THE ORGANISATION OF THE DELIVERY OF LEARNING SUPPORT AND RESOURCE TEACHING IN A SAMPLE OF URBAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS SERVING DISADVANTAGED PUPILS

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ABSTRACT

A time-sampling approach was used to examine the organisation of learning support in primary school classrooms. Time-sampling data indicated that, despite efforts to promote in-class provision, learning support is primarily delivered to pupils that have been withdrawn from their normal classrooms. The data also revealed that groups, rather than individuals, are more frequently targeted for learning support. The paper describes briefly some other aspects of learning support provision (e.g., targeted areas and grade levels). Time-sampling data provided by class teachers for the study are compared to questionnaire data on the same issue collected from other key personnel in the same schools (principals and learning support teachers). These comparisons reveal large discrepancies between estimates provided by principals and learning support teachers and outcomes in the current study, with withdrawal of pupils being much more common than indicated by principals and learning support teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The provision of learning support at primary level in Ireland

In the course of conducting an evaluation of a programme aimed at addressing educational disadvantage, the Educational Research Centre (ERC) conducted a study of the organisation of learning support in a sample of 1,392 classrooms in 120 urban schools participating in the School Support Programme (SSP) under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools).

Half a century ago (in 1963), the first remedial teaching posts in Irish primary schools were sanctioned. The term 'remedial' carried with it the idea that the aim of such teaching was to rectify a deficiency or correct a disability. Indeed, in the early days, some school authorities resisted the appointment of remedial teachers to their schools on the grounds that the appointment might reflect poorly on their pupils or teachers. This 'deficit' model of remedial education has traditionally focused on low achievement of children in basic skills areas (e.g., targeting pupils achieving below the 10th percentile on a standardised reading test). In more recent years, the Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000) described the aim of learning

support as to 'optimise the teaching and learning process in order to enable pupils with learning difficulties to achieve adequate levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy before leaving primary school' (p. 15). As well as addressing the learning needs of low-achieving pupils, emphasis was placed on prevention (junior infant to second class) and early intervention (senior infant to second class) programmes in the guidelines (DES, 2000).

Traditionally, five categories of children have required additional support from a teacher other than their class teacher: those with low achievement (e.g., with low reading test scores); those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) arising from a high incidence disability (e.g., borderline mild general learning disability or a specific learning disability such as dyslexia); those with a low incidence disability (e.g., those diagnosed as having Autistic Spectrum Disorders); those with poor levels of English (learning English as an Additional Language – EAL); and those from the Travelling Community[1]. Pupils with SEN may be taught in the mainstream classroom, or accommodated in a special class. Such pupils may also attend special schools. For pupils in the other categories above, the dominant model of learning support provision has traditionally been one in which the learning support teacher withdraws individuals or groups of students for short periods in order to provide them with intensive instruction. Schools, however, have considerable discretion in how learning support teaching is organised. Variations on the withdrawal model include learning support teachers engaging in some class teaching or team teaching, co-ordinating English (or mathematics) teaching throughout the school, co-ordinating pupil assessments, and assisting class teachers in planning teaching programmes for lower-achieving pupils. This is sometimes done by means of establishing work stations in the classroom, which enables teachers to work with groups of pupils on separate activities.

A distinction is often drawn between resource teaching and other kinds of learning support. The delivery of resource teaching is similar to that of learning support, and includes one-to-one teaching, small group instruction and team teaching. However, the characteristics of pupils in receipt of resource provision are qualitatively different to those pupils in receipt of learning support. According to Griffin and Shevlin (2007), resource teachers work with pupils who have severe learning difficulties and, who as a result of their difficulties, have received a formal psychological assessment and an Individual Education Plan. The level of

[1] Supports in the form of Resource Teachers for Travellers (RTTs) and Visiting Teachers Service for Travellers (VTS) were withdrawn from August 2011 (i.e., before data for the present study were collected). From then on, Traveller pupils eligible for learning support were to receive tuition through the general learning support system (DES, 2011a).

resource provision required by pupils in this category is usually intensive and offered on a long-term basis. For example, support will usually be provided by the resource teacher to pupils with special educational needs across diverse areas including literacy, the development of life and social skills, and learning strategies (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007).

Pupils in receipt of learning support provision are characterised by specific difficulties in literacy and numeracy. At one stage, it was recommended that those pupils who score at or below the tenth percentile on standardised tests of literacy or numeracy should be offered remedial (learning support) provision (Report of the Special Education Review Committee, 1993). Later guidelines published by the DES (Learning-Support Guidelines, 2000) further emphasised effective whole-school policies and parental involvement, early intervention strategies, the prevention of learning failure, and the channelling of resources towards those pupils in greatest need (p. 14).

Two decades ago, a survey revealed that in the case of 76% of learning support teachers, withdrawal of children for short periods every day was the sole method of organising learning support (Conroy, 1993). A few years later, in a major Irish study of remedial education, Shiel and Morgan (1998) reported that remedial teachers spent 85% of their time teaching individual pupils or groups of pupils who had been withdrawn from their classrooms. The tendency to withdraw students for support is not unique to Ireland. In a study conducted in the United States around the same time, the most common form of learning support provision was withdrawal of groups of children from their regular classrooms (Johnston & Allington, 1991). In the United Kingdom, the Warnock Report on Special Education Needs (Department of Education and Science, 1978) advocated the delivery of learning support within the classroom rather than via withdrawal. However, despite the recommendation being incorporated into subsequent Education Acts in the UK, research carried out a long time after the recommendations were made showed that a majority of teachers continued to operate the system of withdrawal teaching (Duffield, Brown & Riddell, 1995).

There has been a move more recently in Ireland towards promoting the delivery of learning support within pupils' classrooms. The Learning Support Guidelines published in 2000 (DES, 2000) advised against the over-reliance on withdrawing students for support and for involving the class teacher and the learning support teacher in the student's regular classroom (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007). In a circular released to schools by the DES in 2003, the

recommendation that children with special needs be mainstreamed and that learning support should be delivered within the classroom was made explicit:

> …children…need to belong to a peer group and to mix with children of different abilities in a variety of situations. Research on mixed ability teaching illustrates that children of lower ability benefit greatly and children of average or above ability are not academically disadvantaged. However, the practice has developed in recent years of using resource hours for individual tuition only. An exclusive reliance on this approach is contrary to the principle of integration in teaching and learning. Wherever possible, schools should provide additional help for children in the mainstream classroom or, if necessary, in small groups. This will also have the effect of minimising the disruption to the normal class programme that can happen if individual children are being withdrawn at different times for tuition (DES, 2003).

