunity to take children out of school for various activities."

"The smaller groups allow children to mix together socially."

"Children have more space and freedom of movement."

"More specific time can be spent by teacher encouraging acceptance and communication among children."

Table 6.25 Numbers and percentages of Junior class teachers who gave various explanations as to why they believed marginalised pupils had benefited from being taught in smaller classes (*N*=193*).

Category	Number of teachers	% of teachers
More individual (one-to-one) attention / teaching methods and tasks cater to specific needs of individual children / more child-centred approach / children can work at their own pace	180	93.3%
Teachers have better knowledge of pupils / know their strengths and weaknesses/ can identify problems / specific needs / address needs and problems	93	48.2%
Better pupil-teacher relationships/ more positive atmosphere in classroom / more social interaction among pupils and between pupils and teachers	60	31.1%
Pupils self-esteem / confidence/ motivation improved / more positive attitude to school/ more independent / motivated	58	30.15%
Pupils participation in class improved / improved performance / fewer discipline problems / pupils ask more questions / fewer intimidated by other pupils	46	23.8%
Extra resources/ equipment/ materials available	16	8.3%
Practical and small group work easier to organise	13	6.7%
Broader curriculum / more time for each topic	7	3.6%
Benefits of out-of-school activities	6	3.1%
Other		
- more space in classroom	3	1.6%
- more varied activities	5	2.6%
- greater contact with parents	5	2.6%
- other	15	7.8%

* only Junior class teachers' responses were analysed.

Only two Junior Class teachers felt that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds had not benefited from the smaller classes. One thought that pupils' confidence had improved as a result of being taught in a smaller group but was unsure whether there had been an improvement in their academic performance. Another teacher felt that pupils taught in a co-operative classroom setting were not receiving the individual attention they needed.

Ninety Junior class teachers made other comments on the 15:1 PTR (Table 6.26). A quarter of respondents thought that the extra attention pupils received enhanced pupils self-confidence and helped them realise their potential. For example:

"Each child gets more attention, enhancing learning and self-esteem."

Many teachers also believed that the sense of belonging pupils experience in small classes improved their self-esteem. Twenty Junior class teachers thought that relationships between pupils and teachers had improved as a result of the reduced PTR, while others believed that teachers were better able to monitor pupils' progress. In addition, nine teachers made general positive comments on the reduced PTR. For example:

"The 15:1 is very beneficial to the pupils and suits my style of teaching, i.e. with the children learning through play."

However, ten teachers made negative comments about the smaller class sizes. Several were of the opinion that improvements made by pupils in junior classes are lost when they enter large senior classes, and believed that the reduced class sizes should be extended to senior classes. One teacher felt that they were expected to achieve unrealistic targets in improving children's schooling, while another teacher remarked that:

" Over the past 2 years with the 15:1, I have found that the time spent on the core curriculum has diminished, more time is spent on Art, P.E. and computers…this leads to a broadening out of the subject but less is covered".

Finally, 30 teachers made other comments on the reduced class sizes. Several thought that extra support was needed in the classroom (e.g., classroom assistants, resource teachers, psychologists and speech therapists). Others reported that there were fewer discipline problems, better attendance and improved reading levels as a result of the smaller classes. Teachers also indicated that organising group work in the classroom and out-of-school excursions was easier. Examples of other responses are:

"With smaller numbers there is greater scope for using concrete materials to reinforce concepts. More scope for positive communication with parents through, e.g. homework copies etc. Outings have given children first hand experiences which they might not have had. Also more time for discussion and sharing experiences and ideas."

" This is the first year I have taught Junior infants since the 15:1 PTR was introduced. I feel that it is a wonderful opportunity for teachers of Junior Infants to do lots of practical work, language etc. Also not one child cried in my class in September, as a group of 15 is not nearly as frightening as 30!"

Table 6.26. Numbers and percentages of Junior class teachers who made other comments on 15:1 pupil to teacher ratio in junior classes in *Breaking the Cycle* schools (*N*=89).

Category	Number of teachers	% of teachers
Attention given to children important for their personal development / confidence / enthusiasm for learning / realise their potential	23	25.8%
Better atmosphere in class / better relationship between teachers and pupils / teacher gets to know children better	20	22.5%
Problems identified earlier / easier to monitor pupils' performance	15	16.9%
Better sense of belonging / self-esteem / confidence	14	15.7%
Greater access to resources and materials	11	12.4%
Negative comment (e.g., less time spent on core curriculum)	10	11.2%
Co-operative teaching not as beneficial as PTR 15:1 / problems with co-operative teaching	8	9.0%
General positive comment (e.g., it seems to work)	9	10.1%
Other - 15:1 PTR should be extended to senior classes - more support needed in the classroom (e.g., classroom assistants) -other	 6 4 20	 6.7% 4.5% 22.5%

Almost seven out of ten teachers of middle classes agreed that disadvantaged pupils had benefited from the reduced PTR in junior classes. Almost a quarter were unsure; and one in thirteen did not believe that pupils had benefited from the small class sizes (Table 6.27).

Table 6.27. Numbers and percentages of teachers teaching middle classes who believed that marginalised pupils in their school had benefited from the reduced class sizes operating under *Breaking the Cycle* (*N*=52).

