

Monday June 12, 2017

Press release – launch by the ERC of latest report on the evaluation of DEIS

‘The Evaluation of DEIS: Monitoring achievement and attitudes among urban primary school pupils, 2007-2016’ by Lauren Kavanagh, Susan Weir and Eva Moran

The latest report on the progress of students in DEIS schools was released today by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) (see www.erc.ie/DEISreport2017). The report, which describes student outcomes in urban primary schools between 2007 and 2016, is the most recent in a series of reports arising from the independent evaluation of DEIS by the ERC which has been ongoing in DEIS primary and post-primary schools since 2007. Previous reports on the evaluation dealt with earlier outcomes, as well as a variety of implementation issues (see <http://www.erc.ie/studies/deis/>).

Results of the most recent round of testing indicate that reading and mathematics achievements of students in DEIS primary schools have continued to improve. Tests have been administered to students at four grade levels (second, third, fifth and sixth) at three-year intervals beginning in 2007. This allowed the performance of students at a particular grade level in 2007 (which may be regarded as baseline data) to be compared with their counterparts in 2010, 2013 and 2016. The average test scores achieved by students in the latest round of testing which involved 17,000 students in a sample of 118 schools were higher than those of their counterparts in previous years at all grade levels and in both reading and mathematics. Much of the improvement in reading and mathematics achievement from 2007 to 2016 has been among lower achievers. For example, the percentage of sixth class students scoring at or below the 10th percentile in reading fell from 28% in 2007 to 18% in 2016, and from 31% to 15% over the same period in mathematics.

As on all previous testing occasions, in 2016 the average reading and mathematics scores of Band 1 students were lower than those of Band 2 students at all grade levels, reflecting greater levels of disadvantage in the former sample of schools. The latest data reveal that average scores in Band 1 schools remain considerably below national norms, but the average scores of students in Band 2 schools are approaching or surpassing national norms in several instances, particularly in mathematics.

School attendance is also an important pupil variable, and evaluation data indicate that average attendance has improved on each testing occasion since 2007. Pupil attitudes were also assessed by evaluators, and analysis revealed that the proportions of pupils reporting that they like school have increased substantially over that period at all grade levels. Similarly, pupils’ educational aspirations (how far they would like to go in education) and expectations (how far they think they will actually go in education) have increased with each round of testing. However, there appears to be scope for further raising expectations, as a substantial gap remains between pupils’ aspirations and their expectations.

It is important to note that, in the absence of a control group, the degree to which growth in achievement since 2007 can be directly attributed to participation in DEIS is unclear. Interpretation of the gains in urban DEIS schools is also complicated by the finding in the most recent national assessments of achievement in reading and mathematics revealed that standards increased among second and sixth class pupils nationally between 2009 and 2014. Of course, it is possible that the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools would have widened in the absence of the DEIS programme. It is also important to note that the improvements in DEIS schools coincided with a period of economic recession, and there is some evidence that its impact was felt more by families in DEIS schools than

in others. This might have been expected to operate against achievement gains in participating schools. However, it is interesting that the gains observed during the worst of the recession were greater than those observed between 2013 and 2016 when at least some economic indicators started to show signs of recovery.

A further evaluation report, in which these achievement outcomes are contextualised in terms of a range of school, pupil, and home background factors, is in preparation.

Notes for editors

The DEIS programme

DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) is the most recent in a series of programmes provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) aimed at addressing the needs of educationally disadvantaged students. DEIS has been in operation in Ireland's schools for almost a decade. In 2005, primary schools with the highest levels of disadvantage nationwide were identified by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) for inclusion in DEIS. The programme was introduced in 2007 with the explicit aim of addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. At its centre is an integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which is intended to bring together and build upon existing interventions for schools with a concentrated level of educational disadvantage.

Resources available to participating schools under DEIS

Urban schools in the SSP under DEIS are divided into two 'bands', depending on their assessed level of disadvantage. In 2016, there were 190 Band 1 schools and 138 Band 2 schools receiving supports under the programme (for more details on participating schools see <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/DEIS-Supporting-Information/Supports-to-DEIS-Schools.html>)

Resource allocation under the SSP varies somewhat for schools in Bands 1 and 2, with more intensive resources allocated to schools in Band 1, where assessed levels of disadvantage are greater. Since 2012/13, schools in Band 1 have been permitted to operate a maximum of 20 students in schools with junior classes only, 24 in schools with senior classes only, and 22 in vertical schools (schools with junior and senior classes) (DES, 2012).

Apart from reduced class size, the supports allocated to Band 2 schools are the same. Briefly, these are: the allocation of administrative (non-teaching) principals on lower enrolment and staffing figures than apply in primary schools generally; additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on assessed level of disadvantage; financial allocation under the school books grant scheme, based on level of disadvantage; access to the School Meals Programme; access to a literacy and numeracy support service, and to literacy and numeracy programmes (Reading Recovery; First Steps; Maths Recovery; Ready, Set, Go Maths); access to homework clubs/summer camps designed to assist literacy and numeracy development; access to Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) services (including literacy and numeracy initiatives involving parents and family members, such as paired reading, paired maths, Reading for Fun, and Maths for Fun); access to transfer programmes supporting progression from primary to second-level; and access to planning and other professional development supports from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

The evaluation of DEIS

At the request of the DES, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) began work in 2007 on an independent evaluation of the SSP component of DEIS in urban and rural primary schools and post-

primary schools. Like the programme itself, the evaluation is multifaceted, and is attempting to monitor the implementation of the programme and assess its impact on students, families and schools. As well as monitoring the operation of the programme on participating urban primary schools (the subject of the current report), the evaluation has involved data collection from participating primary schools in rural areas and from post-primary schools. Evaluation reports on these are also available (<http://www.erc.ie/studies/deis/>)

Author quote

Dr Susan Weir, Research Fellow at the Educational Research Centre and a co-author of the report, commented “Data collected from 17,000 students last spring reveal increases in student achievement in DEIS primary schools for the third time since baseline data were collected in 2007. This finding is unprecedented in evaluations of programmes to address disadvantage in Ireland, and is most encouraging. However, student outcomes remain very closely associated with poverty levels, and the gap between students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more affluent counterparts persists. This is particularly true in schools serving the countries most disadvantaged families. For this reason, it is very important to continue providing supports to these schools and to continue to monitor outcomes”.

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