ADDRESSING DISADVANTAGE

A REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE AND OF STRATEGY IN IRELAND

REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE

EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 2004

PETER ARCHER AND SUSAN WEIR
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE

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1. INTRODUCTION

In October, 2003, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) agreed to carry out two sets of research tasks for the Educational Disadvantage Committee (EDC). The first set involved analyses of the procedures for the selection of schools for the receipt of supports under initiatives of the Department of Education and Science (DES) to tackle disadvantage. Staff at the ERC reported the results of these analyses to the EDC on a number of occasions including an oral presentation to a full meeting of the committee on January 20, 2004. Outcomes of the analyses were taken into account in submissions made by the EDC to the Minister for Education and Science (Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2003, 2004, nd). Further analysis relating to issues of identification were subsequently carried out at the ERC and are the subject of forthcoming research papers.

The present document contains an overview of the work of the ERC on the second set of four tasks which, together, constitute a review of the current provision (overall strategy and individual measures) for responding to disadvantage, with a particular focus on responses within formal schooling. The four tasks are to:

1. update the review of the literature on effective strategies conducted for the Kellaghan, Weir, Ó hÚallacháin & Morgan (1995) report;

2. prepare an overview of existing evaluations of educational disadvantage programmes;

3. prepare a brief commentary on core aspects of the implementation of Giving Children an Even Break (GCEB), which has not been the subject of a formal evaluation; and

4. comment on the extent to which existing provision in Ireland reflects the findings of the review of the literature presented at (1) above.

Separate detailed reports of the second (Weir & Archer, 2004) and third (Weir, 2004) tasks have been prepared. The present document contains a report of the first and fourth tasks as well as summaries of the two other reports. A final section of the document contains some general conclusions.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Attempts to tackle disadvantage which date back to the mid-1960s have, until relatively recently, tended to focus on particular aspects of disadvantage and to adopt a one-dimensional approach to addressing those aspects. Thus, for example, preschooling was adopted as a way of supporting the cognitive and language development of disadvantaged children (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Klaus & Gray, 1968; Weikart, 1967) and enhanced parent involvement was promoted as a way of dealing with discontinuities between home and school (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of reviews, including some in Ireland (e.g., CMRS, 1992), concluded that, while many of these one-dimensional approaches had some success, that success had been limited. Typically, children from disadvantaged backgrounds were found to benefit from initiatives when compared with non-participating children with similar backgrounds, but very substantial gaps remained between their performance and that of children with non-disadvantaged backgrounds. The authors of these reviews further suggested that part of the reason that these initiatives had not been more successful was precisely their concentration on a single aspect of the problem. As a result of this kind of shift in thinking, there is now an emphasis on multi-faceted approaches to tackling disadvantage. For example, in the 1995 report referred to in Task 1 above (Kellaghan et al., 1995), it was argued that seven elements should constitute a precisely targeted approach to addressing disadvantage that would be "comprehensive and coordinated". These were

1. curriculum adaptation at primary and post-primary levels (paying particular attention to literacy and numeracy skills);
2. smaller classes, particularly in the early grades, to facilitate individual attention and the development of relationships between teachers and pupils;
3. preschool provision, reflecting an emphasis on prevention rather than remediation;
4. a high degree of parent involvement in the educational process (both in their own homes and in schools);
5. the reform of school organisation to develop a unity of purpose and build on existing strengths of teachers and pupils;
6. adequate financial resources for schools to operate comfortably; and
7. a high level of involvement of other community agencies (pp. 66–67).

An attempt will be made here to assess the evidence on the effectiveness of each of these elements in tackling disadvantage. The focus will be mainly but not exclusively on effectiveness in terms of the measured achievement of pupils. Most attention will be devoted to research reported since the Kellaghan et al. (1995) review. Ideally, one would want to conduct this review in a way that would allow three questions to be answered:

(a) how effective is each element on its own?
(b) is the effect of combining "effective" elements additive?
(c) is the impact of multi-faceted, comprehensive and coordinated intervention greater than the sum of the effects of the individual parts?

Difficulties arise, however, because one-dimensional initiatives have become increasingly rare. Instead, the fifth element on the list (the reform of school organisation) has become part of a growing literature on school development planning and comprehensive school reform/restructuring. Multifaceted interventions incorporating many of the factors in the Kellaghan et al. list and some other factors have become more common.

There are two general points about the nature of this section of the report that are worth mentioning at this stage. First, we will be attempting to use research findings to provide guidance for policy and practice. In doing so, we need to make clear that research in this area is not always clearcut and is rarely definitive. Indeed, as we proceed, we will encounter many instances of contradictory research findings. Second, we recognise the limited nature of current definitions of disadvantage (Kellaghan, 2001). Arising out of these two points, we have to concede that "we do not have a very secure knowledge base on which to establish guidelines for an effective intervention" (Kellaghan, 2001, p.5). However, given the seriousness of the issues involved, it would clearly be irresponsible to postpone action until greater clarity emerged from research findings.

The remainder of this section is presented under nine headings. Some correspond exactly with factors in the Kellaghan et al. (1995) list. Others, while reflecting the earlier list, also take account of recent developments such as comprehensive school reform. Thus, there is a heading relating to raising expectations which is a feature of some efforts at comprehensive school reform, and a heading relating to professional development which is a frequently cited characteristic of effective interventions. Although we did not find new research on the effectiveness of adequately resourcing schools, resource issues are clearly important in terms of a strategy for disadvantage. Therefore, we have included a brief discussion of these issues[1].

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[1] More detailed versions of some of the research reviews presented in this section are available on request from the authors.

Reduced Class Size

Glass and Smith's (1979) meta-analysis of early studies in the area of class size reduction revealed that lowering class size (to fewer than 20 pupils) was associated with modest increases in academic achievement, that the benefits were greater in earlier grades, and that pupils from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds benefited most. The 1980s and 1990s saw the introduction in the United States of large-scale field experiments and trial programmes in class-size reduction, including Tennessee's project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio), Wisconsin's Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE), and a state-wide class-size reduction initiative in California. The results of evaluations of programmes such as STAR and SAGE not only confirmed the earlier conclusions about class size reductions but added further to the knowledge base through a number of fairly robust findings regarding targeting and conditions of effectiveness.

First, small class sizes are particularly effective when they are targeted at pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Evaluation data from the STAR project underscored the particular benefits that small classes hold for minority or inner-city pupils, among whom the achievement advantages were often two to three times those of white pupils attending schools in more comfortable areas (Finn, 2002).

Second, there is a good degree of consensus that, for small classes to impact positively on achievement, the number of pupils in a class should be fewer than 20 (Biddle & Berliner, 2002).

Third, the magnitude of the achievement advantage is greater among pupils who start earlier and spend more years in small classes. By the time pupils who had participated in STAR had reached grade eight, those who had spent the first four years of primary school in small classes had almost a full year of achievement advantage over pupils who had not (Finn, Gerber, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001).

Fourth, the finding in STAR that pupils in small classes outperformed those in classes with a teacher aide in all tests and at every grade level suggested that effective learning environments depend not on the adult-child ratio, but on the availability of appropriately qualified personnel. No achievement differences were found between pupils in standard full-size classes and in similar classes that also had a teacher aide (Finn et al., 2001).

Fifth, teachers involved in class size reduction initiatives require ongoing support through professional development activities to enable them to maximise the potential provided by the smaller numbers. In fact, several studies (including STAR) have shown that, even following tailored professional development, teachers are highly resistant to changing their instructional style (Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran, & Willms, 2001).

Sixth, the California state-wide initiative illustrated how class-size reduction programmes need careful planning (and need to take account of schools' existing physical and other resources) if they are to succeed. In California, the hurried implementation of small classes in both affluent and poor districts served to exacerbate existing inequities within the state's education system. The failure to target schools in low-income areas, and the resultant competition between schools in poor and affluent areas to hire additional teachers, led to a large increase in the number of unqualified teachers in schools serving the most disadvantaged pupils (Stecher, Bohrnstedt, Kirst, McRobbie, & Williams, 2001).