	Yes	Unsure	No
Number	36	12	4
Percentage	69.2	23.1	7.7

*including teachers who taught middle and senior classes.

Forty middle class teachers explained why they believed that pupils had (or had not) benefited from the reduced PTR (Table 6.28). Seven in ten thought that pupils benefited from the extra individual attention they received from teachers in small classes. A third of teachers perceived an improvement in pupils' self-esteem, and many felt this was attributable to the attention they received from teachers while in Junior classes. Indeed, one teacher thought that pupils who had been taught in small junior classes were more self-assured and confident than some of the older pupils in the school. Another teacher stated that:

"These pupils have learned appropriate behaviour in Junior classes. Although these pupils are still marginalised, I believe their problems would manifest themselves earlier and be more serious without *Breaking the Cycle*."

Twelve middle class teachers thought that pupils were participating more in class, were more confident when asking questions, and were less intimidated by their classmates. They also perceieved an improvement in academic standards, particularly in reading and mathematics. Several teachers also felt that Junior class teachers knew their pupils better and were more aware of their individual needs. Others reported that that pupil-teacher relationships had improved. Some teachers mentioned that t more resources were available for each pupil in smaller classes, while others said that it was easier to organise practical, group, and remedial work in smaller groups. Eleven middle class teachers gave responses which were categorised as 'other'. For example:

" 15:1 is not yet the optimal ratio for severely disadvantaged areas. 10:1 would be- these children need as much time as possible to interact with teacher and peers in a non-threatening environment. 15:1 shows what may be possible but unless it is delivered in conjunction with Early Start, reduced ratios (workload) for HSCL teachers and extended into middle and senior classes, its impact will be limited".

Table 6.28. Numbers and percentages of middle class teachers who gave various explanations as to why they believed marginalised pupils had benefited from being taught in smaller classes (*N*=40*).

Category	Number of teachers	% of teachers
Teachers can give pupils more time and individual (one-to-one) attention	28	70.0%
Pupils self-esteem improved / more independent and able to express themselves	13	32.5%
Pupils participation and confidence in class improved / ask more questions / less intimidated by other pupils improved performance	12	30.0%
Teachers can identify and address pupils specific problems and needs / more aware of pupils progress	8	20.0%
Better pupil-teacher relationships/ more positive atmosphere in classroom	7	17.5%
Extra resources available	3	10.0%
Practical and small group work easier to organise	4	7.5%
Other	11	25.0%

*including middle and senior class teachers.

Ten middle class teachers believed that 'marginalised' pupils had not benefited from the reduced pupil-teacher ratio (Table 6.29). Five teachers made general negative comments. For example:

"They show an amazing inability to listen in a larger class. They are unable to complete task and think for themselves."

Two teachers felt that pupils who had been taught in small junior classes were less disciplined and less independent, while another thought that pupils were less mature. Finally, one teacher felt that it was difficult to counteract the influence of a pupil's home background.

Table 6.29. Numbers and percentages of middle class teachers who gave various explanations as to why they believed marginalised pupils had not benefited from being taught in smaller classes (*N*=9*).

Category	Number of teachers	% of teachers
General negative comment *(e.g., no benefit)*	6	66.6%
Discipline problems/ children less independent / easily distracted	2	22.25%
Other	2	22.3%

*including middle and senior class teachers

Twenty-five middle class teachers made other comments on the reduced junior class sizes (Table 6.30). Seven felt that pupils who had attended small junior classes had difficulty adjusting to the larger senior classes and were overly demanding of their attention. As one teacher commented:

> **"I have found this year, teaching third class, that it's an absolute shock for the pupils being put back into a big class. I just can't give them the attention they have been used to. This leads to all sorts of problems."**

Other middle class teachers thought that all classes in their school should have a PTR of 15:1. Six teachers made general positive comments, although several teachers reported that children who had been taught in small junior classes were less well behaved, more immature, and less independent than other pupils. Six teachers gave responses which were categorised as "other".

Table 6.30. Numbers and percentages of middle class teachers who made other comments on 15:1 pupil to teacher ratio in junior classes in *Breaking the Cycle* schools (*N*=25*).

Category	Number of teachers	% of teachers
Children have difficulty adjusting to larger classes in 3rd class/ demand attention they received in junior classes/ difficult for senior class teachers to give individual attention	7	28.0%
General positive comment *(e.g. benefit to children)*	6	24.0%
Smaller classes (15:1) should be extended to whole school (up to 6th class) / should reduce PTR in other schools	5	20.0%
Too early to say	2	8.0%
Other		
- Discipline problems in larger classes	1	4.0%
- Problems identified earlier	1	4.0%
- More immature/ less independent	2	8.0%
- other	6	24.0%

*including middle and senior class teachers

Finally, senior class teachers were invited, if they desired, to comment on the reduced PTR in junior classes in their schools (Table 6.31). Only 42 senior class teachers in total responded. Many of the comments were similar to those made by middle class teachers. The most common remark (45.2% of respondents) was that the

reduced PTR should be in operation in all classes in the school. Eleven senior class teachers also reported that children have specific problems when they transfer from small junior classes to large senior classes as they are used to individual attention from Junior class teachers. Overall, senior teachers were positive about the reduced PTR, however, indicating that it gave pupils a chance to receive individual attention, to gain confidence and to prepare for the senior cycle in primary school. A fifth of respondents (nine teachers) made general positive comments. For example:

