Partnership in DEIS schools: A survey of Home-School-Community Liaison coordinators in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland

Susan Weir
Lauren Kavanagh
Eva Moran
Aisling Ryan

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE 2018

Weir, Susan.

Partnership in DEIS schools: a survey of home-school-community liaison coordinators in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland / Susan Weir, Lauren Kavanagh, Eva Moran, Aisling Ryan.

Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

1 online resource (59 pages).

ISBN: 978 0 900440 75 5 (pdf)

1. DEIS

- 2. Education, Primary Ireland.
- 3. Education, Secondary Ireland.
- 4. Educational equalization Ireland.
- 5. Home and school Ireland.
- 6. Parent-teacher relationships Ireland.
- 7. Community and school Ireland.

2018

I Weir, Susan II Kavanagh, Lauren III Moran, Eve IV Ryan, Aisling 379.2609417 dc23

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Chapter 1: Introduction	2
DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools)	2
The evaluation of DEIS	4
A summary of DEIS evaluation findings to date	4
The Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme	11
A description of the scheme and its history	11
The DEIS evaluation and the HSCL scheme	14
Aims of the current study	16
Chapter 2: The Collection of Data	18
Response rates	18
Instrument	18
Procedure	19
Data Analysis	19
Chapter 3: Findings	
Coordinators' allocation of their time	
Nature and extent of parental involvement	25
Problems facing families	29
Networking and Collaboration in the Community	31
Perceived Impact of the HSCL Scheme	33
Satisfaction with support for the HSCL scheme	42
Responses by School Type	44
DEIS Band	44
Sector	46
Summary	47
Chapter 4: Discussion	49
References	.56

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the HSCL national leadership team within the Senior Management Team of the Educational Welfare Services of TUSLA for their practical support in facilitating the research and for their insightful feedback on this report. The authors also gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the HSCL coordinators who provided valuable input during the instrument development and pilot phases of the research. Finally, we offer sincere thanks to all HSCL coordinators who took the time to complete and return questionnaires.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study was undertaken as part of the formal evaluation of the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools) programme. The programme, which was introduced by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in 2007, is aimed at addressing the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in primary and post-primary schools. The Home-School-Community-Liaison (HSCL) scheme is one of the key supports available to participating schools. This chapter begins by describing the DEIS programme, then briefly describes the approach to its evaluation, and summarises the evaluation findings at primary and post-primary levels to date. The chapter concludes with a description of the HSCL scheme and its history, and outlines the aims of the current study.

DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools)

DEIS is aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). Among other things, DEIS comprises 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 (Department of Education and Science, 2005). DEIS differs from its predecessors in that it has a greater focus on school planning and on activities designed to boost literacy and numeracy (e.g., programmes such as First Steps and Reading Recovery). In the 2017/2018 school year, there are 341 urban primary schools and 363 rural primary schools receiving supports under the SSP. Urban schools are divided into two 'bands', depending on their assessed level of disadvantage, with those in Band 1 having greater concentrations of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds than those in Band 2. At post-primary level, there are 198 schools in the SSP.

All urban primary schools participating in the SSP have access to the Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme (including literacy and numeracy initiatives involving parents and family members, such as paired reading, paired maths, Reading for Fun and Maths for Fun). The HSCL scheme is funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Since 2014, the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, have had operational responsibility for the scheme. Schools also have access to a range of other resources, with more intensive resource allocation in Band 1 where assessed levels of disadvantage are greater. Briefly, schools in Band 1 are entitled to operate junior classes (the first four years of primary school) with maximum class sizes of 20, 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 school books grant scheme based on level of disadvantage; access to the School Meals Programme; access to a literacy/numeracy support service and to literacy/numeracy programmes (Reading Recovery; First Steps; Maths Recovery; Ready, Set, Go Maths); access to homework clubs/summer camps assisting literacy and numeracy development; 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 DEIS Plan 2017 (Department of Education and Skills, 2017) promoted the piloting of innovation and creativity in interventions to tackle educational disadvantage in participating schools. A pilot programme supported by a new School Excellence Fund will test delivery of interventions in the following key areas School Leadership, School networking/clustering, teaching methodologies, integration of all supports within communities and greater use of HSCL services. Also, the DES will actively support and develop wellbeing initiatives to ensure that mental resilience and personal wellbeing are integral parts of the education and training system. This involves extending the Incredible Years Teacher Programme and Friends Programmes to all DEIS schools, and increasing the allocation of National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) resources to DEIS schools to assist with this. Schools in Band 2 receive all of the above with the exception of reduced class sizes at junior level.

Rural primary schools are entitled to the following supports: financial supports to underpin the development of home, school and community linkages, the implementation of literacy and numeracy measures, planning supports etc.; additional non-pay/capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage; additional funding under school books grant scheme; access to the School Meals Programme; access to after-school and holiday-time supports; access to transfer programmes supporting progression from primary to second level; and access to a range of professional development supports. When the programme was introduced, rural schools were entitled to a HSCL coordinator shared between a cluster of schools, the major purpose of which was to develop home, school and community links. However, that aspect of the SSP in rural schools has not been in place since 2011.

At post-primary level, all participating post-primary schools have access to the following: the Home School Community Liaison scheme; the School Completion Programme¹; targeted measures to tackle literacy and numeracy problems; the extension of the school library and librarian support on a phased basis to schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage; assistance with school planning and measures to enhance student attendance, educational progression, retention and attainment; the provision of enhanced guidance counselling, targeted at supporting junior cycle students in second level schools with the highest concentrations of disadvantage; the expansion of the role of ICT; and the promotion of increased access to third level students in co-operation with the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education. As at primary level, under the DEIS Plan 2017, schools are actively encouraged to participate in the School Excellence Fund, and are facilitated in the promotion of student wellbeing by implementing the Friends programme.

_

¹ Schools newly admitted to the DEIS programme in 2017 do not yet have access to the School Completion Programme.

The evaluation of DEIS

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) began work in 2007 on an independent evaluation of the SSP component of DEIS in primary and post-primary schools on behalf of the DES. 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, schools, and communities at primary and post-primary levels. While questionnaire studies are being used to investigate some issues, school visits, interviews, and focus groups have been used to investigate other issues. The DES has supplied the evaluation team with data to permit some implementation issues to be examined in detail (such as class size in DEIS and non-DEIS schools at primary level). Other data has been supplied by the State Examinations Commission to allow outcome data in DEIS and non-DEIS post-primary schools in the State examinations to be compared over time. All participating schools have contributed evaluation data, although more intensive data collection has taken place with a smaller number of schools that have identified themselves as particularly interesting in various ways (for example in achieving consistent increases in standardised tests). Several evaluation reports have been published, some of which concern rural primary schools (Weir, Archer & Millar, 2009; Weir & McAvinue, 2013), post-primary schools (McAvinue & Weir, 2015; Weir, McAvinue, Moran & O'Flaherty, 2014), and urban primary schools (Kavanagh & Weir, 2018; Kavanagh, Weir & Moran, 2017; Weir & Archer, 2011; Weir & Denner, 2013; Weir & McAvinue, 2012; Weir & Moran, 2014).

A summary of DEIS evaluation findings to date

Primary level - urban schools

A range of positive outcomes have been noted by the evaluators. With some exceptions, all of the main elements of the DEIS Action Plan (DES, 2005) have been put in place at national level, and there is no evidence of any serious implementation failures at school level. Periodic examinations of issues such as whether the class size guidelines in Band 1 schools were being implemented revealed that the majority of schools had junior class sizes that were within the programme guidelines (Weir & McAvinue, 2012; Kelleher & Weir, 2017). Other questionnaire and interview data collected on school planning for DEIS (a specific requirement of all participating schools) indicated that all schools had engaged in such planning and that targets were set in key areas such as literacy, numeracy and parent involvement. Data provided to the evaluators by the Teacher Education Section of the DES also indicated widespread uptake of literacy and numeracy programmes provided under DEIS and that the training provided by the members of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in establishing these programmes had been highly regarded by schools. Overall, the response of schools to the DEIS initiative has been overwhelmingly positive, both in the sense that what has happened at school level has been in line with what was envisaged in the Action Plan, and in the sense that participants place a high value on the supports that have been put

in place. Recent changes to the programme under the DEIS Plan 2017 (e.g., initiatives intended to enhance student wellbeing) will also require monitoring in terms of their implementation and effects.

The monitoring of change in achievement (test scores in reading and mathematics) over the period 2006/07 to 2015/16 has been a major component of the evaluation. Pupils in 2nd, 3rd, and 6th class were tested in reading and mathematics in a sample of 120 schools in the urban dimension of the SSP in 2007. Pupils in the same schools were retested on three further occasions (2010, 2013 and 2016), with 5th class pupils added to the sample on those occasions. Very large numbers of pupils were involved. When absences and exemptions are taken into account, approximately 11,000 pupils in urban SSP schools participated in testing in 2007, while approximately 16,000 pupils participated in testing in each of 2010, 2013 and 2016.

Test data collected in 2007 (which served as baseline data) revealed that the measured achievements of pupils attending schools participating in the SSP were well below those of pupils on whom the tests were standardised (Weir & Archer, 2011). However, significant improvements occurred in reading and mathematics between 2007 and 2010 at all grade levels. Subsequent test administrations showed upward change in reading and mathematics achievement of pupils in all grade levels in the SSP both between 2010 and 2013 (Weir & Denner, 2013) and between 2013 and 2016 (Kavanagh, Weir & Moran, 2017). Furthermore, within the SSP, the average achievements of pupils in schools in Band 1 in which disadvantage is more concentrated were found to be consistently below those of pupils in schools in Band 2.

Improvements in achievement coincided with a considerable decrease in the percentages of pupils with very low scores (i.e., pupils with reading and mathematics scores at or below the 10th percentile). The percentage of pupils with scores below the 10th percentile decreased at all grade levels over the six-year period, although the decrease was greatest at 2th class level. For example, at the start of the programme, 22% of 2th class pupils had reading scores that were below the 10th percentile, and by 2016 this figure had almost halved to 11.9% (Kavanagh, Weir, & Moran, 2017) bringing 2th class pupils in DEIS schools close to the national average.

Interpreting the outcome data is problematic due to the absence of a control group², but is further complicated by the results of the most recent national assessment which indicated an overall national improvement between 2009 and 2014 in reading and mathematics. It may be the case that the improved

² In 2005, schools with the highest levels of disadvantage nationwide were identified for inclusion in the SSP under DEIS (for information on how DEIS primary schools were identified, see Archer & Sofroniou, 2008; for information on how DEIS post-primary schools were identified, see Weir, 2006). This preselection of programme schools made it impossible to subsequently identify a matched control group of schools with similar levels of disadvantage. Even if there had been an opportunity to identify such a control group, it would not have been ethical to withhold treatment from schools with an identified need when it involved schools being allocated additional resources from the exchequer.

outcomes in DEIS schools are merely a reflection of improved outcomes across the board. On the other hand, it is possible to take the view that it was the performance of students in DEIS schools that contributed to the overall improvement. There is no overlap between the tests used in the national assessments and in the DEIS evaluation. For that reason, consideration is being given to undertaking some kind of test equating exercise in a sample of schools in which the two tests can be benchmarked against each other. This may happen as part of the National Assessments in English and mathematics in 2020.

Other pupil outcomes showed improvements over the course of the evaluation. First, overall attendance rates on the days of testing increased with each successive test administration, increasing from 89.2% in 2007 to 93.0% in 2016. Also, fewer pupils were exempted by teachers in 2016 (1.1% overall) than was the case in 2007 (1.7%). Pupils could be exempted from testing by their teacher if they had been diagnosed with a moderate to severe general learning disability, had a physical disability that would prevent them from participating, or their proficiency in English was at such a level that, in the opinion of their teacher, they were unable to attempt the test. There was also evidence of improving attitudes among pupils from questionnaires completed by all pupils who were tested in reading and mathematics. Third, Fifth, and Sixth class pupils completed a questionnaire designed to elicit information on their attitudes to school, their scholastic self-evaluations, their leisure and reading activities, and their educational aspirations and expectations. The questionnaire for pupils in Second class was shorter and simpler and sought information on their self-evaluations, reading behaviour, leisure behaviour, and attitudes towards school. The data revealed that, in 2016, pupils reported more favourable attitudes to school, reading, and mathematics than in any other year of testing and this was the case at all grade levels. More positive attitudes were associated with higher average achievement in both reading and mathematics. Aspirations and expectations for educational attainment also increased substantially from 2007 to 2016, with more pupils aspiring to, and expecting to, attend college or university than on any previous occasion. Higher aspirations and expectations were associated with higher achievement. However, despite this positivity, there remains a gap between pupils' educational aspirations and expectations, with substantially greater proportions of pupils aspiring to attend college or university than actually expecting to do so.

In 2011, all 120 schools in the sample were visited by members of the evaluation team or specially trained fieldworkers and interviews were conducted with the principal in each school. There was an overwhelmingly positive response from principals for most of the measures under DEIS. All principals responded positively or very positively about the impact on opportunities for staff development and funding under DEIS. Three-quarters of principals were very positive about the requirement of a development plan for DEIS and the availability of literacy and numeracy programmes under DEIS. More than two-thirds of principals were very positive about the impact of DEIS on pupil-teacher ratio and the sizes of junior classes, while slightly less than two-thirds of principals were very positive about the impact of DEIS on opportunities for parent involvement and with links to the wider community. Principals were also asked about a range of potential obstacles to achievement in their school, with poor oral language

skills for students and unemployment in the community as the factors most frequently stated as a major problem in their school. A smaller but significant number of principals cited pupil and parent factors (i.e., poor social skills of children and parents, lack of parental involvement in child's education, emotional and behavioural problems of pupils, effects of dysfunction among pupils' families and effects of substance abuse among pupils' families) as obstacles to student achievement in their school.

In 2014, evaluators organised a series of nationwide seminars for principals of urban primary schools participating in the SSP. Nine seminars were held across seven locations nationwide: Athlone, Cork, Dublin North, Dublin West, Limerick, Sligo and Wexford. Each seminar was facilitated by an ERC staff member and the format was predominantly open-ended, with principals encouraged to offer their insights regarding any of the issues raised throughout. Evaluators were particularly interested in principals' attributions for increases in student achievement. Feedback from all of the seminars was reviewed and are summarised here.

