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Education Welfare in Ireland: a study of the experiences of young people and families referred to the Statutory Education Welfare Service

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for the degree of

PhD in Education

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Declaration

"This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism."

Signed: Sinéad O'Flynn

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Conference contributions

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O'Flynn, S. (2016). A study of the experiences of young people and families referred to the Education Welfare Service in Ireland. *All Ireland Doctoral Conference*. Queens' University College, Belfast, June 2016.

Abstract

This research examines the experiences of young people and families referred to the Educational Welfare Service in Ireland. This is a small-scale unique study based on seven case studies and includes in-depth semi-structured interviews with young people, parents, schools, external agencies and the Education Welfare Officers (EWOs). This qualitative study explores the factors contributing to poor school attendance from the perspectives of the young people and their parents, the research explores their response to these contributing factors and considers their engagement with the school and subsequent engagement with the Education Welfare Service (EWS).

A number of central themes emerge from the data as contributing to school absenteeism, these include; educational inequality, mental health issues including bereavement, anxiety and trauma and the impact of having a special educational need. The research highlights the effects of inequality and the lack of appropriate services for young people both in and outside of the school environment. The importance of a positive school climate and the importance of true and meaningful school inclusion also emerge from the research as being fundamental in ensuring continued engagement for marginalised young people within the education system. The research recommends the review of the current school attendance legislation, the review of practice methods used by schools and agencies to maintain young people within the education system and a targetted, holistic approach to effectively respond to the complex issues that lead to early school leaving. Consideration should be given to using a multidisciplinary approach with the potential to offer a range of services to support young people with their learning, with their emotional and mental health issues and include the provision of outreach options to marginalised families.

The research also explores the role of the Education Welfare Officer and focuses on the influence of power and social class on school attendance. This research explores the appropriateness of prosecution as a response to poor school attendance, given the complexity of the underlying issues that are illustrated by the cases presented. The role of the Education Welfare Officer is presented as the advocate for children and young people through the support and guidance offered to parents, schools and agencies.

List of Acronyms

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ALNP: Additional Learning Needs Panel

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder

ATP: Action Team Partnership

BOM: Board of Management

CAMHS: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CBT: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

CFA: Child and Family Agency

CMRS: Conference of Major Religious Superiors

CPNS: Child Protection Notification System

DCYA: Department of Children and Youth Affairs

DES: Department of Education and Skills

DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

D*f*ES: Department for Children, Schools and Families

DSP: Department for Social Protection

EBD: Emotional Behavioural Difficulty

ERC: Educational Research Centre

ESLI: Early School Leaver Initiative

ESRI: Economic, Social, Research Institute

ETB: Education and Training Board

EU: European Union

EWO: Educational Welfare Officer

EWS: Education Welfare Service

GUI: Growing Up in Ireland

HSCL: Home School Community Liaison

INTO: **Irish National Teacher's Organisation**

ISPCC: **Irish Society for the prevention of Cruelty to Children**

JCSP: **Junior Certificate Schools Programme**

LCA: **Leaving Certificate Applied**

LEA: **Local Education Authority**

MABS: **Money Advice and Budgeting Service**

NDA: **National Disability Authority**

NBSS: **National Behaviour Support Service**

NCSE: **National Council for Special Education**

NDP: **National Development Plan**

NEPS: **National Educational Psychology Service**

NESF: **National Economic and Social Forum**

NEWB: **National Educational Welfare Board**

NNPS: **National Network of Partnership Schools**

OECD: **Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development**

PAM: **Primary Attendance Matters**

PRAB: **Parental Responsibility for Behaviour and Attendance**

PSU: **Public Services and Utilities Section**

SAN: **School Attendance Notice**

SAP: **School Assistance Programme**

SEAL: **Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning**

SEN: **Special Educational Need**

SESS: **Special Education Support Service**

SCP: **School Completion Programme**

SNA: **Special Needs Assistant**

SSP: **School Support Programme**

SSRI: **Stay in School Retention Initiative**

T.D.: Teachta Dála

TESS: Tusla Education Support Service

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

USA: United States of America

WAG: Welsh Assembly Government

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences of young people and families referred to the Statutory Educational Welfare Service[1] in Ireland. This is a qualitative research study that will examine the history and emergence of the Educational Welfare Service (EWS), the relevant legislation and the national and international literature on school absenteeism.

Data was gathered from young people, parents, social work, relevant school staff and the Education Welfare Officer (EWO). The data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, a focus group consisting of EWOs and through case file notes. There were seven case studies included in the research, chosen purposefully to allow the reader to experience the variety of work conducted by the Education Welfare Service from the perspective of the schools, agencies and the parents and young people who are central to this research.

1.1 The Context

The most recent data available on school absence levels is the School Attendance Data from Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2016-2017 (Millar, 2018). This data is compiled from the AAR (Annual Attendance Report), this is the annual reporting requirement for all Primary and Post-Primary schools required under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, (Section 21(6)). The information generated by this data raises some interesting questions that are very relevant to the research:

1. The overall percentage of days lost at primary in 2016/2017 was 5.6% and 7.9% at post-primary,
2. On average 59,000 pupils miss school each day, 31,200 at primary level and 27,800 at post-primary,

[1] The term statutory is used here to identify the main focus of this research, that of the work of the EWO as opposed to the work of SCP or HSCL Personnel who also are included in the term Education Welfare Service, now known as Tess. The EWOs are the only personnel with a statutory responsibility under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

3. Non-attendance is higher in special schools and higher in mainstream schools with special classes. All 125 special schools returned AAR data and non-attendance is twice as high in special schools when compared with mainstream primary schools and the rate of 20 day absences is more than three times higher in special schools,
4. Expulsions are disproportionately high in special schools. Pupils in special schools make up to 1.4% of the primary school population but account for 28.6% of the total number of pupils expelled from primary school in 2016-2017, this is similar to last year (Millar, 2016),
5. DEIS schools show higher figures for all forms of non-attendance.

There are a number of areas highlighted by this data that require examination, in particular the impact of SEN on school attendance, the correlation between areas designated as disadvantaged and increased rates of poor school attendance and the higher rates of absenteeism among post-primary students.

The Education (Welfare) Act (2000) is concerned primarily with school attendance but the Education Welfare Service emphasises school retention and participation in addition to attendance and the EU has set a target for every member state to reduce the current rate of 'drop out' by 10% by 2020. The plan for Ireland specifically is to reduce early school leaving by 8% by 2020 (Morris and Parasher, 2012, p.10). In order to achieve this target there needs to be a greater understanding of the complexities of early school leaving and school absenteeism. This research will, through in-depth interviews and analysis, examine the emerging complex issues affecting school attendance in Ireland and offer an in-sight into the work of the Statutory Education Welfare Service from the view point of the service users.

1.2 The Purpose of the Research

I have worked in the Education Welfare Service since 2003 in a senior management position. Prior to this position, I taught in a variety of settings at post-primary level, including an off-campus provision for young people who had disengaged from learning and were at risk of permanant exclusion. This coupled with my previous research into alternative educational settings led to further interest in the reasons why young people disengage from education and/or how education leads to disaffection in young people. My present role has made me

aware of the wide range of issues that present for young people that affect their day to day school attendance and this reseach aims to explore these issues in-depth through qualitative research methods which will allow the research participants to share their stories. The purpose of this research is to analyse the experiences of post-primary pupils and their families as a result of their referral to the Statutory Education Welfare Service for poor or non-school attendance. Central to this research is the engagement with young people and families and the opportunity to hear their perspectives which will assist in addressing these research questions:

- Why do young people disconnect from education?
- How do external factors impact on school attendance?
- What is the role of the Education Welfare Officer?
- How does the dilemma that exists between welfare and prosecution feature in the work of the EWS?

1.3 Motivation for the Research

Throughout my career, I have worked with young people and families who are considered to be marginalised, who have had a difficult relationship with the education system, where they don't fit in to the expected 'norms' presented by the system. Every year there is an increase in the number of referrals to the Statutory EWS, on these referrals school principals are asked to identify the reason they believe why the child/young person is missing school, the two reasons most often cited in recent years are anxiety and school refusal. Both of which are very complex and vague reasons for school absenteeism, this has motivated me to understand the connections between school absenteeism and external/internal causes. The best way to understand these connections 'in the pursuit of knowledge' (Hammersley, 2008,p.557) is to conduct research that will give a unique insight into the failings of the present system in meeting the needs of young people and their families. There has been a lot of research at national and international level on educational disadvantage and early school leaving however there is a significant lack of research in the area of school absenteeism and in particular on the work of the Education Welfare Service in Ireland. In the UK there is research by Reid (2012, 2010, 2008, 2005), Zhang (2003, 2004, 2010, 2007) and Sheppard (2011, 2009, 2007) who have all worked in the UK education welfare service and take the

opportunity to give the 'insider' perspective to evaluate the work of the service and the impact of the service for the service user. This research will provide a unique perspective of the work of the Statutory EWS in Ireland through a variety of lenses. Central to the motivation for this research is to provide the young people and families with the opportunity and space to tell their stories and share their experiences of their lives, their school and of an education system that claims to be 'accountable to students, their parents and the state' (Education Act 1998, p.1).

1.4 Significance of the Research

This research is unique in Ireland and it examines the experiences of seven post-primary pupils subsequent to their referral to the Statutory Education Welfare service. It is a qualitative research study and although only a select number of families were chosen through purposeful sampling, it does give an insight into the experiences of the young people and their families as they interact with the school, external agencies and the EWS. The research also examines how that interaction results in disengagement from learning and ultimately disaffection from their school. The research explores this interaction, examines the reasons for this disaffection and explores the dilemmas faced by the statutory EWS in their daily work.

The theories of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu explored in detail in chapter seven, provide the conceptual framework for this research. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Foucault's theory of power provide useful tools for analysing the relationships and interactions between the professionals and families, within the field of education, who are central to this research.

A key element of this study is hearing the voices of the participants, particularly the parents and young people who share their stories, their lived experiences, so openly. This research makes a significant contribution to the field and will add another perspective to existing research on educational disadvantage and early school leaving in Ireland.

1.5 Research layout

The context for the research is set out in Chapters two to six which reflect different elements of the literature; including in chapter two an outline of the history of school attendance in

Ireland, the development of school attendance legislation and various Government policies that have emerged to deal with attendance issues in Ireland from the 1800s to the present day. The focus here is on the emergence of initiatives such as the Home School Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme, both of which are now under the remit of the Education Welfare Service (EWS). The work of the EWS is outlined in the context of the many changes within the service as it moved from the School Attendance Service to the EWS under the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), then to TUSLA and the Education Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency. More recently the Education Welfare Service has changed its name to TESS (Tusla Education Support Service) and continues to incorporate the SCP and HSCL programmes.

Chapter three explores the international and national legislation that is used by different jurisdictions to ensure continued regular school attendance. This chapter looks at how the legislation in the US has recently been reviewed and how there appears to be a shift away from sanctions of a punitive nature with a move to an increased whole community approach to tackling the issues that lead to school absenteeism, and how on the other hand England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland continue to use methods which largely result in court sanctions for excessive school absences.

Chapter four, examines the various initiatives that have developed in the USA and Europe to work with young people who are regularly absent from school. There is an outline of these key initatives and the strategies used to work with young people and their families and a discussion on the outcomes of those initiatives.

Chapter five, looks at the concept of school absenteeism or truancy and how there are many elements to school absenteeism, including school refusal, and how a number of factors including school climate can contribute to young people absenting from school. This chapter also looks at how vital successful transition periods are, particularly the transition between primary and post-primary school.

Chapter six, explores the concept of educational inequality in Irish society and looks at Ireland's attempts to combat inequality in education throughout the 1990s to the present day. An effective definition of 'educational disadvantage' is sought by exploring relevant and pertinent literature in this area. The factors that contribute to educational inequality are also explored, including school factors, child poverty and inequality in Irish society.

Chapter seven, presents the theoretical framework that underpins this research, exploring the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. The concept of social class position is explored as is the concept of power and resistance and the impact of power relations on behaviour and attitudes to education and school.

Chapter eight, presents the methodological orientation and methods used in this research. This begins with an exploration of the interpretive paradigm and an outline as to why the qualitative case study method was chosen as the most appropriate method for this research. The concept of reflexivity is explored as is the method of purposeful sampling. This chapter examines the methods used to extract data such as the semi-structured interview and the focus group. The chapter includes an outline of the data analysis methods used which included documentary analysis, discourse analysis and coding, the chapter also explores the ethical considerations undertaken by the researcher in conducting research with vulnerable young people and families.

Following from the methodology chapter there is a brief outline of each of the case studies in chapter nine to allow the reader experience their individual stories which then leads to the discussion chapters (chapters ten to twelve) where the data generated by the interviews and documentary analysis is used to further explore the emerging themes from the research. These chapters discuss in detail the findings that have emerged from the data and describe how complex issues such as educational inequality, SEN and mental health contribute to school absenteeism.

Chapter thirteen, focuses on the role of the EWO and highlights this role through each of the case studies and explores the tension that has emerged in this role over time. The research examines the dual role of welfare and prosecution and illustrates through these case studies how the EWO works with parents, young people and schools. Much of the data in this chapter is generated from the focus group and individual interviews with the EWS, schools and families.

In the final chapter, the conclusions and recommendations are presented. There is a summary of the overall findings, suggestions for further research and an outline of potential implications for government policy.

2.0 The Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the emergence of the legislation and initiatives developed to respond to school absenteeism in Ireland from the 1800s to the present day. This chapter outlines how various government initiatives were established to ensure improved attendance, participation and retention in education, initiatives such as the DEIS programme, NEPS, the Home School Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme. The chapter also explores the origins and role of the Education Welfare Service, its development and its transformation from the original School Attendance Service to TESS, the Tusla Education Support Service of the Child and Family Agency.

2.2 The History of School Attendance in Ireland

Since the mid to late 1960s education in Ireland has had a change of focus that has led to closer examination of the issues of early school leaving, truancy, school absenteeism and educational disadvantage in general. These were issues that permeated all levels of the Irish education system and required intervention on a number of fronts. In Ireland, these issues were manifested in a number of ways, including low levels of participation and achievement in the education system (Frawley, 2014). However despite a large volume of research that indicated the presence of multi-faceted causes of such disadvantage and consequent absenteeism and/or early school leaving, much of the state focus historically has been on increasing the numbers attending or staying on in education provision rather than dealing with the underlying issues that led to such phenomena.

Historically, Ireland's concern with inequality in education was seen initially in the *Investment in Education Report* (DES, 1965) which indicated social class and regional disparities in educational participation. In the 1970s and 1980s however the focus still remained on increasing participation rather than reducing inequality (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). It is only since the 1990s that research in Ireland has shifted focus and has indicated the need for interagency and welfare approaches to address the issues associated with educational disadvantage.

2.3 1800-1936:

The First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry published in 1825 led to the establishment of the national system of education in Ireland in 1831 which fundamentally replaced the hedge schools by the 1870s (Fernandez-Suarez, 2006), this marked the beginning of national control over education in Ireland. However, attendance at school in Ireland in the 1870s was poor as it was calculated that the percentage of those enrolled who were in daily attendance amounted to only 30% and the number of years spent at school varied considerably as there was no compulsory attendance legislation (Coolahan, 1981). It was the Education Act of 1892 that provided for compulsory school attendance in Ireland by law (Fahey, 1992). The Act stated that all parents were to send their children between the ages of 6 and 14 years of age to a national or some other 'efficient' school (Ryan, 1911). In Ryan's report on school attendance in Ireland (1911), he refers to the presence of 18 inspectors who were required to control the attendance of 45,000 children in the Dublin area alone. This legislation had provided for the establishment of school attendance committees in Cork, Dublin, Waterford and Dun Laoghaire, where school attendance inspectors were engaged. It was not until the Local Government Act of 1898 that compulsory school attendance was extended to rural areas and this Act created country and district councils which then acquired responsibility for school attendance (O'Buachalla, 1988). Ryan in his 1912 report criticises the legislation for allowing too much time to lapse before a parent was taken before the courts and the penalty was also considered insufficient as a deterrent particularly to parents who engaged their children in labouring tasks on their farms. Ryan was also not satisfied with the school leaving age which he felt should be raised from 14 to 18 years of age. It was not only Ryan who was critical of this legislation, written correspondence of the time between the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland and the Irish Government highlights numerous difficulties with bringing the Act into operation (National Education Office, 1894).[2] However it was not until 1926 that the compulsory school attendance element of the 1892 Act was amended in the form of the School Attendance Act. The aim of this legislation was to ensure the attendance of children in a national or elementary school between the ages of 6 and 14 years. Section 4.1 of the Act stated that:

[2] A board of seven Commissioners on National Education were appointed by the Government of Ireland in 1831.

> *The parent of every child to whom this Act applies shall, unless there is a reasonable excuse for not so doing, cause the child to attend a national or other suitable school on every day on which school is open for secular instruction and for such time on every such day as shall be prescribed or sanctioned by the Minister in respect of such day.*

This legislation placed responsibility with the Gardai for ensuring regular school attendance in most rural areas of Ireland. However in the Boroughs of Cork, Dublin, Waterford and Dun Laoghaire where there were established attendance committees under the 1892 legislation, the Act gave the power to such committees to appoint School Attendance Officers subject to the approval of the local authority. The Act clearly outlined the steps to be taken by the School Attendance Officer in ensuring that children attend school and clearly outlined the penalties open to the courts. These included a fine of 20 shillings for a first offence and 40 shillings for a second offence (Fahey, 1992). In the case of a second or subsequent offence the courts had the power to seek a committal order, where the child would go into the care of a relative or in certain instances to an industrial school. The 1926 legislation had some initial effect on enrolment and attendance, as enrolments in 5th and 6th classes increased from 70,000 to 92,000 between 1926 and 1936 and there was also a significant improvement to daily school attendance. In 1935, levels of attendance at school reached 83% (Fahey, 1992) and it was calculated that in 1945, 41% of the age range 14 to 16 years were in some type of full-time schooling, while 12% of 16 to 18 year olds were in full-time education (Coolahan, 1981).

2.4 1960s Ireland:

The 1960s saw Ireland and its government changing its view on education. Education was now seen very much as a central element of social structure and this saw a shift in Ireland to view primary education as a stepping stone to post-primary education (Breen et al., 1990). The issues of poor school attendance and early school leaving were now seen as a 'form of self-exclusion from the social-occupational placement function of school' (Fahey, 1992, p.383). With this changing attitude to education came a significant improvement in school attendance and enrolment. The 1965 OECD *Investment in Education Report* made no reference to any school attendance problem among those children of compulsory school going age but was concerned with post-compulsory school going age groups. Attendance at school was now the norm, hence there was now another significant change emerging as

education policy makers began to view any attendance problems as more the remit of child care policy makers rather than the sole responsibility of those within the education system.

Education policy in Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s was more concerned with educational performance and participation as seen with the introduction of free post-primary education in 1968. School attendance problems were now a minority issue that sat more comfortably within the realms of social work rather than education *per se*. This was evident in the Kennedy Report (1970) which argued that continued absence from school may have been one of the early warning signs of the existence of families and children in difficulty. This report also recommended that school attendance officers should have a background in social work as this would be more beneficial to their work practice. These changes in attitude were also reflected in the actions of the courts at this time. The judiciary increasingly wanted to examine the issues behind persistent absenteeism and the records from the school attendance officer's court work in the 1980s show that much of the work they were now engaged in, involved linking families into the appropriate social services.

The Report on National Youth Policy (1986) called for government to look at underlying social issues that led to instances of persistent absenteeism in parts of Limerick City and Dublin County and noted a number of characteristics that it attributed to such issues, these included: difficulties with the school curriculum, family tradition of poor school attendance, personal disabilities in children leading to a lack of educational attainment and difficult home circumstances. This report argued that the existing legislation was too limited and the existing school attendance officers did not have flexibility to deal with the issues they faced on a daily basis. This report recommended that the school attendance service should redevelop to meet the changes emerging in society. Despite the recommendations of the Kennedy Report and the National Youth Policy Committee there were no dramatic changes to school attendance legislation. In 1967, the 1926 School Attendance Act was amended slightly to focus on some of the enforcement procedures of the legislation and in 1972 a Ministerial Order raised the school leaving age from 14 to 15 years. The Child Care Act of 1991 saw another amendment under Section 75 which allowed the courts to subsume school attendance cases into procedures that allowed the health boards to take children at risk into care.

2.5 1990s Onward:

Prior to the publication of the Green Paper in 1992 a working group[3] on school attendance/truancy was established in the Department of Education and Science. This group met on 22 occasions over two years and carried out a detailed review of the working of the 1926 school attendance legislation. During this review the group met with school attendance officers, teacher unions, management bodies and voluntary agencies working with children affected by poor school attendance. In a report entitled *School Attendance Truancy Report* (1994) to the then Minister for Education, Niamh Breathnach, T.D., the working group made a number of significant recommendations for change to the existing legislation and requested that the following issues be addressed:

- the definition of a minimum education;
- the lack of service to many areas of the country;
- the role of the Gardai as an enforcement agency;
- issues with transfer of pupils from primary to post primary;
- the role of the school in relation to school attendance matters;
- the need for a form of education welfare service and for links to be formed between school and childcare services including health, social and community input;
- the need for flexible and responsive alternative education programmes to cater for children who cannot cope with mainstream education;
- the role of residential care in school attendance matters before the courts;
- the attendance difficulties of traveller pupils and children with disabilities;
- the implications of raising the school leaving age to 16 as proposed by the 1992 Green Paper (DES, 1994, p.3).

The working group also recommended changes to the penalties issued by the courts and suggested that these be increased. They also requested that committal to care be looked at as this was deemed an inappropriate response to dealing with non-school attendance matters. The group recommended that the courts look at school attendance orders and education

[3] The working group established by the Department of Education had the following members: Micheal Mac Craith, Principal Officer (Chairperson); George Rowley, Principal Officer (Interim Chairperson, November 1992-January 1993); Pauline Gildea, Assistant Principal Officer (to June 1992); Des O' Lochlainn, Assistant Principal Officer (to September 1993); Des Ormond, Assistant Principal Officer (from September 1993); Sean O'Dubháin, Cigire Sinsireach (Inspectorate); Pádraig Mac Sitric, Cigire Ceantair (Inspectorate); John O'Leary, Psychologist; Marian White, Secretary to the group.

supervision orders as a way forward and that these be included in the future legislation in this area.

The working group expressed concern regarding the overall accuracy of attendance data and suggested mechanisms be put in place for pupil registration and tracking particularly from primary to post-primary education and suggested that schools should adopt change at policy level in matters of school attendance. The group also noted that current attendance figures were of some concern as in 1992/1993 the average attendance in national schools in Dublin was 91%, in Dun Laoghaire it was 92.7%, in Cork City 93.2% and 94% in Waterford and consequently stated that this was no basis for complacency (DES, 1994, p.7). The report also noted that the work of the School Attendance Officers had become more welfare orientated and that increasingly cases were referred by the officers to other welfare agencies for assistance in dealing with social and health related problems associated with poor school attendance. The group noted that 'the link between poor school attendance and disadvantage is now so marked that officers have become more involved in rescuing children at risk in the wider community' (DES, 1994, P.23).

Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment (1997) was another very influential report published by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), this report endorsed many of the proposals made by the working group on attendance and stated:

> *Education based solutions alone are not sufficient to deal with the complexity of poverty and educational disadvantage. Such solutions need to be situated in a wider, or 'whole community' approach, otherwise they may reinforce false impressions about the nature of poverty by implying that the causes of poverty are to be found at the level of individual characteristics (their 'failure' to benefit from the education offered) rather than at the level of society's structures'* (NESF 1997, p.51).

In 1997, an inter-departmental working group was commissioned to examine the NESF report and they recommended a whole community approach to tackle early school leaving and educational disadvantage. The following year the Education Act (1998) stated that 'the Minister shall by order, establish a Committee, herein referred to as the Educational Disadvantage Committee after consultation with the various education partners' (Education Act, 1998, Section 32(1)). This committee would advise the Minister on policy and strategies that should be adopted to identify and address the issue of Educational Disadvantage (Education Act, 1998, Section 32). The following year the Education (Welfare) Bill of 1999

was welcomed by educationalists as a new approach to the issues of poor school attendance in Ireland. The Bill made provision for the entitlement of every child in the Irish State to a certain minimum education by ensuring:

- the statutory obligation cast on parents by existing school attendance legislation will be retained;
- the prescription of minimum standards of education by the Minister in instances where children receive their education outside the recognised school system;
- the registration of all children who are to be educated outside the recognised school system will take place following an assessment of the capacity to provide minimum standards of education;
- the continuous assessment of the provision of education;
- the compulsory attendance of children at recognised schools;
- the adoption of measures to prevent truancy;
- the repeal of the School Attendance Acts 1926-1967;
- the supply of data concerning an individual's educational history to certain persons and for
- the amendment of the Protection of Young Persons (Employment) Act 1996 (Glendenning, 1999, p.1.).

These provisions were the subject of a Consultative Seminar held in Dublin in 1999[4]. This purpose of this Seminar was to examine the Education (Welfare) Bill and discuss the implications of same for existing school attendance staff. At this time a number of policy driven initiatives began to emerge with the brief of 'tackling' disadvantage, one such initiative was the '8-15 years' pilot project for young people at risk of early school leaving, this was announced in April 1998 and additionally the Home School Liaison Scheme was extended to all schools classified as disadvantaged. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) was established on the 1st September 1999 with the initial objective of assigning the services of a psychologist to 5000 pupils (Downes & Gilligan, 2007), this was followed by the 'Stay in School Retention Initiative' aimed at keeping students in school to

[4] A Consultative Seminar was held in Clontarf Castle Dublin in 1999. This Seminar was hosted by the National Youth Federation, City of Dublin Youth Service Board, and The National Coordinators Office for Youthreach, the School Attendance Committee for Dublin Borough, Fás and Youth at Risk Project.

the end of Leaving Certificate through funding selected schools to implement plans designed by the schools themselves. Ireland in the 1990s saw a greater focus on children's rights and educational equality, consequently there was an increasing policy focus on educational inequality (Frawley, 2014). As a result of this, numerous Department initiatives were established or extended by the late 1990s.

2.6 The Emergence of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme in Ireland

The Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) was one of the schemes with parental engagement and school attendance as some of its core aims. The HSCL scheme began as a pilot programme in 1990 and by 1999 all primary and post-primary schools in the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme were invited to join the scheme. The scheme was extended in 2005 and also in 2017 under DEIS. The scheme was concerned with the establishment of partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of the child's learning. The role of the individual coordinator was to work with school staff, parents and relevant community agencies in advancing these aims. In 2014, overall responsibility for the HSCL scheme came under the remit of the Tusla Child and Family Agency with operational responsibility for the scheme under the remit of Tusla EWS.

The School Completion Programme (SCP) was established in 2002, it also began as a pilot programme known as the '8-15 Early School Leaver's Initiative' (ESLI) and elements of best practice were taken from the ESLI and the Stay in School Retention Initiative (SSRI) to inform future practice in the SCP. The focus of this programme was young people who were considered educationally marginalised and at risk of early school leaving between the ages of 4 to 18 years. The SCP aimed to develop local strategies to ensure maximum attendance, participation and retention in education.

Each SCP was managed by a coordinator at local level who was answerable to the local Management Group. This Management Group would have consisted of school principals, school staff, parent representatives and local agency representatives. Each management group identified target pupils and a range of home, school and individual supports were put in place for the pupil and their families. Since 2009, the SCP also came under the remit of the EWS Service and now all three strands are under TUSLA Child and Family Agency since

January 2014. As an integrated service model, the aim and rationale of the integrated services strategy for Tusla is:

- to provide more effective service delivery, through appropriate intervention, for children who have difficulties in relation to school attendance, participation and retention,
- to foster and develop improved engagement with other agencies and services working with children and families and,
- to influence more effective policy-making with an increased emphasis on planning, outcome measurement and the gathering of evidence on the impact of interventions. (Tusla, DCYA, DES, 2019, www.tusla.ie)

2.7 Education Welfare in Ireland:

The Education (Welfare) Act was signed into law and came in to effect on July 5th 2002. The Act repealed the 1926 legislation on school attendance and radically altered the approach to now focus on the identification of children or young people with school attendance difficulties and to help address these difficulties in school and in society (NEWB, 2002). The Act provided for the raising of the school leaving age to 16 years or the completion of three years of post-primary school. In addition, the Act provided for the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) as the single national body with responsibility for supporting regular school attendance. The Act also provided for the division of the state into 'school attendance areas' - county boroughs that included Cork, Dublin, Waterford and Dun Laoghaire.

The Education Welfare Act (2000) aimed to promote and improve school attendance for children at primary and post-primary levels. It was considered that this Act (2000) would systematically address issues with school attendance (ESRI, 2007). The Act established the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) the body with responsibility for supervising and implementing the provisions of the Act. In addition to the Education Welfare Service there were a number of other initiatives that were established by the Department of Education in Ireland with the aim of reducing educational disadvantage and early school leaving. Initiatives, such as Early Start, Breaking the Cycle, Book Schemes, Home School Community Liaison Scheme, School Completion Programme, alternative in-school programmes such as the JCSP and LCA and most recently DEIS (Delivering Equality of

opportunity In Schools) have all received significant European and Irish government funding with the purpose of improving school attendance, retention and participation.

In 2001, the then Minister for Education and Science, Dr, Michael Woods appointed the National Educational Welfare Board and charged them with responsibility to put in place the staffing, structures and systems required for the new service. The Board appointed a number of new Education Welfare staff in addition to the existing school attendance staff who now transferred to the new service. The vision was that these Education Welfare Officers would work in close cooperation with schools, teachers, parents and community/voluntary bodies with a view to encouraging regular school attendance and the development of strategies to reduce overall absenteeism and early school leaving. The Board also had responsibility to maintain a register of children receiving education outside of a recognised school structure and the responsibility to assess the adequacy of this provision on an ongoing basis, (Section 14, Act 2000).

This legislation also placed increased responsibility on to the school authorities who were now expected to provide and maintain school registers, attendance records, codes of behaviour and attendance strategies with the purpose of promoting regular school attendance. The legislation stated that school managers must adopt a pro-active approach to school attendance by careful monitoring of daily attendance. The Act also outlined very clearly the responsibility of parents to ensure that their child attend a recognised school or be in receipt of a certain minimum education. The Act also made specific provision for the continued education for young people aged 16-17 years who leave school early to take up employment. To date, this section of the legislation has not been implemented.

2.8 The Role of the Educational Welfare Service under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 replaced the previous School Attendance Committees with a national Board. This Board was charged with the implementation of the Act and one of its first responsibilities was the appointment of the Education Welfare Officers (EWOs). 37 former School Attendance Officers who had been employed by 4 local authorities became staff of the Board on the 5th of July 2002 in accordance with Section 40 of the Act; later 25 staff were appointed as Educational Welfare Officers in March 2003. The legislation however did not clearly outline the role of the EWOs but did state that Boards of

Management, Principals, teachers and other members of staff were required to give the EWO any assistance they required in order to fulfil their functions under the Act.

The role of the EWO has developed over time and the Board has researched and developed practice for the day to day work of the officer. Two core elements of work practice have emerged as a result of this legislation, the first core element was that of advising and assisting parents in ensuring that their children were in receipt of a minimum education and advising schools in ensuring a continued provision of education for children and young people who may be at risk of expulsion, have no school place or have been refused enrolment. The EWS is required to assist schools with the drafting of school attendance strategies and codes of behaviour. The assisting of parents is a large part of the work of the EWO and this includes regular meetings, home visits, meetings with other agencies and schools. Sometimes it is necessary to aid parents in locating alternative schools or alternative educational placements. EWOs attend many meetings with other government agencies such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Social Work, NEPS and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). The EWO is the advocate for the child in these settings and their aim is to ensure a continued educational provision for the child or young person. The EWO is also responsible for advising and assisting parents in relation to home tuition applications[5] and for providing advice and information regarding Home Education[6] if this is required. In addition, the EWO also has a role in advising and assisting parents in the taking of appeals[7] under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998.

The second core element is that of prosecution under Section 25 of the Act, the legislation however only outlines the role of the Board in this matter and the role of the EWO is inferred under their purpose of fulfilling the functions of the Board. The legislation outlines how a School Attendance Notice[8] (SAN) is to be served if a parent is 'failing or neglecting to cause his or her child to attend a recognised school' (Act 2000, Section 25.1). Once the Officer has

[5] The Home Tuition Scheme is a Department of Education and Skills Scheme which allows parents to apply for a grant to fund tuition for their child in the home. This grant is there for children who have significant medical or psychiatric difficulties or who have no school place.

[6] Section 14 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 makes provision for a register to be maintained by the Board of all children in receipt of an education in a place other than a recognised school, it also makes provision for assessment of such education by 'authorised persons' as appointed by the Board. Such provision includes home based education and education provided in independent private schools.

[7] The Appeals under Section 29 include: expulsion, suspension exceeding 20 days, reduced timetable/curriculum without agreement and refusal to enrol.

[8] The School Attendance Notice is the first legal document sent to parents, signed by the EWO on behalf of the Child and Family Agency. It states that the parent is guilty of an offence and if they continue to be so, they will be prosecuted. The Notice outlines the penalties under the legislation.

served a SAN there is close monitoring of the case, here there is overlap with the advising and assisting function as the EWO tries again to work with the family and relevant agencies to address the attendance issues but if these continue despite the work of the Officer a Court Report is completed for Senior Management, this is a practice that has developed and is not required by the legislation, once Senior Management agree to proceed, the Officer completes a summons which is then sent to the Board's solicitors for signature and service. The penalties are clearly outlined in the legislation for this offence and include 'a fine of 500 pounds[9]' or 'imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month, or to both such fine and imprisonment' (Act 2000, Section 25.4). Appendix A provides a table of summons issued by the EWS and subsequent court activity between 2013 to 2016.

The role of the Board in relation to Section 29 of the Education (Welfare) Act has never been enacted, this section relates to the expectation that the Board would maintain a register of young people in employment and ensure that a plan is provided for that young person to 'avail of education and training opportunities' (Act 2000, Section 29.5).

In 2015, the EWS under TUSLA developed a school attendance strategy guidelines for schools, the subsequent guidelines entitled *Developing the Statement of Strategy for School Attendance* and were distributed to all schools in 2016-2017. The purpose of these guidelines was to promote school attendance and required all schools to develop a strategy of attendance as outlined under Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. This Section of the Act required each school to prepare and submit to TUSLA their Statement of Strategy for School Attendance. The Act outlined what should be included in the Strategy and the guidelines distributed to schools identified the school factors, the attitudes of students with persistent absences, socio-economic and family factors that needed to be considered by the school when drafting their individual attendance strategy.

2.9 Transformation of NEWB:

In May 2009, the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills, Sean Haughey announced his decision to extend the remit of the NEWB to include responsibility for the HSCL and the SCP. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was agreed (McMurray,

[9] The fines have since changed in the District Courts – this fine was increased in January 2014 to one thousand euro.

2012) and the NEWB responsibilities were extended to include the development of a single strategic approach by all three strands to school attendance, participation and retention, to support the entitlement of every child to a minimum education, to put in place process and structures for the governance, management and operation of the integrated service and to undertake responsibility for the management and development of the three services (McMurray, 2012). In 2009, the NEWB (National Educational Welfare Board – Previous title for the EWS) took responsibility for the School Completion Programme and the oversight of the Home School Liaison Scheme, this combination of services was consistent with the previous government plan for inclusion under DEIS –amalgamating services within the DES.

The overall aim was an integrated service model of practice for staff and schools into the future. The approach of the integrated Education Welfare Services therefore involved strengthening prevention, promoting early intervention and teamwork with individual children and developing strong interagency approaches. The three services were to provide an integrated support service to all DEIS schools (NEWB, 2012). In 2014, the NEWB became the Statutory Education Welfare Service of TUSLA Child and Family Agency. TUSLA brought together a range of agencies responsible for the delivery of services to children in areas such as early childhood care, education and participation, youth justice, child welfare and protection and facilitated closer liaisons with other Departments including the DES, Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Department of Justice and Equality. TUSLA was mandated to lead the development of a quality integrated service for children and young people. The Education Welfare Service now known as TESS (Tusla Education Support Service) since late 2019 has a unique remit within this structure and it is required to work with key agencies to ensure that children maximise their attendance, participation and retention in the education system. In 2020 it was announced by the Taoiseach Micheál Martin in his inaugural speech that TESS (EWS, SCP and HSCL) would move from the DCYA to the Department of Education and Skills, the logistics for this move are currently under discussion.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the emergence and development of the Statutory Education Welfare Service in Ireland and presented the various government initiatives that have emerged particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s to respond to the issue of school absenteeism in Ireland. It is important to consider the emergence and development of the Service as it contextualises the research questions and illustrates how the Service is continously changing in response to need. The legislation that emerged in 2000 (Education (Welfare) Act) was intended to provide a mechanism where the causes of school absenteeism could be responded to in a more holistic manner. This eventually led to the integration of the Statutory EWS with more welfare orientated initiatives such as the HSCL and the SCP, which meant a focus not only on school attendance but also on participation and retention in education in DEIS schools. The necessity for this change in focus from the predominantly prosecutory Service to a more welfare orientated one was identified as far back as the 1990s and is still evolving today. The next chapter will examine the legislation that has emerged at national and international level to respond to school absenteeism and early school leaving.

3.0 School Attendance Legislation

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the legislation that has developed in various jurisdictions to respond to school absenteeism. There is a particular focus on the ways the USA and the UK use compulsory school attendance legislation to improve attendance and how they have modified their work practices under their legislation to provide better outcomes for children and families. The Irish compulsory school attendance legislation is outlined and explained in this chapter as is the role of the Education Welfare Officer under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

3.2 International Compulsory School Attendance Legislation

Some of the first references to compulsory education can be found in literature in the time of Martin Luther (1500s) and also later in the Renaissance era where there are references made to the importance and necessity of organised education and the subsequent criticism by society of parents who did not see the importance of educating their children (Zhang, 2004). All modern progressive states have enforced attendance laws since the 1800s and have seen the value and necessity of doing so. In the United States of America in 1852, the Compulsory Attendance Act was introduced; this was the first general law attempting to 'control' school attendance and included mandatory attendance for children between the ages of 8-14 years for a period of at least 3 months per year.

Since then, compulsory school attendance laws exist in all US states with 5 years of age being the required age of entry in to education and 18 years the finishing age in some US states (the average is 16 years).[10] For many years most state laws did not specify the number of times students had to be absent to be defined truant. However, in recent years a number of states have begun to explicitly define truancy and insist that districts now do this in order to more appropriately deal with this issue. Virginia, for instance, revised their laws in 2004 to enable courts to use alternative methods such as counselling provision and summer schools as opposed to sanctions (Christie, 2006 p.485). Many other US states have

[10] http://nces.ed.gov/programs/statereform. State Education Reforms. Table 5.1 Compulsory School Attendance Laws. 2013.

progressed along these lines and have sought to look at ways of encouraging families to work with them rather than 'punishing' them for their children's non-school attendance. However, all US States at the same time have tightened up their legislation around school absences and truancy and have expected districts to clearly define the reasons for even a pupil's half day absence. In 2005, Kentucky lawmakers passed a Bill to address attendance issues for young people with special needs; this piece of legislation also clearly stated the penalties for school absenteeism which included fines of between 100 and 250 US dollars. Almost all US states imposed monetary sanctions on parents who violated the attendance laws. Rhode Island compulsory attendance law (Board of Education Act) stated that attendance at school between the ages of 6 and 18 years was expected and if breached parents/carers could be fined 150 dollars per day that the child fails to attend school, if absences accumulated to 30 days the parent/carer could then be prosecuted and if convicted could be imprisoned for a period not exceeding 6 months and/or could be fined 500 dollars.[11] Over half of the states had the authority to imprison parents or to direct social service intervention for those students who did not attend school. Accountability for attendance matters was considered to be shared among the schools, the parents and the relevant authorities. Washington law required that children from 8-17 years attended public or private school or were home schooled. Washington's state truancy law was known as the Becca Bill.[12] This law required the school district and the juvenile court to take specific actions when a child was truant and to assist them to return to school or to file truancy petitions in juvenile court when students met a certain number of unexcused absences. Since the introduction of the Becca Bill in 1995 there has been a dramatic increase in the number of truancy petitions filed with the juvenile courts, they increased from 91 in 1994 to 15,000 in 1997 and have remained around this figure (Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2009). The legislation clearly outlined the responsibility of the district or school to respond to absences in an appropriate manner. Therefore when absences reached between 7 to 10 days per month, the school or district was required to file a petition with the juvenile court. The parent/carer was held responsible accordingly and penalties were then levied on the parent/carer.

[11] http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/ststutes/title16/16-19. P.1.

[12] The Becca Bill was passed in 1996 when the parents of a 13 year old girl went to the Juvenile Court with their out of control daughter Rebecca Hedman, the courts said they could not help unless she had committed a crime. Later Rebecca was found murdered. Her parents lobbied the state to pass this law to help other parents. http://lewiscountywa.gov/beccabill

In 2008, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy was directed by legislature to study the implementation of the truancy provisions of the Becca Bill in school districts and to examine the costs to the school districts and the courts; the Washington State Becca Task Force was charged with this responsibility. Their findings showed that truancy caseloads dramatically increased and although each school district had the same laws within Washington State there were substantial variations in the interventions used and the timelines used to respond. In addition, they found that the court process had become more about prevention and intervention rather than prosecution. The courts often adopted the role of directing the interventions of other relevant services such as anger management programmes, social service intervention or substance abuse programmes. One of the additional key findings was that effective out of school programmes in the community were identified as making a difference as opposed to legal sanctions alone, also the programmes that had Community Truancy Boards to oversee and address these attendance problems were more successful in attempting to divert families from the court process as they involved local community members who regularly met with the families involved.

It emerged that many local practices had evolved from district to district and some even appointed probation officers or truancy specialists to work with individual families with high level absences, for instance, the Spokane County Community Truancy Board Truancy Specialist used the 'Check and Connect' model of intervention which had four principal components; mentoring, systematic monitoring, timely and individualised intervention and enhanced home-school supports (Washington Becca State Task Force 2009). If families however did not engage in this method of intervention and continued to be in contempt of the court order, the penalties then imposed consisted of fines, child detention or community service.

Australia and New Zealand also have compulsory school attendance legislation. New Zealand's 1989 Education Act (Section 29) stated that the parents of a child could be convicted and fined 30 dollars per day that the child was absent without valid reason from school.[13] Australia's Education Act of 1972 provided for the compulsory attendance of any child between the ages of 6 and 16 years and if children had unexplained absences in Australia their parents could both be prosecuted and fined. Compulsory Education

[13] http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1989/0080

Legislation (2009) required that all young people between the ages of 16 and 17 attend and participate in a full-time approved learning programme.

3.3 The United Kingdom and Compulsory School Attendance

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980, gave the Education Authority the ability to use the law to ensure that parents did all they could to cause their children to attend school. Responsibility for school attendance and all education matters rested with the Scottish Executive Education Department (Reid, 2008). The Education Service in Scotland followed a series of procedures prior to the issue of a School Attendance Order which included; initial letters sent to parents but if attendance levels fell below 95% in a 6 week period this was followed by a series of meetings with the parents and school staff. There was also the chance of social work involvement if required at this stage and a case conference of relevant professionals could be called. If there was still no improvement in attendance figures there was then a referral to the Attendance Review Committee and under the legislation this committee had the authority to issue a School Attendance Order. Parents had the right of appeal to the Sheriff however if the Order was to remain, it would continue to be in force as long as the child was of school going age, if the parent did not comply with the order they were then guilty of an offence under section 41 of the Act (Education (Scotland) Act 1980, Section 41).

In England, the Department for Children, Families and Skills (DCFS) had responsibility for managing all attendance related issues. In Wales, the responsibility for school attendance matters lay with the Department for Children Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills and in Northern Ireland, with the Northern Ireland Irish Department of Education. All of these Departments although adhering to the same legislation had independent responsibility for ensuring that school attendance legislation was adhered to and managed at local level by the local authorities (LEAs). All children were expected to be in receipt of an education between the ages of 5 and 16 years. The relevant part of the legislation to school attendance was Section 437-447 of the 1996 Education Act[14] which clearly outlined parental responsibility in relation to school attendance. The Act outlined parental responsibilities and the procedures to be used to secure the regular attendance of a pupil at school. The UK saw poor school attendance as a serious social indicator and the overall improvement of school attendance

[14] www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpg9/1996/56/part/VI/chapter/II

was part of the Every Child Matters Agenda (Wright, 2009) and has been a key aim of successive governments in the UK.

This UK legislation gave scope for a number of options to be pursued with parents to secure improved school attendance. The 1996 Education Act stated that prior to 'instituting proceedings for an offence under Section 443 or 444 a local education authority shall consider whether it would be appropriate (instead of or as well as instituting proceedings) to apply for an Education Supervision Order with respect to the child'. The monitoring of the child's educational welfare then became the responsibility of the courts. If parents were non-compliant and faced prosecution under Section 444 of the Act they were liable to a fine of up to £2,500 or a period of imprisonment (up to three months).

Prior to prosecution the local authorities had a number of options open to them to secure improved attendance. These included; a Parenting Order which required parents to attend parenting classes and be monitored by the courts or an Education Supervision Order which appointed a Supervisor on behalf of the courts to work with the family. The School Attendance Order was a court order that required parents to register their children in a recognised school within a specified time frame or provide evidence of home education. Alternative sanctions included a Penalty Notice which if not paid would lead to prosecution under Section 444 of the Act, the Penalty Notice consisted of a fine of £60 rising to £120 and if not paid parents faced prosecution. Local authorities in the UK were required by government to ensure a change to attendance figures in more recent years, hence the emergence of Fast Track to Prosecution as a framework to ensure improved results in relation to school attendance.

3.4 The Fast Track Initiative

In 2003, 9 local authorities (LEAs) implemented the Fast Track to prosecution framework. The policy intervention behind the programme was to ensure that both schools and LEAs dealt with school attendance cases quickly and efficiently with the purpose of engaging the parent and working with them over a defined period of time (approximately 12 weeks). If no improvement was evident after the time period then the LEA would proceed to court. Over the 12 week period the LEA had flexibility with the procedures to be followed with the parents under the following guidelines:

- If attendance fell below a specified level, the school would be required to take action initially, this would take the form of letters, home visits, meetings with school and education welfare officers and the creation of an action plan with specific targets (4 week time frame),
- If there was no change to attendance or non-compliance the case would then have proceeded to Fast Track. At this stage there was a summons issued and the school/LEA would have convened a meeting where they reviewed the case. It is at this stage that a decision was made about proceeding to court. The process was to be concluded within 12 weeks (Halsey et al., 2004).

