

**A REVIEW OF SCHOOL-BASED MEASURES AIMED AT
ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE IN IRELAND**

**Report to the
Educational Disadvantage Committee**

**Susan Weir and Peter Archer
with the assistance of Rita Flanagan
Educational Research Centre**

Educational Research Centre, Dublin

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INTRODUCTION

This report is concerned with one of the tasks that the Educational Research Centre undertook for the Educational Disadvantage Committee: 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 report is based almost exclusively on the results of programme evaluations, with a major focus on the extent to which each of the initiatives has 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 has been prepared for the EDC (Weir, 2004a) and a summary of that commentary 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 members of 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).

PRESCHOOL LEVEL

The Rutland St Project

One of the earliest attempts to deal with the problems of disadvantage in Europe was the establishment in 1969 of a preschool programme to cater for children between the ages of three and five in a disadvantaged inner city area known as Rutland Street (Holland, 1979; Kellaghan, 1977; Kellaghan & Greaney, 1993).

The initiative had two main aims. First, it sought to provide children in a preschool setting with experiences that would facilitate the development of knowledge, skills,

and attitudes appropriate to later school success. Second, it sought to increase the involvement of parents in the education of their children through visiting homes, organising parent-teacher meetings, and encouraging parents to participate in classroom activities. Children attended the preschool for two and a half hours per day in groups of 15 (a total of 90 children enrolled in the first year). Each group was led by a primary school teacher with the assistance of a classroom aide, and emphasis was placed on developing children's cognitive, language, personality, and social skills. The effects of participation were formally evaluated during the period in which the first cohort of participating children progressed through the two years of the preschool and through the first three grades of primary school. A follow-up study monitored the later educational careers and work and leisure experiences of children in the cohort. Evaluation findings indicated some success in relation to the two stated aims of the programme.

In relation to the first aim, participating children's average measured scholastic ability (as assessed by the Preschool Inventory) increased over the two years of the preschool programme (Kellaghan, 1977). In particular, improvements in children's vocabulary, ability to respond to verbal communication, and knowledge of numerical concepts, were noted. At age six, the achievements of participants appeared comparable with American norms on a test of pre-reading skills. Participants' intellectual development was also monitored over the five years of the project using the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. The average group score on the test, which was 92.99 on entry to the programme, increased to 99.44 following the completion of two years of participation. However, there was a subsequent decrease to 90.91 during the three years of junior school. Kellaghan (1977) pointed out that, although the final score of the treatment group was about the same as their starting score, this should be considered in the light of an expected decline in the absence of any intervention programme. Indeed, the mean IQ of eight-year olds in the area was 84.71 before the project began. The programme appeared to benefit girls who had participated in the programme more than boys. The reading scores of girls were higher than those of boys at age eight, although there were no gender differences in intelligence as measured by the Stanford Binet Intelligence Scale. Furthermore, girls were perceived by teachers to be superior to boys on a range of personality measures such as

persistence with school work, self-determination, and mood (with girls being perceived as generally more cheerful).

In relation to the second aim, data collected from the parents of participating children showed evidence of the programme's effectiveness in homes. The impact of the programme was felt in two ways. Parents reported a high level of satisfaction with the preschool (and claimed their children also held positive attitudes towards it), and were pleased with the way in which the programme operated. Furthermore, parents perceived participation in the programme to have led to the development of school-related interests in their children. The programme was also perceived by parents to have affected the manner in which they related to their children. Increases in the extent of parent-child verbal communication were noted, a good proportion indicated that they read to their children every day, and a number reported that their discipline methods had become less characterised by corporal punishment. It should be noted that girls' homes, in comparison with those of boys, were rated by teachers as being characterised by higher levels of family activities, including educational activities such as reading books and making use of libraries.

In the first report of the evaluation, Kellaghan (1977) pointed to the limited value of a single intervention in areas in which disadvantage is prevalent, and suggested that if any early gains from participation in preschool programmes were to be maintained, participants required ongoing support at family, school, and community level.

Holland's (1979) account of the programme indicated that mothers were more actively involved in the programme than fathers (e.g., mothers were much more likely than fathers to attend meetings related to the programme). This may have been because, at the time, matters relating to children were perceived, by both mothers and fathers, to be predominantly the concern of mothers. However, fathers became involved when they considered it appropriate. For example, when the building in which the preschool was housed was vandalised, the fathers organised to take it in turns to keep watch on the building every evening, an arrangement which lasted for a year and a half. This sense of ownership of the building (and of the project) was cited by Holland (1979) as evidence of the beneficial effect of the project on the community as a whole.

A longer-term follow-up of the progress of participants in the preschool programme and of the original control group was also conducted (Kellaghan & Greaney, 1993). This revealed little or no difference between the groups on most of the measures on which they were compared. Participants were similar to controls in terms of absenteeism rates and the extent to which they had been assigned to special classes. Their employment experiences were similar, as was the extent of social deviancy. However, two important differences emerged. First, programme participants were two to three times more likely to take public examinations (Intermediate and Group Certificate) than were non-participants. Second, while none of the control group completed the Leaving Certificate Examination, 10% of programme participants did.

The overall findings of evaluations of Rutland Street (that initial benefits seem to disappear in the early years of formal schooling only to re-emerge in adulthood) are similar to findings of evaluations of preschool interventions in other countries undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s.

Early Start

As part of the integrated approach to problems of disadvantage in designated schools, Early Start was introduced to eight schools in the 1994/95 school year and to a further 32 schools in the following year. (For an account of the procedure of designating schools see the section on the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme below). Like the Rutland Street Project, the initiative was set up to provide for three-year old preschool children.

The programme is broadly concerned with the development of the whole child, but it has a particular focus on the promotion of language and cognitive development and the prevention of school failure. Participating children are entitled to attend an Early Start centre, all of which are attached to primary schools, for a two and a half hour session in either the morning or afternoon for the duration of the primary school year. A qualified teacher and a childcare worker are responsible for two groups of up to 15 children (one of the groups attends in the morning; the other in the afternoon). All schools involved in Early Start have the support of a Home School Community

Liaison co-ordinator who is available to help parents of Early Start participants to become more involved in their children's education.

An evaluation of Early Start in the original group of eight participating schools was undertaken during its first four years of operation (1994-1998), culminating in two evaluation reports (Educational Research Centre, 1998; Kelly & Kellaghan, 1999). Assessing the impact of the programme on the achievements (cognitive and non-cognitive) of pupils formed a major part of the evaluation. This task was approached by first collecting some baseline data. All pupils who were in second class in the eight participating schools in 1994/95 when Early Start was introduced were tested in reading and mathematics. The reading test was the Drumcondra Primary Reading Test (Level 2, Form A) and the test in mathematics was the Drumcondra Mathematics Test (Level 1, Form B). The results provided a baseline for comparison with the results of the same tests administered in 1998/99 and 1999/2000 in the same eight schools to subsequent cohorts of second class pupils that included Early Start participants.