In 2005, a new model of allocating additional teaching resources to schools – the General Allocation Model (GAM) – was introduced (DES, 2005a). The GAM replaced the previous system of resource teaching which was based on individual applications for each child with special educational needs. The new system provided each school with a permanent allocation of learning support staff based on various categories of school (e.g., more favourable allocations were given to schools that only had boys enrolled, or were in the SSP under DEIS). The learning support/resource teaching hours under the GAM were to be used for supporting pupils in the following categories: low achievers (e.g., those below the 10th percentile); those with high incidence disabilities (e.g., those with specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia / borderline mild or mild general learning disabilities); and those with learning difficulties (e.g., those with mild speech and language or social or emotional disorders). The GAM did not provide for pupils with low incidence disabilities (e.g., those diagnosed as having Autistic Spectrum Disorders). Children in this group were allocated hours separately, subsequent to application following diagnosis. The circular that introduced the GAM also emphasised that 'effective additional teaching support for literacy and numeracy can usually be provided in small group situations either within the classroom or by withdrawal to another room' and that all additional support 'will build on and complement the support planned for and delivered by the class teacher'. In 2012, the GAM was refined somewhat to give schools more autonomy on how to deploy teaching resources between language support and learning support/high incidence SEN (special education needs), with additional support being provided for schools with high concentrations of

pupils requiring language support[2]. In June 2014, a report of a Working Group established by the Minister for Education and Skills contained a proposal to replace the GAM and the method of allocating teachers to support pupils with low incidence conditions. At the time of writing, this proposal is being considered.

The shift away from a reliance on the withdrawal method of delivering learning support has been particularly promoted by the DES Inspectorate. In schools in which there are concentrations of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, the Inspectorate has recommended a more co-ordinated and integrated service for children with learning difficulties, and advocated that class teachers and learning-support or resource teachers collaborate on a formal basis to plan the delivery of focused learning programmes (DES, 2005b). More recently, the Department's literacy and numeracy strategy contained an explicit recommendation that in-class support for children identified as having difficulties in literacy and numeracy is provided by learning support teachers in junior infant classes from 2013 onwards (DES, 2011b).

Methodological considerations in the planning of the present study

Many studies of classroom organisation rely on self reports (such as responses to interviews or questionnaires) by classroom teachers or by those involved in the provision of other support. Indeed, in the present study, learning support teachers and principals responded to questionnaires containing a limited number of questions about the organisation of learning support teaching in their school and some of the data gathered will be summarised later in the present report. As surveys normally rely on respondents retrospectively recalling what happened at a particular point in time, or recalling a state of affairs in general, respondents may be susceptible to influences that reduce the validity of the data gathered (e.g., inaccurate recall, tendency to favour socially desirable responses) (Schwarz & Oyserman, 2001). Surveys delivered and returned by post often suffer from poor response rates further reducing the validity of the data captured. Other methods, such as observational studies, overcome some of the problems associated with self reports, but have the disadvantage of being very labour-intensive. The time-consuming and labour-intensive nature of the observational approach greatly limits the size and representativeness of samples in research of this kind. Furthermore,

[2] Over the past decade, large increases in the numbers of migrant children enrolling in Irish schools necessitated the expansion of services to support these students in boosting their English language skills. Many schools in the urban dimension of the SSP, the schools that comprise the sample in the present study, have large numbers of migrant pupils.

the presence of observers in classrooms may well impact on those being observed in ways that affect the validity of the data being gathered (Yoder & Symons, 2010).

The present study sought to minimise the influence of such extraneous factors by requiring class teachers to participate in a momentary time-sampling study of learning support practices, in which teachers recorded what was happening to students in their class at one of seven predetermined time points during the school day. This approach has the advantage of making the study possible in a large number of classrooms during a single day, thereby placing very minimal demands on the classroom teacher. It also has the advantage of being completed at a single point in time during the school day that can be varied across teachers and grade levels within schools. The existence of data from others (principals and learning support teachers) on the organisation of learning support permits information from the three sources to be combined and compared.

Aims of the present study

The main aim of the study was to gain insights into how learning support is organised in schools. Among the issues to be investigated were: the extent to which support is given to pupils within their normal classroom as opposed to being provided outside the classroom; whether individuals or groups are targeted; the areas in which learning support is delivered, and the frequency with which it is delivered within those areas. The study also yields some data on pupils absences from class for reasons other than learning support.

The context of the present study

The ERC began an evaluation of the SSP under the DEIS programme in early 2007. The evaluation is attempting to monitor the implementation of the programme and assess its impact on students, families, and schools at primary and post-primary levels. A report on the first phase of the evaluation in urban primary schools (Weir & Archer, 2011) contained evidence on the outcome of two rounds of testing in reading and mathematics in a sample of 120 urban SSP schools between 2007 and 2010. Further follow-up data were collected in 2013. Test data gathered revealed that, while the achievements of pupils in the sampled schools were well below those of the norm group, improvements had occurred in both reading and mathematics at all grade levels tested between 2007 and 2010, with further gains observed in 2013 (Weir & Denner, 2013). As a follow up to the testing in 2010, each of the schools in the sample was visited in late 2011 or early 2012 by a member of staff from the ERC or by a

specially trained fieldworker. This visit afforded the opportunity to collect time-sampling data for the present study from classroom teachers on the organisation of learning support in each of their classrooms. It is hoped that these data will allow for an analysis, among other things, of the potential relationships between pupil achievement – in particular increases in average test scores at school level between 2007 and 2010, and 2010 and 2013 – and the organisation of learning support.

METHOD

Sample

Class teachers in a sample of 119[3] urban schools in the DEIS programme participated. DEIS is the most recent programme aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. The programme was introduced by the DES in 2006/2007, and most primary schools received some additional funding under DEIS. The funding allocated varies depending on the level of disadvantage (indicated by the percentage of pupils fulfilling a variety of criteria based on their home backgrounds) and the total enrolment of the school[4]. About 340 urban primary, 340 rural primary, and 200 second level schools that were assessed as having the highest levels of disadvantage were invited to participate in the most intensive component of DEIS known as the SSP. Under the urban dimension of the SSP at primary level, schools were divided into two 'bands' depending on their assessed level of disadvantage. Some supports (e.g., reduced class size) are restricted to schools in Band 1 (about 200 schools) in light of their having greater concentrations of disadvantage than those in Band 2[5].

In our sample of 119 schools, 70 schools were in Band 1 and 49 were in Band 2. The presence of a fieldworker in the school on the day the data were gathered helped to ensure a very high response rate from teachers. Of the 1,412 sheets distributed and class teachers, 1,392 were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 98.6%. Following data cleaning procedures, 76 teacher responses were excluded from the database because they contained impossible or improbable values. It is also worth noting that the sample was comprised of both multi-grade and single-grade classes. Unless otherwise indicated, the analyses in this

[3] There were 120 schools in the original sample but two of these schools amalgamated after the collection of baseline data in 2007.
[4] For more information on the identification of schools for participation in DEIS, see Archer and Sofroniou (2008).
[5] For more information on the DEIS programme, see www.education.ie.

report exclude multi-grade classes, because the total number of such classes is too small to facilitate meaningful comparisons between grades (*n*=91 classes; 1,917 pupils)[6].

Instrument

The instrument used to collect the data is short (comprising one double-sided A4 page) and was designed to get a picture of what was happening at a given moment in the classroom (see Appendix 1). While the main interest for present purposes is in the organisation of learning support (withdrawal or in-class), the instrument was designed to also yield information on general movement of pupils and teachers, both in and out of the classroom. Each sheet had an assigned 'time' indicated at the top of the page, at which time the teachers were instructed to complete it. There were seven different time slots in all, each of which was specified with reference to various breaks and start and end times during the day (e.g., 20 minutes before lunch break, 15 minutes before the end of the school day, etc.). Each teacher filled in one sheet, on which was indicated one of the possible seven timeslots. Among other things, teachers were asked to record the number of pupils on the roll, the number of pupils present on the day, and the number of pupils who were temporarily absent at the time the form was filled out. Further questions were designed to establish where the temporarily absent pupils were at that point in time. Teachers were asked to indicate if the absence was for learning support or if the pupils had gone on an errand or on a toilet break. If the reason was for learning support, they were then asked to indicate the type of learning support the pupils were receiving, whether it was on a one-to-one basis or in a group. These questions are located on the first page of the instrument. The two questions on the second page relate to traffic *into* the classroom (i.e., other teacher/s in the classroom and any other adult/s in the classroom working with the pupils).