An evaluation of Fast Track took place between January 2003 and June 2004 by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NfER) who were commissioned by government to examine the framework. Feedback was largely positive and significant impact to school attendance figures was recorded in some LEAs. One of the principal benefits recorded was the improvement to school recording and the school's overall involvement in the process. In instances where Fast Track had poor outcomes it was considered to be largely due to the lack of involvement of the school (Halsey et al., 2004). Another noted factor contributing to good outcomes was the choice of case entered into the Fast Track system – a decision was made by some LEAs that 'entrenched' cases would be omitted to secure some chance of success (Milton Keynes Local Authority Guidelines 2014, p.4).

Education Welfare in the UK, has like Ireland, changed in the last number of years and the previous focus of attendance only cases has now changed, as the role of the Education Welfare Service involved dealing with referrals which included; exclusions, child protection issues, anti-social behaviour, out of school placements, special needs provision as well as truancy and non-school attendance. Local authorities also varied in the way they managed the service, for instance some schools had EWOs working on the school campus and others did not. In a study by Ken Reid for NfER (2006) where he conducted a survey of 431 Educational Welfare Officers in England and Wales between 2004-2005 and in-depth interviews with 59 respondents, he found that the majority of EWOs did not believe that the existing court sanctions such as parenting orders, anti-social behaviour orders or fines were effective methods for improving school attendance. In Reid's study the EWOs believed that the court's failure to implement worthwhile penalties in non-attendance cases was a key part of the problem and rather than 'punish' parents through the court system that 'pupils should

be provided with appropriate alternative or vocational curriculum programmes in order to facilitate both their learning and attendance' (Reid, 2006, p.14). For the most part EWOs found themselves trying to reintegrate pupils into school systems that they had already rejected. The EWOs involved in Reid's research also noted that the parents referred to their service were struggling with depression, were in situations of poverty and disadvantage and that to focus on supports for parents would make more sense than prosecuting already vulnerable families (Reid, 2006).

In 2000, The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act introduced the possibility of prison sentences for parents of poor attenders as a response to government belief that eradicating poor attendance would also eradicate adolescent anti-social behaviour. Despite numerous initiatives in place in the UK, overall school attendance has not greatly improved in the last 20 years (Sheppard, 2011). Also there is no evidence that legal sanctions work in getting children to attend school (never mind participate) or that anti-social behaviour lessens as a result of increased school attendance. Information from the Ministry of Justice in 2010 showed parental prosecutions increased for poor school attendance in England by 27.6% between 2007 and 2009 and of these an average of just over one a week received a suspended prison sentence and just over one a month served a prison sentence (Sheppard, 2011, p.245), yet we still have no evidence that parental prosecution actually had any effect on school attendance.

3.5 Ireland – The Education (Welfare) Act 2000

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 replaced the existing school attendance legislation of 1926. Prior to enactment the Education (Welfare) Bill was sent before Seanad Éireann for discussion, it then proceeded to the Dáil where it became law in 2000. Micheál Martin (Minister for Education and Science 1999) presented the Bill before the Seanad and described the Bill as a 'significant milestone in Irish Education', he stated that 'for the first time in our history a Bill had been drafted and is being discussed which is focused on targeting the underlying causes of non-attendance at school rather than on sanctions for truancy', Micheál Martin continued by saying that 'the school attendance system was governed by out of date legislation, legislation that is implemented in a haphazard manner, with a poor level of information generally on the scale of non-attendance, a lack of resources

and the absence of a properly co-ordinated national strategy' (Seanad Éireann Debate, 1999)[15].

By June 2000, the Bill which had been passed by the first, second and third stages of the Seanad and was subsequently amended by the Dáil, came before the Seanad for the final time. The new Minister for Education and Science, Dr. Michael Woods, defined the Bill as an 'important and central measure of the government's ongoing strategy to reduce disadvantage in society' (Seanad Éireann Debate, June 2000). The aims of the Bill included ensuring all children of compulsory school going age attend school or were in receipt of a minimum standard of education. The Bill also sought to address the causes of truancy by identifying the need to help families and children who may be at risk of school attendance problems. The Bill also imposed statutory duties on schools to have a more proactive approach to the issue of truancy and advised greater coordination between services and agencies involved with these families and children. The Bill raised the school leaving age from 15 to 16 years with an emphasis on the child having at least 3 years of post-primary education. The Bill clearly outlined the parent/carer's responsibility and statutory duty to ensure the regular attendance of the child. The Bill became law on the 5th of July 2000 and was enacted by the Oireachtas to:

> *provide for the entitlement of every child in the state to a certain minimum education, and, for that purpose, to provide for the registration of children receiving education in places other than recognised schools, the compulsory attendance of certain children at recognised schools, the establishment of a body, to be known as the National Educational Welfare Board or, in the Irish language, An Bord Náisiúnta Leasa Oideachais, the coordination of its activities and those of certain other persons in so far as they relate to matters connected with school attendance, the identification of the causes of non-attendance on the part of certain students and the adoption of measures for its prevention, to repeal the School Attendance Acts 1926 to 1967, to permit the supply of data relating to a person's educational history to certain persons, to provide for the amendment of the protection of Young Persons (Employment)*

[15] http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates/1999

Act, 1996, and to provide for matters connected therewith. (Education (Welfare) Act 2000, p.5)

The Act, like other European and international legislation clearly outlined the penalties for non-school attendance. Once the 'welfare approach' had been tried and had failed, the parent/carer could be issued with a legal notice which was issued by the Educational Welfare Officer, if the parent/carer continued to be in breach of the Notice they could then be prosecuted in the District Court, if convicted and found guilty of the offence, the parent could be fined up to 1000 euro or be imprisoned for a term up to one month or both a fine and imprisonment. If the child continued to be absent, Section 25(5) of the Act allowed the district court impose a fine of up to 200 euro per day that the child continued to be absent or again a term of imprisonment up to one month. Section 11 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, directed the appointment of Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) by the National Educational Welfare Board (replaced by the Child and Family Agency in January 2014).

Section 9 of the Act outlined the functions of the Board but the Act never outlined clearly the functions of the EWO, therefore the role of the EWO has never been defined in legislation. However, as in other countries the role has become defined in response to the social issues that have emerged for the families referred to the service. Similar to the US and UK, the Irish judicial system adopted the role of director of services and rather than punish parents initially the courts attempted to identify the appropriate social services for the parent/carer to work with under the direction of the court. Hence EWOs increasingly found themselves in the role of Social Worker, Community Worker, Counsellor, Youth Worker etc. The work practices that emerged are very similar to the EWO service in the UK, apart from their extensive menu of legislative options once a family is referred to their service. Their legislation provided options such as Supervision Orders, Parenting Orders, Penalty Notices, and Attendance Orders that were not open to the Irish Education Welfare Service as is evident from Appendix A where court sanctions primarily included adjournments and/or convictions. In both jurisdictions, parents and carers could be brought before the courts to be prosecuted for their children's non-attendance issues. Also, in both jurisdictions there was a lack of research to indicate whether this was the correct way to address the underlying issues that led to the problems of poor school attendance. Ken Reid, when asked to reflect on his 40 years of work in the area of truancy in the UK concluded that 'there is much more research needed to be undertaken in the search for effective solutions into the

prevention of pupil's non-attendance and truancy and into the most effective interventions' (Reid, 2012, p.336).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined the international and national legislation pertaining to compulsory school attendance. It provides a flavour of the various laws used by various jurisdictions to ensure school attendance for children and young people. In both the USA and the UK there appeared to be a move away from the solely punitive sanctions to consider alternative approaches to respond to the complex issues behind school absenteeism. All jurisdictions appear to struggle with a punitive approach to school absenteeism. This questioning of the appropriateness of the penalties imposed on parents is pertinent to this research, as these jurisdictions illustrate their struggle to respond to complex issues using legislation with a very limited brief. This is an important consideration within this research as the interactions between EWO and the families will illustrate. In Ireland, there is no clear definition of the role of the Education Welfare Officer and this is a necessity in ensuring the development of alternative methods in dealing with poor school attendance. In the next chapter we will see how alternative methods have developed internationally within the confines of the legislation, to provide a more appropriate response to school absenteeism.

4.0 International Initiatives to Combat School Absenteeism

4.1 Introduction

In most countries children are required to remain in school until they are at least 16 years old. Compulsory schooling begins at either age five or six years and all countries have legislation in place in an attempt to ensure regular school attendance. Many countries as a response to their individual legislation have sought to find methods to address continued school absenteeism and early school leaving. These initiatives have often developed as a response to particular needs that have arisen in particular areas. Reducing truancy levels is an important part of the EU2020 strategy aimed at lowering the numbers of early school leavers (The European Commission, 2013). The following is a sample of initiatives that have developed throughout Europe and the US to combat absenteeism and early school leaving, that illustrate that although there is diversity in the methods deployed there are common findings when identifying what contributes to successful outcomes. These initiatives were chosen as they illustrate a shift in thinking from a purely punitive method of dealing with the complexities of school absenteeism to a more holistic approach, with an emphasis on community responses from a number of agencies working with families and young people, they illustrate how in some instances that the judiciary can be creative when working with the most marginalised.

4.2 The USA

Jefferson County:

The USA had for many years attempted to combat the issues of school absenteeism and truancy. There had been a number of initiatives in different US states that were established to break the cycle of disadvantage. An example of one such initiative was the *Jefferson County Truancy Court Diversion Project* which arose out of frustration with existing legal intervention that had resulted in little change to truancy levels. A review was conducted of over 500 cases and showed that despite numerous court hours and hundreds of dollars there was little change to school attendance and no benefit to the child, family or the community (Byer and Kuhn, 2003). Research identified that intervention was required long before court involvement and it was necessary for all of the relevant stakeholders in the child's life to be

involved at the same time. Therefore this initiative oversaw the establishment of an organised team that consisted of a Judge, school/court liaison, a counsellor, other school staff member, a case manager (social worker) and treatment provider(s). Fifteen students were identified for involvement and each family was then assessed by the team who aimed to gather information in order to focus the plan of intervention. The key was that the plan would be in place before any court appearance by the family. The Judge then held proceedings at the neighbourhood school. The programme duration was approximately 10-12 weeks and during that time the Judge saw the family once a week. Teachers were also regularly updated by team members so that they could provide appropriate classroom responses and so that their expectations would be reasonable. In the main, the programme targeted the family structure, assisted with housing issues, helped parents with job interviews and provided therapeutic services. The individual students were offered sessions to help with self-esteem, personal hygiene and other adolescent issues. Academic assistance was extended to all participants. The aim of the programme was that the families and students would feel part of a school community.

The main reason behind the success of this initiative was that it required the attitudes of the local Judges to change – to now come into the communities and in this initiative they volunteered hours each week during school time to participate in these projects as they felt they resulted in improved attendance, grades and family function in the majority of the cases.

Chicago:

Chicago had also attempted to tackle increasing issues of school absenteeism particularly at high school level. They identified the students to be at greatest risk to be those with significant learning difficulties (Roderick et al., 1997). On examining levels of truancy in a number of marginalised high schools including Gore Park High School and Curie High School, the recommendations were that teachers should be supported through policies, information systems and support services. In addition; it was a priority that teachers got to know their students and that those at risk students were identified very early and assigned an advisor or mentor. Another recommendation was that schools must work with parents so that students would understand that everyone is ‘on the same page’. In addition, students were given the opportunity to return to school to catch up academically so that their re-entry was not too daunting. Two further recommendations from these initiatives were, firstly for improved communication between elementary school teachers and high school teachers

around the students transitioning and secondly the importance of early identification and access to other services such as mental health or social services for young people at risk.

Ohio:

The state of Ohio was also active in attempting to improve rates of school attendance. The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) was a programme open to all schools in the state and was based on the theory that schools, families and communities were important contexts for children's learning and that greater coordination among all three elements benefits children's education and development (Epstein and Sheldon 2002, p.268). Schools were therefore required to use research-based approaches to plan, implement and evaluate comprehensive programmes of partnership that focused on student's success, including improving school attendance. The first step in this initiative was to establish an Action Team for Partnership (ATP) whose aim was to link family and community involvement activities to specific goals. An examination of the research in to the ATP has shown that schools with higher quality Partnership Programmes reported greater parent involvement and attendance at school events, more parents involved in decision making that facilitated increased student-parent interaction as opposed to the school with lower quality teams/programmes (Sheldon, 2005). The work of the ATP also led to improved discipline and academic performance (Sheldon, 2007, p.269). Epstein and Sheldon's research study (2002, p.311) on schools that participated in the programme showed that in each of the 18 schools involved, average daily attendance rates increased over the three year period 1995-1997. Prior to this focus on attendance, the school had reported an average daily increase of 0.12% from 1995-1996. After the interventions of the ATP through the NNPS between 1996 and 1997 the schools reported a 0.71% increase in average daily attendance. This study also found that schools were more likely to improve student attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism with three broad strategies:

- By taking a comprehensive approach to attendance with activities that involved students, families and communities
- By using positive involvement activities rather than negative activities i.e. rewards
- By sustaining a focus on improving attendance over time

Michigan State:

The Truancy programme in Michigan State developed from growing concerns of community members and the public schools. A pilot programme was then undertaken and a truancy committee was formed which consisted of a steering committee of relevant stakeholders. These stakeholders included; principals, the truant officer, representatives from a child and family service agency, a mental health agency and the juvenile court. This steering committee met regularly, agreed programmes and brought back subsequent plans to the larger group. The students identified to participate in the programme were chosen by the principals, intervention took the form of letter in the first instance followed by a visit from the attendance officer and if further intervention was deemed necessary the family were subsequently referred to the community mental health agency or the child and family services. The study of this particular intervention conducted by Mcluskey et al. (2004) found that once correspondence was received by families followed by a visit from the attendance service, there was a significant improvement to school attendance.

New Haven Connecticut and Florida:

The Stay in School Programme implemented in New Haven Connecticut used mentor supports and positive peer pressure to encourage their students to maintain regular school attendance. In Florida, the *Mentoring and Tutoring Help Programme* used mentors who are matched with 'prodigies' based on their interests. The prodigies received small group tutoring in mathematics and English and the families were also expected to participate actively in the programme (McCray, 2006). It was evident that despite the diversity of the programmes used throughout the US in the past to tackle school absenteeism, they all had a number of common elements:

- They involved parents
- They ensured sanctions were firm and consistent
- They involved social and community agencies

Many of the programmes also had a mentoring component which had proved successful in re-engaging children with learning. The use of incentives and consequences and the greater collaboration between community workers such as law enforcement, mental health, educators, mentors and social service providers were all components of effective school absenteeism reduction programmes.

In the US in recent years there has been a shift from the punitive approach to attempting to understand why young people are not attending school. A new Act entitled Every Student Succeeds Act 2015 (ESSA) coupled with the requirement of all schools to adopt the keeping of electronic records has meant that 'chronic absenteeism has become a nationally recognised metric' (Rueb, 2019, Article, NY Times). Chronic absenteeism was defined by the US government as being absent for 18 days or 10% absenteeism and recognition of the seriousness of the current absenteeism rates throughout the US (8 million students chronically absent in 2015-2016) has led to initiatives such as 'Attendance Works' which was an intervention programme focusing on positive engagement with families and students and on building capacity by teaching attendance and creating a culture of attendance. In 2017, the Barak Obama administration launched a national initiative – Every Student, Every Day: A national initiative to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism.

4.3 Europe and the UK:

In research conducted in Europe and the UK a similar picture emerged. Research conducted in Germany on truancy identified family, school and peers as impacting on truancy levels. In Wagner et al. (2004) the following methods were suggested to be incorporated into any initiative attempting to reduce school absenteeism; accurate control of the students presence at school, parents being informed immediately of any unauthorized absence, involving parents in school life, improving pupil-teacher relationships and finally the modification of the curriculum if required. In Sweden, recent research indicates the importance of a positive school ethos and culture and the importance of effective school leadership to aid in reducing school absences (Ramberg, Brolin Låftman, Fransson & Modin, 2018).

Non-attendance and truancy rates were much higher in Britain than the rest of Europe (Reid, 2005). Despite the establishment of a significant number of initiatives to deal with non-attendance, there has been little overall improvement to school attendance (Reid, 2010). Since devolution, each part of Britain was responsible for the running of their individual education system. In England, there were two facets to the management of attendance issues: the National Programme on Attendance and the National Strategy for School Improvement. The former was developed between 1997 and 2007 by the D*f*ES which is now the Department for Children, Schools and Families and placed emphasis on school staff including school support staff as being the key players in managing and preventing non-

attendance. The programme was based on research indicators for best practice which involved a three pronged approach;

1. The implementation of a specialist curriculum to promote learning known as the SEAL curriculum- Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning. The aim of this programme was to support and challenge schools in developing social and emotional skills for staff and pupils.

2. The promotion of Parental Responsibility for Attendance and Behaviour, this was known as the PRAB scheme – here parents who had to sign contracts for behaviour and attendance may receive fixed penalty notices but will have parenting support providers within the local authority.

3. The development of school partnerships – this was to aid the prioritization of behaviour and attendance, the sharing of local provision and effective practice and development (Reid, 2010).

The second facet is that of the National Strategy for School Improvement which has in recent years been extended to include a 'field force' for behaviour and attendance. This programme consisted of a director, senior programme advisors, senior territorial advisors, regional advisors and local authority strategic behaviour and attendance consultants. The aim of this programme was to reduce absenteeism, encourage good attendance and facilitate the exchange of good practice (Reid, 2010).

Throughout England the LEAs and the D*f*ES operated a number of programmes at local level within the schools, these included the fast-track to prosecution for parents of persistent absentees, location of police officers in particular schools, increased grants to LEAs to promote initiatives on attendance and behaviour and amendments to the national curriculum (Reid, 2005). One example from Wrexham LEA was an illustration of good practice, here all support staff had been trained to participate in the School Assistance Programme (SAP). This programme was initially developed in the US and was a model of primary prevention and early intervention that used support groups and learning activities for all students who exhibited high risk behaviour, including non-attendance.

The Education Welfare Service (EWS) was a specialist education support service that has been in existence in some form in the UK since the late nineteenth century. They worked in partnership with schools, the LEAs and other agencies to provide a service to young people and their families. They were commonly referred to as Education Social Workers and much

of their daily work involved liaison with police, school staff, parents, teachers, psychologists and social services to identify and address children's needs. Included in this role was court work and prosecution if that was deemed to be a necessary intervention. The EWS were expected to work closely with families and schools in order to resolve attendance issues. The LEA was responsible for the effective working relationship between the school and the EWS. This has proved a difficulty in some areas where the Education Welfare Officer was not part of the school staff and there was tension between the enforcement of the law and the welfare role of supporting families (Sheldon, 2009). The EWS for the most part were located in the LEA offices but on occasion they were school based. There has been research into the area of school attendance and prosecution of parents and in particular the use of fast-track prosecution and truancy sweeps in England and the UK (Kendall et al., 2004) and (Halsey et al., 2003, 2004).

In Scotland, the government had identified a number of priority areas in education and consequently Parliament had proposed early intervention strategies designed to help and support vulnerable children and families, strategies to improve the quality of the learning experience, new skills and life-long initiatives and innovation in higher education related to Scotland's future economic needs (Reid, 2010). The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 allowed for the Education Authority to require a parent/carer to provide an explanation for non-attendance, if the Education Authority believe there was not a reasonable excuse for that non-attendance (Section 36), continued failure to improve attendance would result in a referral to the Attendance Review Committee. This review committee may then issue an Attendance Order. Prior to the issue of such an Order, the Scottish Education Service were required to implement a number of stages, which included an initial letter, meetings with the senior school staff, followed by a case conference. If attendance had not improved the referral was then made to the Review Committee who then determined the best course of action for the child.

Similar to the Scottish and English system, the Education Welfare Service in Northern Ireland had responsibility for ensuring that pupils attend school on a regular basis. The Public Services and Utilities Section (PSU) had also implemented three main strategies to improve school attendance, these included: Primary Attendance Matters (PAM) – which had as its focus regular attendance at primary school, the School Age Mothers (SAM) Programme and an initiative to oversee the education of children in residential care. Northern Ireland also considered the gathering and analysis of data from pre-school to upper secondary school as

a primary focus, this was to identify where resources would be best placed. On the ground resources to schools included: attendance coordinators in schools, numeracy and literacy support, breakfast clubs, after school clubs, lunch time and homework groups, individualised curriculum and support for parents (McClure Watters, 2012). One report from Northern Ireland also recommended that each school should have an EWO on staff to promote regular school attendance (NIAO, 2004). In 2016, a strategy document was published for schools entitled 'Improving Pupil Attendance Strategy', this document outlined the need to focus on early intervention, tailored support for students, collaboration and engagement by all parties and the sharing of good practice.

Wales has adopted similar approaches on the ground to promote regular school attendance. Initiatives such as the Flying Start and free breakfasts were designed to target pre-school and primary schools. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) have also established centres for learning needs. They have also published strategies entitled Strategies to Improve Attendance and Manage Lateness (2011), this document advised schools on the management of school absenteeism. The Additional Learning Needs Panel (ALNP) which reported to the Welsh Ministerial Advisory Group had the responsibility for school attendance and therefore had as its focus – additional learning needs, gathering of accurate school attendance data and the review of the EWS to tackle bullying, racism and social welfare issues (Reid, 2010). It is worthy of note that certain schools in Wales have EWOs as part of the schools' pastoral care teams.

4.4 Conclusion

All of the above initiatives had the reduction of school absenteeism as their core aim, all recognised the importance of focusing on the issues pertinent to families and students and sought to find ways to deal with these issues through a variety of different methods. All of these initiatives had a legal basis and were entitled to resort to court prosecution should all other interventions fail. However, identifying this failure is difficult as the issues that cause poor school attendance are complex and the USA in its move away from the punitive approach to one that adopts a community approach is of significant note. The US administration according to a White House Press Release (2015) is 'partnering with states, local communities and non-profit faith and philanthropic organisations' and is calling on both public and private sector bodies to assist in the elimination of chronic absenteeism through the implementation of early warning systems, cross-sector interventions and

supports that will connect students to meaningful education, health, housing, juvenile justice and other critical services. These initiatives and those in the UK and Europe seek to address the many barriers that students face in order to ensure students can attend schools but 'schools need to offer more than curriculum content' (Francis and Mills, 2012, p.265) therefore these initiatives need to focus on the wide ranging complex elements that disadvantage young people and lead them to disengage from school. The next chapter explores why young people disengage from school and from learning and explores the key factors that contribute to poor school attendance.

5.0 School Absenteeism or Truancy

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed literature review relating to the fields of school absenteeism and truancy and explores the reasons why young people disengage from learning and from school. At the outset, the various definitions of school absenteeism are discussed as is the complex issue of school refusal, from this follows a discussion on the factors influencing school absenteeism, in particular the influence of the school and the influence of home and peer relationships on a young person's school attendance. The area of school transition is explored as a key area of difficulty for some young people, particularly that important transition between primary and post-primary school.

5.2 Definition:

The literature has provided much debate on the most appropriate definition for school absenteeism. There are, it seems, many interpretations of this term including: truancy, school refusal, school drop-out, authorised absences and unauthorised absences. On closer analysis many of these terms however can mean different things, added to this is the school's interpretation of a particular situation and their consequent labelling of absences. The school is the one who determines the type of absence being reported or as Reid (1999) illustrated parental condoned absence was not considered to be truancy by some institutions, on the other hand some schools considered any unexcused absence from school or the habitual engagement in unexcused absence from school as a form of truancy (Zhang, 2007), although this absence may often have been with the parent's knowledge. Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson and Kirk (2003) used three different terms to describe pupils' non-attendance. These terms included truancy, unacceptable absences and parentally condoned absences. They defined 'truancy' as absences which pupils themselves indicated would be unacceptable to teachers, 'unacceptable absences' were those not acceptable to the teachers or local education authorities but not recognised as such by the pupils themselves and finally 'parentally condoned' absences were those where parents were aware that their child was not at school.

Other research in this area including Atkinson, Hasley, Wilkin and Kinder (2000) explored the concept of time in their search for an appropriate definition as they examined the extent

of the absences and the differences in the nature of those absences; those who are absent from a single lesson or those who are absent for longer periods of time. O'Keeffe (1993) looked at the difficulty in the classification of absences that happen in schools both before and after the registration time as absences post-registration are often not recorded by school authorities. Expanding from this observation was the consideration that there were difficulties with the overall accuracy of attendance data and in fact such data can be unreliable given the extensive number of variables involved, variables such as the school, the family environment and the pupil themselves.

A popular definition of school absenteeism used extensively in the literature is that of 'truancy'. This has been broadly defined by Stoll and O'Keeffe (1989) as being absent from school without parental consent. Reid (2003) also used this definition but added the term 'illegal' absence. Again, as the school was the main judge as to whether the pupil is truant or not this led to further variations within the definition of the term. Sheldon (2009) outlined examples of where local authorities in the UK have tried for a number of years to distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absences without success. Parental condoned absences also depended very much on school and parent relationships, parents who engaged well with schools and offered excuses for absences found that they were not reported to local education authorities. Schools, it appears, have different opinions themselves as to the categorisation of certain absences and this means subsequently provided definitions and data have to be carefully considered.

5.3 School Refusal

School refusal is another complex element of school absenteeism. School refusal behaviour is considered by many to be a child motivated refusal to attend school or to have difficulty attending classes or being unable to remain in the school for the whole day (Kearney and Bensaheb, 2006). Those who school refused often exhibited problems such as general and social anxiety, worry, fear, self-consciousness and depression (Kearney and Albano, 2004). Berg (1992) defined school refusal as a condition characterised by reluctance and often outright refusal to go to school. He attributed the reasons for this to fear of separation from their parents, emotional upset and possible anti-social tendencies. His research also illustrated that this type of absenteeism unlike truancy was not concealed from their parents, Berg (1992) also noted that this form of absenteeism was not influenced by social class or academic or intellectual ability and he defined school refusal as:

> *A condition characterized by reluctance and often outright refusal to go to school in a child who (1) seeks the comfort and security of home, preferring to remain close to parental figures, especially during school hours; (2) displays evidence of emotional upset when faced with the prospect of having to attend school, although this may only take the form of unexplained physical symptoms; (3) manifests no severe anti-social tendencies apart from possible aggressiveness when attempts are made to force school attendance and (4) does not attempt to conceal the problem from parents* (Berg, 1997, p.90-91).

Berg noted that boys and girls are equally affected by school refusal issues and this condition had no relationship to social class, however it did impact more on young teenagers about to make the transition from primary to post-primary school. Berg made a clear distinction between school refusal and truancy as he described the latter as when 'children stay off school and attempt to conceal the fact from their parents' (p.91). Berg also believed that truancy was usually connected with severe social disadvantage. Hanna et al. (2012), stated that recent studies indicated that 'increased rates of both emotional and behavioural disorders were found in children who had both anxious school refusal and truancy, indicating that the two aspects of behavior are distinct but not mutually exclusive' (p.58). Kearney and Bensaheb (2006), noted that another indicator of school refusal behavior was that of 'tardiness'. Their behaviourist approach although very narrow in its focus concentrated on the use of clinical interventions that could be successful with school refusing behavior and suggested:

> *parent based contingency management, establishment of house rules with rewards and disincentives, structured routines in the morning and evening, alteration of parent commands towards brevity and clarity, reduction of excessive reassurance seeking behavior and occasionally forced school attendance* (p. 5).

Kearney (2008) made a very important point in that much of the literature contains the terms truancy and school refusal and these terms are often used inter-changeably which causes problems with clarity. He also noted the difficulty with qualifying school refusal behaviour as it can include 'complete and partial absences, tardiness and anxiety based difficulties' (p. 454), he went on to examine why children present with school refusal behaviour and identified the significance of factors such as homelessness and poverty, teenage pregnancy,

school violence and victimization, school climate and connectedness, parental involvement and family and community variables (p.458-461). Kearney et al. (2005) in their research on school refusal in young children aged between 5 and 9 years noted that such refusal may result from 'recent and critical family transitions such as parental illness or a move' (p.218), also of interest in this research was the school refuser who missed school for what Kearney et al. (2005) term as 'tangible reinforcers outside of school' these are children who did not present with anxiety but who were drawn to stimuli such as 'sleeping late, watching TV or participating in other activities during a school day' (p.219).

The issue of school refusal also provided a difficulty for schools reporting to local authorities as some schools could be more sympathetic than others and classified this form of absence as illness, again affecting the reliability of the data. Given the many definitions and significant debate on the various terms used in much of the literature on this subject, this research will focus on the term 'school absenteeism' as this is all encompassing and takes into consideration the difficulty with school provided data at both a national and international level. This research will illustrate that young people 'drop out' of the education system as a result of a number of factors including disaffection from school, inability to 'keep up', economic background and lack of parental interest (McNeal, 1999; Reid, 2006).

5.4 Factors influencing school absenteeism

The research on school absenteeism has identified a number of components that have contributed to poor school attendance. Kinder, Wakefield and Wilkin (1996) in their NFER study on disaffection from school found the main causes of absenteeism to be:

- The influence of friends and peers
- Relationships with teachers
- The content and delivery of the curriculum
- Family issues
- Bullying
- The classroom context – lack of control or pupils' learning difficulties

Malcom et al. (2003) in their study of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England stated that persistent absentees were more likely to come from marginalised home backgrounds and poor social circumstances (Reid, 2005). Much of the literature and national and

international level identified disadvantage as being a one of the principal causes of school absenteeism. Zhang, Willison, Katsivannis, Barrett, Ju & Wu (2010) in their research on 'truancy offenders' focused on the influences of home and family, the school itself and the individual student on levels of absenteeism and non-engagement with education while Epstein and Sheldon's (2002) study identified the school and the educators as being the primary influence on student engagement and participation. Wagner, Dunkake & Weiss (2004), in their research of truancy in Germany identified three main factors that they considered contributed to school absenteeism:

- Inadequate parental upbringing
- Weak parental supervision
- Poor internalisation of conventional norms and values by the student

They suggested further research in the area of weak parental bonding to fully ascertain the effects on school absenteeism. School refusal can therefore be attributed to emotional problems such as anxiety or depression whereas truancy is a form of resistance behavior towards the school. Darmody et al. (2008) in their research on truancy in Irish secondary schools referred to this form of resistance and described how students removed themselves 'at least temporarily from this environment by truanting' (p.63), here truanting is viewed as a form of 'counter school behaviour'(p. 63). Reid (2008) conducted research across three groups of professionals to ascertain the causes on non-school attendance, his findings suggested that pupils' non-attendance fell under three main categories: pupils who did not like coming to school, those who had home difficulties and those pupils with psychological problems (p.345). Sheppard (2007), in her research on pupil's perceptions of parental responses to absenteeism found that parents of poor school attenders were more likely to condone absences from school whereas the parents of good attenders were less likely to accept excuses permitting school absences. Hence parenting was considered a key factor when examining the reasons for poor school attendance.

The influence of family is explored in much of the research as an explanation for poor or non-school attendance. The essential role of parent's attitudes to school attendance should never be underestimated (Reid, 2007). Higher rates of school absenteeism were evident in families at the lower end of the social scale or where there was paternal/maternal unemployment. In addition, these families were unable to cope with day to day life and factors such as alcoholism, physical violence and abuse became prevalent (Reid, 2005;

1999). Apart from socioeconomic factors influencing school absenteeism, also of importance were family relationships, family history and family structure. Most of the research is in agreement that parental influence was particularly relevant among primary/elementary school children whereas older children were more affected by their school, their community and their peers (Mcluskey, Bynum and Patchin, 2004), (Smyth, McCoy and Darmody, 2004).

A significant amount of research focused on the school and its contribution to the promotion of school absenteeism. Reid (2007) identified the following factors within the school system that required further analysis:

- The quality of teaching
- Teacher-pupil relationships
- Overall pastoral care
- School ethos
- Leadership and management style
- The curriculum
- Bullying
- Out of school and after school provision

School plays a vital role in a child's life and can provide consistency for many students. Therefore, it is important that the student feels cared for and that they have positive relationships with their teachers. Reid (2012) has also noted that persistent absentees had 'statistically lower academic self-concepts and general levels of self-esteem' (p. 212). The curriculum also presented as a barrier to students who had difficulty accessing same and consequently they may have opted out to avoid failure. Quiroga, Janosz, Bisset, & Morin (2013) identified the link between students' self-perception of competence as determining student success where there is a relationship between depression, academic competence and achievement (p.1). They suggested that students with pessimistic academic self-views should be screened for depression and offered 'the appropriate care needed' (p. 6). Bullying within schools has become another factor contributing to poor school attendance or even drop out. Ross (2009), found a clear association between being bullied and disengaging from school. The nature of bullying has also changed with the growth of social media and now cyber bullying has been acknowledged as a serious and growing problem for young people.

Boldt (1994), in his research on early school leavers stated that home factors were not as significant as school factors in influencing a young person's decision to leave school, his study concluded that differences in expectations and values between staff and students in schools combined with peer pressure, opportunities to work and poor relationships with teachers were responsible for poor attendance and eventual drop out of the education system. Reid (2005) also identified that secondary school students were more likely to attribute school factors rather than home factors when explaining their poor school attendance as absences at primary level were perceived by schools to be parentally condoned absences and were therefore as a result of home factors rather than school. Only a small number of primary school teachers believed school factors to be relevant at this age. However, studies have shown that up to 27 per cent of primary pupils compared with 16 per cent of post-primary pupils started missing school at some point in their primary education (Malcom et al., 2003). Esch, Bocquet, Pull, Couffigal, Lehnert,Graas, Fond-Harmant and Ansseau (2014) found that substance use and disruptive behaviour disorders had a significant impact on early school leaving and that socio-economic factors, academic achievement and family support provided 'significant mediating factors of the association between mental disorders and subsequent educational attainment'(p.1).

When interviewed about their school experience pupils cited problems with lessons, problems with teachers, being bullied, peer pressure and social isolation as being the main causes of their poor attendance. The importance of listening to the voices of the young people is evident here. Article 12 (1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child declares:

> *State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

The 'Lundy Model'developed by Laura Lundy in 2007 assists educators and policy makers to allow young people and children to meaningfully participate in decision making which will hopefully 'improve the quality of decisions taken' and will 'empower children to be effective agents of change in their education and beyond' (Welty & Lundy, 2013, p.4) a point that is mirrored by Downes (2013) who advocates listening to the voices of children and young people and their views on early school leaving in order to facilitate change to the *system* and subject this system to 'public scrutiny' (p.347). This research sought to hear the

voices of the marginalised parents and young people so that they could have the opportunity to share their experiences and to influence change in their 'education and beyond' as very often, early school leavers become disconnected from the system and lose the opportunity to have their views heard.

The causes of school absenteeism are complex, they range from psychological issues that result in school refusal behaviours to parentally condoned absences, to absenteeism at secondary/high school level as a result of poor or non-engagement with school to bullying or pressures from peers and community influences. All research agrees that the consequences of absenteeism can have long lasting effects on one's life. Research has shown that absences begin in early education (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002) and lead to continued school absenteeism that result in eventual drop out and eventual socio-economic problems. A recent study of 26 children of low socio-economic status in Ireland who had recently commenced school, illustrated how early intervention in the form of increased supports, the use of play and enhancing the relationship between home and school from the very beginning would be advantageous to children in promoting lifelong positive attitudes to school (O'Rourke, O'Farrelly, Booth & Doyle 2017).

5.5 Transitions

The transition from primary to post-primary school is considered to be one of the most significant milestones in a child's life. Research has shown that this is a stressful, anxious period for all children (Lucey & Reay, 2000) but particularly for the more vulnerable child. In the ESRI commissioned research by Smyth et al. (2004) they examined the transition of pupils into 1st year and found that young people had mixed emotions around this transition process, there was a combination of nervousness and excitement evident on their first day, however there was a cohort of students who had very negative feelings about the transition and these were usually the students who had a negative experience of primary school (Smyth et al., 2004, p.188). Coffey (2013) clearly illustrated the difficulties facing young people on transition as they faced a change in their school environment, they mixed with a new peer group, they had to learn about a new form of school organization, they had greater number of teachers and their new school was significantly larger than their last (p.262).

It is essential that students feel connected to school and a sense of belonging in the school community, 'school climate that makes students feel they are cared for, safe and treated fairly

is conducive to their developing a positive sense of belonging to school' (Ma, 2003, p.348). Kearney (2008) described school climate as students feeling connected to their school, students feeling supported regarding their academic, social and other needs, where there was evidence of positive classroom management, participation in extracurricular activities and tolerant disciplinary procedures (p.459). Schools that promote inclusion are those that provide a supportive, quality learning environment, they are 'welcoming and caring schools and classrooms' and they ensure the prevention of discrimination (Downes, Nair-Wirth & Rusinaite, 2017, p.2). Successful transition to school leads children to be more positive towards school and to feel a sense of belonging and encouragement. Dockett & Perry (2014) see transition to school as being characterized by: opportunities, expectations, aspirations and entitlements and they emphasise the importance of children's active roles in shaping their own transition experience and they emphasise the importance of 'consulting' children about their transition (p.94). To aid the transfer process Lucey and Reay (2000) advocated the use of 'real' experiences, such as visits and practice lessons for children on route to post-primary school. It is vital that information transfers with young people between school placements this is stressed in Smyth et al. (2004) where they highlighted that 'a minority of school principals reported receiving information on all in-coming students' and a significant number of principals were 'dissatisfied with the information they received on the students entering their school' (p.282).

Coffey (2013) in her research on school transition advocated the appointment of a transition coordinator in schools to ensure good communication between all of the stakeholders and she also advocated that the key to successful transition rests with parental communication with the school (p.269). Smyth et al. (2004) also noted that students settled much faster in 1st year as a result of induction programmes or when school personnel such as class tutors or mentors helped the students (p.284). Sometimes 'transitions are often positioned as problems of the individual child who needs to be prepared for school' (Souto-Manning, 2018, p.2) where the onus is placed on the family to ensure readiness for school, often for families from other cultures this means not only transferring school but an expectation of 'assimilation' into the dominant culture of the school, causing the transition to be more difficult and complex for the young person. The DEIS 2017 Plan recognises that parents and children from poorer socio-economic backgrounds are not as well equipped to transition successfully between key stages of their educational career. Therefore under Goal 3.8 they have identified key actors to support these transitions including professionals in early years and school

settings, HSCL Coordinators, SCP Project Coordinators and access officers from further and higher education institutions (DEIS, 2017, p.41). The recognition and response to the importance of transition for all young people is essential but even moreso for young people who are in the process of disconnecting or already have disconnected from school, for these young people transition is more difficult and increased supports need to reflect this fact.

School absenteeism has also been linked with crime and delinquency. McCluskey et al. (2004) outlined how school absenteeism has led to violence in adulthood and the greater possibility of substance abuse as a result of negative self-perception which in turn can serve to limit the chances of developing normal relationships with peers. Zhang et al.'s (2010) study on truancy, found that truancy offenders had more incarcerations and more probations than non-offenders. In addition, truancy offenders, it found, were more likely to be juveniles with a family criminal history and were more likely to have received special education services during their schooling. The consequences of non-school attendance it appears are costly not only to society in general but also to the individual involved.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored the concept of school absenteeism and the complex area of school refusal. The significant influences of family and school are discussed and in particular, for older children, the important influence of the school and its impact on pupil engagement is considered. This chapter also briefly explored school transition and its impact on attendance and the negative long-term effects of persistent school absenteeism. The next chapter will explore the complex concept of educational disadvantage and will look in more detail at the factors that contribute to school absenteeism in Ireland.

6.0 Educational Inequality in Irish Society

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the complex concept of educational inequality and the origins of the dialogue associated with this concept. The chapter also focuses on how educational inequality manifests itself through school absenteeism, and how a number of government initiatives emerged to respond to the factors contributing to school absenteeism. These factors are explored with particular emphasis on the impact of SEN and school climate. There is also a discussion on the impact of agency involvement and the significant impact of poverty as a key contributor to poor school attendance. The concept of educational inequality is discussed in depth exploring not only financial inequality but also the class inequality that exists in Irish society.

6.2 Origins

The publication of the *Investment in Education Report* in 1965 saw the beginning of change in the way education was viewed in Ireland, initially government policies aimed to address the issue of insufficient or inadequate school participation levels. As time went on however, it became clear that there were other issues emerging in Irish society that required closer examination. The words educational disadvantage began to appear in research increasingly throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Mulcahy and O'Sullivan 1989; Kellaghan, Weir, O' hUallachain and Morgan 1995; Boldt and Devine 1998; Tormey 1999). Some major work that emerged during this time included Kellaghan et al. (1995) whose work explored the causes and consequences of educational disadvantage in Irish society. The 1980 government White Paper on education referred to the 'unequal treatment of children within an education system in Ireland' (White Paper 1980, p.31), the 1992 Green Paper spoke about tackling barriers to participation in education and in 1995 the OECD (1992) recommended that Ireland needed to raise standards if the country was going to compete in a technical international market.

The 1990s saw an increase in the debate on the subject of social class and educational participation, previously the *Investment in Education Report* (1965) had recognised that inequalities existed throughout educational provision in Ireland. The Conference of Major

Religious Superiors (CMRS) Education Commission (1992); the INTO (1994); the European Union and the OECD (1992) all conducted research in the 1990s into social class and educational participation. As a result, there was a major influx of funding at this time to develop initiatives to target disadvantage and early school leaving and, as Tormey (2010) noted the focus of disadvantage at this time was the child's environment 'rather than in the political power which shapes what is valued in school' (p.191). Tormey (2010) also noted that in the 1990s there were two broad approaches to the measurement of educational disadvantage' (p.193); an outputs led approach and a comparative approach. The outputs based approach, Tormey believed, were the targets of a conservative political perspective that focused 'attention on the marginalised person while directing attention away from the possibility that processes of disadvantaging may be built into the educational system' (p. 195). The comparative approach on the other hand 'focused on the inequalities in resources between different people and social groups' (p.196). In the late 90s however, the outputs led model was adopted with school dropout being identified as 'the key measure of educational disadvantage' (p.196), evidencing Tormey's statement that 'educational disadvantage policy' was 'probably best characterised as something of a muddle' (Tormey, 2010, p.197).

6.3 Definitions and Initiatives

Boldt and Devine's (1998) definition of educational disadvantage also focused on the child's environment and they described the young people considered disadvantaged as having;

> *a limited ability to derive an equitable benefit from schooling compared to that of their peers…as a result of school demands, approaches, assessments and expectations which do not compound to the student's knowledge, skills and attitudes into which they have been socialised* (p. 10).

They were concerned that the educational system was presenting young people with a programme that did not meet their needs. These young people were then unable to access the education system and therefore opted to leave. This was the viewpoint that focused on the deficits of the young people and their families as opposed to considering the political positions of the time that influenced policy making.

Boldt and Devine (1998) referred to those students who had already left formal education as being educationally disadvantaged, as they left with no formal qualifications, they were inadequately trained and consequently would find stable employment difficult or impossible

to achieve. The National Youth Federation in its paper entitled, *Opening Horizons* (1998), defined educational inequality as the result of 'social, economic and family factors that resulted in the education system failing to deliver equality of outcome in education to all'. In the discussion paper entitled *Education and Poverty* commissioned by The Education Commission of the Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CMRS) in 1992, educational inequality was defined as 'a concept which over the last thirty years has been used to explain why children from poor backgrounds do not derive the same benefit from their schooling as children from more comfortable backgrounds' (p.xvii). They identified four strategies for tackling educational inequality which included:

- Intervention in the pre-school years, particularly between the ages of three and five years;
- Allowances to be made within the education system for the special needs of disadvantaged students;
- The development of partnership through community education;
- The provision of extra resources, particularly in relation to an improved pupil/teacher ratio.

In addition to the above strategies, the paper also clearly identified two key components of educational inequality, family poverty and a failure to benefit from the existing education system. The CMRS (1992) illustrated that educational inequality was not only an urban phenomenon but was also a rural problem. Whelan and Hannan (1998) attributed three factors to the persistence of social inequalities in the Irish system. Firstly, the Irish system had been linked to social stratification systems with a high emphasis on academic achievement, secondly school choice was determined by the social class of the parent and finally the ultimate goal of second level was to aim for third level access and required that subjects were taught in such a way, that the curricular or pedagogical needs of those students not destined for third level, were consequently neglected. In research conducted by Cahill and Hall in 2014 on school choice processes within a working class community, we can see the complexities that emerged around choosing schools for those working class parents who did not possess the relevant skills to make informed decisions around school placements for their children. The research saw the emergence of different types of school choosers and also noted the 'preservation of the status quo of class difference and a continuation of class action that militates against social mobility' (Cahill and Hall, 2014, p.395).

6.4 Initiatives

The Education Act of 1998 defined educational disadvantage to mean 'the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools' (Education Act 1998, Section 32.9). Consequently a number of initiatives emerged at this time to target the problem of educational inequality and to ensure that students could derive 'appropriate benefit from education', initiatives such as Early Start (1994), Breaking the Cycle (1996), Giving Children an Even Break (2001) and the National Action Plan against Poverty (2001-2003). This led to the establishment of the Educational Disadvantage Committee in 2003. The committee worked on their recommendations to Government on how best to tackle educational inequality, in their final report, *Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage* (2005), they set out three strategic goals for Government:

- achieve educational equality in the broader context of achieving social inclusion,
- provide inclusive opportunities for learning at all stages of the life cycle,
- improve the mainstream school system so that all young people aged from three to eighteen receive an education appropriate to their needs (Downes & Gilligan, 2007, p. 95).

It was the Educational Disadvantage Committee's 2003 report *A More Integrated and Effective Delivery of School-based Educational Inclusion Measures* that subsequently led to the establishment of the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) programme in 2006. DEIS had the aim of ensuring that the educational needs of children and young people from marginalised communities were prioritised and effectively addressed (DES, 2005 p. 9). There were to be two core elements to the DEIS programme: to standardise the system for identifying and regularly reviewing levels of disadvantage and the development of a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP). Therefore the following existing schemes were to be integrated into the SSP over a five year period:

- Early Start
- Giving Children an Even Break (incorporating the primary Disadvantaged Areas Scheme and Breaking the Cycle)
- The Support Teacher Project (Primary level)

- Aspects of Early Literacy Initiative, including the Reading Recovery Initiative and the Junior Certificate School Programme Literacy Strategy and Demonstration Library Project
- The Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (established in 1990)
- The School Completion Programme (established in 2002)
- The Disadvantaged Areas Scheme for second level schools and related projects in second level schools supporting access to third level (DES, 2005, p. 10)

The subsequent National Development Plan 2007-2013 highlighted the 'centrality of education in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty' (Flynn, 2007). Subsequently substantial funding was allocated to DEIS and Early Education and National Childcare.

6.5 Understanding Inequality:

It is evident that educational inequality and early school leaving are persistent issues in Irish society. Educational disadvantage is a complex phenomenon, linking economic, social and educational factors (OECD, 1992). Research would agree for the most part that factors such as poverty, family structure and socio-economic status are key to understanding inequality. Research shows that young people from poorer backgrounds are grossly under-represented at third level institutions, and that Universities draw a substantial proportion of their students from fee paying and middle class schools (McCoy et al., 2006 & McCoy et al., 2014). In addition, maternal levels of education have a significant impact on childrens's socio-economic status and attainment levels (Williams et al., 2016, p.47, p.116). Inequality also not only appears to be prevalent in urban areas but is also evident in rural areas where 'poverty is less concentrated' (Weir, Errity & McAvinue, 2015, p. 95).