A similar procedure was adopted in relation to junior infant pupils. In this case, testing involved a sample of pupils who were assessed in the areas of cognition, language, and motor skills development using the American Guidance Service 'Early Screening Profiles' tests. Subsequent testing of the first two cohorts of Early Start pupils was carried out when they reached junior infants in 1995/96 and 1996/97 along with their classmates who had not participated in the programme. Additional information relating to the first cohort of Early Start pupils was also obtained in interviews conducted with 17 teachers of Junior Infants. In these interviews, the teachers were asked to make a series of comparisons between pupils who had been in Early Start and pupils who had not.

Data on pupils' achievement from the evaluation present a contradictory picture. The teachers who were interviewed were clearly of the view that Early Start had had positive effects on pupils. They believed that children who had attended Early Start adapted more readily to school than children who had not had that experience. Early Start participants were judged by their Junior Infant teachers to have higher levels of cognitive and social maturity, to be better adapted to classroom procedures, and to

have more self-determination and independence. However, the testing of former Early Start pupils when they were in Junior Infants and in second class and the comparison of their performance with the appropriate baseline data did not support the judgements of teachers. The scores of the first two cohorts of Early Start pupils on the Early Screening Profile when they were in Junior Infants were not found to differ significantly from those of pupils who had not attended Early Start. The language performance of the second cohort was found to be significantly better than that of the first cohort, however. Results of the tests of English reading and mathematics involving pupils in second class produced similar results. Differences between the achievements of pupils who had attended Early Start and those who had not were not found to be significant.

As well as looking at pupil achievement, the first two evaluation reports addressed a number of aspects of the implementation of the programme. In the second report, Kelly and Kellaghan (1999) suggested that problems with implementation, identified in the first evaluation report (Educational Research Centre, 1998), may have contributed to the failure of Early Start to impact on achievement. These included the duration and intensity of the programme, which were considered inadequate by international standards; low attendance rates in some schools; difficulties in securing the active involvement of some parents, and problems in the working relationship between teachers and childcare workers. More fundamentally, perhaps, the report indicated that there may not have been sufficient emphasis on cognitive activities in the Early Start curriculum and it endorsed reservations expressed by many Early Start teachers about the adequacy of the inservice education and training provided and the absence of curricular guidelines. The report also raised questions about adult-child interaction in Early Start, noting that research on early intervention programmes showed that “individual attention/tutoring produces better results” (Kelly & Kellaghan, 1999, p.14).

Following the initial evaluation, the Department of Education and Science initiated a series of measures designed to address at least some of the shortcomings of the programme that had been identified during its initial phase of operation. Important developments included additional inservice support involving visits to classrooms and the preparation of a draft curriculum which was disseminated to Early Start providers

in 1998 and which spelt out specific graded objectives for pupil development in a number of areas. In light of these developments, the Educational Research Centre was asked to undertake a further evaluation of Early Start. It was agreed that this further evaluation should begin by focusing on implementation. In particular, it would investigate those aspects of implementation that had been identified as problematic in the previous evaluation. The first aim of the further evaluation was, thus, to document how, if at all, Early Start differed from the intervention that had been the subject of the previous evaluation.

A first report of the further evaluation, based on school and teacher questionnaires, examination of existing documents, and discussion with Early Start personnel, indicated that a good deal of change had occurred in Early Start since the earlier evaluations had been carried out (Lewis & Archer, 2002). Objectives were more clearly specified, there was an increased emphasis on cognitive and language development, profiles of pupil achievements were produced to assist planning and preparation, small-group work became more common, provision for inservice education and training for teachers and childcare workers was expanded, the role of childcare workers was clarified, and parental involvement increased. The report also revealed that some aspects of Early Start had not altered, however. In particular, the duration and intensity of the intervention had remained the same; neither was there evidence of much improvement in attendance rates. Demand for places in many centres was not found to be particularly high. This may be due to the fact that provision only lasts for four hours per day, and this can be inconvenient for parents who work outside the home. There were indications of variation between centres with regard to a range of features of Early Start (e.g., effort made to target families, percentage of time devoted to small-group activity, direct involvement of parents, and clarity of teacher preparation notes).

A second report (Lewis & Archer, 2003) was based on systematic observation of classrooms in 19 of the 40 Early Start centres using a modified version of an existing instrument (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998). According to this second report “Observation of practice in the centres visited lends support to the conclusion that Early Start is a high quality intervention with a strong emphasis on adult-child interaction” (Lewis & Archer, 2003, p.15). In general, the observations confirmed

the earlier evidence relating to the ways in which implementation of the intervention had changed (e.g., greater parental involvement, better working relationships between teachers and childcare workers, and a shift from whole-group to small-group learning contexts). While the results of analyses of the observation schedule suggested that the extent of variation between centres was limited overall, some differences were revealed and it was possible to identify three groups of centres that could be distinguished from each other in terms of the quality of their implementation of Early Start. A surprising finding of the observation visits was that the work observed was more in line with objectives for the beginning of the year (as outlined in the curricular guidelines and profiles) than with the corresponding objectives for the end of the year when the visits took place. This finding is one of a number of issues that will be examined as part an assessment of the learning outcomes of Early Start that is currently being planned.

Preschools for Travellers

Traveller preschools were originally established on an ad hoc basis around the country arising from local community initiatives among Traveller parents and others determined to raise educational standards among the Traveller community. These preschools later came to receive support from the Department of Education and Science and between 1984 and 1994, 54 preschools were opened to cater for the needs of Traveller children. By the school year 1999/2000, 52 preschools (located mainly in urban areas) with over 530 pupils were receiving support from the Department of Education and Science, other Government departments, statutory bodies and a range of voluntary and charitable bodies.

The Inspectorate of Schools conducted an evaluation of the preschools, the results of which were published in 2003 (Department of Education and Science, 2003). Many issues concerning the establishment and operation of the preschools were examined using a combination of questionnaires, interviews and observations. Data were collected from 23 of the 25 preschools selected from around the country. The preschools selected represented almost half of the 52 preschools receiving support from the Department of Education and Science at the time of the evaluation.