It was originally intended that one classroom teacher in each school (i.e., 2nd class teachers) would complete the sheet. However, following a try-out of the questionnaire in a few DEIS schools outside of the sample, it was decided that all classroom teachers should be given the opportunity to participate. There were two main reasons for this decision. First, the sheet itself is relatively simple and does not take much time to complete. Second, it would provide data for the whole school rather than a single grade level. The instrument was further piloted in

[6] There were 24 missing or ambiguous entries for the variable 'Grade level' and these were also excluded from analysis (*n*=24 classes; 530 pupils).

three schools in the sample proper prior to the fieldworkers' visits to the remaining 116 schools. Some small and non-substantive changes were subsequently made to the instrument.

Procedure

As already mentioned, the administration of the study of classroom organisation was part of a larger data collection exercise during school visits carried out by fieldworkers engaged by the ERC. Other elements of the school visits included an interview with the principal, the dissemination of a questionnaire for learning support and resource teachers, and a short questionnaire for the principal containing questions relating to how they spend their time, and to challenges they face in running their schools. In all cases, the data were collected over the course of a day's visit to each of the 119 schools.

The fourteen fieldworkers hired for the exercise were retired primary school principals, some of whom had previously been involved in data collection for the ERC as part of the evaluation of the SSP. Many of the fieldworkers had themselves worked in schools in the SSP. The individual fieldworkers were chosen on a geographical basis to reduce the amount of travelling involved to carry out the visits. Each fieldworker attended a training day at the ERC during which they were briefed on their role, and on each of the instruments involved. They each received a list of schools to visit along with a manual of instructions relating to the school visit. They also brought away all the necessary materials and instruments with them for each of their schools. Staff from the ERC accompanied the fieldworkers on a number of the school visits which took place mainly during November and December of 2011, although the last few were not conducted until January 2012. On the day of the visit to a school, the fieldworker's first task was to ensure that each teacher had a copy of the instrument so that those with very early timeslots (i.e., those requiring completion 40 minutes after the start of the school day) were able to complete them. The sheets themselves were distributed at random in the sense they were printed and ordered sequentially according to time slot. The fieldworker simply had to hand the next sheet off the pile in turn to each teacher encountered. At the end of the visit, it was normally possible for the fieldworker to collect all completed sheets before leaving the school. Teacher absences on the day of the visit were not problematic, as the sheets were completed by whoever was taking the class (in some cases substitute teachers).

Other Data Sources

In the next section, results relating to twelve questions are presented. Data from the time-sampling method just described are used to answer the first ten questions. However, in the case of the final two, data from other sources are used. Each of these other data sources is described briefly here.

The first additional source of data is a principal interview. Principal interviews were conducted in 2011 with 118 out of the sample of 119 principals in DEIS schools who were involved in the achievement testing in 2007 and 2010 (and, indeed, subsequently in 2013). The interview combined both closed and open-ended questions, and topics covered included school planning, progress towards targets identified in an earlier questionnaire (2008), and more general aspects of DEIS and its impact on the school.

As part of the same data gathering exercise, a questionnaire was given to 559 learning support and resource teachers (response rate of 97%). The questionnaire sought information about pupils in receipt of learning support and/or resource teaching, the organisation of learning support/resource teachers' work and teachers' opinions of the DEIS programme.

The third source of data was generated by a questionnaire which was sent to all 336 urban primary school principals in the SSP in February 2014 (response rate of 65%). The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain further insight from school principals into the positive achievement outcomes which have been found in SSP schools since baseline data were collected in 2007.

The final source of data is feedback from a series of nationwide seminars for urban primary school principals participating in the SSP that took place in March 2014. In total, 163 principals (or, in a small number of cases, their representatives) attended a seminar. This represents slightly under half of the total number of DEIS principals invited. The seminars presented an overview of the SSP evaluation, followed by a brief synopsis of the findings to date, and an opportunity for feedback and discussion by the principals. As most of the data presented here concerns a sample of just 119 of the 336 urban primary schools participating in the SSP, the seminars provided the added advantage of obtaining feedback from some principals whose schools were outside that sample.

RESULTS

The outcomes of the study will be described as responses to a set of questions about the delivery of learning support in the sampled schools.

It is useful to clarify at this point a couple of terms which will be referred to in the results section: the *percentage of classroom teachers reporting withdrawal of pupils* and the *percentage of pupils withdrawn*. The *percentage of classroom teachers reporting withdrawal of pupils* refers to the percentage of classroom teachers in the sample who reported pupils as withdrawn from the class. The *percentage of pupils withdrawn* refers to the average percentage of pupils recorded as being withdrawn from the class.

It should also be note that, in the remainder of this report, the term 'learning support' is used to refer to what used to be termed remedial teaching, resource teaching, and language support.

1. From how many classrooms had pupils been withdrawn for learning support?

Across all grades, approximately 35% (*n*=419) of classroom teachers indicated that one or more pupils had been withdrawn for learning support at the time the instrument was completed (Table 1). Thus, the majority of teachers did not indicate having pupils withdrawn for learning support at the time the instrument was completed. In the sub-sample of classes in which withdrawal for learning support did occur, the percentage of pupils withdrawn across all classes was 16.5% (Table 2). When the whole sample of classes is included in the analysis (including those classes where no withdrawal occurred), the percentage of pupils withdrawn falls to 5.9% of the sample of all pupils in the classes studied.

2. At what grade levels were pupils most commonly withdrawn for learning support?

Withdrawal for learning support occurs very infrequently in junior infant classes: only 16% of the sample of junior infant class teachers indicated that withdrawal for learning support occurred at the time of the survey (*n*=23 teachers) (Table 1). Withdrawal for learning support occurred most frequently at 3rd class followed by 1st class (43% and 40% of teachers respectively).

The lowest percentages of pupils withdrawn from the whole sample of classes occurred at the two junior classes, with junior infant and senior infant classes having 2.3% and 4.5%, respectively, of pupils withdrawn at these grade levels. The highest percentages of pupils withdrawn for learning support in the whole sample of classes occurred at 5th, 4th and 1st class (7.7%, 6.8% and 6.8% of pupils respectively). Within the subsample of classes in which

TABLE 1
The number of teachers in the study, and the percentage of teachers who had at least one pupil withdrawn for learning support, by grade level.

	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total (all grades)
No. of teachers in the study	143	117	115	139	172	161	169	178	1,194
% of teachers who had at least one pupil withdrawn for L.S.	16.1%	30.8%	40.0%	36.7%	43.0%	39.1%	39.6%	33.1%	35.1%

TABLE 2
The number of pupils in the classes studied, the number of pupils in classes in which at least one pupil was withdrawn for learning support, the number of pupils withdrawn, and the number of pupils withdrawn as a) a percentage of all the pupils in the classes studied, and b) as a percentage of pupils in classes in which at least one pupil was withdrawn for learning support.