The introduction of specialized literacy and numeracy programmes was seen by the vast majority of principals as the most important determinant of gains in achievement between 2007 and 2013. The practice of target-setting in relation to literacy and numeracy levels was also deemed to have played a large role. Other frequently endorsed determinants of gains included improvements in the quality and quantity of learning support available, more positive pupil attitudes towards school, the provision of continuous professional development (CPD) for staff and better pupil attendance. Several principals commented on the interdependence of various factors. Many felt they were inextricably linked and that it was unrealistic to isolate just one or two. The success of specialized literacy and numeracy programmes, for example, was attributed to both CPD for classroom teachers and to adequate learning support and resource provision. It was suggested during the seminars that this may be one of the reasons that DEIS appears to have been more successful than earlier programmes addressing educational disadvantage in Ireland.

While continuing to collect data in a range of other areas, the evaluators remained focused on trying to better understand why some SSP schools in the sample were particularly successful in raising student achievement while other schools with the same resources were not. With this in mind, a sample of schools was identified in which students had performed particularly well and in which consistent increases in reading and mathematics achievements had been recorded between 2007 and 2013. Arrangements were made to visit twenty schools that were selected for this group in late 2015 and early 2016. During the visits, a structured interview was held with the principal focusing on the impact of the SSP in their school. During the interview, principals were asked to review a list of possible determinants of achievement gains, and to indicate if they thought each was a factor in the achievement gains in their school. Similar factors were judged to be determinants of gains among this important subsample of schools as was found in the nationwide focus groups. Principals cited students' attitudes towards school, the setting of targets in literacy and numeracy, the use of specialised literacy and numeracy programmes, and, to a slightly lesser extent, reduced class size, as being very important contributors. Among this group of principals a further set of

factors emerged as being of equal importance. These were: increased levels of home support and parental involvement; engaging parents in students' learning; improvement in Learning Support services for low-achieving children; improved attendance; increased professional support for teachers; raised teaching standards in the school; teaching literacy and numeracy across the curriculum; grouping students for English reading and mathematics; the use of both formative and summative assessment; and the general introduction of the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy* (DES, 2011), elements of which many schools were already implementing under the SSP (e.g., planning and target setting in literacy and numeracy).

Primary level - rural schools

As was the case in urban schools, the evaluation involved the collection of data from rural schools. At the start of the programme, there were 334 rural schools participating in DEIS, most of which were in clusters of four to five proximal schools. Some schools that were not located near other schools in the programme were given a grant to compensate for the fact that they could not avail of the services of a coordinator to work with groups of schools (which was one of the major provisions under the rural dimension of the programme). As was the case in participating urban schools, a range of evaluation data was collected from rural principals, coordinators, teachers, pupils and their parents. Reading and mathematics test data were collected from approximately 4,500 pupils in 3rd and 6th class in each of 2007 and 2010 (Weir & Archer, 2011). In most cases, tests were administered by cluster coordinators in each of their schools. In 2007, 276 schools participated and 259 schools participated in 2010³. Analysis of the test data revealed that the 2007 scores of pupils in rural schools were much closer to the norm than those of their counterparts in urban schools (Weir & Archer, 2011). Subsequent analyses of data from 3rd and 6th class pupils in a sample of a core group of 256 DEIS schools in rural areas revealed statistically significant increases in achievement levels in reading and mathematics between 2007 and 2010 (Weir & McAvinue, 2013). These increases brought rural pupils' scores even closer to the national norm. Unlike the monitoring of achievements in the urban dimension of DEIS, no further testing was carried out as part of the evaluation in rural schools. This is mainly because one of the most significant aspects of the SSP in rural schools - the shared coordinator posts available to clusters of rural schools - were withdrawn in 2011. This meant that the large scale testing programme was no longer practicable due to the small size and remote locations of the schools involved.

The numbers of schools in the rural samples were less that the total number of schools in the rural dimension of DEIS. This is for several reasons: a small number of schools did not wish to participate and some schools did not have pupils at either 3rd or 6th class level. The most common reason for non-participation was that the cluster of schools had not appointed a coordinator, or were unclusterable due to their location. In these cases, subsamples were included in the programme of testing. For more detail on the samples in 2007 and 2010, see Weir and Archer (2011).

The observed improvements in achievement in reading and mathematics between 2007 and 2010 in rural schools may be directly attributable to efforts under the programme to improve literacy and numeracy. Both literacy and numeracy were prioritised under the SSP in terms of the school planning process, which involved target-setting, monitoring of progress towards targets, assessment of outcomes, and ongoing support and advice to schools from the PDST. The improvements might also reflect some other aspects of the SSP (e.g., clustering and the support of a coordinator), or these other aspects might have interacted with the emphasis on planning. In an earlier evaluation report on the rural dimension of DEIS, Weir, Archer and Millar (2009) described how poverty was less concentrated in the rural than in the urban sample, but no evidence could be found to implicate this in the explanation of the superior performance of rural pupils over their urban counterparts in DEIS. Some analyses were carried out to also explore the hypothesis that small school size acted as an antidote to the effects of poverty. This was found not to be the case, as achievement was not found to vary according to school size.

To better understand the complex relationship between achievement and poverty found in the evaluation sample in 2007, a small study was carried out in 2010 at the same time as the large scale testing was happening in DEIS rural schools. The study involved identifying a small comparison group of 40 rural schools, matched in terms of size and gender to rural SSP schools, but characterised by low levels of poverty. Thirty-two of these schools were recruited to participate in a testing programme using the same instruments as those used in SSP schools and specially recruited fieldworkers were recruited to carry out the testing. The results revealed that the average reading and mathematics scores of pupils in these schools were above the national norm in all cases, although only significantly above the norm in the case of 3rd class mathematics. This indicated that poverty levels do relate to achievement outcomes in rural areas (Weir & Archer, 2011). There was also evidence to support the idea that the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and pupil achievement differs both quantitatively and qualitatively in rural and urban areas (Weir & McAvinue, 2013). Outcomes of some exploratory analysis suggest that the achievements of rural pupils may have been somewhat protected by their parents' engagement in, and emphasis on, education. It would appear that, not only did rural children have greater access to educational materials and were more frequently engaged in educational activities such as reading, but that these educational practices within the home had a greater influence on their achievements than on those of their urban counterparts.

Post-primary level

The evaluation at post-primary level has described principals' views of DEIS, including their views on planning and resourcing under the programme, and used data provided by the Teacher Education Section of the DES to examine implementation issues such as schools' uptake of educational programmes (e.g., JCSP) under DEIS (Weir, McAvinue, Moran, & O'Flaherty, 2014). A major element of the evaluation at post-primary level is the use of centrally-held data provided to the Centre by the State Examinations

Committee (SEC) on student achievement in all post-primary schools to examine trends over time between 2002 and 2014 in Junior Certificate Examination (JCE) performance (specifically, candidates' overall performance based on their best 7 subjects, and their performance in the individual subject areas of English and Mathematics). Other data provided by the Statistics section of the DES to the Centre have been used to monitor trends in retention rates to Junior and Leaving Certificate for the cohorts from 1995 to 2008. Analyses revealed the existence of significant positive trends in both performance and retention levels across the time period (McAvinue & Weir, 2015). The data also afforded the opportunity to compare the 200 schools that had participated in the SSP programme under DEIS with the 503 schools which had not. The differing socioeconomic circumstances of these two kinds of school are obvious from the significant divide between them in terms of the average percentage of medical card holders within the schools. This divide was substantial and remained throughout the period between 2002 and 2014. Significant gaps between SSP and non-SSP schools were evident for all performance and retention variables across that time period. However, there was evidence of significantly greater increases in these outcomes in SSP than in non-SSP schools, indicating that while performance and retention levels remained significantly lower in SSP schools across the time period, they were improving at a significantly faster pace.

The data also revealed that the introduction of resources associated with the DEIS programme in 2006/2007 may have had an impact on trends for SSP schools. Indeed, the analyses revealed that the period of time in which resources were in place in SSP schools was marked by an increase in the magnitude of positive trend for all variables. This finding is consistent with the conclusion that the DEIS programme had a positive impact on performance and retention levels in post-primary SSP schools. However, the correlational nature of the data precludes drawing conclusions about cause and effect (i.e., that the introduction of resources under the programme caused the improvement). It should also be noted that non-SSP schools also experienced an increase in trend during this period on a number of variables (namely, Junior Certificate English scores, retention to Junior and Leaving Certificate), although the increase in trend for non-SSP schools was generally not as great as that for SSP schools. It is possible to conclude, however, that there has been an overall improvement in schools nationally, that the improvement is more marked in DEIS schools than in non-DEIS schools, and that the data are suggestive of a significant change in trend around the time that the DEIS programme might have been expected to have its first impact. Nonetheless, the ongoing monitoring of educational outcomes in DEIS and non-DEIS schools is indicated. Preparations are underway to repeat and extend the trend analyses described here as part of the next phase of the evaluation of DEIS at post-primary level. Analyses will be carried out using retention data from the more recent entry cohorts, and JCE data for students who sat the examination in 2015, 2016, and 2017.

The Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme

A description of the scheme and its history

The HSCL scheme was established in designated areas of disadvantage in 1990 as part of the (then) Department of Education's attempts to combat educational disadvantage. Introduced as a pilot project, funding was initially allocated for the appointment of 31 teachers as HSCL coordinators in 55 primary schools in disadvantaged areas. In 1991, the scheme was expanded to include 13 post-primary schools serving concentrations of students from the original 55 primary schools (Archer & Shortt, 2003). A National Steering Committee was established to provide advice and guidance on the scheme, and a National Coordinator was appointed to support its development and to liaise with participants at local level (Ryan, 1994). Other support for the scheme's development included in-service training for coordinators and other stakeholders (e.g. principals, inspectors), and cluster meetings of HSCL coordinators (Ryan, 1994). The scheme has been extended several times since its inception, and in 2017 was in place in 259 primary schools and 181 post-primary schools.

Fundamentally, the scheme aims to improve outcomes for students indirectly by focusing directly on salient adults in their lives (Conaty, 2002). The philosophy underpinning the Scheme is the promotion of partnership between parents, teachers, and the community in order to maximise outcomes for students at risk of experiencing educational disadvantage (Conaty, 2002). The HSCL scheme is guided by five basic aims and 12 basic principles.

The five aims are:

- 1. To maximise active participation of the children in the schools of the scheme in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure
- 2. To promote active cooperation 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 from education, their retention in the education system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning
- 5. To disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally (Department of Education and Science, 2003, pp. 8-9).

The 12 guiding principles of the scheme are:

- 1. The scheme consists of a partnership and collaboration of the complementary skills of parents and teachers.
- 2. The scheme is unified and integrated at both primary and post-primary levels.
- 3. The thrust of the scheme is preventative rather than curative.

- 4. The focus of the scheme is on the adults whose attitudes and behaviours impinge on the lives of children, namely, parents and teachers.
- 5. The basis of activities in the scheme is the identification of needs and having those needs met.
- 6. The development of teacher and staff attitudes in the area of partnership and the 'whole-school' approach is fostered.
- 7. The scheme promotes the fostering of self-help and independence.
- 8. Home visitation is a crucial element in establishing bonds of trust with families.
- 9. Networking with and promoting the coordination of the work of voluntary and statutory agencies increases effectiveness and obviates duplication.
- 10. HSCL is a full-time undertaking and HSCL duties cannot be added to a teacher's job specification.
- 11. The liaison coordinator is an agent of change.
- 12. The promotion of community 'ownership' of the scheme is through the development of Local Committees (Conaty, 2002, pp. 71-80).

Since its introduction as a mainstream intervention in 1993, the Educational Research Centre has undertaken several reviews of the HSCL scheme (Ryan, 1994; Ryan, 1999; Archer & Shortt, 2003). Surveys have generally focused on the ways in which coordinators spend their time, and the main ways in which parents are involved in the school or in supporting their children's learning. A brief summary of the findings of these reviews is now reported.

In a 1994 evaluation of the HSCL scheme, Ryan reported that two-thirds of coordinators' time (67%) was spent on activities relating to parents (either in school or in their homes), with 15% of time on activities relating to teachers, and 9% on community-related activities. The main way in which parents were involved at school was attendance at activities or courses, particularly those relating to parenting, home management and children's education. There was little difference in parental involvement activities in primary and post-primary schools, although primary parents were, predictably, more likely to be involved in paired reading programmes at school (Ryan, 1994). An element of the programme deemed to be particular helpful by coordinators and teachers was that of home visits, with coordinators able to make contact with parents who would otherwise have little or no contact with the school. It was originally envisaged that 30% of coordinators' time would be spent on home visits (Conaty, 2002) and Ryan (1994) reported that the average amount of time spent was 26%, but that a significant minority of

12

⁴The most recent guidelines recommend that HSCL Coordinators spend one third (33%) of their time on home visitations (see section 3 in 'HSCL Scheme - Key Priorities' of the HSCL Information booklet https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/HSCL_from_Vision_to_Best_Practice.pdf

coordinators were spending little to no time conducting home visits. On the whole, contacts with community agencies were also deemed to be helpful. Teacher attitudes towards parents were reported to have become more positive since the introduction of the scheme. Links between primary and post-primary schools were also considered to have strengthened. In addition to surveying coordinators, teachers and principals, reading and mathematics achievement data were collected via standardised tests from students in a sample of participating primary schools as part of the evaluation. These data were to serve as baseline data against which later achievement could be compared. As noted by Ryan (1994, p. vii), "Effects on pupil achievement of a project such as the HSCL scheme would be likely to be long-term rather than short-term".

Achievement data were collected from pupils again after the scheme had been in operation for five years. Achievement gains were found for First class and Third class pupils, but not for Fifth class pupils (Ryan, 1999). As noted by Ryan, Fifth class pupils would have spent part of their school life in a school with the HSCL scheme, while First and Third class pupils would have spent all of their school lives in such schools.

A comprehensive review of the HSCL scheme was carried out by the ERC in 2002 (Archer & Shortt, 2003). The review had several objectives, among which were to: set the scheme in the context of Government policy, comment on the appropriateness and adequacy of the scheme's aims and how well these aims had been met, evaluate the development and implementation of the scheme, assess the impact of the scheme on relevant stakeholders, and identify key themes and learning from the HSCL scheme (Archer & Shortt, 2003). As one part of the review, a survey of primary and post-primary HSCL coordinators was undertaken. Among the findings of the survey was that two-thirds of coordinators' time (66%) was spent on contact with parents, 15% on contact with the principal and other teachers, and 10% on contact with individuals and agencies in the community; these were almost identical time allocations to those reported in Ryan (1994). Coordinators identified the improvement of home-school communication and the addressing of parents' own educational needs as among their top priorities in their roles. The average time spent on home visits was 32%, with two-thirds of coordinators exceeding the stated target of 30%.