The evaluation showed that while all preschools had some form of management structure in place, wide variation existed. Management involvement in the work of the preschools was rated as at an “optimal” or “very good” level in almost three-fifths of the preschools. However, management in one-third of the preschools showed “scope for development” and was rated as “requiring major improvement” in 9% of the sample.

Few of the preschools had written admission or registration policies. In general, pupils enrolled were between the ages of three and five, but in four preschools children under the age of three had been admitted and children over the age of five were attending three of the preschools. The report also showed that some preschools had admitted children from a non-Traveller background.

Preschools were asked to return data on average attendance of pupils over the ten-day period prior to the completion of the questionnaire (17 schools did so). Findings suggested wide variation in attendance levels (from over 70% in seven cases to below 30% in two others). Importantly, there was evidence in a number of schools that where attendance was carefully monitored and recorded, the attendance of pupils improved. The report also identified a number of other factors which positively affected attendance, including the cultivation of close links between parents and the preschools, and the work of visiting teachers for Travellers. The most significant factor affecting attendance was the provision of an efficient, supervised transport scheme.

All preschools were sited in urban areas where large Traveller populations are to be found. Proximity to halting sites and/or primary schools appeared to have been a priority in their location. Of the 23 preschools surveyed, 8 were based in classrooms made available by primary schools or in accommodation located near a primary school, while a further 6 were located on Traveller halting sites or complexes used by Travellers. The evaluation concluded that, where feasible, preschools should be established in or adjacent to primary schools to foster closer links between the Traveller community and mainstream schools.

Despite the difficulties encountered in the provision of buildings for the preschools, the evaluation concluded that management authorities had made good efforts to provide satisfactory accommodation for the teachers, assistants and pupils with almost 70% described as being housed in “optimal” or “very good” accommodation. However, approximately one-quarter of the preschools showed “scope for development” and two preschools surveyed “required major improvement”. While Inspectors praised the efforts that had been made to provide attractive and stimulating learning environments, it was noted that adequate play space, in particular the lack of suitable external play space, was not available in all preschools.

Preschools received 98% of the salary costs of teachers from the Department of Education and Science. The other significant personnel cost in the running of the Traveller preschools was the salaries of the childcare assistants and there was considerable variation in the way in which this aspect of the preschools was funded. Transport costs were a further significant expense in a number of preschools. While an average of just over €5,000 per preschool was received from the Department of Education and Science in the school year 1999/2000, exceptionally high transport expenditure at two of the schools was noted. It was recommended that, where possible, long-distance transport schemes should be discontinued and preschool provision made locally. Funding for other items of expenditure, such as insurance, electricity and food for the children, was raised from a variety of sources, including health boards, local authorities, voluntary, religious, and charitable organisations.

Teaching staff and assistants in the preschools came from a wide variety of professional backgrounds and held a range of qualifications. Given the origins of the preschools in voluntary initiatives, it is not surprising that teachers and assistants would have a diverse range of professional qualifications, with this diversity offering many advantages. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that important benefits could be achieved by the provision of recognised accredited pre-service courses which would gradually allow all preschools to employ teachers holding suitable teaching qualifications. All teachers had access to in-career development courses offered to teachers of Travellers and supported by the National Education Officer for Travellers. Teachers’ responses suggested that, while this provision was valued by them, they were keen to have access to a greater number of courses.

In general, Inspectors reported positively on the teaching approaches and methodologies used, and identified a number of features of the most effective schools. It was found that more effective learning took place when the teacher motivated children by matching activities to their needs and interests, when activities were carefully paced so as to provide challenging and engaging tasks for the children, when pupils' involvement was carefully monitored, when a careful balance was maintained between teacher-led and child-centred activities, and when a balanced combination of free play, structured individual activities, and group activities was used. Although the preschools lacked comprehensive curriculum advice, they were characterised by a considerable similarity in approach, possibly because of the regular in-career development provided for the teachers. It was recommended that urgent action should be taken to develop comprehensive learning and teaching guidelines for Traveller preschools.

The preschools were found to have developed linkages between Traveller parents and the educational system, initially at the level of the preschools and later between Travellers and primary schools. Almost all of those surveyed stated that they had some level of contact with local primary schools. The crucial role in facilitating this contact played by teachers (including Home-School-Community Liaison teachers, and, in particular teachers with specific responsibility for Traveller education) was highlighted. Many preschools emphasised that they operated "open door" policies with parents free to drop in at any time. Some adopted a more proactive approach to encouraging parental involvement (e.g., visiting Traveller homes). However, few reported that they had implemented structured policies for encouraging involvement by parents. Traveller parents were not involved in the management of all preschools, and no instances were recorded of their involvement in curriculum planning. It was recommended that each preschool should, over time, develop and implement a policy to encourage involvement by parents in the life of the preschools.

PRIMARY LEVEL

Teacher/Counsellor Scheme / Support Teacher Project

The Teacher/Counsellor project¹ was set up in 1996 following a submission to the Department of Education from a number of schools in disadvantaged areas of Dublin. The aim of the submission was to assist in managing disruptive and introverted pupils in order to teach such pupils and their peers more effectively. The appointment of 27 Teacher/ Counsellors was sanctioned, and their role was seen as two-fold: (i) to co-ordinate a whole-school approach in devising and implementing good practice and strategy to help prevent disruptive behaviour and (ii) to teach and counsel those pupils displaying behavioural problems during class. It was projected that these aims would be achieved by introducing whole-school policy strategies including anti-bullying programmes, playground management, and codes of conduct which promote good behaviour. Careful records on disruptive or introverted pupils would also be kept, to include noting the form of disruptive behaviour and its frequency; the steps being taken to prevent or manage the disruptive behaviour; and psychological, psychiatric and social reports. Behaviour checklists and progress charts would also be provided for teachers to record disruptive behaviour and appropriate intervention strategies would be suggested. While support would be offered to teachers to help manage and teach disruptive students during class time, teacher/counsellors would also withdraw disruptive students from class and teach them core areas of the curriculum, provide them with counselling to raise their self-esteem, and teach them social skills. Liaison with outside school agencies involved with the student would also be maintained.

An evaluation of the teacher/counsellor project was carried out in 1998 (Inspectorate and Psychological Service of the Department of Education, 1998). Data were collected from teacher/counsellors, class teachers, principals, parents, chairpersons of boards of management, and members of the Psychological Service who had direct contact with the project schools. The evaluation revealed that it was mainly the class teachers and principal who selected pupils to attend the Teacher/Counsellor.

¹ The name of the scheme was changed to Support Teacher Project following recommendations to do so by the working party charged with the evaluation described in this section (Inspectorate and Psychological Service of the Department of Education, 1998).