> **"I think it is an excellent scheme and if problems are attended to and solved before the children reach 3rd class then the work in the senior classes will be so much easier for the children."**

Finally, seven senior class teachers made comments which were categorised as 'other'. For example:

> **"I think 15:1 is a great idea and I think that it is terrible that it is just confined to junior classes as it would be of extreme benefit to all children in all classes especially on the upper primary as this is where a lot of learning takes place. It is very hard to teach a programme with a large class in a disadvantaged area."**

> **"Marginalised pupils are likely to benefit from the extra attention available to them through 15:1 PTR, but their problems are not going to go away since for the most part they arise from home situations. Therefore I think further support is needed for marginalised pupils in senior classes if they are to succeed in school."**

Table 6.31. Numbers and percentages of senior class teachers who made other comments on the 15:1 pupil to teacher ratio in junior classes in *Breaking the Cycle* schools (*N*=42*).

Category	Number of teachers	% of teachers
Smaller classes (15:1) should be extended up to 6th class	19	45.2%
Children have difficulty adjusting to large senior classes after PTR 15:1 in junior years / used to individual attention from teacher / brighter pupils in senior classes (5th and 6th) demand more individual attention	11	26.2%
Chance for children to get individual attention / their individual needs are met / problems can be identified and dealt with	9	21.4%
General positive comment (e.g., will see benefits when children enter senior cycle)	9	21.4%
Develop skills and gain confidence	4	9.5%
Smaller classes prepare children for senior cycle / chance to learn basics of subjects thoroughly	2	4.8%
Problems with co-operative teaching (noise levels, lack of spontaneity)	2	4.8%
Problems with absenteeism / difficult to teach certain subjects to small groups (e.g. drama, music) /discipline problems with pupils in senior classes	1	2.4%
Other	7	16.7%

*including middle and senior class teachers.

6.5 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. Teachers were asked whether they believed participating in *Breaking the Cycle* had improved their understanding of the nature of educational disadvantage.

They were also asked whether their ability to respond to the needs of disadvantaged pupils and to monitor pupils' progress had improved since the introduction of the scheme. 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, over three-quarters 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 three-quarters of teachers in 1996/97 (77.1%) and more than nine out of ten teachers in 1997/98 (91.1%) and 1998/99 (93.3%) thought that that the scheme had improved their understanding of educational disadvantage 'a lot' or 'somewhat' (Table 6.32). Furthermore, half of teachers in 1998/99 indicated that the scheme had increased their knowledge of disadvantage 'a lot'.

Similarly, an increasing number of teachers agreed that their ability to consider the needs of marginalised children, when organising their work, had improved to some degree. Over four-fifths of teachers (80.9%) 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*. The following years, 90.4% (1997/98) and 94.5% of teachers (1998/99) thought that the scheme had enhanced this ability 'a lot' or 'somewhat'. It is noteworthy that more teachers in 1997/98 and 1998/99 (44.7% and 49.8% respectively) than in 1996/97 (31.2%) felt that the scheme had enhanced this ability 'a lot'.

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 of the scheme. In 1996/97, 83.7% of teachers responded that their ability to select appropriate methodologies when teaching educationally disadvantaged pupils had improved 'a lot' or 'somewhat'. In 1997/98 and 1998/99, 92.4% and 95.8% of teachers, respectively, thought that their ability to respond to the learning needs of the disadvantaged had improved to some extent. Only 7.6% of teachers in 1997/98 and 4.2% in 1998/99 felt that their ability to respond to the learning needs of the disadvantaged had not improved 'at all'.

Finally, an increasing number of teachers believed that the scheme had improved their ability to monitor their pupils' progress. In 1996/97 over three-quarters of teachers also reported that their ability to review and record pupils'

scholastic progress had improved ' a lot' or 'somewhat' in 1996/97. The following year (1997/98), 85.8% thought that they were better able to monitor pupils' academic performances, with a total of 93.2% of teachers in 1998/99 indicating that this ability had improved. Moreover, only 6.8% of teachers, compared to 19.6% in 1996/97 and 14.2% in 1997/98, reported that their ability to review and record pupils progress had not improved 'at all' (Table 6.32).

Table 6.32. Numbers and 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*=340)	%	28.2	48.9	20.4
1997/98 (*N*=314)	%	47.1	44.0	8.9
1998/99 (*N*=313)	%	50.2	43.1	6.7
Organise my work on the basis of knowledge and needs of disadvantaged children.				
		A lot	Somewhat	Not at all
1996/97 (*N*=337)	%	31.2	49.7	16.0
1997/98 (*N*=313)	%	44.7	45.7	9.6
1998/99 (*N*=311)	%	49.8	44.7	5.5
Adopt teaching strategies that respond effectively to the learning needs of disadvantaged children.				
		A lot	Somewhat	Not at all
1996/97 (*N*=338)	%	35.6	48.1	13.0
1997/98 (*N*=316)	%	42.7	49.7	7.6
1998/99 (*N*=312)	%	51.6	44.2	4.2
Review and record pupils' progress.				
		A lot	Somewhat	Not at all
1996/97 (*N*=337)	%	33.4	43.9	19.6
1997/98 (*N*=317)	%	28.7	57.1	14.2
1998/99 (*N*=311)	%	37.6	55.6	6.8

Two further items required teachers to indicate the extent to which their teaching practices, opinions, and attitudes had changed as a result of being involved in *Breaking the Cycle.* Three-quarters of teachers in 1997/98 (76.1%) agreed that their

teaching practices had changed 'somewhat' or 'very much'. The remaining quarter were unsure, or believed that their teaching methods had 'not really' or 'not at all' changed. In 1998/99, a larger majority of teachers (87.1%) thought that their teaching methods had changed to some extent, with less than 7% reporting that they had not changed 'at all' (Table 6.33).