While it is reasonable to assume that most if not all of the children attending schools involved in the pilot phase of the HSCL scheme were from disadvantaged backgrounds (Archer & Shortt, 2003), the expansion of the scheme made it likely that there would be more heterogeneity in the profile of students attending schools with access to the scheme. This meant that the targeting of the scheme towards the most marginalised families became a greater priority. In 2002, coordinators were asked questions about this targeting. First, coordinators were asked to indicate the number of families in their schools that they would classify as severely educationally disadvantaged, moderately educationally disadvantaged, and not educationally disadvantaged, and then to indicate the level of involvement of each of these groups in HSCL activities. On average, coordinators classified 28% of families as severely disadvantaged, and

indicated that 60% of these families were 'not involved' in HSCL activities. This support the findings of Ryan's (1994) evaluation which indicated that most of the families described as not involved in HSCL activities were those families who were actually most in need of support. However, there was evidence of the targeting of support with respect to home visits. Archer and Shortt (2003) reported that coordinators rarely made visits to the homes of children classified as not educationally disadvantaged, and that home visits were most common to those families described as severely disadvantaged. Finally, coordinators were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with different aspects of support for the scheme. Majorities indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with in-career development for coordinators (94%), access to advice (84%) and the funding allocated for the scheme (60%). Coordinators were less likely to be satisfied or very satisfied with in-career development for other school staff in relation to the HSCL scheme (20%).

The DEIS evaluation and the HSCL scheme

In 2005, the HSCL scheme became available to all primary and post-primary schools that were participants in DEIS. In the 2017/2018 school year, there were 416 HSCL posts across DEIS primary and post-primary schools. In an acknowledgment of the key role that the HSCL scheme plays in addressing disadvantage, the evaluation has sought the views of HSCL coordinators on several occasions. In 2009, the evaluation team attended 13 regional cluster meetings of HSCL coordinators and used a focus-group approach to get their views on the operation of the SSP under DEIS at both primary and post-primary level. Five meetings were held in Dublin with one each in Cork, Limerick, Sligo, Donegal, Galway, Waterford, Dundalk, and Portlaoise. Approximately 300 HSCL coordinators (primary and post-primary) attended the meetings. The meetings were structured around a 30-minute presentation of baseline data and preliminary evaluation findings by ERC staff. This was followed by a questions and answers session. During the question and answer sessions ERC staff asked HSCL coordinators about their views and opinions on various issues related to the DEIS programme. Questions were asked on the following aspects of the programme at each location; allocation of additional resources under DEIS; integration of the overall approach to disadvantage under DEIS; school development planning; and professional support. As well as being an important source of information in its own right, that exercise helped to inform the selection of content for other data collection exercises that followed with principals and teachers. Some of the findings from the meetings under each heading are summarised below.

-

HSCL Coordinators are currently only assigned to schools with DEIS status. However, where a DEIS school is amalgamated and loses its DEIS status, the assignment remains in place until the cohort of students in their first year at the school (junior infants at primary or First year at post-primary) leave the school (complete Sixth class in the case of primary school or complete the Leaving Certificate examination at post-primary), or in accordance with the terms of the Department of Education and Skills.

Additional resources

HSCL coordinators believed that the extra funding received by schools participating in the DEIS programme was viewed positively by almost all schools. Literacy and numeracy Programmes, including Reading and Maths Recovery, First Steps, and Literacy Lift-off were all made possible by DEIS funding. Reading Recovery in particular was singled out as being a very successful intervention for children with low literacy levels. Other things like trips, free meals, breakfast clubs and projects were identified as positives achieved under DEIS which may not have occurred otherwise. It was felt that these types of events helped to improve overall student and staff morale and increase pupil attendance.

The professional development opportunities provided by the PDST were praised highly by primary school HSCL coordinators. The experience of the advisors (cuiditheóirí) was seen as a means of getting to a level of success quickly, and advisors were seen as vital in convincing teachers and parents about the benefits of new initiatives.

Libraries funded by DEIS were mentioned in several discussions as being of great benefit to post-primary schools. This view was confirmed during visits by ERC researchers to schools that had established JCSP libraries, and by interviews with several school librarians and other staff.

The establishment of parents' rooms in schools was considered by many coordinators to be a means of enabling parents to overcome any apprehension they may have about visiting the school and giving them a sense of 'ownership' of the school. Many observed that attendance at school meetings and events had noticeably risen. One coordinator described this as being a result of a 'latent advance', in which "the role of the school in the community has been reinvented due to DEIS".

Integration of supports

For the most part, coordinators felt that integration of supports at school level had been improved as a result of DEIS. The activities associated with HSCL itself were seen as an important link between various personnel, arising from regular meetings and contact with the principal as well as other school staff (e.g., School Completion Programme staff and trained counsellors). The HSCL coordinators also developed many links with other agencies such as the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS). There was widespread agreement among coordinators that communication and cooperation between all of these bodies provided a more integrated approach from the perspective of students. The need for a school-based speech and language service was raised in several of the groups, citing low attendance for appointments as an unfortunate break in the chain of events following an assessment. It is worth noting that a pilot scheme designed to examine school-based assessments in a sample of schools is planned for the 2018/2019 school year.

School development planning

In most focus groups there was agreement that there was a more structured and coordinated, whole school, approach to planning under DEIS. All school staff were working together as a team to achieve set goals and targets, and this had led to a more cohesive and satisfactory working environment. It was also noted that the emphasis on planning in literacy and numeracy has also created a greater awareness in schools of the need for assessment. The lack of time available was seen by most groups as the biggest problem with respect to school planning and there were calls for more planning days. Difficulty getting teachers together for planning at post-primary level was raised by several groups.

Professional support

The majority of coordinators felt they were well supported by the network of their HSCL peers, and attendance at in-service days was seen as vital to their professional development. As already mentioned, the presence in schools of advisors from the PDST was viewed very positively and was considered an important factor in boosting staff morale as well as supporting staff in implementing new programmes and in the development of the school plan. The NBSS was highlighted as being of great benefit to teachers and schools in coping with pupils with emotional behavioural disorders, while some schools also benefited from extra NEPS hours under DEIS. Leadership programmes for principals and vice-principals were viewed as being important for helping staff manage new challenges. Classroom management courses were mentioned as a good way for teaching staff to establish their needs and to help work towards these. The training of teachers in areas such as language therapy was perceived to be a way of spreading ownership among staff of problems encountered in day-to-day classroom situations.

Aims of the current study

The HSCL scheme is a key feature of the SSP under DEIS. In the 2005 DEIS Action Plan, it was stated that:

'one of the main objectives of this action plan is to build on the successful work of the HSCL Scheme over the past 15 years. A renewed emphasis will be placed on the involvement of parents and families in children's education in schools and school clusters participating in the SSP. It will be a requirement that schools incorporate the Home/School/Community liaison function as part of their three-year action plans, with coordinators being employed on a full-time basis to cover one or more schools (DES, 2005, p. 40).

At this point in the evaluation, it is considered important to once again seek the views of coordinators as the programme moves into its second decade. The survey of HSCL coordinators may be conceived of as an implementation study which forms part of the larger evaluation of the SSP under DEIS. The survey mainly concerns coordinators' work (how they spend their time, levels of parent involvement in their schools, their relationships with families, the difficulties they encounter, and the issues faced by families). Some questions that were included in earlier ERC studies of the HSCL programme have been included

for purposes of comparability. These can be used to see if the HSCL scheme and the work of coordinators has changed since it has become part of the range of resources provided under DEIS. The past decade has been a time in which many changes have taken place in schools and society. The inevitable impact of these changes on families in DEIS schools and on the work of coordinators is of interest to the evaluators.

Chapter 2: The Collection of Data

This chapter outlines the methodology involved in the collection of data from HSCL coordinators in the spring of 2017.

Response rates

Questionnaires were sent to 413 coordinators, 240 whose base school was a primary school and 173 whose base school was a post-primary school. As shown in Table 2.1, the response rates were very similar across levels, with approximately three-quarters of coordinators at both primary and post-primary levels returning questionnaires. Overall, 77% of coordinators returned a completed questionnaire. Response rates in 2017 were broadly in line with, but slightly lower than, those in 2002, when 76% of post-primary coordinators and 85% of primary coordinators returned questionnaires for an overall response rate of 80%.

Table 2.1: Primary, post-primary and overall response rates for the HSCL questionnaire, 2017

	п	%
Primary	184	77.1
Post-primary	134	77.5
Total	319	77.2

Instrument

A draft questionnaire was compiled which included questions adopted or adapted from the questionnaire administered to coordinators as part of the review of the scheme in 2002, in addition to a number of new questions. This draft questionnaire was piloted with a group of coordinators from around the country resulting in a number of changes, including reducing the length of the instrument and the addition and amendment of content. Feedback on the revised version was then sought and received from another cluster of coordinators and from the national leadership team in Tusla, The Child and Family Agency.

The final version of the questionnaire contained 19 questions comprising 140 individual items. Questions covered such topics as: the proportion of coordinators' time spent on a range of activities, coordinators' perceptions of the impact of the HSCL scheme in their school, the nature and extent of parental involvement in school life, factors contributing to or hindering the success of the scheme, collaboration with other agencies, and coordinators' level of satisfaction with support for the scheme. Items were a mix of closed-choice and open-ended items.

Procedure

Names of coordinators and corresponding school addresses were supplied to the ERC by the national leadership team in Tusla. A copy of the questionnaire was sent to each coordinator in March 2017 and follow-up reminder letters were sent in May. An Irish language version of the questionnaire was available on request. Coordinators were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to the ERC in a stamped addressed envelope provided for that purpose. Completed questionnaires continued to be received until July 2017.

Data Analysis

Coordinators' responses to items were considered by level (primary and post-primary). Comparisons were made to findings from 2002 where possible. At the primary level, responses were also considered by DEIS band and, at both levels, by school size and gender compositions. As all HSCL coordinators nationally were included in the survey, the approach to data collection resembled a census rather than a survey of a representative sample. As in the previous surveys of HSCL coordinators described earlier, the approach to reporting the findings in the current survey was descriptive rather than inferential; tests of statistical significance are not reported, and the data were unweighted.

Qualitative data were derived from a number of open-ended items on the questionnaire. These were analysed by means of thematic content analysis. For each item, all responses were reviewed and a classification scheme developed iteratively throughout this process by one member of the research team in collaboration with others. A sample of the data was then coded by an independent rater and interrater agreement checked. Percentage rates of agreement ranged from 80-89% agreement, depending on the item, indicating a satisfactory level of interrater agreement throughout.

Chapter 3: Findings

This chapter presents the main findings of the survey administered to HSCL coordinators in 2017, organised according to six main themes. In the first section, coordinators' reports of how they allocate their time to various activities in the course of their work are described. Second, coordinators' reports of the nature and extent of the involvement of parents in their schools are outlined. Third, coordinators' perceptions of problems facing families of children attending their schools are described. Fourth, information on coordinators' collaboration with agencies and community groups is presented. Fifth, coordinators' perceptions of the impact of their work on the families, schools and communities served by the HSCL scheme are reported. In the final main section, coordinators' levels of satisfaction with different aspects of support for the HSCL scheme are outlined. As well as considering responses from the sample as a whole, findings for primary and post-primary coordinators are considered separately throughout. Where possible, comparisons are made between the findings of the 2017 survey and those from similar surveys carried out in 2001 and 1993. Towards the end of the chapter, similarities and differences in the responses of coordinators working Band 1 and Band 2 primary schools are considered, and the responses of coordinators working in post-primary schools are considered briefly by sector. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Coordinators' allocation of their time

A primary goal of the survey was to explore the current nature of HSCL coordinators' work and to investigate whether this has changed in any major ways over time. To this end, coordinators were presented with a list of tasks and activities that they might be expected to engage in as part of their work, and were asked to indicate the percentage of their time that they allocated (if any) to each of these. Following feedback received when piloting this question with coordinators, respondents were advised that a) estimates of percentages of time would suffice, and b) that it was not necessary that the percentages summed exactly to 100%. Of the 321 coordinators who returned questionnaires, 301 responded to this question. However, when percentage time allocations for each activity were totalled for each coordinator, values ranged from a low of 30% to a high 1535%, casting doubt on the accuracy of some of the estimates. Coordinators with extreme values were omitted from further analyses of data derived from this question. Here, average percentage time allocations are reported for the 205 coordinators for whom the total percentages were not less than 80% and not greater than 120%.

The single aspect of coordinators' work reported to receive the largest allocation was that of home visits, taking, on average, 21% of coordinators' time (Table 3.1). Only two coordinators indicated that they spent no time on home visits. Informal and incidental meetings had the second highest average time allocation, at 9%, while the third most time consuming activity was administration and paperwork (7% of coordinators' time, on average). The activity with the lowest time allocation was that of arranging funding

(2% of time, on average), and this was not something that 24% of coordinators spent any time on. Time allocations of primary and post-primary coordinators were very similar, although primary coordinators report spending, on average, a slightly lower proportion of their time on home visits (18%) than post-primary coordinators (22%), and a slightly higher proportion on informal or incidental meetings with parents (11%, compared to 6% at post-primary).

Table 3.1: Mean percentages of time allocated by coordinators to various tasks in 2001 and 2017

	2001	2017
	%	%
Home Visits	30.1	20.6
Informal and/or incidental meetings with parents	7.6	9.1
Individual formal meetings with parents (outside the home)	4.0	5.8
Working with a core group of parents	5.9	5.2
Meetings/contact with school principal	5. 3	6. 3
Meetings/contact with pupils	2.9	4.2
Meetings/contacts with teachers	8.1	5.1
Meetings with agencies or individuals from the community	5.4	4.8
Contacts with agencies or individuals from the community	3.8	4.2
Organising courses for parents	6.7	6. 3
Acting as course presenter or facilitator on courses for parents	2.8	2.2
Organising other activities for parents (e.g. coffee mornings)	2.7	4.4
Planning, monitoring and evaluating your work	4.9	5.7
Arranging funding	2.0	1.6
Administration/Paperwork	5.2	7.0
Cluster meetings	6.9	$4.1^{\scriptscriptstyle 6}$
Policy formation in the school	3.0	2.1
Organising or helping to organise after school educational activities	2.6	2.1
Enabling parents as class support		2.5
Liaison with therapists/counsellors		2.5
Other	4.4	5.1

Coordinators were also asked to indicate whether the amount of time spent on each of these tasks had increased, decreased or remained unchanged since they began working as HSCL coordinators. (Coordinators who had only recently adopted the role and those who spent no time on a particular activity were given the option to indicate that the question was not applicable in their circumstances.) For every listed activity, coordinators were more likely to indicate an increase than a decrease in its time allocation

⁶ Due to budgetary constraints, regional cluster meetings were not held between 2012 and 2017. This probably accounts for the drop in average percentage time allocated to cluster meetings from 2001 to 2017.