Preference for selection was given to disruptive, confrontational, distressed, or introverted pupils, as they took up an excessive amount of the teacher's or principal's time. While requests from parents were given high priority, it was noted as a matter of concern that, in about one-third of cases, parents were not consulted and involved in the selection of pupils.

The report of the evaluation suggested that certain Teacher/Counsellors were dealing with too many pupils. It was argued that in order for the Teacher/Counsellor's work to be effective, the number of targeted pupils would have to be quite limited and a maximum of 15 (identified according to specific criteria) was recommended.

Group work, such as circle time, and individual counselling sessions were seen by teachers and principals as the most frequent kinds of support for pupils. In more than half of cases, Teacher/Counsellors spent more than three hours each week on group counselling and circle time. The majority of Teacher/Counsellors reported that they provided support for pupils in an emergency situation and that they were available for crisis work. A majority of Teacher/Counsellors reported that they spent between one and two hours a week meeting with class teachers and up to one hour each week meeting parents to advise them on ways of supporting their child's learning.

Satisfaction with the project was expressed by parents and it was agreed by all respondents that contact with parents was a vital part of the work of the Teacher/Counsellor. The fact that one-third of teacher/counsellors reported that they counselled parents was raised as an issue of concern as the focus of the work of the teacher/counsellor had been intended to be solely on the pupil. The report recommended that the services of the teacher/counsellor be integrated with other targeted services in the school and in the community, especially the Home School Community Liaison scheme in relation to parental involvement.

The broad picture that emerged from the evaluation of Teacher/Counsellors' preparation and planning was positive, although there was significant variation in terms of both content and style. While all Teacher/Counsellors reported that they carried out short-term preparation, only three-quarters made written preparation for their work and organised timetables. It was recommended that Teacher/Counsellors

should be provided with more in-career developmental support to assist in the areas of planning and record keeping. A majority of Teacher/Counsellors reported that they reviewed their work, and inspectors rated more than half of these reviews as good or very good. In one-third of the responses, parents were identified as being active in the review process and the report highlighted that the involvement of parents added a very worthwhile dimension.

Despite a majority of Teacher/Counsellors reporting that they observed pupil behaviour in the classroom and other settings, they reported that they felt insufficient time was spent on observing classroom behaviour. Surprisingly few Teacher/Counsellors reported that they observed teacher behaviour, even though this is considered to be an important part of their work.

All respondents were agreed on the benefits of the Teacher/Counsellor service both specifically to individual pupils and generally to the whole school. Comments by teachers indicated that pupils who were supported by Teacher/Counsellors displayed enhanced motivation and self-esteem. They also noted less disruption and aggression, and a classroom atmosphere that was calmer as a result. Furthermore, other pupils were considered to have benefited more from their schooling because of the interventions with disruptive pupils. It was also noted that principals had far more time for visiting classes and attending to administrative duties because less time was taken up with discipline problems. Schools also had more supports, skills programmes and whole-school interventions such as anti-bullying programmes than prior to the project's introduction.

Breaking the Cycle

Following the review of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (DAS) by Kellaghan, Weir, Ó hUallacháin, and Morgan (1995) (see below), Breaking the Cycle was introduced by the Department of Education as a pilot scheme in 1996/97 to 33 urban schools and 123 rural schools to assist them in addressing problems associated with catering for large numbers of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The scheme in rural schools provided grants for the purchase of books, teaching materials and equipment, a dedicated grant for out-of-school activities and special projects, and incareer development programmes for teachers. A major provision of the scheme in

rural schools was the appointment of shared co-ordinators in clusters of participating schools to work with pupils and their families. The scheme in urban schools also provided grants for the purchase of books, teaching materials and equipment; enhanced capitation grants; and incareer development programmes for teachers. A key provision of the urban dimension of the scheme was the reduction in size of junior classes (junior infants to second class) to about 15:1.

The urban and rural schemes were evaluated over the first five years of their operation (Weir & Eivers, 1998; Eivers & Weir, 1998; Weir & Ryan, 2000a; Weir & Ryan, 2000b; Weir, Milis & Ryan, 2002a; Weir, Milis & Ryan, 2002b). Follow-up data were collected in 2003 on the achievements of sixth class pupils in urban schools (Weir, 2003). The aim of the evaluation was to assess the schemes' overall effectiveness, and to examine how participation affected schools, teachers, and pupils.

The evaluation of the scheme in urban schools

As a result of their participation in the scheme, schools were much better resourced, in terms of personnel, than was the case prior to the scheme. However, although the number of teachers in participating schools increased, schools experienced considerable difficulties with staff shortages and turnover. Furthermore, significant numbers of teaching posts were occupied by unqualified teachers. A survey of schools in 2001/2002 revealed that 72% of schools employed unqualified teachers. This, combined with the high staff turnover rate, suggests that teaching posts in participating schools are not sought after, and the difficulty of retaining teachers is likely to limit the impact of inservice training, impact negatively on staff morale, and impede the communication of information on pupils from year to year. Schools were much better resourced in terms of materials and equipment than had been the case prior to the scheme. Additional funding provided under the scheme enabled schools to purchase a wide range of necessary items over the first five years, and staff cited the extra funding for materials and equipment as one of the most important benefits of the scheme, especially in light of the difficulties of fundraising in disadvantaged areas.

The development of a school plan for Breaking the Cycle required schools to identify challenges, set targets, and decide on methods of evaluating the success of the chosen

strategies in the areas of curriculum, home-school liaison, and school organisation. By the end of the pilot phase of the scheme, data collected from principals suggested that schools were more conscious of the need to evaluate their strategies in priority areas, and were doing so using increasingly objective methods of assessment. Furthermore, the planning process was described by some as having led to a greater sense of connectedness and community among school staff.

The importance of fostering and maintaining links between the home and the school is widely acknowledged, and all schools in Breaking the Cycle also participated in the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme. While it is impossible to separate the effects on home-school links of participation in Breaking the Cycle from those of the HSCL scheme, data collected from principals over the first four years of the scheme indicate that parents had a good deal of contact with schools, and were involved in a wide range of school-related activities. These ranged from participating in educational courses to assisting in the running of events such as concerts, sports days, and homework clubs. Furthermore, in the fourth year of the scheme, principals perceived a decrease in the percentage of parents that lacked an interest in the educational progress of their children, as well as in the percentage that had low educational expectations for their children. However, there is further scope for improving parents' educational expectations, as in the fifth year of the scheme, almost one principal in five reported that the vast majority of parents had low educational expectations for their children.