The OECD (1992) definition of educational disadvantage was 'a complex phenomenon', resulting from a combination of economic, social and educational problems, therefore it required a multi-faceted approach to address the issue of educational disadvantage. As views on educational inequality have changed, there is an increasing realisation that the school cannot tackle the problem of educational inequality alone. Other institutions and agencies, both statutory and voluntary, have a vital role to play to ensure equality for all in educational opportunity. This is evident worldwide, as indicated through a variety of interventions set up to combat educational inequality. OECD member countries have been concerned about the number of children and families, classified as marginalised as a result of school failure and

unemployment, who find themselves excluded from mainstream society. Kellaghan et al. (1995) explored the causes of disadvantage such as home conditions, school conditions and status differences (socio-economic or gender) to attempt to define this 'complex phenomenon'. Drudy and Lynch (1993) regarded educational disadvantage as 'relating primarily to social class differences in educational attainment' (p.52).

Tormey (1999) was critical of such 'definitions' as he believed there should be an emphasis on the process-based nature of educational inequality rather than looking simply at the concept of being disadvantaged, he was also critical of the many models of intervention that sought to target the person rather than the process. The process he defined is working with the schools, teachers, teacher training, pupils and families and the education system itself. Tormey believed that this was preferable to looking at the individual as though they are 'diseased' or afflicted in some way as though educational disadvantage is something that happened to them. In Tormey's (1999) chapter entitled *Education and Poverty* in *Welfare Policy and Poverty* he continued to develop this theory on disadvantage and defined it as a function of advantage, stating that despite intervention, there will always be a gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged as successive governments in Ireland fail to truly understand and accept the concept. Cahill (2014), advocated for further consideration to be given to social class inequality and referred to 'the layers of policy that enable inequalities to flourish on the Irish educational landscape' (p.302). His research stressed how educational inequality 'cannot be viewed in isolation', how 'it is intrinsically linked to material poverty and wider economic inequalities in Irish society' (p.305) and how successive governments through policy and legislation have focused on 'international comparisons and a consumer driven philosophy' (p.301).

O' Sullivan (2005) stated that the policy makers had different understandings of educational disadvantage and consequently the term is used widely but with no clarity therefore not allowing for any critical thought about these 'different positions' (p.319). The following 'different positions' illustrate O'Sullivan's understanding of the various perspectives on educational disadvantage:

1. Constitutional Limitation – the identification of those who are educationally disadvantaged, who it is then assumed have a low intellectual capacity, therefore looking at the individual rather than the group.

2. Material Condition – that poorer pupils are impeded from benefiting from education as poverty in an area affects all aspects of their life – housing, healthcare etc.
3. Personal Deficit – the failure to benefit from school due to ability, values, beliefs and attitudes, also a lack of understanding of basic concepts.
4. Cultural Deficit – at times the problem is bigger than individual pupils – where the school is situated in an area that does not or cannot 'fit in' with values of the school. These pupils because of where they live develop anti-social or anti-school behaviour.
5. Culturally Discordant Schooling – where the school does not meet the needs of its pupils or is irrelevant to their cultural background.
6. Political Economy – the influence of advantaged over disadvantaged. An education system that 'supports the unequal society of which schools are a part' (p.316) and how therefore advantage causes disadvantage.

Tormey (1999) saw educational disadvantage as a series of 'processes' and strongly believed that we should move away from the 'disease model' interpretation to the process model if we are to begin to truly describe what educational disadvantage is; 'these processes combine and result in comparatively low attainment and participation in formal education by working class children' (p.41), consequently those affected by such processes can be defined as disadvantaged. Tormey, akin to O'Sullivan, was critical of how Ireland viewed educational disadvantage stating that we have spent too much time trying to measure disadvantage rather than looking at the processes, it is these processes he believed would lead to more focused models of intervention in the future. O'Sullivan (2005) agreed that we should look at the *position* of the person rather than the person alone, he was also conscious that there was a political nature to educational disadvantage that must also be considered. Despite the numerous definitions for the concept of educational inequality, researchers would agree that educational inequality 'relates to differentials in educational outcomes' (Tormey, 2010, p.192) that will have a long lasting impact on the lives of children.

Kellaghan (2001) explored the concept of disadvantage from the context of children's experiences in school and therefore viewed the concept as:

> *a child that may be at a disadvantage in school because of factors in the child's environment conceptualised as economic, cultural and social capital, the competencies and dispositions which he/she brings to school differ from the*

> *competencies and dispositions that are valued in school and which are required to facilitate adaptation to school and school learning* (p.5).

He outlined the competencies that needed consideration for the child – cognitive development, their conduct – i.e. self-regulation capacity, social behaviour and self-development. Kellaghan (2001) also explored the factors that affected children's competencies such as economic, cultural and social capital and concluded that children 'who bring the right kind of capital to school will do well'. Kellaghan (2001) described schools as middle class institutions with middle class values and if one identified the form of capital where there is a deficit for the child, you could then focus intervention accordingly and more appropriately. Social class position and its effects on educational participation and performance have been identified by numerous researchers as being a key factor (Lynch 1999; Boldt and Devine, 1998; Wheelan and Hannan 1998; Kellaghan 2001; Darmody et al., 2008). Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' is used by many to explain the inability of certain students to succeed within education as they do not possess sufficient capital to negotiate their way within the present predominantly middle class system.

Darmody et al. (2008) in their research on truancy looked at the concept of 'institutional habitus' which was embedded in the school organisation and culture and led to educational institutions perpetuating these middle class values which ultimately led to class resistance, hence middle class families and their children 'find it easier to navigate within the formal education system transmitting and reproducing middle class values' (p.370). O'Sullivan (Mulcahy and O'Sullivan, 1989) also referred to the 'social bias' that existed within the school curriculum which facilitated unequal levels of achievement amongst pupils (p.251). Smyth (1999) in her study of schooling processes that supported positive outcomes among pupils, noted that certain schools did not provide suitable programmes for their marginalised pupils and Smyth highlighted the need for a positive school climate that promoted higher expectations of, and for, its pupils. Lareau (1999) noted the importance of the field of interaction and the ability of the individual to 'activate' their capital (p.39).

Frawley's (2014) research focused on educational inequality and early years' intervention and involved an examination of the key processes at play when considering inequality, stating that it was more than about the social background characteristics of children. In Frawley's opinion educational inequality was 'material deprivation, transmitted deprivation,

societal, community and school level factors as well as individual processes of student engagement with education' (p.167). The Combat Poverty Agency (2003) described disadvantage as a symptom of a wider range of issues affecting the lives of children and adults, their families, communities and the education system. They identified a number of specific indicators that included welfare needs, financial needs, lack of tradition in education and the issue of an inaccessible school curriculum. Drudy and Lynch (1993) in their research into educational inequality looked at two key areas; firstly, the presumed deficiencies of the child, their family and community and secondly the school organisation and educational practices that continued to reproduce educational inequality. Drudy and Lynch (1993), felt that there was another neglected explanation of such inequality, that of poverty. They believed that social class difference did not explain educational inequality as education is highly valued in Irish society but poverty created the greatest barrier of all to children gaining an equal chance at the educational system. Flynn (2007) examined the effects of poverty, deprivation and educational disadvantage on children in Ireland. Her research illustrated the immense difficulties faced by children in Ireland from disadvantaged areas and how children prior to birth are affected by drug taking and alcohol abuse and that simply ensuring more and more children attend pre-school is insufficient in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and deprivation. She advocated a multi-faceted approach to tackling the issue of disadvantage.

The 2005 Report from The Educational Disadvantage Committee described the deficit model of disadvantage a being 'outdated and inadequate' and proposed a more appropriate 'enlightened approach' bsed on human rights and social justice (p.19), where the overall aspiration is for equality of opportunity, equality of participation and finally for equality of outcomes. Following from this Spring in Downes and Gilligan (2007) examines the language of educational disadvantage and how language and labelling can 'serve to distance those in powerful positions from those on the margins' (p.7) and she insisted that there needed to be a shift in focus from the negative connotations of the term disadvantage to move instead to look at the concept of equality in education. This Spring believed could not happen without the 'fundamental restructuring of the education system' (p.8) and a departure from the deficit language associated with disadvantage.

6.6 DEIS

In recent years there has been an acknowledgement of the need for a national and local multi-agency approach to deal with the issue of inequality and early school leaving. This was a move away from the thinking of the 1990s when funding was school based and aimed at initiatives in the school, such as early start, the HSCL scheme, the SCP and more recently DEIS. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013, highlighted the importance of education in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion identified education as being central to addressing the issues associated with poverty (NDP, 2007-2013). The Educational Research Centre (ERC) was commissioned by the DES (Department of Education and Skills) in 2007 to conduct an independent evaluation of the SCP, the initial period of the evaluation was from 2007 – 2013, initial results were very encouraging (Weir & Denner, 2013, p. 20). In 2015, a review of School Completion was conducted by the ESRI, this review identified a number of positive aspects to the programme such as their ability to identify the most at risk pupils and their ability to respond to the needs of those pupils, particularly pupils deemed to be in crisis. The review did note a number of issues with the governance and management of the projects at local level and also issues with clarity around the distribution of funding. The review also made a number of recommendations including: that principals treat SCP as an integral part of DEIS and that SCP also be evaluated under DEIS by the ESRI and the DES inspectorate. The review also recommended the more formal integration of the three strands of the EWS (SCP, HSCL and Education Welfare) and in turn greater improved links with other services such as the Special Education Support Service (SESS) and the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), they also recommended increased funding to projects, particularly those in DEIS band 1 and the development of an outcomes focused quality assurance model ‘to indicate specific outcomes on objective measures such as attendance and early school leaving’ (Smyth, Banks, Wheelan, Darmody and McCoy, 2015, p.181).

The DEIS programme has been described as being different to its predecessors in that it had a greater focus on school planning and on activities designed to improve levels of literacy and numeracy in schools (Kavanagh, Weir and Moran, 2017, p.1). The programme has also recently been evaluated for the period 2006-2016 and the findings included an increase in the average scores for reading and mathematics in Urban primary schools, the increases were

described as ‘modest’ but were ‘slightly larger in mathematics than reading’ (Kavanagh et al., 2017, p.60). The researchers expressed reservations regarding the use of certain tests that may now be considered to be out of date. Another key finding was that pupils’ educational expectations and aspirations had increased and more pupils reported ‘a more favourable attitude to school in 2016’ (p.64). Another study in 2015 (Smyth, McCoy and Kingston, 2015), was commissioned by the DES to look at the impact of DEIS supports on disadvantaged schools, this research found:

- Improvements in attendance levels in DEIS band 1 schools and overall retention rates and Junior Certificate grades in post-primary schools
- Improved literacy and numeracy in DEIS primary schools ‘although the gap in achievement between DEIS and non-DEIS schools has not narrowed over time’ (p.82)
- Improved planning for learning and more structured self-evaluation processes for schools

The research also noted that there were continued challenges in numeracy levels, there was also a need to move away from ‘rigid forms’ of ability grouping, that there needed to be an improvement in student-teacher interaction and the need to ‘foster high expectations’ for students (p.82). The Review of Deis: Poverty and Social Inclusion in Education report (2015) which emerged from the proceedings of a joint conference of the INTO and the Educational Disadvantage Centre at DCU in December 2015 acknowledged the importance of school in enabling children and young people to reach their full potential but highlighted how schools cannot address the issues of social exclusion on their own. It recommended that resources needed to be put in place to ensure access to mental health supports to support the emotional and social wellbeing of children and also the need for changes at policy level to address health, welfare and housing issues all of which contribute to pupils’ success at school’ (p. 3).

It is hoped that the DEIS 2017 plan with its five main goals will address the shortfalls of DEIS 2006. These Goals include: the implementation of a more robust and responsive Assessment Framework for the identification of schools and effective resource allocation, to improve the learning experience and outcomes of all pupils in DEIS schools, to improve the capacity of school leaders and teachers to engage, plan and deploy resources, to support and foster best practice in schools through inter-agency collaboration and finally to support the work of schools by providing research, information, evaluation and feedback to achieve the goals of the plan (DEIS Plan 2017, p. 9). The plan has identified over 100 actions to support

the identified goals and these include; professional leadership training for school leaders and teachers, access to a guidance counsellor for schools in the School Support Programme, better communication between primary and post-primary schools and a pilot approach to identify effective interventions and creativity around teaching and learning.

The Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 including the Statement of Strategy was launched in September 2016, and the Action Plan 2017 derives from this Plan building on the progress made and and incorporating feedback from a consultative process. The key themes and projects in this Plan included; a new Action Plan on Educational Inclusion, setting targets and taking action on STEM, a review of progress in literacy and numeracy and the introduction of the resource Teacher Allocation Model and this plan has as its central aim the provision of 'the best education and training system in europe over the next decade' (p.8). This plan also has five central goals that include; improving the learning experience and success of learners, improving the progress of learners at risk of educational disadvantage or learners with special educational needs, to help those delivering services to continously improve, to build bridges between education and the wider community and finally to improve national planing and support services (p. 9).

6.7 Factors Contributing to Inequality

6.7.1 Special Educational Needs Including Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties:

All of these case studies involved young people at both primary and post-primary level who had disengaged from school, they all had home difficulties and they had experienced some psychological difficulties that contributed to their challenge with school attendance. McCoy et al. (2016) in *Cherishing all of the Children Equally- Ireland 100 years on from The Easter Rising* looked at the prevalence of special educational needs in Ireland today. The Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) data used in this research indicated the SEN prevalence rate to be 25% which included 29% of boys and 21% of girls, in addition prevalence rates were higher among semi-skilled/unskilled manual groups as there was higher levels of reported EBD and there were much higher rates of SEN from 'economically inactive households' (p. 159). Also, boys accounted for a larger share of children identified as being high risk by teachers and a greater number of boys were identified as having a 'physical disability, speech impairment, learning disability and EBD' (p. 157). The research also indicated that children

with SEN also found it difficult to have positive peer relationships as they were continually made feel different from their peers. Findings from McCoy's analysis of the GUI data indicated that children with SEN were more likely to indicate that they didn't like school, they also found that children with 'multiple SEN, EBD and learning disabilities were much more likely not to like school' (p.162). In addition, boys with SEN were less likely to like school as were children from 'economically inactive families' (p.162). Furthermore, the GUI data indicated that social class heavily influenced the prevalence rates of SEN and multiple disabilities and also boys from economically inactive one parent families were more likely to be identified with EBD. Much of the research acknowledged the lack of engagement for pupils with learning difficulties with the education system (Reid, 2008; Darmody et al., 2008; Finn, 1989; Reid, 2005) and that children with disruptive behaviours and attention problems would find school transition difficult, had difficulty fitting in with their peers and forming friendships (DeSocio and Hootman, 2004, p. 192). In addition, 'children who begin school with learning difficulties are at greater risk for developing mental health problems' as such learning difficulties were a source of stress for these young people throughout their school day. There is growing recognition that 'disengagement from school and poor academic performance reinforce each other' (Spencer, 2009, p. 310). Consideration also needs to be given to the 'intersecting forms of social disadvantage' (Liasidou, 2014, p.304) and the intersection of SEN with social class, gender and poverty and where these combine to compound the 'oppression, marginalization and discrimination' (p.301) experienced by certain groups. The education system can propogate the unequal and discriminatory treatment of young people where identity indicators such as SEN, gender and race do not exist independently of one another.

In Ireland, our legislation states that people with special educational needs will have: 'the same right to avail of and benefit from appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs' (Education For Persons with Special Needs Act 2004). The NCSE (National Council for Special Education) was an independent body established as a result of this legislation 'to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special education needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children' (www.ncse.ie). The council acts in accordance with DES policy regarding resourcing and the nature of services to be provided and Section 14 of this legislation outlines the responsibility placed on schools, which includes ensuring that parents of special needs children are:

(i) Informed of their children's needs and how these needs are being met and

(ii) Are consulted with regard to, and invited to participate in, the making of all decisions of a significant nature concerning their child's education (p.19)

Reschly and Christenson (2006) in their research into student engagement amongst students with learning difficulties and EBD in the U.S. illustrated how student engagement levels were a solid predictor of student dropout. They described students with disabilities as being the most vulnerable of the school population and these were the students with the highest dropout levels due to their level of engagement with school. This reduced level of engagement can be exacerbated by the ways schools respond to students with learning difficulties making young people acutely aware of their limitations and where 'classroom lessons can be so well organized for putting the spotlight on those who are doing less well than the others that hiding becomes a sensible strategy for all of the kids all of the time' (Chaiklin and Lave, 1993, p. 287).

Finn (1989) explored the concept of drop out in the context of non-engagement or young person's lack of bonding with school which he believed 'contributes to problem behavior and early school leaving' (p. 118). Finn also attributed school drop out to a 'frustration self-esteem model' where an 'impaired self-view' existed as a result of 'frustration or embarrassment' and for those children with undiagnosed or diagnosed learning problems, behavior may deteriorate as a consequence, however adults responded to the behavior more readily than they do the learning disability where the 'child falls further and further behind and becomes more of a problem' (p.119). This is echoed in Reschly and Christenson's (2006) research which found that even students with mild disabilities were more likely to have behavioural problems and have less positive engagement with teaching staff and these students with more severe difficulties and EBD were at 'high risk for school failure and dropout' (p. 289).

6.7.2 The School Factor

We have seen how learning difficulties are more prevalent amongst young people from marginalised backgrounds. However not all young people who have learning difficulties opt out of school, nor do all young people from marginalisedbackgrounds do so but there is a cohort of young people who cannot or will not remain within the mainstream system. It is

often easy for those working or researching in education to focus on the deficits of the young people and their families but there are also the school deficits to consider and their impact on young people and children.

Finn (1989) referred in his work to the participation-identification model, meaning that young people needed to develop and maintain some form of attachment with school in order to succeed, he believed that students 'who identify with school have an internalized conception of belonginess' (p.123). Accordingly, participation and identification were more apparent in children from families who emphasized 'school related goals in their lives and the lives of their children' (p.130). From this emerged the deficit model which according to Harrry and Klinger (2007) was based on the 'normative development of students whose homes and communities had prepared them for schooling long before they enter school' (p.8), a belief that is also echoed in Darmody et al. (2008). Those young people who 'lack' this preparation for school are then more affected by the pre-conceived judgement by schools of young people and we see this in particular in the case of minority groupings such as the travelling community. Historically, absences from school have always been high in the travelling community, particularly in post-primary education. At post-primary level young people often opt out themselves and research has shown that travellers are 3.4 times more likely than those from the settled community to truant in their last year of school (Darmody et al., 2008, p. 366). Bhopal (2011) conducted research in the UK using qualitative research in one inner London borough to examine examples of good practice in schools, practice that would improve educational outcomes for travellers, her findings indicated teacher negativity as a principal factor in influencing school attendance and participation. Although schools perceived themselves as inclusive in their ethos – their teachers adopted a 'stereotypical attitude' (p.479) towards traveller pupils, which meant they were singled out for special attention and teachers often had low expectations which reinforced their status as outsiders so that they were 'clearly distinguished from other children in the schools' (p.480). Harry and Klinger (2007) examined the disproportionate placement of minorities in special education, they also referred to teacher's negative attitudes as they described the young person as being 'deficient' and attributed this 'deficiency' to cultural reasons, they illustrated that it's not about whether the young person is or is not able to perform a task, it is whether they are able to perform to the satisfaction of the teacher, as the teacher decides what is acceptable, but often teacher's perceptions are affected by their own views of particular cultural groups.

Haynes et al. (2007) referred to the impact of school climate on children's 'cognitive, social and psychological development' (p. 322), Francis and Mills (2012) stated that a 'structural change of schools as institutions must preclude changes in curriculum' (p.264). Their research emphasised the importance of a school climate that promotes and supports a caring atmosphere and pupil autonomy, as being essential elements for promoting good school attendance and how it is not just relations with individual teachers that negatively impact on school attendance but more significantly the influence of whole school climate. Reid (1983) in his research referred to the influence of school climate and he outlined how students cited 'institutional reasons' for missing school – such as 'school rules, the teachers and bullying' (p.112). Downes (2016) noted how it wasn't 'simply the direct experience of being individually bullied' that impacted on young people leaving school early but rather 'the direct experience of existing in a communicative culture of bullying in school'(p.905). Gaffney, Farrington & Ttofi (2019) found that school based anti-bullying programmes can be effective in 'reducing bullying perpetration and victimisation' (p.23) but also note that a whole school approach may not be effective for each individual student. Haynes et al. (2007) conducted research in middle and high schools across the US where they interviewed young people about their experiences of school. Students indicated that they felt they had not connected with school and, they felt they were not treated with respect. Students also expressed concern with the extent to which suspension was used. The interviews indicated the negativity of teachers towards pupils 'not realizing that students want to learn and they favor interesting and challenging rather than boring or repetitive work' (p. 326). This was also evident in *Cherishing all of the Children Equally* where DEIS schools emerged as being guilty of 'caring for' rather than 'challenging' children in school. Darmody et al. (2008) asked school leavers to respond to a number of 'attitudinal statements regarding their school experiences' (p.367), what emerged is the importance of school climate and those students who experienced a supportive school climate were significantly less likely to truant while those who reported a more disorderly school climate were much more likely to truant (p.367).

6.8 Child Poverty and Inequality in Ireland

Child poverty is also a cause of school non-attendance and is a factor to be considered in some of the cases that will feature later in this research. The EU 2020 Strategy defines poverty as 'a lack of income and sufficient material resources to live in dignity; inadequate

access to basic services such as healthcare, housing and education, labour market exclusion and poor quality work (p.9). The DCYA 2020 report defines poverty as both a lack of economic resources and being socially excluded. Over a quarter of children in Ireland are considered to be in poverty, equating to 320,000 children, with 7.4% of children considered to be in 'deep poverty' equating to 89,000 children (DCYA, 2020, p.15). The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 developed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection with input from a number of Government Departments and those experiencing poverty and community and voluntary groups aims 'to lift 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2025 (p.17). Weir et al. (2015) described poverty as a 'crucial factor in determining educational disadvantage' (p.94). Zhang (2003) attributed school absenteeism to poverty as well as schools not meeting students' needs. In his research with a number of Education Welfare practitioners and parents (defined as living in poverty), he found a strong association between school absenteeism and poverty – 61% of parents interviewed had children with a school attendance problem and it was those students at primary level that were most affected (Zhang, 2003, p.15) as parents appeared to have much more influence over primary school pupils' attendance than they did at post-primary.

The necessity for parenting skills particularly amongst lone parent families has been identified as a key factor in addressing attendance issues in very young children, Astone and McLanahan (1991) conducted research into parenting styles and parents' educational aspirations which illustrated how children who live with single parents receive less encouragement around school attendance and engagement. Their study also illustrated the importance of positive child parent interaction in order to increase the child's social capital and consequently enhance their chances at long-term school success. Watson, Maitre, Whelan and William's (2017) research using GUI data outlines how poverty as a result of the recent economic recession in Ireland has significantly impacted on children's socio-emotional development. The DCYA report (2020) compliments the earlier *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020* and both outline the need to address 'child poverty, social exclusion and wellbeing' therefore 'improving the lives and life chances of children' (p. 13)

> *if the state requires young people to stay in school by law then it is imperative that their education in school is an enabling and enriching experience, it is*

> *imperative that it not only develops their capabilities, but that it also reinforces their sense of well-being and self-esteem (Lynch & Lodge, 2002, p.2).*

As is evident from the above quotation there is an expectation that all children attend school, however school does not always provide that enabling and enriching experience. In particular cases school can be a negative experience for young people. It is generally accepted that access to and successful participation in education is dependent on one's ability to avail of the opportunities provided by education. However, there are a number of factors at play that influence children's ability to benefit from education. These include: access to resources, the school system itself and ineffective government policy that would once and for all address the real issues of inequality in education. O'Sullivan's (1999) article on Irish educational policy and equity posed relevant and probing questions on Irish educational policy subsequent to the publication of the Green Paper:

> *What are the factors in the environment that affect pupil's ability? What are the roles of home and school? When should remedial action be taken? If one accepts that pupils of different abilities should follow different courses, what are the consequences? Are they acceptable?* (p.193)

Irish educational policy has always recognised the issues of inequality and this was evident in the many programmes and initiatives that have been developed since the publication of the Green Paper to the present day. These initiatives and programmes have been established to address inequality however it could be argued that inequality is embedded within the system and as a consequence such attempts to 'combat' and 'eradicate disadvantage' and early school leaving will never succeed in doing so as long as inequality exists. Lynch (2001) was rightly critical of government response to social class inequality and described government response as 'baffling' as it ignored international research that demonstrated that such programmes or initiatives 'cannot and will not work in isolation from deeper structural change in income and wealth distribution' (p.398). Also, when attempts were made to re-dress the balance of equity the result was middle class families continued to 'widen the gap' by choosing selective schools, funding extra tuition and offering increased 'voluntary' contributions (Lynch, 2001).

The role of the school in the perpetuation of inequality is also a fundamental factor. Schools like to attract the best students and will act in an exclusionary manner to any applicants who they consider to be a 'threat' to their ethos, although admissions policies must appear to be

all inclusive and quite often appear so, there are other ways schools find to exclude the most marginalised in our society. One such exclusionary method is through sizeable 'voluntary' contributions which are expected from parents often prior to school enrolment. Add to this costly school uniforms, books and the practice of giving priority to siblings of past pupils all of which ensures that the middle classes have the ability to determine the best schools and ensure that they contain the 'best' pupils (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). It is envisaged that the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 will go some way to address the practice in many schools of putting barriers in place for the enrolment of students; including the charging of admission and enrolment fees and discrimination against students on the grounds of SEN, gender and culture (Section 64 (1)).

The practice of streaming or banding in schools often sees middle class pupils appearing in the top groups where they will largely take higher level subjects which provides them with a clear advantage to not only their educational but occupational future also (Lynch, 2001). The school culture also widens the gap as schools are managed by and have teachers who are largely middle class. The curriculum by its very nature is also responsible for the propagation of inequality. The curriculum of primary and post-primary schools is heavily weighted in favour of students with linguistic and logical mathematical capabilities (Baker et al., 2004 p. 149). In addition, school time-tables illustrate how emphasis is placed on subjects such as English and mathematics but not art, music or physical education and assessment practices principally involve written examinations with little regard for multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1991).

Lynch and Lodge's (2002) research looked at secondary schools in Ireland and identified a number of factors that contributed directly to inequality in education including: the historical profile of the school, whether it is fee paying or not, the school management, the amount of 'voluntary' contribution expected, whether they use banding or not and whether the school is single sex or co-educational. Twelve schools were included in the research which involved interviews with pupils and teachers, classroom observations and questionnaire surveys. Lynch and Lodge examined stratification through economic policies, school choice, ability grouping and classroom climates, their findings illustrated that there were serious economic inequalities between social classes and when it came to choosing schools, families from low income working classes found this difficult and did not have the ability to exercise free choice unlike middle class families. In addition, schools positioned themselves to attract the most desirable students and exclude others. They also found that middle class pupils were

least likely to be found in lower ability classes and that mixed ability groups only factored in fee paying schools (p.184). They found that as a result of social class segregation the middle class pupils were segregated from the working class pupils on a daily basis. Attempts to address inequality in the past have lacked real purpose or intent and initiatives have often served to widen the gap between middle and working classes and for the most part those involved in the decision making processes approved of and maintained the basic nature of the system (Lodge and Blackstone, 1982, Lynch and Lodge, 2002, O'Sullivan, 1999).

Research on inequality must consider the influence of poverty on educational access and participation. Education is a highly valued commodity by almost everyone (Drudy and Lynch, 1993) but poverty makes it inaccessible to everyone. Nolan and Wheelan's (1999) study on cumulative disadvantage, which they defined as a combination of childhood poverty, lack of educational qualifications and unemployment highlighted the ongoing issue and effect of poverty and deprivation on children in Ireland, much of the findings were reflected in O'Neill's (1992) study of Kilmount in the north side of Dublin. O' Neill's book documented the experiences of a Dublin working class community and highlighted the importance placed on education by working class communities but as a result of day to day experiences their ability to access the benefits of education were affected. O'Neill's study of the 80 families in Kilmount illustrated how the school system can exclude working class parents and their children through its 'hidden curriculum' and general inaccessibility. 87% of those interviewed by O'Neill stated that the school books did not reflect working class lifestyles, 62% felt that teachers did not understand working class people and 46% stated that they had difficulty helping their children with their homework (p.95). These families also identified cost of books, the necessity to pay school contributions and the cost of uniforms as reasons why they were 'summoned' to the school. Teachers' attitudes were also of relevance as mothers reported that the 'teacher talked down' to them (p.96). All of the parents acknowledged the importance of education in order 'to get a good job' (p.101). Doyle and Keane's (2019) research on parental perspectives of their children's early school leaving illustrated how despite seeing the value of education and wanting their children to progress in life, these parents were 'constrained' by what they viewed as '(a) an unsupportive and discriminatory education system and (b) the human need to prioritize everyday life in their challenging world'(p.82).

Lynch (1999) explored O'Neill's study and identified that the absence of financial resources to make the system work alienated working class children more so than the 'middle class character of the formal and hidden curriculum' (p. 58). It was this lack of economic resources that provided the main barrier to access and participation in our education system for working class children. Lynch and O'Riordan (1998), in their research on access to higher education stated that 'while cultural and educational barriers were regarded as seriously restricting educational opinions, economic barriers were seen as virtually insurmountable by many of those interviewed' (p.472). Lynch and O'Riordan also pointed out that working class students do not 'give up' on the system; rather they try to negotiate to stay in the system. Lynch and O'Riordan emphasised the need for change to the present educational system 'including state institutional systems and individual classroom practices' (p.475).

Forde's (2000) research on educational disadvantage and third level access identified four factors why working class families feel alienated from education, these included the negative impact of streaming, family resources and attitudes, facilities and peer influence and the lack of provision within the education system of support and guidance for students from working class communities (p. 74). Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) in their research on inequality in society argued that poverty solely does not explain the 'inequality effect' they did however recognise that high school dropout rates were higher in poorer states and that instances of poverty and subsequent school dropout was higher in more unequal societies (p.108).

To address the issue of inequality therefore, income differentials need to change between middle and working classes. In states that have been prepared to deal with inequality directly through high quality child care, related educational and welfare supports for children and investment in welfare supports for adults, there has been an attempt to decrease the economic gap between classes, in Norway for example, inequality is lowest with 97.8% of spending on school education arising from public expenditure (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009 p. 161). In Ireland, however attempts to address the issue of educational inequality have only meant the middle classes have been facilitated to be more selective about their educational provision, they buy extra tuition and increase resources to their schools through higher contributions and donations (Lynch and Lodge, 2002).

Recent ESRI research illustrates how after the Great Recession in Ireland the national unemployment rate increased from 5% to 15% by 2012 and by 2013 the deprivation rate for children in one adult households was at 64%, twice that of children in two adult households

and the material deprivation rate for children increased from 18% in 2008 to 37% in 2013 (Regan & Maitre, 2020). The 2015 DEIS review outlines how between 2008 and 2011 the number of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion increased and was in fact the highest in the EU. The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People – Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures published by the Minister for Youth and Children in 2014 includes a target to reduce the number of children in consistent poverty in Ireland by two thirds by 2020.

As the problem of class inequality originates outside of the educational system then the solution does too and therefore we need to look to social and economic policy rather than educational policy alone (Baker et al., 2004). It is clear that 'unless structural inequality in Ireland is addressed' there will continue to be disengagement by some young people from the education system (Doyle and Keane, 2019, p.84). There are however certain areas where schools could make improvements: such as their selection criteria for admission, the streaming or banding of pupils and the attitudes of teachers towards their pupils. Changes are also needed to school curricula and current assessment techniques, however this area is outside of school remit and is the responsibility of government bodies such as the NCCA and the state exams commission. There needs to be recognition of the other intelligences or skills that would facilitate inclusivity for students to show their talents and capabilities and therefore there is a need to provide for more accurate testing of pupils' true ability. There needs to be a recognition of the importance of developing the emotional, inter personal and intra-personal intelligences (Lynch, 2001).

Prosecution for non-school attendance does appear to be a class issue. The majority of prosecutions taken by the CFA involve parents from working class, marginalised backgrounds; these are low-income families often with only one parent. Research conducted by Perry (2017) on legal proceedings and prosecutions in the EWS between 2006 and 2013 found that a disproportionate number of SANs and Summonses were issued to mothers as opposed to fathers, finding 61% of summonses were issued to mothers and 39% to fathers (p.199). Lodge and Lynch (2004) considered that the following should be implemented in any future strategies for change:

- *Change of culture and attitudes of the way we think about and relate to people who are different from us,*
- *Change in organisational practices to promote and achieve equality,*

- *Changes in practices and processes that shape legislation, economic relations and affective relations* (p.102).

The Educational Welfare Act (2000) insists that all children attend school between the age of 6 and 16 years. However the school system does not always embrace those pupils that are referred to the EWS and unfortunately the only mechanism available to this service after the 'welfare ' approach has failed is legal action against parents who are deemed to be 'failing or neglecting' in their duty under the Act. O'Sullivan's (1999) questions arising from the 1992 Green Paper are still relevant today. In the absence of real change to economic and social circumstances and the problem posed by the child's right to an education which must be safeguarded, we are for now left with limited legislation that provides a restrictive and inadequate response, a response that is not appropriate to deal with the complex issue of inequality in Irish education.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter explored some of the literature on educational inequality in Ireland from the 1990s to the present day. There is a focus on the various definitions used to describe educational disadvantage and the negative connotations that are associated with the term disadvantage illustrated by Tormey's criticism of the 'disease model' which targetted the person rather than the process and O'Sullivan's criticism of policy makers lack of overall understanding of the term educational disadvantage. This chapter outlines the emergence of the DEIS programme and outlines the development of various supports within that programme. We see the impact of the school in perpetuating inequality and there is a focus on the importance of a caring school climate that promotes pupil autonomy to provide support for young people from marginalised areas who find themselves struggling within a system that is perpetuating inequality. Poverty also emerges as a significant barrier for children and young people and as a determinant of educational success. The next chapter aims to both explore the concepts of inequality, cultual capital, power relations and resistance using the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault and to embed this research in these theoretical fields.

7.0 Theoretical Framework

7.1 Introduction

This research is influenced by the theoretical concepts put forward by Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and also the concept of resistance theory to provide a theoretical framework that will be used to explore the experiences of young people and parents referred to the Education Welfare Service (EWS) in Ireland. The research will include seven case studies that will illustrate the interaction between families and the Education Welfare Service and the role of the school and its influence on the life chances of pupils. The theories and insights offered by Bourdieu and Foucault allow for a greater understanding of the experiences of young people and their families who have been referred to the EWS for poor or non-school attendance.

When in 2000, the then Minister for Education and Science, Dr Michael Woods addressed the Seanad and defined the new Education Welfare Bill as 'an important and central measure of the government's ongoing strategy to reduce disadvantage in society' (Seanad Éireann Debate, June 2000), one questions if he fully appreciated the rather unrealistic task set by government with this new legislation which was put in place with the aims of 'preventing non-school attendance' (Education Welfare Act 2000) and reducing overall disadvantage. Successive Irish governments have all funded various initiatives and agencies designed to 'combat' and 'eradicate' disadvantage (DEIS 2005, Education Disadvantage Committee 2007), however there still exists a very real issue in education today as young people choose to leave school early and/or to disengage from education. Consideration therefore needs to be given to the impact of two crucial factors at play in education today; the impact of various power relations in the school and home and the impact of cultural capital and social class.

7.2 Social Class Position and Bourdieu

Social class position and its effects on educational performance has been identified previously by a number of researchers in the field of educational disadvantage and early school leaving (Lynch, 1999, Boldt and Devine, 1998, Whelan and Hannan, 1998, Kellaghan, 2001, Darmody et al., 2008). The significance of cultural capital and the concept of Bourdieu's 'habitus' are used to explain the failure of particular students to succeed within

the education system (Mills, 2008). Bourdieu (1984) defined habitus as a 'structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices' (p.170). Bourdieu (1989) viewed habitus as 'schemes of perception, thought and action' (p. 1). Mills (2008) believed that 'habitus shapes but does not determine our life choices' (p. 82) and Reay (1995) considered that 'choice is at the heart of habitus' - although these choices can be fairly limited. However, Mills (2008) believed that teachers can act as agents of transformation rather than reproduction (p.84) and that the field itself can be transformed rather than attempting to transform the pupils themselves, this transformation of schooling itself would allow pupils equal capital, to give them the 'aces in a game of cards' (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 4).

The young people in this research have found it difficult to obtain the relevant habitus, that is the habitus that is more agreeable to the school, therefore they are perceived as having inadequate 'capital' and therefore 'unconsciously internalise their objective social conditions, such as their economic class so that they have appropriate tastes and perform the appropriate practices for that social position' (King 2000, p. 423), therefore, this particular lower socio-economic class 'act in a way that reproduces the social structure' but 'without transforming it' (Swartz and Zolberg 2004, p.43). Bourdieu (1987) outlined how we are 'agents' distributed in 'an overall social space' according to the dimensions of capital possessed 'that determines a position, a location or a precise class' (p. 4). In each of these case studies the individuals are forced to make choices that are 'different from the collective' which according to Rose (2013) can 'not only alter the habitus of that person but also the habitus of the family or community to which they belong' (p.179).

Bourdieu (1986) described three types of capital; economic, cultural and social (p.16) and outlined how capital exists in three forms; the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalized state. Embodied capital is that which is an 'integral part of the person' (p.18) and although cultural capital can be acquired he believes 'it always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition (p.18). Objectified cultural capital is the physical representation of the experience, intellect and meaning that a culture has accrued over time 'it exists as symbolically and materially active, effective capital only in so far as it is appropriated by agents' (p.20). Finally, institutionalised capital refers to 'the cultural capital academically sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications' which guarantees the holder both 'material and symbolic profits' (p.20-21).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is widely used by researchers/theorists to explain the failure of students to succeed within the education system as they are perceived as having inadequate 'capital'. The concept of habitus refers to a person's 'inbuilt (socially acquired) disposition to behave and think in a certain way' (Darmody et al., 2008, p.362) within 'the structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). The habitus according to Mills (2008) 'operates below the level of calculation, underlying and conditioning and orientating practices by providing individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives' (p.80). Schools consist of groups of people from a cross section of society for the purpose of teaching and learning. Bourdieu's theories provide a valuable framework for the examination of the various values, meanings and social understandings that these different groups bring to the education system and their influence on school practices.

Children inherit 'capital' from their parents and consequently inherit social class position and 'the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.87). This inheritance determines the development of the person's habitus. Bourdieu believed that both economic and cultural capital are linked to education and middle class educated parents who know how the system works therefore 'have the economic capital to send their children to college' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 179). Darmody et al. (2008) referred to the importance of this 'individual' habitus also referred to as 'family habitus' by Atkinson (2011), of equal significance is 'organisational' (McDonough, 1997) or 'institutional' habitus (Reay, 1998 a, 1998 b) which explains the ways in which a particular habitus becomes embedded into the school organisation and culture. All individuals have social capital to invest in their social setting or field. However not all capital has the same value in a given field. Lareau (1999) argued that Bourdieu did not draw enough attention to this fact and she stressed that for cultural capital to be of value it must be activated. Lareau also noted that when a researcher is analysing a certain event or situation they should always consider the field of interaction and the capital each individual has, and their ability to 'activate' this capital (Lareau, 1999, p.39). Lareau (1999) also believed that class can affect social reproduction but 'it does not determine it' (p.50) and various moments of interaction can change the outcome for the individual.

Bourdieu (1977) stated that the education system helped to provide 'the dominant class' 'through the practical justification of the established order' which it achieved through the 'legitimacy it confers' on the inheritance of a particular form of capital (p. 188). Bourdieu

pointed to the importance of 'class and class culture in facilitating or impeding children or parent's negotiation of the process of schooling' (Lareau, 1987, p.74). As a consequence these students feel alienated within the education system as their families are perceived as having 'inadequately' prepared them for the system as it exists (Reed-Danahay 2005). Darmody et al. (2008) refered to this theoretical concept as 'individual habitus' and examined in their research the effects of class related habitus as students from working class backgrounds were described as 'feeling like a fish out of water' (p.370) as opposed to the middle class students who found it easier to navigate their way around the system and continued to reproduce these middle class values. Habitus was a product of childhood experiences and of socialisation within the family. Although habitus allowed the individual to perform certain actions, these actions were determined by the environment of the person (Reay 2004). Smyth (1999) found that students from higher professional backgrounds were less likely to have poor attendance than those students from unskilled manual backgrounds. In addition, levels of parental education were also an indicator of success in school, particularly the level of education achieved by the mother. Lynch and Baker (2005) attributed lower rates of attainment among students from low-income families as a result of their inability to compete on the same terms as other classes for educational advantages (p.135).

Lareau (1987) in her research viewed cultural capital as a significant factor in determining a child's school performance especially for middle-class children. The inability to derive some benefit from the school system as it exists is either due to the 'negative reaction' of the school or institution to those in lower socio-economic groupings or their inability to access the system itself and often their interaction with the system has a negative association as parents are often only called in when there are instance of misbehaviour. Cultural capital is not only inherited by children from their parents but also 'cultivated' by middle class parents (Lareau, 2011), this 'concerted cultivation' which results from engaging young people in extra curricular 'organised activities' coupled with their parent's adherance to the 'dominant set of cultural repertoires' that constitute approved child rearing practices (p.4) allows middle class children to obtain that 'sense of entitlement' which plays an important role in the institutional setting of the school (p.2). What subsequently results is a familiarity with the dominant culture in society and this is expressed by these students through their conduct and language.

Teachers bring their social practices to the classroom; ‘they (teachers) at least unconsciously measure all their students against the accomplished model of the student who is none other than the ‘good pupil’ they were and who ‘promises’ to become the teacher they are’ (Bourdieu, Passeron & Nice, 1990, p.214). Students tend to form groups that reflect their identity or habitus, this connection to a group is important, as is the ‘social space’ that impacts on ‘the amount of influence an individual or group may exert in society’ (Burridge, 2014, p. 574). Atkinson (2011) referred to these groups as ‘occupying fields and social spaces’ (p.336), Burridge (2014), stressed the importance of identifying these ‘fields’ for research and believed that once identified the ‘social spaces’ or fields can be determined and the ‘extent of the power relations’ can then be examined (p.574). Bourdieu’s theory of social practice provided a solid framework to examine the complex connections between the social groups. In this research, the social ‘fields’ under examination are those of the family unit, the referring school and the Education Welfare Service.

Giddens (1984) theory of structuration allowed for clarity around the link between the ‘human actors’ and their social structures. He considered the fact that they both equally influenced each other and repeated acts by the individual can and do reproduce the structure so that it then became acceptable practice after a period of time, or it was recognised as an institution that became a feature of society, as in the case of prolonged school absenteeism and the perpetual cycle of educational inequality. Bourdieu’s concept of social space allowed for the existence of a dominant social group (Bourdieu, 1989). This social group would ‘affect individual action and ultimately social structures’ (Burridge, 2014, p. 580), and where we see the reproduction of ‘the structure of class relations’ as the education system ‘need only obey its own rules’ (Bourdieu, Passeron & Nice, 1990, p.1999).

Bourdieu has been criticised for assuming that ‘social actors or agents’ have no control over their destiny, however his work did consider that there is a ‘struggle’ that needs to be addressed. Bourdieu’s concepts suggest that there was a possibility for schools and their teachers to improve the attendance, participation and attainment of their marginalised pupils but only if they were willing to do so despite they themselves being the ‘most finished products of the system of production’ (Bourdieu, Passeron & Nice, 1990, p.197). It is this ‘struggle’ that becomes evident in this research where particular families’ reality is a divide between school and their lives which is just too great and consequently where their actions are often construed as a threat to the dominant social group.

7.3 Foucault and Power Relations

Adding to Bourdieu's theories on capital and habitus are the theories of Michel Foucault and the impact of power relations on society. He explored how power is used to control the status quo, we see in this research how parents are on occasion coerced into making important decisions that impacted on their children's future education and how schools expected pupils to fit in and comply with the school system. Foucault referred to the 'disciplinary technology' evident in schools, and all public institutions, where the aim was to create a 'docile body', a place where individuals were disciplined and supervised (Rabinow, 1986). Foucault's use of Jeremy Bentham's 'Panoptican' concept illustrated the concept of discipline, power and control in the school. This is evident today in the use of streaming, timetabling, the compilation of data and records, even desks in rows and the numerous methods of surveillance (Leask, 2011, Ball, 2013). Foucault (2008) referred to 'the enclosed segmented space, observed at every point' where power was exercised without division (p.83). This Foucauldian perspective is one that attempts to better comprehend the way that power operates and is used within social structures and relationships. We also see how labelling young people, as having SEN and or emotional and behavioural difficulties results in the young person being subjectivated as they are rendered a subject and subjected through this discourse (Foucault, 1977), where 'the act of designation constitutes the subject' (Youdell, 2006, p.36), then these young people are considered to be 'outside the bounds of acceptability as a student' (Youdell, 2006, p.37).

Foucault saw power as exercised instead of possessed, therefore the school does not have power but exercises power to bring about effects in particular spheres (Freie & Eppley, 2014). Individuals within the school or institution are socially positioned and defined and consequently socially position and define others. The most apparent use of power in schools is that of discipline and discipline attempts to control the actions of others, those 'docile bodies' as referenced by Foucault. Also of consideration is that individuals allow themselves to be disciplined and supervised, they also play a part in power relations. Consideration needs to be given to 'the complex elements of power which operate simultaneously at different levels and often unequally, within school systems and within relationships in schools' (Robinson, 2011, p. 17). There are the 'norms' expected of young people and parents and the desire to conform to these norms or 'the principle of a rule to be folllowed' in order to maintain the status quo, because resistance is viewed with even more negativity by those that

hold the power (Foucault, 1977, p.182). Foucault believed individual subjects were produced by a pre-existing system of power relations and that discourse has the ability to transmit, produce and reinforce power (Foucault, 1978). Foucault believed that discourse is created and is 'perpetuated by those who have the power and the means of communication' (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013, p. 24) meaning they are in control and can decide what is discussed. There are discourses that then 'position students as powerless' where we see how 'the educators are positioned as powerful actors and students are positioned as powerless, silenced marginalised and excluded from educational decision making' (Nelson, 2017, p.3). Foucault emphasised the 'productive aspects of power – the notion that freedom depends on and requires the presence rather than the absence of power'(Bragg, 2007, p. 346) and schools although appearing on the surface to give voice to parents and young people, in reality they do not, then any non-cooperation is viewed as resistance to the 'norm' and leads to increased marginalisation and ultimate exclusion from the system. Foucault (1994) refers to 'panopticism' a form of power that is not based on enquiry but is a form of power that leads to 'constant uninterrupted supervision' (p.58-59), that is 'the moulding and transformation of individuals in terms of certain norms' (p.70) and is understood as a 'generalizable model of functioning' (Foucault, 2008, p.9) that then 'assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 2008, p.6). Within this research we see how schools expect young people to conform, using discipline, power and control, how schools subjectivate young people by labelling them and how young people are expected to comply with a system that is clearly not meeting their needs, which then leads to a form of resistance, in an attempt to regain control. There needs to be a shift to empowering the student and the parent so that they can 'participate influentially in educational decision making (Nelson, 2017, p, 3).