Finally, the evidence suggests that small class sizes are beneficial when they are part of a deliberate intervention but not necessarily when they arise naturally. One reason for this is that naturally occurring small classes are usually associated with factors such as declining enrolments, which in themselves may be symptomatic of problems in the school. Thus, pre-existing negatives factors may counteract any beneficial effects of the small class environment.

Preschool Provision

Throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century, research studies (e.g., Kagiticibasi, Sunar, & Bekman, 2001; Kellaghan & Greaney, 1993) and reviews (e.g., Barnett, 1998; Ramey & Ramey, 2003) have confirmed previous findings that exposure to preschooling can enhance cognitive functioning, ease the transition from home to school, and improve the long-term educational prospects of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

There continues to be some debate about the generalisability of findings on the benefits of preschooling. For example, Olsen (2003) accepts that research has shown that children from disadvantaged backgrounds can benefit from preschooling but he does not accept that this has been shown to be the case for other children. On this basis, he rejects the idea of universal preschool provision, while recognising the value of targeted provision. In general, however, attention seems to have moved from the basic question of whether preschooling is effective to questions about the conditions in which it is effective and, to a lesser extent, why it is effective.

While substantial disagreements remain about what constitutes "good quality" preschooling there is an emerging consensus about some of the characteristics of effective interventions (Frede, 1998; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 2003; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, & Elliot, 2003; Vandell & Pierce, 2003). The following are six examples.

First, curricula based on the belief that children need to direct their own active learning (largely through play) seem to be more effective than didactic or direct instruction curricula. It seems to be particularly important for disadvantaged children that the curriculum contains specific objectives relating to cognitive and language development and that preschool staff are proactive in directing learning towards the achievement of these objectives. The promotion of social development is also important however.

Second, various kinds of parental involvement seem to greatly enhance the benefits of preschool intervention. There is some evidence that efforts to promote learning at home (by helping parents to acquire new skills and confidence in their own teaching roles) can be particularly effective. This can be done through home visits (e.g., Levenstein, 1970) or a series of workshops (e.g., Kagiticibasi, Sunar, & Bekman, 2001).

Third, the nature of the interaction (especially the verbal interaction) between adult and child has been found to be particularly important. Sylva et al. (2003), for example, suggested that "effective settings" are characterised by shared thinking to solve problems, clarify concepts, extend narratives, etc. In these settings also, staff tend to try to provide children with opportunities to initiate activities and conversations and to respond in ways that challenge the child (e.g., by open-ended questioning).

Fourth, presumably partly because interactions of the sort just described are more likely to occur when the adult engages with individual children and small groups, classroom organisation that facilitates individual attention, tuition and small-group work is sometimes cited as a characteristic of effectiveness.

Fifth, there is agreement that more intensive interventions of longer duration are more effective in terms of pupil outcomes. However, it is not clear from the research which of a number of factors are most important in terms of intensifying or extending the preschool experience: the age at which the intervention begins and ends; the number of hours per day; the number of days per year; and whether the children are good attenders or not (McCall, Larsen, & Ingram, 2003).

Sixth, the professional qualifications of staff are generally regarded as important. Sylva et al. (2003) highlighted the need for staff to have knowledge and understanding of curriculum and of how children learn. Vandell and Pierce (2003), as well as Sylva et al. (2003), referred more specifically to the need to employ well-trained teachers. Bronfenbrenner (1975), Conaty (2002) and others have made a strong case for employing members of the local community in a paraprofessional capacity (e.g., as home visitors) in collaboration with qualified staff.

With some exceptions (CMRS, 1992; Lewin, 1977; Woodhead, 1985), questions about why preschooling is effective have received relatively little attention in the literature, although answers to such questions could have serious implications for policy making. Barnett, Young and Schweinhartz (1998) identified four explanations for the evidence: (1) preschooling has direct effects on cognitive functioning and on later educational achievement; (2) preschooling has indirect effects on educational achievement mediated through initial effects on motivation; (3) the long-term effects of preschooling on children are due to the effects on parents; and (4) the effects are due to teachers' expectations. These authors used longitudinal data from a preschool project to model the first three explanations and concluded that, overall, the results favoured the first one (the effects of preschooling on pupils are direct), but they recognised a number of complexities and did not rule out the possibility that the factors identified in the other three explanations may make some contribution to the long-term effects of preschooling.

Parental Involvement

There is a vast amount of evidence, going back over several decades, that children's academic achievement and general development are influenced to a very great extent by the kind of educational roles adopted by their parents. For example, there are many studies that show a strong association between children's performance in school and home process variables that mostly relate to the ways parents interact with their children and to stimulation provided in the home (see Kellaghan et al., 1993, for a review).

There are also many studies, including those in the school effectiveness literature, that show a positive association between student achievement (individual and aggregated to school level) and the amount of parental involvement in the work of the school (Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995).

Both of these sets of findings have had an important influence on the design of interventions for dealing with disadvantage. Thus, there are programmes like those mentioned earlier in our discussion of preschooling, that seek to help parents to improve the home learning environment of their children, especially in relation to the process variables that have been found to relate to student achievement. These programmes are usually, but not always, implemented in conjunction with a preschool centre. Parents of school-going children have also been the focus of programmes. Some of these are designed to increase family involvement in homework (e.g., Bali, Demo, & Wedman, 1998; Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997). Others (e.g., Shaver & Walls, 1998) use workshops and other methods to enhance parents' skills in a variety of areas related to their children's learning.

There have also been many attempts to increase the involvement of parents from disadvantaged backgrounds in the work of the school including, as will be seen later, in the context of comprehensive school reform. The ways in which parents become involved are quite variable and include working in classrooms as voluntary teaching aides, being consulted about policy matters, serving on management boards, organising out-of-school activities and fund raising.

A recent review of the literature (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) suggests that programmes that focus on what parents do in the home have particularly impressive outcomes. In this context there is renewed interest in programmes that seek to help parents develop skills that will enhance their children's oral language (Archer & Shortt, 2003). Programmes that increase parental involvement in the work of the school also tend to have positive effects.

Concerns have been expressed in the literature about the possibility that some efforts to promote parent involvement may benefit middle-class families more than families from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Lareau, 1989, 1996; Toomey, 1987). Another concern seems to reflect a belief that attempts to promote parent involvement still cast parents in a subordinate role to that of the teacher in a way that was described in 1975 as "parents helping teachers to achieve goals specified by teachers in ways specified by teachers" (Sharp & Greene, 1975, p. 206; see also White, Taylor, & Moss, 1992). Despite these kinds of reservation, there seems little doubt that initiatives designed to enable parents to develop their roles as educators, before and after their children begin school, can be effective even among children from the most marginalised families (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). For example, the involvement of very marginalised families which is often difficult to achieve, can be secured with the help of members of local communities, working in a "para-professional" capacity (Conaty, 2002).

Some recent developments in the literature may be worth noting such as attempts to focus on the inter-generational nature of educational disadvantage and attempts to model some of the ways in which different kinds of interventions try to impact on whole families and not just children. These include "family literacy" programmes (Wasik, Dobbins, & Herrmann, 2001) and "two-generation programmes" (St. Pierre, Layzer, & Barnes, 1998). The Irish National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA, 2004) recently published a policy document on family literacy in which approaches to developing literacy and numeracy in family contexts are outlined. Particular attention is paid to activities that involve two or more generations. Another development worth noting is the growing number of studies of the barriers to parental involvement in schools and of parents' understanding of their own educational role and how they see it as differing from the role of the school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Links with the Community

Part of the rationale for the inclusion of this factor in a strategy to tackle disadvantage is the belief that it is important that schools forge links not just with those adults who happen to be parents but with the whole of the wider community. In an early review, Nettles (1991) described a number of initiatives that mobilise community members and community organisations to provide help and support for targeted students in disadvantaged areas with a view to increasing their chances of success. Although she documented some of the problems encountered, she expressed optimism that community involvement could help to "remove impediments to the progress of disadvantaged students" (Nettles, 1991, p.403; see also Crowson & Boyd, 1993).