	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total (all grades)
No. of pupils in classes studied	2,503	2,229	2,218	2,715	3,665	3,451	3,631	3,671	24,083
No. of pupils in classes in which at least one pupil was withdrawn for L.S	470	658	897	1038	1585	1353	1393	1184	8578
No. of pupils withdrawn	58	101	151	132	243	234	278	223	1,420
Pupils withdrawn as a % of (a) all pupils in classes studied	2.3%	4.5%	6.8%	4.9%	6.6%	6.8%	7.7%	6.1%	5.9%
(b) pupils in classes in which at least one pupil was withdrawn for L.S.	12.3%	15.3%	16.8%	12.7%	15.3%	17.3%	20.0%	18.8%	16.5%

withdrawal occurred, the highest numbers of pupils withdrawn for learning support occurred in 5th and 6th class, with an average of almost a fifth of pupils being withdrawn from the class at each of these grade levels (20% and 18.8% respectively).

It will be recalled that the survey sheets were to be completed by teachers at seven different timeslots. Analysis revealed that there were no major differences between individual timeslots. In particular, no differences emerged when the timeslots, before and after lunch, were compared. Across all grades, the percentage of pupils withdrawn from the whole sample was 3.1% before lunch compared with 2.8% after lunch.

3. Was learning support most frequently delivered to individual pupils or groups of pupils?

Groups of pupils were withdrawn for learning support more frequently than were individuals (Table 3). For example, across all grades just over a quarter (*n*=306) of classroom teachers indicated that groups had been withdrawn for learning support at the time of instrument completion, compared with approximately one in eight (*n*=152) teachers reporting that individuals had been withdrawn. (However, it should be recalled that in the majority of classes, neither group nor individual withdrawal was taking place).

An exception to the trend occurred in 1st class, where the withdrawal of individuals occurred more frequently across classrooms than the withdrawal of groups. One quarter of the sample of 1st class teachers (*n*=29) indicated that individual pupils had been withdrawn compared with almost 1 in 5 (*n*=22) 1st class teachers indicating that groups had been withdrawn. Despite individual withdrawal occurring more frequently, the total number of pupils in receipt of group support is still greater (91 pupils were withdrawn for group support across 22 classrooms whereas 60 pupils were withdrawn individually across 29 classrooms).

Not surprisingly, the percentage of pupils withdrawn is, in all cases, higher for groups than for individuals. The average number of pupils withdrawn in groups across classes is 3.76 pupils, and the average number of pupils withdrawn from classes on an individual basis for learning support is 1.77.

TABLE 3
Percentage of teachers reporting withdrawal of individuals and groups for learning support, and percentage of pupils withdrawn (mean percentage withdrawn in total sample, for individual and group) and total number of pupils withdrawn for individual and group support, by grade level.

1 to 1 Learning Support	**Junior Infant (*N*=143)**	**Senior Infant (*N*=117)**	**1st (*N*=115)**	**2nd (*N*=139)**	**3rd (*N*=172)**	**4th (*N*=161)**	**5th (*N*=169)**	**6th (*N*=178)**	**Total (all grades) (*N*=1,194)**
% teachers reporting withdrawal - 1 to 1	**4.9%**	**16.2%**	**25.2%**	**15.8%**	**13.4%**	**8.7%**	**11.8%**	**10.1%**	**12.7%**
Percentage of pupils withdrawn- individuals (Sum) (Sample)	0.3% (8) (2,503)	1.0% (23) (2,229)	2.7% (60) (2,218)	1.3% (35) (2,715)	1.2% (45) (3,665)	0.7% (26) (3,451)	1.2% (42) (3,631)	0.8% (30) (3,671)	1.1% (269) (24,083)
Group Learning Support	**Junior Infant (*N*=143)**	**Senior Infant (*N*=117)**	**1st (*N*=115)**	**2nd (*N*=139)**	**3rd (*N*=172)**	**4th (*N*=161)**	**5th (*N*=169)**	**6th (*N*=178)**	**Total (all grades) (*N*=1,194)**
% teachers reporting withdrawal - Group	**13.3%**	**17.1%**	**19.1%**	**22.3%**	**33.7%**	**34.2%**	**31.9%**	**26.4%**	**25.6%**
Percentage of pupils withdrawn- group (Sum) (Sample)	2.0% (50) (2,503)	3.5% (78) (2,229)	4.1% (91) (2,218)	3.6% (97) (2,715)	5.4% (198) (3,665)	6.0% (208) (3,451)	6.5% (236) (3,631)	5.3% (193) (3,671)	4.8% (1,151) (24,083)

4. What was the most common type of support provided to pupils withdrawn from their classrooms?

Pupils may be withdrawn from the classroom for many reasons, including the following: literacy support, numeracy support, resource teaching, and English language support. In this section, the data for both individual and group support are combined across each area to provide an overall result by grade level and by type of support[7]. The percentage of pupils withdrawn by type of support is reported for the overall sample only.

The most common reason for withdrawing pupils from their classrooms was to provide them with learning support in literacy. Almost one teacher in five (18.1%; *n*=216), indicated that one or more of her or his pupils had been withdrawn for support in literacy at the time of the survey. Literacy support occurred most frequently in 1st and 2nd class, where approximately one quarter (25.2%) of the sample of classroom teachers reported pupils had been withdrawn for this reason. Literacy learning support occurred very infrequently at the two junior classes, with only 6 junior infant and 15 senior infant class teachers reporting that they had pupils withdrawn for support in literacy.

Learning support in numeracy occurred less than half as frequently in the sample than literacy learning support. Across all grades, 94 teachers (7.9% of the sample) indicated that pupils had been withdrawn for support in numeracy. In the junior classes, numeracy learning support did not occur at all at junior infant level, and was almost non-existent at senior infant level (with 0.0% and 0.8% of classes involved respectively). Numeracy learning support occurred most frequently at 5th and 1st class (12.4% and 12.2% of teachers reporting withdrawal of pupils, respectively).

More than one in ten teachers (12%; *n*=146) in the sample indicated that pupils had been withdrawn for resource teaching. Resource teaching occurred most frequently at 3rd and 5th class (16.9% and 17.2% of the sample of classroom teachers at these grade levels reported pupils withdrawn for this reason). The highest numbers of pupils withdrawn for resource teaching were also recorded for 3rd and 5th class (the percentage of pupils withdrawn at 1.4% and 1.2% of the total sample at these grade levels respectively). The percentage of junior infant classroom teachers reporting resource teaching is very low (*n*=8 teachers), and this grade level also has the lowest percentage of pupils withdrawn from the class for resource teaching (0.4%).

[7] Overall numbers are too small to make a comparison of individual and group learning support for each subject.

Just over 7% (*n*=86) of teachers, across all grades in the sample, indicated that pupils had been withdrawn for English language support (EAL). This type of support occurred most frequently at junior level, from junior infant, through to senior infant and 1st class (8.4%, 10.3%, and 12.2% of teachers at these grade levels reporting withdrawal of pupils).