7.4 Risk Aversion Mechanism Theory

The relative risk aversion mechanism theory put forward by Van de Werfhorst and Hofshede (2007) is worthy of note, this looked at how students used their parent's social position as a reference for their own aspirations, therefore students from higher social class origins would remain in the education system longer than their lower class counterparts although they may have had equal ability to begin with. The goal, they believed, for both groups was to avoid any downward mobility within the system. The higher socio-economic groups possessed the necessary tools to perform well within the system which further reproduced middle class

values and codes of behaviour. The impact of the school or institution on these students from lower socio-economic groups could also be viewed in the realm of power relations within the school setting and the shift then occurred from the individual perspective to the group dynamic. This dynamic must also be considered in research into how various class groupings are better placed to 'survive' the system. This was also reflected in Apple's (1995) theory of 'deviance amplification' and the fact that school naturally generated certain kinds of deviance. In Apple's research he used the example of workers from all levels who attemptted to gain control over their labour and although they were perceived to be controlled, they attempted to challenge that control in numerous ways, Apple transferred this concept of resistance to the student population who he believed became adept at working the system and who consequently rejected the 'hidden curriculum'. Apple adopted a similar line to the risk aversion mechanism when he commented in his research on the work of Paul Willis (1977) who found that students in working class areas and from working class schools realised that as a class, schooling would not enable them to go much further than they already had or their parents had, therefore their response was to reject the system as an unconscious response to their conditions and although they appeared to have some control over their destiny, they continued to aid social reproduction.

7.5 Resistance Theory and Power

In response to the 'deterministic aspects' of reproduction theory, resistance theory has emerged. Darmody et al. (2008) referred to student resistance which was manifested by students dropping out of the school system or truanting to show their rejection of middle class codes and values that were evident in schools. Truancy then was viewed as a form of 'counter school behaviour' (p.363). As Darmody et al. (2008) stated in their research into truancy in Irish secondary schools; institutional habitus leads to resistance theory where truancy becomes a form of counter-school behaviour (p. 363). These young people were therefore challenging the middle class values of the school system, it is these middle class values produced by the system that highlighted the differences in cultural capital amongst those students in the lower-socio economic groups. What is of concern is that the education system facilitates such failure in order to maintain the cultural conservatism and traditionalism that already exists within the system. Such institutions reward and value the 'habitus' of some children because the school embodies this 'habitus' itself (Reed-Danahay,

2005, p.63). Therefore, the curriculum, the hidden curriculum, the organisation of the classroom, the relationships between students and teachers all contribute to social class reproduction (Apple, 1979, Lareau, 1987). This also contributes to power relations theory. Donnelly et al. (2014) in their study on power relations in the classroom demonstrated how power relations between the student and teacher are complex and they described the classroom as a 'complex setting with undercurrents of power and control' (p. 2032). Foucault (1994) described how schools 'fasten individuals to an apparatus of knowledge transmission' and how their primary aim is 'to insert individuals into an apparatus of normalization of people' (p.78). Apple (1995) described the educational and cultural system as being an 'exceptionally important element in the maintenance of existing relations of domination and exploitation in society' (p.9). Fundamentally, there is a real imbalance of power between the 'consumer' and the 'provider' (Hoyle 1998) which maintains the unequal relations in school and society, while Apple promotes the theory of rejection of a curriculum that 'covertly teaches expected norms and dispositions that pervade the school' (Darmody et al., 2008, p. 363). Apple (2010) viewed schools as cultural and economic institutions and believes that we need to further examine the curriculum organisation, the principles on which it is built and evaluated, if we are to fully understand these power relations that are 'very complex' and that are designed to ensure the schools 'own preservation' (Foucault, 1982, p. 791).

Foucault conceptualised three principal instruments of disciplinary power: hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and examination (Foucault, 1994, p.58). In this research we see how schools and the EWS implemented these principal instruments of disciplinary power through constant surveillance and examination and through ensuring that the status quo is maintained. School policies are often created and enforced not by those who created them but by school staff who follow instruction without questioning the reasoning behind such policies. In addition, power is exercised in the main to control behaviour and those that resist the 'norm' are excluded as a result of persistent resistance behaviour or in time they exclude themselves from the system. Examinations also aid with this exclusionary process and students opt out as they fail to see the relevance or benefit of these examinations for their lives. The EWS further enhances the concept of disciplinary power as EWOs are viewed as masters of surveillance and control.

Foucault viewed teachers as 'technicians of behaviour' who have absorbed a set of norms that they now attempt to impose on their students and with this particular use of power,

comes resistance. Similar to that resistance described by Darmody et al. (2008) which resulted in truancy, disaffection and disengagement from the education system or Apple's (1995) similar example of the workers who attempted to gain control over their labour and although they were under control they attempted in various ways to challenge that control (p.87). Darmody et al. (2008) concluded that 'rejection of school authority by working class children is seen as working class resistance to what they recognise as the inherent inequalities in the education system favouring middle class aims and values' (p. 362). This resistance often occurs subtly and over time and only comes under scrutiny when the students resist the 'norm' and challenge authority. For the most part, the system continues to exercise this power without challenge and this power is then 'normalised' and is seen as a natural way of working (Freie and Eppley, 2014). The concepts of power relations and resistance can also be used to examine the resistance of parents to compulsory school attendance legislation. Their children's non-attendance at school reflects this resistance but it is unclear if this is the result of the behaviours of the 'deviant child' or the behaviours of the 'incompetent parent' as described by Reid (2005). It appears that the students are attempting to control their environment or field as they are the ones resisting the norms of school, the hidden curriculum, the structures and practices that are inherent in the system; they are reflecting their parent's attitudes and maintaining their position within their social class, or are they constrained within a particular social structure and the position occupied within that structure determines what they can or cannot do? (Bourdieu, 1998).

7.6 Bourdieu and Foucault combined

The legislation governing school attendance is designed and implemented by government officials who hold the very same middle class values and norms that are reproduced by the education system. Here is the combined effect of 'habitus' and power relations at work, which ultimately leads to resistance by the student of the system that is not meeting their needs and the eventual reproduction of social class inequality. The state controls the compulsory school attendance legislation which is a method of discipline and control, the state working through various collective agents manages the education system within which inequality is produced and reproduced, the state also controls the organisation of schooling, the curricula, examinations, the appointment of teachers and therefore has a direct impact on educational outcomes (Lynch and O'Riordan 2006).

7.7 Power Imbalance

When parents are referred to the EWS by a school or agency, all parties now become 'equally placed in power relations which are very complex' (Foucault 1982, p. 778). At the outset these power relations appear to take the form of resistance as these are parents who do not send their child to school, parents who do not engage with child protection services and these are children who do not behave in a way that is expected of them at school. Foucault believed that in order to understand power relations we need to:

> *investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations*, he believed that *the main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much 'such and such' an institution of power, or group or elite or class but rather a technique, a form of power* (Foucault 1982, p.780 – 781).

Student resistance manifests itself with students dropping out or not attending school regularly, and poor behavior can also be viewed as a form of resistance behavior, Apple (1995) referred to 'deviance amplification theory' where schools themselves naturally generate certain types of deviance. Foucault referred to the disciplinary technology in schools, where pupils are constantly disciplined and supervised (Rabinow 1986) and Youdell (2011) referred to schools as 'disciplinary institutions in which the practices that constitute school life are shaped and permeated by the localized effects of disciplinary power' (p. 37). In situations such as these the school is then forced to look to outside agencies for assistance in maintaining order when 'the ensemble of regulated communications' (Foucault, 1982, p.787) breaks down. Discipline in itself is a form of power and when it is threatened, the institution is forced to regain that space 'where individuals are located in a manner that facilitates' their surveillance (Turkel 1990, p. 185).

This is a very complex relationship and power dynamic where the usual normalized power of the school (Freie and Eppley 2014) is now off balance. Here we see what Foucault referred to as institutions exercising power relations to guarantee their own preservation as 'one risks giving in to the other' (Foucault 1982, p.791). Schools often contact the EWO when they want to reduce a pupils' time table which is often used as a way of regaining power and control over very difficult young people, here the school is using its position of power to negotiate new terms and conditions for the young person in order 'to control activity' and aid in the creation of the 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977, p. 149). Darmody et al. (2008)

referred to the subtle resistance and challenges over time and in these cases we see evidence where reduced time tables or curricula only lead the young people involved to become even more determined to take control of their school experience. Foucault (1994) referred to the school system as 'being based on a kind of judicial power' where 'one is constantly punishing and rewarding, evaluating and classifying, saying who is the best, who is not so good', Foucault referred to this judicial power and questions 'why must one punish and reward in order to teach something to someone?' (p.83). Schools use the threat of a referral to the EWS as a method of controlling the actions of parents and students, here we see judicial power operate at a very basic level, all of the school staff interviewed spoke of sending letters to parents when the child reached 15 days absence, and in these letters they would warn of the impending notification to be sent to the EWS. Hence the relationship between the parent and the EWO has at its foundation the fear of potential sanction. The EWS is seen as the enforcer of discipline and attendance for the school and at every moment 'the relationship of power may become a confrontation between two adversaries' (Foucault 1982, p.794).

7.8 Conclusion

Both Bourdieu and Foucault's theoretical concepts provide a comprehensive framework for exploring the experiences of the families referred to the EWS and the elements of power relations and social and cultural capital that affect school attendance, participation and retention in education. The resistance theorists provided an interesting dimension and in particular the idea that young people have an almost deterministic view-point which leads them to deliberately control their environment to gain power in a system that appears to them to hold all of the power. Lynch (1999) was critical of the resistant theorist's belief that teachers were the key to social class change and she questioned just how successful theories such as these can be at bringing about change as there was an expectation that these students can be easily moulded by schools. Lynch did not believe this to be the case and believed that research has shown the need for power to be given back to those who are marginalised. 'They must find their own voice rather than have experts speaking at them, for them or about them' (Lynch, 1999, p.49). This research aims to give the young people and families their own voice, the opportunity to relay their observations, feelings and viewpoints on the interventions offered to them in their 'social space' and to examine the effect of cultural

capital and power relations on these young people as they negotiate their way in a system that holds predominately middle class values and expectations. The following chapter will present and discuss the methodological approaches and methods by which the data was gathered to further the research.

8.0 Methodology

8.1 Introduction

The following chapter outlines the methodology and methods used in this research, it outlines the reasoning behind choosing this methodology and provides a description of the methods used and how they were used to obtain the data. This research lends itself more appropriately to the interpretivist approach which will allow the reader an insight into the experiences of the families and young people at the centre of the research.

8.2 Interpretivism

A paradigm is described as a 'way of looking at the world' (Punch, 2009. p.16), or a theoretical orientation or perspective (Bogden and Biklen, 1982. p. 30) and the interpretive paradigm in particular, is fundamentally concerned for the individual and their experiences of the world. 'The interpretive researcher…accepts that the observer makes a difference to the observed and that reality is a human construct' (Wellington, 2000. p. 16). This approach focuses on action and allows the researcher to explore perspectives and consequently develop insights that inform the research. The focus is therefore on both action and the shared experiences of human behaviour so that theory may develop (Cohen et al., 2011, p.17-18). Inquiry paradigms address three fundamental questions: the ontological question which seeks to explore the reality that exists and to examine the form and nature of that reality; the epistemological question which explores the relationship between the researcher and the 'researched' and to discover what 'can be known' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994. p. 108) and finally the methodological question, which explores how best the researcher can explore and present 'what *is* known' (Punch, 2009, p.16). Guba and Lincoln (in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), state that not just any methodology can be considered appropriate and that methodology will be determined by the answers to the ontological and epistemological questions that should be addressed first. In their view 'methods must fit a pre-determined methodology' (p.108).

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) consider those key philosophical questions as; ontological questions which concern 'being'; epistemological questions which are those that concern 'knowing;' and methodological questions concern 'how' the research should operate (p.19).

In their view; 'ontological assumptions will give rise to epistemological assumptions which have methodological implications for the choice of particular data collection techniques' (p.21). These fundamental philosophical questions have given rise to two traditional paradigms in social research – Positivist and Interpretive. This qualitative research model uses a number of interconnected interpretivist practices to gain a better understanding of the subject being researched and each of these practices 'makes the world visible in a different way' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p.4-5). The basic assumption guiding the interpretivist paradigm is that knowledge is socially constructed by people and the researcher as a consequence needs to understand the complex world of the people who have lived these experiences (Mertens, 2005, p. 12-13). Therefore, it is essential that the researcher examine the 'setting' as there needs to be understanding of where the respondent is coming from. 'Meaning' is essential to the interpretive researcher as is understanding 'the ways people make sense of their lives' (Bogden and Biklen, 1982, p.29).

In this research the ontological question is concerned with the reality that a number of young people do not attend school on a regular basis, the epistemological question seeks to know why this is the case and what causes this behaviour and the subsequent methodology is determined by the requirements of these philosophical questions. The interpretive researcher needs therefore to ask questions that will illuminate what people are experiencing, how they interpret these experiences and therefore how they construct their world. This paradigm allows the researcher to discover meaning and interpret events and actions (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.16-17). The researcher also has a responsibility to be aware of his/her own values and reality and to realise that the researcher cannot be independent of them. Therefore 'reflexivity' is an essential component of the research. The researcher needs to recognise that they are part of the world that they research and that qualitative inquiry is not a neutral activity, therefore reflexivity is required so that the researcher can acknowledge their role in the research and seek to understand their part in that research in order to ensure validity within the research (Cohen et al. 2011, p. 225). This will be an important consideration in research where the researcher has worked with the respondent in some capacity in the past as is the case in this research.

Smaller samples of population are used to provide important information not because they are necessarily representative of a larger group but because the nature of reality is changed as a result of the individual's experiences. The case study method provides a very suitable model for the interpretive researcher as the researcher is allowed the opportunity to look at

the reality in existence for the sample group, to learn about that reality and delve into the experiences of the respondents to allow for deeper analysis (Van Wynsberghe et al., 2007, p.89). The process which seeks answers to these ontological and epistemological questions will guide the researcher in how the research should be conducted, therefore the 'case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied' (Stake, 2005, p. 438).

The interview questions should therefore facilitate the respondent in outlining their interpretation of their reality rather than just presenting the researcher's interpretation of *his/her* own reality in the analysis stage. This approach could be facilitated by providing numerous examples or direct quotations from the respondent's interviews to support any inferences from the data collection. In this research, rich data was obtained to outline people's first hand experiences of real life events allowing the researcher to move from individual cases to more 'general situations when they have achieved a close, detailed description and explanation of those individual cases' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989, p.29). It is a high priority of the interpretivist researcher to accurately represent the views and opinions of the respondent's reality, particularly if language usage varies; therefore the interpretivist researcher often prefers to 'rely on the self-reported accounts of lay actors as they engage in the various meaning-making activities that constitute their lives' (Scott and Morrison, 2007, p.131-132). It is essential that this is a considered part of the research but not to the detriment of the in-depth analysis that will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of educational processes and actions.

8.3 Reflexivity

> *Research is primarily an enterprise of knowledge construction. The researcher with his/her participants is engaged in producing knowledge* (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p.274)

Research in the above quotation is described as an active process and reflexivity is a requirement for this process to be truly effective and worthwhile. A reflexive researcher is one that can step back and critically look at his/her own role in the overall research process. This process of rigorous research includes the interactions between the researcher and the participants, the creation of knowledge and the awareness and response to ethical issues within the research. The qualitative researcher is central to the process as they influence the selection, collection and ultimate interpretation of the data obtained throughout the research process.

Reflexivity is a term commonly used in qualitative research design within the social sciences. There is some ambiguity concerning the exact meaning of the term and it is often used simultaneously and with the term self-reflection. The origin of the word stems from the Latin 'reflectere' which means to bend back. There is however a distinction between reflection and reflexivity. 'Reflection is the process of thinking about our practice at the time or after the event' (Taylor and White, 2000, p.198). Reflexivity includes self-reflection but goes further, reflexivity expects that you 'turn a critical gaze towards yourself' (Finlay and Gough, 2003, p.3). It requires the researcher to 'bend back' and interrogate the work and 'subject' their 'own knowledge claims to critical analysis' (Taylor and White, 2000, p.35). Pillow (2003) regards the combination of reflection and reflexivity within qualitative research as essential, as on-going self-awareness throughout the research process that will expose the practice and construction of knowledge within the research so that more accurate analysis can be facilitated. Such self-awareness will aid data collection and the researcher should seek answers to the following questions; why was the research topic chosen? What does the researcher bring to the situation? What is the researcher's experience and what is their bias? Also, it is essential that we understand that different experiences can result in different reactions within the research process. It is important to note that reflexivity goes beyond the personal domain as of importance here is the interaction between the researcher and the participant and the issues of power and status that may be present within the research process (Finlay and Gough, 2003, p.23).

Wellington (2000) believes that the researcher is required from the outset of the research to state their position in relation to the research; he outlines how reflexivity can be practiced within research by; questioning the self – the researcher's assumptions, ideas and values. It is essential that the researcher states his/her position, outline their past experiences, prior knowledge and ask themselves are they carrying bias or prejudice or anything that will affect their role within the research process? The researcher should examine the assumptions taken by schools, colleges and employers and ask what are the underlying values? How might they influence the research? Finally, there is a requirement for a close examination of the language used by all parties, both verbal and written, according to Wellington the question should be asked; does everyone have the same understanding of the language used? What are their frames of reference? Pillow (2003) states that 'self-reflexivity acknowledges the researcher's role in the construction of the research problem, the research setting and research findings

and highlights the importance of the research becoming consciously aware of these factors and thinking through the implications of these factors for his/her research' (p.179).

The collection of data for this research was primarily through the method of interview and therefore it was essential that both reflection and reflexivity were practiced throughout the research process as Steier (1991) describes the process of reflexivity as 'a concern for recognising that constructing is a social process, rooted in language, not located inside one's head (p.5). It is therefore important to note that the interview process was much more than a collection of verbal data but it was a reflexive process where a relationship was established as the process of interview can never be totally neutral, objective and non-biased and both researcher and participant needed to be reflexive for the process to be successful. Finlay and Gough (2003), suggest that participant reflexivity should be encouraged and should go beyond talking together at the end of the research process to include methods such as giving the participants previously obtained similar data to stimulate discussion during the interview. This method may help to overcome inequalities of power within the interview situation.

Reflexivity is a tool that allows the researcher to situate him/herself and be aware of how personal history can influence the research process; this further validates the research findings. Pillow (2003), outlines four effective reflexive strategies for use within qualitative research:

1. Reflexivity as recognition of self
2. Reflexivity as recognition of the other
3. Reflexivity as truth
4. Reflexivity as transcendence – when you are aware of yourself, others and the truth you then need to 'transcend subjectivity' and your 'own cultural context' (p.186).

Gewitz and Cribb (2006), in their article which argues for more 'ethical reflexivity' outline the critical elements required to be ethically reflexive within research. These include strategies such as; being clear about your own values, assumptions and judgements, being prepared to defend your values, assumptions and respond to any tensions created by them and being able to take responsibility for any political or ethical implications within the research. Ethical reflexivity asks that the researcher consider not just social relationships but also ethical and political beliefs in the shaping of the research. Gewitz and Cribb (2006), clearly identify the dilemma for the researcher as being one where the researcher's value commitments fuel their research but must not influence their research so that they are 'simply

discovering what it is they would like to find out' (p.151). Hamersley (2008) discusses the dangers of bias within research and he believes that the researcher must take precautions against it and assess whether or not it has occurred in the research. He states the importance of researchers seeing research not as a response to the requirements of governments and funders but as 'the pursuit of knowledge' (p.557). Guillemin and Gillam (2004), take ethical reflexivity further in their article and discuss 'ethically important moments' that may arise in the interview situation where a disclosure could be made to the researcher, therefore the researcher needs to be equipped to address and respond to ethical concerns if and when they arise in the research setting. Their view is that reflexivity affords the researcher the opportunity to develop skills to respond appropriately to the participant. The researcher who practices reflexivity will be more aware of these 'ethically important moments' when they arise (p.277). They advocate for the expansion of the term reflexivity to include ethical reflexivity in addition to the reflexivity that should ensure rigorous research practice.

The processes of reflection and reflexivity should begin at the outset of any research project when the researcher is thinking about their research project. The researcher needs to examine their reasons for choosing the research subject and their relationship to the research subject. All researchers come with pre-conceived ideas and judgements that pertain to the research topic, therefore the task is to set all of this aside and listen openly and objectively to the participant's view and engage openly in reflexive analysis. Finlay (2002) outlines how her experience of being an occupational therapist was both advantageous and disadvantageous in her research on occupational therapists. She outlines how the research relationship evolves through reflective analysis and how difficult the process is, she strongly advocates for a balance to be struck between the researcher's reflexivity and ensuring that the primary focus is on the participant's involvement in the research process. This is also pertinent in this researcher's case where the researcher is working in the organisation and therefore needs to be even more conscious of the need for reflexivity when obtaining data and interpreting same. Reflexivity should not just be apparent in the data collection stage of the research but also in the evaluation of the research findings. Reflexivity has often been defined as ongoing self-awareness that happens throughout the research process from inception to completion. It is a process that makes visible to all the construction of knowledge so that we may accurately analyse our research. Finlay in Finlay and Gough (2003) states that it cannot be said that reflexivity will ensure trustworthiness and integrity of research but reflexivity does have the important role of 'forcing' the researcher 'to stay mindfully engaged' (p.118) and

hopefully this will allow the researcher the opportunity to 'truly represent another' as opposed to 'discovering what it is we would like to find out'!

8.4 Ethics in Research

> *Thinking about ethics in research involves constant questioning of both the aims and means of research, drawing on first-hand understanding of the particular actors and circumstances of a research situation as it unfolds* (Punch and Oancea, 2014, p.74)

As ethics are the moral principles that govern our behaviour when undertaking research, it is essential that the researcher takes ethical questions into consideration at all stages of that research. Kvale (1996) refers to the seven stages of research and suggests the drafting of a 'parallel ethical protocol' which is designed to deal with any ethical issues that may arise throughout those research stages. (Bassey, 1999) sees research ethics under three distinct headings: respect for democracy, respect for truth and respect for persons (Bassey, 1999, p. 73). He also notes that the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines have included a fourth value which is the respect for 'educational research itself' to ensure that researchers conduct their research in a manner that will not have a negative impact on the work of future researchers. The Economic Social Research Institute (ESRI) insist on four basic principles of ethical research: beneficence – ensure that your work benefits others; non-maleficence – ensure there is no harm to the participants; justice – that benefits and risks are equally analysed so that they are both equally distributed in society; and finally, autonomy of the subjects –the rights and dignity of the participants should be respected and protected (www.esri.ie).

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) have established a framework of ethics to ensure a high level of ethical standards are adhered to at all times. Their principle is to ensure maximum benefit of the research whilst minimising the risk of harm. Therefore, they propose in their 2015 research framework, six key principles of ethical research that should be addressed by the researcher which include:

- That participants should take part voluntarily;
- That the research must be worthwhile and provide value that will outweigh any harm;

- That the research staff and participants must be informed and understand what participation involves;
- That all research must meet standards of integrity and assure quality and transparency;
- That anonymity should be respected and confidential information and personal data must be protected;
- That the research should be independent and any conflicts of interest or partiality should be made explicit. (www.esrc.ac.uk p.4)

Punch and Oancea (2014) focus on three principal ethical perspectives in order to interrogate the research, these are; duty, consequence and virtue. These are influenced by Kvale's (1996) work where he outlines the three philosophical ethical positions of duty, utility and virtue. Duty- where actions are judged independently of their consequences; utility- where emphasis is placed on the consequences of an action and finally virtue - where the researcher relies on their moral values and personal integrity. These philosophies emphasise different aspects of ethical choices within research and should be borne in mind when conducting research that is deemed to be ethical and results from actions that are morally appropriate where the dignity, rights and welfare of the research participants are protected at all times. Prior to commencing this research both the University Ethics Committee and Tusla Ethics Committee were required to approve the research to ensure that all ethical standards were adhered to in respect of interviewing young people in particular.

8.5 Consent and Vulnerable Groups

Informed consent is a demonstration of respect for all of those involved in the research. It is essential that the risks and benefits to the research are provided to the participants, Kvale (1996) states that the research subject must be informed about the purpose of the investigation and the 'main features of the design' (p.112). Informed consent requires that research participants are involved voluntarily and are fully made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. It is essential that the research participant signs a letter of agreement that outlines clearly the nature of the research. In the case of young children, consent must be given by the parents/guardians of the child. With older children it is advisable to obtain consent from the parents/guardians but equally important is to obtain the 'assent' of the older child to participate in the research (Morrow & Richards, 1996), it is also important to continually monitor that assent throughout the research (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

In obtaining informed voluntary consent consideration should also be given to ensure the information is presented in language that is easily understood and that consideration is given to the literacy levels of the potential participants. It may be the case that the researcher may be required to find more creative methods of obtaining such consent, such as tape recording to obtain verbal agreement (Punch & Oancea, 2014). It is important to state that informed consent is on-going and does not end when the participants sign the consent form but it is a process of continuous negotiation where the researcher must strive for balance between over informing and under informing (Kvale 1996).

Most educational institutions require the researcher to seek appropriate consent from a parent or guardian if a child is under 16 years old. Some children are able to give consent if they are under 16, yet legally it is most probably preferable to obtain all consent in writing. It is important to stress how important it is to protect the child and ensure that the child is informed about the research. Therefore, they like the adults should be informed in advance and the information should be presented in an age appropriate manner. In the case of young children a verbal explanation of the research may be more effective and appropriate (Powell & Smith, 2010). They conclude in their research on ethical guidelines with children that firstly of primary importance is obtaining informed consent and the researcher must make it clear to the child and parent that they can withdraw at any time. Secondly, the information supplied must be child friendly, any risks must be outlined clearly in language that is easily understood and thirdly, the researcher should have the knowledge and understanding to 'reflexively consider' children's responses and any possible ethical issues that may arise throughout the interview process (Powell & Smith, 2010, p.136). In addition, research that involves children as participants in the interview process must consider that their competencies are different, which has implications for informed consent and they are considerably more vulnerable and must be therefore protected as such (Morrow & Richards, 1996). All of the young people who participated in this research gave assent to being interviewed in addition to the consent received from their parent.

Children are one element of a vulnerable group and when conducting research with members of marginalised groups or minority groupings one must also consider the following issues:

- Reinforcement of stereotypes with particular groups
- Exploration of vulnerable participants
- Causing distress (Savi-Baden and Howell Major, 2013, p.328)

The power differential between the researcher and child is also a factor and that this disparity in power between adult and child is a huge ethical obstacle to be considered (Powell & Smith, 2000). It is important to include the voices of children in research as this adds great depth to any research. The UN Convention recognises children's participation rights and emphasises the necessity to protect those rights.

8.6 Data Collection from Children

Data collection from research participants, especially children is a sensitive issue. Parents give consent but it is essential that the child understands your research to the best of their ability and that they also give informed consent when they know what data the researcher will collect and the purpose of the data collection. It must also be made clear that the data will be kept confidentially and controlled by the researcher. When talking to children it is advisable to include them and make them feel they are 'working with you' (Wood in Sheehy et al., 2005). It is advisable to also code data as it is collected so that it is anonomyised to ensure that the participants are protected.

The Open University regulations regarding data collection for research include the following:

- Data should be collected fairly and legally;
- Data should only be used for the purpose for which it is collected and this must be explained to the individuals supplying the data;
- Data should be adequate, accurate, relevant and not excessive, i.e. unnecessary data should not be collected;
- Personal data should not be kept for any longer than necessary;
- Personal data should not be disclosed to any third parties;
- Data should not be unnecessarily reproduced in any form;
- Personal data should not be transferred by any insecure means;
- No data should be disclosed to anyone without prior permission;
- Personal data must be held securely by the researcher (Wood in Sheehy et al., 2005. pp.243-245).

It is essential that the research process is always transparent and to enable this, the researcher must 'situate him/her self in relation to the participants' (Baden and Howell-Major, 2013, p. 328). In addition, the research participants must be treated as vital and equal contributors to

the research process at all times therefore they should be empowered so that they are not passive subjects but have the rights to express their views and 'constructively influence the process'(Wolfendale in Sheehy et al., 2005, p.126). Throughout the interview process with the families and young people, the researcher ensured that there was an understanding of the purpose of the research, that they had the opportunity to see in advance all of the questions and that the language used was appropriate to their age, it was clear from the interviews that the young people had an understanding of the context and were fully informed, willing participants.

8.7 Confidentiality, Privacy and Anonymity

'Confidentiality in research implies that private data identifying the subjects will not be reported' (Kvale, 1996, p.114). Many countries have legal provision to protect the right to privacy. Within the interview process information will be shared with the researcher that may be of a sensitive nature and this must therefore be handled sensitively. One method of dealing with such data is to remove any identifying material from the data that is stored and analysed that may make the research participants easily identifiable. This is termed 'anonymisation' (Punch & Oancea, 2014). This technique involves the deletion of personal information such as name, place of work, school, etc. It was always made clear to the participant that no one would have access to the original interview transcript except the researcher and that these originals would be shredded/destroyed once the research was complete (Bell, 2010).

It is vitally important that all research must seek to avoid causing harm to the research participants and that the benefits of the research should outweigh any risk to the participant. The researcher has a responsibility to look carefully at the interview process and to ensure that no harm is caused to the participants or the groups they may represent. It is essential to question whether the expected outcomes of the research justify the burden placed on the participants and the principal question is 'how to maintain a balance between rigour in research and care for the participants and their setting' (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 72). Also of importance is the use of any knowledge obtained at a political or policy level and how research participants are represented at such levels. Burgess (1989) considers a number of ethical dilemmas in research and of note is that of research sponsorship, whereby the research is supported and/or funded by an agency/organisation and this factor may influence the findings within that research.

8.8 The Case Study

The case study research method has been used in educational research since the 1970s in the UK and USA, previous research methods were seen to be lacking and were viewed as limited as this form of research provided the opportunity for understanding in 'real contexts' rather than just providing evidence alone (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Merriam (1988) defines the case study as an examination of a phenomenon such as a programme, an event, a person, a process, an institution or a social group. In later work, Merriam (1998) describes the case study as a 'bounded unit' which can emerge in three forms; heuristic, particularistic and descriptive. A significant amount of the case study research conducted in the area of education focuses on qualitative research as this method best suits the needs of many researchers as they are primarily interested in insight, discovery and interpretation rather than the testing of hypothesis. Guba and Lincoln (1981) believe that the case study is therefore the preferable method of research as it provides the reader with 'thick description, is grounded, is holistic and life like, simplifies the data to be considered by the reader, illuminates meanings and can communicate tacit knowledge' (p. 375). The case study as a means of qualitative research allows educational researchers to access a situation that they may have never otherwise encountered. Rowley (2002), in her research views the case study as being an appropriate method if the researcher is seeking through deep and detailed investigation to answer the 'how' and 'why' type questions. The case study provides the reader with the opportunity to be exposed to enriched concepts that are second only to direct experiences and allows for the detailed exploration of a 'bounded system' through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Stake 1995). The case study method of research can be used to identify a specific form of enquiry and as a means of qualitative research it has been tried and found to be a direct and satisfying way of adding to experience and improving understanding (Donmoyer 2000).

Yin (2009) sees the case study method as allowing the researcher or investigator to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. Yin (2009) defines the case study as:

'an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context' (p.18).

Yin identifies five criteria that he considers to be vital in the presentation of an exemplary case study, he believes that the case study must:

- be significant;
- be complete;
- consider alternative perspectives;
- display sufficient evidence;
- be composed in an engaging manner (p.185-190).

As part of this research process, the researcher must explore the nature and purpose of the case study. There are many different views; one viewpoint to be considered is that of generalizability, this requires the reader to draw conclusions about a general phenomenon from a number of cases that in turn will enable the reader to form conclusions about a wider population of cases. This method of research can aid the researcher as it allows a basis for argument based on common findings within cases. Rowley (2002) would see generalisation as contributing to theory and states that this can only happen if the case study design has been informed by theory. Stake (1995) however would argue that the real purpose of case study is particularization not generalization. Therefore the case is researched until completion and the main emphasis is on understanding the case itself, what it is and what it does. The case study is instrumental in aiding our understanding, not just of the case itself, but of the other factors that are relevant to the case. As in this research the use of collective case studies or more than one case allows the reader the opportunity of examining a number of different cases which exhibit similar characteristics so that theories can be generated about a larger collection of cases/situations.

The case study method gives the opportunity to provide insight into particular issues or hypothesis. Becker (1971), views the case study as providing us with the opportunity of casual or narrative analysis. By its nature case study research allows for the investigation of ‘casual processes in the real world’ rather than artificially created settings. In addition, narrative accounts of events in particular cases are essential so that we are able to fully understand the outcomes of the case. The case study method by the nature of the narrative form allows the reader accessibility, accessibility to experiences to which they may otherwise have never been exposed. Donmoyer (2000) believes that the case study allows the reader to experience vicariously, unique situations and unique individuals within our own

culture. This research provides that unique opportunity for the reader to experience what the respondents have experienced through hearing their stories of their interaction with schools and services in relation to their children's education.

There are many strengths to the case study method and there are weaknesses. The case studies may not be generalizable, representative or typical. Therefore it is important to ensure that all of the studies will illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study, be insightful, attention holding and be of value (Wellington 2000). The research should present new meanings. Furthermore, the research undertaken in the case study should be inductive; therefore generalizations, concepts or hypotheses can and should emerge when the data is examined. The case study, to be successful and meaningful must be authentic and must be presented on its own terms; it must be evaluative, descriptive and interpretative. In order to be successful in case study research the researcher must be rigorous and must follow systematic procedures or the research will be easily criticised, case studies are often criticised as they do not provide ample basis for scientific generalisation, this can be avoided by ensuring the study can stand alone and allow for the expansion and generalisation of relevant theories (Yin 2009).

There are four tests used to establish the quality of empirical social research (Rowley, 2002, Yin, 2009); construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. For construct validity to be successful it is essential that multiple sources of evidence are used by the researcher and to also establish a 'chain of evidence' (Yin 2009), for internal validity testing, Yin suggests pattern matching, explanation building, addressing rival explanations and the use of logic models (p. 43) and for external validity testing, Yin suggests using theory from single case studies and using replication logic in multiple case studies and finally for reliability testing the researcher will be required to maintain a case study data base and ensure the use of transparent case study protocols. In the data analysis, the coding assists the researcher to locate those common themes and patterns that contribute to a greater understanding of the case.

The qualitative case study method was the most appropriate method of research to be used for this particular research as the case study method allowed for an in-depth analysis of those families and young people referred to the Education Welfare Service during the specified time-frame. There were a number of case studies, therefore it was necessary for each case

to be clear and accessible, also that each case be presented in the same way, using the same design format. Yin (Green et al., 2006) outlines the merits in choosing multiple case studies, stating that you cannot be accused of being anyway limited in the research presentation as you may be with a single study or of choosing a case that may be somewhat special to the researcher, also multiple studies facilitate the extraction of comparative data which can be of assistance in the analysis stage of the research. The cases were selected for this research so that the maximum could be learned within clearly defined boundaries. The cases that were chosen for this research were chosen because they were significant, each study constituted a 'bounded system' and examined the systems and processes within the interaction between the service and the client. Each study was objectively presented and included the perspectives of the parents/guardians, the school, EWOs and the young people. This increased the richness of the data. There was a number of methods of data collection used for the case studies; these included interviews with the young people, their parents/guardians, members of the school staff and the EWOs. In addition, the EWO has a significant amount of information recorded in their case files which provided valuable data on each of the young people and their families. Schools also held records pertaining to attendance issues and referral processes that were also of relevance to this research. In addition, a focus group was conducted with a group of EWOs who had worked with the young people and their families.

8.8.1 Purposeful Sampling – how were the cases chosen?

Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for selecting cases that are information rich and related to a phenomenon of interest. Of utmost importance is that 'the participants are available and are willing to participate and have the ability to communicate their experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive and reflective manner' (Palinkas et al., 2013, p.3) Cohen et al. (2011) define purposeful sampling as the selection of cases by the researcher based on their 'typicality' or 'possession of the particular characteristics' being sought (p.156). Patton (1989) suggests several approaches to purposeful sampling techniques including; 'typical case', 'extreme or deviant case', 'critical case', 'sensitive case', 'convenience sampling' and 'maximum variation sampling' (pp.100-107). Ritchie et al. (2003) describe purposeful sampling as sample units chosen with 'particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes……which the researcher wishes to study' (p.78). From the numerous approaches to

purposeful sampling, Patton's (1989) typical case sampling where the cases characteristic positions are the 'normal' or 'average' and are therefore selected to provide a detailed profiling opportunity. The criteria for case selection in this research was informed by the aims of the research, existing knowledge in this field of study, theories that the research may wish to explore or any gaps in knowledge in the study. It was also important that the chosen cases were representative of the usual case type referred to the Education Welfare Service. In this research, 7 cases were purposively chosen based on their potential to provide deep insight into experience. Criterion sampling is a strategy that is 'used to narrow the range of variation and focus on similarities' (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015, p.3). The criteria used in the selection of these cases included; gender, social class, ethnicity, SEN diagnosis and finally the proximity of the families to the researcher to facilitate access. The cases were selected to illustrate the work practices of the Education Welfare Service and they were chosen as they were 'information rich' (Patton, 1990) as there had been significant interaction between the EWO and the family over a significant period of time.

8.8.2 Interviewing in Research

> *The interpretive researcher begins with the individual and sets out to understand the interpretations of the world around them* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, p.18).

Good research should originate out of a concern for the individual at the heart of the research and the researcher should strive to fully understand the person and their actions through in-depth qualitative procedures and techniques. Opie (2004) describes this as a rationalist's view of knowledge whereby the researcher is classed as 'anti-positivist, interpretivist and subjectivist and is therefore concerned with understanding personal constructs and relatability' (p. 13). The initial method of data collection in this research was that of the interview. Kvale (1996) describes interviewing as a 'craft' and states that 'it does not follow content and context-free rules of method, but rests on the judgement of a qualified researcher' (p.105). Kvale (1996) proposes six steps within the interview process that will allow for the establishment of meaning: the collection of the subject's descriptions, allowing for the subject's self-discovery, condensing and interpreting the interview event by the researcher, interpreting the transcribed interview by the interviewer, conducting follow-up

interviews and observing if interviewees begin to act differently from the insights revealed by the research (p.189-190). Rowley (2012) sees the use of interviews as being useful when the objective of the research is on understanding people's opinions, attitudes, values and processes, when there is insufficient information regarding the subject that facilitates the drafting of a questionnaire and the interviewees would be more inclined towards this form of data collection than any other. The most common form of interview in case study research is that of the semi-structured interview. Rowley (2012) recommends the use of 6-12 well phrased questions with some flexibility in the questioning. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that there are seven stages of research interviewing which include; thematising an interview project, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying and reporting. The interview project should be planned using these seven stages before commencement of any interview with the client.

The purpose of the qualitative interview in the case of this research was to meet with each of the young people and their parent/guardian and obtain a first-hand account of their experience of the Education Welfare Service, the reasons for their referral to the service and the ultimate outcomes of such involvement. In addition, interviews were also conducted with school staff, relevant agency workers and one District Court Judge who was familiar with EWS prosecutions. These semi-structured interviews also served to provide the researcher with information about the nature of interaction between all parties, the strategies used by the EWO and the family's response to same.

As an integral part of the research process it was necessary to firstly conduct a pilot interview with one parent/guardian and the young person. The purpose of the pilot interview was to establish the most appropriate method of conducting the future interviews and to determine the feasibility of the initially designed interview questions. The parent/guardian was also interviewed with the purpose of ascertaining their response to the EWS intervention and the interview with the parent/guardian also allowed the researcher to obtain information about the family situation, information about their child's early education and an overall picture of their child's experiences of primary and early post-primary education. The young person and parent that were chosen for this pilot study were chosen as they exhibited similar characteristics to the other subjects who would feature in the main study. The purpose of the pilot was therefore to test the interview questions and interview procedure and to establish if the interview questions and procedures would enable the researcher to obtain the

information necessary to further the research. The interview questions were checked to ensure that they:

- were not leading or have implicit assumptions;
- did not include two questions in one;
- did not invite 'yes/no' answers;
- were not too vague or general; and
- were not, in any sense, invasive (Rowley 2012, p. 265).

From the outset, consideration was given at all times to ethical guidelines, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), recommend the preparation of an ethical protocol for the interview study and they detail the researcher's responsibility within the four main fields traditionally discussed in ethical guidelines; informed consent, confidentiality, consequences and the role of the researcher (p. 68). Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) consider two guiding principles that must be adhered to in any research: respect and responsibility. The researcher must respect all of those involved in the study and maintain the integrity of the research. They recommend that the researcher must in the first instance seek clearance from the school, employer or institution to which they are affiliated then make a submission to the ethics board for approval before any negotiations commence with the potential participants. It is essential that potential participants are clear and informed regarding the research. Therefore, at the introductory meeting the researcher should:

- Explain the project clearly;
- Let the informants know what part of the study will be shared with them;
- Identify key documents to share with the informants when applicable;
- Explain the researcher's ethics and the agreement around confidentiality and anonymity;
- Explain the consent form;
- Outline where any transcripts or documents will be kept throughout the research (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

It was essential that the interview questions were prepared with great care. The reasoning behind the preparation of the interview questions serves two purposes, as noted by Denzin (1970), firstly it provides the researcher with the means for translating the research objectives into specific and perhaps even measurable language and secondly it provides a way of motivating the respondents/participants to share their knowledge. As Patton (1980) states the

interview is the best way and perhaps the only way, to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. There are many methods used in the recording of interview data, these include tape recording, notes taken at the interview and note writing after the interview. Most research in this area would advocate the use of tape recording for a more accurate account of the interview and the interviews in this research were all recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. In this research, the final stage of the interview process allowed the researcher to check the responses with the participants to ensure that the information collected was an accurate account of their experiences or viewpoints.

8.9 Documentary Analysis

The second method of data collection for this research involved the analysis of documents such as school records, referral documentation and the EWO's case notes. Documents can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover insights relevant to the research problem (Merriam 1988). In the interest of triangulation of evidence, documents can aid in supporting the evidence provided by other sources (Stake 1995). Once all of the information was gathered on each of the young people and families it was included to form the case study. Qualitative case study analysis is often considered to be difficult, this difficulty stems from the fact that this aspect of case study methodology is underdeveloped (Tellis, 1997). However, Rowley (2002) suggests that good case study research should adhere to the following principles: the analysis should make use of all of the relevant evidence; the analysis should consider all of the major rival interpretations and explore each of them in turn; the analysis should address the most significant aspect of the case study and should draw on the researcher's prior expert knowledge in the area of the case study, but in an unbiased and objective manner (p. 24).

8.10 The Interview in more detail

Seidman (1991) describes interviewing as providing access to the 'context of people's behaviour……..thereby providing a way for the researcher to understand the meaning of that behaviour' (p.4). Seidman also refers to the benefits of interviewing in allowing the researcher gain further insight and also the 'pleasure of experiencing other people's stories'

(p.7). Cohen et al. (2011) describe interviews as a 'flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used; verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard' (p.409). Interviews ultimately have a specific purpose and that is to provide the researcher with information that will enrich the existing data and ultimately the research. The interview 'is more than a conversation with a purpose' (Kvale, 1996). There are numerous types of interview within qualitative research methods. What is important is that the researcher identifies a 'type' that best fits the research. This research examined the participant's unique experiences within the education system and considered that the semi-structured interview would be the most appropriate 'fit' for this research. Also of consideration, was the subject being interviewed as they also impacted on the type of interview being conducted; as interviewing children requires a different skill set to interviewing adults. It became clear as stated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) that 'there are no general standard procedures and rules for research interviewing' (p.148).

8.10.1 The Semi-Structured Interview

The most common form of interview in case study research is that of the semi-structured interview. The standardized semi-structured interview 'is structured in terms of the question wording' (Turner, 2010). Cohen et al. (2011) outline the strengths and weaknesses of this particular interview method. The strengths include the fact that the respondents are required to answer the same questions, which increases the researcher's ability to compare responses and in addition the amount of data collected is controlled. The principal weakness with this method is the limit to flexibility as the 'standardized wording of the questions may constrain and limit naturalness' (p.413). However as Brenner (2006) states an 'open ended interview's strength may be the opportunity it allows the interviewer to extend and clarify responses through further probing' (p.364). Arthur and Nazroo in Ritchie and Lewis (2009) state that in the semi-structured interview 'the interviewer asks key questions in the same way each time and does some probing for further information'(p.111). The interview questions serve principally as a guide rather than a compulsory set of questions. Before the interview questions were designed by the researcher consideration was given to the following:

- The objectives of the interview;
- The nature of the subject matter;
- Whether the interviewer was dealing with facts, opinions or attitudes;

- Whether specificity or depth was sought;
- The respondent's level of education;
- The kind of information he/she can be expected to have;
- Whether or not his/her thought needed to be structured;
- Some assessment of his/her motivational level;
- The extent of the interviewer's own insight into the respondent's situation;
- The kind of relationship the interviewer can expect to develop with the respondent. (Cohen et al. 2011, p.415)

8.10.2 The Interview Protocol

The initial stage in this process required the researcher to design an interview protocol or schedule. This interview protocol is the 'guide to the journey we want our respondents to take' (Dilley, 2000, p.133). The interview protocol not only provides the 'script' for the interview but also serves to focus the researcher within the research. Scripted interview protocols are used frequently in investigative interviews, particularly with young people and have been 'proven to increase compliance and have increased the proportion of information obtained from free-recall memory' (Sternberg et al. 1999). These investigative interviews are conducted adopting the 'funnel approach' where the interviewer commences the interview with open-ended questions and finishes with more focused questions at the end. Broad general questions can put the respondent at ease and aid in the establishment of a rapport at the initial stages of the interview, this is essential for the interview to work. If the respondent is comfortable and understands the context of the interview, this will lead to improved question answering, more reflection on their part and more extensive answers overall (Dilley, 2000, p.133). It is essential that the research protocol is revisited and revised on many occasions to ensure the best 'fit' for the research.