In the past ten years, there have been many attempts to increase community involvement as part, for example, of the promotion of Community Schools (Dryfoos, 2000) or as part of efforts to bring about integrated delivery of services to marginalised children and their families (OECD, 1998). As a result, a number of programmes and other initiatives have emerged where, typically, families can avail of a variety of services at a single site in or very near a school, schools are open for community activities during and outside of school hours, and out-of-school learning programmes (e.g., summer camps and homework clubs) are available for students. In these initiatives also, community groups, local businesses, and individual volunteers contribute to the work of the schools by, for example, tutoring or mentoring individual students and organising or sponsoring events.

Some evaluations of initiatives in this area have been carried out and provide evidence of beneficial outcomes in terms of student achievement and behaviour, family well-being, and levels of inter-disciplinary collaboration among professionals (e.g., California Department of Education, 2000; Dryfoos, 2000; Sammons, Power, Elliot, Robertson, Campbell, & Whitty, 2003). Unfortunately, these evaluations tend to be produced by individuals or groups involved in the design or implementation of the initiative and do not contain enough detail to allow proper assessment of the validity of the conclusions drawn. They also tend to omit reference to what, in an earlier review, were called the "ubiquitous problems of institutional deficiencies, professional training differences, resource constraints, communication gaps, authority and turf issues, and legal and leadership problems" (Crowson & Boyd, 1993, pp. 152–153). Furthermore, because strong links between schools and community usually imply strong links with parents, it is difficult to disentangle the effect of the two factors (links with the home and links with the wider community). Nevertheless, there is in the literature a broad consensus about the value of greater community involvement in schools and a more integrated approach to service delivery (OECD, 1998).

The case for greater community involvement in schooling is strengthened by a growing acceptance of the importance of the concept of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Kellaghan, 2001; OECD, 2001). Social capital tends to be seen as the extent to which interpersonal relationships and social networks in a community are characterised by shared norms, mutual trust, and reciprocal exchange of information. Indicators of social capital have been found to be associated with a variety of positive educational outcomes (Portes, 1998). Although the determination of cause and effect in these associations is difficult (Kellaghan, 2001), the proposition that enhancing social capital in areas of disadvantage would lead to improved educational outcomes seems plausible. Forging links between schools, other service providers, and the wider community could be one way of enhancing social capital. Two points of caution may be noted however. First, not all forms of social capital are positive (Bourdieu, 1986; Kellaghan, 2001). Second, recognition of the importance of social capital seems to be growing at a time when it is widely believed that the stock of such capital is declining (Putnam, 2000).

Adequate Financial Resources

This factor is somewhat different from the others on the list insofar as Kellaghan et al. (1995) were not suggesting that extra resources themselves can have a major impact. Rather, they were pointing out that the absence of financial resources could undermine attempts to implement other kinds of intervention. Very often, schools serving disadvantaged areas have less access to financial resources (e.g., through fundraising) and may have higher running costs. In the literature search conducted for this report, no research was found that would lead to conclusions that are any different from those drawn in 1995.

Comprehensive School Reform

Since the mid 1990s, as noted already, strategies to address educational disadvantage have seen a shift away from one dimensional interventions towards interventions that have several elements which are implemented in a coordinated manner. This shift arose out of a number of developments.

First, there was growing recognition that poverty and educational disadvantage are complex multi-faceted phenomena. Definitions of poverty began to incorporate references to social exclusion (e.g., barriers to full participation in society) as well as reference to lack of resources (Nolan & Whelan, 1999). There was also an increased appreciation of the widespread nature of the consequences of poverty. Thus, educators and policy makers concerned with educational disadvantage needed to take account not just of the fact that children from poor backgrounds were less likely than others to benefit from their schooling, they were also more likely to suffer from poor health and to live in communities that exhibit high levels of crime and substance abuse. As Kellaghan (2001), put it "The association of such factors with what has been called 'social exclusion' of

individuals from the normal exchanges, practices, and rights of the society in which they live (see, e.g., Room, 1995) may add to children's developmental problems" (p. 8).

A second factor that gave rise to the shift towards a multifaceted approach to disadvantage was the literature on effective schools which had begun to make clear that what made some schools more effective than others in overcoming difficult circumstances was a relatively long list of separate but related characteristics (OECD, 1989; Sammons et al., 1995; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Some items on these emerging lists (e.g., parental involvement and early intervention) had been tried as strategies for dealing with disadvantage. Other items (e.g., strong leadership and the setting of targets as part of an overall school plan) had not been tried.

A third factor in the move towards a multifaceted approach was disaffection among policy makers in a number of countries with the use being made of funds that had been set aside for disadvantage and, more generally, with the results of previous programmes. In the United States, in particular, there was concern that such a large proportion of the funding provided under its federal legislation (Title 1) was being spent on "pullout programs that provided remedial services to the subgroups of students with the greatest academic needs" (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003, p. 129). Such "pullout" programmes mean that most aspects of the functioning of the school are unchanged and "a growing belief developed that at-risk students and high-poverty schools could be better served by schoolwide reforms" (Borman et al., 2003, p. 129).

In 1998, the US Congress initiated the Comprehensive School Reform Programme (CSRP) which encourages and financially supports schools to develop comprehensive plans for schoolwide reform. The CSRP is

> …built on the premise that unified, coherent, and integrated strategies for improvement, knitted together into a comprehensive design, will work better than the same strategies implemented in isolation from each other....Improving instruction without attending to leadership, improving leadership without emphasizing parent involvement, or concentrating on high academic standards without addressing the barriers to learning that affect so many students indicate a flawed and inadequate approach to comprehensive problems (US Department of Education, 2002, p. 1).

The US document just quoted sets out conditions for funding under the CSRP. Plans submitted by schools must be based on research and must make provision, in an integrated way, for instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental and community involvement, and school management. Schools are required to set ambitious but measurable goals and establish "benchmarks for meeting these goals" (p.6). They must also show that there is support among the staff for the plan.

Specific provision must be made for the introduction of strategies that research indicates can improve academic achievement. Schools participating in CSRP have access to external support and assistance from individuals and agencies (including institutions of higher education) that have relevant expertise. Finally, schools must make provision for an annual evaluation of the implementation of the planned reforms and the student results achieved.

Some schools in the CSRP have developed their own reform models, often with the assistance of an agency such as a university. Many other schools, however, have opted for one of a growing number of externally developed "off the shelf" programmes. Borman et al. (2003), in a review and meta-analysis of 29 of these programmes, reported some encouraging early results across schools with varying levels of poverty. Results relating to three programmes seem particularly impressive. These are Direct Instruction (http://www.nifdi.org) the School Development Program (http://info.med.yale.edu/comer), and Success for All (http://www.successforall.net).

In the remainder of this section, three of the aspects of comprehensive school reform that have been mentioned above will be considered. Some strategies for improving literacy and numeracy will be discussed first. Raising expectations in the context of meeting ambitious goals will be considered next, followed by some material on the role of professional development. The factors that have been considered already in this section are also, of course, frequently part of comprehensive school reform.

Improving Literacy and Numeracy

There is a vast array of initiatives designed to deal with the literacy and numeracy problems of children in disadvantaged circumstances and, more generally, to raise the reading levels of weak readers. In this review we focus on two types of initiative where the findings of well conducted research and evaluation were available.

First, there are initiatives where an innovative approach to the teaching of reading and, in some cases, mathematics is embedded in a programme of comprehensive school reform. Second, there are stand-alone programmes of individual tutoring for weak readers. Success for All may be taken as an exemplar of the former, and Reading Recovery as an exemplar of the latter. Both have been the subject of extensive research.