5. To what extent was learning support provided within pupils' classrooms?

In order to gauge the levels of in-class learning support, teachers were asked to indicate whether there was another teacher currently present in the classroom at the time they completed the instrument. Teachers were asked (a) whether that teacher was providing learning support or resource teaching, and if so, (b) the number of pupils they were teaching. A relatively small percentage of classes were in receipt of in-class support: 92 teachers (7.7%) across all grades indicated that this form of support was taking place at the time of the survey (Table 4). More than nine classes in every ten had no in-class support taking place at the time. However, in those classes in which in-class support was being delivered, an average of more than two fifths of pupils (42%) in the classroom were involved (Table 5). When the whole sample is included (i.e., classes where in-class support was not occurring) the figure falls to 3.3% of all pupils in the sample receiving in-class support.

As there was wide variation among classes in the percentage of pupils who were in receipt of in-class support (ranging from a low of 4.8% to a maximum of 100%), it is useful to examine measures of central tendency other than the mean. This reveals that 100% was the most frequently occurring value in the dataset (mode), with 15 out of 92 classroom teachers indicating that all pupils in the class were in receipt of in-class support. The median percentage value of pupils in receipt of in-class support was 30%. The range along with the mean, median and modal values indicate that, in those classes in which in-class support was occurring, there was considerable variation in the extent to which that support was targeted, but that a high percentage of pupils (frequently all) tended to be the focus.

6. Was withdrawal more common than in-class support?

The time-sampling data revealed that in-class support (7.7%, *n*=92 teachers) was less common than withdrawal (35.1%, *n*=419 teachers). In fact, the withdrawal method of delivering learning support was almost five times more common than in-class support. The percentage of pupils withdrawn was approximately twice the percentage in receipt of in-class support: across all grades, time-sampling data indicated that 5.9% of the class were

TABLE 4
The number of teachers in the study, and the percentage of teachers who had at least one pupil in receipt of in-class support, by grade level.

	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total (all grades)
No. of teachers in the study	143	117	115	139	172	161	169	177	1,193
% of teachers who had at least one pupil in receipt of in-class support	8.4%	8.5%	13.0%	6.5%	7.6%	6.2%	4.7%	8.5%	7.7%

TABLE 5
The number of pupils in the classes studied, the number of pupils in classes in which at least one pupil was in receipt of in-class support, the number of pupils in receipt of in-class support, and the number of pupils in receipt of in-class support as a) a percentage of all the pupils in the classes studied, and b) as a percentage of pupils in classes in which at least one pupil was in receipt of in-class support.

	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Total (all grades)
No. of pupils in classes studied	2,503	2,229	2,218	2,715	3,665	3,451	3,631	3,653	24,065
No. of pupils in classes in which at least one pupil was in receipt of in-class support	209	197	268	174	277	194	166	304	1789
No. of pupils in receipt of in-class support	65	67	153	119	116	41	59	131	751
Pupils in receipt of in-class support as a % of (a) all pupils in classes studied	2.6%	3.0%	6.9%	4.4%	3.2%	1.2%	1.6%	3.6%	3.1%
(b) pupils in classes in which at least one pupil was in receipt of in-class support	31.1%	34.0%	57.1%	68.4%	41.9%	21.1%	35.5%	43.1%	42.0%

withdrawn compared with 3.1% of the class receiving in-class support. When individual grades are examined, it is clear that the percentage of pupils withdrawn for learning support was higher in most instances than for in-class support. The difference is especially marked in 4th and 5th class. At 4th class, the percentage of pupils withdrawn was over five times greater than the percentage of pupils in receipt of in-class support (6.8% of the class were withdrawn compared with 1.2% of the class receiving in-class support). The picture is similar in 5th class (7.7% of the class were withdrawn compared with 1.6% of the class receiving in-class support). Exceptions occurred at junior infant and 1st class where the percentages of pupils in receipt of in-class support were slightly higher than the percentages of pupils withdrawn.

7. At what grade levels were pupils most commonly receiving in-class support?

In-class support occurred most frequently in 1st class, with an average of 13% of 1st class teachers reporting that in-class support was taking place. A large percentage of the class, on average just over half of the class (57.1%), was reported to be receiving in-class support in the subsample of classes where such support took place. When the whole sample is included in the analysis, almost 7% of the pupils in 1st class were involved. Where in-class support occurred in 2nd, 3rd and 6th class, teachers indicated that large percentages of the class were receiving support (68.4%, 41.9% and 43.1% of pupils respectively).

8. How frequently were pupils temporarily absent from the classroom for reasons other than to receive learning support?

Just under a fifth of the total sample of classroom teachers (*n*=216 teachers) indicated that pupils were temporarily absent for 'other reasons' at the time the instrument was completed (Table 6). The average percentage of pupils that were temporarily absent for 'other reasons' is 2.3%. When only those classes where temporary absence for 'other reasons' occurred are included, the average percentage of pupils temporarily absent rises to 13.3%.

Temporary absence for 'other reasons' was most common in 6th class, with almost a quarter of classroom teachers indicating that this was true of their class. Sixth class also had the highest average percentage of pupils (3.8%) temporarily absent for 'other reasons'. When only those classes where temporary absence for 'other reasons' occurred are considered, the average percentage of pupils temporarily absent for 6th class rises to 17.9%. The lowest average percentages of temporary absence occurred in the junior classes, at junior infant (1.3%) and senior infant level (1.2%).

TABLE 6
Percentage of teachers reporting temporary absence from the classroom for 'other reasons', the mean percentage of pupils temporarily absent, the total number of pupils absent, and the total number in the sample, at each grade level.

Sample	**Jun. Infant (*N*=143)**	**Sen. Infant (*N*=117)**	**1st (*N*=115)**	**2nd (*N*=139)**	**3rd (*N*=172)**	**4th (*N*=161)**	**5th (*N*=169)**	**6th (*N*=178)**	**Total (all grades) (*N*=1,194)**
% teachers reporting temporary absence	**11.2%**	**16.2%**	**19.1%**	**17.3%**	**15.7%**	**16.1%**	**22.5%**	**24.7%**	**18.1%**
Mean % temp absent – subsample (Sum)	11.4% (33)	7.4% (26)	14.0% (60)	13.6% (57)	14.8% (82)	15.2% (82)	8.8% (80)	17.9% (138)	13.3% (558)
Mean % temp absent – total sample (Sample)	1.3% (2,503)	1.2% (2,229)	2.7% (2,218)	2.1% (2,715)	2.2% (3,665)	2.4% (3,451)	2.2% (3,631)	3.8% (3,671)	2.3% (24,083)

9. For what reasons were pupils temporarily absent from the classroom (other than for receiving learning support)?

Reasons for the temporary absence of pupils are given in Table 7. More than a quarter of pupils were engaged in school activities[8] (25.4%), while somewhat smaller percentages were attending another subject[9] (14.2%), or taking a toilet break (13.6%). It should be noted that a relatively large proportion of pupils (7.9%) were categorised as attending a workshop/resource[10] in the 'other reasons' section of the instrument, even though there was already an existing category on the questionnaire to indicate that pupils were absent due to attendance at learning support.

TABLE 7
Other reasons given for pupils' temporary absence from the classroom, and the percentage and total number of pupils across all grade levels who were temporarily absent.