Table 6.33. Numbers and percentages of teachers who believed that their teaching practices and 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 (*N*=314).						
		Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
1997/98 (*N*=314)	No	65	174	22	43	10
	%	20.7	55.4	7.0	13.7	3.2
1998/99 (*N*=308)	No	67	198	23	18	2
	%	21.8	64.3	7.5	5.8	0.6
My opinions and attitudes have changed as a result of being involved in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme (*N*=317).						
		Very much so	Somewhat	Unsure	Not really	Not at all
1997/98 (*N*=317)	No	70	170	26	39	12
	%	22.1	53.6	8.2	12.3	3.8
1998/99 (*N*=309)	No	92	177	17	18	5
	%	29.8	57.3	5.5	5.8	1.6

Similarly, the majority of teachers in 1997/98 (75.7%) felt that their opinions and attitudes had changed as a result of being involved in *Breaking the Cycle*, with only 16.1% saying that their attitudes had 'not really' or 'not at all' changed. The following year teachers were even more certain that their attitudes had changed. A total of 87.1% in 1998/99 felt that their opinions and attitudes had changed to some extent, while only 7.4% thought that this was not the case (Table 6.33).

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. The vast majority in 1997/98 (91.7%) and 1998/99 (94.4%) believed that *Breaking the Cycle* had a very positive or positive effect on their school overall (Table 6.34). Only one teacher each year felt that the scheme had a negative effect.

Over four-fifths of teachers also felt that the scheme had a very positive (40.38%) or positive (44.55%) effect on morale in their school. Comparatively more teachers were unsure (13.78%), although only four believed that the scheme had a negative effect on school morale (Table 6.34). Over four-fifths of teachers (84.9%) in 1997/98 and almost nine out of ten (89.4%) in 1998/99 also thought that the scheme had a very positive or positive effect on morale in their school. The number of teachers who were unsure decreased from 13.8% to 9.2% over the two-year period, and only four teachers each year thought that the scheme had a negative effect on school morale (Table 6.34).

Table 6.34. 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 school morale.

Effect participating in *Breaking the Cycle* has had on school						
		Very positive	Positive	Unsure/ None	Negative	Very negative
1997/98 (*N*=311)	Number	151	134	25	1	0
	%	48.6	43.1	8.0	0.3	0
1998/99 (*N*=303)	Number	166	120	16	1	0
	%	54.8	39.6	5.3	0.3	0
Effect participating in *Breaking the Cycle* has had on morale in school.						
		Very positive	Positive	Unsure/ None	Negative	Very negative
1997/98 (N=312)	Number	126	139	43	4	0
	%	40.3	44.6	13.8	1.3	0
1998/99 (*N*=303)	Number	137	134	28	4	0
	%	45.2	44.2	9.2	1.3	0

Teachers were asked whether they believed that 'marginalised' pupils in their school had or had not benefited from participating in the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme. Over four-fifths of teachers (82.8%) in 1997/98 believed that pupils had benefited from the scheme. Only seven teachers thought that they had not and 14.97% were unsure (Table 6.35). The following year, the vast majority of teachers (93.7%) felt that disadvantaged pupils were benefiting from the scheme. In fact, only three teachers thought that pupils had not benefited, and only 5.3% were unsure.

Table 6.35. 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*=314)	Number	260	47	7
	%	82.8	15.0	2.2
1998/99 (*N*=302)	Number	283	16	3
	%	93.7	5.3	1.0

In a follow-up item, teachers were asked to explain why they believed children had, or had not, benefited from the scheme. Tables 6.36 and 6.37 list various explanations given in 1997/98 and 1998/99. Over two-thirds of teachers in 1997/98 indicated that since the introduction of the scheme, they had more time to devote to individual pupils and consequently were better able to identify and attend to the needs of disadvantaged children (Table 6.36). Some teachers said that 'marginalised' pupils in particular benefited from the increased individual attention they received. Ten percent of teachers felt that *Breaking the Cycle* had afforded disadvantaged children an opportunity to participate in activities that would not otherwise have been possible. A further 10% thought that disadvantaged pupils had benefited from the extra equipment funded by the scheme, while 15 teachers (5.08%) mentioned the financial benefits of the scheme in general. Almost a fifth of teachers (17.63%) reported an improvement in pupils' social skills and enhanced self-esteem and 5% noticed better behaviour and attendance rates among disadvantaged pupils.

Over one fifth of teachers gave explanations which were classified in the 'other' category. Eight teachers thought that the scheme had not been of any benefit to 'marginalised' children' while a further eight felt that it was too early to evaluate the effects of the scheme. A number of teachers mentioned the advantages of the reduced pupil-teacher ratio of 15:1 in junior classes and the extra inservice arranged for teachers in participating schools.