The Success for All approach to the teaching of reading places an emphasis on the integration of phonics and meaning-focused instruction. Pupils are placed in reading groups for daily 90-minute periods with others of similar reading ability, some of whom may be from different grade levels. Pupils who require one-to-one tutoring are taken by qualified teachers in 20-minute sessions at times other than during reading or mathematics classes, and focus on the same work being done by the regular reading teacher. The reading programme in primary school is preceded in

most schools by a half-day pre-school or a full-day kindergarten for eligible children in which the emphasis is on language development.

Apart from its curricular features, Success for All includes the promotion of high expectations, a family-support programme engaging parents, community members, and integrated services. Professional development for staff is another priority. Although pupils are taught in small groups within their classes during the daily 90 minute reading period, Success for All does not involve reductions in class size.

The results of research and evaluations indicate that Success for All is capable of bringing about and sustaining gains in achievement in reading (Borman et al., 2003; Herman, 1999; Pearson & Stahl, 2002). Furthermore, although expensive to implement, Success for All has been found to compare favourably with other high profile initiatives (e.g., the Perry Preschool Project and Project STAR which involved class-size reduction) in terms of long-term cost effectiveness (Borman & Hewes, 2003).

The programme's effectiveness has been found to vary with the quality and completeness of its implementation (Slavin & Madden, 2003). The greatest achievement benefits seem to accrue in schools that adopt the full model. There is also some indirect evidence from Borman et al.'s (2003) meta-analysis that stronger achievement effects occurred in schools in which the programme had been implemented for five years or more.

Research on Success for All does not support the idea that, to be successful, school reform policy must be generated by or initiated by school staffs (Slavin & Madden, 2003). Although staff must agree by a majority of 80% or more to implement it, and the programme can be adapted to meet the needs of each participating school, Success for All is an externally developed programme with a specific curriculum, set of materials, and structure.

The Reading Recovery programme (Clay, 1979) is aimed at the lowest-performing 10–20% of readers in a class after one year of formal instruction. Individual students receive a half-hour lesson each school day for 12 to 20 weeks with a specially trained Reading Recovery teacher. As soon as students can read within the average range for their class, their individual tuition is discontinued.

Reading Recovery has been the subject of much research, including some recent work in Ireland (Munn & Ellis, 2001; Murtagh & Ní Threasaigh, 2002). However, interpretation of the findings has been quite controversial [see, for example, a recent lively internet debate initiated by Baker et al. (2002)] and responded to by the Reading Recovery Organisation (2002) (http://www.readingrecovery.org/sections/Evidence/ExecutiveSummary.pdf). Having considered these and other contributions to the debate, we found the conclusion of an earlier review paper (Shanahan & Barr, 1995) to be the most convincing. Although the review recognised several

methodological problems in the research on Reading Recovery, Shanahan and Barr (1995) concluded that it is effective in bringing the achievements of many but not all low-achieving pupils up to those of their average-achieving classmates. However, they pointed out that learning gains tend not to be maintained. More recently, Pressley, Duke, and Boling (2004) concluded that the available data support Reading Recovery as a programme that promotes beginning reading achievement, but claimed that much more needs to be known about why and how it is effective, and about its cost-effectiveness compared with other interventions. However, they argued that this does not provide sufficient grounds to "explicitly forbid individualised tutoring", as is the case in the No Child Left Behind legislation in the United States (Pressley, Duke & Boling, 2004, p.45).

Some issues arise when Reading Recovery is being considered for use in schools where large numbers of pupils are achieving at very low levels. In such schools, there may be ethical difficulties associated with withdrawing only the most poorly performing pupils for Reading Recovery tutoring. Some commentators have pointed out that aiming to achieve the class average in schools serving low-income and minority children may actually serve to maintain relatively low expectations for the pupils concerned, as well as increasing existing inequities between them and pupils from more affluent backgrounds (Grossen, Coulter, & Ruggles, n.d.). On the other hand, practical difficulties would arise if a more ambitious target is set because the number of pupils to be withdrawn would increase to a point that would be very difficult to manage.

It might be possible to overcome some of the difficulties outlined above by considering the provision of individual tuition outside normal class time, for example in after-school clubs, Saturday clubs, or summer camps (see Weir, in preparation, for a review of research on the extent to which children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from participation in these out-of-school activities).

Raising Expectations

There is an extensive literature documenting the relationship between teacher expectations and student outcomes. In classrooms, naturally occurring high expectations are usually associated with higher pupil achievement, and low expectations with poorer achievement (Good, 1987). Pupils for whom the teacher holds low expectations are presented with fewer opportunities to learn than those for whom the teacher has higher expectations (for example, by being called on less often, being asked fewer and less challenging questions, being afforded less time to respond, and being given poorer quality feedback) (Cotton, 1989). These pupils are also less likely to believe in the value of effort, are less persistent, and ultimately less successful (Cooper, 1983). Even if the teacher's expectations are soundly based (e.g., on a realistic assessment of the pupil's current achievement), the consequences for the pupil are negative especially if the teacher believes that the achievement cannot be improved upon. If the low expectation is not soundly based, because for example,

a teacher is unduly influenced by a pupil's socioeconomic background (Tauber, 1997), then the possibility of a self-fulfilling prophecy arises.

In addition to the self-fulfilling prophecy, researchers have identified a sustained expectations effect (Good, 1987). Sustained expectations differ from the self-fulfilling prophecies in that they arise when teachers expect pupils to maintain previously developed behaviour patterns and assume these patterns are permanent. In this situation, teachers ignore changes that are inconsistent with previous patterns and, therefore, miss opportunities to capitalise on the pupil's potential. The assignment of pupils to particular streams or ability groups may also encourage teachers to maintain sustained expectations.

A climate of high teacher expectations is a commonly cited feature of effective schools (e.g., Sammons et al., 1995). Therefore, it is not surprising that policies aimed at raising expectations invariably feature in efforts at comprehensive school reform. As noted earlier, evaluations of Success for All and the School Development Program, both of which are characterised by a strong drive towards high expectations, have revealed positive effects of both programmes on student achievement (Borman et al., 2003). However, it has been noted that simply encouraging teachers to expect more of their students by using phrases such as "all children can learn" are probably not sufficient, and that raising expectations requires good professional development programmes aimed at encouraging more responsive teaching methods (Ferguson, 1998).

Helping teachers change their expectation-related behaviour is the aim of a widely used programme in the United States known as TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement). Although the programme has been perceived by teachers to have had positive effects, it has not been subject to rigorous evaluation regarding its effects on achievement. TESA involves training teachers to use more efficacious behaviours in the provision of response opportunities and feedback to students, and enhance their personal regard for students. Other jurisdictions are using innovative methods in an attempt to raise expectations for students. For example, the educational authorities in New Zealand recently introduced a communication programme designed to increase Maori participation and achievement. As the programme is in its infancy, its effectiveness in terms of outcomes has not yet been documented. The programme employs a variety of methods including radio and television broadcasts to persuade students, education providers, and the community that Maori students can and do achieve. The programme is supported by resource magazines for teachers, a dedicated website, brochures, and posters, as well as by a series of videos aimed at helping teachers to focus on, and model, quality teaching practices that can better engage Maori students in learning and improve student outcomes.

Professional Development

Despite a dearth of empirical work in the area, there is a general consensus that teachers derive benefits from professional development activities. Indeed, in a drive to improve standards, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) in the United States requires states to annually increase the percentage of teachers engaging in high-quality professional development activities (Neville & Robinson, 2003). There are many reasons why professional development for teachers might be considered important. For example, appropriate training could assist teachers in incorporating new ways of thinking and methods into their teaching, or assist them in implementing revisions to curricula. However, several basic, but important, questions arise in relation to the efficacy of development activities. First, does engaging in professional development actually influence teachers' classroom practice? Second, which (if any) strategies are most effective in influencing practice? Third, do changes in practice arising from participation in professional development activities enhance children's achievement?