Other Reason	Percentage (%)	Total No. of Pupils
School activity[11]	25.4	142
Other subject[12]	14.2	79
Toilet break	13.6	76
Gone on an errand	8.6	48
Attending workshop/resource[13]	7.9	44
Medical Appointment	6.6	37
Other	5.7	32
Meeting with another teacher/professional[14]	5.0	28
Illness/injury	4.3	24
Discipline-related matter	3.8	21
Gone home early	2.9	16
Not specified	1.3	7
Absent	0.7	4
Total	**100**	**558**

[8] Examples of school activities are as follows: choir practice, sports, breakfast, and lunch clubs.
[9] Examples of attending another subject include: maths streaming, woodwork.
[10] Examples of workshop/resource include: reading recovery, school completion, shared reading.
[11] For example, choir practice, school trip, sports.
[12] For example, maths streaming, music lesson, special class.
[13] For example, reading recovery, school completion, literacy lift-off.
[14] For example, counsellor, social worker, play therapist.

10. What were levels of classroom traffic like, in general?

Classroom traffic may be thought of as the movement in and out of pupils' regular classrooms of pupils themselves, and of others, including teachers and other adults.

Across all grades, the incidence of temporary absence for any reason whatsoever was high: the data revealed that in just over 45% of classrooms one or more pupils was temporarily absent at the time the instrument was completed (*n*=539 teachers). In these 539 classrooms, the average level of temporary absence across all grades was almost a fifth of pupils (18.1%). This includes temporary absence for the purposes of attending learning support and temporary absence for 'other reasons' (Table 7). When the whole sample is included (including classes where no temporary absences were recorded), the average temporary absence level was approximately one in twelve pupils (8.2%). Therefore, across all grades, 91.8% of pupils were present within the class at the time of instrument completion. The highest overall levels of temporary absence occurred in the two senior classes (5th and 6th class, 9.9% and 9.8%, respectively), and in 1st class (9.5%).

Assessing levels of classroom traffic also needs to take account of others temporarily present in the classroom. With this in mind, teachers were asked to indicate whether there were other adults present in the classroom. Specifically, they were asked to indicate a) whether there was another teacher present in the classroom or b) whether there were any other adults in the room. Across all grades, just over 14% (*n*=176) of classes in the sample had another teacher present in the classroom, and when examined by grade level, most classes were close to this figure. Exceptions occurred at 1st and 5th class. Another teacher was present most frequently in 1st class, with just over 22% (*n*=26) of 1st class teachers indicating that there was another teacher present in the room. As reported earlier (see Question 7), 13% (*n*=15) of 1st class teachers reported that another teacher was providing learning support within the class. An analysis of the responses of the remaining 1st class teachers (9%; *n*=11) who indicated that there was another teacher present reveals that most were not providing learning support. However, a minority of 1st class teachers (3.5%, *n*=4) did not correctly classify the activities of the other teachers as being involved in in-class learning support, such as station teaching (2 teachers), literacy in-class support activity (1 teacher), co-teaching with a maths recovery teacher (1 teacher), and numeracy in-class support (Maths Blast) (1 teacher). Fifth class was least likely to have another teacher present, with just over 11% (*n*=19) of these teachers indicating that there was another teacher present in the room.

The number of teachers in the sample indicating that there was one or more other adults (as opposed to another teacher) present in the classroom was much higher. Across all grades, 28.5% (*n*=342) of classes had one or more other adults present in the room. About a third of junior infant, 3rd, and 1st classes had one or more other adults present in the classroom (34.3%, 32.9%, and 30.2%, respectively). Table 8 presents the main categories of other adults in classrooms, and the percentage of classes in which they were present. SNAs were by far the most common category, with almost 75% of those classes which stated that there was another adult having an SNA present. Rarely, teachers indicated that there was more than one other adult present (e.g., a SNA and a student teacher). However, as this was an infrequent occurrence, it has not been tabulated here.

Analysis was also carried out on the number of teachers who indicated that there was both another teacher and one or more other adults present in the classroom. Across all grades, just over 6% (*n*=76) of classes had two or more other adults present in the room, **apart from** the classroom teacher (i.e., another teacher and one or more other adults). First and 3rd class had the most people present, with approximately 1 in 11 classes at these grade levels having two or more other adults present in the room, other than the classroom teacher (9.5% and 8.7% respectively).

TABLE 8
Categories of other adults, and the percentage of classes in which those categories were present.

Other Adult(s) present in the Class	**% (*n*=337)**
Special Needs Assistant (SNA)	74.8
Student Teacher	9.5
Student on work experience/placement	3.3
Classroom/Teaching Assistant	1.8
Other Teacher(s)	2.1
Learning Support/Resource/In-class Support Teacher[15]	1.2
Parents	0.6
Other	6.8

[15] Learning Support/Resource/In-class Support Teachers should have been counted in a question on the instrument (see Questions 2(a), 2(b) and 2(c) in Appendix 1).

11. How much agreement is there concerning the extent of withdrawal of pupils for learning support among teachers, principals and learning support teachers?

There are three independent sources of information regarding the delivery of learning support in our sample of 119 schools. The first source (described already), and derived from the current time-sampling study, is classroom teachers. The second is principals who, as part of an interview, were asked to estimate the breakdown between withdrawal and in-class learning support in their schools (Table 9). The third source is learning support and resource teachers themselves, who provided data on the issue in their responses to a questionnaire in 2011. Both the principal interview and learning support questionnaire were described earlier in the Method section. According to principals, delivering learning support by withdrawing pupils from the classroom was most common, with almost half of principals (44%) indicating that either pupils were always withdrawn for support or that pupils were mostly withdrawn for support. Approximately two-fifths of principals (39.7%) reported that there was an equal balance between in-class and withdrawal for learning support. In-class learning support was perceived to occur less frequently than withdrawal: only about one in six principals (16.4%) indicating that support was either mostly or entirely delivered within the classroom in their school.

TABLE 9
Principals' estimates of how much learning support is provided in-class and by withdrawal (*N*=116).

Entirely withdrawal	Mostly withdrawal with some in-class support	About half in-class and half withdrawal	Mostly in- class support with some withdrawal	Entirely in-class
4.3%	39.7%	39.7%	14.7%	1.7%

Learning support and resource teachers responded to a similar question in a questionnaire designed to glean information on the structure and organisation of learning support (Table 10).

TABLE 10
Learning support and resource teachers' estimates of how much learning support is provided in-class and by withdrawal (*N*=519), and the ideal amount of time spent on each (*N*=517).

	Entirely withdrawal	Mostly withdrawal with some in-class support	More or less equal balance between withdrawal & in-class	Mostly in-class with some withdrawal	Entirely in- class
Estimate	4.8%	56.8%	26.8%	11.0%	0.6%
Ideal	1.2%	37.9%	44.7%	16.1%	0.2%

It is clear from learning support teachers' responses that withdrawal was perceived to be the most common form of delivering learning support. Almost two thirds (61.6%) said that pupils were always or mostly withdrawn for support. As was the case with principals' reports, the figures for providing learning support solely by withdrawing pupils (entirely withdrawal) are very low (4.3% and 4.8%, respectively). However, fewer learning support teachers than principals (26.8% compared with 39.7%) reported that there was an equal balance between in-class and withdrawal methods of delivering learning support. In line with principals' responses, in-class support was not as common as withdrawal. The self reports of learning support teachers indicated that only one in nine learning support teachers (11.6%) said that support was mostly or entirely delivered by them within the classroom.