(Table 3.2). Among the activities that coordinators were most likely to indicate were associated with increased time allocations included: having informal or incidental meetings with parents (59% indicating an increased time allocation); having individual formal meetings with parents outside the home (47%); communicating with agencies or individuals from the community (50%); liaising with therapists and counsellors (52%), working with a core group of parents (40%); administration and paperwork (53%); and planning, monitoring and evaluating their work (41%).

A majority of coordinators (53% - 71%) reported that there has been no change in the amount of time that they spend on policy formation, cluster meetings, meetings with pupils, meetings with principals and teachers, organising or helping to organise after-school educational activities, or the arrangement of funding. In relation to most of the activities listed, very small proportions of coordinators (2-12%) indicated that these now took up less time. A notable exception is that of home visits, where one in four coordinators (24%), indicated that they now spend less time on these than they had previously.

Coordinators were given the option of listing any additional activities on which they spend their time. This option was availed of by approximately one third (33%) of coordinators. Additional tasks mentioned by coordinators included: the monitoring of attendance⁷; retention and participation activities; enrolment and induction activities; transfer and transition activities; meeting with special needs assistants; working with the school's Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit; resolving bullying; and (unspecified) out of hours work.

⁷ It should be noted that, while coordinators have a central role in supporting attendance, it is not within their remit to monitor attendance.

Table 3.2: Percentages of coordinators indicating that the proportion of time spent on various activities relating to their role has increased, decreased or remained unchanged since they began working as coordinators

	No. of Responses	Increased	Decreased	Unchanged	N/A
		%	%	%	%
Home Visits	288	34.7	24.0	33.3	8.0
Informal and/or incidental meetings with parents	285	58.6	1.8	31.6	8.1
Individual formal meetings with parents (outside the home)	274	46.7	2.6	42.3	8.4
Working with a core group of parents	267	40.4	4.9	42.7	12.0
Meetings/contact with school principal	283	27.9	5.3	59.0	7.8
Meetings/contact with pupils	278	25.2	11.5	54.3	9.0
Meetings/contacts with teachers	280	31.8	5.7	55.4	7.1
Meetings with agencies or individuals from the community	282	50.0	5.0	37.9	7.1
Contacts (including telephone) with agencies or individuals from the community	274	54.4	3.3	34.7	7.7
Organising courses for parents	283	34.6	12.0	45.6	7.8
Acting as course presenter or facilitator on courses for parents	262	24.4	9.9	36.6	29.0
Organising or helping to organise after-school educational activities (e.g., home-work club) for pupils	281	28.1	8.9	53.4	9.6
Planning, monitoring and evaluating your work	278	40.6	5.0	46.8	7.6
Arranging funding	261	13.4	5.7	55.9	24.9
Administration/Paperwork	277	53.4	3.6	34.7	8.3
Cluster meetings	282	11.0	10.3	70.9	7.8
Policy formation in the school	270	21.9	7.8	58.1	12.2
Organising or helping to organise after school educational activities (e.g. home-work club) for pupils	265	26.0	4.5	47.5	21.9
Enabling parents as class support	251	19.1	11.2	43.8	25.9
Liaison with therapists/counsellors	271	51.7	1.5	36.9	10.0

Reports of primary and post-primary coordinators on changes in time allocations over time were broadly similar, although there were some notable differences. While just 11% of primary coordinators indicated that the time they spent on meetings or contacts with students had increased over time, this was the case for 41% of post-primary coordinators. Similarly, post-primary coordinators were almost twice as likely as primary coordinators to indicate that meetings and contacts with principals had increased (42% and 23%, respectively), and more likely to indicate increases in the time spent on meetings/contact with the

principal, and on meetings/contacts with individuals or agencies in the community (Table 3.3). Nearly three-quarters of post-primary coordinators (72%) indicated an increase in time spent on paperwork and administration, compared to 43% of primary coordinators. Primary coordinators were more likely to indicate an increase in time spent on enabling parents as class supports (25%) than post-primary coordinators (7%), 44% of whom indicated that this was not an activity on which they spent time.

Table 3.3: Average percentage time allocations of primary (P) and post-primary (PP) coordinator, and percentages indicating that time allocations have increased, decreased or are unchanged

		nt time ation	Increased Decreased		Unchanged		N/A			
Amount of time spent on	P M	PP M	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %
Home Visits	18.3	21.6	28.6	40.2	26.1	22.3	36.6	29.5	8.7	8.0
Informal and/or incidental meetings with parents	10.6	6.2	62.6	51.9	1.8	1.9	27.0	38.0	8.6	8.3
Individual formal meetings with parents (outside the home)	6.0	5.2	44.6	48.1	1.3	4.8	45.2	38.2	8.9	8.7
Working with a core group of parents	5.5	5.2	40.9	38.6	3.9	6.9	45.5	39.6	9.6	14.9
Meetings/contact with school principal	5.8	6.5	23.8	34.3	3.8	8.3	63.8	50.0	8.8	7.4
Meetings/contact with pupils	3.1	5.1	10.7	40.6	12.6	11.3	64.8	42.5	11.9	5.7
Meetings/contacts with teachers	4.5	5.4	22.5	41.9	5.6	6.7	63.1	45.7	8.8	5.7
Meetings with agencies or individuals from the community	4.7	4.6	45.0	57.9	5.0	4.7	41.3	31.8	8.8	5.6
Contacts (including telephone) with agencies or individuals from the community	3.8	4.5	48.7	62.9	2.6	3.8	39.6	26.7	9.1	6.7
Organising courses for parents	6.3	5.9	30.4	38.2	12.7	11.8	48.1	42.7	8.9	7.3
Acting as course presenter or facilitator on courses for parents	2.6	1.7	22.9	25.8	8.5	9.3	41.8	30.9	26.8	34.0
Organising or helping to organise after- school educational activities (e.g., home- work club) for pupils	4.2	4.1	24.4	31.5	8.1	9.3	56.9	50.0	10.6	9.3
Planning, monitoring and evaluating your work	5.1	6.2	32.7	52.8	7.5	.0	50.3	41.5	9.4	5.7
Arranging funding	1.6	1.3	10.2	17.0	4.1	7.0	62.6	46.0	23.1	30.0
Administration/Paperwork	6.0	7.8	43.1	72.1	4.4	1.9	41.9	20.2	10.6	5.8
Cluster meetings	4.3	3.8	5.6	17.6	10.6	10.2	74.4	65.7	9.4	6.5
Policy formation in the school	1.8	2.3	15.7	30.2	9.2	6.6	60.8	52.8	14.4	10.4
Organising or helping to organise after school educational activities (e.g. home- work club) for pupils	2.2	1.8	28.0	21.6	4.7	3.9	50.0	46.1	17.3	28.4
Enabling parents as class support	3.4	0.6	24.5	7.5	12.2	9.7	48.3	38.7	15.0	44.1
Liaison with therapists/counsellors	2.3	2.7	45.8	60.2	2.0	1.0	40.5	30.1	11.8	8.7

It was also possible to use findings of earlier surveys conducted with HSCL coordinators to further explore whether the ways in which coordinators spend their time are changing over time. In order to update findings reported in Archer and Shortt (2003) that compared time allocations in 1992-1993 to those in 2000-2001, a number of the activities listed above were classified as belonging to one of three higher-order categories: contact with parents, contact with principals and teachers, and contacts with the community. As shown in Table 3.4, there appears to have been a reduction in the time allocated by coordinators to contact with parents, from approximately two-thirds (67%) of coordinators' time in the 1992-1993 school year to 60% in 2000-2001, and again to 54% in 2016-2017. This is in part attributable to a decrease in time spent on home visits, from 26% in 1992-1993 and 30% in 2000-2001 to 21% in 2016-2017. The time allocated to contact with principals and teachers has also declined, from 15% in 1992-1993 to 13% in 2000-2001, with a further reduction to 10% in 2016-2017. The time allocated to contact with individuals and agencies in the community has remained stable over time, at 9%.

Table 3.4: Coordinators' allocation of time in 1992-1993, 2000-2001, and 2016-2017

	1992-1993	2000-2001 ⁸	2016-2017
Contact with parents	67%	60%	54%
Contact with principals and teachers	15%	13%	10%
Contact with individuals and agencies in the community	9%	9%	9%

Nature and extent of parental involvement

A major goal of the HSCL scheme is to increase the involvement of parents in their children's education and to promote effective partnerships between families and schools. Coordinators were asked to indicate whether parents in their schools were involved in each of a range of school-based parental involvement activities. Large majorities of coordinators indicated that parents helped with extra-curricular activities in the school (82%), helped with fundraising (80%), and helped to recruit other parents to participate in HSCL courses and activities (90%). Just over 70% of coordinators indicated that they had a 'core group' of parents' supporting HSCL activities, and two-thirds (68%) indicated that parents were involved in the

_

⁸ Note: Data from 2001 were reanalysed so as only to include responses from coordinators for whom the totalled percentage time allocations were not greater than 120% and not less than 80% (in line with the treatment of the 2017 data). As such, the percentages for 2000-2001 presented here differ somewhat from those reported in Archer and Shortt (2002).

⁹ It was intended that all participating schools would have a "core group" of involved parents who worked with coordinators to support the aims of the HSCL scheme (Conaty, 2002).

formation of school policies. Lower percentages of coordinators indicated that parents were involved in running a crèche, parents' room, library, etc. at school (29%) or in acted as course presenter or facilitator for other parents (34%). Fewer than one in four coordinators (23%) worked in schools where parents were involved in after school educational activities (like a homework club).

There were some differences between coordinators' reports of the nature of parental involvement in primary and post-primary schools (Table 3.5). For example, 86% of coordinators in primary schools reported that parents helped with curricular activities in the classroom, compared to 21% of coordinators in post-primary schools. Primary coordinators were also more likely to say parents were involved in extracurricular activities (93%) than coordinators in post-primary schools (67%), and were also more likely to report parental involvement in fundraising (89% of primary coordinators compared to 66% of post-primary coordinators). Post-primary coordinators were less likely to have a core group of parents (62%) than primary coordinators (79%). With the exception of involvement in policy formation, involvement in school planning and involvement in Local Committees (where there was little difference across primary and post-primary schools), higher proportions of primary coordinators reported parental involvement in the listed activities than post-primary coordinators (Table 3.5). This is in line with the findings of international research that shows that parental involvement declines as children progress through the education system and that certain parental involvement activities are less welcomed by older students than by younger children.

Table 3.5: Percentages of all HSCL coordinators from primary (P), post-primary (PP) and all schools indicating the involvement of parents in various school activities

	P %	PP %	All %
Helped recruit participants for the HSCL courses and activities	92.7	88.8	90.0
Helped with extra-curricular activities in the school (e.g., school concerts, sports, book fair, shop)	93.3	67.2	81.9
Helped with fundraising	88.8	66.4	80.4
Helped as members of core groups of parents	79. 3	62.4	70.7
Helped organise courses for parents	73.7	61.6	68.8
Involved in policy formation for the school	65.9	73.6	67.6
Helped with curricular activities in the classroom (e.g., paired-reading tutor)	86.0	20.8	59.5
Served as a member of school committee (not including Board of Management or Parents' Council)	55.3	53.6	53.9
Served as members of Local Committee	36.3	47.2	40.2
Helped with school planning (e.g. drawing up the DEIS school plan)	38.5	42.4	39.3
Acted as a course presenter or facilitator for other parents	38.0	28.0	34.0
Ran a Creche, Parents' Room, school library/toy library etc.	42.5	10.4	29.0
Helped with after school educational activities (e.g., a homework club)	28.5	15.2	22.7

As outlined in Chapter 1, in addition to serving all families of children in the school, the role of the HSCL coordinator involves targeting efforts and resources at the most disadvantaged families. Coordinators were asked to indicate whether parental involvement in target families and non-target families had changed over time. Coordinators were somewhat more likely to indicate increased parental involvement in target families (92%) than in non-target families (82%), and less likely to indicate that there had been no change in parental involvement in target families (8%) than non-target families (17%; Table 3.6). This indicates that HSCL efforts have been successful for both target and non-target families, but that there may have been more widespread change among the most disadvantaged families that were specifically targeted by coordinators. Primary coordinators indicated similar patterns of change in involvement of parents in target and non-target families to those indicated by post-primary coordinators (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Percentages of HSCL coordinators from primary (P), post-primary (PP) and all schools indicating changes in the involvement of parents in their child's education

	Increased			Decreased			Unchanged		
	P %	PP %	All %	P %	PP %	All %	P %	PP %	All %
Target families	88.7	94.3	91.5	.6	.8	.6	10.7	4.9	7.9
Non-target families	81.9	81.3	81.8	1.8	.8	1.6	16.4	17.9	16.6

Coordinators were asked to indicate whether parents were involved in the formation of each of a range of school policies in the previous school year. Although approximately three quarters of coordinators (73% of primary coordinators and 82% of post-primary coordinators) indicated that parents were involved in at least one area of policy development, there was no single area of policy development in which a majority of coordinators indicated that there was or had been parental involvement (Table 3.7). Approximately one third of coordinators (30-37%) indicated that parents were involved in the development of policies relating to behaviour/discipline, school uniform, healthy eating, bullying, attendance, and homework. On the whole, post-primary coordinators were more likely to indicate parental involvement in school policy formation (Table 3.7), but in some cases (e.g. healthy eating, homework, child protection policies) the differences were negligible.

Table 3.7: Percentages of HSCL coordinators from primary (P), post-primary (PP) and all schools who indicated parental involvement in various school policies

	P	PP	All
	%	%	%
Behaviour/discipline	32.4	44.0	37.1
School uniform	31.3	42.4	36.4
Healthy eating	34.6	36.0	35.8
Anti-bullying	33.0	36.8	35.2
Attendance	27.4	36.0	30.8
Homework	28.5	29.6	30.2
Child protection	26.3	29.6	27.4
Literacy/numeracy	20.7	28.0	23.4
Mobile phone usage	15.6	28.8	21.5
HSCL	14.5	28.0	20.6
Enrolment	13.4	24.8	18.1
Gaeilge	5.0	8.8	6.9

In the survey administered in 2001, coordinators were asked whether parents were involved in policy formation in just four of the areas asked about in 2017, meaning comparisons can only be made between the 2000-2001 and 2016-2017 school years on this subset of policy areas. The proportion of coordinators indicating that parents were involved in policy development has decreased in each of the four areas, in some cases dramatically (Table 3.8). In 2001, 72% of coordinators indicated that parents were involved in developing anti-bullying policies in the 2000-2001 school year, compared to just 35% indicating such involvement in 2016-2017. Similarly, while 68% of coordinators in 2001 indicated that parents had input into enrolment policy in 2000-2001, just 18% indicated that this was the case in 2016-2017. Almost two thirds of coordinators (64%) in 2001 indicated that parents were involved in the development of behaviour/discipline policies in 2000-2001, compared to 37% in the 2016-2017 school year. It is not possible to ascertain from the existing data, however, whether this reflects a reduction in the extent to which schools are involving parents at a policy making level, or whether there was simply less development of school policies in the 2016-2017 school year than in 2000-2001.