" Teachers are more positive in their approach to these students. Inservice days help teachers to give support to one another."

Table 6.36. Numbers and percentages of principals who gave various explanations as to why they believed 'marginalised' pupils had or had not benefited from *Breaking the Cycle* in 1997/98 (*N*=295).

Category	Number of teachers	% of teachers*
More time for the pupils/ Learn to focus on disadvantaged pupils/ Early identification of problems	198	67.12%
Improved pupil self-esteem/social skills	52	17.63%
Early identification of problems	31	10.51%
Chance to do things not otherwise possible	30	10.17%
Extra equipment	30	10.17%
Better behaviour/attendance rates	17	5.76%
Financial benefits	15	5.08%
Learn to focus on disadvantaged	12	4.07%
More parental interest	2	0.68%
Pupils meet outsiders	1	0.34%
No benefit / no change in performance	8	2.71%
Too early to say	8	2.71%
Children frequently absent from school do not benefit	7	2.37%
Extra teacher in 2nd class / benefit of reduced PTR	6	2.03%
Other		
- Childrens' needs are met	5	1.69%
- More specialised help needed	5	1.69%
- Can't compensate for pupils disadvantaged home background	3	1.02%
- Inservice beneficial	2	0.68%
- Improvement in pupils academic performance	1	0.34%
- Other	20	6.78%
	65	22.03%

* percentage of teachers who gave one or more explanation

Several teachers were of the opinion that children who were frequently absent from school could not benefit from the scheme, while others questioned whether it was possible to compensate for pupils' disadvantaged home backgrounds at all.

" The children most in need of this new system rarely attend for more than a week."
"There are people within school who will never benefit."

Five teachers believed that more specialised help within the school was needed, for example:

" Some children need more specialised help for emotional and behavioural problems."

"Further input needed from outside agencies, i.e. refugee children and extension of psychological service to advise teachers how to deal with children with emotional difficulties."

However, other teachers believed that as a result of *Breaking the Cycle* the needs of 'marginalised' pupils were being met.

In 1998/99, 254 teachers gave reasons for believing that 'marginalised' pupils had, or had not, benefited from their involvement in *Breaking the Cycle* (Table 6.37) . Many of the reasons were similar to those made in 1997/98. Two-thirds of teachers felt that the reduced pupil-teacher ratio in junior classes had been particularly beneficial to 'marginalised' pupils as they received more individual attention and teachers could address their individual needs.

A fifth of teachers thought that pupils' self-confidence had improved and that their attitude to school had changed. They were more motivated to learn and had a more positive attitude to school overall. For example, as two teachers remarked:

"**Children receive badly needed attention, emotional support and interact much more frequently with caring adults."**

"Children are more inclined to *want* to come to school."

Many teachers (13.8%) felt that the out-of-school activities exposed them to new experiences, which were previously not available to them. Several teachers (8.7%) also reported that pupils' attendance at school and their academic performances (e.g., reading skills) had improved since the commencement of the scheme. Others (18.1%) felt that the financial benefits of the scheme and the extra equipment and materials purchased with *Breaking the Cycle* funds were beneficial to disadvantaged children. Relatively few teachers (4.3%) made negative comments on the scheme. Some thought that it was too early to evaluate its effects, while others thought that children benefited academically but were not sure that their social skills had improved. Others commented that there was no discernible difference in children's work and that children with behavioural problems were also disruptive in smaller classes. Another stated that:

" I'm unsure because some of these childrens' needs are still not met - e.g., poverty, poor attendance, hence school has little relevance in their lives and education is very low in their priority list."

Finally, over 10% of teachers made other comments on the benefits of the scheme for 'marginalised' pupils. Many commented on the benefits of the reduced pupil-teacher ratio in junior classes. Others made general remarks on the scheme overall. For example:

> **"They have been given a very positive learning environment to start their days in school."**

They also reported that the scheme had boosted the morale of parents, teachers and pupils and that there was greater contact between teachers and parents of 'marginalised' pupils. Teachers also remarked that there was more time to engage in oral language work, art activities, and group work since the commencement of the scheme.

Table 6.37. Numbers and percentages of teachers who gave various explanations as to why they believed 'marginalised' pupils had or had benefited from *Breaking the Cycle* in 1998/99 (*N*=254).

Category	No of teachers	% of teachers
Benefited from lower PTR in junior classes / more individual attention / improved pupil-teacher relationship / teacher attends to the academic and emotional needs of children	166	65.4
Pupil self-esteem / social skills / self-confidence improved (due to extra attention from teachers) / pupils have a more positive attitude to school / more motivated / pupils' perception of school changed, e.g. more interesting	54	21.3
Chance to partake in activities not otherwise possible / out-of-school activities	35	13.8
Attend school more often / educational standards have improved / reading skills improved	22	8.7
Financial benefits / resources (unspecific)	22	8.7
Extra equipment / materials	24	9.4
Problems identified earlier	16	6.3
No benefit / general negative comment	11	4.3
More parental interest	4	1.6
Too early to tell	3	1.2
Other	31	12.2

Over the two years there was little change in the reasons teachers gave for believing that 'marginalised' pupils benefited from the *Breaking the Cycle* scheme, although teachers responses were more varied in 1997/98 than in 1998/99. The most beneficial aspect of the scheme, according to two-thirds of teachers, was the reduced PTR in operation in junior classes. There was a marginal increase in the proportion of teachers who thought that pupils' self-esteem and social skills had improved as a result of their participation in the scheme: a fifth of teachers in 1998/99 compared to 17.6% in 1997/98. Similarly, more teachers in 1998/99 (13.8%) than in 1997/98 (10.1%) felt that disadvantaged pupils had benefited from the out-of-school activities.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This section contains a summary of the findings described in earlier sections relating to schools, teachers and pupils. In order to make some statements about the impact of the *Breaking the Cycle* 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.