Learning support and resource teachers were also asked to indicate how learning support should ideally be organised (results are in Table 10). The majority (44.7%) agreed that an equal balance between withdrawal and in-class support is ideal. Approximately two-fifths (39.1%) of learning support teachers indicated that support should always, or mostly, occur through withdrawal. This figure is lower than the level of withdrawal which is *estimated* to have occurred (61.6% of learning support teachers reported that support is provided always, or mostly, through withdrawal). Therefore, in an ideal situation learning support teachers seem to envision more of a balance between in-class and withdrawal types of provision. Compared with the data provided by the current time-sampling study, learning support teachers would like to see more in-class support: about one in six (16.3%) indicated that the ideal learning support environment would be either entirely or mostly in-class.

To further investigate this issue, data from the time-sampling study of classroom teachers were aggregated to school level (Table 11). The aggregation process involved creating some fairly arbitrary cut-off points in order to further categorise the data. Firstly, the aggregation was achieved through examining the balance of in-class versus withdrawal for learning support which was recorded for each class. One of five categories was assigned to each class: 'withdrawal only', 'in-class only', 'approximately half and half', 'mostly withdrawal', and 'mostly in-class'. A category of 'withdrawal only' was assigned to a class if all the learning support in that class took place by withdrawal, and the 'in-class only' category was assigned if all the learning support took place within the class. For the category 'approximately half and half', cut off points of up to 60% in-class (or withdrawal) to 40% withdrawal (or in-class) were used. Above 61% and below 39% constituted either 'mostly in-class' or 'mostly withdrawal' (whichever the case). These five classifications were used to categorise each

class in the dataset, and the dataset was then aggregated by school roll number to obtain a school-level dataset (*N*=113 schools). In the school-level dataset, the five variables were added across each school to obtain the sum of classes in each school which had either withdrawal or in-class support. Each school was then assigned to one of five final categories, based on the sum of withdrawal or in-class across classes[16].

In the vast majority of schools (91%), the aggregated time-sampling data indicated that learning support was delivered either entirely, or mostly, through withdrawing pupils from the classroom. In contrast to the two self-report sources already described, delivering learning support exclusively by withdrawing pupils was very common in schools (57%). In contrast to principals' and learning support teachers' reports, in just 7% of schools (or about one in fourteen), an equal balance between withdrawal and in-class support was found. Furthermore, in-class support was almost non-existent: just 3% of schools indicated that support took place mostly in-class.

TABLE 11
Classroom teachers' time-sampling data on how learning support is provided in-class and by withdrawal, with data for all classes aggregated to school level (*N*=113).

Entirely withdrawal	Mostly withdrawal with some in-class support	More or less equal balance between withdrawal & in-class	Mostly in-class with some withdrawal	Entirely in- class
57%	34%	7%	3%	0%

There is general agreement among the three sources of information described that withdrawal is more common than in-class provision in the delivery of learning support. However withdrawal, as found in the current time-sampling study, occurs far more frequently than is indicated by the self reports of principals and learning support teachers. Furthermore, the exclusive use of withdrawal for the provision of learning support occurs very frequently as assessed by the time-sampling data from classrooms (aggregated to school level), compared with estimates provided by principals and learning support teachers. Also, while there is some agreement between principals and learning support teachers' reports on the extent of in-class support, the time-sampling study found such in-class provision to be uncommon in our sample of DEIS classrooms.

[16] Learning support status categories: 'entirely withdrawal', 'entirely in-class', 'approximately half and half', 'mostly withdrawal, with some in-class', 'mostly in-class, with some withdrawal'.

12. How might discrepancies between the three sources of data be explained?

Two sources of additional data collected since the time-sampling study took place shed light on the conflicting reports of principals and learning support teachers and data generated from the time-sampling study. The first source is from a questionnaire which was sent to all 336 urban primary school principals in the SSP in February 2014 (described in the Method section). One of the questions in the questionnaire sought to obtain principals' views on why there were such large discrepancies between the estimates from different sources. The second set of additional data comes from a series of seminars for DEIS principals which took place in March 2014 (also described in the Method section). During the seminars, principals were once again asked for their views on the discrepancies. A thematic analysis of the responses from the first source is presented here supplemented with data from the DEIS seminars.

The most common issue which emerged from the principal questionnaire in relation to the discrepancies between parties descriptions of how learning support was organised was that of *changing plans*. Principals felt that estimates of in-class provision reflected the plan or *intention* at the beginning of the year, but that, in reality, greater levels of withdrawal occur during the school year.

Further analysis of the responses reveals that there are at least two reasons why learning support plans may change during the year: teachers' beliefs that withdrawal is more effective, and a reluctance to break away from traditional methods. For example, principals indicated that many teachers begin the year with in-class support, yet as the year progresses, they find that it can be more effective to withdraw pupils, or use a combination of the two methods. Teachers may realise that certain pupils, for example those of differing ability levels or with challenging behaviour, may benefit from a smaller, quieter environment. Furthermore, it was suggested that classroom teachers (as well as some learning support teachers) sometimes favour withdrawal over in-class methods because the latter can require team-teaching and much preparatory work. Withdrawal may be viewed as less time-consuming. One principal expressed this view of learning support organisation plans changing over time at the DEIS seminars. A few principals acknowledged that the class teacher is the only person who is aware of the true balance of the organisation of learning support and, therefore, would be confident that the time-sampling data from class teachers' estimates are most reflective of reality. The view of favouring traditional methods was also expressed during the DEIS seminars, with a couple of principals commenting that class teachers believe that withdrawal

is necessary to get the 'real work' done or is necessary for certain pupils (e.g., those on the autistic spectrum or exhibiting disruptive behaviour).

Poor communication between classroom teachers, principals and learning support teachers with respect to the organisation of learning support was implicated by some principals in their questionnaire responses. This view did not arise during the DEIS seminars, although given the frequency with which principals cited this as a plausible reason in the questionnaire responses, it is possible that it played a significant role in contributing to the discrepancies in the data.

Another common issue related to the *ambiguity* associated with the term 'in-class support'. Responses from the principal questionnaire suggest that classroom teachers may, in fact, only associate the term 'learning support' with situations where withdrawal has taken place. Certain in-class activities, such as station teaching and team teaching, may not be recognized as 'learning support', perhaps because other pupils may also be interacting with the learning support teacher. If classroom teachers did not classify these activities as learning support at the time of completion of the time-sampling instrument, in-class support would have been underestimated. This view about station and team teaching was echoed in the DEIS seminars, as well as from an analysis of the responses of 1st class teachers about the presence of other teachers in the classroom (described in Question 10). This revealed that a minority of teachers failed to correctly classify learning support activities such as station teaching as in-class support.

The location of the delivery of learning support may influence how it is classified by the teacher also emerged from the principal questionnaire. For example, some team teaching may take place in another room, where the learning support teacher has taken a group to another classroom. This might occur for a variety of reasons such as class size or noise levels in the main classroom. This situation should be perceived as an 'in-class' support model, although it might be recorded by the class teacher as withdrawal. The issue of location potentially impacting on how support was described by teachers also arose during the DEIS seminars. For example, one principal communicated that an activity such as Literacy Lift-Off, which is an 'in-class' support model, may take place in another room, but may be described as withdrawal by the class teacher.