Table 3.8: Percentages of HSCL coordinators who indicated parents' involvement in various school policies in 2000-2001 and 2016-2017

	2000-2001 %	2016-2017 %
Anti-bullying	72.0	35.2
Enrolment	67.8	18.1
Behaviour/discipline	64.2	37.1
School uniform	58.0	36.4

Problems facing families

In order to understand the context in which they are working, coordinators were asked to indicate the extent to which each of a range of potential issues were a problem facing pupils and families served by their schools¹⁰. All coordinators (100%) indicated that emotional and behavioural problems of pupils were a problem in their schools, with three-quarters (74%) indicating that this was true to a great extent. Over 90% of coordinators indicated that ongoing pupil absenteeism, diet issues (e.g. poor diet, malnutrition), bullying/cyberbullying, poor oral language of pupils, substance abuse in families, unemployment, poor quality of housing, literacy/numeracy problems of parents, and general family dysfunction were, to some

¹⁰ As this question was not asked in previous surveys, it is not possible to look at trends in the problems facing pupils and families over time.

extent or a great extent, problems faced by pupils and families served by their schools (Table 3.9). Majorities of coordinators indicated that it was true to a great extent that poor oral language of pupils (57%) unemployment in the community (56%), general dysfunction in pupils' families (55%), and ongoing pupil absenteeism (53%) posed problems for pupils and families in their schools. Issues most likely to be reported as being not at all a problem for pupils and families were organised crime (47%) and ethnic conflict (41%).

Reflecting documented increases in homelessness in Ireland in recent times, and child homelessness in particular, more than two thirds of coordinators (68%) indicated that homelessness was a problem facing pupils and families in their schools, either to some extent (53%) or to a great extent (16%).

Table 3.9: Percentages of HSCL coordinators indicating the extent of problems among the pupils/families served by the school

	To a great extent	To some extent	Not at all
	%	%	%
Emotional and behavioural problems of pupils	74.3	25.7	0.0
On-going pupil absenteeism	52.7	46.4	.9
Diet (e.g., poor diet, malnutrition)	25.8	67.0	7.2
Bullying/cyber-bullying	19.9	74.4	5.7
Organised crime	9.8	43.3	46.9
Youth/petty crime (e.g., vandalism)	9.7	59.7	30.5
Poor oral language/vocabulary of pupils	57.1	37.8	5.1
Effects of substance abuse among pupils' families	25.6	65.5	8.9
Unemployment in the community	56.2	42.2	1.6
Ethnic conflict	6.5	52.4	41.1
Effects of general dysfunction among pupils' families	54.5	44.6	1.0
Poor quality of housing	22.9	69.2	7.9
Homelessness	15.7	52.7	31.6
Domestic violence	7.8	79.5	12.7
Literacy/numeracy problems amongst parents	42.9	56.8	.3

Coordinators were also given the option of listing any additional problems faced by pupils and their families, and 18% of coordinators availed of this option. Among the additional issues specified by coordinators were: serious illness or death in the family (including by suicide), financial difficulties and stress, child neglect, lack of parenting skills, and challenges associated with parents working long hours. A number of coordinators highlighted problems surrounding the integration of migrants or refugees to communities and schools with inadequate support or funding. Finally, coordinators indicated that self-harm and addiction to technology were problems experienced by pupils in their schools.

When looking at problems faced by families of pupils in primary and post-primary schools, similarities and differences were noted. Reports of the extent to which issues such as emotional and behavioural difficulties, diet, and bullying were problems were similar across primary and post-primary levels (Table 3.10). Primary coordinators were more likely than their post-primary counterparts to indicate that issues such as poor oral language of pupils, literacy and numeracy of parents, and homelessness were, to a great extent, problems faced by families served by their schools, while post-primary coordinators were more likely to indicate that ongoing student absenteeism was a widespread problem.

Table 3.10: Percentages of HSCL coordinators from primary (P) and post-primary (PP) schools indicating the extent of problems among the pupils/families served by the school

	To a gre	at extent	To som	e extent	Not	at all
	P	PP	P	PP	P	PP
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Emotional and behavioural problems of pupils	74.7	75.8	25.3	24.2	.0	.0
On-going pupil absenteeism	42.9	69.1	55.4	30.9	1.7	.0
Diet (e.g., poor diet, malnutrition)	29.5	21.6	65. 9	67.2	4.5	11.2
Bullying/cyber-bullying	18.2	24.2	73.3	74.2	8.5	1.6
Organised crime	12.2	7.5	47.1	36.7	40.7	55.8
Youth/petty crime (e.g., vandalism)	11.6	8.3	54.7	66.7	33.7	25.0
Poor oral language/vocabulary of pupils	79.0	30.1	19.3	60.2	1.7	9.8
Effects of substance abuse among pupils' families	33.3	17.2	56.9	75.4	9.8	7.4
Unemployment in the community (recession)	63.4	49.6	34.3	49.6	2.3	.8
Ethnic conflict	9.8	2.5	55.2	47.1	35.1	50.4
Effects of general dysfunction among pupils' families	61.9	45.1	36.4	54.9	1.7	.0
Poor quality of housing	32.6	11.4	62.3	77.2	5.1	11.4
Homelessness	23.6	5.7	55.7	48.8	20.7	45.5
Domestic violence	11.1	3 . 3	80.1	79.2	8.8	17.5
Literacy/numeracy problems amongst parents	53.4	29.5	46.0	70.5	.6	.0
Other	71.0	66.7	29.0	33.3	.0	.0

Networking and Collaboration in the Community

A stated principle of the HSCL scheme is that coordinators liaise with the statutory and voluntary agencies in the community in order to promote a cohesive provision of service to pupils and their families (see Chapter 1). In order to explore the nature of this collaboration, coordinators were asked to list the three voluntary or statutory agencies with which they had the most frequent contact. A large number of agencies were listed and these were grouped together into discrete categories. Tusla was mentioned most frequently (39% of coordinators; Table 3.11). Approximately 14% of coordinators mentioned specific local services or groups such as community centres, local libraries and youth groups, while 13% mentioned charity and voluntary organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, Barnardos and the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA). Also frequently mentioned were the Health Services Executive (HSE) and services under the auspices of the HSE such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS); the National

Educational Psychology Service (NEPS); and services for parents such as adult education services, Parents Plus, etc.

Table 3.11: Voluntary and statutory agencies with which coordinators have most frequent contact

	No. of Responses	%	
Tusla (SCP, EWS)	370	38.7	
Local services	131	13.7	
Charity and voluntary organisations	127	13.3	
HSE	95	10.0	
Parent services	95	10.0	
Other	73	7.6	
Mental Health Services (private and voluntary)	40	4.2	
Gardaí	12	1.3	
NEPS	12	1.3	

There was little difference across the primary and post-primary levels, although post-primary coordinators were more likely to mention having frequent contact with An Garda Síochána and NEPS than were primary coordinators (Table 3.12).

Table 3.12: Numbers and percentages of HSCL coordinators from primary and post-primary schools describing the voluntary and/or statutory agencies with which they have the most frequent contact

	Primary		Post-Primary	
	n	%	n	%
Tusla (SCP, EWS)	213	40.0	138	36.8
Local services	73	13.7	51	13.6
Charity and voluntary organisations	73	13.7	48	12.8
HSE	42	7.9	51	13.6
Parent services	69	13.0	22	5.9
Other	42	7.9	27	7.2
Mental Health Services (private and voluntary)	18	3.4	21	5.6
Gardai	1	.002	10	2.7
NEPS	2	.004	7	1.9

Perceived Impact of the HSCL Scheme

Coordinators were asked to give an indication of the extent to which the HSCL scheme had impacted on the involvement of parents in the educational lives of their children, if at all. More than 95% of coordinators reported that parents' involvement in all but two of the 10 parental involvement activities included in the question had been positively impacted by HSCL efforts, either to some extent or to a great extent (Table 3.13). For example, 83% of coordinators indicated that it was true to a great extent that parents felt less threatened by school and teachers as a result of the HSCL scheme. Majorities of coordinators also indicated that it was true to a great extent that parents were more aware of their contribution to their children's education (66%), had a new interest in what is happening in school (62%) and visited the school more (62%) as a result of HSCL coordinators' efforts. In relation to all but three of the parental involvement activities mentioned in the survey, only very small proportions of coordinators (0.3% to 5%) indicated that the HSCL scheme had not impacted levels of involvement in these activities at all. Coordinators were most likely to say the scheme had had no impact on the numbers of parents helping with classroom activities (30%), helping with school activities (18%), or on parents' learning of new home management skills (15%).

Table 3.13: Percentages of HSCL coordinators indicating the extent of their impact on parents' involvement in activities

	To a great extent	To some extent	Not at all
	%	%	%
Visit the school more often (e.g., for coffee mornings)	61.2	37.2	1.6
Are more involved in their children's schoolwork	38.0	60.8	1.3
Have learned new parenting skills	35.8	63.0	1.3
Have learned to use new home management skills	18.3	66.9	14.8
Help with school activities (e.g., sports days, school tours)	41.1	40.8	18.1
Help with classroom activities (e.g., paired reading)	39.0	30.7	30.3
Are more confident about helping children with homework	33.9	61.3	4.8
Feel less threatened by school and teachers	83.3	16.4	.3
Are more aware of their contribution to their children's education	65.6	34.1	.3
Have a new interest in what is happening in school	62.1	37.2	.6

When examined separately, there were some clear differences in primary and post-primary coordinators reports of the impact of the HSCL scheme on parental involvement in certain activities. At post-primary level, 70% of coordinators indicated that the HSCL scheme had had no impact at all on parental involvement in classroom activities, compared to just 6% of primary coordinators (Table 3.14). Similarly, 42% of post-primary coordinators indicated that the scheme had had no impact at all on parental involvement in school activities, compared to just 4% of primary coordinators. In relation to all of the activities mentioned, primary coordinators were more likely to indicate that the scheme had impacted parental involvement to a great extent than were post-primary coordinators. As an example, almost half of primary coordinators (48%) indicated that it was true to a great extent that parents were now more involved in their children's schoolwork as a result of HSCL efforts, compared to a quarter of post-primary coordinators (25%). Similarly, 71% of primary coordinators indicated that it was true to a great extent that parents visit the school more often, compared to 51% of post-primary coordinators.

Table 3.14: Percentages of HSCL coordinators from primary (P) and post-primary (PP) schools indicating the extent of their impact on parents' involvement in activities

	To a great extent		To some extent		Not	at all
	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %
Visit the school more often (e.g., for coffee mornings)	70.6	51.2	27.7	47.2	1.7	1.6
Are more involved in their children's schoolwork	47.5	24.6	52.5	72.1	.0	3.3
Have learned new parenting skills	39.2	31.7	60.2	65.9	.6	2.4
Have learned to use new home management skills	23.4	10.7	63.4	71.1	13.1	18.2
Help with school activities (e.g., sports days, school tours)	58.0	14.9	37.9	43.0	4.0	42.1
Help with classroom activities (e.g., paired reading)	56.9	9.0	36.8	20.7	6.3	70.3
Are more confident about helping children with homework	39.5	23.5	57.1	68.9	3.4	7.6
Feel less threatened by school and teachers	86.0	79.0	13.5	21.0	.6	.0
Are more aware of their contribution to their children's education	71.3	57.6	28.1	42.4	.6	.0
Have a new interest in what is happening in school	67.6	54.0	31.3	46.0	1.1	.0

When comparing findings of the 2017 and 2001 surveys, the proportion of coordinators indicating that the scheme has impacted parental involvement to a great extent increased for all of the aspects of parental involvement listed (Table 3.15). As an example, 15% of coordinators in 2001 indicated that it was true to a great extent that parents were more involved in their children's schoolwork as a result of HSCL efforts, while in 2017, 36% indicated that this was the case. Similarly, in 2001, half of coordinators (50%) indicated

that it was true to a great extent that parents were more aware of their contribution to their children's education as a result of HSCL efforts, compared to two-thirds of coordinators (66%) in 2017. Ryan (1994), when evaluating the HSCL scheme soon after it was first introduced, noted that it was likely that any impacts of the scheme likely take time to be discernible and would unfold over the longer term. That coordinators in 2017 were more likely than coordinators in 2001 to report that the HSCL scheme had greatly impacted all aspects of parental involvement appears to bear this out.

Table 3.15: Percentages of HSCL coordinators indicating the extent of their impact on parents' involvement in activities for 2017 and 2001

	To a gr	eat extent	To son	ne extent	Not at all		
	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %	
Visit the school more often (e.g., for coffee mornings)	45.2	61.2	53.4	37.2	1.4	1.6	
Are more involved in their children's schoolwork	14.7	38.0	82.0	60.8	3.2	1.3	
Have learned new parenting skills	17.9	35.8	74.6	63.0	7.5	1.3	
Have learned to use new home management skills	4.4	18.3	66.7	66.9	28.9	14.8	
Help with school activities (e.g., sports days, school tours)	22.2	41.1	62.7	40.8	15.1	18.1	
Help with classroom activities (e.g., paired reading)	7.2	39.0	42.1	30.7	50.7	30.3	
Are more confident about helping children with homework	14.3	33.9	78.0	61.3	7.7	4.8	
Feel less threatened by school and teachers	75.6	83.3	24.0	16.4	.4	.3	
Are more aware of their contribution to their children's education	50.4	65.6	48.6	34.1	1.1	.3	
Have a new interest in what is happening in school	45.2	62.1	54.8	37.2	.0	.6	

Coordinators were also asked to indicate the extent to which HSCL efforts had impacted the local community in each of a number of ways. In relation to all but one of the listed potential effects, over 90% of coordinators indicated that the HSCL scheme had impacted these to at least some extent. For example, 92% coordinators indicated that there was greater community spirit as a result of HSCL efforts, either to a great extent (34%) or to some extent (58%). A somewhat lower proportion (70%) agreed that transfer of students to third level had increased as a result of the scheme, with an additional 24% indicating that they did not know whether this had been the case (Table 3.16). Majorities of coordinators indicated that it was true to a great extent that there was increased parental confidence and involvement (72%), better interagency cooperation (58%), and a more important role for the school in the community (52%) as a

result of the HSCL scheme. Responses of primary and post-primary coordinators to these items were broadly similar (Table 3.17).