Principals were unanimous in their agreement that Breaking the Cycle had had a beneficial overall effect on their schools, while virtually all said that teaching practice and staff morale had been positively affected by participation. Principals also noted a range of beneficial effects on pupils, which included improvements in academic achievement, increases in self-esteem, and improved standards of social interaction. All principals in the final year of the pilot phase indicated that pupils had benefited from participation in the scheme, citing the reduced pupil-teacher ratio at junior level as a key factor. Principals felt that the extra individual attention given to pupils in small groups was of benefit, and that this had facilitated teachers in the early identification of problems. However, more than one-third of principals thought that the reduced pupil-teacher ratios should be extended to other classes in the school, as

they felt that the benefits of being taught in a small class were negated when pupils were subsequently placed in a much larger class.

Teachers' perceptions of the scheme were also, in the main, positive. Most thought that the scheme had improved their understanding of the nature of educational disadvantage, and that their attitudes and teaching practices had changed as a result of participating in the scheme. However, they held relatively low expectations for pupils, and were more likely to agree that the scheme had impacted on pupils personally and socially rather than academically. It should be noted that specially tailored inservice training for teachers in Breaking the Cycle schools was severely curtailed during the last two years of the pilot phase due to the requirement that teachers attend training related to the introduction of the new curriculum. This is an important factor, as targeted inservice support for teachers was one of the main provisions of the scheme. Furthermore, because the staff turnover rate was high, it is likely that a significant proportion of teachers would not have had any inservice training associated with Breaking the Cycle. The implications of this would seem particularly serious for junior class teachers, who required as much support as possible in maximising the educational opportunities provided by small numbers.

The scheme's effect on pupils is of critical importance in assessing its effectiveness. However, the range of potential effects at pupil level is broad, and may include a reduction in absenteeism, improvements in behaviour and discipline, changes in attitudes towards school and schoolwork, and improved achievement and attainment. The evaluation attempted to assess the extent to which each of these was affected by participation in the scheme. Pupil attendance did not improve over the pilot phase of the project. The average attendance rate in Breaking the Cycle schools of about 86% compares unfavourably with the daily attendance rates of 90-91% in all Dublin city schools over the same period. National figures were not available at the time of the evaluation, but recent figures on attendance from the National Educational Welfare Board suggest the average was about 90.7% in designated schools in 2003/2004, most of which are located in urban areas (Weir, 2004b). Furthermore, low attendance levels were observed on the days when achievement tests were administered in 1997, 2000, and 2003. If principals were correct in attributing problems with attendance to parents, further work with parents is indicated.

Standardised achievement tests in reading and mathematics were administered to pupils in third and sixth classes in the first (1997) and fourth (2000) years of the scheme, and to sixth class pupils in 2003. Test scores in 1997 indicated that the achievements of pupils were significantly lower than those of pupils nationally. This finding confirmed both that the selected schools served educationally disadvantaged pupils, and that the indicators used to select schools were valid indicators of disadvantage. Tests scores three years later recorded no improvement in average achievement, and, indeed, indicated that there was a statistically significant decrease in the average literacy and numeracy achievements of pupils in sixth class between 1997 and 2000. In 1997, slightly less than 30% of pupils in sixth class scored below the 10th percentile in reading, and 35.5% scored at that level in mathematics. By 2003, 37.6% of the sixth class cohort scored below the 10th percentile in reading, while the numbers scoring at this level in mathematics had increased by over 10% to 45.6%. There were very few high-achieving pupils, with less than 1% of pupils achieving scores above the 90th percentile in 2003. The small number of high-achieving pupils should be acknowledged, however, as it shows that low achievement levels are not an inevitable consequence of attending schools that serve large numbers of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The failure of the scheme to effect improvements in achievement may be the result of a combination of factors, including poor attendance, high teacher turnover, the presence of relatively large numbers of unqualified teachers, teachers' instructional priorities, insufficient targeted inservice training for teachers, and low expectations for pupils on the part of teachers and parents.

While it must be acknowledged that the failure of the scheme to bring about improvements in pupils' literacy and numeracy levels is disappointing, positive outcomes were noted in other areas. Feedback from principals and teachers suggested that participation in the scheme had very beneficial effects at school and pupil level. Staffs in schools with junior classes were certain that the reduction in numbers had benefited pupils. Furthermore, it is possible that the scheme will have positive educational outcomes in the longer term in areas such as pupil attainment. For this reason, it is planned to examine rates of early school leaving in participating schools. This will be achieved by comparing, in 2007, the Junior Cycle completion

rates of pupils who were in Junior Infants when the scheme began with those of a sample of pupils who received their primary education in participating schools prior to the introduction of the scheme.

The evaluation of the scheme in rural schools

As was found in the urban scheme, schools were much better resourced in terms of materials and equipment than had been the case prior to the scheme. The additional funding enabled schools to purchase a wide range of necessary items over the first five years, and significant decreases were noted in the percentage of principals who claimed that their capacity to teach in key areas was adversely affected by a shortage or inadequacy of equipment or books. Indeed, school staff cited the extra funding for materials and equipment as one of the most important benefits of the scheme, especially in light of the difficulties of fundraising in communities with a small number of families.

Despite declining enrolments, staffing levels in participating schools remained stable over the course of the pilot phase of the scheme. However, schools' access to non-class teachers appears to have increased over the same period. In particular, almost all schools had access to a remedial teacher by the fifth year of the scheme, compared to less than half of schools in the first year. The data collected also show that, in some cases, schools used a portion of the funding under the scheme to engage sessional teachers in various areas. Principals indicated that, while they had little difficulty in retaining class teachers in their schools, they were experiencing difficulties attracting teachers, mainly due to the isolated location of schools and a shortage of qualified teachers.

Principals were unanimous in their agreement that Breaking the Cycle had had a beneficial overall effect on their schools, while virtually all said that teaching practice and staff morale had been positively affected by participation. Almost all principals indicated that pupils had benefited from participation in the scheme, most notably from their participation in out-of-school activities / special projects, and from their access to improved learning materials and equipment. Principals also felt that teachers were more aware of the needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds,

and some emphasised the benefits pupils had derived from contact with the co-ordinator and from contact with pupils in other schools in the cluster.

The development of home-school links was seen as a major aim of the scheme in rural schools from the outset, and work with parents was considered to be a key element of the cluster co-ordinator's role. Data collected from principals over the first four years of the scheme indicate that parents had a good deal of contact with schools, and were involved in a wide range of school-related activities. These ranged from participating in educational and extracurricular courses to assisting in the running of events such as concerts and sports days. In fact, there was a substantial increase over the life of the scheme in the percentage of schools that organised both educational and extracurricular courses for parents. One interesting finding is that the percentage of parents who visited the school on their own initiative also increased significantly, possibly signifying that the school was perceived by parents to be a more welcoming place. This change might also reflect the work of co-ordinators in their development of relationships with the families served.