Price (2001) refers to a 'laddered approach' – where the interview commences with open-ended questioning. The interviewer arranges the questions in an order that starts with questions which are 'least invasive and then proceeds to deeper matters' (p.276). Laddered questioning operates at three levels; firstly the questions that invite description of action are less invasive, followed by more invasive questioning about knowledge and finally questions

about philosophy (feelings, values, beliefs). Dilley (2000) sees this format of interviewing to be beneficial in all research gathering and believes that laddered questions can help the researcher 'select questions and responses designed to promote the flow of interesting data, whilst respecting the needs of the respondents' (p.280). Seidman (1991) refers to Spradley's (1979) work on open ended questioning; where he states that there are two types of open-ended question that are used in in-depth interviewing. The first is the 'grand tour questions' – where the interviewer asks the respondent to talk about their large ranging experiences, followed by the 'mini-tour' where the interviewer then seeks information about a particular experience. The second type of question focuses on the respondent's own experiences rather than the external stance. To summarise a successful interview protocol will consider the following factors: the introduction, the rapport establishment with the respondent and the interview/research question.

At the initial stages of the interview the researcher outlined the research topic to the respondents and explained the format of the interview. The researcher should have a standard script and as referred to by Cohen and Manion (2011), the interviewer should 'set the scene' (p.426). Once the interview had commenced, the researcher began by asking easy, open-ended and general questions of the respondent. These questions included background questions, questions about school experiences etc. all of which were classified as 'easy' for the respondent to answer. Interview questions that seek narrative style responses at the initial phase of questioning will lead the respondent in providing more detailed responses to the more substantive questions later in the interview (Sternberg et al. 1999). Throughout the interview it was beneficial to use prompts or probes and to use these effectively the interviewer should initially ask a 'broad' question with several 'off-shoot' questions to guide the interview (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012, p.4).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) outline nine types of interview question, first the introductory questions, which are open ended questions designed to 'yield spontaneous, rich descriptions' (p.135). Following from these questions are the follow up questions which are based on the answers already given by the respondent, in addition there are the probing questions, which look for more detail on areas important to the research. Specifying questions can also be used as these seek more detail on a particular area of questioning. Kvale and Brinkmann also outline the benefits of using direct questions and indirect questions. They also advocate the use of silence in the interview process as this allows the respondent the opportunity to reflect.

Finally, there are the interpreting questions – questions based on the respondent's answers, where more detail is sought, these are similar to the philosophical questions in the 'laddered questioning' referred to previously.

Legard, Keegan and Ward in Ritchie and Lewis (2003) outline two types of interviewing style within the interview process, 'content mapping' and 'content mining'. The first opens up the research question and identifies issues relevant to the respondent and the latter is designed to explore the detail and to 'access the meaning it holds for the interviewee' (p.148). As the interview proceeds the interviewer must perform five central activities according to Dilley (2000):

1. Listen to what the person is saying;
2. Compare what the person says to what we know;
3. Compare what the person says to the questions on the rest of the protocol;
4. Be aware of the time - judgements may have to be made whether you stray from the protocol or stick to it;
5. Offer information to prompt reflection, clarification or further explanation (p.134).

Dilley states that 'listening' is the most important factor in data collection. Seidman (1991) further explores the act of listening and states that 'interviewers must listen on at least three levels' (p.56). Firstly the interviewer must listen to the respondent and what they are saying. Secondly, they must listen to the 'inner voice' and finally they must listen and remain aware of the process 'as well as the substance' (p.57).

8.10.3 Interviewing Children and Young Adolescents

Much of the research on interviewing children focuses on investigative interviewing, particularly in cases of abuse (Lewis, 2002, Sternberg et al., 1999). Research conducted by Sternberg et al. shows how when children were questioned using open-ended questions in the pre-substantive stage of the interview, they responded to the first substantive question they were asked with two and a half times as many words and details as children who were asked direct or closed questions (p.71). This is attributed to those children having the opportunity to provide narrative style responses in the pre-substantive stage of the interview,

as they were given the opportunity to 'practice' answering questions. In this study conducted by Sternberg et al. 15 children were interviewed between the ages of 4-12 years, the results indicated that the structured interview protocol improved the organisation of the investigative interview and increased the amount of information given by the children. In addition, the children who were asked open-ended questions gave longer and more detailed responses to those questions (p.75). Lewis (2002) advocates the use of statements that prompt a response as opposed to direct questioning. Direct questioning can be interpreted as the adult having the 'upper-hand' and can impact on the power relationship within the interview. Lewis also found that children with learning difficulties seem to respond best to general open-ended questions rather than free-recall questions i.e. 'what did you do?' rather than 'tell me about.'

It is essential when interviewing children that the child's age is taken into consideration. Younger children will have less of an attention span and can be more easily distracted. In all cases it is important to put the child at ease and use language that is straight forward, to ask age appropriate questions and allow the child or young person time to think (Cohen et al. 2011, p.433). In this research, the young people were sent the questions in advance so that they were aware of the content and there would be no surprises so to speak! Questions that are asked of children or young adolescents should be drawn from what they know, from within their frame of reference (Brenner, 2006, p.365).

8.10.4 The Pilot Interview

The purpose of the qualitative interview in the case of this research was to meet the young people and their parent/guardian and obtain a first-hand account of their experience of the Education Welfare Service, the reasons for their referral to the service and the ultimate outcomes of such involvement. These semi-structured interviews served to provide the researcher with information about the nature of interaction between the two parties, the strategies used and the family's response to same. As an integral part of the research process it was necessary to firstly conduct a pilot interview with one parent/guardian and the young person.

The purpose of a pilot interview as outlined earlier was to establish the most appropriate method of conducting future interviews and to determine the feasibility of the initially designed interview questions. Prior to conducting the research it was necessary to obtain signed informed consent (See Appendix 15, B-E) from all parties, whereby all subjects agreed to participate in the study with full knowledge of the aims, purpose and likely publication of the findings. The form was accompanied by a letter of explanation (See Appendix 15, F-I) which clearly described the aim and purpose of the research, the methods of data collection, the timeline and privacy and confidentiality issues. Participants were always informed of their right to refuse or withdraw at any time. The initial step was to make contact with the participants either in writing or by phone, it would have been preferable to arrange an introductory meeting but this was not always possible. During my initial conversation introductions were made and the purpose of the research was explained. The purpose of this was to ensure that the participants were sufficiently prepared for the interview and that they were fully aware of the nature of the questions that they were to be asked. Also, all of the participants should have the same perception of their role in the interview process (Kimmel 1996). A date and time was then arranged for the pilot interview that suited the parent/guardian, young person and the researcher. The interview (as per the interview schedule, Appendix K) was conducted at the parent's home, as this was their choice, the interview was recorded with their permission and later transcribed. At the interview, I sought consent to meet and interview the professionals who had been involved in the young person's life, including the school and the EWO.

8.11 The Focus Group

> *Focus groups should provide your participants with a rewarding learning experience of their own' (*Breen, 2006, p. 473).

In addition to the semi-structured interview, this research involved a focus group which facilitated the researcher to gather the views and thoughts of a group of nine EWOs from two large geographical areas in southern Ireland. The group was moderated by the researcher who sought to 'demonstrate reflexivity' and to ensure that the discussion was not 'influenced' (Breen, 2006, p.473). Much of the research on this method of research collection (Krueger, 2000, Wilson, 1997, Breen, 2006 and George, 2013) agree that the focus group is a successful research method for the gathering of data and that it successfully complements

other qualitative methods (Wilson, 1997, p.216) while allowing the respondents the opportunity to 'tell their stories' (p.221) also the opportunity of the interaction between respondents 'has the potential to create a dynamic synergy that is absent in individual interviews' (George, 2013, p.257). The moderator's role is to stimulate discussion and allow the participants 'to influence each other through their answers to the ideas and contributions during the discussion' (Freitas, Oliveira, Jenkins, and Popjoy, 1998, p.2). Like all research methods this research method has its weaknesses also; including the researcher having less control over the data generated, the fact that the 'atmosphere' may appear to be unreal and that the data analysis can be more difficult due to the large amount of data generated (Freitas et al., 1998, p.4).

8.11.1 The Focus Group Process

This focus group took place in April 2019 and consisted of nine participants from the EWS. The researcher distributed by email the questions for the focus group in advance of the session. The purpose of this was to allow the respondents the opportunity to reflect before the discussion which allowed the discussion to begin quickly and flow more easily, the questions 'are the essence of a focus group interview' (Freitas et al., 1998, p.16). The session lasted almost two hours and was recorded by Dictaphone, consent was sought and obtained from each of the participants in advance and at the start of the session the researcher/moderator outlined the need for confidentiality around the content of the session. The session began with general questions and then moved to more specific issues (See Appendix 15, N). Throughout the session the participants appeared to largely agree on certain topics, there was also some disagreement and some shift in opinion, all 'positive indicators of the focus group data' (Breen, 2006, p.472).

After the session, the data was transcribed and subsequently systematically coded and the important themes were identified for further discussion.

8.12 Data Analysis in Case Study Research

Stake (1995) advocates four forms of data analysis and interpretation in qualitative case study research. The first is categorical aggregation, this involves the researcher looking for a collection of instances in the data collected and the hope that issue-relevant new meanings

will emerge. The second is direct interpretation, here the case study researcher looks at a single instance and draws meaning from that instance. This involves the researcher in the process of pulling the data apart and then putting it back together in a more meaningful way. The third form of data analysis is that of pattern matching, here the researcher establishes patterns that emerge within the research and forms the basis of their research on such patterns. The final part of the process is what Stake terms naturalistic generalization, assuming that conclusions can be drawn from personal engagement of the reader, by vicarious experience, almost as though the person reading the research feels as though they are directly involved. The reader is therefore assisted to make naturalistic generalizations by the narrative descriptions provided by the researcher.

Elements of all of the above forms of analysis were incorporated into this research process. As each case was different and individual there was balance needed in the use of description and analysis and in the use of multiple sources of evidence in the research process. Any finding or conclusion that emerges from the case study is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information. Another important factor to consider at analysis stage is case validity. It is necessary to prove that the information used in the cases is accurate and objective. Stake (1995) suggests deliberate triangulation of the evidence, to ensure that when the researcher makes key assertions and interpretations, extra effort is made to provide confirmation of the information, such as 'member checking', whereby the researcher asks the 'actors' or participants to examine rough drafts of the writing in which their words appear. This gives both confirmation and further illumination to the work of the researcher. Yin (2009) advocates the use of three principles of data collection to ensure validity and reliability within the case study evidence; the use of multiple sources of evidence, the creation of a case study database and the maintenance of a chain of evidence. Finally, as with all good case studies, this research should be clearly presented, the issue will be stated from the outset and followed by a 'thick' description of the context, the setting and the processes observed. Following this will be a discussion of the important elements that leads finally to the lessons we can learn from this valuable and comprehensive research method. Yin (1984) suggests, that in order to produce quality analysis within the case study, the following characteristics must be observed; the case study must be significant, include rival interpretations in the analysis section, it must focus on and address the important aspects of the study and finally, all of the researcher's prior and expert knowledge must be used to further the analysis.

8.13 Qualitative Data Analysis- Introduction

> *Analysis involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what you will tell others.* (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p.145)

There is no one single way to analyze and present qualitative data, in fact analysis is an ongoing part of the collection of data and as long as the researcher uses methods for the analysis of data that are 'systematic, disciplined and are able to be seen' (Punch, 2009, p. 171) this should ensure appropriate and successful analysis of collected data. In qualitative research data analysis occurs throughout the process and not just at the end as in quantitative studies and as data is gathered by the researcher 'the findings are generated and systematically built' (Mertens, 2005, p.420). Due to the broad nature of qualitative data analysis and research, the researcher needs to safe-guard the validity and integrity of the research process. Consequently researchers from the National Centre for Social Research in London have developed a framework against which research can be assessed. This framework is guided by four core principals which state that:

- Research should contribute to advancing knowledge or understanding
- The research design should address the research question
- Data collection, analysis and interpretation should be rigorous, systematic and transparent
- Research claims should be credible with plausible arguments about the significance of the evidence (Mertens 2005, p. 456 and www.natcen.ac.uk)

Regardless of the methods used to conduct qualitative research, the approach can be both an inductive and deductive one, more often data analysis within qualitative research is inductive as qualitative research seeks to generate new theories or explanations and where analytic induction involves 'the systematic examination of similarities between cases to develop concepts or ideas' (Punch, 2009, p.173). It is essential that the process is systematic as this will bring order and understanding to the research.

In general, data analysis should happen from the very beginning of data collection. Usually with qualitative research, large amounts of data are gathered and to avoid data overload it is essential that the researcher 'manage' the analysis from the outset and within this management that the researcher also consider the effects of personal bias that may emerge while selecting or ordering data. Whatever data is being collected by the researcher, it is vital that the researcher revisits their initial research questions as this will remind the researcher of the real focus of the analysis. Then as the data is collected, this 'simultaneous analysis and data collection allows the researcher to direct the data collection phase more productively' (Merriam, 1988, p.145). Ritchie and Spencer in Huberman and Miles (2002) describe qualitative data analysis as detection and believe that in order for the function of analysis to be performed, the researcher needs to follow a 'framework' (p.309) but it is the key features of this framework that merit noting to ensure successful data analysis, these include; that the analysis is grounded or generative, that it is dynamic, systematic, comprehensive, that it enables easy retrieval, allows in-between and within-case analysis and finally that it is accessible to others (p.310). There are three main components to data analysis that need to be considered: data reduction, data display and the drawing and verification of conclusions.

8.13.1 Coding

Data reduction happens throughout the analysis, it occurs at the outset through editing and summarizing data and dividing up the data. In the middle stages of data analysis it is seen in coding and memoing and in the latter stages, through the development of abstract concepts. The principal function is to reduce the data without harming the information and for the researcher to generate theories from the data. 'Grounded Theory' as developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) is an interactional method of theory building and they have identified a number of forms of coding in the grounded theory analytic process which arise from the core question; what is central within the data? The aim is to 'find conceptual categories within the data, to find relationships between these categories and to conceptualize and account for these relationships at a higher level of abstraction' (Punch 2009, p.183). Coding is a common feature of qualitative data analysis and enables the researcher to identify similar information.

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) advocate searching through the data to identify patterns and regularities and to then assign codes to this data. There are different kinds of codes used in data analysis and much of the guidelines used in qualitative research outline the variety of

coding mechanisms which can be summarized to include; substantive codes – codes produced by open coding where the initial concepts are examined through breaking down the data into key questions; theoretical codes – that are produced by axial coding where the researcher starts to make connections between the data pieces and begins to formulate certain relationships between pieces of data, and finally core coding – this is produced by selective coding which is the 'higher order conceptualization of the theoretical coding around which the theory is built' (Punch 2009, p. 183). The selective code involves examining the core category and related categories and then generating theories from the data. Lichtman (2006) refers to this method as the three 'c's; coding, categorizing and identifying concepts. The overall objective of data analysis is to 'construct abstract theory from the data' (Punch 2009, p. 188-189). All researchers need to construct a coding framework before commencing analysis; this framework is dependent on the research question. Within grounded theory analysis there are two significant processes that must be considered, these are constant comparison and memoing. Constant comparison is built on the coding process and requires the researcher to constantly compare subject with subject and data with the emerging concepts as this will raise the level of abstraction. Memoing allows the researcher who is working with the data to note ideas that may occur, it is essential that these ideas are not lost but are recorded to benefit the analysis. These ideas according to Punch (2009) may be 'substantive, theoretical, methodological or personal' (p.180). Grounded theory methods are systematic but flexible guidelines for the collection and analysis of qualitative data so that theories may be constructed from early data study and coding. Grounded theorists start with the data and aim to develop theoretical analyses from the beginning of the research through the research settings and the experiences shared by the respondents.

8.14 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is concerned with the way we use language. Cohen et al., (2011) use the word discourse to 'indicate the meanings that are given to texts which create and shape knowledge and behavior, not least by the exercise of power through texts and conversations' (p.574). Discourse analysis has the ability to reveal how power operates and is reproduced in texts and conversations. We use language to achieve outcomes and to re-frame reality. Wetherell et al. (2001) identify four methods of discourse analysis:

1. Focus on words and the way we express ourselves. This is how context such as social situation and background influence our use of language.

2. Focus on language in use – a focus on the interaction between subjects and how language is used.
3. Analysis of the language pattern used – here the focus shifts from the way language is used to consider the context of its use.
4. Focus on the link between language and the nature and structure of society. This type of analysis focuses on the way language is used in particular social settings and often 'focuses on differentials of power and their reproduction' (Cohen et al., 2011, p.575).

Researchers analyze and interpret discourse in a number of ways which include: narrative analysis, conversational analysis and critical discourse analysis. Narrative analysis looks at the written or spoken statements of individuals. All research data is a narrative that presents an individual perspective. Narrative analysis considers three types of data; research interview data, written, textual data and written accounts conducted by the subjects themselves. Narrative analysis provides the researcher with the opportunity to examine the main features within an event and to interpret these features, identify common experiences, explore political leanings within the narrative and to identify the emerging common themes. By its nature case study research allows for the investigation of processes in the real world rather than in artificially created settings. In addition, narrative accounts of events in particular cases are essential so that we are able to fully understand the outcomes of the case. The case study method by the nature of the narrative form allows the reader accessibility, accessibility to experiences to which they may otherwise have never been exposed. Lincoln and Guba in Huberman and Miles (2002) argue that case studies should meet specific criteria so that their basis assumptions will be reflected in the study's methodology and will 'rhetorically exemplify' the interpersonal relationships whereby the reader is an 'interactive partner' with the writer and finally that case studies will 'empower, activate and stimulate' the reader (p.213-214). Conversational analysis involves exploring the interaction between the parties involved in the research. It is a 'rigorous investigation of the features of a conversation, how it is generated and constructed, how it operates, what are its distinguishing features and how participants construct their own meanings' (Cohen et al., 2011, p.575). Reflexivity is an essential element of all analysis including conversational analysis as it can be difficult for the researcher to avoid bias in a conversation in which they were also a part. Critical discourse analysis sees language as a way of exercising and demonstrating power. Critical discourse analysis is concerned with power 'as a central condition of social life and its efforts to develop a theory of language which incorporates this as a major premise' (Wodak &

Meyer, 2011, p.11) and the researcher needs an awareness of the use of power within language throughout data collection and data analysis.

Data analysis is an ongoing process that commences with data collection and with the research question at the core. Once completed the researcher must decide on how the data should be presented. Will it centre around the research question or on the themes that may have emerged during analysis? How much of the data will be included in the writing? Will it be limited to the appendices? Will the researcher include data to enable the respondent the opportunity to have their voice heard? This is usually done in one of the following ways according to Newby (2010):

- We can explain what we have found in theoretical or conceptual terms or
- We can judge whether an action or activity has met its objectives and how modifications to processes can improve outcomes or
- We can identify courses of action that should not be followed to avoid failure or that should be followed to ensure success (p.639).

Once data is analyzed, even during the early stages, the researcher looks for patterns and meaningful relationships and seeks to demonstrate the wider implication of the findings, at this point the researcher has discovered ‘what was important, what is to be learned’ and they must now ‘learn how to tell others’.

8.15 Conclusion

This chapter explored the methodology at the heart of this research. It outlined the interview as a method and the interview process, in addition it explored the concept of purposeful sampling, ethics and reflexivity. Reflexivity is an essential component in the methodology as the researcher is an insider and therefore must always be aware not to influence the research in any way. The purpose of the methodology used was to allow each of the participants to share their experiences through the semi-structured interview and focus group and the data collected was then coded and analysed. Influenced by the literature review and the generated data the researcher subsequently identified the following central themes:

- Dimensions of Educational Inequality
- Special Educational Needs
- Mental Health

These will be discussed in detail in the coming chapters using the data. The next chapter will provide the story behind each case, and the context of the referral to the Educational Welfare Service. Following from this, each of the central themes are discussed in detail using the analysed data, allowing the researcher the opportunity to share the experiences of these families and to discover ‘what is important and what is to be learned’ (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p.145).

9.0 The Case Studies

Their Stories.....

9.1 Adam

Adam is the youngest of three children and at the time of interview he was 15 years old. Adam lives with his dad and siblings in a rural setting and at the time of the referral, Adam was registered in a mixed very large post-primary school approximately 10km from his home. Adam was referred to the EWS for school absences in excess of 20 days in April 2016 when in his first year of post-primary school. The EWS referral form indicated that he had no identified SEN and that his mother had died when he was just 8 years old. The EWO in this case found it difficult to make contact with Adam's dad initially as he had work commitments and appeared reluctant to engage with services. When contact was made Adam's dad outlined the reasons for Adam's absences as: stress and anxiety as a result of his mother's death. He also stated that Adam was awaiting a CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) appointment as a referral had been sent to CAMHS by the family doctor.

Subsequent to the initial contact with Adam's father there was a meeting convened by the EWO with Adam's dad and a close family relative (Adam's aunt). This meeting highlighted that there had been a number of bereavements in Adam's life, including his mother, his Uncle, who had died in 2014 and a close family friend. At the time of this meeting, Adam was still waiting to see the CAMHS service and he was refusing to meet with friends or leave the house, however Adam's father still believed Adam wanted to go to school but just was not able.

In the absence of any diagnosis from CAMHS, the EWO contacted the G.P. who informed the EWO that Adam had 'anxiety and low mood' which prevented him from attending school. This G.P prescribed medication and according to Adam's father this resulted in an improvement to his mood. In December 2016, the EWO with permission from Adam's father, wrote to CAMHS to request that his referral to their service be expedited as he had initially been referred in April. In addition, the EWO arranged for a home tuition application to be lodged with the DES for Adam, from which he was granted four hours home tuition

per week on condition that a report be sent to the DES from a psychologist/psychiatrist outlining future therapeutic intervention.

CAMHS saw Adam in April 2017, one year after referral, their initial assessment was that 'Adam's difficulties with school attendance are significantly influenced by his ability to keep up with the academic curriculum. We are recommending that Adam be prioritized for full psychological testing through NEPS' (extract from letter sent by CAMHS to the father in May 2017). In addition, CAMHS informed the EWO that Adam also needed an assessment for ADHD, noted the significance of the death of his mother and they reported that 'he was quite low at the moment'.

In June 2017, the EWO discussed the possibility of a referral to IScoil for Adam as he was unlikely to receive full home tuition hours without a clear diagnosis from CAMHS. CAMHS did report that Adam had received a recent diagnosis of ADHD 'which affects his levels of concentration and attention which ultimately affects his ability to learn' (extract from letter from CAMHS Psychiatrist, March 2018). They also noted that Adam's difficulties with school attendance have been 'significantly influenced by his ability to keep up with the academic curriculum. We also believe there is a strong possibility that Adam is also Dyslexic which would account for his difficulty with Irish and Maths'.

Adam's father always believed that Adam would return to school and in September 2018. He returned to Transition Year at his previous post-primary school after completion of the IScoil online learning programme.

9.2 Alex

Alex is an only child to parents who moved from Eastern Europe to an urban town in Ireland to find employment. Alex attended the all-boys local primary school from Junior Infants to sixth class, and Alex transitioned to post-primary school in 2016/2017, at the time of referral he was 12 years old. He was referred in his first year of post-primary school due to ongoing concerns around his behaviour which meant his school placement was at risk. When the EWO met with the school to discuss Alex's behaviour, they were clear that they felt a reduced timetable would be the only way forward, the EWO insisted that this be reviewed by the October mid-term break (2 weeks later), however by November Alex's behaviour had deteriorated further and he received a three day suspension. The school outlined a number

of serious incidents of behaviour including: 'kicking other students', 'refusing to follow instruction', distracting the teacher', 'inappropriate touching of other students' and 'constant harassment' of other students (EWO Case Notes).

By December of 1st year Alex was suspended for two further days and at the end of January a meeting was held by the school with the parents and the EWO. Alex's parents insisted at this meeting that his day be increased however the school proposed that Alex's name be put before the Board of Management at their next meeting recommending his expulsion from the school. In February 2017, the BOM met to consider his expulsion, a translator was present and the minutes of this meeting indicate the parent's dissatisfaction with the way the school conducted the meeting and how they felt they had mistreated their son. Alex's mum is quoted as saying 'the child feels humiliated as he is the only one that gets punishment in class'. Both parents outlined how they felt the school didn't support them, on the other hand the school claimed they gave Alex a number of 'chances'. The outcome of the Board meeting was to recommend Alex's expulsion from the school. One of the board members at this meeting commended the school and teachers on 'their excellent recording system' and stated that 'this boy is way beyond the duty of teachers in this school'.

The EWO was informed of the intention to expel as is required under legislation and met the parents to assist with their appeal. The appeal was heard in the first instance by the ETB who based on the submission of the EWO and the contents of the NEPS assessment completed in February 2017, overturned the school BOM decision and Alex was permitted to return to school. The EWO stressed at the appeal hearing that the findings and recommendations of the NEPS assessment illustrated that Alex had a number of significant issues that the school had not attempted to address. These were some of the findings of the NEPS Psychologist:

- Alex finds it difficult to work independently in class
- Alex has a specific literacy difficulty with scores below the 10th percentile and that he is functioning in the borderline range of intellectual disability
- He frequently fails to have equipment or the correct books
- That he requires instructions to be broken down to his level
- On Alex's file was a 2010 Speech and Language assessment but there had been no involvement with speech therapy as was recommended in that report
- The report also notes how it is 'unfortunate' that Alex was not able to access resource hours or a special needs assistant since transitioning to post-primary school

- The report also addresses Alex's inappropriate behaviours with his peers and notes that 'perhaps differing cultural perspectives and beliefs may have also had an influence to date' the report states that 'going forward he needs support to develop these skills' (NEPS, 2017 Report).

Alex did return to school but there continued to be issues with his behaviour resulting in further suspensions. Alex lost his father in October of 2017 in tragic circumstances. The EWO and the NEPS psychologist met with the school and the recommendation from this meeting was for Alex to pursue a placement in a Special School for children with a mild general learning difficulty. This school placement was secured for Alex in January 2018. In June 2018 Alex and his mother returned to their home country to live.

9.3 Anna

Anna is one of five children living in a rural setting and at the time of referral Anna was attending a mixed post-primary school near to her home. Anna was referred to the EWS for school refusal when she was 13 years old. The referral from the school stated that Anna was school refusing as a result of an incident in school. The referral was submitted in May 2017 and shortly after the referral was received, the EWO met with Anna and her family in their home. Anna gave no reason to the EWO as to why she had stopped attending, but as the summer progressed Anna started to refuse to leave the house and wouldn't meet with her friends. In late August the EWO met with Anna and advised that Anna be taken to the GP so that a referral to CAMHS could be made, it was agreed that once the referral was made, both the EWO and the parent would contact CAMHS to expediate the referral. Shortly afterwards CAMHS contacted the parent to arrange a meeting. In September, Anna continued to school refuse and refused to leave her home. The EWO advised the parents to apply for home tuition for Anna in the interim. The GP signed the home tuition form and CAMHS agreed to meet Anna and assess if they would support the application in October 2017.

Anna met with CAMHS in October and she was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, it was decided that she should be treated with a combination of medication and CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy). CAMHS felt that home tuition would not be appropriate initially as they wanted Anna 'to engage in activities outside the home' (EWO notes October 2017). However Anna failed to engage in any activity and as a result CAMHS agreed to support home tuition. In November, the DES granted five hours home tuition per

week. Anna engaged very well with the home tuition and her tutor, who encouraged her to return to school for one to one tuition for a limited time each week. By August 2018, as a result of CBT, medication and working with the home tutor, Anna returned to school part-time at the end of August 2018, by October she was attending school full-time.

9.4 Gearoid

Gearoid is the third eldest of eight children and lives with his mother and five siblings. They live in a rural village and Gearoid attends the nearest post-primary school approximately 8km from his home. Two of Gearoid's younger siblings have special needs and one is attending a Special school. Gearoid has a formal diagnosis of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and is under the care of CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). Gearoid's mother spent much of her life in care and only left care at 17 years old when she became pregnant, Gearoid's mother never finished her post-primary education due to her pregnancy. There is an assigned social worker to Gearoid and his family and a Supervision Order was applied for by the social worker as there were child protection and welfare concerns. The children's names were placed on the CPNS (Child Protection Notification System) until they were subsequently removed as there were improvements in the family situation.

Gearoid was referred to the EWS by his local primary school in June 2013 as he had recently enrolled in the school but was starting to miss days on a regular basis. Gearoid had attended a primary school in a different area before this, as his mother had been evicted from their home. Gearoid's mother looked for a return to her original council house which she subsequently got in late 2013. In May 2015, the EWS received another referral from the school as Gearoid's attendance deteriorated as he had been absent for 48 days and he had now began to school refuse. Child protection social workers also became involved with the family and a child protection social work conference was called in May 2015. The notes from this conference outline how Gearoid has a diagnosis of ADHD and ODD, they also state how the Social Worker intended applying through the courts for a Supervision Order due to child protection and welfare concerns and Gearoid's mum's difficulty with managing his behaviour at home. Gearoid was at the end of 6th class at this point and plans were put in place to assist with his transition to post-primary school. The EWO met with the post-primary school support staff (HSCL, SCP) and discussed Gearoid's case and a plan was

developed to assist with the transition. Gearoid's mum was also invited to the school and involved in the planning process.

There was a meeting subsequently held in the post-primary school that October to review his transition, which had been successful. Gearoid attended regularly and was linked in with the SCP staff for additional support, by November he had missed only one day however the following month he was involved in a fight and received a five day suspension. This incident appears to have had an impact on Gearoid's attendance which deteriorated and by May 2016, Gearoid began truanting from school for which he received a further suspension. Gearoid's family situation appears to have stabilized over this period and he and his siblings' names were removed from the CPNS and the review Child Protection Conference in October was very positive about the family situation. However by early February, Gearoid had started to school refuse, stating that he was afraid of an older student in the school, the decision was made that the EWO to aid the transition would contact Gearoid's father who lived in a different area with Gearoid's older brother and provision would be made for Gearoid to go and live with his father full-time. All services involved with Gearoid and his mother felt a change of school and area may be more appropriate for him coupled with the support of his paternal grandparents.

Gearoid started in his new school placement in September 2017 in 2nd year. He has continued to attend this placement and lives with his father and older brother. He sees his mother at weekends and holidays. Gearoid completed his Junior Certificate in June 2019.

9. 5 Darragh

Darragh comes from a large rural town and lives with his mother and sister and his mother's partner. At the time of referral in early 2012, Darragh was in 6th class in primary school and both his attendance and behaviour were of concern to his school. Darragh's father had recently died in tragic circumstances. By the end of that academic year, Darragh's attendance had become worse as had his behaviour and his school were looking for ways to remove Darragh from 6th class.

In May 2012, the school contacted the EWS because Darragh was now 'very disruptive' in class and they had met with his mother and there was an agreement that 'he should be home educated' (EWO case file notes), as the EWO did not think this was an appropriate course of action, a meeting was called in the school and a plan was put in place to encourage Darragh

to attend school until the end of the school year. The EWO contacted the Family Psychology Department in the HSE for their input as Darragh was an open case for them, it was felt their input would be beneficial to the overall planning for Darragh.

Towards the end of term, Darragh's behaviour did improve and he continued to attend school. He secured his placement in the local post-primary school for September and a plan was put in place to aid his transition. The school principal was informed of Darragh's difficulties and it was arranged by the EWO that he would be supported by the HSCL and SCP staff in the school. Darragh's 1st year at post-primary school went well and he appeared to successfully transition. However by December of 2nd year the EWS received another referral as Darragh was very disruptive in class and was now leaving school without permission. At this time Darragh was also known to the Gardai for a number of offences relating to theft and assault. In February, there was further disruption as Darragh's mum felt Darragh was 'out of her control' (EWO case file notes) so he was sent to live with his grandparents in another county. He enrolled in a local school there, but by March he returned home. In April 2014, Darragh had been absent for 79 days and in May he was suspended for a further 5 days for:

- Being disruptive in class
- Failing to take instruction
- Health and safety reasons in woodwork class
- Negative impact on his class group (EWO case file notes 29/05/2014)

As Darragh had now been suspended for 23 days that academic year, his mother was informed by the school of her right to appeal, which she chose not to do. By the end of the school year, Darragh had been absent for 111 days. The EWO requested a meeting with Darragh and his mother to explore other options for education as this placement was at risk, but Darragh stressed that he wanted to return to school, he didn't want to attend another school or the local Youthreach. On return to school in September, the school insisted on a reduced day for Darragh which they felt would manage his behaviour, however Darragh's behaviour escalated and in October 2014 after a Board of Management meeting his mother was informed in writing that Darragh was now being given a 'final warning' and should 'his misbehaviour continue, the Board may be forced to consider his permanent exclusion' (letter from the Principal on behalf of the BOM). It was at this point that Darragh's mother expressed her wish to home educate her son to the school. The EWO was contacted by the

school to support the home education application, the EWO contacted the school and said that was not the role of the EWO; the EWO did arrange for the home education application forms to be sent out to Darragh's mother.

Once the forms were returned, the EWO spoke with the school to ask for help for Darragh's mother, so the school released the SCP worker and HSCL to do work on Junior Certificate Subjects with Darragh. An assessment of the education took place with an independent assessor in late 2014 and in early 2015, Darragh's name was placed on the Section 14 (Education (Welfare) Act 2000) Register (children educated in a place other than a recognised school). The EWO contacted the school to arrange for Darragh to sit his exams as an external candidate in June 2015. There continued to be social work involvement with the family and a new social worker was assigned in January 2015, she contacted the EWO to state that Darragh 'has a lot of offences against him' and he is 'likely to be regularly before the district court'. Darragh was assigned a Probation Officer in April 2015 by the District Court Judge.

Darragh did sit his exams in June 2015 and with the negotiation skills of the EWO he was permitted to return to his original school in 5th year. He passed all of his Junior Certificate exams.

9.6 James

James is one of a family of four living in an urban area and at the time of referral he was attending his local primary school and had been absent for 22 out of 28 possible school days. On receipt of the referral, the EWO visited the family and met with both parents and James, James did return to school after this visit but refused to go into the classroom. At this time the social work department became involved with the family and James was assigned a social worker. As the attendance deteriorated again the EWO issued a School Attendance Notice (SAN) afterwhich, James did return to school. An incident happened in the school yard and James parents claimed he was being bullied and although he did return to school after the incident he refused to go into class, the teacher reported to the EWO that he 'spends one hour a day with the support tracher and the rest of the time he spends alone or in the toilet' (EWO notes, December 2012).

The social worker put a Supervision Order in place and at this stage the Social Work Department were contemplating a full care order. Around this time there was an

improvement to James' attendance at the end of 6th class. The EWO assisted the parents with an application for a post-primary place. James received an offer of a place in a nearby post-primary school. His assessment with ASD services was to take place that summer but when the EWO was contacted in early September they were informed the assessment would not be completed until October or November. The SANs that were issued when he was in primary school were revoked as new ones needed to be issued naming his new post-primary school, however James' attendance quickly deteriorated and he spent more time out of class than in class when he was in school. His assessment wasn't completed until that summer and this assessment recommended a school placement with an ASD unit. Applications were then made with the help of the EWO to two school placements, however because James was delayed in making the application he was not entitled to the nearest placement as the Unit in that school was at capacity. In the meantime, the EWO assisted the parent in making an application for home tuition which James was granted in March 2014. James engaged well with the tuition and he was eventually offered a placement in an ASD unit in a school 20km from his home, once that school had received the completed assessment reports.

James commenced at the Unit in September 2014, but by December his attendance had again deteriorated. A meeting was held in the school with the parents and the EWO and the plan was for James to have a 'modified curriculum, SNA access, resource hours and withdrawal support' (EWO notes, January 2015), in addition James was placed on a reduced day. James' attendance did improve for a period of time, however by May of that year he had started to school refuse again. A professionals meeting was then held by Social Work and a core group was established to look at James' education, membership of this group included the ASD Social Worker, the EWO and the ASD Unit staff at the school. It was decided that James would be brought to school by his mother every morning and that he would come in and collect a learning pack, complete the pack and bring it back the following day. James refused to return to the school. The EWO made a referral to the ISPCC Teen Focus Programme and a worker was assigned to James to work with him at home. The EWO also reapplied for home tuition for James as he was in 3rd year with no educational provision, this application was supported by the ASD Services. Home tuition was granted by the DES in March of that year and a tutor was sourced by the ASD services to work with James. James sat four Junior Certificate subjects that June with the help of his tutor and the ISPCC Teen Focus Worker.

9.7 Roisin

Roisin lives on the outskirts of a large rural town with her parents and two brothers and two sisters. She was referred to the EWS in May 2013 for poor school attendance. A letter was sent by the EWO to her family and attendance subsequently improved for a period of time. In September 2013, Roisin failed to return to her primary school and the EWS was contacted by the school, the EWO issued a School Attendance Notice and called a meeting with the parents in the school. At this meeting Roisin's parents cited financial difficulties as one of the factors contributing to Roisin's poor attendance, their car needed repair and they couldn't afford to fix it, the EWO agreed to contact St. Vincent de Paul and supplied the family with contact details for MABS and the Community Welfare Officer. Roisin's mother also informed the EWO that her mother was ill and that they had to travel to visit her and this resulted in a number of days being missed at school.

After this meeting the school attendance did not improve, the EWO prepared a Consideration for Prosecution Report for Senior Management who agreed that the case should proceed to court given the level of absences. The first court appearance was in May 2014, after which there were a number of court appearances and adjournments in order to monitor the case. In September 2016, Roisin transitioned to a post-primary school in her locality, however by November, Roisin's attendance had deteriorated, Roisin's mother contacted the EWO to inform her of her husband's mental health difficulties and to request assistance in contacting St. Vincent de Paul again as the family were struggling approaching Christmas. The EWO subsequently contacted St. Vincent de Paul by email and they later supplied food vouchers to the family. Roisin's attendance did improve and the Judge granted an adjournment from the December court to the following court sitting in June 2017. In the meantime, the EWO liaised with the school pastoral care team and Roisisn was prioritized for a NEPS assessment, this later showed Roisin to have a specific learning disability for which she was then allocated resources.

Between May 2014 and February 2018, Roisin's parents were in court twelve times and were given ten adjournments. The case was struck out in February 2018 as Roisin's attendance was excellent. Roisin was re-referred to the EWS in February 2019 for poor attendance, she was then in 3rd year. The EWO met the family again and encouraged Roisin to complete her Junior Certificate and apply for a place on the LCA course for the following year. Roisin was informed she had secured that LCA place in March 2019.

This chapter gave a brief outline of each of the cases from the time of referral to the EWS to the date of closure. In the next chapter, we will explore the themes central to the research that have been generated by the data analysis.

10.0 Themes from the Research

10.1 Introduction

These following chapters will explore the themes generated by the data. On completion of the data collection and analysis these are the central themes that have emerged:

- Educational inequality
- Mental health
- SEN and school absenteeism

The chapter on educational inequality 10.2 will examine concepts such as poverty, the effect of school climate and the role of school in effecting disengagement. This chapter will also explore deficit views of difference. The chapter on mental health 11.0 will look specifically at anxiety, parental capacity and the effect of trauma on young people and finally the chapter on SEN 12.0 will explore the impact of SEN on young people, the impact of peer relations and the concept of inclusion for those young people with SEN.

10.2 Dimensions of Educational Inequality

Bourdieu (1987) refers to the 'discovery of powers or forms of capital' that act like 'aces in a game of cards' and the number of aces that one possesses determines one's ability to navigate the system or the 'multi-dimensional space' (p.3-4). In this research the space referred to pertains to the school; where a series of relationships emerge and develop and those who occupy the space, who 'occupy the same positions have every chance of having the same habitus' (p.5).These similar positions within this social space 'are subject to similar conditions of existence and conditioning factors and as a result, endowed with similar dispositions which prompt them to develop similar practices' (p.6). This is not a level playing field and the capital or resources people possess varies and is dependent on their position within society and the game. Bourdieu refers to four types of capital; economic, cultural, social and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1977, Di Giorgio, 2009) and each has a part to play in determining one's overall capacity for negotiation and survival within the social space. Bourdieu believed that the formal education system is the principal mechanism in the perpetuation of socio-economic inequality (Bourdieu, 1997) and this along with habitus determine one's overall capacity to function within the formal education system.

In this research the whole concept of capital is worthy of exploration to illustrate how these young people and their families perform within the social space that is the school and to illustrate the extent of parental influence and how the level of influence is dependent on the possession of particular forms of capital. Also worthy of note is the interaction between the social space of the school and the impact of individuals or agencies on the levels of capital, whereby parents can be assisted to have more aces to play the game and how social class can determine educational outcomes and how 'education acts as a vehicle for reproducing privilege and inequality within societies' (Graetz, 1988, p.374).

10.2.1 Impact of Poverty and Relative Wealth

The parents interviewed for this research possess varying types of capital, the better equipped the parent is to navigate the system determines better outcomes for those children and families. One of the striking elements to affect family's capacity to manage the school system is poverty. Poverty has been described as 'the single most determinant of attainment' (McClusky, 2017, p.32). The impact of poverty on young people and families is both material and psychological (Wrigley, 2014). In five of the cases in this research we see families that are in receipt of social welfare benefit.

Roisin's parents are from the travelling community and her parents are unable to work due to issues with mental health. In the interview with the former school principal she refers to a number of wealthy families that live in the local area but acknowledges that Roisin's family have financial difficulties –'poverty is an issue there so we would help them out' (Interview with Principal Primary School). The EWO, when interviewed, spoke about the prevalence of traveller students transitioning to Youthreach for the payment they would receive. The EWO commented that 'they get paid at that stage and a lot of them, not all, see it as their first job' (EWO Interview Roisin). Roisin's mum when interviewed spoke very openly about their financial situation and how her husband was reluctant to go to hospital for treatment as the distance would be costly:

> *spending too much money on petrol and things that could go towards something else or the kids or something, we would have to find 50 or 60 euros for petrol which we haven't got and we can't find* (Interview Roisin's Mum).

In the above quotation we see the impact of the family's financial situation on their daily life and the stress caused by this, in addition we can see their inability to access mental health

services as a result of this financial difficulty. Irish travellers have often been identified as being amongst one of the most marginalised groups in education and consequently are at a greater risk of early school leaving (European Commission 2014). Recent research has shown that unemployment rates for the travelling community are at 82% as opposed to 17% for non-travellers and that 'only 8% of travellers have completed secondary education compared with 73% of non-travellers' (Boyle, Flynn and Hanafin, 2018, p.2).

In Darragh's case there is also evidence of the effects of financial difficulties and his mum spoke openly about her own issues with alcohol as she was unable to work and she hadn't been in employment for a number of years. She spoke about the inability to access services for her son as she was reliant on the public system with its significant waiting lists, she described how Darragh 'was very sad and upset (due to the tragic death of his father) and I tried to get him professional help through the social work department but it wasn't given' (Interview Darragh's Mum). Darragh's mum outlined how she herself had left school early and how she had worked locally at one time 'cleaning and stuff' but that now she was unemployed. She spoke about the effects of alcohol on her family and the involvement of social workers as a result of this alcohol use. When asked if there was anything she could have done differently she responded: 'I did as much as I could, I had no one with me only myself'. This indicates how alone Darragh's mum felt and how powerless she felt due to the circumstances she found herself in at that time. Here we can see how 'differences in cultural toolkits' can impact on the 'educational trajectories' (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014, p.197). Lareau's theory of natural growth is to some extent also evident here, where we can see how working class parents tend not to try and control outcomes for their children through natural growth however this may not necessarily be their choice, resources may not be available to these parents due to a variety of circumstances that are underpinned by poverty. Here is an example of how this can exclude a person from 'ordinary living patterns, customs and activities in their society' (Drudy and Lynch, 1993, p. 161) and research by Horgan (2009) shows how tackling child and family poverty provides the only solution to allow children 'have an equally good experience of school' (p.374).

In Alex's case both of his parents came from marginalised backgrounds, the interpreter for Alex's mother informed me in the interview that Alex's mother 'had been in care from the age of 8 to the age of 16' and that she was living in care 'because her parents were not able to care for her' (Interview with Alex's mum). Through the interpreter she told me how she had left school at 15 and she had gone to work:

She was in many families, many foster families and places in her childhood and in many schools as well, so she never had a full school year in any place.

Alex's dad also left school early in order to earn a living and he came to Ireland to find work in the construction industry, through the interpreter he told me how he had worked:

in different places because the first place wasn't paying well, he started to do plastering, he was a general ground worker and in the plastering team.

Unfortunately, due to the recession, neither of Alex's parents secured any form of employment. Low levels of parental education and low socio-economic status are considered to be major contributing factors in early school leaving, here we see how the intersectionality of race, culture and language difficulty, combined with poverty all combine to influence the educational outcomes for Alex and his family. Recent research shows the extent of poverty amongst migrant groups in Ireland and how uncertain residency status combined with 'discrimination in the labour market and in the access to services' culminate to exacerbate inequality in educational participation and attainment (Kennedy and Smith, 2018, p.15).

Gearoid's mother was also in care as a child and left care at 17 when she became pregnant, she also dropped out of school at this time also. Gearoid's mum was a lone parent to six children and four of these children have an identified special need. Gearoid and his family were forced to leave their home as they had not made the rent payments. During the interview with the EWO it became clear that this eviction and subsequent moving to different areas had a very obvious impact on the children's attendance:

it was parenting and poor housing……..and you know inadequate bedding, the house (they were in) was actually very, very unhygienic……..my main concern for all those children at one stage was that they were going to become homeless because the house she was staying in was up for sale and also she had huge arrears in rent and she was not able.

Gearoid's mother refers to the isolation she also experienced; 'I was trying to rear six of them on my own'. This reality for Gearoid and his family was a lack of stability and 'not knowing whether the children would have to go into care, whether they'd end up in a shelter once again and whether they'd have to attend different schools' (EWO Interview). Gearoid's mother also suffered from ill health and informed me during the interview that she had had a number of lung infections. The school principal described circumstances at home for

Gearoid as being ‘very bad’ outlining how social services became involved with the family and how also at this time Gearoid’s uncle was in prison, the principal commented in her interview that ‘when home life is difficult, I don’t think I can do anything for them then you know’ (Principal Interview).

James’ case illustrates how his mum was compromised financially when she was forced to give up her job when she separated from her husband;

> *I had 3 of them but we were separated and I had no one to mind them, I was working shift work and no one wants to mind children on shift work* (Interview with mum).