Table 3.16: Percentages of HSCL coordinators indicating the extent of the impact of their role on the local community

	To a great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Don't know
	%	%	%	%
Greater community spirit	33.5	58.4	1.9	6.1
Better cooperation between agencies	57.7	39.1	1.0	2.2
Increased parent confidence and involvement	72.4	26.3	.3	1.0
Greater use of community facilities and services	43.6	52.9	1.3	2.2
Role of the school in the community is more important	51.7	44.1	.6	3.5
Greater transfer to third level	27.3	42.4	3.2	27.0

Table 3.17: Percentages of HSCL coordinators from primary (P) and post-primary (PP) schools indicating the extent of the impact of their role on the local community

	To a gre	at extent	To som	e extent	Not	at all	Don't know		
	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	
Greater community spirit	35.8	29.8	57.2	59.5	1.2	3.3	5.8	7.4	
Better cooperation between agencies	59.8	53.7	36.8	43.0	1.1	.8	2.3	2.5	
Increased parent confidence and involvement	76.4	66.1	23.0	31.5	0.0	.8	.6	1.6	
Greater use of community facilities and services	43.9	40.7	52.6	<i>55.</i> 3	1.7	.8	1.7	3 . 3	
Role of the school in the community is more important	55.2	47.6	40.8	47.6	0.6	.8	3.4	4.0	
Greater transfer to third level	27.5	26.8	30.4	56.1	5.8	.0	36.3	17.1	

In the 2001 survey, coordinators were also asked about the impact of the HSCL scheme on the local community, although fewer potential areas of impact were included at that time. In relation to all of the areas on which comparisons can be made between the two surveys, coordinators in 2017 were more likely to say that it was true to a great extent that the HSCL scheme had had an impact (Table 3.18). For example, in 2001, 37% of coordinators indicated that it was true to a great extent that there was better

cooperation between agencies as a result of the HSCL scheme, compared to 56% in 2017. Similarly, 14% of coordinators indicated that it was true to a great extent that there was greater community spirit as a result of the HSCL scheme, compared to 32% of coordinators in 2017.

Table 3.18: Percentages of HSCL coordinators indicating the extent of the impact of their role on the local community for 2017 and 2001

	To a gre	at extent	To som	e extent	Not at all		
	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %	
Greater community spirit	13.7	32.4	69.1	56.4	17.2	1.9	
Better cooperation between agencies	36.7	56.1	56.7	38.0	6.7	.9	
Increased parent confidence and involvement	-	71.0	-	25.9	-	.3	
Greater use of community facilities and services		42.4	-	51.4	-	1.2	
Role of the school in the community is more important	28.8	50.8	61.6	43.3	9.6	.6	
Greater transfer to third level	-	27.3	-	42.4	-	3.2	

In addition to responding to closed-choice items about the impact of their work, HSCL coordinators were also asked to list the three areas in which they feel they have made the biggest impact during their time as a HSCL coordinator. Of a possible maximum number of 963 responses, 955 were provided. Responses were classified as relating to one of nine main themes (Table 3.19). The impact most frequently mentioned by coordinators as being among the largest was that of increased involvement of parents at school, including in courses offered for parents (70% of coordinators mentioned this). Close to half of coordinators (47%) mentioned improved communication and relations between the home and school as being among the biggest impacts of their work. Issues such as increased awareness and understanding of the role of the HSCL coordinator (27%), increased parental confidence and self-esteem (24%) and improvements in attendance and retention (21%) were listed as having been greatly impacted by the HSCL scheme. Smaller numbers of coordinators mentioned having had the largest impact on interagency collaboration (6%), with the most disadvantaged or 'target' families (9%) and with migrant families (2%).

Table 3.19: HSCL coordinators' reports of the areas in which they feel they have made the biggest impact in their roles

	No. of Responses	% responses	% coordinators
Increased parent involvement in the school and courses	328	35.2	70.4
Improved relationships and communication between parents and the school	181	19.4	46.7
Increased awareness/understanding of the role of the HSCL coordinator	103	11.1	27.1
Increased parental confidence and self-esteem	84	9.0	24.3
Matters of attendance, retention, and school transfer	68	7.3	20.6
Parents' attitude towards their children's education	61	6.6	18.4
Target families	32	3.4	9.0
Linking, collaborating and strengthening partnerships with agencies and local services	19	2.0	5.9
Migrant families	6	.6	1.9
Other	49	5. 3	14.3

The areas of biggest impact identified were similar across the primary and post-primary levels (Table 3.20). For example, 26% of primary coordinators and 25% of post-primary coordinators mentioned increased parental confidence as one of the areas on which they had had the largest impact. However, post-primary coordinators were less likely to mention parental involvement in school activities as among the areas of largest impact (62%) than were primary coordinators (77%).

Table 3.20: Primary (P) and post-primary (PP) coordinators' reports of the areas in which they feel they have made the biggest impact in their roles

		o. of onses		of inators
	P	PP	P	PP
Increased parent involvement in the school and courses	201	111	76.5	61.6
Improved relationships and communication between parents and the school	106	67	49.7	44.0
Increased awareness/understanding of the role of the HSCL coordinator	50	46	22.9	32.0
Increased parental confidence and self-esteem	50	33	25.7	24.8
Matters of attendance, retention, and school transfer	37	28	20.1	21.6
Parents' attitude towards their children's education	30	28	16.8	20.8
Target families	21	9	10.1	7.2
Linking, collaborating and strengthening partnerships with agencies and local services	6	10	3.4	8.0
Migrant families	4	2	2.2	1.6
Other	21	25	10.6	19.2

In addition to coordinators' evaluations of the impact of the HSCL scheme, also of interest were their perceptions of the factors which influenced the success or otherwise of the scheme. In order to assess these, coordinators were asked to indicate whether each of a range of factors had contributed to or hindered the success of the scheme in their school and, if so, to what extent.

On the whole, coordinators were very positive about the support they had received from principals, with 85% indicating that principal support had contributed to the success of the scheme in the school to a great extent, and a further 13% indicated that it had contributed to some extent. Similarly, almost all coordinators (97%) indicated that teacher support had contributed to the success of the scheme at school, either to a great extent (73%) or to some extent (23%), and a very large majority (93%) indicated that parental response to the programme had contributed to its success. Echoing the finding reported earlier that coordinators were largely satisfied with the level of funding of the scheme, 79% of coordinators indicated that the availability of funding had contributed to the success of the scheme, either to some extent (28%) or to a great extent (51%). In terms of factors that hindered the success of the scheme, coordinators were most likely to point to the workload of coordinators, with 44% indicating that this had hindered the success of the scheme to at least some extent. Additionally, 29% of coordinators indicated

that (a shortage of) in-career development had hindered the success of the HSCL scheme at least to some extent.

Coordinators were asked to list any factors other than those listed on the survey that had contributed to or hindered the success of HSCL in the school; 11% of respondents availed of this option (Table 3.21). Additional factors listed as contributing to the success of the scheme included: support from Tusla, in particular from the national leadership teams of the HSCL scheme and the SCP. The first National Coordinator of the HSCL scheme, Concepta Conaty, was also mentioned as having influenced the success of the programme. Other contributing factors mentioned included: the prior experience of the HSCL coordinator, school spirit, cluster meetings, and cooperation and collaboration with schools' SEN teams. Coordinators also mentioned additional factors that they deemed to have hindered the success of the scheme in their schools. Among these, respondents mentioned having coordinator posts shared between schools, being expected to fulfil duties outside the remit of the HSCL role (e.g. being treated as a "jack of all trades"), and a lack of guidance about the role itself. Lack of a parent room was also mentioned as a hindrance by a small number of coordinators.

Table 3.21: Percentages of HSCL coordinators who indicated the extent of the effect of various factors on the success of HSCL in their school

	Contribute	d to success	Hindere	d success	Neither
	To some extent	To a great extent	To some extent	To a great extent	contributed nor hindered
	%	%	%	%	%
Level of support from principal	12.9	84.9	1.0	.0	1.3
Level of support from teachers	23.3	73.2	.9	.3	2.2
Parental response to the programme	29.3	63.4	5.7	1.0	.6
Level of community involvement in HSCL	51.0	40.1	3.2	.0	5.7
Extent of "whole-school approach"	32.9	59.5	2.2	.3	5.1
Availability of facilities	29.6	43.3	15.6	6.4	5.1
Availability of funding	27.6	51.0	14.4	2.2	4.8
In-career development for coordinators	32.7	17.5	21.4	7.8	20.7
Coordinators' workload (manageability, level of focus)	21.4	18.8	35.9	8.2	15.8
Local Committee	34.8	23.0	4.1	.3	37.8
Meetings with other coordinators	19.5	78.3	. 3	.0	1.9

Responses of primary and post-primary coordinators were very similar (Table 3.22), although a higher proportion of primary coordinators (68%) indicated that a whole-school approach contributed greatly to the success of the HSCL scheme than were post-primary coordinators (48%).

Table 3.22: Percentages of HSCL coordinators from primary (P) and post-primary (PP) schools who indicated the extent of the effect of various factors on the success of HSCL in their school

	Coı	ntribute	d to suc	cess	F	Hindere	d succes	SS	Neither		
	To some extent		To a great extent		To some extent		To a great extent		contributed to nor hindered success		
	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	
Level of support from principal	11.5	16.5	86.2	81.0	1.1	.8	.0	.0	1.1	1.7	
Level of support from teachers	21.0	28.2	75.6	68.5	1.1	.8	.0	.8	2.3	1.6	
Parental response to the programme	28.7	30.1	64.9	61.0	4.0	8.1	1.7	.0	.6	.8	
Level of community involvement in HSCL	46.9	56.9	44.0	34.1	4.0	2.4	.0	.0	5.1	6.5	
Extent of "whole-school approach"	26.1	43.5	67.6	47.6	2.3	1.6	.0	.8	4.0	6.5	
Availability of facilities	31.0	30.9	44.8	39.0	17.2	11.4	4.6	8.9	2.3	9.8	
Availability of funding	24.0	30.6	57.1	43.8	13.1	16.5	1.7	3.3	4.0	5.8	
In-career development for coordinators	30.1	36.8	15.9	18.8	26.1	14.5	10.2	5.1	17.6	24.8	
Coordinators' workload (manageability, level of focus)	18.1	25.6	17.5	17.9	40.9	29.9	10.5	5.1	12.9	21.4	
Local Committee	34.3	40.0	26.5	16.5	5.4	1.7	.6	.0	33.1	41.7	
Meetings with other coordinators	17.5	18.5	79.7	79.8	.0	.8	.0	.0	2.8	.8	

Some differences were clear in the responses of coordinators in 2001 and 2017. Particularly marked was that 77% of coordinators in 2001 indicated that in-career development for HSCL coordinators had contributed greatly to the success of the scheme, compared to just 18% in 2017 (Table 3.23). Conversely, coordinators in 2017 were more likely to favourably evaluate the contributions of support received from other teachers and the availability of funding than their counterparts in 2001.

Table 3.23: Percentages of HSCL coordinators who indicated the extent of the effect of various factors on the success of HSCL in their school in 2017 and 2001

	Cor	ntribute	d to suc	cess	I	Hindere	d succes	SS	Neither		
		ome ent	To a great extent		To some extent		To a great extent		contributed to nor hindered success		
	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %	2001* %	2017 %	
Level of support from principal	11.5	12.9	85.3	84.9	2.5	1.0	.7	.0	-	1.3	
Level of support from teachers	35.6	23.3	60.5	73.2	3.6	.9	.4	.3	-	2.2	
Parental response to the programme	40.4	29.3	57.8	63.4	1.1	5.7	.4	1.0	-	0.6	
Level of community involvement in HSCL	67.1	51.0	23.8	40.1	2.2	3.2	6.9	.0	-	5.7	
Extent of "whole-school approach"	51.4	32.9	30.1	59.5	7. 3	2.2	.8	.3	-	5.1	
Availability of facilities	35.7	29.6	40.8	43.3	14.8	15.6	5.1	6.4	-	5.1	
Availability of funding	41.2	27.6	36.8	51.0	14.4	14.4	4.3	2.2	-	4.8	
In-career development for coordinators	21.8	32.7	76.8	17.5	.4	21.4	1.1	7.8	-	20.7	
Coordinators' workload (manageability, level of focus)	23.4	21.4	30.1	18.8	38.3	35.9	7.4	8.2	-	15.8	
Local Committee	49.0	34.8	21.7	23.0	2.4	4.1	.8	.3	-	37.8	
Meetings with other coordinators	-	19.5	-	78.3	-	.3	-	.0	-	1.9	

^{*}In 2017 'Neither contributed nor hindered' was used as a response option instead of 'Not relevant' which was used in 2001.

Satisfaction with support for the HSCL scheme

HSCL coordinators were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with different types of support offered as part of the HSCL scheme. Majorities of coordinators indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the funding allocated to the scheme (77%), coordinators' access to advice (74%), and initial teacher education relating to HSCL (54%). However, half of coordinators indicating that they were dissatisfied (37%) or very dissatisfied (12%) with the in-career development available to them as part of the scheme, while one third of coordinators expressed satisfaction with in-career development available and 17% indicated that they were not sure (Table 3.24). One quarter of coordinators (23%) expressed satisfaction with the in-career development for others on the HSCL scheme. However, a majority (56%) indicated that they were not sure, perhaps indicating that coordinators are not in a position to evaluate in-career development given to others. Levels of satisfaction reported with aspects of support for the scheme varied little between primary and post-primary coordinators (Table 3.25).

Table 3.24: Percentages of HSCL coordinators indicating their level of satisfaction with different types of support offered as part of the HSCL scheme

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not sure	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
	%	%	%	%	%
In-career development for coordinators	12.0	21.5	17.0	37.2	12.3
In-career development for others	4.4	18.3	55.6	15.9	5.8
Funding	17.4	59.9	7.9	13.2	1.6
Access to advice	20.3	53.8	13.9	8.9	3.2
Initial teacher education/pre- service training	14.7	42.3	19.4	17.2	6.3

Table 3.25: Percentages of HSCL coordinators from primary (P) and post-primary (PP) school's indication of their level of satisfaction with different types of support offered as part of the HSCL scheme

	Very satisfied		Satisfied		Not sure		Dissatisfied		Very dissatisfied	
	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %	P %	PP %
	/0	70	/0	70	70	70	70	70	/0	/0
In-career development for coordinators	10.2	13.8	20.9	21.1	15.8	17.9	40.1	34.1	13.0	13.0
In-career development for others	3.6	4.5	13.1	23.2	54.2	56.3	19.6	10.7	6.5	5.4
Funding	19.1	16.4	65.2	53.3	5.6	9.8	8.4	18.9	1.7	1.6
Access to advice	16.9	23.0	54.8	53.3	14.1	13.9	10.7	6.6	3.4	3.3
Initial teacher education/pre-service training	10.1	17.7	43.8	41.1	16.3	25.0	21.9	11.3	7.9	4.8

When comparing levels of satisfaction with support for the HSCL scheme in 2001 and 2017, some changes are evident. For example, in 2001, 84% of coordinators expressed satisfaction with access to advice for coordinators, compared to 74% in 2017 (Table 3.26). Conversely, a higher proportion of coordinators were satisfied with funding in 2017 (77%) than in 2001 (60%). The most marked difference relates to in-career development for HSCL coordinators. In 2001, almost all coordinators (95%) were either satisfied or very satisfied with in-career development for coordinators, while in 2017, that figure had dropped to just 34% of coordinators.