The final major issue which arose from the principal questionnaire was that of *social desirability* with respect to principals' and learning support teachers' responses. The desire to

reflect D.E.S. recommendations may have led to exaggerated estimates of in-class support, a view also reflected in the DEIS seminars.

These issues implicated in explaining the discrepancies between parties, namely changing plans, poor communication among staff members, ambiguity associated with the term 'in-class' support, and socially desirable responses, may all to some extent explain the conflicting reports.

CONCLUSION

Findings from the present study on practical aspects of the organisation of learning support and resource teaching in schools participating in the SSP under DEIS include the following:

- Withdrawal of pupils from their classrooms for additional teaching is a common occurrence, especially in first, third, fourth and fifth classes.
- With the exception of first class, withdrawal of small groups of pupils is about twice as common as the withdrawal of individuals.
- Across all classes, learning support for literacy is the most frequent focus of withdrawal followed by resource teaching and learning support for mathematics.
- In-class support is a feature of less than 10% of classrooms according to time-sampling data. This compared to over one-third of classrooms in which withdrawal was a feature when the time-sampling data were collected.
- In-class support occurs most frequently in first class, with over one half of pupils being involved in those classes where in-class support is occurring.
- There is considerable variation in the extent to which in-class support is targeted, but a high percentage of pupils tend to be the focus.
- The predominance of withdrawal over in-class support from the time-sampling data is only partly reflected in principals' and learning support teachers' reports of what typically happens in their schools. While both groups indicated that withdrawal is a more common strategy than in-class support, the gap reported by principals and learning support and resource teachers between the frequency of the two strategies is considerably smaller than that suggested by the time-sampling data.
- Learning support and resource teachers appear to favour more in-class support than they report actually delivering, as evidenced by discrepancies between their responses to a question about what they regarded as the 'ideal' way of organising learning support and their responses to a question about what 'typically' happens.

- Data collected from principals after the initial analysis of time-sampling data and comparison of these data with the self-report data, shed some light on the discrepancies noted above. In particular, some principals expressed the view that while the self reports might have reflected what was *planned* for the organisation of learning support, various factors prevented these plans from being implemented as intended.
- Absence of pupils from the classroom is, by no means, confined to withdrawal for learning support teaching. This is particularly the case with older pupils. The most common reason for temporary absences is participation in activities such as choir practice or sporting events.
- Additional teachers and adults other than the classroom teacher were commonly found in classrooms, with Special Needs Assistants being the most commonly reported other adult present.

Although the 12 questions posed in this report have been addressed to some extent, many others arise. These relate, in particular, to the relative unpopularity of in-class support despite the fact that this approach is being promoted by the Inspectorate and others, and is, in fact, favoured by learning support teachers and principals. Another set of questions relating to in-class support concern the detail of how the presence of a second teacher is used and understood, and the extent to which support is targeted towards low achieving students.

While the present study did not investigate the barriers to implementing in-class provision, the 2011 study by Travers on the organisational practices of learning support mathematics teachers sheds some light on the obstacles to implementing more in-class learning support. For example, mathematics learning support teachers reported being uncertain as to the benefits of in-class support: 40% were undecided as to its effectiveness, and a further 10% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that in-class support is very effective (Travers, 2011). Attitudes concerning the expertise of the learning support teacher and how they are deployed may also be important: 40% of learning support teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that the expertise of the learning support teacher is under-utilised through operating in-class provision (Travers, 2011). In an analysis of open-ended responses, Travers also found several perceived advantages of withdrawal for supplementary teaching among mathematics learning support teachers:

> 'Ability to work at pupil level; learning benefits, enhanced learning space; benefits for certain types of pupils; time benefits; positive contrast with mainstream class; assessment benefits and greater use of concrete or manipulative materials in teaching mathematics' (Travers, 2011, p. 467)

Despite some useful insights from principals reported on pages 26-28, the discrepancy between self-report and time-sampling data remains largely unexplained. Methodological issues may also be important, such as those relating to the reliability of self-report data already raised in the introduction to the report. Indeed there may well be problems associated with the time-sampling approach used here also, even though it seems to successfully capture the data as intended. As expected, the presence of someone in the school for the entire school day almost certainly enhanced the response rate. Because the approach can be regarded as efficient and satisfactory, the data can be treated as a baseline against which data collected in future can be compared. This will allow any shift away from withdrawal to in-class support to be monitored. However, while the method used here works well at school level (due to the fact that data from all teachers and various time points in the school day can be aggregated to the level of the school), it does not tell us much about the organisation of learning support (or classroom traffic) at teacher level. This might be addressed by conducting a study in which the data recording period is extended to several days and several sampling points. However, this would place additional demands on teachers, as they would be required to record information on multiple occasions. Such a change in methodology would also probably lead to a reduction in response rates and to poorer data quality. It would also seem worthwhile to investigate in detail the nature of the support delivered within and outside of the classroom setting, as this may further our understanding of why so much withdrawal is occurring.

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APPENDIX 1

Example of Data Collection Instrument

N.B. Time at which this sheet should be completed by you: **40 minutes after school day starts**

Dear Teacher

We are asking all teachers in this school (and in other DEIS schools) to complete this sheet. The main purpose of it is to provide us with information on the organisation of learning support in the school. Teachers are being asked to complete the form at various times throughout the school day. Please complete the form exactly *at the time specified in the box above*. If it is not possible to complete it at the specified time, please complete it based on your best recollection of what was happening in your classroom at that time.

SCHOOL NAME: _____

ROLL NO: _____ **GRADE LEVEL:** _____ **DATE:** _____

1(a) Total number of pupils in the class (i.e., on the roll for the class)? ..... ☐

1(b) Of these, how many are recorded (or will be recorded) as present today? ..... ☐

1(c) Of those present in school today, how many (if any) are temporarily absent from the classroom? *If none, write '0'and skip to Q2 overleaf*. ..... ☐

1(d) Use the tables below to record the reason(s) why any pupils are temporarily absent from the classroom.

Reasons related to learning support Withdrawn for …	No. of pupils (one-to one support)	No. of pupils (group or small group support)
Literacy learning support	☐	☐
Numeracy learning support	☐	☐
Resource teaching (SEN)	☐	☐
Resource teaching for travellers	☐	☐
English language support	☐	☐

Other reasons	No. of pupils
Gone on an errand (e.g., bringing a note to another class)	☐
Discipline related matter	☐
Toilet break	☐
Other (specify) ..... _____ _____	☐

2(a) **Is there another teacher present in the classroom now?** *Tick one.* Yes ❑ No ❑

2(b) **If yes, what is that teacher doing now?**

2(c) **If he/she is providing learning support or resource teaching how many children is he/she teaching?** ..... ☐

3(a) **Apart from anyone counted in question 2, are there any other adults in the room?** Yes ❑ No ❑

3(b) **If yes, please use the space below to describe who they are and what they are doing.**

4. **If you do not feel your responses to questions 1 and 2 on this sheet accurately reflect the typical situation regarding withdrawal of pupils from your class, please use the box below to indicate why.**

5. **Since the start of this school year, how many pupils have been withdrawn from the classroom to receive learning support or resource teaching?**
Use the table below to record numbers receiving the different types of support.

Reasons for withdrawal. Withdrawn for …	No. of pupils
Literacy learning support	
Numeracy learning support	
Resource teaching (SEN)	
Resource teaching for travellers	
English language support	

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form.