Added to this financial pressure was the significant distance James’ mum was expected to travel daily as there was no local school equipped to meet his needs; ‘it’s quite a distance for someone who doesn’t have any money either and a car that’s not that great’ (EWO Interview). The professionals who made the decision around James’ school provision did not consider the impact of this on the family and the school insisted that James’ mum come every day to the school to collect a pack that he would then do at home as he was school refusing. Redford, Johnson and Honnold (2009) note that ‘parental actions matter, but these actions are very often affected by the family’s social location, making it difficult for families of lesser means to meet the expectations that educators demand’ (p. 41). Their research finds that it is necessary for ‘school officials and teachers’ to understand the needs of ‘needier families’ so that both can work together to ensure success for the children. In James’ case a number of professionals made the decision to offer him a school place in a completely impractical location, given where the family were living and the finances available to them. One has to question the motives behind such a decision, this coupled with the inflexibility of the school which is evident in this quote from James’ mum:

> *I was dropping him down early because I used to have to drop the others to school so I was leaving about ten to eight in the morning and then they decided for health and safety reasons he couldn’t be down that early outside the school so they changed it so that he could come in to the school but then he refused.*

Here is evidence of how the school is unaware of the hardship experienced by this parent on both a financial and emotional level. This is an example of Lareau’s ‘cultural tool kit that families from different class backgrounds bring to bear on their interactions with teachers

and schools' (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 197). James' mother is unable to challenge the decisions made by the school which are causing great stress to her and her son.

This contrasts sharply with Adam's experience where his father had the capacity to utilize the 'cultural toolkit' to access services privately for his children and he had the ability to choose when he needed services or not:

> *I got him (Adam) counselling, it helped my daughter quite a lot and she finished counselling and when she was finished for a while I sent Adam to the same counsellor because I thought the connection would be good'* (Interview with Adam's dad).

Adam's father came from a background of private schooling and he had gone on to third level education. This is similar to Anna's background, where both her parents were in employment and came from middle class backgrounds, they also had the necessary resources to access services for their daughter to help with her anxiety and school refusal. Anna had been placed on a lengthy waiting list with CAMHS but she was seen very quickly subsequent to a letter sent in by the parents requesting an urgent appointment for their daughter:

> *when she was referred to CAMHS she was put on the waiting list but I was advised by the psychiatrist to write a letter which I did and they saw her quickly then* (Interview with Anna's Mum and Dad).

This provides an example of how the parent when placed on a waiting list does not accept this and contacts the relevant agency, in this case CAMHS, we see how the agency treats the parent and advises them of the most strategic way of accessing their service in a timely manner. This contrasts sharply with the other cases in this research, where services are not as available to the young people or their families. In Anna's case there is 'a greater sense of entitlement among middle class parents……to question and intercede with institutional authorities' (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014, p.197).

The majority of the parents in this research were early school leavers, that is they did not complete the senior cycle of post-primary school, however in each of the interviews it is clear that they wanted a different path for their child, it was clear that they did value education and that they wanted their children to complete post-primary school. This concurs with Lareau's research (1987) where she notes that all of the parents in her research - both working and middle class – 'valued educational success; all wanted their children to do well

in school' (p.81). Recent research shows within the travelling community, the parents of traveller children 'wanted their children to study the same curriculum and complete secondary education' (Boyle et al., 2018, p.13). However the resources needed to deliver these expectations is seriously influenced by financial means which should not determine educational success, however a lack of economic resources and differences in cultural capital prevents the people in this research from accessing services in a timely manner particularly in the area of mental health and therapeutic intervention. Anna and Adam's families have the financial means to access vital services for their children in addition to the cultural capital that gives them the 'aces' they require to navigate the system. These 'aces' include sufficient financial stability, the necessary language used to communicate with schools and professionals and that 'sense of entitlement' that enables 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2011). In these cases we see how schools and professionals are viewed by parents either as intimidating or as equals depending on the capital available to them at the time.

10.2.2 The School Effect

Schools can perpetuate inequality often without even realising that they are doing so. Di Giorgio (2009) states that as 'a researcher of inclusion, one may have to see through the rules of the game, in order to see the truth behind the way people behave' (p.186). Research on truancy and absenteeism has highlighted the school as being a factor in children's attendance and participation levels. Darmody, Smyth and McCoy (2008) in their research on truancy in Irish Secondary Schools found that the school influenced student's behaviour rather than the individual's habitus and students who attended small, rural, supportive school environments were less likely to truant; 'the institutional habitus of the school operates as a significant influence on truancy levels over and above the effects of individual habitus' (p.370). Jaeger (2009) uses an interesting term in his research to describe schools as he refers to the 'gatekeepers in the educational field' and how cultural capital means 'knowing the rules of the game' (p.1949). This we see in Lareau (1987) and her research on family-school relationships where she notes how schools look for 'very specific types of behaviour from all parents, regardless of their social class. Not all cultural resources are equally valuable however for complying with schools' requests (p.83).These case studies illustrate how certain parents are at a distinct disadvantage when interacting with schools. There is evidence of this in Darragh's case when his mother decides to home educate her son so that he would not be expelled from school:

Mum: *he was getting suspended every second day*

Int: *is that why you decided to home educate?*

Mum: *yeah*

Int *and why not choose Youthreach, you mentioned it there?*

Mum: *because he wouldn't go*

There are two points of note here; firstly, we can see the emergence of another form of capital that aligns with the concept of 'natural growth' where this young person is making decisions for himself and his own life. The second point is mum's own fear that her son would be expelled as he had refused to attend an alternative provision setting, as a result she 'chooses' to home educate her son, there appears to be no real choice here. When the principal was asked about Darragh's mother's decision to home educate he responded:

> *mum came up with the suggestion that she could teach him herself at home or she could get someone to teach him, I think (EWO) reluctantly went along with that as opposed to him being permanently expelled by the school* (Interview with School Principal).

Here choice was removed from this parent because of the power exercised both by agency and school and because of her difficulty navigating the system. Here the principal perceived the EWO as supporting the 'decision' of the parent 'reluctantly' as the EWO also feared Darragh would be without a school place. This relationship between the school principal and the EWO in this case is very interesting as we see from the extract from the EWO interview when asked about the option of home education that was 'chosen' by Darragh's mother:

> *I said, I'm not going to stand over him being home educated especially when I didn't feel that mum had the capacity to home educate and I did ask the school if they had anybody that could link in with Darragh in the home, so they put in place that, XX the HSCL would do maths and science with him, and he had a good relationship with the HSCL and also with XX from the SCP ……I suppose then I would have been in contact with the home education assessor, I would have outlined my views and concerns and I suppose normally when it comes to home education EWOs normally don't have any more to do with it but I remained involved in the case simply because if I didn't I*

would feel there wouldn't be any onus on the mum to continue with the education for Darragh, so Darragh was placed on the home education register. I was heavily involved as was XX the HSCL then who was up and down to the house.

In this case not only is power exercised over the parent of the child but also over the professional who consequently does everything to try and maintain Darragh in some form of educational provision so that he is not permanently expelled. Darragh is placed on the Home Education Register which satisfies the legal requirement for educational provision however the real issue is not addressed; the school has succeeded in excluding him and to a certain extent the Education Welfare Service facilitates or legitimises this exclusion.

During the interview with Darragh's mother when she spoke about Darragh's difficulties in school prior to his leaving, it was clear that Darragh had been assessed, but when asked, Darragh's mother was not aware why the assessment took place and she also was not made aware of the outcome:

There was an assessment done for ADHD or something……I didn't know anything about that either, there was a teacher inside in the class watching him do his homework or whatever (Interview with Darragh's mum).

Darragh's mother was either not made aware of the assessment process in the school operated by NEPS or perhaps she did not fully understand the process, however here it was the school's responsibility to ensure that she did understand the process and the implications for her son. The school in question believes that they did explain the assessment process however this is not the view of Darragh's mother, here is an illustration of how the 'life experiences and cultural capital of middle-class professionals are insufficient to understand the educational requirements of working class families to whom they provide an education service' (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002, p.46). Apple (1995) is accurate in his observation of the education system 'as an important element in the maintenance of existing relations of domination and exploitation in society (p.9).

In the case of Roisin, she was not assessed in primary school although the school did provide her with extra classes in maths and English. When she moved into first year, the school then referred her for a NEPS assessment based on the recommendations of the EWO, during the interview however it is evident that Roisin's mother was not fully aware of the type of

assessment and again who was conducting the assessment and why; 'they said they would run a few tests on her' (Interview with Roisin's mum). Often when seeking to include pupils, the effect is that they are targeted or singled out in order 'to classify and regulate student identities, bodies, spaces and social practices in different relations of knowledge and power' (Dunne, 2009, p.50). When Roisin's mother was asked if she had ever been assessed in primary school, she told me that Roisin had always found school difficult and she would often 'complain' when she came home, Roisin's mother commented:

> *but my house is full, I have 7 kids, there is 5 at school and 2 at home, of the 2 at home one fella went for an operation last year, he just got off his cast in March, I'm running up and down to XXXX with him, my husband has to go over and back to the hospital……..I just haven't got the time to come in to them and explain what she was complaining to me about at home, I know I should have done it but I just hadn't got that extra bit of time on my hands and I didn't do it* (Interview Roisin's mum).

This is a parent who clearly understands the difficulties faced by her daughter, but she finds it difficult to focus on this when there are a number of difficulties in her home life that are not considered by the school, often in these cases these parents are dismissed as not valuing education or not having any interest in their child when in fact the opposite is more often the case. Previous research has shown that parents want to be 'involved in their child's schooling, they are capable of being involved and they have a contribution to make to schools and to school personnel' (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002, p.46). In addition, Boyle et al. (2018) research found that despite their own negative experiences of education, traveller parents 'expressed hope and determination in relation to their own children's education' (p.15). Despite this longing for a different life for their own children, the existing school system does not lend itself to allow particular social classes or minority groups in society to easily navigate their way through the system. However, Roisin was never referred to NEPS for an educational assessment to determine whether she had a learning difficulty or not as her learning difficulties were attributed to her absences, when I asked the principal what could have been done differently in this case, she responded:

> *I suppose if I was back again, I would have intervened at an earlier stage, I think since then although you don't consciously say it, you know they are travellers and they are different.*

Interviewer: *Is there more leeway given?*

Principal: *yes because all you will get is it is their rights, this is their culture…..…well I would get in earlier, I would with let's say the minorities, while you allow a certain amount – I was too lenient…there is a certain fear or wariness about taking them on because all you'll get is their rights and you will have to listen to the spiel about what do they need an education for because nobody will give them a job you know, you get that all the time.*

There is evidentially a fear here on the Principal's behalf of the resistance shown by particular minority groups to education and also a tendency to allow these groups a different set of rules as it is the easier route. However this is also exacerbating the issues surrounding their non-school attendance as these pupils are then not being referred to agencies in a timely fashion and consequently they are not being dealt with equitably by the system, 'maintaining the pre-existing order' (Bourdieu 1998, p.20).

Rose (2013), in her research on travellers and family literacy programmes, argues that travellers do not have the tools or knowledge, the correct form of capital, to play the mainstream game and are in fact starting from a field of disadvantage – which is not an even playing field. In fact the school setting or 'habitus' assists in widening the gap within social classes and the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities (Mills, 2008). There appears to be little effort by particular schools to celebrate difference which contributes to the alienation of young people and 'while social inequality begins at home, it is schooling that formalizes it, certifies it, structures and entrenches it' (Francis and Mills, 2012, p.257).

In Alex's case he was required to have an updated assessment for transition to post-primary school, however this assessment never took place in his final year of primary school. This assessment would have meant the post-primary school could have applied for additional resources to meet his needs and aid his transition from primary to post-primary school. When Interviewed the EWO in Alex's case outlined how Alex had spent much of his time in primary school:

I think they were managing him by having him in a room playing computer games rather than in class or by doing little jobs around the school for the principal.

When I interviewed Alex he told me how he had preferred primary school as he 'was sent to the shop to get milk or stuff for the teachers', this was also reported by his mother in her interview. Clearly this primary school appear to have given up on Alex and found 'creative ways' of occupying his time in school rather than work with Alex to prepare him for post-primary school. Shortly after entering post-primary, Alex's behaviour became such an issue that his timetable was significantly reduced and eventually his school place was considered to be at risk. His father reported Alex's school experience in the following way:

> *They are shouting to him, they are not talking to him in a nice way, they are shouting to him a lot, he tried to say to the teacher I need help during class and he being ignored , he is missing a lot of hours and he is behind…..* (Interview with Dad through an Interpreter).

Alex was placed on a reduced timetable of 2 hours per day, his parents did not agree with this and met with the school to outline their concerns, at this meeting the EWO was present and commented that:

> *at our meeting two weeks ago the parents made it very clear that they wanted him in school for a full school day and they wanted this to stop, I asked the school would they consider that, they left the room, came back and said no they wouldn't, it was 2 hours and that was it* (Interview with EWO).

This is an example of how the school exercised its power, the EWO subsequently informed the parents that they now had the right to appeal this decision under Section 29 of the Education Act and resulting from this, the BOM met and informed the EWO of their intention to permanently exclude Alex from the school. The ultimate exercise of their power. However, the expulsion process was halted as the school lost the appeal at local level on the grounds that Alex had no recent assessment and as a result resources were never put in place for him. This meant that Alex could never have accessed resources that may have assisted him to maintain his school place, the local ETB as a result ruled in favour of the parent in the appeals process and instructed the Board of Management to reinstate Alex within the school. This case illustrates how schools respond when they feel they are under surveillance by agencies such as the EWS and ultimately the DES, here there is a shift in the power balance, and we see as a result how a school is asked to take back a pupil and ensure they are then assessed to allow them to then have a more equal playing field to their peers. This surveillance is a form of hierarchical observation as referred to by Foucault, where there is

a ‘supervision of the supervisors with everyone accountable to authority from above’ (Allan in Murphy 2013, p. 25). The school professionals involved with Alex could have been more ‘reflexive in their approach’ which in turn would allow them to ‘shape their interactions with parents and pupils in ways that are socially inclusive’ (Gazeley, 2012, p. 308). This case illustrates the intersection of race and capital leading to educational inequality and also the negative way Alex and his family are treated by the school from the beginning, here we see how schools ‘privilege those with the right cultural attributes and discriminate against those who lack them’ (Savage in Khan and Shaheen, 2017, p.17). The use of a reduced timetable in this case was an attempt to identify what would be perceived as an acceptable alternative to exclusion, while in reality it was a form of exclusion.

In James’ case it is also evident how the lack of an educational assessment at an earlier stage in his education affected his educational trajectory. He was badly bullied in primary school and despite attempts by his mother to address the situation with the school who she felt ignored her complaints, the situation did not change for James and subsequently he began to school refuse. When interviewed, the Social Worker who worked closely with James and his family, spoke very openly about the impact of social class on therapeutic intervention:

Social Worker*: My pet thing that I give out about at work, if you are living in XXXX (affluent part of the City) and you have a James in your home, you are not on anybody’s list, you are just not.*

Int*: is it that the family don’t look for help?*

Social Worker*: People will listen to parents quicker, they understand that the child may have a condition quicker, that’s my belief, it’s not based on research! If they are middle class and are able to talk the talk.*

This extract indicates that those parents who have the necessary resources to ‘fight’ for their child will obtain assistance quickly as opposed to James’ mother who was not listened to by both the school and services. On a number of occasions James’ mother had met with the school to attempt to prevent her son being bullied, however the school did not resolve the issue and did not seek at an early stage to have James assessed, which may have helped to identify a more appropriate school placement at that stage.

The possession of these resources or capital is also evident in Adam and Anna’s cases where we see a different response from schools and services. Adam’s father was the one who

decided that Adam should be at home rather than attempting to go into school each day and becoming more and more distressed, unlike James' mother who had to travel a significant distance with James every morning to collect a homework pack as he was school refusing. Adam's father was also familiar with the work of the EWS as his daughter had been out of school also with anxiety previously. Adam's father told me how the EWO at that time had identified alternative school placements for his daughter but he stated that:

> *I wasn't happy, I reckon that would have done damage to her because she was not in the same category, don't get me wrong, I'm not putting kids down or anything like that, but they are from a different set up, a different background* (Interview Adam's dad).

Here Adam's father is making distinctions between his children and those who attend alternative education provision and how he perceives these children as being different to his own son.

Anna's parents also show their ability to activate capital or take control over their situation and how they see everyone as being on an even playing field as they describe how they met with the NEPS psychologist about Anna's school refusal 'but she (psychologist) couldn't help us…..she was telling us to do things we did already…….I'm not sure she actually understood the situation' (Interview Anna's parents). We see here the difference in the resources held by parents, some parents ensure that they are part of the decision-making process and others are dependent on the school or agencies to assist them in their decision making and in their navigation of the system.

In Gearoid's case however, despite financial constraints his mother approached services and sourced finances for an assessment for her son rather than have him on a lengthy waiting list or wait for him to be prioritised for a minimal number of assessments that are allocated to schools annually by the DES. Lareau (1987) comments on the 'importance of the role of the individual in constructing a biography within a social structure' (p.84) this is something we cannot overlook. Individuals can take control of their situation despite the blocks that are all too often placed in their way.

In all of these cases, these young people missed substantive amounts of school for a variety of reasons, whether through absenteeism, school refusal or suspension, the individual parent's response to the situation is what is of greatest interest as parents exercised varying

levels of control over their situation depending on their capital. Those parents from a higher socio-economic background tend to dictate their own lives while those parents from lower socio-economic groupings depend heavily on the school and agencies such as the EWS for support; whether these supports are being offered for the right reason or perhaps this is evidence of how 'those involved in reproducing the social order often do so without either knowing they are doing so or wanting to do so' (Mills, 2008, p.84).

10.2.3 A Deficit View

> *By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give.* (Bourdieu, 1977p.494)

It is a widely held belief that the formal education system is predominately middle class. In this research we see how a number of young people from varying backgrounds are affected by the way they are treated by school staff and agencies and how only in a minority of cases do schools adopt a pro-active role with families based on their social class position. We can see how the curriculum is often inaccessible to these young people, how parental social class directly impacts on their educational success, how being different to 'the dominant class' of the school impacts on one's educational experience (Sullivan, 2001, p.910). What is even more striking in this research is the way young people and their families are viewed by the school staff and how their difficulties are responded to, often in the name of inclusion, but the response often in fact leads to exclusion.

10.2.4 Deficit Views of Difference

In each of the interviews the attitudes of the school staff towards their pupils emerges. In Roisin's case it is clear from the interview with her primary school principal how she views her students. We see this in her description of her student cohort whom she described as being predominately from other countries and including 'single mothers, single families, very few middle class'. The principal was asked to discuss the attendance of pupils generally at that school and she outlined how the absences in the Irish community were predominately among the travellers and in the interview attributed these absences to: 'they just couldn't be bothered half the time', she also commented on their difficulty with the curriculum: 'a lot of

them would have speech and language difficulties or poor language attainment because of the language spoken at home'. The principal also outlined how she herself tended 'to make excuses for them without even realising it' when she spoke about her reluctance to refer traveller children to the EWS earlier for poor school attendance.

The language used here by the principal is very interesting as it does illustrate a lack of respect for these young people, their families and their culture. We see a similar deficit view in Alex's case when the deputy principal attributes Alex's behaviours to 'a cultural thing'. Although consideration is given to the young people as they are part of a minority group, the effect of this 'inclusion' is in fact exclusion through dismissal, low expectations and disrespect. The use of term such as 'them' implies they are 'the other' and not the majority (Dunne, 2009, p.49). In addition, recent research looks at how travellers are viewed in schools and concluded that they are seen by school staff as a 'people in deficit' and that this view 'continued in the classrooms' (Boyle et al., 2018, p.15).

In the interviews with each of the families it was clear that the parents did see value in education, Roisin's mum described education 'as a right', Gearoid's mother spoke proudly about her eldest son's achievement of 5 As in his pre-Junior Certificate exams and his plans after school: 'he's talking about going right up to leaving cert and he's going to college'. When interviewed Alex's mother spoke about his unhappiness about being suspended and how she and her husband both wanted him to be in school. When interviewed about general school attendance in school, the principal of Darragh's school commented: 'basically we straightened out the school, in straightening out the school, a lot of our, shall we say better, more interested kids have come in to the school'. As the interview progressed, the Principal spoke about the pupils targeted for intervention in the school by the School Completion Programme (SCP):

> *they come up for mention regularly at the SCP meeting and at that stage there's very little you can do with them…..there's really nothing you can do with them, it's just you know there are so many issues going on at home and the parents are trying hard in some cases and it's still not happening you know?*

In this extract the principal illustrates how the young people become the case, where they are described, judged and measured, where they are spoken about and compared with others (Foucault, 1977). The language used here by the Principal illustrates how he effectively feels there is little hope for pupils like Darragh. This echoes the earlier quotation from Gearoid's

school principal when she described how she felt little can be done with children from such difficult home lives. There needs to be consideration given to how the cultural messages of schools and classrooms impact on young people and their educational success, how cultural bias can lower teacher expectation resulting in poorer academic performance and early school leaving. We also see how parents do participate in the process by attending meetings and giving 'consent' however they are not 'powerfully positioned' within these processes (Gazeley, 2012, p. 308) and therefore they are unable to overcome the deficit view held by the school who are the ones exercising this power and recreating 'systems of social stratification' (Lamont & Lareau, 1988, p.155).

10.2.5 A form of Exclusion – The Reduced Day/Curriculum

Another mechanism used by schools to expedite early school leaving under the guise of controlling pupil behaviour is that of a reduced day or reduced curriculum. Research shows how social class influences 'parent-professional interaction' in a number of ways and this 'impacts on the provision that is made for pupils within these processes and on the outcomes they ultimately experience' (Gazeley, 2012, p.308). In three of these cases the schools operate a reduced day/curriculum in the name of inclusion and management of pupil behaviour, often against parent's wishes, where parents are forced into 'choices that are not their own' (Atkins, 2010, p. 262). Here schools talk about inclusion and the use of reduced days to facilitate inclusion, the fact remains that 'traditionalist systems and practices that potentially limit ways of thinking and talking about perceived difference appear to prevail' (Dunne, 2009, p. 52). Recent research (Pavee Point Submission, 2019), illustrated an increase in the use of reduced days/curriculum particularly for members of the traveller and Roma communities and also for young people with SEN (Inclusion Ireland Submission, 2019). In Alex's case his day was reduced to two hours per day initially as the school was unable to manage his behaviour. His parents met with the EWO and requested that his day increase as the school had refused their request, however once the EWO sought an increase in the school day, the BOM met and agreed to expel Alex.

In Darragh's case his curriculum was also reduced in order to manage his behaviour, when interviewed the principal informed me that:

> *we did reduce his curriculum and we did negotiations with his mother and himself, we came up with an alternative timetable for him, he was allowed go*

home if there were big gaps in the day, so he wouldnt be hanging around causing problems you know, sometimes there was only one class where he mightn't have something to do, so he was put into whatever so we tried to pre-empt any issues with him.

The language used by the principal in this extract indicates that there was no remedial element to the reduced curriculum, and Darragh very quickly disengaged from his educational provision or lack thereof. We see here how beliefs about the significance of differences of attainment can inform practice in ways that affect and determine children's future performance' through the misconception of believing that pupil's abilities and social background are factors that schools cannot address and are 'not within their power to control' (Hart, 1998, p.156). Darragh accordingly left school and completed his Junior Certificate at home. This case surely exemplifies the need for more inclusive educational provision, one that does not 'produce social hierarchies and legitimate inequality' (Giroux, 2003, p.10) but is caring and respectful.

In both Alex and Darragh's cases the reduced day/curriculum effectively failed to manage or address their behaviour and led to complete exclusion. Research has shown how these attempts to support the inclusion of pupils by limiting their day, results in 'gaps in some cases that seemed likely to have cumulative effects' and in addition they 'constitute a highly differentiated educational pathway' and in addition to this we see situations arising where the 'onus continues to be on parents to identify and seek redress for the procedural irregularities even though many are poorly equipped to do so' (Gazeley, 2010, p.306).

In James' case the reduced day was put in place to aid his integration into a special unit in a new school, when the EWO was interviewed she commented how inadequate the education provision was: 'I mean yes he has a school place, but he was only doing two hours a week!' It is hardly surprising that a young person will fail to connect with a school with so little interaction and such a limited provision is unacceptable and inadequate. Here is an example of how 'a system of special education, constructed to identify and meet the learning needs of pupils with SEN may reinforce exclusionary practices…….through its focus on difference' (Kerrins, 2014, p. 49).

10.3 Conclusion

The practice of reduced days or curriculum in Ireland is largely unregulated and previously there was 'no requirement for schools to report on the practice' (Barnardos, 2018, p.2) As part of the DEIS 2017 Plan schools are now required to report 'on the numbers of pupils who are on a reduced timetable' (p. 52). This is to ensure the EWO is now made aware of children and young people who are placed on reduced days and the reasons for the reduction in the school day or curriculum. However the school is not precluded from using this as a method of either controlling behaviour or for the provision of an inappropriate school placement. The DES stated in a press release in September 2019 that schools were required to obtain the consent of parents and that there must be a clear reintegration strategy for the child or young person. The Ombudsman for Children, Niall Muldoon told the Oireachtas Committee in June 2019 that reduced timetables are 'impacting on the rights of children' and he stated that he is concerned about the use of reduced timetables as a form of 'informal suspension' (Kenny, 2019, article for RTE.ie).

The use of reduced days or curriculum is evidence of how vulnerable parents can be mistreated by those in perceived positions of power, the cycle of cultural reproduction is evident while these young people should instead be supported within the educational system 'to enable them to achieve their aspirations and develop their understandings of the world' (Atkins, 2010, p. 261). The assumption too often amongst professionals and educators is that these young people and their families have no aspirations, there is a 'persistent deficit model of youth' (Atkins, 2010) evident in these cases. Schools perpetuate privilege and schools 'continue to reproduce social class ideals so that middle class families and children can continue 'to demand and exercise privilege and create new ways of sustaining privilege (Tomlinson, 2000, p. 4). Schools and agencies going forward need to 'engage with the realities of young people's lives' (Wrigley, 2014, p. 200) as opposed to creating a division on a number of levels between the majority and the minority. The minority or 'other' in these cases are subject to constant surveillance, assessment, alienation and deficit often under the guise of inclusion until they eventually opt to leave the system, further perpetuating inequality where they are forced to make choices that are not their own, by a system that demands 'that everyone have what it does not give'. There continues to be a 'distorted economy of pupil worth' encouraging those pupils who mirror the middle class values of schools and discouraging those who are viewed as 'troublesome, demanding and expensive

to teach (Tomlinson, 2000, p.7). The next chapter explores the theme of mental health and the significance of its impact on school attendance.

11.0 Mental Health

11.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the impact of mental health on school attendance. Over half of the young people in this research presented at referral with school refusal behaviours. Truancy was not considered by the referrer to be a factor in their absenteeism, their families were well aware of the absences and admitted that they were unable to get their children to attend school or return to school. The remaining young people in this research were referred as their school placements were at risk due to out of control behaviour in school and family circumstances which led to their school refusal.

With regard to mental health the following sub-themes have emerged from the data:

1. Anxiety and subsequent School Refusal
2. Parental Capacity and Mental Health
3. Traumatic Events

11.2 Anxiety and School Refusal

Every year nationally there are increasingly significant numbers of young people referred to the EWS for anxiety and subsequent school refusal. School refusal is another complex element of school absenteeism. Hersov (1972) defines school refusal as 'a persistent inability to attend school, often starting as a reluctance and progressing to total refusal to go to school or remain in school' (p.103). In one EWS region 45 % of the open cases in the month of January 2018, were children and young people presenting with anxiety and school refusal. The majority of these cases were at post-primary level. In a number of these cases the effects of anxiety for the young person is clearly evident.

For example in Adam's case high levels of anxiety prevented him from being in school. During the interview I asked Adam's father when he started to school refuse, he responded: 'it wasn't that he didn't want to go, he just couldn't go'. His father then described how he would bring him to school in the mornings but then he would get a call from his son asking to come home. He also described how the levels of anxiety had reached such a point that: 'he couldn't go out to meet his friends, it would be one thing if he couldn't go to school but

he didn't want to go out with his friends either'. Ek and Erikkson (2013) noted in their research how young people who school refuse have difficulties 'in establishing and maintaining social contacts' (p.236) and outlined how these young people can become 'socially isolated' (p.236). In Adam's case his father described to me how his son 'didn't go outside the door for maybe a year and a half'. Adam when interviewed himself gave a very poignant description of the effects of his anxiety:

> *I would go in to the class and I'd sit down and everything felt wrong. I just couldn't be in the room because I don't know why, I just had to get up and leave, basically just for some reason everything inside there just got under my skin, I just couldn't face being inside there and that just made me start having panic attacks and then I just couldn't stay there at all, all I wanted to do was go home*.

Adam went on to describe how being in school made him feel 'trapped and how he 'started shaking in school' and how he knew 'something was wrong'. Adam's ADHD influenced his school refusal behaviour significantly. ADHD has been associated with mental health disorders and is often treated medically in the same way (Thomas, 2013, Kendall, Taylor, Perez & Taylor, 2008). When interviewed Adam appeared very aware of the impact of his ADHD on his school attendance, when asked if he felt overwhelmed when he transitioned to the post-primary school he responded:

Adam: *Yeah I think to be honest it could have been something to do with the ADHD or something because it was like I don't think I let it out, my kind of fidgeting, whatever class I was in and at the time it built up a bit and at the time I don't know……..*

Interviewer: *so you were trying to control that as well?*

Adam: ……..*I didn't know what it was, so I thought if I hold off for long enough it would stop but it just kind of built up and kept going do you know? And eventually that just brought on panic attacks and I just…..*

Interviewer: *couldn't be there?*

Adam: *yeah and with the ADHD it's like hard to be in big groups as well as its just a lot of things get under your skin really…..I don't know it's just everything just kind of piles up on top of you and you just can't hold it anymore.*

This extract from Adam's interview illustrates how Adam felt out of control in the classroom environment, he refers to the difficulty of being in a big group and his anxiety and his inability to control his own behaviours which led him to effectively remove himself from the situation which caused more and more stress. Adam's Year Head when interviewed spoke about how she noticed Adam from the beginning of 1st year as he appeared 'timid and anxious', she outlined how when he was in school he would leave class and go hide in the toilet and how she and his older brother who was also in the school, would go from toilet to toilet looking for him. The Year Head described how Adam looked when he experienced a panic attack:

> *the breathing would start…he'd go….he used to go as white as a ghost, like you know, the breathing would start and he would be in a state of despair, that's what it used to come across to me like, he couldn't see any good in anything and the only thing that comforted him was his brother.*

Hill, Waite and Cresswell (2016) describe how anxiety disorders are characterised by physical symptoms such as 'increased heart rate, quick shallow breathing, sweating and pain in the stomach and chest' (p.548). When I asked if there were any particular triggers for these panic attacks experienced by Adam, the Year Head informed me that as far as she was aware there were no particular reasons for the attacks, they appeared to be random, she did comment that Adam 'never had any work done, he was never on top of things at all, organisation was a huge issue'. This is a predominant feature of ADHD, the inability to 'get organised and stay organised' (Fleischman & Miller, 2013, p. 56).

Adam spoke very openly about his withdrawal from society and his peers and how it began gradually:

> *when I couldn't take it, and I just said I want to stay in for a day and then it turned into a week and then a month then all of a sudden I haven't been out for so long, I can't just appear again.*

Hersov (1972) noted how this is typical of school refusal and anxious behaviour and noted how there is often 'no abrupt or definite change in personality but a gradual withdrawal from peer group activities' (p. 103). Hill et al. (2016) outlined in their research how anxiety disorders are 'often comorbid with other disorders such as depression' (p. 548). Adam described in his interview how he became more and more withdrawn and depressed:

> *I found myself spending a lot of time in bed not even wanting to go up around the house, just staying in bed, just getting up to go to the toilet and then going back to bed..*

This is a symptom of ADHD which manifests in social isolation and leads to impaired academic achievement, peer relationships and impaired self-care (Kendall et al, 2008, p.751).

In Anna's case, there is evidence of similar school refusal behaviour, her mum when interviewed outlined how at the beginning *she wanted to go home sick, she was crying in school and then she refused to attend*. Anna began school refusing as a result of a particular incident in her school that happened after class, as a result she was diagnosed with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) by CAMHS. Mum outlined how in the early stages of school refusal she would try and get Anna in to school until 'one particular day when she got dressed and ready but she couldn't, she just froze'. As Anna's school refusal became more entrenched, her anxiety levels increased accordingly and symptoms of depression become evident 'she started wearing a particular black jumper and leggings all the time and these shoes with holes in them' (Interview with Mum), Anna similar to Adam, started to withdraw from society, her mum told me how:

> *she had joined a local youth club but she won't attend that now…… and Anna loved sports and was on the basketball and football teams but she's not taking part now.*

It came to a stage where Anna like Adam refused to leave the house, 'it was six months of lockdown – she went nowhere' (Interview with Mum). Research shows that 'if depression deepens, the young person can isolate themselves entirely from both friends and family and it can manifest itself in a refusal to go to school' (Ek and Eriksson, 2013, p. 233).

In Anna's case her parents spoke about the delay in accessing the appropriate mental health services for their daughter due to lengthy waiting lists and a reluctance on the part of the family GP to refer Anna earlier. In research conducted by Hansen, Sanders, Massaro and Last (1998) who examined the severity of absenteeism in children with anxiety, it is explored how adolescence itself 'presents a particularly complex developmental period during which teenagers with anxiety based school-refusal experience increasing difficulty coping with fears of school resulting in greater avoidance and absenteeism' (p. 252). Anna's school

principal when interviewed outlined how Anna's school refusal behaviour escalated very quickly once it began:

> *Before the attendance became an issue she started wanting to go home a lot…..then there was a day when she would not…..we had been trying to get her to sit by the office for one class and then remain in school for the school day, sometimes that was successful, sometimes it wasn't……..it transpired then one day they could not get her outside the door to the school, she sat in the car, she just wouldn't come in.*

Also relevant in Anna's case is where their research showed that 'avoiding school allows children with social phobia to elude anxiety resulting from negative evaluations of teachers or peers' (p. 252), this avoidance leads to reduction in the anxiety experienced by the young person. When the principal went to the car to try and encourage Anna to come in to the school, she refused, it was only when her mother arrived to the school that she went in to the building. Once inside Anna 'refused to sit down' according to the principal, she also described her as being 'defiant' and she was 'aggressive in her tone, not physically aggressive in any way but sheer anger at us' (Interview with School Principal). Children and young people with anxiety disorders often 'overestimate the actual threat or danger associated with a feared situation' and more importantly they 'underestimate their ability to cope' (Hill et al., 2016, p. 548). Often, as in Anna's case, the young person's instinct is to remove themselves from the situation entirely and consequently the anxiety leads to total school refusal.

In James' case his school refusal started in primary school in response to persistent bullying. By the time he reached post-primary, it was clear he was not in an appropriate placement but as there was a delay with his diagnosis (ASD) and he had no choice but to attend a post-primary school inappropriate for his needs. The teachers there described how he became 'distressed, agitated and upset' during their classes and how his 'constant need for support is making the experience very distressing and stressful for him' (Report from 1st year class tutor, in EWO case notes). Research would indicate how there is a clear link between ASD and anxiety. When interviewed the EWO outlined how ASD services, when they became involved with James, recognised how the anxiety he was feeling in school was 'crippling him'. In addition, James found peer interaction very difficult:

he does not really interact with other students and upon supervision during lunchtime he appears to spend them alone, very simple tasks panic him.

When asked why James was school refusing, the ASD social worker described it as 'too stressful for him' she informed me in the interview: 'he really gets very, very stressed, his way of coping is withdrawing', she also described him as being 'vulnerable'. When James was unable to attend school anymore due to anxiety he was granted home tuition from the DES. The social worker informed me in the interview that she felt that James should have got this earlier as it would have saved him a lot of stress:

> *The stress was gone, I'm sorry he hadn't it earlier if I'm truthful, I was trying to maintain him in school because we see the other side of not maintaining kids, mental health issues and isolation.*

When interviewed James' mum outlined the form of stress James experienced on a daily basis, she described her son as 'shutting down in the car', his mum felt he was ignoring her: 'I thought he was ignoring me and I was pulling him out of the car and in hindsight it was the worst thing you could do'. The EWO outlined in her interview the 'palaver' in the car park outside the school as 'James was screaming', as teachers became involved trying to get James to come in to the school. When asked if the EWO thought James was anxious, she responded:

> *I do genuinely believe that he was anxious, I do believe that he intended to come in and try but just couldn't, even though he wasn't meeting that many people inside the school – I think too with James, he didn't see the point of it, he didn't see the relevance of the whole thing.*

Anxiety disorders are one of the most common psychiatric disorders in young people with ASD. Approximately 40% of children and adolescents with ASD meet the criteria for at least one anxiety disorder (Hill et al., 2016, p. 552), this coupled with social difficulties associated with ASD, make school attendance exceptionally difficult for ASD children who have had a negative experience of school from a young age as James did as a result of persistent bullying and a very late diagnosis of ASD. Every day for four months, James travelled a significant distance with his mother to the nearest school with an ASD Unit, every day they sat outside the school in the car park, 'he got into the car, he got ready but he wouldn't get out of the car' (EWO), clearly he was unable and as described by the social worker, he was 'crippled

with anxiety'. School refusal behaviour is considered by many to be a child motivated refusal to attend school or to have difficulty attending classes or being unable to remain in the school for the whole day (Kearney and Bensaheb, 2006). Those who school refuse often exhibit problems such as general and social anxiety, worry, fear, self-consciousness and depression (Kearney and Albano, 2004). Berg (1992) defines school refusal as a condition characterised by reluctance and often outright refusal to go to school. The reasons for this he attributes to fear of separation from their parents, emotional upset and possible anti-social tendencies.

This research also illustrates that this type of absenteeism, unlike truancy, is not concealed from parents. Berg also notes that this form of absenteeism is not influenced by social class or academic or intellectual ability and affects both girls and boys equally. This research clearly illustrates that despite varying socio-economic backgrounds the manifestation of anxiety for these young people is similar in most cases and is exhibited through physical symptoms of illness and high levels of what appears to be defiance. Stroobert and Jones (2006) outline how school refusal is 'usually characterised by high levels of anxiety' (p.209) and how school refusers 'may exhibit somatic symptoms on school days including nausea, vomiting, headaches and shaking' and that it is these physical symptoms that distinguish the school refuser from the truant' (p.202). This illustrates the physical and mental effects of anxiety on the young people and how this is exhibited through their ultimate school refusal. Kearney (2006) states that if left unaddressed school refusal behaviour can lead to serious short-term problems such as distress, academic decline, alienation from peers, family conflict and financial and legal consequences' (p.616).

11.3 Parental Capacity and Mental Health

The impact of the family on a child or young person's life is a significant one, as is the impact of power within that family dynamic. Foucault (1980) notes how it is not possible for us to separate ourselves from the influence of power. The dynamic of parent and child ordinarily means that power rests with the parent, however in many of these case studies we see a shift in the power dynamic to the young person and added to this there is a capacity issue for certain parents in how they manage their children's behaviour. This is evident in Alex's case, when I interviewed Alex with his parents, although an interpreter was present for his parents, Alex was immediately in a stronger position as he had the ability to converse in English without the need for an interpreter. This had also been the case at meetings with the school, Alex's father was frustrated by his inability to speak English which was evident in his

interactions with the school, which resulted in Alex's dad demonstrating very aggressive behaviour with the school staff and 'he often stormed out of the room'(Interview with EWO). When I interviewed the Deputy Principal in the school she spoke quite negatively about Alex and his dad. The school had particular concerns around Alex's behaviour particularly with female staff and students: 'he doesn't respond well to females he would be better with the male teachers than the female teachers', she also outlined how she felt this was a 'cultural thing' and 'we have met the parents and I think dad - it might be coming slightly through that cultural thing – male – female'. The deputy principal also noted that at meetings with the school Alex's father exhibited high levels of aggression and that she and the Principal were afraid of him:

> *They had been at several meetings with us where the EWO had been present, the father on occasion became quite aggressive, the social worker recommended that both the Principal and I and the EWO would not attend the meeting when the father would be told Alex was to be excluded*

The EWO went on to describe Alex's dad's behaviour at one school meeting: 'at one meeting he stood up and you know he threw the chair over and stormed out and banged the door'.

Alex also exhibited high levels of aggression in school which the social worker and the school felt were connected with Alex experiencing high levels of aggression at home. When I interviewed the EWO she spoke about the behaviour that led to his proposed exclusion:

EWO: *He wanted to own the girls, one girl in particular, he didn't want anyone else talking to her*

Interviewer: *so he became fixated on her?*

EWO: *yes and he was quite aggressive if anyone else wanted to mix with her and talk with her*

Interviewer: *and how did she feel about that?*

EWO: *she was terrified and her parents had to come in to the school*

Interviewer: *and were there other behaviours he exhibited apart from that?*

Interviewer: *he was quite aggressive with the boys*

We can see from this extract that the levels of aggression that Alex exhibited were unusual for a 12 year-old boy and this leads us to question if he was in fact mimicking his father's behaviours towards others. One should also query how much of this aggression is from frustration at not having the level of language required or the appropriate skills required for successful peer interaction. When interviewed, Alex does not give appropriate answers initially to some of the questions which could indicate that he may have had either a language or comprehension difficulty. In this case we see a lack of cultural capital which was required to work with a system that was fundamentally exclusionary from the beginning, where the parents were frustrated due to their lack of understanding of the language and the system and where Alex had (at this point) an undiagnosed learning difficulty and inadequate social skills to assist him to survive within the system. Here we can see the intersection of culture, gender, class and SEN all of which impacted on the power dynamic between parent and school, between young person and parent and between young person and school. This is an imbalance of power, where the parents and young person are ultimately disadvantaged by language and their capacity.

Gearoid is an example of someone very much out of his mum's control, whose risk taking behaviour increases with his school refusal and where the power dynamic within the family had changed. When interviewed the EWO outlined how she believed Gearoid's behaviour was a reaction to:

> *total, total instability at home, things had totally fallen apart and he was refusing to go to school for his mum, he just didn't want to get out of bed, that was giving him once again his own sense of control, that tiny bit of control that he had in his life because he had no control over other issues* (EWO Interview).

In this case there is resistance of power – both of the school and of the parent. Gearoid's mum here is struggling to cope and at the time of Gearoid's school refusing the family had been evicted from their home. The school principal outlined how:

> *mum felt she couldn't cope and how circumstances at home were very bad, I mean social services were involved with him as well..*

Gearoid's out of school behaviour deteriorated as he would leave the house in the middle of the night and go 'to a middle aged man who was living in the area and they (he and his friends) spent the rest of the night down there watching videos' (EWO Interview). There

were also ‘incidents where I had the police at the door’ (Interview with Mum) not just for Gearoid but also for his brother. When interviewed Gearoid’s mother spoke openly about the difficulties in her own life: ‘I was in care from the age of 3 to 17 and when I got pregnant then I had to move out (of the care home)’, she also told me how she struggled with her own health and financial issues that meant the family were recently evicted and how four of her eight children had a diagnosed SEN. All of this affected Gearoid’s mother’s capacity to cope with Gearoid’s issues in school and his school refusal. The school principal of Gearoid’s primary school at the time outlined the difficulties experienced by the family:

> *She (mum) engaged with us, that was no problem, she came to every meeting we arranged, ah, but she found it difficult to cope so I suppose little by little we started working on things, and we had reward charts and the EWO met with Gearoid and pointed out this….you are big enough, old enough, this is your responsibility, you have to come to school and he did.……*

This extract illustrates how the young person has to assume the responsibility as their parent is unable for a variety of reasons.

In Darragh’s case he, like Gearoid engaged in risk taking behaviour both in and out of school and after the death of his father he became increasingly unmanageable for his mother. When I met with Darragh and his mum it was clear that their relationship was poor and he was quite disrespectful to her. The EWO when interviewed echoed this as she described Darragh’s mum as ‘being unable to cope with his behaviours’. The school spoke positively about Darragh’s mum as she ‘was always on their side’, however the EWO described Darragh’s mum as ‘struggling at meetings’ as she appeared to go along with everyone and every plan as she lacked the confidence and ability to negotiate in this ‘field’. Darragh’s mum clearly indicated to me throughout the interview her inability to cope with Darragh’s behaviours and her own difficulties with alcohol dependency and in addition she was concerned for her own father who was very ill (at the time of the interview). Darragh also exhibited very aggressive behaviour both in and out of school, the Principal when interviewed described to me an incident that had been witnessed by the deputy principal:

> *One day the deputy principal happened to be passing down town and he saw him (Darragh) stripped to the waist and he belting the living daylights out of someone else and then the guards arrived.……*

Darragh's father also had mental health issues. Darragh's mum also told me that Darragh's father had self-harmed and that he had cut himself, that he had been involved in arson and that he was also an alcoholic, 'the social worker needed to be present because he was drunk and stuff' (Mum's description of the supervised access between Darragh and his father). Darragh's risk taking behaviour escalated after the death of his father and he became involved in substance abuse (both alcohol and drugs). During the interview with Darragh's mother she told me: 'Darragh doesn't like me drinking, that's it he doesn't like me drinking' here we see how the lack of a positive role model in a child's life can further compound risk taking behaviours and 'can have a negative impact on children's self-esteem' (Ek and Eriksson, 2013, p.237). The EWO when interviewed described the rap songs that Darragh had written as part of the music programme he was involved in through Youth Justice Programme and the Probation Service:

> *He was rapping at the time and he did play the raps he had written and one of them was about his dad dying and about him not being there and all of the drinking he would have done subsequently and all of that, so definitely it must have been a big part of his life and in his rap the words were quite strong in relation to the darkness he was experiencing and what he went on to abuse then as a result of trying to cope with all of this.*

This extract shows the level of despair experienced by Darragh at the death of his father and the circumstances surrounding his death, which were tragic. Mental health had a significant impact on Darragh's life and undoubtedly contributed to his disaffection from school.

Roisin's case also illustrates the direct impact on a young person when a parent has a mental health difficulty. When interviewed, the school Principal described Roisin's father as having 'huge mental health problems'. Roisin's mum when interviewed spoke openly about her husband's depression, she spoke about how understanding the primary school was if she was late with Roisin for school:

> *there was mornings I used to be late and she would understand, because I had to bring her in here then sometimes my husband would be extremely badly depressed and I couldn't go away and leave him on his own cause he talked about committing suicide twice.*

Roisin was present throughout the interview and was clearly aware of her father's difficulties, when I asked her if things were hard at home she responded with 'yeah, everything, kind of'. Roisin was not a school refuser, her lack of school attendance was a result of parental capacity and family circumstances. When I asked Roisin's mum about her extensive absences, she very honestly responded:

> *I know I should have got them back quicker (if they had been off ill) but at the same time my husband was suffering from depression and things were kind of up in a heap.*

In addition, Roisin's mother also informed me that at the time when Roisin was missing school her own mother was dying and the family wanted to be with her:

> *my mother was dying and we kind of looked at it at the time that the education would be there when my mother won't be there*.

The school Principal spoke about the visits to Roisin's ill grandmother and stated how she thought because of Roisin's dad's mental illness that Roisin's mum couldn't leave the children with him and go alone to see her mother because 'she knew he just wasn't safe'.