There was no significant improvement in pupil attendance over the pilot phase of the project. However, the average attendance rate in participating schools of about 92% over a four-year period compares favourably with the daily attendance rates of 90-91% in all Dublin city schools over the same period (attendance data from the National Educational Welfare Board for 2003/2004 suggest the average is about 94.8% in rural schools (Weir, 2004b)). Furthermore, the results of standardised achievement tests in reading and Mathematics which were administered to third and sixth class pupils in a sample of 50 schools in the first and fourth years of the scheme indicated that the achievements of pupils on both occasions were comparable with those of pupils nationally. Therefore, the fact that attendance and achievement did not improve significantly during the project is not surprising.

The fact that attainment (measured by Junior Cycle completion rates of pupils from the selected schools prior to the introduction of the scheme), achievement, and attendance levels were untypical of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds indicates that the procedures used to select schools for participation in the scheme failed to identify schools serving educationally disadvantaged pupils. This may be due to the

fact that the selection process took practical factors into account (i.e., the potential to cluster schools based on their proximity to other, similar, applicant schools) in addition to characteristics associated with disadvantage (e.g., the percentage of pupils in the school whose parents possessed medical cards). Further, it appears from analysis of the data supplied by urban and rural schools in their applications to join the scheme, that the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and pupil achievement is not as strong in rural as in urban settings (see Weir, 1999). It may be the case also that disadvantaged pupils in rural areas are dispersed across schools rather than concentrated in a small number of schools and, therefore, using the school as the level of intervention may be inappropriate in rural areas.

PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY LEVEL

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (primary)

The Disadvantaged Areas Scheme² (DAS) was introduced in 1984 by the Department of Education as a set of special measures to deal with the problem of disadvantage in selected primary schools in Dublin, Cork, and Limerick. Provision initially allowed for increased capitation grants for participating schools, as well as a dedicated grant for the development of home-school links. Later in the scheme, schools were also eligible for concessionary teaching posts. Following concerns about the procedures used to identify schools that would benefit from the scheme, specific indicators to assist in the identification of schools serving disadvantaged pupils were introduced in 1990. Schools were asked to supply information on the number of pupils in the school whose families: were resident in local authority housing or non-permanent accommodation; held medical cards; and were in receipt of unemployment benefit or assistance under schemes administered by the Department of Social Welfare. These indicators were weighted and used in the calculation of an index of disadvantage for each applicant school. The index also took account of the existing pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) in the school by making a downwards points adjustment to compensate for favourable existing PTRs. Applicants were rank-ordered for consideration for inclusion in the scheme on the basis of this adjusted index. In the 2001/2002 school

² The scheme was originally entitled “ The Scheme of Assistance to Schools in Designated Areas of Disadvantage”.

year, 312 schools (10%) of 3,109 primary schools countrywide were designated as disadvantaged.

Early internal and unpublished evaluations of the scheme in 1985/86 and 1987/88 by the Department of Education indicated that the additional grants for the purchase of materials provided under the scheme were particularly welcomed by schools, although difficulties in devising and implementing home-school strategies (for which a portion of the grant was dedicated), were reported. Although the DAS has not been subject to any formal evaluation since, it was examined in its later form as part of a review of provision for disadvantaged students (Kellaghan et al., 1995). The review used data from the 1993 National Reading Survey to examine differences between available resources in designated and non-designated schools. Designated schools were found to have better access to remedial services than non-designated schools, but there were no differences between designated and non-designated schools in key areas such as class size, numbers of books per pupil, pupils' access to computers, and teachers' access to photocopying and professional library facilities. Therefore, while the data indicated that the scheme had been successful in bringing the resources of designated schools up to the level of schools in more advantaged areas, with the exception of remedial provision, there was not much evidence of positive discrimination in favour of designated schools. However, a further National Assessment of English Reading was carried out in 1998 (Cosgrove, Kellaghan, Forde & Morgan, 2000), permitting the comparisons between designated and non-designated schools in the 1995 report to be repeated and updated for this report. As was the case in 1993, the number of books per pupil did not differ according to designated status of school. By 1998, all designated schools and 93.4% of non-designated ones had access to a remedial teacher. For this reason, it is more appropriate to compare the number of remedial *hours per pupil* in designated and non-designated schools. In 1998, pupils in designated schools had an average of .10 contact hours per week, while those in non-designated schools had a significantly lower average of .06 hours. Designated schools also fared better in terms of pupils' access to computers, with an average of 37 pupils to each computer compared with 75 pupils to each computer in non-designated schools. It seems, therefore, that the DAS has led to at least some positive discrimination towards the designated schools in some areas.

An examination of the application procedure and individual indicators used for the DAS, as well as of data on the characteristics of selected schools, highlighted some of the scheme's drawbacks (Kellaghan et al., 1995). First, anomalies in the designation process and the allocation of resources were noted. For example, schools in the same area (or serving the same families) were sometimes treated differently in terms of designation. This may have occurred because schools provided different assessments of the conditions of families served, because principals estimated (or overestimated) values on the indicators, because the points index was not the sole criterion used in the designation of schools, or because similar schools differed in their existing PTRs at the time of application (resulting in an adjustment of points which impacted negatively on some schools). Second, several of the indicators (local authority housing, rented accommodation, and PTR adjustment) were found to be biased against small rural schools. While it was estimated that over 60% of disadvantaged pupils resided in rural areas (i.e., areas with a population of less than 10,000), only 2% of schools in rural areas were designated in 1993/1994, compared with almost half of schools in Dublin. Further analysis by the Educational Research Centre relating to anomalies in designation of primary schools and location biases were part of an oral presentation to the Educational Disadvantage Committee in January 2004 and are the subject of forthcoming papers.

As a result of the review of provision in general, and of the DAS in particular, several recommendations for a new approach to the identification and targeting of educationally disadvantaged pupils were put forward for consideration (Kellaghan et al., 1995). A key recommendation was that resources should be targeted at a limited number of schools (not more than 25-30) with high concentrations of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and low levels of achievement. The inadequacy of existing provision for disadvantaged pupils in rural areas was noted, and it was recommended that the funding available for initiatives designed to address disadvantage be distributed more equally across geographical areas.