A number of studies have failed to find an impact of professional development on teachers' practice (Hargreaves & Grey, 1983; Stevenson, 1991). For example, research on the effectiveness of professional development activities on the practices of teachers involved in class-size reduction initiatives has shown that teachers are slow to change their existing teaching practices, even when given explicit guidelines about how to do so (Ehrenberg et al., 2001). There is some evidence that teachers are less likely to change their behaviour after traditional development activities when teachers attend courses and workshops outside of the school. Little (1993) found that short-term training programmes had little chance of success unless the teacher already had beliefs similar to the ideas being demonstrated in the programme. When teachers return to the classroom they find that ideas promoted in the course, while good in theory, do not always transfer easily to their classroom (Elmore, 2002). Elmore claimed that "Successful professional development is likely to occur in schools and classroom settings, rather than off-site, and it is likely to involve work with individual teachers or small groups around the observation of actual teaching" (p. 8). The use of mentoring, which is an approach to professional development that incorporates some of the features advocated by Elmore, has been evaluated favourably in several studies (e.g., Gold, 1996; Hegstad, 1999).

In an attempt to identify a consensus regarding what constitutes effective professional development, Guskey (2003) reviewed thirteen published studies containing lists of effective characteristics. His analysis led him to draw three main conclusions. The lists of characteristics varied widely; much of the evidence on effective characteristics was inconsistent and sometimes contradictory; and while most of the lists were generated on the basis of research, they rarely included investigations of the relationship between the characteristics considered effective and improvements in instructional practice or student outcomes. Only two of the

studies reviewed by Guskey (2003) showed a direct link between identified characteristics and measures of student achievement. One of these studies was carried out by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and used data from the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to explore the link between classroom practices and student achievement in mathematics (Wenglinsky, 2002). The findings indicated that the additive effects of classroom practices and other teacher variables contributed as much to explaining student achievement as did factors such as student background. Furthermore, of the three aspects of professional development examined, the amount of time devoted to such development was the only factor that was not significantly related to student achievement. Professional development both in higher-order thinking skills and in dealing with special populations were significantly related to student achievement, leading to the conclusion that "Students whose teachers received professional development in learning how to teach different groups of students substantially outperformed other students" (p.22).

Another study of the characteristics of professional development that improve classroom teaching practice was based on teachers' self-reports (Porter, Garet, Desimone, Suk Yoon & Birman, 2000). Six features of professional development that improve teaching practice were identified. First, reform-type activities (e.g., study group or teacher networking) were found to be more effective than traditional workshops or conferences. Second, activities of longer duration were more beneficial (i.e., the total number of hours spent on the activity, as well as the time span over which the activity took place). Third, the collective participation of teachers from the same school, department, or grade level, was more effective than the individual participation of teachers from many schools. Fourth, effectiveness was greater where opportunities were provided for teachers to be actively involved in the analysis of teaching and learning, such as receiving feedback about their teaching. Fifth, effectiveness was enhanced when professional development was focused on improving teachers' knowledge of a particular content area (e.g., mathematics). Finally, the promotion of coherence in teachers' professional development (i.e., the extent to which development experiences were consistent with teachers' goals and aligned with state standards) was also associated with increased effectiveness.

3. AN OVERVIEW OF EVALUATIONS OF EXISTING PROVISION

The second task of the ERC's work for the EDC reported here involved the preparation of an overview of selected programmes in the formal school sector which are aimed at addressing the problems of disadvantage at preschool, primary, and post-primary levels in Ireland. The review is based almost exclusively on the results of programme evaluations, with a major focus on the extent to which each of the initiatives had been successful in meeting its original aims and objectives. The programmes involved are: the Rutland Street Project, Early Start, and Preschools for Travellers at preschool level; Breaking the Cycle, the Support Teacher Project (previously known as the Teacher/Counsellor Project), and Giving Children an Even Break at primary level; and the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme at both primary and post-primary levels. As Giving Children an Even Break has not been the subject of a formal evaluation, a separate commentary was provided (Weir, 2004), a summary of which appears later in this report. The School Completion Programme was originally listed in the project specification, and it was planned to summarise an audit of that programme by the EU Court of Auditors. However, because the EU audit has not been completed, it was agreed following consultation with the EDC not to include it (see Cullen and Walker, 2000 for an evaluation of the Early School Leaver Initiative which was replaced by the School Completion Programme).

Individual summaries of each of the other evaluations have been prepared and are available in a separate report (Weir & Archer, 2004). In a final section of that report, an attempt is made to draw together the main findings of the evaluations. That section is reproduced here.

The ultimate goal of schemes to address the problems experienced by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, whether stated explicitly or not, is to bring about improvements in their intellectual development, and their educational achievements and attainment. Whether these improvements have occurred has been a focus of many of the evaluations. In an evaluation of the Rutland Street project, the intellectual development, as measured by the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, of the first cohort of participants over a five-year period (from their entry to the preschool at age 3 to age 8) was monitored. A significant gain was observed over the first two years during which time the children were actually attending the preschool. Over the next three years, the average score declined to about the level it had been at age three but this was still significantly higher than the average score of a control group (8-year olds in the area before the project began). Evidence was also found that the children had made progress in areas regarded as necessary for success in school (e.g., responding to verbal communication, understanding mathematical concepts) (Kellaghan, 1977).

Standardised test scores have been used to assess the impact of schemes on the achievement in English reading and mathematics of pupils who had participated during the first few years of Early Start, the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme (primary), and Breaking the Cycle. With the exception of the follow-up study of the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme (Ryan, 1999), there is little evidence that programmes have had an impact on achievement as measured by standardised tests.

A long-term follow-up of participants in the Rutland Street project revealed that participants were more likely to obtain educational qualifications at second-level than members of a control group (Kellaghan & Greaney, 1993). The evaluations of the urban and rural dimensions of Breaking the Cycle included an assessment of rates of early school leaving in participating schools before the programmes began (Weir, Milis & Ryan, 2002a, 2002b). It is planned to carry out a follow-up study to determine whether rates of participation in formal education of participants in the scheme improved.

In general, schemes have tended to be positively evaluated by those directly involved. For example, in the urban dimension of Breaking the Cycle, the scheme was perceived by junior class teachers to have had a range of benefits. Almost all believed that pupils had benefited from the reduction in the size of junior classes, citing factors such as increased individual attention to pupils, easier identification of individual pupils' needs, and a belief that participating in the scheme had improved teachers' ability to respond effectively to the learning needs of pupils (Weir & Ryan, 2000). In Early Start, teachers perceived the scheme to have had positive effects on pupils, a finding not supported by test data. Teachers believed that children who had attended Early Start adapted more readily to school, had higher levels of cognitive and social maturity, were better adapted to the classroom, and had more self-determination and independence than pupils who had not participated in the programme (Educational Research Centre, 1998; Kelly & Kellaghan, 1999). Staff, parents, and chairpersons of boards of management in schools that are part of the Support Teacher Project, in which an extra teacher is appointed to provide counselling to pupils and support to classroom teachers to minimise and manage disruptive behaviour in 48 designated schools, identified several benefits as a result of their school's participation (Inspectorate and Psychological Service of the Department of Education, 1998). Benefits included enhanced motivation and self esteem among pupils and a better atmosphere in the school as a whole.

Parents provided data for a number of evaluations of programmes that had a particular focus on parental behaviour and attitudes. For example, Kellaghan (1977), on the basis of interviews with mothers, found that parents of children who had been part of the Rutland Street project had begun to change the way in which they interacted with their children (exemplified in more verbal interaction and in reading stories, and in a less rigid approach to discipline). Parents who had been involved in the HSCL scheme said that confidence in their own capacities to help their children had increased (Conaty, 1999, 2002; Ryan, 1994).

