

DEIS Evaluation Report Press Release – Monday 16th December, 2013

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) has released a new report today on the evaluation of the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme in primary schools. The ERC has been carrying out an evaluation of DEIS in its most intensive form (i.e., the School Support Programme or SSP) since it was introduced by the Department of Education and Skills in 2007 as a response to addressing the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The recent findings indicate that reading and mathematics levels have continued to improve significantly in participating schools since the programme began.

While the evaluation is broad in scope, the report launched today is focused on just one area – the achievements of pupils in participating urban schools in reading and mathematics. Today's report follows on from an earlier evaluation report (2011) in which baseline test data from 2007 in reading and mathematics were compared with test scores of pupils three years later. That report revealed that pupils' achievements at all grade levels had significantly increased in both areas over the 3-year period. The current report extends that analysis to include test data collected in spring of 2013 from over 17,000 primary pupils in 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 6th classes in 119 SSP schools.

The test data indicate that the reading and mathematics achievements of pupils in DEIS schools are below that of national samples. However, the data collected last spring show that average test scores have continued to improve at all grade levels in both reading and mathematics (in other words, the gains observed in 2010 had not only been maintained, they had been built upon). This means that the achievement gap between pupils in DEIS schools and in national samples (particularly in the more junior grade levels such as 2nd and 3rd class) has narrowed significantly since baseline data were collected in 2007. This finding was also reflected in the halving of the percentages of pupils with very low scores. Most progress in both areas was made by pupils in schools where disadvantage is most concentrated.

A limitation of the study relates to the absence of a control group with which the achievements of pupils in the SSP can be compared. Without it, we cannot be certain that the improvements are due to participation in the programme rather than reflecting a general improvement in reading and mathematics achievement nationally. However, more information on whether this could be the case will emerge from the national assessments of reading and mathematics due to take place in 2014. Further, more detailed, analysis of the data including data from sub-groups (e.g., pupils whose home language is not English or Irish) will be the subject of future reports. Work has begun on investigating why some participating schools have made large gains while others have not. A range of home, pupil, and school factors (particularly focused on schools' use of the resources made available to them under the SSP, and levels of implementation of elements of the programme at individual school level) will be examined. The outcomes of these and other analyses will be described in future evaluation reports.

The report by Susan Weir and Sylvia Denner *'The evaluation of the School Support Programme under DEIS: Changes in pupil achievement in urban primary schools between 2007 and 2013'*, along with previous reports on the evaluation of DEIS, is available at www.erc.ie.