The intervention was envisaged as being co-ordinated and comprehensive, and multi-faceted in its approach to meeting the needs of educationally disadvantaged children (e.g., it should involve appropriate curriculum adaptation, a reduction in the size of

junior classes to facilitate individual attention to pupils and the development of teacher-pupil relationships, and the reform of school organisation to develop a unity of purpose and build on existing strengths of teachers and pupils). In addition, the participation of selected schools in the scheme should be supported by advice and inservice training for school staffs.

It was further proposed that acceptance into the scheme should be dependent on the school undertaking to formulate a five-year plan of action. The plan should be based on an examination of the problems in the school, and should describe the existing deployment of resources in the school, as well as specifying how additional resources would be used. Implicit in this school plan would be the setting of targets to be met during the five-year period of intervention, as well as the monitoring of progress towards the attainment of these targets. It was also recommended that the number of indicators used to identify schools in disadvantaged areas be increased, and that the relative weightings given to each indicator should be re-evaluated. The existing indicators relating to possession of a medical card and long-term unemployment status were considered useful for assessing poverty and deprivation, but the suggestion was made that some achievement-based indicator was also desirable. Many of these recommendations were subsequently incorporated into the urban and rural dimensions of the Breaking the Cycle scheme.

The Disadvantaged Areas Scheme (post-primary)

The DAS has been in operation at post-primary level since 1990/1991. In the 2001/2002 school year, 207 (or 27.6%) of 749 second-level schools were in receipt of additional support under the DAS, taking the form of concessionary teaching posts and enhanced capitation grants. Although the scheme has not been formally evaluated, Kellaghan et al. (1995) reviewed briefly the selection procedure for the scheme, and described some characteristics of designated schools at second level.

Comparisons of the application indicators with those used at primary level revealed a larger number of application indicators at post-primary level. Some indicators related to family background (unemployment, medical card possession, residence in local authority houses or flats, residence in non-permanent accommodation, lone-parent households, and number of pupils from deprived rural backgrounds). Other

indicators related to pupil attainment and achievement. Specifically, principals were asked to estimate the number of first-year pupils with significant literacy and numeracy difficulties, and to give the percentage of pupils who drop out of school at or about 15 years of age without formal educational qualifications.

On the basis of the information supplied, an index of disadvantage was calculated for each applicant school. Also, an examination-score points adjustment (up to a maximum of 300 points in 1994/1995) was made on the basis of each school's performance on the Junior Certificate Examination. Four variables were used to calculate this: the number of candidates achieving fewer than four D grades; the numbers of candidates taking Foundation-level English; the number taking Foundation-level Mathematics; and the number taking Foundation-level Irish.

It was noted that the method of points adjustment based on the examination score had the effect of penalizing smaller schools. This was because calculations were based on the absolute numbers of pupils, not the proportion in a class or school who met the achievement criteria, and, therefore, schools with fewer pupils accumulated fewer points on this indicator. Also, schools in differing locations were found to differ significantly in their mean score on certain indicators. Specifically, schools in rural areas and small towns received fewer points for residence in local authority housing, residence in local authority flats, lone-parent families, and poor performance on examinations. In contrast, schools in small towns and rural areas had the greatest proportion of pupils who had parents who were medical card holders. However, it was noted that while there were fewer designated post-primary schools in large towns and in rural areas than in urban areas, all locations were better served (in proportional terms) by designation than at primary level. In addition, a greater percentage of small schools were designated at post-primary than at primary level. Further analyses by the Educational Research Centre relating to anomalies in designation of post-primary schools were part of an oral presentation to the Educational Disadvantage Committee in January 2004 and are the subject of forthcoming papers.

The Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme (primary and post-primary levels)

This scheme was initiated in 1990 as a pilot project in 55 primary schools that were already part of the DAS. In 1991 the scheme was extended to 13 post-primary schools that served the children from the original 55 primary schools. Following several expansions, HSCL is now available in almost all of the 310 primary and 210 post-primary schools in DAS. It was “mainstreamed” in 1993 (i.e., it is no longer regarded as a pilot project).

The basic unit of the HSCL scheme is the full-time co-ordinator whose role is defined in official documentation in terms of influencing the adults (mostly parents and teachers) “whose attitudes and behaviour impinge on the lives of children”. The scheme is led and supported at national level by a National Co-ordinator and two Assistant National Co-ordinators. The National Co-ordinator and her two assistants design and provide a substantial programme of in-career development for local co-ordinators and other school staff, visit schools on a regular basis and maintain contact in a variety of other ways.

A variety of supports are available to co-ordinators. For example, they participate with other co-ordinators in four types of cluster that are designed to provide mutual support and opportunities for sharing ideas and reflection on practice. In addition, most participating schools are now involved in Local Committees comprised of representatives from schools, parents and local voluntary and statutory bodies. As well as being supportive of co-ordinators, Local Committees are intended to provide a forum for identifying needs and fostering “ownership” of the scheme by communities.

A number of sources of evidence on the effectiveness of the HSCL exist. It has been the subject of an external evaluation by the Educational Research Centre (Ryan, 1994, 1999). The National Co-ordinator conducted surveys of co-ordinators, classroom teachers, school principals and parents. She has combined reports of these surveys with a personal account of her experience of the evolution of the scheme in a doctoral dissertation (Conaty, 1999) and a book (Conaty, 2002). Finally, the Educational Research Centre carried out a review (Archer & Shortt, 2003) for the Department of

Education and Science and the Department of Finance as part of the Government's Strategic Management Initiative (SMI). In each of these sources an attempt is made to examine the outcomes of the scheme in terms of its stated aims:

1. To maximise active participation of the children in the scheme schools in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure.
2. To promote active co-operation between home, school, and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children.
3. To raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills.
4. To enhance the children's uptake of education, their retention in the educational system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level, and their life-long attitudes to learning.
5. To disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally (Department of Education and Science, 2002, p.2).

In relation to the first and fourth of these aims, Ryan (1999) pointed out that "major effects on pupil achievement of a project such as the HSCL scheme would be likely to be long term rather than short term" (Ryan, 1999, p.31). However, Ryan's (1999) evaluation included analysis of the reading and mathematics achievement, as measured by standardised tests, of pupils in third and fifth class after the scheme had been in operation for five years. Achievement gains were found for third class but not for fifth class. Ryan (1994, 1999) also reported a number of effects of the scheme on pupils as observed by co- coordinators and classroom teachers. These included "improved behaviour, improved school attendance, improved scholastic achievement, greater care in their school work, and more positive attitudes to school and teachers, to themselves and to their parents" (Ryan, 1999, p.25), although she made clear that these effects are, in many cases, confined to a relatively small number of pupils.