In addition to attempting to increase achievement and participation, many of the schemes have other aims, some of which might be termed 'intermediate'. For example, the Home-School-Community Liaison scheme was found to have achieved its aim of increasing the involvement of parents in their children's education (Ryan, 1994). Archer and Shortt (2003) found that large majorities of HSCL coordinators and school principals believed that the scheme had made progress toward its aims relating to community involvement and the dissemination of good practice as well its aims relating to pupils and parents. The evaluation of the Preschools for Travellers programme confirmed that it met its aim of encouraging a greater involvement of Traveller children in primary education. This was done by fostering linkages between Traveller parents and the educational system, initially at the level of the preschools, and later in primary school (Department of Education and Science, 2003).

Finally, schemes to address disadvantage also aim to provide additional resources to schools serving pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds by increasing levels of funding and staffing. Analyses conducted for the present report suggest that these attempts towards positive discrimination have been successful in targeted schools in relation to staffing and some other resources (see also Kellaghan et al., 1995). For example, all schools in the Designated Areas Scheme are permitted to operate lower maximum class sizes than non-participating schools. Schools in the urban dimension of Breaking the Cycle operate junior class sizes of 15:1 or lower, and urban schools with the greatest concentration of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds operate class-size maxima of 20:1 and 27:1 in junior and senior grades respectively under Giving Children an Even Break.

Overall, the evidence from the evaluations suggests that the programmes have impacted on participating schools in ways that would generally be regarded as very positive and likely to give rise to improved educational performance. It is disappointing that, with only a few exceptions, improved performance has not been observed in evaluations to date. Possible reasons for this outcome will be considered in the concluding section of this report.

4. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GIVING CHILDREN AN EVEN BREAK (GCEB)

Following a request from the DES in early 2000, the ERC undertook a nationwide survey of disadvantage in all primary schools in Spring of that year. The survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire to principals, in which they were asked a number of questions concerning pupils' socioeconomic characteristics (such as the percentage of pupils whose families held medical cards). While several problems with this method were acknowledged (for example, that principals may not have had sufficient knowledge about pupils' family circumstances to provide accurate information), this approach was adopted in light of time constraints and the absence of any viable alternative at the time. Based on principals' responses to several key questions, an index of disadvantage was produced for each school. The index, which differed depending on whether schools were located in urban or rural areas, was used to rank-order schools for the allocation of additional resources. An appeals process was set up to investigate, on a case-by-case basis, the individual circumstances of schools that contacted the DES or ERC to express dissatisfaction with their allocation under the scheme (for example, in cases where another school serving the same families was perceived to have received a greater allocation). In a small number of cases, DES Inspectors visited schools that had made appeals. In these cases, reports from the Inspectors were taken into account in adjudicating on appeals. A total of 80% of ordinary national schools responded to the survey, about 5% of which represented schools that had not been included in the first round in 2000. For a variety of reasons, these schools had either not returned the original survey or submitted it late, but were subsequently included following representations to the ERC and the DES.

Giving Children an Even Break set out to provide additional resources to schools serving pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, regardless of whether they contained large or small numbers of target pupils. For that reason, almost all schools that returned a questionnaire received a financial allocation under GCEB. However, in addition to extra funding, schools above the post bar (i.e., the highest scoring urban and rural schools) were eligible to be considered for additional staff. About one-quarter of schools in urban areas that participated in the survey were considered for additional posts to permit the operation of maximum junior and senior class sizes of 20:1 and 27:1 respectively. Just over half of these schools received additional posts based on their existing pupil and teacher numbers. The vast majority of schools that were considered for posts had been previously designated. However, only half of all designated schools above the post-bar received posts compared with over three-quarters of non-designated schools.

In rural areas, the scheme followed the model of Breaking the Cycle, and involved allocating a shared post to clusters of proximal high-scoring schools. Of about 1,500 rural schools that returned questionnaires, about a quarter were considered for shared posts. In a minority of cases, some schools were deemed to be unclusterable, and a compensatory financial allocation was made instead.

In 2003/2004, about two-thirds of the total expenditure on GCEB went on staffing, while one-third went towards the payment of financial allocations to schools. The total financial allocation was spread fairly evenly between urban (52%) and rural (48%) schools. However, urban schools were favoured in the provision of additional staffing, with a ratio of urban to rural posts of between 5:1 and 6:1.

Some elements of the scheme as originally envisaged were not implemented. For example, although staff in rural schools received some inservice support under the auspices of the HSCL scheme, two proposed support teams for teachers were not provided (one to help teachers in urban schools exploit the smaller classes and another to support the work of the rural co-ordinators). No formal evaluation of the scheme has taken place despite an indication by the DES at the outset that an evaluation would be carried out. However, it is understood that it is planned to collect data in 2005 on schools' use of additional resources under the scheme.

5. THE EXTENT TO WHICH EXISTING PROVISION IN IRELAND REFLECTS THE FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section contains commentary on the extent to which existing provision for responding to educational disadvantage in Ireland reflects the findings of the review of the literature reported in Section 2. Existing provision is taken to refer to the overall strategy and the individual measures and programmes which were dealt with in Sections 3 and 4. The section is organised under headings corresponding to the nine factors discussed in Section 2 and in Kellaghan et al. (1995).

Reduced Class Size

Concessionary posts under the Designated Areas Scheme (DAS) and the provisions of Breaking the Cycle (BTC) and Giving Children an Even Break (GCEB) mean that urban primary schools with significant numbers of disadvantaged pupils are in a position to have smaller classes than other schools. It is not possible to be precise about such comparisons. However, on the basis of some work currently underway in the ERC, it has been estimated that at least half of designated primary schools and all of the top 225 schools in the GCEB rank order have been allocated sufficient staff to have class sizes of less than 20 in the junior grades. The fact that junior grades are favoured, and that 20 has been set as a threshold, are policies that are supported by research.

Whether the smaller classes are leading to more individual attention and better relationships between teachers and pupils is not known. However, how teachers might exploit smaller classes was a focus of in-career development for teachers in BTC schools. The support team that was envisaged for the urban component of GCEB was intended to work with teachers and schools to ensure that "the pupils concerned received the maximum benefit from reduced class sizes" (Weir, 2004). However, as noted in Section 4, the support team has not been put in place.

Preschool Provision

When Kellaghan et al. (1995) were preparing their report, Early Start had just been introduced in eight designated schools. A further 32 schools became involved the following year. Lewis and Archer (2002) have shown that, as it has evolved, the Early Start curriculum has moved in a direction which the research indicates should increase effectiveness. Early Start also has well qualified staff and promotes high levels of parental involvement. Its duration/intensity, however, is less than the research indicates is important. There is also some evidence that Early Start is not attractive to parents who work outside the home or, for other reasons, require day care for their children for more that a few hours a day.

There is also a recognition in the urban dimensions of BTC and GCEB of the importance of early years learning. An emphasis on prevention rather than remediation characterises many of the schemes. For example, one of the 12 principles of the Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme states that "the thrust of the scheme is preventive rather than curative" (Department of Education and Science, 2002, p.2).

Parental Involvement

From the establishment of Rutland Street onwards, all schemes have recognised the importance of the role of parents and have included techniques to increase their involvement. Parental involvement is, of course, a particular focus of the HSCL scheme. In their review of that scheme, Archer and Shortt (2003) found that HSCL coordinators seemed to have achieved a reasonable balance between the different types of involvement that are discussed in the literature. They also noted the efforts within the scheme to reach out to the most marginalised parents and to avoid placing parents in a subordinate role to that of the professional educator. Archer and Shortt did conclude, however, that there was scope for some change of emphasis in the work that local coordinators do with parents "in favour of work designed to stimulate children's learning in the home. Work that is designed to help parents to support their children's development of oral language might be a particularly useful example of this kind of work" (p. 114). Since the report of Archer and Shortt (2003) was completed, the National Coordinator of the HSCL scheme has been encouraging the change of emphasis proposed, as well as other developments identified in the report. There were indications in a survey of local coordinators in May 2004 that helping parents to support their children's learning at home was receiving increased attention in the context of the HSCL scheme (C. Conaty, personal communication, October 26, 2004).