7.1 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. In relation to administrative practices, 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. Almost four-fifths of schools had set up sub-committees to address curricular and planning issues and other administrative and management matters. Principals also reported a considerable improvement in their school's system of communication.

Since the introduction of the scheme, attendance rates in urban schools improved slightly (86.58% in 1996/97 and 86.37% in 1997/98 compared to 85.12% in 1995/96). The number of very low attenders (i.e., pupils attending fewer than 25 days per quarter) also decreased marginally during this period. Furthermore, fewer pupils were referred to attendance officials, or had legal proceedings brought against them, for poor school attendance in 1996/97 and 1998/99 than had been the case in the year preceding the introduction of the scheme. However, the average percentage attendance in participating schools was consistently about 4% below the average percentage attendance in Dublin City schools during the same time period (1996-1998).

The total number of urban pupils who were psychologically assessed increased in the first three years of the scheme, with schools referring approximately 7% of pupils for assessment in 1996/97 and 1997/98 and 10% of pupils in 1998/99. Many principals

indicated, however, that the psychological assessment service being offered to pupils was inadequate. In fact, 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. Principals estimated that between 17% and 20% of pupils each year were in need of assessment. Furthermore, in the second and third years of the scheme, approximately 30% of pupils referred did not undergo assessment. The most common reason for non-assessment was that pupils were on waiting lists. Fourteen schools in 1996/97, and five schools in 1997/98, did not have any of their pupils assessed. 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 to a special school/class following assessment while many received help from remedial teachers in their existing classes. Each year, the number of boys referred and assessed exceeded the number of girls by a ratio of two to one.

Participation in other schemes designed to address disadvantage was reasonably common in *Breaking the Cycle* schools. Thirty-one schools were participating in the Home School Community Liaison scheme, 16 were involved in the Teacher Counsellor/Support Teacher Scheme, and seven were taking part in the 8- to 15-year old Early School Leaver Initiative. Only five schools had an Early Start programme. Sixty percent of schools were involved in other local or national schemes aimed at disadvantaged pupils. These initiatives included early school leaver prevention programmes, personal development schemes, homework and after-school clubs, Information Technology projects, environment projects, preschools, and other school and community partnership schemes.

Parental involvement in participating schools increased over the first three years of the scheme. Parents' Associations were established and formal one-to-one and group meetings between parents and teachers were held in an increasing proportion of schools. The number and range of educational and extra-curricular courses for parents also increased considerably. Schools provided courses in English, Mathematics, Irish, paired-reading, computers, French, and parent-assisted learning and pre-entry programmes. Extra-curricular courses organised included self-development, parenting, home management, community development, drama, arts and crafts courses, and health information talks. Parents in the majority of schools also assisted teachers with a variety of school activities, such as school outings, paired-reading, school libraries,

craftwork, sports training, and school plays and concerts. Parents were also invited to attend many other school events such as religious ceremonies, sports days, open days, plays, concerts, and various fundraising events (e.g., cake sales).

Overall, principals were positive about *Breaking the Cycle* and the effects of the scheme on their schools and on their pupils. In the second and third years of the scheme, all principals felt that the scheme had a positive effect on their school in general. The vast majority thought that the scheme had had a positive effect on school morale, and on teaching practices in particular. Most principals also felt that 'marginalised' pupils had benefited from the scheme. The most beneficial aspects of the scheme, according to principals, were the reduced pupil-teacher ratio in operation in junior classes and the extra funding for materials, equipment, and out-of-school activities. Principals also said that pupils were more self-confident, better behaved in class, and appeared to be enjoying school more than was the case prior to the introduction of the scheme. In the third year of the scheme, over 70% percent of principals reported that formal or informal tests had shown that pupils' academic achievements had improved since the introduction of the scheme. The vast majority of principals also reported that pupils' self-esteem and standards of social interaction had improved to some extent.

Nine out of ten schools organised out-of-school activities for their pupils in 19998/99, with drama, music, art and sport-related activities being the most popular types of activity. Outings to places of historical and cultural interest and nature trips to zoos, parks and farms were also popular. The majority of principals felt that these activities were beneficial to pupils in terms of enhancing their enjoyment of school and improving their social skills. Most also thought that the out-of-school activities had led to improvements in pupils' verbal and artistic skills, but were less certain that they had led to improvements in pupils' school attendance and academic achievements.