Table 3.26: Percentages of HSCL coordinators indicating their level of satisfaction with different types of support offered as part of the HSCL scheme for 2017 and 2001

	Very satisfied		Satisfied		Not sure		Dissatisfied		Very dissatisfied	
	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %	2001 %	2017 %
In-career development for coordinators	68.2	12.0	26.1	21.5	2.5	17.0	2.5	37.2	.7	12.3
In-career development for others	1.9	4.4	18.5	18.3	36.3	55.6	33.7	15.9	9.6	5.8
Funding	15.7	17.4	44.3	59.9	14.6	7.9	21.4	13.2	3.9	1.6
Access to advice	33.9	20.3	49.8	53.8	11.9	13.9	4.0	8.9	.4	3.2
Initial teacher education/pre- service training	-	14.7	-	42.3	-	19.4	-	17.2	-	6.3

Responses by School Type

DEIS Band

Responses of coordinators in primary schools with different DEIS statuses were also considered separately, in order to explore whether coordinators' experiences varied depending on the levels of disadvantage in their schools.

Coordinators' allocation of their time to different activities was nearly identical in Band 1 and Band 2 schools. For example, coordinators in Band 1 schools spent 21% of their time on home visits, compared to 20% of coordinators' time in Band 2 schools. In both Band 1 and Band 2 schools, coordinators spent, on average, 7% of their time on planning, monitoring and evaluating their work, and spent 8% of their time organising courses for parents.

For the most part, responses relating to the involvement of parents in school activities were broadly similar for coordinators working in Band 1 and Band 2 schools. For example, 87% of coordinators in Band 1 schools indicate that parents were involved in helping with curricular activities in the classroom, compared to 84% in Band 2 schools. Similarly, 77% of coordinators Band 1 schools indicated that they had the support of a core group, compared to 79% in Band 2 schools. Parental involvement in school planning, policy development, committee membership, etc. were reported by similar percentages of coordinators

¹¹ Given the very small number of coordinators in non-DEIS primary schools, responses of these coordinators were not included in these analyses.

in Band 1 and Band 2 schools. Coordinators in Band 1 and Band 2 schools also reported having frequent contact with similar statutory and voluntary agencies, and reported similar levels of satisfaction with different aspects of support for the scheme.

One area in which there were differences in the responses of coordinators in Band 1 and Band 2 schools was that of the extent to which a range of issues present difficulties for families faced by the schools. As might be expected, given that Band 1 schools should have more concentrated levels of disadvantage than those in Band 2, for all of the issues listed on the questionnaire instrument, coordinators in Band 1 schools were more likely than those in Band 2 schools to indicate that it was true to a great extent that these were problems experienced by families of pupils served by their schools. For example, one in five (21%) coordinators in Band 1 schools indicated that organised crime was, to a great extent, an issue among families served by their schools, while no coordinator working in a Band 2 school indicated that this was the case for their families. Similarly, one third of coordinators in Band 1 schools (32%) indicated that it was true to a great extent that homelessness was a problem experienced by families served by their schools, compared to just 8% of coordinators in Band 2 schools.

Despite these challenges, coordinators in Band 1 schools were more positive than those in Band 2 about the impact of the HSCL scheme in their schools. As an example, 85% of coordinators in Band 1 schools indicated that the scheme had had a great impact on parental involvement and confidence in their schools, compared to 67% of coordinators in Band 2 schools. Similarly, 70% of coordinators indicated that it was true to a great extent that there was better interagency cooperation as a result of the HSCL scheme, compared to 46% of coordinators in Band 1 schools. These findings may reflect the fact that Band 1 schools are more likely to have a dedicated rather than a shared coordinator, and/or that Band 1 schools were coming from a lower base in terms of home-school partnerships and therefore had greater scope for improvement in these areas than was the case in Band 2 schools.

Sector

At post-primary level, coordinators' responses were considered by sector. A majority of coordinators worked in Education and Training Board (ETB) schools (63%), while approximately one fifth (21%) worked in community/comprehensive schools and the remainder (16%) worked in secondary schools. Coordinators' allocation of their time to different activities varied little by sector. For example, coordinators in community and comprehensive schools reported spending, on average, 23% of their time making home visits, compared to 24% of coordinators in ETB schools and 26% in secondary schools. Similarly, coordinators in community/comprehensive and ETB schools indicated that they spent an average of 9% of their time on planning, monitoring and evaluating their work, compared to 10% of time for coordinators in secondary schools.

Reports of parental involvement in school activities were also broadly similar across sector. For example, 66% of coordinators in community/comprehensive schools and 66% of coordinators in ETB schools indicated that parents were involved in extracurricular activities at school, compared to 71% of coordinators in secondary schools. Coordinators in ETB schools were more likely to indicate that parents were involved in fundraising for the school (77%) than coordinators in secondary (61%) or community/comprehensive schools (48%).

A higher proportion of coordinators in community/comprehensive schools indicated that it was true to a great extent that ongoing student absenteeism was a problem in their schools (87%) than coordinators in either ETB (66%) or secondary (50%) schools. One quarter of coordinators in community/comprehensive (26%) and ETB schools (25%) indicated that bullying was, to a great extent, a problem in their schools, compared to 11% of coordinators in secondary schools. However, coordinators in secondary schools were more likely to indicate that homelessness was a widespread problem facing families of students in their schools (18%) than coordinators in community/comprehensive (10%) or ETB schools (1%). Coordinators in secondary schools were also more likely to indicate that poor quality housing, unemployment, and poor diet/nutrition were, to a great extent, problems experienced by students and families in their schools. It should be noted, however, that relatively few post-primary coordinators indicated that homelessness, poor quality housing, unemployment, and poor diet/nutrition were very problematic.

¹² It is possible for coordinators to work in schools in different sectors. Coordinators working in more than one school were asked to complete the questionnaire with respect to the school to which the questionnaire was sent.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of a survey administered to HSCL coordinators in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland in 2017 and, where possible, compared them to findings of similar surveys carried out in 1993 and 2001. Coordinators were asked about the ways in which they spend their time. In 2017, coordinators reported spending, on average, one fifth of their time on home visits, more than any other activity that they engage in in their roles as coordinators. However, this represents a decrease from the approximately 26% of time spent on home visits by coordinators in 1992-1993 and the 30% of time in 2000-2001. On average, coordinators in 2017 reported spending less time on contact with parents and on contact with teachers and principals than their counterparts in 1993 and 2001. Approximately half of coordinators in 2017 indicated that time spent on meetings or other contacts with agencies or individuals in the community, liaison with therapists/counsellors and on administration/paperwork had increased over time. The ways in which coordinators spend their time were broadly similar in primary and post-primary schools and in schools of different DEIS band and sector.

Large majorities of coordinators indicated that parents were involved in a wide range of activities at school and most indicated that parental involvement in their schools had increased as a result of the HSCL scheme. On the whole, coordinators in primary schools were more likely to report parental involvement in school activities than their post-primary counterparts, particularly in relation to helping with curricular activities in the classroom, involvement in extra-curricular activities, and fundraising.

In order to provide context on the schools in which the HSCL scheme is in operation, coordinators were asked to indicate the extent to which a range of issues were problems facing the pupils and families served by their school. Over 90% of coordinators indicated that emotional/behavioural difficulties, pupil absenteeism, diet issues (e.g. poor diet), bullying, poor oral language, substance abuse in families, unemployment, poor quality housing, literacy/numeracy difficulties of parents, and general family dysfunction were problems facing pupils and families served by their schools. Two-thirds of coordinators working in primary schools indicated that that homelessness was a problem facing pupils in their schools, with one-quarter indicating that this was true to a great extent. At primary level, most of the issues appear to be more prevalent in Band 1 schools than in Band 2 schools.

Overall, coordinators were very positive about the impact that the HSCL scheme had, both on parental participation at school and on their local communities. When asked to indicate the main areas in which they felt that they had made an impact in their roles, coordinators were most likely to mention: increased parental involvement in education, improved relationships and communication between home and school, increased awareness and understanding of the HSCL scheme, and increased parental confidence in self-esteem.

Half of coordinators indicated that they were not satisfied with the in-career development available to them in their roles, with 29% indicating that they felt that this had hindered the success of the scheme to some extent. However, for the most part, coordinators reported satisfaction with various aspects of support for the HSCL scheme. For example, approximately three-quarters of coordinators were satisfied with the level of funding for the scheme and with coordinators' access to advice.

Although some differences were noted, particularly in relation to the problems experienced by pupils and families served by schools, the responses of coordinators in Band 1 and Band 2 primary schools and those of coordinators in post-primary schools in different sectors were broadly similar.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The HSCL scheme is a key feature of the School Support Programme under DEIS. As such, it is important that the evaluation of that programme incorporates the views of HSCL coordinators. To this end, a survey was administered to all coordinators in primary and post-primary schools in Ireland in 2017. The principal aim of the survey was to seek information from coordinators on the current nature of their work, the ways in which their work has changed over time (if it all), their satisfaction with aspects of support for the HSCL scheme, and their views on the impact that their work has had in the schools and communities in which they work. Main findings of the survey were reported in Chapter 3. In this chapter, these findings are further interpreted and discussed. Limitations of the survey are outlined. Finally, some conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made.

There are a few notes of caution regarding the interpretation of the findings reported in the previous chapter. The response rates in 2017 were fairly typical for a survey of this kind, with about three-quarters of coordinators at both primary and post-primary levels completing and returning the questionnaires sent to them. Post-primary level response rates were similar to those for the survey carried out by Archer and Shortt in 2001 (77% in the current survey and 76% in 2002), but post-primary rates were poorer on this occasion (78% compared with 85% in 2002). It is possible that current response rates have been impacted by a reduction in managerial support available to encourage engagement with the survey. The size of the national leadership team reduced from six staff members and a National Coordinator to three staff over this period. The fact that some coordinators are not represented in the responses should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings. It is possible that non-respondents differed from those who did respond in important ways. For example, they may be less or more positive about their work than those that opted to share their views; however, the data do not exist to determine whether or not this is the case. Response rates - and response quality - also vary between questionnaire items. One item in particular appeared to present difficulties to respondents. The item which required coordinators to indicate the percentage of time they typically spent on a range of activities was answered by 94% of respondents. However, a sizeable number of those that did so had combined total percentages that fell outside reasonable parameters. Specifically, the range of the percentage of total time spent on all activities combined went from a low of 30% to a high of 1,535%. In order to permit some learning to be gained from the item, a decision was taken to only include responses that fell within the 80-120% range. The research team were made aware of the potential difficulties with the completion of this item at the piloting stage, but took the decision to include it as the data it would generate were considered to be of key interest. However, the quality of the responses has probably reduced the validity and reliability of the data generated, and so the resulting findings for this item in particular should be treated with caution.

As mentioned above, one of the main aims of the survey was to investigate how coordinators spend their time, and to find out if there have been any changes in this since coordinators were surveyed 16 years

previously, prior to the introduction of DEIS. Notwithstanding the difficulties already described, it is possible to draw some general conclusions about how coordinators allocated their time and how time allocated to certain activities has changed. Of the 18 activities common to the questionnaires administered in 2017 and 2001, the percentage of time spent on 10 decreased, while the percentage increased on the remaining eight. Visiting students' homes has been of the main activities associated with the coordinator's role since the HSCL scheme was established. The current survey suggests that the overall percentage of time on home visits in 2016/2017 was approximately 21%, despite the requirement outlined by the DES and Tusla that coordinators spend at least 33% of their time on home visitation. The proportion of time spent on home visits has reduced since 1991/1992 and 2000/2001 (when it was 26% and 30%, respectively). It is possible that issues such as homelessness, crime and substance misuse, issues which most coordinators indicated were prevalent among families served by their schools, have resulted in coordinators arranging more individual meetings with parents *outside* of, rather than in, the home (due to practical or safety concerns). Indeed, close to half (47%) of coordinators indicated that the time they allocated to individual meetings with parents outside of the home had increased over time. It should be noted that the problem of homelessness did not feature significantly in previous surveys of coordinators, but it is widely accepted that the issue has grown in seriousness over the last few years and is likely to be more acutely felt in DEIS than non-DEIS schools due to the socioeconomic profile of the families served.

To examine the overall division of time between coordinators' work with parents, with principals and teachers, and with agencies and individuals in the community, all relevant items common to the questionnaires in 2002 and 2017 were grouped according to type of activity. Analyses revealed that while contact with those in the community remained stable in 1991/1992, 2000/2001 and 2016/2017, at about 10% of total time, the overall time spent with principals and teachers fell by 5% (from 15% in both 1991/1992 and 2000/2001) to 10% in 2016/2017. The largest reduction, however, was found in relation to time spent with parents. That fell from two-thirds of overall time in 1991/1992 (67%) to 60% in 2001/2001 to 54% in 2017. As work with parents has always been an important, if not the most important, aspect of coordinators' work, this finding is unfortunate. Although data are not available to explain precisely why this changed has occurred, it is likely that other activities have now begun to occupy more of coordinators' time. Indeed, half of coordinators indicated that time spent on meetings with agencies or individuals in the community, liaison with therapists/counsellors, and on administration/paperwork had increased over time.

In the 2017 survey, about one-third of coordinators indicated that they spent about 5% of time on 'other' activities not listed and many gave details of these. Common among these were: monitoring attendance, participation and retention, and activities associated with enrolment, induction, transfer and transition. This may reflect the fact that, since 2014, services under the HSCL scheme and the National Educational

Welfare Board have both been administered by Tusla (the child and family agency), whereas prior to that they were administered separately. It may also reflect an increased integration of services which was one of the aims of the original 2005 DEIS action plan (DES, 2005) and the more recent DEIS Plan 2017 (DES, 2017). The increases in other activities probably reflect a growing emphasis on planning, evaluating, and record keeping since 2002.