Links with the Community

The inclusion of the word "community" in the title of the HSCL scheme was an early indication that the DES recognised the importance of schools working closely with the wider community as well as with families in areas of disadvantage. More recently, the School Completion Programme, and its predecessor the Early School Leaver Initiative, involve the development of stronger links between home, school and a wide range of community agencies (voluntary and statutory). The Early School Leaver Initiative was particularly significant in that it required the establishment of broadly based local consortia as a condition of eligibility for funding. Schools in GCEB are also encouraged to collaborate with other local agencies in devising plans for using the financial resources that they receive as part of that scheme.

The DES has taken several steps to give effect to the concept of integration at national as well as local level. Thus, for example, a Social Inclusion Unit, within the Department, has responsibility for the coordination of policy on disadvantage and has initiated mechanisms whereby the National Coordinators of the various schemes meet regularly with a view to maximising integration.

Unfortunately, the evaluations summarised in this report devote less attention to community involvement than to other areas. Archer and Shortt's (2003) review of the HSCL scheme and an early report on BTC (Weir & Eivers, 1998) include some data on the ways that coordinators collaborate with agencies in the community and on coordinators' and principals' perceptions of the impact of the schemes on communities. These data convey a picture of a considerable level of activity in areas that the international research indicates are important. However, there is also evidence (e.g., Eivers & Ryan, 2000) that, despite this level of activity, there are many instances of fragmentation in the effort to tackle disadvantage. Therefore, there is probably scope for further development in out-of-school work, opening schools at night and at weekends and, perhaps, the establishment of integrated service delivery centres in or near schools.

Adequate Financial Resources

Although no new research on the impact of extra financial resources was reported in Section 2, arguments to the effect that a shortage of such resources could undermine the capacity of schools to take action in various areas were noted.

Every DES scheme provides schools with extra finance to help with the running of the scheme and, in the case of DAS, with the general costs of the school as a whole. Finance is provided in a number of ways (e.g., increased capitation and grants for specific purposes). The impact of the additional finance on designated schools up to 1993 was examined by Kellaghan et al. (1995) who, using data from the 1993 National Assessment of English reading, found that all that had been achieved was parity rather than positive discrimination, in terms of some resources, between designated and other schools.

As the present review suggests, between 1993 and 1998, the position of designated schools improved slightly relative to other schools in some respects (e.g., on average, pupils in designated schools have more access to computers than pupils in other schools). The introduction of GCEB which allocated finance to schools on a sliding scale may have altered the balance further.

Comprehensive School Reform

Section 2 of this report included a brief account of Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) because, as noted above, this seemed to be a development of the fifth factor identified by Kellaghan et al. (1995) (the reform of school organisation to develop a unity of purpose and build on existing strengths of teachers and pupils). Although

there has been no concerted attempt in Ireland to bring about comprehensive reform of the sort described in Section 2, the notion of School Development Planning has been promoted. The development of a plan of action for the whole school was a stated requirement for BTC and GCEB. In addition, the School Development Planning Initiative, which is system-wide and is underpinned by Section 21 of the Education Act (1998), was introduced first in designated schools. Thus, there was an attempt, through the mechanism of school planning, to forge the "unity of purpose" proposed by Kellaghan et al. Although the evaluations of BTC (Weir, Milis, & Ryan, 2002 a, b) contain information on the views of staff about the planning process, more needs to be known about its operation and impact in schools serving disadvantaged pupils. In particular, there is a need to know how significant the process is in the life of the school. It seems unlikely that many Irish schools prioritise planning in the way that happens in programmes like Success for All or the School Development Programme.

Improving Literacy and Numeracy

In Section 2, two broad approaches to improving literacy and numeracy were contrasted. The first involved using innovative approaches to intensify the teaching of reading and mathematics in classroom settings and in the context of school reform programmes. The second involved the withdrawal of pupils from their classrooms for individual tuition. The latter approach is a significant feature of Irish schools through the Learning Support Service. At least until 1999, when that service was greatly expanded, designated primary schools were treated more favourably than other schools in relation to the appointment of Learning Support teachers (Kellaghan et al., 1995; Shiel, Morgan & Larney, 1998). Archer and Shortt (2003) suggested that the former (classroom-based) approach is not as well developed in schemes for disadvantage as it might be.

A strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy is a major feature of Early Start especially since the introduction, in 1998, of curriculum guidelines. It is quite clear that the main aim of the curriculum, in relation to cognitive development and language development, is the promotion of early literacy and numeracy (Lewis & Archer, 2002).

In relation to other schemes, Archer & Shortt (2003) stated that "our impression is that the development of literacy and numeracy, while clearly central in all of the schemes, is not assigned the kind of priority that it receives in apparently successful initiatives in the United States" (p. 19). They cited the finding of the evaluation of the urban dimension of Breaking the Cycle that revealed that the time spent teaching English decreased between the start of the scheme and the end of its pilot phase (Weir et al., 2002a). The recent report on the survey of literacy in disadvantaged primary schools (Eivers, Shiel & Shortt, 2004) contained data that support the view that there is scope for an increased focus on literacy in designated schools.

Raising Expectations

An aspect of school planning and reform that has emerged as important is the setting of clear targets for pupil achievement to which the relevant adults (teachers and parents) subscribe. Because these targets are typically high (often requiring that all children master aspects of the curriculum), a possible link between this aspect of school planning and an older literature on the relationship between expectations (especially those of teachers) and pupil achievement was explored in Section 2. It was concluded that deliberate attempts to raise expectations could be important in the context of addressing disadvantage. Some programmes designed to raise expectations were described.

In preparing this report nothing was found in the documentation relating to the various DES schemes that has an explicit emphasis on raising expectations for pupil achievement. Interview and questionnaire data collected as part of the survey of literacy in designated schools indicate that teachers held low educational expectations for many of their pupils (Eivers et al., 2004). Indeed, there is a danger that an unintentional effect of targeting schools for intervention, as is done in all of the schemes being considered here, will be a lowering of expectations (Archer & Shortt, 2003).

Professional Development

Many of the evaluations summarised in Weir and Archer (2004) and in Section 3 of this report describe and assess the provision of in-career education and training/professional development in the various schemes. The picture that emerges is mixed. According to most participants, the quality of the provision is high.

However, with the exception of the HSCL scheme, where a fairly comprehensive yearly programme is in place and a variety of supportive networks and clusters exists, the level of provision is problematic. In the case of Early Start, apart from an induction programme for new staff, provision has varied from year to year. Around the time of the introduction of the curricular guidelines, a support programme was put in place for a short time but it has not been possible to maintain it (Lewis & Archer, 2002). Provision for teachers and rural coordinators in BTC has also been uneven, mainly because in-career development work related to the Revised Primary School Curriculum disrupted plans for scheme-related development. As noted in Section 3, a two-day training programme for coordinators in GCEB (rural) was held in October 2003. However, no professional support has been provided in the urban dimension of GCEB.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In Section 2 of this report, recent evidence on seven factors identified by Kellaghan et al. (1995) as elements of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to tackling disadvantage was reviewed. Empirical support for the continued use of six of the factors was found and strong arguments for the seventh (adequately resourcing schools in disadvantaged areas) were noted. The fifth element on the list (the reform of school organisation) has become part of a growing literature on school development planning and Comprehensive School Reform (CSR). A brief account of CSR is included in Section 2. Arising out of this account, two other factors are identified and discussed (raising expectations and professional development).

An examination of the extent to which provision in Ireland reflects the findings of the literature review suggests that considerable progress has been made in the direction of implementing a multifaceted, evidence-based approach to disadvantage. This is particularly true in relation to class-size reductions and the allocation of extra financial resources in Breaking the Cycle and Giving Children an Even Break and in relation to the promotion of parent involvement, most notably in the context of the Home/School/Community Liaison scheme. Serious attempts have also been made to forge links between schools and the wider community, to situate educational provision in an integrated area-based approach to dealing with poverty and social exclusion, to develop (albeit in a small number of schools) high quality preschool provision, and to promote school development planning. In view of this progress, the fact that so few of the evaluations of existing schemes found evidence of gains in measured achievement (see Section 3 of this report and Weir & Archer, 2004) may be regarded as disappointing. The fact that the performance of pupils in designated schools continues to fall so far below the performance of other pupils (Eivers et al., 2004; Weir 2001) will also be seen as disappointing.