Overall, principals indicated that they were satisfied with the role played by the co-ordinator of the urban dimension of *Breaking the Cycle*. They felt that she kept them informed about the scheme, and that she was supportive when organising out-of-school activities and when engaging in school development planning. Most principals were also satisfied with the organisation of incareer development courses offered to them. Good course content was the most common explanation given for satisfaction with inservice days, although many principals felt that there should be more school-based inservice organised for them. Finally, principals made many positive comments about

Breaking the Cycle, citing mainly the benefits of the reduced junior class sizes, the financial benefits associated with the scheme, the out-of-school activities, the extra inservice and the improved home-school links. Many principals reported that pupils had benefited from the reduced PTR, which allowed for more one-to-one attention from teachers. They also indicated, however, that pupils experienced particular problems when they transferred from small junior classes into larger senior classes. In fact, many principals thought that the reduced PTR should be extended to senior classes. Shortcomings of the scheme mentioned by principals included the extra workload involved in both the administration and organisation of the scheme and in school development planning.

7.2 TEACHERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHEME

Teachers perceived an improvement in the atmosphere in their school since the commencement of *Breaking the Cycle.* In the third year of the scheme, they described the atmosphere as more welcoming, friendly, pleasant and warm, as well as more colourful and clean than it had been before the introduction of the scheme. They also reported that there was a greater sense of order and discipline. However, only one-third of teachers said that their school was 'quiet' in 1998/99, which is approximately the same proportion as before the commencement of the scheme.

Overall, teachers were satisfied with the leadership abilities of their principals. The majority agreed that their principal showed an interest in what was going on in their classroom, introduced them to new teaching methods, and encouraged their attendance at staff development programmes. Satisfaction with incareer development programmes increased considerably following the introduction of *Breaking the Cycle*. By 1998/99, approximately three-quarters of urban teachers agreed that staff development programmes were available to help them acquire new knowledge and skills. Similarly, over the first three years of the scheme, an increasing number of teachers reported that they felt involved in the decision-making process in their school. Furthermore, most teachers felt that, since the beginning of the scheme, their access to school-based information had improved to some extent.

There was a marked increase in the number of days teachers spent attending incareer development courses following the introduction of the scheme, with a corresponding decrease in the proportion of teachers who did not spend any days

attending staff development courses. The majority of teachers in 1997/98 and 1998/99 reported that the incareer development courses were beneficial to them on their return to the classroom. During the first three years of the scheme, principals attended courses on school planning, school review, SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Targets) analysis, school development, 'multiple intelligences', art appreciation, and a module on reviewing, evaluating and recording progress in their school. Junior class teachers attended a workshop on developing the teaching and learning environment in their classrooms, while senior class teachers attended a course on classroom management and discipline. In the second and third years of the scheme, all staffs also attended two school-based seminars on language development and 'multiple intelligences'. In addition, schools closed for one day to allow staffs to work on their school's action plan. Finally, incareer development summer courses were held for participating schools each year.

Teachers' responses indicated that the teaching practices of junior class teachers were affected by the reduction in size of their classes. Junior class teachers devoted proportionately more English and Mathematics class time to individual teaching, and less time to whole class instruction, in comparison with middle/senior class teachers. Similarly, during a typical Mathematics lesson, junior class teachers spent considerably more class time engaged in group activities, more time introducing a topic, and more time developing a topic, than had been the case prior to the introduction of the scheme.

Almost all junior class teachers (97.5%), and almost 70% of teachers who taught middle classes, believed that 'marginalised' pupils had benefited from the reduction in size of junior classes. The most frequent comment made by junior class teachers was that pupils benefited from the individual attention they received in smaller classes. They also said that it was easier to identify and address the needs of individual pupils in smaller classes, that there was a more positive atmosphere, and that junior class pupils were more self-confident. Teachers who taught the middle classes also thought that pupils had benefited from the one-to-one attention they received from teachers. They reported that pupils who had been taught in smaller classes were more self-assured and more likely to participate in class than senior class pupils. However, several teachers of middle classes felt that pupils who had been taught in small classes were lacking in independence and discipline. Many middle and senior class teachers were of the opinion that pupils who had attended small junior classes had difficulty adjusting to large senior classes. They also felt that the reduced PTR should be extended to senior

classes. Overall, however, senior class teachers were positive about the small junior classes and felt that the extra attention pupils received was beneficial and that it provided them with an opportunity to gain confidence and prepare for the senior cycle. Teachers had relatively low expectations in relation to the future educational attainments of their pupils, although their expectations improved marginally since the introduction of the scheme. The majority of teachers, however, 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. Most teachers also thought that participating in the scheme had improved their ability to organise their work based on the knowledge and needs of disadvantaged pupils, and had enhanced their understanding of educational disadvantage. Over three-quarters of teachers in 1997/98 and 1998/99 also believed that their teaching practices, opinions, and attitudes had changed as a result of being involved in the scheme.

Four out of five teachers believed that the scheme had had a positive effect on their school in general, and on morale in particular. More than four-fifths in 1997/98 and more than nine out of ten in 1998/99 thought that 'marginalised' pupils had benefited from the scheme. The most beneficial aspects of the scheme, according to teachers, were the reduced pupil-teacher ratio in operation in junior classes, the out-of-school activities, and the extra material and facilities funded by the scheme. Teachers considered that pupils' academic achievements to have improved, and thought that pupils were better behaved, more self-confident, and had a more positive attitude to school since the introduction of the scheme. Teachers also indicated that they found it easier to identify and address individual pupils' needs.

