**Monday January 7th, 2019**

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

**‘The evaluation of DEIS at post-primary level: Closing the achievement and attainment gaps’ by Dr Susan Weir and Dr Lauren Kavanagh**

The latest report on the evaluation of the DEIS programme was published today by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) (<https://bit.ly/2SGSgD8>). This report is the most recent in a series on the evaluation of DEIS at post-primary level, and examines trends in achievement and attainment in DEIS and non-DEIS post-primary schools over time using centrally-held data. Student attainment is defined in terms of Junior and Senior cycle retention rates, and student achievement is defined in terms of performance in the Junior Certificate Examination (JCE). The report also describes how student achievement relates to socioeconomic background (using medical card possession as a proxy for low family income) and gender in DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The data were also used to examine whether a ‘social context’ effect operates in schools. Such an effect refers to the extent to which student outcomes in a school are negatively affected by increasing densities of students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, over and above the impact of the student’s own background.

The main findings of the report are as follows:

* Significant positive trends in achievement (overall JCE performance, performance in JCE English and mathematics) were identified across all schools between 2002 and 2017. Significant positive trends over time in attainment were identified in all schools in retention levels to Junior and Leaving Certificate of students in the entry cohorts from 1995 to 2011 (the most recent cohort for which data are available and which would have been expected to have taken the LCE in 2016 or 2017).
* The comparison of the achievements and attainments of students in DEIS and non-DEIS schools is a key element of the evaluation of the programme. In 2002, average achievement and retention was significantly lower in schools that would later be identified for inclusion in DEIS than in schools that did not participate in the programme. While positive trends in achievement and attainment were identified in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools since 2002, there was evidence that improvements in these outcomes were more marked in DEIS than in non-DEIS schools. The average yearly increase in JCE performance scores in English, mathematics and overall, as well as the average yearly increase in percentage of students retained to the JCE and LCE was significantly larger in DEIS than non-DEIS schools, indicating a narrowing of the gaps in the achievement and attainment levels between schools in the programme and other schools. For example, in the 1995 entry cohort of students, 77% of students in non-DEIS schools were retained in the system until the Leaving Certificate, compared to 62% of students in DEIS schools; for the 2011 entry cohort, 90% of students in non-DEIS schools were retained to Leaving Certificate level, compared to 82% of students in DEIS schools.
* Since the introduction of DEIS in the 2006/2007 school year, there have been reductions in the proportion of students in DEIS schools sitting Foundation Level papers in English and mathematics, and increases in the proportion sitting Higher Level papers in these subjects. For example, in 2007 approximately one quarter (24%) of students in DEIS schools who sat the Junior Certificate mathematics examination took a Foundation Level paper. By 2016, this had reduced to 13%. Furthermore, the proportion of DEIS students taking the Higher Level mathematics paper increased from one fifth (19%) in 2007 to one third (33%) in 2016. The data also revealed a significant increase in the magnitude of the positive trend in OPS around the time DEIS resources were introduced in 2007, suggesting that participation in the programme may be implicated in the improvements.
* Rates of medical card possession have increased significantly over time in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools, with a significantly higher rate of increase in DEIS schools than in non-DEIS schools. For example, around the start of the programme, in 2007, just over one fifth (21%) of students in non-DEIS schools were from medical card holding families, compared to approximately half (49%) in DEIS schools. In 2017, the most recent year for which data are available, approximately one third (34%) of students in non-DEIS schools were from medical card holding families, compared to 62% of students in DEIS schools.
* Gender gaps in achievement were in favour of girls in all instances. Gaps were larger in English than in mathematics, where they can be described as very small. On the whole, gender gaps in achievement in DEIS and non-DEIS schools have remained relatively stable since the introduction of the DEIS programme.
* There was evidence of a strong social context effect in post-primary schools in 2016. After controlling for the effects of individual socioeconomic status on achievement, there was a significant effect of school SES on school-level achievement in both JCE English and mathematics. The effect did not differ significantly for girls and boys.
* The fact that our analyses show that the achievement and attainment gaps continue to narrow is very welcome. However, significant gaps still exist and most of those gaps have their basis in income inequality. While this is a societal problem, the impacts are evident in our schools and it is important to continue to provide educational programmes such as DEIS to address the needs of our most marginalised students.

**Notes for editors**

***The DEIS programme***

DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) is the most recent in a series of programmes provided by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) aimed at addressing the needs of educationally disadvantaged students. DEIS has been in operation in Ireland’s schools for over a decade. In 2005, primary schools with the highest levels of disadvantage nationwide were identified by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) for inclusion in DEIS. The programme was introduced in 2006/2007 with the explicit aim of addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. At its centre is an integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which is intended to bring together and build upon existing interventions for schools with a concentrated level of educational disadvantage.

***The evaluation of DEIS***

At the request of the DES, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) began work in 2007 on an independent evaluation of the SSP component of DEIS in urban and rural primary schools and post-primary schools. Like the programme itself, the evaluation is multifaceted, and is attempting to monitor the implementation of the programme and assess its impact on students, families and schools. As well as monitoring the operation of the programme on participating post-primary schools (the subject of the current report), the evaluation has involved data collection from participating primary schools in rural areas and urban areas. Evaluation reports on these are also available (<http://www.erc.ie/studies/deis/>).

***Junior Certificate Examination Overall Performance Scale***

Student performance in the Junior Certificate Examination (JCE) is described in the report using an Overall Performance Scale (OPS) that involves the allocation of numerical values to the alphabetical grades awarded to JCE candidates in individual subjects and summing these values produce an index of a candidate’s general scholastic achievement. Clearly, it is important to continue to monitor educational outcomes in DEIS schools. However, the change to the grading system in Junior Certificate English introduced in 2017, and which it is planned to extend to other subjects in the future, will make it impossible to continue to examine trends in achievement in the way that it has been done in the current report, as the two marking schemes have many differences that make them incomparable.

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