It is possible that the failure to find achievement effects is due to features of the evaluation design rather than to weaknesses in the programmes. In some of the individual evaluation reports, explanations related to methodological problems (e.g., the absence of a contemporaneous control group; limitations of the tests used) and the difficulty of separating the effects of an intervention from other developments (e.g., demographic change) have been noted (e.g., Kelly & Kellaghan, 1999; Weir, Milis & Ryan, 2002a, b). It is also worth noting that, in all of the evaluations where achievement data were available, the achievement tests were administered to cohorts of pupils who were involved in the particular programme during the first five years of its life. There is a suggestion in the literature that achievement effects of comprehensive interventions are more likely to occur in schools where the intervention has been in place for five years or more (Borman et al., 2003).

However, it is also necessary to consider the possibility that the absence of the achievement effects is due to weaknesses in the provision. Thus, while many of the factors identified in the literature as ingredients of an effective intervention are prominent features of Irish provision, other such factors are not. Three factors in particular, can be highlighted.

First, there is the suggestion that many Irish programmes appear not to assign the kind of priority that the literature indicates is warranted to the promotion of literacy and numeracy. While measures to assist low achieving pupils by withdrawing them from their classrooms are well developed in Irish schools (perhaps more developed in designated schools than in other schools), specific attempts to develop intensive, innovative approaches to teaching reading and mathematics in classroom settings are not particularly evident in schemes for dealing with disadvantage. A number of ways of increasing the priority assigned to literacy and numeracy in schools with large numbers of children from disadvantaged backgrounds could be considered. These include increasing time for instruction, providing classroom teachers with specialist expertise, and focusing professional development activities on literacy and numeracy. Consideration also needs to be given to finding innovative ways of providing low achieving children with one-to-one tuition that do not impinge on their classroom work in literacy and numeracy.

A second factor from the literature that is missing from Irish provision is any concerted effort to help teachers and parents to set high, but realistic, expectations for what their children can achieve. As noted in Section 5, there is a danger that, when schools are selected to participate in schemes for addressing disadvantage, an unintended consequence may be a lowering of expectations. Teachers and others may feel that confirmation of the poor economic circumstances of their pupils provides a ready explanation for poor achievement. National coordinators and others responsible for the Irish schemes are aware of this danger and have adverted to it in their dealings with schools. However, there is evidence that a more proactive approach to actually raising expectations would be of benefit. Some programmes designed to raise expectations in the United States and New Zealand were mentioned in Section 2. Further investigation of these and other similar programmes might be worthwhile.

A third gap in provision that was identified by the present review relates to professional development which, with the exception of the HSCL scheme, is not afforded the central role in Irish schemes that it is in successful programmes elsewhere. Such development may be all the more necessary here given the fact that teachers do not feel adequately prepared in initial training to teach reading, especially in disadvantaged areas (Eivers, et al., 2004). The professional development opportunities that are provided in successful programmes include traditional in-career development activities such as workshops and conferences. However, there is some basis for believing that other forms of support are more effective in this context. For example, teachers who are trying to implement

innovative approaches to the teaching of reading seem to find it very helpful to have access to other teachers with whom they can share experiences, engage in joint problem solving and act as observers in each others classrooms. Mentoring and being able to access specialist expertise (e.g., in particular curriculum areas) are other popular strategies. The recommendation of Eivers et al. (2004) that "literacy co-ordinators should be assigned to schools with large numbers of low achieving pupils" (p.166) would be a worthwhile development in this regard. Interestingly, implementing some of the strategies just described was among the functions envisaged for the support team that was proposed but not established for GCEB.

In addition to highlighting three gaps in Irish provision (improving literacy and numeracy, raising expectations, and professional development), the present review indicates that there may be merit in further exploration of the concept of comprehensive school reform. This might take the form of intensive examination of "off the shelf" programmes such as Success for All and the School Development Programme or it might involve a strengthening of the School Development Planning Initiative to help schools develop their own reform programmes.

The present report has also identified at least four ways in which factors that are prominent in existing provision may need to be refined. First, in relation to reduced class size, the balance of the research suggests that teachers need support to maximise the opportunities that smaller classes provide for more individual attention and better relationships between teachers and pupils. It is clear that not enough is being done to support teachers in this way. Professional development of the kind described above could help in this regard. Second, there is a strong case for developing Early Start into a more intensive intervention that is better integrated with forms of day care that meet the needs of parents from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., parents who are in work or involved in education or training). Third, the work recently begun in the HSCL scheme on helping parents to stimulate learning in the home (C. Conaty, personal communication, October 26, 2004) needs to be supported and evaluated. Fourth, more could be done to promote an integrated, area-based approach to poverty, while recognising the many real difficulties that can arise when agencies with varying traditions and professionals with different backgrounds and training seek to collaborate.

It is important, at this stage, to reiterate a point made earlier about the weakness of the knowledge base from which we are trying to derive guidelines for policy and practice. This arises from the inconclusive and sometimes contradictory nature of research findings and the absence of an agreed definition of educational disadvantage. Clearly, it is important, as policy makers try to develop and refine existing provision, that research and evaluation activities be substantially increased. Research needs to focus on understanding the nature of the phenomena underlying disadvantage (Kellaghan, 2001). What are the processes at work in disadvantaged families and communities that create difficulties for children in schools? Why are the

difficulties for some children from disadvantaged backgrounds greater than for others? Is the impact of poverty on educational outcomes different in urban and rural settings?

An improved understanding of educational disadvantage would, of course, also facilitate the development of better procedures for identifying those who are disadvantaged, the schools in which they are concentrated and the areas in which they live. This, in turn, would lead to improved targeting of specific interventions and general resources. The ongoing work of the ERC on the identification of disadvantage provides evidence for the continued use of targeting (especially at the level of the school), if possible, on the basis of a sliding scale rather than on the basis of a dichotomy (e.g., a school is designated as disadvantaged or it is not). Targeting is also a feature of many of the successful initiatives described in this report.

While more research capacity has been directed towards programme evaluation than towards investigation of the more basic questions just outlined (Kellaghan, 2002), most of the evaluations have been limited to the early (pilot) stages of programmes. There would seem to be value in moving towards a situation in which evaluation is seen as an ongoing part of programme planning and development as has been happening, to a very limited extent in recent years, in the case of Early Start (Lewis & Archer, 2003). In this way, evaluation would be formative, in the sense of providing regular feedback to those responsible for designing and implementing programmes, as well as summative, in the sense of helping policy makers come to a judgement about the worth or value of a programme (Scriven, 1967, 1980; Stufflebeam, 2000).

Any expansion of research and evaluation will need to be accompanied by a process of reflection and debate in which empirical findings can be related to values and the experiences of people directly affected by educational disadvantage. Some promising developments in this regard have already taken place at the National Forum on Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage at St Patrick's College in July 2002, at the Inaugural Meeting of the Educational Disadvantage Forum (Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2003) and at several public consultation meetings as part of the Your Education System process (www.youreducation.ie). While research and evaluation were considered at some of these events (e.g., in the form of keynote addresses), their main contribution to policy has probably been in compiling and articulating the views of stakeholders on the nature of disadvantage and how it needs to be addressed. Very often these views are consistent with the implications of research. However, there are areas of difference. For example, the conclusion drawn here about the importance of targeting might not receive support from some stakeholders who favour universal provision. A challenge for the future will be to find new ways through which researchers and stakeholders can engage with each other to arrive at a fuller understanding of the complex nature of educational disadvantage and agreement on how to deal with it.

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