7.3 THE PUPILS

Sections 3 and 4 of this report contain baseline data on the Junior Cycle completion rates and Junior Certificate performance of a cohort of pupils who had attended *Breaking the Cycle* schools prior to the establishment of the scheme. An examination of Junior Cycle completion rates among the cohort revealed that, of the 962 pupils tracked from 6th class in 1993/94 to Junior Certificate, 730 (or 75.9%) had taken the Junior Certificate Examination. However, it was suggested (due to difficulties encountered in

matching students in the cohort to their JCE results in the national Junior Certificate database) that the observed completion rate should be thought of as representing the lowest possible rate (see Section 3). Unfortunately, directly comparable completion figures for students nationally are not available. 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 students 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 considerably higher than that observed among students who attended urban 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 28.1% of boys and 19.9% of girls in the urban cohort left school prior to completing the Junior Cycle, which is consistent with ratios found in other studies. It obviously is a source of considerable concern that almost one in three boys and one in five girls who attended a school which is now participating in *Breaking the Cycle* left school without any formal qualifications.

The average Junior Certificate Examination achievements of pupils in the cohort who did complete Junior Cycle were considerably weaker than those of the national population of students in that year. The Overall Performance Scale score (OPS) of 65.3 achieved by students nationally may be thought of as slightly better than an average of a "D" grade at Higher Level, or an "A" grade at Ordinary Level, on each of a student's best seven papers. This compares with an average OPS score of 53.7 achieved by students who had attended *Breaking the Cycle* schools, which corresponds to slightly less than an average of an "E" grade at Higher Level (or a "B" grade at Ordinary Level), on each of a student's best seven papers. Thus, the effective difference between the two groups of students may be thought of as an average of more than one grade on each of a student's best seven papers. These achievement data are consistent with the view that students in our sample originated in primary schools which cater for pupils who are educationally disadvantaged. Apart from their achievements in the examination, students in the two groups also differed on other characteristics (i.e., subject choice and levels at which papers were taken).

There were no discernible gender differences in the overall performance in the Junior Certificate Examination of students in the urban cohort. This contrasts with the pattern nationally in the 1997 JCE , where the achievements of female students were higher than those of males. Achievement levels in our sample were, however, 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 also applies to students 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, 87.9% of our sample, 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. In both groups, 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 weak compared to those of the national sample of pupils on whom the test had been standardised. Data on the Junior Certificate achievements of students in the urban cohort also show that their achievements are considerably below those of students nationally. Furthermore, Junior Cycle completion rates among the urban cohort are substantially lower than completion rates nationally. Therefore, all of the available data point to levels of scholastic achievements and attainments of pupils served by schools participating in *Breaking the Cycle* that are significantly lower than those of students nationally. There is clearly great scope for improving retention rates in the selected schools. However, 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. 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.

7.4 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 participating 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 rates and for Junior Certificate Examination performance.

8. REFERENCES

Area Development Management Ltd. (1999). *Preventive education strategies to counter educational disadvantage.* Insights No 10. Dublin: Author.

Collins, C., & Williams, J. (1998). *The 1997 annual school leavers' survey: Results of the school leavers' surveys, 1995-97.* Dublin: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment / Economic and Social Research Institute / Department of Education and Science.

Ireland (1995). *Charting our education future. White paper on education*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Kellaghan, T. (1994). *Using the findings of research on school effectiveness for school evaluation*. Unpublished Manuscript.

Kellaghan, T., & Dwan, B. (1995). *The 1994 Junior Certificate Examination: A review of results.* Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Martin, M.O., & Hickey, B.L. (1993). A survey of the prevalence of pupils with disabilities and special needs in ordinary classes in primary schools. In Special Education Review Committee, *Report* (pp. 243-289). Dublin: Stationery Office.

Mortimer, P., Sammons, P., Stoll, L., Lewis, D., & Ecob, R. (1988). *School matters.* Wells, Somerset: Open Books.

McCormack, T., & Archer, P. (1998). Inequality in education: The role of assessment and certification. In CORI (Ed.), *Inequality in education. The role of assessment and certification. Analysis and options for change* (pp. 13-46). Dublin: CORI, Education Commission.

National Economic and Social Forum (1997). *Early school leavers and youth unemployment*. Forum Report No. 11. Dublin: Author.

Purkey, S.C., & Smith, M.S. (1983). Effective schools: A review. *Elementary School Journal, 83*, 427-452.

Sammons, P., Hillman, J., & Mortimer, P. (1995). *Key characteristics of effective schools: A review of school effectiveness research*. London: Office for Standards in Education / Institute of Education, University of London.

School Attendance Department. (1995). *Annual report*. Dublin: Author.

School Attendance Department. (1996). *Annual report.* Dublin: Author.

School Attendance Department. (1997). *Annual report.* Dublin: Author.

School Attendance Department. (1998). *Annual report.* Dublin: Author.

School Attendance Department. (1999). *Annual report.* Dublin: Author.

Weir, S., & Eivers, E. (1998). *The Breaking the Cycle scheme in urban schools: A report for 1996/97.* Report to the Department of Education and Science. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.