In addition to the stress of her husband's depression and her mother's illness was the worry about their financial situation. Roisin's mother informed me during the interview that her husband needed to go into hospital for tests but he 'wouldn't go in':

Interviewer: *he wouldn't go in…cause he doesn't like being in hospital?*

Roisin's mum*: it's not that he doesn't like being in hospital it's just that he thinks that I couldn't manage financially like*

Interviewer: *oh right ok, so he's continuing to try and work?*

Roisin's mum: *no that's not what I'm talking about, we are only getting social welfare and by him going up to the hospital he reckons that he would be taking so much of that on petrol and things that it could go towards something else or the kids or something….and that doesn't include the car park……..it is expensive and then if he was kept for a couple of days I'd be over and back and that's what he's thinking of as well, you could be out 50 or 60 euros in petrol which we haven't got and we can't find nowhere.*

This extract shows the impact of financial stress on a family and how although Roisin's father required medical intervention, he is prohibited from same for financial reasons, thus impacting further on his mental health and consequently his capacity and the capacity of his wife in ensuring their children attend school. Ek and Erikkson (2013) identify a significant amount of research that illustrates how young people 'who were regularly absent from school had psychiatric diagnoses such as depression, school phobias and separation anxieties' (p.244). In their research the findings indicate that 'these young people also had parents with psychiatric diagnoses' (p.244). The role of Parental Self-Efficacy (PSE) in school refusal cases has been researched by Carless, Melvin, Tonge and Newman (2015) who found that parents of school refusing adolescents were found to have lower levels of PSE than parents of school attending adolescents and how the cycle is reinforced as 'their lack of success in returning the child to school could conceivably confirm the parents low sense of efficacy in the parental role', this led to 'higher levels of parental anxiety and depression' (p.166-167), this then in turn contributes to a shift in the power dynamic from parent to child.

11.4 Traumatic Events

Three of the young people in this research suffered a traumatic incident in their lives that significantly impacted on their school attendance and led to changes in their behaviour. In Darragh and Adam's case this incident involved the loss of a parent in tragic circumstances, in Anna's case the incident occurred in her school that led to her school refusal and subsequent PTSD diagnosis from CAMHS.

Adolescents and children experience death through 'a mix of shock, confusion and disbelief' (Dowdney, 2005, p.118). In Darragh's case his father died by suicide and research has shown how this commonly leads to post-traumatic stress symptoms and 'traumatic bereavement' has emerged as a clinical disorder and differs from PTSD 'because the trauma symptoms persist for lengthy periods' also 'boys exhibit higher rates of difficulties and acting out/aggressive behaviours' (Dowdney, 2005, p.119). This is evident in Darragh's case as he became involved in anti-social behaviour, substance abuse and crime. During the interview with Darragh's mum, she outlined to me how Darragh 'cut all of his hair off' after the death of his father and how he was 'suicidal'. She also informed me of how his behaviour in school became more and more unmanageable, and that he was possibly going to be excluded. Outside of school Darragh became involved with substance misuse, theft and violent behaviour, his mother informed me in the interview:

Darragh's mother: *he got into trouble, he sold drugs, he got drugs, I can't tell you……...he got into a fight last year and he was up in front of the court.*

Interviewer: *was this fight on the street rather than school?*

Darragh's mother: *yeah*

Interviewer: *did he say he was provoked or what happened?*

Darragh's mother: *I think someone gave him drugs, he wasn't himself, that's my own feeling, I don't know.*

The EWO in her interview outlined how Darragh was also before the courts for an incident of theft:

> *I happened to be in court one day with another case……Darragh's name was also mentioned in the theft of a substantial amount of money from an old man*

The way children express grief varies according to their development level and adolescents can engage in risk taking behaviours as 'they challenge their own mortality' (Dowdney, 2005, p.118). It is evident in this case that Darragh was deeply affected by the death of his father and the circumstances surrounding his death. Research shows how grieving young people deal with death: 'anger is commonly expressed, perhaps because it is easier to express than sadness and hurt. Expressions of anger can give adolescents a feeling of power which counteracts their emotions of fright and helplessness' (Conrad Glass, 1990, p.156-157). The school obviously had expectations around the appropriate behavior they expected, their discipline system that attempted to create that Foucauldian 'panoptical discourse of control' (Hope in Murphy, 2013, p. 37), which was resisted by Darragh in his attempt to control his existence. However the school did not see the opportunity in this case for positive, productive intervention to affect change for this pupil but instead created an environment that promoted resistance, 'there always remains the possibility of resistance' (Foucault, 1982 (a), p. 245). Given the significant amount of trauma suffered by Darragh, this resistance was his way of regaining control in his world.

In Adam's case the sudden death of his mum from a brain aneurysm when he was just 8 years old had a profound effect. Adam's dad informed me during the interview of how his wife had died:

She just died like, she died of an aneurysm, she died in my arms, she just got caught for breath, she couldn't breathe, ambulance straight away, and then trying to run out then, to get them (the children) downstairs to watch cartoons while the ambulance arrived and went upstairs in the background.……..

Also during the interview with Adam's dad, he told me that a number of Adam's close relatives died around the same time when he was in primary school, and although he did alright in primary school, it was during the transition to first year where issues began to arise for Adam. PhD research conducted by Abdelnoor and Hollins (2004) which examined the effect of childhood bereavement on secondary school performance concluded that the 'effect of bereavement may be prolonged and that intermittent support could be needed throughout secondary and perhaps tertiary education' (p.52). Their research also showed that bereavement had a significant impact on anxiety levels particularly in children between the ages of 5 and 12 years which is the case for both Darragh and Adam. Adam's dad reflected in the interview:

I think the ADHD brings on the anxiety coupled with what happened in his life – a lot of loss and a lot of grief for a young boy.

Abdelnoor and Hollins (2004) research also illustrates how children who experience bereavement do less well academically. They looked at the effect of bereavement on primary school children and considered the impact of gender, age and whether the surviving parent was working or not and they found that children bereaved at 12 years scored 1.3 grades below their controls and 1.8 grade points below if the surviving parent did not work, this is important in a case such as Darragh's where a lower socio-economic background combined with the effects of bereavement can have a more negative impact on school success.

In Anna's case, she started to school refuse almost immediately in response to an incident in 'a particular class after school', in the interview with Anna's mum she told me:

when the incident happened in school, the damage was done, it's taken months trying to repair it and when she's better I will go into the school and talk to them about that…..she has built up a massive phobia, CAMHS are doing CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) with her.

Anna initially came back to school but refused to attend class, she would only come as far as the office door until she totally refused eventually and then isolated herself socially as we see from this extract from the interview with the EWO:

> *I certainly identified that there were significant complications and that there was significant anxiety in relation to school, not just school but in relation to social interactions as well, it extended beyond school, she had disengaged from everything outside the family home.*

School is usually viewed by children and adolescents as a stable, safe environment, but when it is the place associated with a traumatic event in the child or young person's life, it is not surprising that these children/young people then school refuse. Rolfsnes and Idsoe (2011) state that 'situations that are viewed as traumatic for one child or adolescent are not necessarily traumatic for another, there are several factors to be considered including the child or adolescents level of development and preparedness for the event (p.155). In Anna's case CBT provided by CAMHS has assisted her in making significant progress:

> *in that she has now started to return to school in some form, she has re-engaged and gone back into the building, she is doing some home tuition in the school* (EWO Interview),

> *she still hasn't got herself back in to class yet but she is coming in to school, she has got the uniform on, so yes fingers crossed. Once she is in, she will be fine it's just about taking those preliminary steps* (Principal Interview).

The outcome in Anna's case was very positive which was a result of the support of her parents in ensuring that she had the necessary intervention in a timely manner, this we can attribute to their cultural capital and their capacity to respond to their daughter's crisis. This is evident during the interview when they spoke about the interventions offered by the school initially:

Mum: *the school offered NEPS and we met with this girl from NEPS but she couldn't help us*

Dad: *she was telling us to do things we did already*

Mum: *I'm not sure she actually understood the situation then shortly after that we went to CAMHS.*

This illustrates how these parents had the capacity to make decisions for their daughter based on their own judgement and analysis of the situation which is a very different to some of the other cases in this research where parents were guided by the school but not always in the best interests of the young person. As the school principal said during her interview: 'I think the way the parents handled it, with the right balance of tough love and care' assisted in promoting a positive outcome in this case.

11.5 Conclusion

Mental health is an increasing factor in school refusal and poor school attendance. Schools have identified mental health to be of increasing concern to them in their dealings with young people at post-primary level and an increasing number of young people are referred to services such as the EWS because of anxiety based school refusal. The principal of Anna's school when asked if she could see an increase in students with anxiety in her school, said: 'more and more'. In one interview Adam's year head spoke about the increasing numbers of students in her school presenting with anxiety:

Interviewer: *and would you find that there are more problems with anxiety?*

Year Head: *yes massively so*

Interviewer: *since you started teaching?*

Year Head: *yes massively so, I suppose the only thing I can say is as they become older it becomes more specific, I think in first year they weren't quite sure what they were anxious about, sounds daft!*

Interviewer: *how does it manifest itself?*

Year head: *ok, so you might have panic attacks, school refusal, parents might ring in and say such and such feels very isolated, is being isolated……*

Here we see how young people begin to disconnect from school until there comes a point when they can no longer attend, it is interesting how the word 'isolated' is used in this extract by parents as a way of describing how their child feels prior to that disconnection from school and from their peers. Most research is in agreement that parental influence is of particular relevance for primary school children however older children or young people are more

affected by their school, their community and their peers (Mcluskey, Bynum & Patchin 2004), (Smyth, McCoy & Darmody 2004).

The next chapter will explore the theme of special educational needs and its impact on school attendance and participation.

12.0 SEN and school absenteeism

12.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the impact of Special Educational Needs (SEN) on school attendance and engagement and how having an identified SEN impacts on a young person's experience of school and how the school can also impact on the young person's ability to cope within the mainstream education system. A number of themes have emerged from the data and include:

- The impact of a diagnosis
- Lack of Communication
- Surveillance
- Disengagement
- Reduced timetable
- School transition and SEN
- Inclusion and exclusion

12.2 The Impact of a Diagnosis - The importance of peer relations

The young people in this research are all reported to have particular behavioural or academic needs that impact significantly on their school attendance. Gearoid and Adam have a diagnosis of ADHD and Gearoid is on medication under the guidance of CAMHS. Roisin has a specific learning disability which was diagnosed during the period of this research when she underwent an educational assessment with NEPS after the referral by her post-primary school. Darragh was at risk of losing his school placement as a result of emotional and behavioural difficulties, Alex has a mild general learning difficulty and emotional and behavioural difficulties and James has an ASD diagnosis. In Roisin's case, (Roisin had not been assessed at the time of the interview) when her mother was interviewed, she described how she had always felt her daughter had some form of specific learning disability:

> *She could tell you everything in words but she couldn't write it, for her to put pen to paper everything scrambled up in her head*

This is also echoed in the Principal's interview when she describes Roisin as 'being brilliant in her head'. During the interview with Roisin and her mother, Roisin had expressed an

interest in being home educated by her mother as she was worried about the response of her peers to her upcoming assessment at the time, Roisin's mum commented:

> *so when she heard then she has to go to a psychiatrist or psychologist for the tests, she's afraid other people will find out in the classroom and she'd be the odd one out so this is why she wants to be home schooled.*

Gearoid's mother recalls a similar situation surrounding the administration of his ADHD medication in primary school:

> *when I was going into the school and when he was young, he was saying mam don't give it to me now in front of them there.*

Sometimes peer relationships can be negative, particularly for young people who have been diagnosed with a special educational need. In Adam's case we learn how the post-primary school was advised that he should be kept apart from pupils who he had interacted with in his primary school class:

> *I do remember from the primary school, I have a note here somewhere – to keep him away from certain people, if they were going to be in classes together, but kind of for his own sake, there were a few people he wouldn't mix well with.* (Adam's Year head)

However as Adam dropped out of school, he still made those associations with peers that were deemed inappropriate for him as his Year Head told me -'I found he was mixing with a tough crew', in the interview his Year Head is clearly disappointed that he didn't engage with school as she felt this would have offered Adam stability:

> *I always thought it was a missed opportunity for him you know….if he could have found something here that would just keep him going steady, but because he wasn't in the school set up, it wasn't available to him, I noticed him and I noticed who he was hanging around with, that other boy who we were informed to keep him away from, I've seen him hanging around with him a lot, I worry about that.*

Gearoid's mother expressed her concern about the friends that Gearoid had begun to hang around with when he began to get into trouble outside of school:

Now he's easily led as well, very easily led. He can lead as well now but I think for Gearoid with his ADHD he needs to be in that gang, he needs to be there.

In the interview Gearoid's mum had outlined how Gearoid had found it difficult to make friends when he was younger, how he had never been invited to birthday parties and how he himself knew that he was somehow different as he refused to go to parties as 'he just felt that if he went he wouldn't be able to control it (his behavior) you know' (Gearoid's mum). The American Psychiatric Association (APA, 1968) define ADHD as being characterized by persistent and developmentally inappropriate levels of in-attention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity. Difficulties associated with this disorder go far beyond those symptoms and include poor social and academic functioning (Diamantopoulou et al., 2007). There has been significant research into ADHD which states that there is a correlation between the disorder and academic failure and school dropout (Trampush et al., 2009, Greene et al., 2002, Diamantopoulou et al., 2007) also the disorder is associated with anti-social behaviours and family discord. Both the EWO and Gearoid's mother in their interviews make reference to the involvement of the Gardai in Gearoid's life for anti-social behavior. In addition, children with ADHD are more likely to be suspended or even expelled from school, it also leads to difficulties for young people in forming friendships and making social connections. This is evident in Gearoid's primary school experience where we learn that he had no friends, that he did not attend birthday parties and his mother refers to his friendships as being 'forced friendships'. Research shows that young people who have friends are more confident, less aggressive and demonstrate better school involvement (Crosnoe, 2000, p.378) and social relationships with peers and teachers can significantly contribute to the sense of community created by a school environment (Coffey, 2013, p.263).

The importance of peer relationships and how young people are viewed by their peers cannot be over-stated as these peer interactions can either make or break a young person's experience of school. Children with an identified special educational need can find it more difficult to make positive connections with their peers. McCoy and Banks (2012) note that school engagement is influenced by a young person's social relationship with their teachers and peers. The shame associated with having a learning difficulty, or an assigned SNA in the case of Darragh and Gearoid, can make it easier for young people to opt out rather than to face instances of teasing or bullying by their peers, sometimes it is the anxiety or fear of being bullied that can even affect school attendance and participation (Smyth et al., 2004, p.5). Adam's case illustrates that it is often easier for young people to remove themselves

from the environment where there is constant surveillance which makes the young person feel different and where deficits are made more and more obvious (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993, p. 281).

In addition, young people who have experience of bullying in primary school 'have a more negative view of themselves, feel more isolated, and have a more negative attitude to school and their teachers' (Smyth et al., 2004, p. 188). James experienced significant levels of bullying in primary school, in 5th class, as his mother described to me during our interview:

> Mum: *about half way through 5th class it got worse and worse because James was quiet I suppose…..he wouldn't be punching at people or things like that if somebody hit him…..like I was always telling the teacher, don't be hitting people, don't be answering people back…….people were hitting him, he couldn't understand the concept of telling the teacher.*

I asked James' mum what the school did about the persistent bullying she described, James interjected and said 'absolutely nothing', his mother responded and told me that she met with the school and told them that 'he is not a punch bag' however the school in Mum's view did nothing and subsequently James began to school refuse.

Bullying is a significant issue for children with SEN, the National Disability Authority - NDA (2014) in their article based on secondary analysis of GUI data confirm that children with SEN are more likely to be bullied or victimised than children without SEN (p.144). We see in James' case how he could no longer face school due to the persistent bullying:

> *He started to get sick and say he didn't want to go in and I said to the principal look you are an adult, how many times would you come in to school and get bullied before you would say I'm either going to be sick or and not come in or lose my temper and hit someone back. (*James' mum*)*

Because of James' ASD, he presented as different to his peer group, his mother noted in her interview that he began to have difficulties when he was in 2nd class in primary school:

James' Mum*: He was grand up to 2nd class*

Interviewer*: and what happened in 2nd class, can you remember that?*

James' Mum*: there was kind of one or two in class who were a bit kind of bullying but it wasn't overt bullying it was more smart comments.……..*

By 5th class the name calling had moved on to physical bullying, this bullying continued on a daily basis despite James' mum speaking with the school staff. She told me how she:

> *kept going to the school and saying it, I mean he was refusing to go to school, he was literally making himself sick in the car.*

The social worker who worked closely with James and his family described how he would present very differently to his peers, she described him as 'childlike' and described how he loved to go to the playground at 15 years old and 'play on the slides'. When we spoke about the advice offered to the post-primary school on how best to cope with James, she responded:

> *I think they did try to receive it well but it's James' presentation, it's just…..I imagine it's quite irritating.*

She also described his presentation as 'quite typical' for his diagnosis, however this was not typical for the mainstream classroom environment. James had considerable difficulty with social skills and research shows how inadequate social skills can lead to bullying and emotional distress (Goodall, 2015). Perhaps had James been assessed when he was in primary school a more appropriate provision may have been identified to better meet his needs and ensure he had a more safe, structured environment?

The NDA (2014) advocate a whole-school anti-bullying policy approach and advocate an atmosphere of inclusion which they believe 'is central to tackling bullying behaviour for children with SEN' (p.149). They believe that 'increasing the participation of children with SEN in all aspects of mainstream school life facilitates interactions and friendships with peers which in turn 'decreases their risk of being bullied/victimised' (p.149).

12.3 Lack of Communication

In a number of these cases we see examples of poor or inadequate communication between parents and schools, we also see a lack of understanding of the school system by very vulnerable parents. In Darragh's case when the school principal was interviewed and was asked if Darragh should have been referred to some other agency due to his behavioural issues, the principal responded:

> *well we wouldn't have made any other referral as such but we would have offered the NEPS service to the parent but they didn't take that up* (Post-Primary Principal)

In the interview with Darragh's mother I asked her about the supports offered by the post primary school to deal with his behavior and she claimed that the school did not offer any supports, I also asked about the level of support Darragh received in primary school around the time his dad died:

Interviewer: *did the primary school do anything to help Darragh?*

Darragh's mum: *every time he would get into trouble, they would be on the phone wanting to kick him out, there was no support, no support, there was an assessment done for ADHD or something and I didn't know anything about that either, there was a teacher inside the class watching him do his homework or whatever*

Interviewer: *that's interesting, that must have been done by NEPS?*

Darragh's mum: *I don't know but I never got a letter to say this was happening or what was happening*

In Roisin's case, I was conducting the interview when Roisin informed her mother for the first time that she was having a test the next day at 3pm. Roisin's mum indicated that this must be the test with the psychologist that the school had mentioned. I asked Roisin if this was part of a psychological assessment and she shrugged her shoulders and responded with; 'I don't know she just said a test today'.

In other situations such as in Adam's case, it is evident how despite attempts by schools, parents can have difficulty engaging in effective communication with the school or the services. Adam's dad is cited in both of the interviews with the EWO and the school staff as being someone who is difficult to contact:

> *I suppose I did find liaison with home a little difficult so I would have contacted dad numerous times – difficult enough to contact you know and I did find it a bit difficult to form that relationship, whereas with others I could pick up the phone you know, at this stage, especially things like that, you know each other so well, I just found dad a bit hard to reach (*Adam's Year head*).*

The EWO informed me how she had tried to contact Adam's dad by letter and by phone and how she too had found it hard to make contact. The EWO then found it necessary to make contact with Adam's aunt as the case wasn't progressing due to the difficulty with making contact with Adam's father:

> *I got quite frustrated and spoke to the aunt one day about nothing happening and the aunt said dad himself is very nervous, finds it hard to contact people, and doesn't follow up on letters* (EWO Adam's case).

This illustrates how difficult it can be for certain parents to cope themselves with difficulties in their own life and how difficult it can be for parents to communicate with schools and agencies.

It is evident from these transcript extracts that there are communication issues between school and home. On the one hand parents can be struggling in their own lives with difficult situations and on the other hand schools or agencies may not be aware of the difficult situations people may find themselves in due to reasons of poverty, substance abuse and bereavement, as we have seen in these cases. In addition, there are cases where parents are unclear if their child is engaging in a formal assessment process such as a NEPS assessment within the school setting. It is unclear if this is a result of a lack of understanding on the parent's behalf or have the school neglected to explain the situation fully to the parent? Nevertheless, in these cases the parent does not appear to have an understanding of the support offered by the school which is an issue for the school to rectify given their position of power in these cases. It is evident that these schools neglected to include these parents as part of the decision making process for their child despite the direction in the Education for Persons with Special Needs Act 2004 that the board of management of a school shall ensure that the parents of a student with special needs 'will be consulted with regard to, and invited to participate in the making of all decisions of a significant nature concerning their child's education' (p.19).

Evidence from this research indicates that a lack of capital for some parents or a lack of ability to 'activate' this capital (Lareau, 1999, p.39) prevents them from actively pursuing appropriate interventions for their children. The 'negative reaction' (Lareau, 1987, p. 74) of the schools to these parents and young people is seen in the lack of intervention for the children in these case studies while in primary school. Alex should have been reassessed on entry to post primary school and was not, Roisin and James were never assessed until they

transitioned to 1st year. Adam was assessed outside of the education system in 1st year by CAMHS and Gearoid's mother sought and paid for his assessment privately. All of these young people have an identified SEN. The previous system relied on the availability of the NEPS service which identified the learning needs of the young person and recommended resources, however this mechanism of resource allocation is to change as the NCSE have recently introduced a General Allocation Model to resource schools based on their individual profile, this replaces the NCSE allocation process that was dependent on NEPS and other assessments and in theory schools now have autonomy over the distribution of resources to those most in need (DES Circular 0013/2017).

12.4 Surveillance

In some of these cases the young people in question are subject to the gaze or surveillance of the school, the Education Welfare Service and agencies such as social work, CAMHS and NEPS. Foucault refers to surveillance as hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and the examination. In the cases of young people with SEN, their lives are dominated by surveillance, this surveillance takes the form of constant scrutiny by schools, medical and educational services, and through defining their needs relative to what is considered 'normal' and once assessed or examined 'they are marked out for perpetual surveillance throughout the remainder of their school career and beyond (Allan, 1996, p.224). Allan (1996) notes that children with SEN are particularly the subject of surveillance not only in the classroom but outside of that time, this is evident from the interview extract with the deputy principal of Alex's school:

Deputy Principal: *We had him on a reduced time table*

Interviewer: *how did that work?*

Deputy Principal: *that worked well because during break – as a lot of issues were at break-time - we had him confined to sitting outside my office and I was minding him – which restricted me from doing other things, supervision duties around the school……*

This extract demonstrates the extent of the surveillance of Alex which extended to the deputy principal watching his every move as he was confined to sitting outside her office on a daily basis. We also see the impact of surveillance in the discipline policy of this school:

Deputy Principal: *We have restorative practice here*

Interviewer: *and how does restorative practice work?*

Deputy Principal: *the discipline liaison teacher will meet them every day*

Interviewer: *so they are assigned someone in particular?*

Deputy Principal: *yes or sometimes they will follow him for a day to try and go through good behavior.*

However Alex's parents have a different perspective of this level of supervision:

> *He is checked every day, in every classroom and it's embarrassing for him a lot as it's happening in front of every child and small little things are adding up, they shouting to him, they are not talking to him in a nice way, they are shouting to him a lot.* (Alex's dad through the interpreter)

This level of surveillance is perceived as a form of harassment by Alex's parents who feel that their son is being singled out by the school. The Panopticon effect is very evident here as is 'the state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault 2008, p.6).

In Darragh's case we see a young person who because of his EBD and subsequent difficult behavior in school was consequently always under surveillance by the school, he was referred to the SCP, the HSCL, he was assigned a mentor and an SNA, he was referred to the guidance counsellor. When all of these strategies didn't work, he was put on report, suspended on a number of occasions and ultimately faced permanent exclusion:

> *He was on the road really to expulsion from the school, he was out of our control, he wasn't behaving and that you know? The Board of Management would have been getting a bit aggravated with him and he was becoming very disruptive* (Principal Darragh).

Darragh was then placed on a reduced time-table which was monitored by the school completion worker but that also failed and he became 'aggressive towards other students, he was aggressive towards myself' (Principal). As Darragh's school placement becomes more untenable the level of surveillance extends beyond the school to the EWO and as his behaviors deteriorate outside of school Darragh becomes involved with the Gardai and the Probation Service and is then subject to the gaze of the justice system. The principal in his

interview outlined how he felt that: 'only for the Judge, he (Darragh) wouldn't be in here at all'. Darragh's mum informed me in her interview how Darragh was subject to a curfew each night until his return to court for sentencing later that year:

Interviewer: *Is the Judge going to sentence him then?*

Mum: *Community service I think, I don't know as Darragh is too young for that, I'm not too sure.*

The EWO when interviewed spoke about Darragh's involvement with the probation service:

> *Unfortunately now Darragh is involved with the court, he has a probation officer, he did return to school and he is to get another chance and return to 5th year, he's in school but it is quite rocky. The placement isn't secure, but he is only attending because it's one of the stipulations of the courts that he has an education. I suppose for Darragh, school is one thing, but I suppose how he is getting on outside of school, getting on with the guards, he is constantly involved in curfews, has a probation officer – that's all hanging over him.*

When I interviewed Darragh's mum, she spoke very openly about the high level of supervision provided by the social worker who was responsible for overseeing Darragh's visits with his father. This level of surveillance had a very negative impact on the family's relationship with the Social Work Department who recently became involved with the family again, Darragh's mother informed me in the interview that an anonymous report had been sent in to the social work department concerning her care of her children and therefore the case was reactivated:

Interviewer: *and do you have a social worker now?*
Mum*: I do*
Interviewer: *and are they any help to you now?*
Mum: *no*

The Social Work Department at the time of Darragh's meetings with his father considered this level of surveillance necessary for the children in this case, however it will be difficult to assess the lasting effect of such supervision on Darragh.

In Roisin's case – she and her family were under very close surveillance from the school and the Education Welfare Service, and then eventually from the court. Once cases are before the court for poor or non-school attendance they are subject to regular adjournments to monitor the attendance; 'ever since it happened I'm there (in court) about 50 times' (Roisin's mum). One Judge when interviewed spoke about identifying another method of dealing with school absenteeism other than fines and imprisonment:

> *I think there should be some kind of other system, call it supervision, call it what you like……*
>
> *See the system should firstly identify the problem, identify it as early as you can, thirdly take steps and fourthly there should be some kind of mediation system or its equivalent, some kind of a system where there are parties who are qualified and who would deal with it in a supervisory capacity.*

The language used here in this extract is all about systems and observation and control through supervision or surveillance by the state.

Similarily, in Gearoid's case, Gearoid and his family were subject to intense supervision by the social work department through a court directed supervision order and the entry of the children's names on the Child Protection Notification System. During the interview with Gearoid's mother she spoke about her involvement with the social work department:

Interviewer: *and why were social work involved?*

Gearoid's Mother: *they came on board a year ago, I actually nearly lost my kids a year ago…..we went to court and everything, they got a supervision order……I would admit the kids were unsupervised, you know they would have been out late.*

Interviewer: *how do you get on with the social worker?*

Gearoid's Mother: *I would have been very defiant, I have to say now up to about 6 months ago*

Gearoid's mother then went on to tell me that she complied with the Supervision Order which led to the positive outcome of the recent case conference:

Gearoid's Mother: *but look I'm getting the support……I mean there were 16 professionals at the meeting the other morning and they all said the kids aren't at risk anymore*

Interviewer: *that's great, it's brilliant fair dues to you*

Gearoid's Mother: *like I'm doing what I'm meant to be doing. I've not missed an appointment and Gearoid is in school.*

In addition to the surveillance of the social work department, Gearoid was also subject to regular visits to his home and school by the EWO who was closely monitoring his school attendance. The involvement of all of these agencies in Gearoid's life did bring about significant change to his school attendance and led to an improved, more stable home environment for a certain period of time. Therefore, in some cases, surveillance may be beneficial and lead to more positive outcomes for some young people. Gearoid was also under significant surveillance at school and was allocated an SNA, from entry to first year he had the support of the School Completion worker, the resource teacher and the HSCL. These resources assisted in improving Gearoid's attendance significantly for a certain period.

Consideration needs to be given to the impact of surveillance in schools on young people with SEN; once diagnosed they are often allocated SNAs, who monitor their behaviour not only in the classroom but outside in the school yard or on the corridors, these young people are often withdrawn from class to attend learning support, so following from their assessment and diagnosis he/she is 'marked out for perpetual surveillance' (Allan, 1996, p. 224). There is a need to consider the impact of such intense levels of surveillance for young people with a diagnosis, there needs to be a balance between accommodating these young people and ensuring that they feel included and there exists the dilemma as to whether we recognise or don't recognise differences (Norwich, 2006). All aspects of the young person's life is under scrutiny, their progress is recorded, they are spoken about at meetings, 'they are both subjects and objects of knowledge and power' (Allan, 1996, p.220), contributing to the creation of Foucault's 'docile bodies'.

12.5 Disengagement

Disengagement from school is often experienced by young people with an identified SEN, evidenced in Roisin's case. During the interview she pleads with her mother on a number of occasions to be home educated so that she doesn't have to return to school:

Mum: *She is trying to talk me in to getting her home schooled…..but I don't think that's going to happen.*

Interviewer: *You want your mum to teach you at home is it?*

Roisin: *yeah, it would be much better*

Interviewer: *Why do you think that would be much better now?*

Roisin: *I just don't like coming in here.*

In the interviews with Roisin and her mother, her mum tells me that Roisin feels ashamed about having to have an assessment, 'the test with the psychologist', as she was afraid of what the other students would think of her, so although she needs an assessment to access the curriculum, which is proving difficult for her, she is afraid of how she is perceived by her peers. Even at the end of my interview with her she asks me: 'am, would I be able to get home schooled instead of coming in here?' In each of these cases, when the young people were asked if they liked school, four out of the five boys all responded in the negative with James stating ' I didn't hate it that much, I didn't like it all that much either, I was neutral to it'. McCoy and Banks (2012) in their research based on the GUI study found that children with EBD and learning difficulties are more likely not to like school and children from 'economically inactive households are at a substantially greater risk of disengagement' (p.93).

Adam was diagnosed after he dropped out of school with ADHD by CAMHS. His case illustrates how his disengagement from school was gradual, beginning in September of first year when he started to exhibit panic attacks in school, this then moved to increasing absences on a weekly basis:

With Adam I would have been on the phone an awful lot cause there were constant absences, two days here, three days there….. (Adam's Year head)

Then the absences increased:

Year head: *from February of first year the days started stretching to weeks and really from Easter of first year I'm fairly sure we had nothing, even a bit before that you know?*

Interviewer*: so he just disengaged really?*

Year head*: totally disengaged and I would say when he was in the building he wasn't engaged, his head was in a totally different place.*

Finn (1989) explored the concept of drop out in the context of non-engagement or young person's lack of bonding with school which he believed 'contributes to problem behavior and early school leaving' (p. 118). Finn also attributes school drop out to a 'frustration self-esteem model' where an 'impaired self-view' exists as a result of 'frustration or embarrassment' and for those children with undiagnosed or diagnosed learning problems, behavior may deteriorate as a consequence, however adults respond to the behavior more readily that they do the learning disability where the 'child falls further and further behind and becomes more of a problem' (p.119). This is evident in both James'and Adam's cases. Reschly and Christenson's (2006) research which found that even students with mild disabilities were more likely to have behavioural problems and have less positive engagement with teaching staff and these students with more severe difficulties and EBD such as Darragh are at 'high risk for school failure and dropout' (p. 289). School context also plays an important role as is shown by the findings of the GUI study (2016), where they indicate 'that children attending disadvantaged school contexts are substantially more likely to be identified with an EBD than children attending other school contexts' and that 'there is an under-identification in DEIS schools of learning disabilities and an over-identification of emotional/behavioural disabilities in these contexts' (p. 167).

These cases provide evidence of how learning difficulties, ADHD and EBD lead to disengagement with school, behavioural problems resulting in suspension in two of the cases, possible expulsion in one case and to instances of school refusal. Cooper's (2008) research on attachment to school notes that for young people with EBD, 'weak attachment can lead to disaffection and alienation' (p.14). Darragh's 'extremely difficult' behaviours, as described by the principal, meant that he 'was on the road to expulsion' (interview with Principal, p.2). Darragh's behavior was quite violent and aggressive in and out of school and despite a number of school interventions, his behavior continued to deteriorate:

Principal: *he didn't behave in some of the classes he was in, he was causing problems there, he more or less demanded that he no longer be in math's class, 'cause he had an issue in that, with the teacher there. He was very aggressive towards other students, he was aggressive towards myself and the Deputy if he was corrected.*

Darragh continued to disengage from school and began to truant even more:

Principal: *I don't know if he's benefitting this year from school, he's not engaging in school, he's out quite a bit, either he's suspended or he doesn't come in.*

The principal responds to these behaviours by suspending Darragh which leads to his further disengagement from school. Suspension is also used in Gearoid and Alex's cases as a means of dealing with disruptive behaviours, in all cases, on return to school there is little evidence of improved behavior and increased evidence of poor-school attendance and decreased engagement with school.

Gearoid was also suspended from post-primary school - for fighting which according to the SCP Coordinator 'caused his attendance to dive a bit afterwards' and he was also suspended for 15 days in 6th class of primary school for a variety of behavioural issues. Gearoid never engaged well with his primary school and according to his mother as he got older his school refusal became worse: 'he was refusing to go like, he missed 60 days or something in 6th class'. Gearoid appears to have better engaged with the post-primary school and has responded well to the work with the SCP staff in the school and with his class teachers. The HSCL teacher when interviewed described Gearoid as having a good relationship with staff; 'I don't think there's a staff member in school that would say they didn't like him'.

In Roisin's case, she has only recently been diagnosed with a specific learning difficulty in her 1st year at post-primary school, however this may be too late as she has also disengaged from post-primary school which is evident from her interview, she is unable to identify any positive aspect to school and is physically exhausted from the experience of school.

James has a diagnosis of ASD, which he also received very late into his primary education. The NCSE guide for parents (2016) states that 14,000 students (1.55% of all students) in Irish Schools have been diagnosed with ASD, which is line with the UK and USA and that 86% of students with ASD are enrolled in mainstream schools of which 63% attend mainstream class, 23% attend special classes in mainstream schools and 14% attend special

schools. In addition, 950 special classes are in place for students with ASD between mainstream and special schools.

Children with ASD 'may have adequate expressive language, sometimes beyond their years' but 'receptive language may be compromised' (Friedlander, 2008, p. 141). This is evident in James' case, the social worker for the ASD services outlined in her interview how he 'compensates using large words' however 'he may not always have the meaning'. James is described as a boy who 'needs a lot of scheduling to know exactly what he is supposed to do', she described him as being of 'typical presentation' - the social worker gave the example of how if James is asked to write a page on something - 'he will naturally go with the smallest size page', he 'is quite literal' and 'has no imagination about what he'd like to do, he has no idea beyond what he is living, he really doesn't'. When I asked the social worker why she thought James could not attend school she said:

it was too stressful for him, he really gets very, very stressed, his way of coping is withdrawing, or he's being smart, he has proximity difficulties.

She also described James as 'vulnerable' and stated that 'he wants badly to fit in'.

In addition, 'children who begin school with learning difficulties are at greater risk for developing mental health problems' as such learning difficulties are a source of stress for these young people throughout their school day, this we see in Roisin's case in particular and also with Adam as he describes how he wasn't able to breathe when he would enter the classroom. There is growing recognition that 'disengagement from school and poor academic performance reinforce each other' (Spencer, 2009, p. 310) and Sheppard (2009) notes that '50% of children and adolescents attending mental health services have a reading or communication disorder' (p. 110).

This is not a problem unique to Ireland; Reschly and Christenson (2006) describe students with disabilities as being the most vulnerable of the school population and these are the students with the highest dropout levels due to their level of engagement with school. This reduced level of engagement can be exacerbated by the ways schools respond to students with learning difficulties making young people acutely aware of their limitations and their deficits. Well organized classroom settings such as an ASD unit, a special class, resource hours, all of which can highlight issues for those young people struggling to cope, who then

find it easier to opt out and which is evident in all of these cases; 'hiding becomes a sensible strategy for all of the kids all of the time' (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993, p.287).

12.6 Reduced Time-tables

Reduced time-tables appear to be used by schools as a way of maintaining discipline and order however, the ultimate effect of such time-tables is further disengagement from school. In Darragh's case the board of management were ready to consider his exclusion from the school:

> *the board of management had sent a letter about issuing a final warning and saying they'd had enough so the next step was to consider permanent exclusion from the school……we did reduce his day and we did the negotiations with his mother and himself and he picked the subjects that he liked and didn't like* (School Principal)

However, Darragh was eventually withdrawn from school by his mother to be home educated as the reduced-time table did not work out, as Darragh's school attendance had deteriorated. On the days when he was in school his behaviours were such that he was regularly sent home.

In Alex's case there were similar issues with the reduced timetable, again he was placed on a shorter day as the school couldn't manage his behavior, particularly at certain times of the day, Alex's parents however did not see any value in the reduced day:

Interviewer: *he was put on a reduced day, a shortened day for a period?*

Dad through Interpreter: *Only two hours a day*

Interviewer: *and did that work do you think?*

Interpreter for mum: *it made it worse actually, it made it a lot worse*

Interpreter for dad: *he lost interest in school*

The research has generated evidence of how reduced days/curricula can lead to further disaffection from school, and how schools use this as a way of encouraging young people to leave school, 'where their own self-awareness affects their survival within the system' (Allan, 1996, p.220). We need to consider to what extent schools either willingly or

unwillingly are complicit in ensuring the early school leaving of young people with an identified or unidentified SEN. Recent research conducted by Inclusion Ireland (2019) who did a survey of parents whose children had SEN and were on reduced timetables found that parents felt pressurized to agree to the reduced day for fear their child would be expelled and of the 100 respondents two thirds of their children were in school for less than three hours per day (p.4). Such a limited time in school will lead to disengagement from learning and peers. The DEIS Action Plan 2017, although requiring schools to report on the use of reduced time tables to Tusla – TESS, does not preclude schools from continuing to use this as a method of managing student behavior and participation, it does require that the EWS is notified to ensure that the parent is in agreement with the arrangement and that the arrangement is reviewed by the school regularly with a view to increasing time in school. This may have been a mechanism for managing or reducing the use of reduced time-tables but in fact it highlights the necessity for better provision for young people whose needs are clearly not being met by their current school placement.

All of these case studies involved young people at both primary and post-primary level who had disengaged from school, they all had home difficulties and they experienced psychological problems. However Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) also factor in these cases and these are also important contributing factors when examining the causes of poor or non-school attendance. In two of these cases the young people were diagnosed with EBD, one of these young people also had a diagnosis of ADHD. Children with ADHD and conduct disorders 'tend to have poor grades, repeat grades more often, have poor test scores and complete less schooling' (Cuellar, 2015, p.115). In addition, young adults display the most symptoms which we see in Gearoid and Adam's cases and academic problems become more of an issue 'which can result in school failure' (Bailey, Lorch, Milich & Charnigo, 2009, p. 1842). It is common to see ADHD coupled with depression (Cuellar, 2015, p. 112) as is evident in Adam's case, where he withdrew from society for a period of time, refusing to leave his room and interact with his friends. Children with learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties 'are consistently found to have the highest dropout rate among special education students and students in general' (Reschly and Christenson, 2006, p. 277).

12.7 School transition and SEN

Research shows that children with ASD approaching the transition to post-primary experienced very high levels of emotional, behavioural difficulties (Mandy et al. 2016, p. 581). When I interviewed the Social Worker for the ASD services she expressed her concerns around school transition not just for James but for other ASD children:

Social Worker: *they have been cossetted and minded in primary school, primary schools mind them really, really nicely but there's no preparation for social skills, they are going to be by themselves, walking down the corridor…..'*

Int: *so you see a big gap in that transfer?*

Social Worker: *yes, that transfer, we haven't the time, we used to do lovely transition work, we don't have time…..*

Int: *did that work when you did do it?*

Social worker: *yes and no, if a child has a lot of difficulties……primary by its very nature is more holding anyway where secondary has to be different you know what I mean?*

In the above extract there is not only clear evidence of a lack of resources for agencies working with ASD children but also a lack of comprehensive support in schools for children with an identified SEN, there was no plan put in place for James prior to transition to post-primary school. The NCSE (2013) report on transition of primary school pupils with special educational needs advocates for the allocation of a mentor or key person who would be present to provide a significant support to the child and also to provide a valuable link for the parents between school and home, they also strongly advocate improved communication between schools and parents (p.63). James' transition to post-primary appears to have been mismanaged, once he was assessed and received a diagnosis, a unit in a mainstream school was recommended, as the local school was at capacity, application was made to a school outside of the area, quite a distance from his home, which added to the stress for James and his family:

Mum: *I applied to school X and to school Y and Y were the only one that would take me without the proper paper because……*

Int*: they hadn't finished the assessment yet? They needed the report?*

Mum*: yes, X wouldn't take him, Y were willing to take him*

Int*: they had a unit?*

Mum*: yeah but he wasn't in the unit he was in a mixed ability class…….I suppose I thought he was going to be in that class all the time……..…*

Poor communication between the school and the parent is evident here, mum however spoke very highly of the resource person assigned to James within the school, however despite the support offered, his placement broke down and mum described to me what it was like in the morning trying to get him in the school gate:

> Mum: *he was refusing to get out of the car because I didn't realise when he was shutting down in the car, I thought he was ignoring me and I was pulling him out of the car and in hindsight it was the worst thing you could do because when they shut down like that, it's like sensory overload*

Perhaps it was unrealistic to expect James' placement would succeed with the help of just one key person in the school as there was no significant preparatory work done with James prior to transition. The NCSE (2016) guidelines for parent and guardians; *Changing Schools: Moving from Primary to Post-Primary School* states 'planning for the transition of students with complex special educational needs should begin at least two years before students are due to start post-primary' (p.10). In James' case his diagnosis of Asperger's came very late and one has to question why this was not identified and responded to at an earlier stage. As a result of this delay there was no suitable school place identified in good time and when a placement was identified, James and his family did not have the opportunity to prepare. The system appears to have failed James' inclusion and participation in mainstream education. The question has been posed whether to identify and label young people with a SEN? In James' case we can see the effect of not identifying his needs in a timely manner.

In Roisin's case she had somehow survived primary school without assistance for her specific learning difficulty which was diagnosed in the first term of first year. Her mother described to me her difficulty with managing in the post-primary school:

Roisin's mum: *from the first week I noticed the pressure*

Interviewer: *did she put it on herself?*

Roisin's mum: *you would just know there was a strain there like I suppose she can be giddy – she is giddy but she was just a different person when she used to come home than when she was in primary*

Interviewer: *in what way was she different?*

> Roisin's mum: *like she would be thrown down, she would be in no humour to do anything, hardly talk……and even now yesterday she came home from school she fell unconscious, fell asleep*

Roisin's case illustrates how she struggled with the transition from primary to post-primary school and how the transition affected her physically and emotionally. During the first term her learning difficulty became more and more apparent and the school referred her to the NEPS service. This assessment should have taken place in primary school however when I spoke with the primary school principal about this she informed me that Roisin did receive resource hours but this was a school arrangement as Roisin had never been assessed. This form of non-specific resource allocation appears to be a common practice in primary and post-primary schools where there is a lack of specific targeted intervention as NEPS assessments are restricted and only a small cohort can be put forward for assessment each year. As a result, the DES has revised the current resource allocation model to 'provide a single unified allocation for special educational teaching needs to each school based on that school's educational profile' (DES Circular 0014/2017). There continues to be a need for a greater coordination of supports for pupils with SEN in order to ensure successful transition and inclusion in post-primary education. The transition from primary to post-primary is a difficult experience for many children but it poses greater problems for children who are deemed 'at risk' (Smyth, McCoy & Darmody, 2004, p. 283), this especially includes children with SEN.

Young people with an identified SEN often do not receive the supports they require in school. For example, Alex had a NEPS assessment in 3rd class in primary school that should have been reviewed when he reached 5th class and most definitely before his transition to post-primary school, however it was not and the post-primary school were never informed that Alex had been assessed until well into his first-year placement, when his behaviour began to deteriorate. We see this in the interview with the deputy principal:

Interviewer: *were there any issues with him in primary?*

Deputy Principal: *am, they informed us that there isn't but he….but we didn't know anything about him, we had no NEPS psychologist and on the enrolment form…..we have a form asking if there is any psychological report or issues and the box was ticked 'no', again when we were having issues with him, we contacted NEPS and we asked her to assess this boy cause we felt he was having issues and he was having difficulties with reading and writing in class and she said I have assessed this boy already!*

Foley et al. (2016) found that it was common that there was 'poor communication and inadequate flow of information between primary and post-primary' (p.20). Smyth et al. (2004) found that migrant pupils take longer to settle into a new school and have greater difficulties adjusting to transition, added to this was Alex's language difficulty which is referred to by his mother as being a difficulty in primary school. The deputy principal in his post-primary school stated that:

Deputy Principal: *I think Alex used to forget himself, forget where he was, I don't know does he understand what appropriate behaviour is……..I think language is a problem as well because they are Romanian.*

This supports Lynch and Lodge's (2004) research where they noted that language difficulties resulting from a 'lack of familiarity with English' present barriers to full participation in the education system (p.167). In addition the language used by the school in describing Alex was very negative and critical of his behaviours, Kitching (2014) outlined how teachers, when interviewed, defended the system by explaining how certain students because of their background or culture were incapable of success and hence are the cause of their own failure within the system (p.135).

In Gearoid and Adam's cases, both boys have a diagnosis of ADHD and both struggled with the transition from primary to post-primary. Gearoid's case however illustrates how supports such as SCP, HSCL and EWS working together can maintain the young person within the system coupled with the sharing of information between primary and post primary schools.