As DEIS is aimed at addressing problems associated with disadvantage, families served by schools in the programme might be expected to experience a range of difficulties that would be less prevalent in schools serving families with lower levels of disadvantage. The responses of coordinators to an item in which they were asked to indicate the extent to which each of a series of issues represented problems for pupils and their families revealed that such issues were present to a greater or lesser extent in all schools. The following issues were the most prevalent, with coordinators indicating that they were problematic 'to a great extent' in their schools: emotional/behavioural problems of pupils (74% of coordinators), poor oral language/vocabulary of pupils (57%), unemployment in the community (56%), general dysfunction among families (56%), and student absenteeism (53%). The existence of problematic levels of emotional and behavioural problems in programme schools has been noted (e.g., by principals) from the very early stages of the DEIS evaluation. As well as the three-quarters of all coordinators who indicated that it was greatly problematic, a further 26% indicated that it was problematic 'to some extent' and not a single coordinator indicated that it was 'not at all' a problem. Under the DEIS Plan 2017, all DEIS schools (both primary and post-primary) are introducing programmes aimed at enhancing students' socioemotional wellbeing (the Incredible Years and Friends programmes). This step, combined with the recently enhanced focus on student wellbeing in the curriculum, should serve to address what has been often highlighted by principals and others as an issue that had not received sufficient attention in DEIS schools (see Weir & Archer, 2011; Kavanagh, Weir & Moran, 2017). It is important that the impact of these programmes on students is assessed as part of the overall evaluation of DEIS in future, particularly in light of the data on the prevalence of the problem found in the current study.

While emotional and behavioural problems among students were as likely to be a problem at primary as at post-primary level, other issues were much more problematic at one level than the other. Student absenteeism was considered by post-primary coordinators to be a much greater problem, with 69% claiming it was a problem 'to a great extent', compared to 43% of post-primary coordinators. Most of the issues, however, were considered more prevalent at primary than at post-primary level. In the case of some of these, the differences make logical sense, as they are probably related to the children's age. For example, 79% of coordinators in primary schools indicated that poor oral language/vocabulary among pupils was problematic 'to a great extent' compared with only 30% of coordinators in post-primary schools. However, the majority of sizeable differences across levels are less easy to explain. In each of the following, much greater percentages of primary than post-primary school coordinators indicated that the issue was problematic 'to a great extent': unemployment in the community (63% vs 50%), general

dysfunction among pupils' families (62% vs 45%), substance abuse among pupils' families (33% vs 17%), poor quality of housing (33% vs 11%), and homelessness (24% vs 6%). It is possible that the problems are more readily discernible among primary school children and some of the difference may be because the true levels are not known at post-primary level (and therefore are underreported). Alternatively, poverty levels (as indicated by unemployment, poor quality housing and homelessness) might be expected to be greater among families with children attending primary school.

Among coordinators working in primary schools, there was very little difference in their responses when considered according to whether their schools were in DEIS Band 1 or 2. One of the few differences related to the problems facing families just described, with greater percentages of coordinators in Band 1 schools indicating that each issue was a problem 'to a great extent'. This is most likely as a result of greater levels of poverty and associated social problems in Band 1 schools. The finding also serves as validation of the assignment of schools to the two bands on the basis of their level of disadvantage. The finding that 85% of coordinators in Band 1 schools (compared with 67% in Band 2 schools) considered that the HSCL scheme had had a great impact on parental involvement and confidence may reflect greater levels of disadvantage also, and a lower starting partnership base.

The vast majority of post-primary coordinators (63%) were working in schools in the ETB sector. This reflects the fact that poverty levels among families tend to be higher in the ETB than in other sectors. Although the percentages working in community/comprehensive (21%) and secondary (16%) sectors are very small compared to those working in the ETB sector, the analyses were conducted by sector to screen for any major differences between the groups. There were very few cross-sectoral differences in terms of how coordinators spent their time, or in their reports of levels of parental involvement. Some student-related issues appeared to be more prevalent in ETB schools: absenteeism (87%) was perceived to be much more of a problem in schools in the ETB sector than in other sectors (50-66%), while bullying was considered problematic 'to a great extent' in ETB (25%) and community/comprehensive schools (26%) but only by 11% in secondary schools. Those working in secondary schools more than in other sectors indicated that problems associated with poverty (i.e., homelessness, poor quality housing, poor diet, and unemployment) were experienced 'to a great extent'. It is difficult to interpret this finding, but it may be related to the size of secondary schools, which tend to be larger than those in other sectors. It is possible that larger enrolments will inevitably contain numbers of students from very disadvantaged backgrounds.

There is evidence from the data collected here that the basic aims of HSCL are being met. In responding to questions about the impact of their work in the area of parent involvement, most coordinators indicated that parents were more aware of their contribution to their children's education, had a new interest in what was happening in school, and visited the school more often as a result of their work. This is consistent with the third basic aim of the HSCL scheme which is 'To raise awareness in parents of

their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills'. One question for which comparative data exist for 2002 required coordinators to assess the extent to which their work had impacted on a range of parent involvement activities and issues. In each of the 10 areas listed, greater percentages in 2017 than in 2002 indicated that their work had impacted these 'to a great extent'. Of particular significance, perhaps, is the increase in the percentage indicating that their work has impacted greatly in empowering parents. For example, the recent survey suggests that parents are more involved 'to a great extent' in their children's schoolwork (38% in 2017 vs 15% in 2002), have learned new parenting skills (36% vs 18%), have learned to use new home management skills (18% vs 4%), are more confident about helping children with homework (34% vs 14%) and are more aware of their contribution to their children's education (66% vs 50%). There is some evidence from a separate item that impacts on parental involvement have been greater among 'target' families (those most disadvantaged) than among other. This is consistent with the first main aim of the scheme which is 'To maximise active participation of the children in the schools of the scheme in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure'.

Other data are suggestive of an impact of the HSCL scheme in ways consistent with the second aim of the scheme, which is 'To promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children'. For example, in indicating what they considered to be the extent of their impact on the community, many agreed that their work had impacted to 'a great extent' in the following areas: cooperation between agencies (58%), greater importance of role of school in the community (52%), greater use of community facilities and services (44%), and greater community spirit (34%). An examination of the responses by level, however, suggest that coordinators in primary schools are more confident of their impact in these areas, with greater percentages of them indicating their role had impacted on the local community 'to a great extent' in each area listed. Where comparative data from 2002 existed, greater percentages of coordinators in 2017 than in 2002 thought that their work had impacted to 'a great extent' in each area. For example, more than twice as many coordinators in 2017 felt that their work had to a great extent led to greater community spirit (32% in 2017 vs 14% in 2002).

A further aim of the HSCL scheme is 'To enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the education system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning'. This aim is reflected also in the DEIS Action Plan (DES, 2005), which states 'In view of the clear link between pupils' attendance patterns and their educational attainment, strategies for improving attendance will be an important element of the planning process to be implemented at both school and school cluster/community level (DES, 2005, p. 41) and that 'A continuing emphasis will be placed on the development of effective transfer programmes by building on the existing work of the HSCL Scheme and the School Completion Programme in this area' (DES, 2005,

p.42). Transfer to third level also featured in the plan, with the intention 'to facilitate inclusive and equitable access to higher education from under-represented groups and promote improved participation by students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds' (DES, 2005, p.46). The DEIS Plan 2017 has built on the 2005 plan and in most areas has set specific targets. For example, in relation to retention there is an acknowledgement of the progress already made in DEIS schools, but it is planned to 'continue to improve retention rates at second level in DEIS schools, from their current rate of 82.7% to the national norm, currently 90.2%, by 2025' (DES, 2017, p.7). The current survey suggests that progress has been made in relation to these aims. In an open-ended item, coordinators were asked to list three areas in which they felt they had made the biggest impact in their roles. While the most common response was increased parent involvement in the school at (70%), matters of attendance, retention and school transfer were listed by 21% as areas in which they had made the biggest difference. In another item, 27% of coordinators indicated that their work had impacted to a great extent on transfer to third level, with a further 42% indicating that that was the case to some extent.

In coordinators' assessments of the factors that had contributed to or hindered the success of the scheme, there was almost universal agreement that support from principals, teachers and parents had contributed to its success (mostly to a 'great extent'). Networking with other coordinators was also considered to have contributed to 'a great extent' to the success of the scheme, as was schools' use of a 'whole-school' approach. Factors that were considered to have represented hindrances to the scheme's success included coordinators' overall workload and in-career development opportunities. There were some differences depending on whether coordinators were working at primary or post-primary level. For example, a larger percentage of primary coordinators (68%) than post-primary coordinators (48%) thought that a 'wholeschool' approach had contributed to the scheme's success 'to a great extent'. This may be related to the fact that primary schools, on average, are smaller than their post-primary counterparts and perhaps this characteristic better facilitates the implementation of a whole-school approach. Comparisons of responses of coordinators in 2001 and 2017 revealed some interesting differences. In 2017, greater percentages of coordinators assessed the available funding, support from other teachers, community involvement in the scheme, and a 'whole school' approach as contributing to the success of the scheme to a great extent than had been the case in 2001. By far the largest difference over time was found for ratings of the extent to which in-career development for coordinators had contributed to the success of the scheme. In 2001, 77% of respondents indicated that this factor had contributed to 'a great extent' compared with only 18% in 2017.

In the main, coordinators in 2017 seemed to be satisfied with the resources and supports (funding, initial teacher education/preservice training) provided under the HSCL scheme. However, there is a fairly widespread view among coordinators that they are not receiving the continuing professional development (CPD) they would like. In 2017, half (50%) of coordinators indicated that they were dissatisfied or very

dissatisfied with the in-career development for coordinators. As this item was also administered in 2001, it permitted change over time to be examined. Data from 2001 indicated that only 3% of coordinators were dissatisfied with in-career development then, indicating a large drop in satisfaction. However, it is worth noting that while HSCL coordinators appointed since 2013 serve a maximum of five years in the role, this was not the case for coordinators in 2001. Coordinators in 2001 would, on the whole, have served longer than five years and would, therefore, have had a larger number of years in which to avail of CPD. Additionally, there was a comprehensive CPD programme annually for coordinators at that time. Due to budgetary constraints and issues relating to managerial capacity, Tusla EWS had not been in a position to offer regional CPD for several years. However, regional CPD resumed in Autumn 2017, after the data for this study were collected. Furthermore, comprehensive induction CPD is offered annually for newly appointed coordinators. Interestingly, coordinators' responses in 2017 indicate that they are largely satisfied with the amount of advice available to them. Unfortunately, the survey did not address the issue of the kinds of CPD that would be considered of most benefit. It would be worth pursuing this issue in more depth, perhaps with a group of coordinators in a focus group setting.

Efforts to increase parents' involvement have featured in all school-level programmes aimed at addressing educational disadvantage in Ireland, from the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and Breaking the Cycle in the 1990s, to Giving Children an Even Break in the early years of this century, and in DEIS since 2005. The HSCL scheme was cited in the OECD Parents as Partners in Schooling study (1997) as being a good example 'of innovative central government initiatives'; further 'It is clear from the Irish experience ... that educational initiatives based in schools can raise the educational level of the adults involved, and result in a general sense of empowerment in the local community. Parental involvement, especially in areas of socio-economic deprivation, does not just benefit the children and the school - it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning.' (OECD, 1997, p.38). The HSCL scheme occupies a place of great importance in the DEIS programme. The findings from the current survey are largely positive, in that the scheme appears to be impacting on students, families and the community in ways that are consistent with its stated aims and objectives. The survey has also identified some challenges, and it would seem important to address these as well as build on the existing strengths. The impact of the HSCL scheme on families with children attending schools in DEIS should continue to be monitored.

References

- Archer, P. & Shortt, F. (2003). *Review of the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme*. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Archer, P., & Sofroniou, N. (2008). The assessment of levels of disadvantage in Primary Schools for DEIS. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Conaty, C. (2002). *Including all: Home, school and community united in education*. Dublin: Veritas.
- Department of Education and Science (2003). Summary of all initiatives funded by the Department to help alleviate educational disadvantage. Dublin: Author.
- Department of Education and Science (2005). *DEIS (Delivering equality of opportunity in schools): An action plan for educational inclusion*. Dublin: Author.
- Department of Education and Science (nd). The Home, School, Community Liaison Scheme in Ireland:

 From vision to best practice. Dublin: Author. Retrieved from https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/HSCL_from_Vision_to_Best_Practice.pdf
- Department of Education and Skills (2011). Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011-2020. Dublin: Author.
- Department of Education and Skills (2017). *DEIS Plan 2017. Delivering equality of opportunity in schools.* Dublin: Author.
- Kavanagh, L. and Weir, S. (2018). *The evaluation of DEIS: The lives and learning of urban primary school pupils, 2007-2016.* Report to the Department of Education and Skills. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Kavanagh, L., Weir, S., & Moran, E. (2017). *The evaluation of DEIS: Achievements and attitudes of students in urban primary schools from 2007 to 2016.* Report to the Department of Education and Skills. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Kelleher, C., & Weir, S. (2017). *The impact of DEIS on class size in urban primary schools in 2014/15 with comparative data from 2010.* Report to the Department of Education and Skills. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- McAvinue, L., & Weir, S. (2015). The evaluation of DEIS at post-primary level: An update on trends over time in achievement and retention. Report to the Department of Education and Skills. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- OECD (1997). Parents as partners in schooling. Paris: Author.
- Ryan, S. (1994). *Home-School-Community Liaison scheme. Final evaluation report.* Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Ryan, S. (1999). *The Home-School-Community Liaison scheme. Summary evaluation report.* (Revised edition). Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S. (2006). A report on the procedures used to identify post-primary schools for inclusion in the School Support Programme under DEIS. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S. & Archer, P. (with O'Flaherty, A, & Gilleece, L.) (2011). A report on the first phase of the evaluation of DEIS. Report to the Department of Education and Skills. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

- Weir, S., Archer, P., & Millar, D. (2009). Analysis of English reading and mathematics achievements in schools in the rural dimension of the School Support Programme. Report to the Department of Education and Science. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S., & Denner, S. (2013). *The evaluation of the School Support Programme under DEIS: Changes in pupil achievement between 2007 and 2013.* Report to the Department of Education and Skills. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S., & McAvinue, L. (2012). *The impact of DEIS on class size in primary schools.* Report to the Department of Education and Skills. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S. & McAvinue, L. (2013). *The achievements and characteristics of pupils attending rural schools participating in DEIS.* Report to the Department of Education and Skills. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S., & Moran, E. (with O'Flaherty, A.) (2014). The organisation of learning support and resource teaching in a sample of urban primary schools serving disadvantaged pupils. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.
- Weir, S., McAvinue, L., Moran, E., & O'Flaherty, A. (2014). A report on the evaluation of DEIS at second level. Report to the Department of Education and Skills. Dublin: Educational Research Centre.