Ryan concluded that a major start had been made in meeting the second aim about "active co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies." She based this conclusion on the high level of activity involving parents that had been generated by the scheme and on the very positive reaction of parents to such activity. For example, she presented evidence to show that the scheme had brought about increases in the numbers of times that most parents visited the school and in the extent to which they became involved in classroom and other school activities.

She reported that there had been an increase in contact between teachers and parents in most schools and “at a more general level, the HSCL scheme made teachers think about the role of parents in the school and in education” (Ryan, 1999, p.18). These changes appeared to be resulting in teachers, at least in some schools, becoming more open and tolerant about co-operation with parents. An important feature of the scheme, according to Ryan, was the development of links between primary and post-primary schools in the same area. These links were seen as important in terms of facilitating the transfer and transition of pupils from first to second-level education.

Conaty (1999) reported a number of developments that also represent progress towards greater co-operation between school, home and community. For example, co-ordinators, principals and classroom teachers were asked whether major changes had occurred in the school since the HSCL scheme was introduced. Over 70% of respondents indicated that there had been such changes and these respondents were then asked to indicate the nature of the “most important” changes. Conaty listed the four most important changes as “attitude change by school towards parents,” “parent enhancement / participation,” “school development” and “school inserted into community” (see Conaty, 1999, pp.336-338).

Ryan also reported that there was some evidence, in the data gathered from co-ordinators, classroom teachers and principals that “movement had occurred towards the achievement of the third aim of the scheme “to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children’s educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills.” This is based on observations “that parents had increased in self-confidence, knew more about what was happening in school, and had learned how to help their children with schoolwork” (Ryan, 1999, p.31). The conclusion that progress was being made towards raising awareness in parents in their own capacities was confirmed by Conaty (1999, 2002), who reported that substantial majorities of parents, in a questionnaire survey, reported increased confidence and other benefits as a result of working with the HSCL co-ordinator. Ryan (1999) reported similar findings based on interviews with a small number of parents who were involved in HSCL activities in its first year (1990/91).

Ryan was not in a position to address the fifth aim of the HSCL scheme because her evaluation was focusing on the period immediately after the introduction of the scheme. However, Conaty's (2002) work shows clearly the extent to which the HSCL scheme has been influential in the development of schemes that were introduced in recent years. Breaking the Cycle (rural) and the School Completion Programme are two examples of initiatives in which ideas and practices, developed in the context of the HSCL scheme, have been disseminated more widely (see also Archer and Shortt, 2003).

In the recent SMI review, Archer and Shortt (2003) reported the results of surveys in which co-ordinators and school principals were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived the scheme was successful in achieving the five aims. Very large majorities (between 85% and 99%) of both groups reported that they believed the scheme to have been successful in relation to all five aims. There was a slight tendency for co-ordinators and principals to regard the scheme as less successful in relation to Aims 1 and 4 (referring to pupil outcomes) than it is in relation to the other three aims.

Archer and Shortt also reported that large majorities of co-ordinators and principals believe that the scheme has had a positive impact on parents, schools, the community and pupils. Apart from a very clear tendency for co-ordinators and principals to view the HSCL scheme in a favourable light, a number of interesting trends emerge. First, although there are some exceptions, co-ordinators and principals tend to regard changes relating to attitudes as more common than changes relating to behaviour. Second, principals are slightly less positive in their judgments than co-ordinators and post-primary personnel are slightly less positive than their primary colleagues. Third, principals and co-ordinators seem a little less convinced of the impact of the scheme on pupils than they are of its impact in other areas.

None of the three sources of evidence on the HSCL scheme is confined to considerations of outcomes. All three provide information on implementation (e.g., how co-ordinators spent their time). Conaty (1999, 2002) provided an account of how the thinking underpinning the scheme (particularly on the key concept of "partnership") evolved. She described some of the challenges encountered in

introducing and developing the scheme (e.g., the resistance of some teachers to working closely with parents; fears on the part of many parents arising from their own negative experience of schooling) and presented some of the challenges that will face the scheme in the future (e.g., striving for more integrated delivery of services). Archer and Shortt (2003) attempted to situate the scheme in the context of official policy on educational disadvantage and poverty, comment on the adequacy and appropriateness of the scheme's objectives, present information on the cost of the scheme, make specific proposals about performance indicators for the scheme, and outline more general proposals about the future development and monitoring of the scheme.

OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

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 (Kellaghan, 1977), 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 three to age eight) was monitored. A significant gain in average measured intelligence 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 (eight year-olds in the area before the project began). Kellaghan also found evidence that the children had made progress in areas regarded as necessary for success in school (e.g., responding to verbal communication, understanding mathematical concepts).

Standardised test scores have been used to assess the impact of schemes on the achievements 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.

In the Rutland Street project (Kellaghan, 1977; Kellaghan & Greaney, 1993), there was evidence that participants were more likely to obtain educational qualifications than members of a control group. The evaluations of the urban and rural dimensions of Breaking the Cycle (Weir, Milis & Ryan, 2002a, 2002b) included an assessment of rates of early school leaving in participating schools before the programmes began. It is planned to carry out a follow-up study to examine whether there has been any improvements in rates of participation in formal education.

In general, schemes have tended to be positively evaluated by those directly involved. For example, in the urban dimension of the Breaking the Cycle scheme, 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 their ability to respond effectively to the learning needs of disadvantaged pupils (Weir & Ryan, 2000b). 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 those who had not participated in Early Start (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 reported that they saw several benefits having occurred as a result of their school's participation in the project (Inspectorate and Psychological Service of the Department of Education, 1998). These benefits included enhanced motivation and self esteem among pupils and a better atmosphere in the school as a whole. In this project, an extra teacher is appointed in 48 designated schools to provide counselling to pupils and support to classroom teachers in order to minimise and manage disruptive behaviour.

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 (more verbal interaction and reading stories, a less rigid approach to discipline). Parents who had been involved in the HSCL scheme reported increased confidence in their own capacities to help their children (Conaty, 1999, 2002; Ryan, 1994).

As well as 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), and 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 between Travellers and primary schools (Department of Education and Science, 2003).

Finally, schemes to address disadvantage also aim to target additional resources towards 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 concentrations 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 described suggests that the various 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 by the pupils in these schools. Disappointingly, however, with only a few exceptions, such improved performance has not been observed in evaluations to date. Reasons for this disappointing outcome are considered, among other issues, in a separate report to the EDC (Archer & Weir, 2004).

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