Interviewer: *with the transfer into yourselves, is there communication from that primary school in relation to their pupils?*

HSCL: *firstly you have your passport so all children have to have an educational passport now so the primary has to fill out a certain amount of details……so we have the details of their last strength transcript, general behavioural issues that might occur, and there's a small bit from the kid themselves about what they are afraid of going into secondary school and things like that. Gearoid came for School C and School C are great for passing on information. Our special needs coordinator here is great and she will go out to the schools and sit down with the class teacher and speak to them about the pupils that have enrolled here.*

When I questioned the HSCL coordinator about the supports deployed for Gearoid she informed me that he had *SCP and AP (Applied Provision Programme) and he is one of our priorities on our care team and our care team is made up of myself, SCP, AP, the SEN coordinator, the guidance counsellor and the deputy principal.* Here we see successful transitional planning where we have 'close cooperation between schools, parents and outside agencies' (Foley et al., 2016, p. 22)

This experience contrasts starkly with Adam's experience in his non-DEIS school, where his diagnosis of ADHD coupled with high levels of anxiety meant he needed a significant amount of support to aid his transition. However, there were no supports put in place apart from the efforts of the overburdened year head who informed me that *the only support Adam had was his brother in 6th year, I often think if he hadn't been in the school, Adam might have made other connections with the guidance counsellor or someone.* When I interviewed Adam about his experience he spoke very openly about his difficulty:

Adam: *I thought primary school was good but secondary school I just couldn't face going in at all, I don't know why like it was just when I went in, I thought I will go in now for the full day or whatever and then all of a sudden I would go into the class and I'd sit down and everything felt wrong, I just couldn't be in the room……*

Interviewer: *In primary school you never had those feelings?*

Adam: *no, no I thought primary was good, it might have been something to do with all of a sudden it was a bigger school, you know you went from being the oldest people in the school to the youngest and all of a sudden there's these massive people around you, do you know?*

Children making the transfer from primary to post-primary require significant support but pupils such as Adam require specific supports. The NEPS publication: Behavioural, Emotional and Social difficulties – A continuum of Support (2007) recommends a 'problem solving approach to understanding and developing interventions for pupils experiencing a range of learning and behavioural difficulties' (p.9) through establishing clear routines and expectations, visual timetables, behaviour charts and calming strategies that can all be done with NEPS support and the resource teachers in schools. There were options there for supporting Adam, however the school appeared to be unable to meet his needs as they were not equipped with the information they required to do so or perhaps the time to give to Adam to support his transition. Adam was not assessed in primary school and was described as 'having great ability but can be lazy' (from notes consulted during the interview by the year head). However, Adam failed to make the transfer between the primary and post-primary as he suffered from panic attacks and anxiety. When I interviewed the year head she described Adam on entry to first year:

Year head: *Adam would have presented initially as timid and a little anxious, am, you know he kind of stood out to me I suppose*

Interviewer*: from the beginning?*

Year head*: from the beginning*

In the interview with the EWO she informed me that Adam was referred to CAMHS for an assessment in April 2016, when he finally stopped attending school, and he didn't meet with CAMHS until March of 2017:

EWO: *CAMHS when they finally did see him, they never did make a diagnosis of anxiety and depression even though the doctor had, they said the presenting issues – they said he had ADHD, they also felt he needed a full NEPS assessment and they wrote to Adam's principal and asked for that to happen*

Interviewer*: did he have that?*

EWO*: no I don't think he ever did, because he wasn't in school and schools don't prioritize children who aren't in school for NEPS assessments*

Interviewer: *and there's nothing else there apart from ADHD from CAMHS point of view?*

EWO*: they did mention that in the letter that the key issues were bereavement and that he found the work very hard to cope with*

Adam never had a NEPS assessment in primary school, apparently he should have been assessed and this would have better equipped the post-primary school in making appropriate provision for Adam. When interviewed, his year head did indicate that she had always been concerned about him and that 'organization was a huge issue'. This is a principal indicator for ADHD but as Adam had no assessment and was perceived to have no learning difficulty, he transitioned to a post-primary school placement with no resources. The benefit of having the appropriate resources in place to meet these young people's needs means that their placements are more likely to be successful. As the principal of Anna's school stated during her interview:

Principal: *yes, the ones coming in to school with a diagnosis – their attendance is quite good*

Interviewer: *I suppose provision is made for them?*

Principal: *and we are aware of them, and we are minding them that little bit more*

Schools do offer resources to each of the young people in this research, resources such as SCP and HSCL support in DEIS schools, even giving one to one resource that is often meant for other children, this we see in Roisin's case, she received learning support in primary school for English and Maths, but yet she was never assessed:

> *We used to come out of our classroom and go down to the special ed. classroom and then come back to our classroom when we were ready* (Roisin)

> *She got as much learning support and resource as if she had resource hours because of the way we operate* (School Principal)

Children with special needs are considered to be the most vulnerable cohort within the school system and it is the school's responsibility in conjunction with their parents to ensure that whatever supports they are entitled to, are put in place to make their school placement more secure and tenable. Although some behavioural needs were identified at an early age, in the case of Gearoid it is his mother that obtained the required psychological assessment for her son. The school had identified when Gearoid was only four years old that his behavior was of concern:

Gearoid's mum: *am I kinda think since really early on the problem started at school, you know they picked up on him, he was going over to the nature table and he'd kill all the bugs and you know at home he was just…he's no fear like, no fear whatsoever*

Interviewer: *are there supports that you remember being offered in the primary school in the first instance?*

Gearoid's mum: *no, nothing, well he would have had an SNA that would have only been when I had him assessed*

Interviewer: *and you did that privately?*

Gearoid's mum: *I did, I had to do them all* (Gearoid's 2 siblings) *privately.*

This is the case of a parent with limited financial means who was forced to pay privately for the assessments for her children. All of these assessments indicated varying degrees of need and one of her children is now attending a special school as a result of the assessment findings which were conducted in the private field as opposed to the school system. Again this leads us to consider the capability of parents to navigate their way through a predominantly middle class system where they (the school) often speak a different language and parents lack the social capital 'to demand service at an appropriate level' (DiGiorgio, 2009, p. 183). Instead they are forced to seek services elsewhere as opposed to services they should be entitled to within the system, because, although costly, this is the easier option:

Interviewer: *and how do you fund those because those private assessments are very expensive?*

Gearoid's mum: *their children's allowance or I get a grant for Gearoid or his brother and if that happens to come in at the time*

Interviewer: *then you can get the assessment?*

Gearoid's mum: *I'm using it, I shouldn't be…...but I mean none of my children have ever went through the NEPS, it's been all private*

In Alex's case we see how his parents are exploited through their lack of knowledge of the Irish education system and their language difficulties. Smyth's (2016) study based on the

GUI data collected in 2007 from nine year-old children noted that 'young people from migrant backgrounds experienced greater difficulties than their Irish counterparts' in making the transition from primary to post-primary and the 'greatest transition difficulties were found 'in young people with special educational needs' (p.462). Alex's case illustrates how multiple complexities such as race, class, gender and SEN intersect to create an experience of marginality. Alex's parents were aware he received resource hours in primary school which they feel helped him but they were unaware that he would also need to be assessed to aid his transition to post-primary. The post-primary school continued to deficit Alex by focusing on his behavior rather that attempting to address his learning needs, on a number of occasions in the interview with the Deputy Principal 'culture' was mentioned as the reason behind Alex's poor interaction with his female peers. The Deputy Principal spoke about using 'restorative justice' and reduced time-tables but did nothing to address his fundamental learning needs, only when Alex was to be expelled did the school look for an up-to-date assessment on the advice of the EWO. This assessment diagnosed Alex with a mild general learning difficulty (NEPS assessment, 2017) and recommended that he attend a special school setting. Here is a case where inequalities such as race and disability affect the ability of those with SEN 'to convert the resources into capabilities to function' (Walker, 2005, p.106).

12.8 Inclusion or Exclusion?

In James' case it is evident during the interview with himself and his mum that he never felt included. Once he received a diagnosis an application was made to a school with an ASD unit. James' mum attributes this model as adding to James' difficulty in school as he was expected to attend in the mainstream class with access to the unit, 'the class were mixed ability…….and I thought they were going to put him in a smaller grouping'(mum). The social worker when interviewed also expressed her concern that the model of the unit 'did not suit James' presentation';

Social worker: *I mean each child is so individual, even though I can say I recognise that child, we have a lot of children that are out of school, they have mental health difficulties, I mean they have severe difficulties and that model won't meet those needs*

Interviewer: *the model of the units?*

Social worker: *the model of the units, because they are all being mainstreamed, the units have changed over time, a lot of children now…*

Int: *go in and out of the unit?*

Social worker: *yes and there is an expectation that they will go into mainstream classes and it can't work for some, it can for others but it just becomes overwhelming, all the different amounts of teachers, the amount of work and a lot of children.*

The unit can have a segregating effect on certain young people who are made to feel different or to have a deficit. The same can be said of special class settings, SNAs and attending resource classes, all of which make young people feel different and not included. James was a child who wanted 'to fit in', consequently this model of inclusion may have exacerbated his difficulties. Holt et al. (2012) consider the views of ASD students who attend a special unit within a mainstream secondary school in the UK. This research showed on one hand how the young people saw the unit 'as a site of acceptance of difference' which offered refuge from the mainstream where there was 'understanding about ASD' (p.2200). On the other hand the unit was perceived as allowing for different behaviours that were not evident in the rest of the school as 'it acted as a container for the abnormally behaving' (p.2200). Also noted in the research is the use of ASD on the door to the Unit, the D representing 'Disorder', this was a space where 'normal' children would never go, 'attending a school or education setting will be of little value if children do not feel welcome and are not able to fully participate in relevant and meaningful experiences' (Donnelly, 2010, p. 9).

Children with SEN are labelled as being different or not normal. Schools can be considered to be or act as 'normalising institutions' and in schools young people 'are subject to normalisation' (Holt, Lea & Bowlby, 2012, p.2193). Young people usually have the ability to regulate themselves in relation to those norms that are determined in certain social spaces (Foucault 1977), however for young people with SEN and in particular ASD this self-regulation is all the more difficult. In all of these cases there is evidence of how schools can enhance the gap between young people with special needs and young people without such difficulties. There is a 'constant division between the normal and abnormal' with those pupils considered to have SEN subjected to 'measuring, supervising and correcting' (Foucault, 2008, p.5). This is illustrated in this research through the assessments, individual programmes, withdrawal of pupils for academic supports, reduced timetables and the specialised Units. Dunne (2009) described attempts at inclusion as 'the process of othering'

(p.49) and noted the division 'between the majority and a minority that was presented as other, or as special' (p.49) evident in the use of the language of the educational professionals interviewed as part of her research. Once pupils are identified as having a special need they are 'subject to what might be regarded as a regime that involves observation, surveillance and examination' (Dunne, 2009, p.50).

Also of note is the practice of withdrawing young people from their classroom for additional learning support. Roisin was withdrawn on a regular basis for support in Maths and English, when asked if she had any issue with leaving the classroom she responded with 'I didn't mind'. Alex was also withdrawn in primary school for resource hours and had the assistance of an SNA:

Alex: *our teacher was very kind I liked her*

Interviewer: *you liked your teacher?*

Alex: *no, that was my helper teacher*

Interviewer*: the resource teacher?*

Alex: *the SNA*

Interviewer: *and was she nice?*

Alex: *yeah*

Interviewer: *what was your class teacher like?*

Alex: *our last year in 6th it was a woman, Ms X, she was in 6th, she was kind*

Alex's predominant memories of primary school are very positive, he appreciated the support of the SNA and his teachers and throughout the interview the word 'kind' is used on numerous occasions. Alex also spoke positively about the help he received from the school completion worker in his post-primary school:

Interviewer: *X the school completion worker, what does he do?*

Alex: *when I was in school, he looks through my homework, looks through my books, helps me get organised, tells me what to do in class, he tells me I'm good, kind.*

Here we can see how appreciative this young person is of the support of a key worker and although this could be difficult for some young people particularly at post-primary level, given the importance of peers at this age. It is evident in Alex's case, Roisin's case and also Gearoid' case how they all appreciate the support offered to aid their school experience. Gearoid was also referred to the School Completion Programme and had a key worker, the HSCL also ensured that each day Gearoid had help to organise his books and his bag, when asked if he thought the SCP had helped him, he responded: 'they keep me in school'. Norwich and Kelly's (2004) research shows that the majority of mainstream pupils 'preferred learning support in withdrawal settings, either as the main form of support or mixed with some in-class support' (p.61), in their view teachers need to listen to the voice of the child when implementing learning support programmes for children with SEN.

Norwich and Kelly's (2004) research is interesting as they noted how schools are not just places of formal learning but 'sites of normalisation' (p.2202) where children with special needs are defined in relation to normality' (Allan, 1996, p. 222). This illustrates the tension that exists for children with a significant special need like James, the dilemma of difference as described by Norwich (2007b) and Kerrins (2014); the mainstream classroom without adequate resources versus the special classes with supports, but then the child feels 'excluded and not accepted by other children' (Norwich, 2008, p.138). In the interview with James' mum she describes his move to the ASD unit in the mainstream school:

> *I thought they were going to put him in a smaller grouping and what happened was that they put him in the ASD unit – James was kinda looking around saying 'I don't really fit in with them' and then he was in the class and he didn't fit in there either* (James' mum)

This leads us to consider Foucault's reference to 'ideal notions of integration' where children with SEN and 'ordinary children' share spaces (Allan, 1996, p.224). Children with special needs are often defined by their needs and this 'deficit model attributes difficulties to within child factors' as opposed to a 'curriculum model' which would 'examine features outside the child' (Allan, 1996, p.226). The aim of inclusion should be to increase participation of children in mainstream and to remove barriers to their participation (Allan, 2012, p.110).

Inclusion should mean that young people have the right to be educated at a level that meets their needs, the current system allows for the assessment of young people from a pre-school age however not all young people will receive the assessment they may be entitled to, as is

evident from a number of the cases in this research. What we can see is the negative effect of the lack of appropriate identification of SEN in these cases, and the consequent lack of an appropriate curriculum, which then led to early school leaving, threatened exclusion and young people suffering an inappropriate, inaccessible curriculum. When examining dilemmas of placement it is clear from this research that to identify learning needs early can make a significant difference to a young person's education and life. Also, what we think of as the negative connotations of difference for young people needs to change to a positive perspective of difference where there is 'a recognition of individuality, individual needs and interests' (Norwich, 2002, p. 496).

The present system appears to reinforce exclusionary practices not just by 'its focus on difference' (Kerins, 2014, p.49) but by its lack of focus, its indifference at its responsibility to the children and young people in its care, which is illustrated through the absenteeism and school refusal of these young people. We cannot say they decided to opt out of school, nor can we say they made a choice, this decision was made for them through the lack of an appropriate educational provision to meet their individual needs.

The National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) now under the NCSE promotes a 3 level model of practice which seeks to address students' social, emotional, academic and behavioural needs at three levels: school wide at level 1, targeted intervention for some students at level 2 and intensive individualised support at level 3. This model of support is drawn from Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) by Sugai and Horner (2002) and Response to Intervention (RTI) by Fuchs and Fuchs (2006). Hopefully this behaviour support model and current proposals by the NCSE (2019) such as the Canadian New Brunswick Model which would see each school having its own multidisciplinary support team are a step in the right direction towards full and meaningful inclusion to ensure the barriers that exist within special education structures are addressed. Inclusion should not just be about, normalisation, constant surveillance and judgement and as Walker (2005) states:

> *we cannot assume that schooling necessarily enhances a child's capabilities; indeed, it may even diminish or restrict them where some social and learner identities are valued and others are not* (p.108).

12.9 Conclusion

This section focused on the impact of SEN on school attendance and participation. It examined concepts such as surveillance and inclusion and concludes that schools can be difficult places to be for young people who have SEN. Factors such as peer relations greatly impact on a young person's level of disengagement with school as does access to an appropriate curriculum. The discourse of inclusion is often misleading and although well meaning often times leads to alienation and frustration. We see how issues such as bullying can have a profound affect on a young person as in James'case and how as a result of a very late diagnosis James attended a mainstram primary school where he was subjected to significant episodes of bullying that were unaddressed by his school. We see in Alex's case how the school focused on his cultural difference and how the undercurrent of institutional racism can exist in schools and in effect how young people can constantly be made aware of their differences to the 'norm' and can then be subjected to increased, perpetual surveillance.

The next chapter focuses specifically on the Education Welfare Officer and their role in ensuring an education provision for the young people central to this research.

13.0 The Role of the Education Welfare Officer in Ireland

13.1 Introduction

The case studies in this research illustrate families' varying involvement with the Education Welfare Service (EWS). In the majority of these cases we see the preference of the EWO to adopt a 'welfare' orientated approach, which is the way the service appears to have evolved over the last 17 years, this is similar to Education Welfare Services in the UK where the EWO is involved in a number of areas of families lives in order to improve and maintain school attendance (Reid, 2008). In this chapter the complex dilemma of welfare versus prosecution emerges through the data collected from the interviews and the focus group, from this data there are a number of emerging themes which include:

- The EWO as advocate
- Tension within the role
- Surveillance and the EWO as prosecutor.

What has emerged through this research is the subjectivity involved within the interactions, where the EWO and family and school intersect is a complex world of tension and conflict. As the EWO works with the family, a relationship develops and from this emerges a 'professional issue – the use of legal intervention against the client's wishes' (Galloway et al., 1981, p.446). This is a prevalent issue within the sphere of social work but it is also becoming more evident in the work of the EWO. This research seeks to explore the complex relationships that emerge within the interactions of the EWO with families and agencies and schools, to look at why in most cases the EWO does not take a prosecution and also to explore the influence and extent of power relations between the parties involved.

13.2 The tensions within the role of EWO

Role Ambiguity:

The role of the EWO has never been clearly defined and consequently, it is both conflicted and ambiguous. Role ambiguity refers to a situation where the role is unclear and role conflict is evident when 'an individual is sent messages to fulfil two or more roles that are incompatible or in conflict with each other (Jones, 1993, p.136). When EWOs were

interviewed as part of a focus group for this research this conflict and ambiguity was evident as were the resulting tensions within the role. These tensions were evident in the interactions of the EWO with schools, parents and agencies and to a certain extent were exacerbated by the EWOs perceptions of their management's expectations of their role. Each one of the EWOs shared the same understanding of their ultimate goal, 'that children are supported to stay in school', and that 'every child receives an education' (EWO Focus Group), however these views were not always shared by other parties in the relationship, leading to the tension and conflict:

> *I think there is a bit of tension between us and schools, there can be, because you have to work with schools, you have to tell them when they are not following procedure.*
>
> *I think there is a huge disconnect between what we do on the ground and how management perceive how we should do our work, I think they are far too detached.* (Extracts from Focus Group Interviews)

Relationship building is a key element of the work of the EWO, this is apparent in the case studies, however these relationships are influenced by the expectations that accompany the role of the EWO and this influences the EWOs relationships with the school. EWOs in the focus group identified their relationships with schools as causing a significant amount of tension, largely this was the result of the EWO in some instances having reason to 'tell the school something they didn't want to hear'. In some instances this involved informing the school when they hadn't followed procedures or when they had no grounds to refuse enrolment to a young person.

13.3 The EWO as Advocate

The EWO acts as advocate for the young person in seeking a new school placement, we see how the EWO perceives the school as not wanting the child and the EWOs exertion of their power over the school so that they will reverse their decision. Here the conflict arises as the school sees that they are protecting their existing cohort of pupils and ensuring the continued control over the present body of pupils. 'Schools act strategically' to avoid these pupils, pupils with 'special needs, behavioural difficulties, unsupportive parents' whose 'behaviour or character is seen as detrimental to learning' (Ball, 2013, p. 109). Yet the schools in each of these case studies have very similar mission statements, stating how they aim to promote

the ‘holistic development of students’ in a ‘caring and inclusive environment’, where each student is ‘accepted unconditionally’ and how they are ‘cherished as individuals’, here there is a tension between the inclusive rhetoric and the reality faced by the young people in this research and this is witnessed by one EWO who commented how in one of his cases, he encountered such tension:

> *I’m dealing with a young child at the moment who is only 10 and his brother 11, they have both been expelled, now they deserve a chance somewhere else, but no school is prepared to take them, the child deserves that opportunity but that’s where we have conflict, they are saying they are protecting what they have, we are saying there is a child here who deserves an education.*

This conflict emerges as a result of the roles that each party has to play in the scenario – the school as regulator, maintaining the status quo for their students and the EWO as the advocate for the child who has not conformed to the expectation of the system previously and therefore is a perceived threat to the controlled, regulated environment of the school.

There was acknowledgement from the EWOs that some schools do great work with young people, they go ‘over and above’, there was acknowledgement of the fact that often teachers, particularly at post-primary level are unaware of events in a young person’s life that may impact on their attendance or behaviour as the principal may be the only one aware of these factors, one EWO described teachers as:

> *middle class people usually, they have all had a certain training in the colleges, they are all bright but sometimes they don’t know.*

This reflects the cultural differences between some teachers and their pupils and the lack of understanding of what is outside their ‘norm’ and the disparity that exists between the ‘institutional habitus’ and the ‘individual habitus’ (Reay, 2004, Darmody et al., 2008, p.370), one EWO described how he met a parent of a child who had ‘missed 30 odd days because she has no uniform pants to go to school’, there appears to be a disconnect here between the world of home and school.

In addition to the tension experienced by the EWO with certain schools, there was a clear tension evident between the capacity of the EWO to do their work and the expectations of management within the EWS, the EWOs felt that senior management have never clearly

defined their expectations around the 'welfare' approach as a number of EWOs stated in the focus group interview:

> *Welfare is very nebulous, we don't know where we start or where we finish,*
>
> *The work can't be done the way it should be done because of the number of referrals coming in and the fact that there are not enough staff on the ground*
>
> *I think there is a huge disconnect between what we do on the ground and how management perceive how we should do our work*

Here the group were speaking about the merits of their case management system and how in theory this is a good way to work, but because of the lack of clarity around the welfare element of the work and the lack of staffing on the ground they believed it to be very unrealistic, they also felt that if something were to go wrong, this would result in a move away from the expectation of a welfare approach to questioning the EWO around the procedures they adopted, the meetings they attended and perhaps questioning why they had not moved to the court process sooner:

> *If something goes wrong, did you follow procedures? Did you have the meeting? We don't have time to do those things, I would love to work that way but you can't with the caseloads.*

The expectations of the EWO's role in the area of welfare has never clearly been defined by the legislation or by the statutory EWS , the EWOs spoke about other services that work with vulnerable young people and their families who they feel have clearly defined roles. Because of this lack of clarity, the role of EWO has emerged over time and has become a role of tension between that of advocate for the child and that of an agent of social control.

13.4 The role of the EWO in the case studies

The following analysis will illustrate the extent and nature of the involvement by the statutory Education Welfare Service in the lives of families in Ireland today. On analysis of the data generated by the interviews with parents and young people, there was clear evidence of the dual role of the EWO; that of advocate and that of prosecutor and sometimes the lines between the two were quite blurred. The EWO clearly felt more comfortable in the role of advocate and within that role we can see the EWO as both an advisor and a negotiator. There

appeared to be a reluctance on the part of EWOs generally to be the prosecutor, this is not really surprising when we see the backgrounds of the EWOs prior to being employed by the EWS. In the cases identified for this research, three EWOs came from a Social Care background, one from Community Welfare, one from teaching and one from the original school attendance service. This reluctance to prosecute families is consistent with research conducted by Waddington (1997) on the School Attendance Service in the UK, where he comments on how some EWOs he interviewed were 'strongly opposed to the implementation of legal proceedings as part of EWO casework' (p.339).

The following extracts illustrate why initially EWOs were drawn to the position:

> *I suppose what attracted me to the profession is that I like working with people and I enjoy that, I suppose my work before led me to this, it was in residential child care and I suppose there in the care setting in particular I took a particular interest in education because I could see that children were failing miserably in school, before they ever came into care, they had a very negative experience of school, maybe chronic absenteeism.…..* (EWO Gearoid)

> *I suppose the good things about the job are that you are there in the fore front of assisting and helping both parents and young people and people in school in relation to difficulties they may be having in terms of their education. I suppose it's nice to be able to make a difference when you are working with young people and their parents as well. When you are trying to find solutions because often times young people don't fit in the box, in terms of schooling…..* (EWO Darragh)

These two extracts illustrate the EWO's passion for working with vulnerable young people and their families, they also illustrate the difficulties experienced by young people in the school system, the fact that children are 'failing miserably in school' that school is a 'negative experience' and that in fact school can be 'damaging' (Frances, and Mills,. 2012, p. 254) with its 'systems of distinction, discipline and surveillance' (p.258). The language used in the second extract is also interesting, the use of the word 'box' to describe the school setting conjures up a sense of confinement and perhaps how the EWO perceives their role to be that of solution finding. There is an expectation that young people need to conform to the school setting, its rules and regulations, where they have little or no sense of inclusion, where 'there is no internalised conception of belongingness' (Finn, 1989, p. 123), as these young people fail to conform to the 'box':

> *This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised* (Foucault, 2008, p.3).

13.5 Surveillance

The above extract from Foucault describes that sense of confinement and surveillance that is the reality of school life for some young people, particularly those young people referred to the EWS. Surveillance is an intrinsic part of the role of the statutory EWS. The role is to monitor school attendance as per the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 and to ensure that 'the parent of a child shall cause the child concerned to attend a recognised school on each school day' (Section 17(1) Education (Welfare Act 2000). To ensure school attendance, the EWO has the authority under this legislation to take a case against the parent, which carries a conviction and either a fine and/or a prison sentence. Once cases are brought before the court, the surveillance continues as they are adjourned and monitored by the courts over a lengthy period of time. Equally schools can feel they are under surveillance from the Service as there is accountability required around their policies and procedures.

When the EWOs were interviewed about the qualities needed for this type of work, one EWO gave the following response:

> *Mediation, conflict management, that you would need to be confident at that and I suppose you need to be a caring person, you need to like people, you need to be good at communicating with people, good communication skills and open to people not too sensitive! You won't do this job if you are very sensitive, you need to know when people are having an off day, not to take it personally. It's about school or education so you have to keep your relationship open with schools, other professionals and young people at all times and that can become a challenge* (EWO Gearoid).

The above quote makes reference to the resourcing issue affecting all services and how schools are often equally under resourced. This point is echoed in recent research (Finning et al., 2018) where educational practitioners were interviewed and asked to identify the main issues that contributed to school attendance difficulties, they outlined how inadequate resources was a principal issue.

There is also a lot of focus in this extract on personality and communication skills, and also the importance of good relationships with schools and families, we also see this in the following extract; the importance of the positive interaction with families:

> *I think you need a certain amount of empathy as you have to know where people are coming from, I suppose to a certain extent the families and the schools are oversubscribed services as well and to a certain extent you need a bit of a thick skin, courage is too strong a word but sometimes you have to say something that is going to upset a parent or a school in the interests of the child, their education welfare, all welfare* (EWO Adam).

This extract illustrates the emphasis on being the advocate for the young person but there is a balance needed to challenge families or schools so that they can achieve the best outcomes for the young people referred to the service:

> *I think you need to be innovative and you need to be flexible because it's welfare so you have to look at all possibilities and I think that's actually one of the big ones, you do need to be innovative and I think you need a certain level of confidence in being an advocate for a child because sometimes you will have to work with agencies that may not necessarily like hearing what you have to say and at the same time you have to be able to motivate them to become engaged* (EWO Roisin).

When the EWOs were asked what they found most difficult about their work, their responses further emphasised the issue of resourcing:

> *I suppose the lack of resources in our service and also in schools (EWO Darragh)*

> *There are major complexities, there's rarely a fast fix. I suppose I know from my own colleagues the main difficulty is waiting for other services to come in to help the child progress in their education (EWO Gearoid)*

> *You can identify the problems but you can't necessarily address them because of the system itself and because of access to resources or because of access to funding (EWO Roisin)*

Getting resources for children particularly with special needs, finding suitable school places for them, making sure the child has the right resources for them, some schools can divert resources to other children (EWO Alex).

I suppose what I find frustrating is with a lot of cases we are often waiting for another service to see somebody make an assessment, it could be NEPS or CAMHS, often we can't do anything because we are waiting for another service and that's very frustrating (EWO Adam).

The frustration of waiting lists and getting things done or not being able to get things done because children are on waiting lists (EWO James).

I think if you had the time to genuinely listen to the voice of the child, I think cases would change significantly, but time and resources militate against that (EWO Roisin).

These interview extracts demonstrate the level of frustration experienced by the EWOs with the lack of adequate resources across the services provided for young people. There are significant waiting lists for mental health services and these EWOs feel their work is affected by inadequate service provision and long waiting lists.

The issue of appropriate school placements for children with SEN is also a significant issue that has emerged within this research and is discussed in the chapter on SEN, also issues with school transition from primary to post primary, poor communication between school and home and the impact of late diagnoses of SEN. These issues coupled with insufficent resources for young people with SEN have contributed to poor school attendance. In addition, there are an increasing number of young people who are experiencing mental health difficulties leading to complex cases of school refusal and anxiety. Resource provision for young people particularly in the area of mental health and SEN is inadequate resulting in little change in these young people's lives consequently allowing the system 'to maintain the pre-existing order' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 20). These cases consequently are very complex in nature and require a well-resourced multi-agency response to address the overall needs of these children and young people. Often these young people disengage from the system and look to alternative educational provision, during the focus group when the EWOs discussed young people moving to alternative sites of education, it is worth noting that one EWO spoke about a Youthreach facility where the young people should be over 16 to be in attendance,

of the 22 pupils, they had 10 young people who were 15 years old. In the absence of access to necessary resources the EWO is often the only advocate for the young person with families, schools and other agencies and often the only option available to these young people is an alternative educational provision.

13.6 The Advocate Continued……

The term advocate is commonly used to define a person who represents another person's interests. The word actually originates from use in the courts and comes from the Latin word advocare to 'add' voice. In the case studies in this research the EWO is an advocate for young people and their families – those who are the most vulnerable and who experience social and cultural issues, poverty, anxiety and associated mental health difficulties, SEN and inappropriate or mismanaged school placements. The EWO in many cases is the only advocate for these young people and in the case studies at the centre of this research we can see that the role of the EWO is that of negotiator and advisor for parents, schools and agencies which conflicts with the EWO's role as prosecutor. With the role of advocate comes 'the possibility of resistance' (Dalrymple, 2003, p.1044). Foucault's notion of resistance is also relevant and where there are power relations there can be the possibility of resistance (Foucault 1988). The role of the advocate then is to help the young people find their voice, their agency within their situation where they are meeting resistance, so that they are allowed to negotiate these power relations within an adult world where as children they are often considered powerless, the role of advocate is essential to allow them a voice. Very often the young person has no representation in the world of the school, as one EWO commented:

> *I think sometimes to get to the children we have to work with the parents, but I think our goal should always be the children and them coming to school and being in school and achieving their potential.*

Very often the world of school is not prepared to move to accomodate the world of the young person, post-primary pupils when interviewed were more likely to attribute school absenteeism to school related factors as opposed to home life (Malcolm et al., 1996).

13.7 Advocacy enacted - Darragh and Gearoid

Both of these case studies illustrate how the EWO advocated to keep both young people in school. Both Darragh and Gearoid had attendance issues and both had behavioural difficulties which in Darragh's case meant his school placement was at risk. Darragh was first referred to the statutory EWS in 2012 in 6th class of primary school for a combination of unexplained absences and suspensions, however at the time of the referral his father had died tragically. When asked how the referral was handled the EWO responded:

> *I took a step back but what I did was advise the school on what to do in relation to Darragh and the services needed……..I suppose in our job we have to make decisions, we have to prioritize and at that time there were other services that needed to be involved.*

Here we see how the family circumstances at the time of the referral were taken into consideration, and how decisions were made to bring in or consult with other services that could better assist Darragh at this time. However, when Darragh returned to school, the EWO was again contacted by the school as it was Darragh's mother's wish to home educate her son:

> EWO Darragh: *I stepped in and said I didn't think it was a good idea, so we decided to have a meeting in the school with mum and Darragh and we devised an Education Welfare Plan to try and see out his final month in the primary school.*
>
> Interviewer*: so what were the key components of the plan?*
>
> EWO Darragh*: Darragh was to come to school every day on time, time was big thing and would have been an issue at the time, we spoke about behaviour and the homework was another issue that Darragh wasn't completing his homework……the behaviours were beginning to escalate towards the end of the school day so we shortened his school day so he would finish at 2pm and mum would have to come to school and collect him.*

The work of the EWO in this case could have and perhaps should have been conducted by a staff member in the school as it really involved identifying the trigger points for Darragh and

looked at ways to respond and avoid these triggers. Power plays an interesting role here in the dynamic between the EWO and the school as the school complies with the plan really as a result of the EWO being involved rather than for the good of the young person. This is evident from the quote below from the school principal where he indicates that he couldn't 'put him (Darragh) out when the Welfare Service were trying to keep him in', this is where we see the 'intensification and deepening of social control' (Leask, 2012, p.58).

The EWO spoke in her interview about how Darragh did complete 6th class and how he successfully moved into post-primary the following September, the EWO attributed his successful transition to the preparatory work done with the school:

> *I think he felt he was not treated as a child, he didn't have the persona of being the troublemaker in the school.*

However, the following year Darragh was again referred to the Service for behavioural difficulties, suspensions and 19 days absence. Eventually it was clear that the school were now prepared to expel Darragh, the EWO met with the school and negotiated a modified reduced time-table, allowing Darragh to sit 5 subjects for his Junior Certificate exam. However the principal viewed this negotiated curriculum reduction in an interesting way:

> *The EWO got involved and negotiated a reduced time-table for him and it became more supportive as we were previously saying you are going out. Look call a spade a spade, we couldn't put him out when the Welfare Service were trying to keep him in.*

In this extract we see evidence of the use of surveillance and control, 'there is a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 2008, p.6). The reduced curriculum is seen as a way of appeasing the EWO by the school, however it is clear that they wanted Darragh out of their school. This case illustrates the role of EWO as negotiator and also the power held by the Service with certain schools, the language used by the principal clearly indicates that they didn't want Darragh, he was 'going out' but once the EWO was involved the school felt they had to be 'more supportive' something that perhaps should have been their role regardless of the involvement of the EWO. As Darragh's position in the school became more unstable in 3rd year, Darragh's mother withdrew Darragh to home educate him to avoid the expulsion, the EWO again became involved and negotiated involvement from the school as part of the home education

process as they would have had concerns around Darragh's mother's ability to home educate her son. As a result, the HSCL agreed to regularly visit the house and actually worked with Darragh on subjects for his Junior Certificate. When the principal was questioned about the role of the EWO in this case he responded:

> *The bottom line, if the EWS hadn't been involved, hadn't reduced his time-table and given him every effort, if they hadn't allowed him to be home educated there is no doubt the BOM would have moved to put him out.*

Again the language in this extract is interesting, the EWO is charged with the responsibility for Darragh, as the school appear to believe that they have no responsibility for Darragh in this case other than ensuring his exclusion. This case illustrates the role of the EWO as advocate for Darragh, as a negotiator and advisor to all parties despite the varying power dynamics. The school plays the part of the regulator of normative standards who has no solutions without the 'guidance' of the EWO – guidance that is clearly seen as being enforced by the authority of the position. The parent in this case is subjected to the power of the school, the fear of her son being expelled that forces her into a situation where she has to home educate her child as opposed to him being expelled from school. The imbalance of power here is exacerbated by this parent's capital or her difficulty in 'activating' this capital (Lareau, 1999, p. 39) with the 'dominant social group' (Bourdieu, 1989). The parent in this case is placed in an effectively impossible position. This is indeed a very uneven 'playing field' where the very vulnerable find themselves in relationships where there is a clear imbalance of power:

> *She (EWO) was very understanding and very good she said I wouldn't be prosecuted because of the circumstances* (Darragh's mum).

The above quote from Darragh's mother about her feelings towards the EWO is an interesting example of that power element that exists within the relationship between the EWO and the parents – influenced by the possibility of being prosecuted. There is evidence of a clear conflict in the role of the EWO, where court is 'threatened' but support is offered, this is evident in Gearoid's case where the EWO made it clear from the initial meetings with the parent that she could be prosecuted for Gearoid's poor school attendance:

> *I would have met with (EWO) a few times, it did get to the stage where she was saying, you are looking at court like, you know.*

In all relationships there are power dynamics at work but in this relationship there is a clear power imbalance where the parent is very aware of the role of the EWO and 'their disciplinary mechanism' (Foucault, 2008, p.5) and how the family are continuously subject to the gaze of the state, something of which they are always aware.

Gearoid began school refusing in 5th class and was initially referred to the EWS by the primary school:

> *When the Welfare Officer got involved it really was as a support rather than anything and mum needed that support (Principal Primary School).*

The Principal outlined in the interview the level of support provided by the EWO:

> *We had reward charts and the EWO met with Gearoid and pointed this out – you're big enough, old enough, this is your responsibility, you have to come to school and he did, he took on board what she was saying and she praised him when he did come, it was in short spells, like if you keep coming I will be back on the 18th and if you keep coming to school every day between then and now, there will be a reward, it might only have been a certificate but it was a reward.*

The regular meeting with the EWO worked to improve Gearoid's attendance and illustrates how effective praise and rewards are with younger children. One does have to question the sustainability of such reward mechanisms long-term and their overall impact on continued school attendance. Gearoid did successfully transition to post-primary school initially as Darragh had done and the EWO in Gearoid's case continued to meet him regularly to monitor his attendance with the assistance of the care team within the school – this team consisted of the HSCL, the SCP worker and the EWO:

> Interviewer: *In your opinion, the involvement of the EWO – did it make a difference to attendance in this case?*
>
> SCP Worker/Coordinator*: Yeah 100% in Gearoid's case*
>
> Interviewer: *Why do you think that?*
>
> SCP: *again it goes back to the relationship, like (EWO) has a very good relationship with Gearoid's mum and Gearoid's mum trusts the EWO.*

This case illustrates how the EWO advocates for Gearoid and ensures his improved attendance at school in addition to his successful transition from primary to post-primary. Much of this is dependent on the relationships established between the parent and the EWO and between the young person and the EWO and also between the young person and their parent. There is a sense that Gearoid does not want to get his mother into trouble, this we can see during his interview:

> Gearoid: *well it was kind of, she said my mam might go to court*
>
> Interviewer: *when you were told your mam might have to go to court how did that make you feel?*
>
> Gearoid: Pause
>
> Interviewer: *did it upset you?*
>
> Gearoid: *no, I just went in to school so my mam wouldn't have to go to court*.

The role of the EWO in this case is significant, the school view the EWO as a support but view that support as having an underlying threat, that if the attendance doesn't improve, there will be consequences. The young person in this case liked the EWO and liked meeting the EWO on a regular basis; *she was sound like, she was funny* however he was also very aware of the consequences of his non-attendance for his mother and in this case Gearoid had a very close relationship with his mother which is an important factor. In Gearoid's case the EWO is his advocate with the school and they ensured Gearoid received the resources he required to ensure that successful transition to post-primary school. The school staff appreciated the role of the EWO as an advocate but fundamentally they viewed the Service as a way to threaten parents to ensure improved attendance:

> *It does add that extra bit of punch for me in terms of saying that they need to be here, (EWO) can take you to court and she can have you prosecuted for not having your son or daughter at school* (HSCL Gearoid).

Research indicates that often schools look to outside agencies and services to deal with issues relating to poor school attendance, when in fact they need to consider the 'potential role of school factors in attendance problems and not underestimate the influence of factors that may be under their control' (Finning et al., 2018, p.224).

13.8 Alternative Pathways - Adam and Anna

Both Adam and Anna's cases reflect the supportive role of the EWS in cases of non-attendance particularly in the area of mental health. Both of these young people withdrew from school because of anxiety and both were assisted by EWOs with the provision of an alternative education programme. In the interview with the EWO in Adam's case, she outlined how on receipt of the referral it was apparent that Adam needed other interventions to be put in place for him prior to return to school. When the EWO was asked about the Education Welfare Plan for Adam they outlined:

> *The elements of the plan were about chasing everyone else up, he was referred in April 2016 to CAMHS but didn't see CAMHS til March 2017, so what I managed to do was get the GP to fill in the form and got CAMHS to write a letter that he was on their waiting list and they (DES) accepted that and gave him a few weeks of home tuition.*

This case illlustrates how a young person is unable to access vital mental health services in a timely fashion, when CAMHS eventually did see Adam, they identified that he could return to school with supports, however Adam was unable to return to school and his home tuition was stopped:

> *CAMHS made the diagnosis of ADHD, the home tuition was stopped on the grounds that it said schools were equipped to deal with people with ADHD, therefore he wouldn't qualify for the home tuition but he still wouldn't go back to school, so (EWO) said look I got this thing in my head, I was thinking about it, I don't know if it will work or not – IScoil online, what do you think? I said to me it sounds great* (Adam's dad).

The EWO in this case worked with the family to identify a suitable educational provision for Adam. What is worthy of consideration here is how Adam's father has no real knowledge of the alternative educational programme offered but readily agrees for his son to partake as he is aware that he 'should be' in receipt of an education, this raises the question are decisions being made as a result of the underlying power imbalance? Professionals need to always be mindful of situations where they could be 'defending their own interests' or the interests of the organisation (Dalrymple, 2003, p. 1052), as opposed to empowering others. Undoubtedly throughout the interview Adam's father was very positive towards the work of the EWS in

his son's case; *probably without her help, he wouldn't be where he is at the moment.* It is essential that professionals acting as the advocate are aware of the danger of disempowering others by not taking into account their client's views and their ability to access resources themselves.

The EWO in Anna's case became involved as Anna had stopped attending school as a result of an incident in school, Anna was subsequently referred to the EWS by the principal and then the EWO met with the family and Anna:

> *I suppose I engaged with them in a supportive role for a period of time and then I supported them with assessments and completing forms for home tuition* (EWO Anna).

The EWO also linked Anna in with a neighbourhood youth project but when that did not work, the EWO again met with Anna and with the help of *small, clear targets, unrelated to school* built a good relationship with Anna. In the interview with the school principal she refers to this relationship: *It was in this case where she (Anna) very much saw the EWO as a friend and a mentor*.

Anna's parents also spoke very positively about the relationship between the EWO and Anna:

Anna's mum: *Anna gelled with (EWO), and the EWO explained everything in a child friendly way when she visited the second time.*

Anna's dad: *there was a bond there between the EWO and Anna. The EWO put our minds at rest, she had a fantastic, brilliant way.*

This contrasts sharply with Anna's dad's initial view of the Education Welfare Service:

> *Initially we used to threaten Anna that she had to go to school or the EWO would come to the house and that we would end up in prison. There was nothing we could do, the process was all new to us. We didn't know what the EWO did, we did see the newspapers and we saw they take you to court – it's a very negative image.*

The language used by Anna's dad in this extract conveys the image of the EWS as the social controller with 'a range of processes, techniques and technologies designed to ensure a

regularised efficient and docile social whole' (Leask, 2012, p. 58). However, in this case we see the opposite as the EWO worked with the child to ascertain the most appropriate supports and provision that ensured Anna's eventual return to school.

13.9 Advocates for Inclusion - Alex and James

Both of these cases illustrate how despite the intervention of the EWS these young people remained out of school. Both cases demonstrate the lack of support given by the referring schools and also the vulnerability of parents, particularly parents whose children have SEN. Alex was referred to the EWS by the school as:

> *he was causing an awful lot of trouble, he was intimidating girls in his class and his behaviour was not acceptable* (EWO Alex).

As a result of Alex's behavioural issues the EWS was informed of his suspension:

> *The principal proceeded to tell me that she was having a BOM and she wanted to suspend him again, I explained you should only be suspended once for any misdemeanour so it became obvious that this was personal as well, but in fairness the principal listened to me and didn't go for the second suspension* (EWO Alex)

This extract illustrates the negotiation role adopted by the EWO as the advocate for the young person, however as Alex's behaviour deteriorated, the EWO intervened and negotiated a shorter timetable which worked for a while, when the EWO attempted to increase this timetable on the request of Alex's parents, however they were met with resistance:

> *At our meeting the parents made it clear that they wanted him in school for a full day. I asked the school would they consider that, they left the room, came back and said no they wouldn't, it was two hours and that was it* (EWO Alex).

It is clear from this extract that the school were very unhappy with the level of resistance shown by the parents and here they exert their power when they refuse to negotiate an increase in Alex's time-table. Alex's behaviour is seen by the school as a threat and consequently the school respond to this by insisting on his expulsion. During the interviews with the parents and Alex it became clear that they did not fully understand the role of the EWS or the EWO, this was no doubt exacerbated by a substantial language difficulty as

English was not the family's first language. When asked through the interpreter if they understood what the role of the EWO is, Alex's dad responded: *we never been properly informed over this so that would be great.* This is of significance as it never occurred to the EWO that this family may not be aware of the role, however Alex when interviewed had a clearer idea:

Interviewer: *Do you remember when you first met the EWO?*

Alex: *yeah*

Interviewer: *And did you know what her job was?*

Alex: *first I didn't*

Interviewer: *and do you know what her job is now?*

Alex: *no*

Interviewer: *what do you think it is?*

Alex: *to help kids not be out of school and get them in to school*

This case illustrates the complicated relationship between cultural factors, language and literacy difficulties and how the school does not consider any of these factors within its interaction with Alex or his family, there is very little evidence of inclusion in this case. Research conducted by Biggart et al. (2013) illustrated 'how minority ethnic children who lack a sense of belonging are likely to lack sufficient social capital to fully exploit their educational achievements' (p. 191). This case illustrates how the role of the EWO can be unclear to parents and that in some instances professionals making decisions such as these need to involve parents earlier and ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of the role. In addition, reduced days or a reduced curriculum appears to be an ineffective mechanism for improving school attendance long term, in fact it appears to lead to disengagement from peers and education and to eventual exclusion as we see in Alex's case.

James' case illustrates how the impact of professionals making decisions for vulnerable families can sometimes have a negative effect, particularly from the interview with the ASD services social worker, where she notes:

> *My biggest regret for James is that we pursued school because he would have got home tuition earlier……there is an expectation that they (children diagnosed with ASD) will go into mainstream classes and it can't work for some, it can for others but it just becomes overwhelming all the different amounts of teachers, the amount of work and a lot of children.*

This demonstrates the impact of attempted inclusion, the way the system or the school act as 'sites of normalisation' which means that in James' case there is the 'process of othering' (Dunne, 2009, p.49) through the offer of the Unit and the increased level of surveillance from the school through a modified timetable. In addition, there is increased 'surveillance' from the ASD services, the Child Protection Department and the EWS all of which combine to lead James to opt out. The social worker and EWO were part of core group that emerged from a Child Protection Conference that was held by the Social Work Department around concerns for the family. The role of the group was to assist James to return to school. The EWO as part of the group referred James to the ISPCC mentoring project and subsequently James was appointed a mentor. The EWO also wrote to the DES outlining the work of the core group and the need at this point for home tuition for James:

> *I outlined in the letter that there had been a core group, we had worked for three years, that we had done every intervention under the sun that we could possibly try and work with this boy and nothing had worked and now he is sitting his Junior Cert. and he has been school refusing since November.*

The EWO has to 'justify' the need for an alternative learning provision for James as he was unable to cope with the existing provision. There is evidence of 'the negative connotations that are attributed to difference, where there needs to be a 'positive perspective' (Norwich, 2002, p.496). The blame is attributed to James as he is seen as the one that is not fitting in and he is the 'school refuser'.

Home tuition was finally granted to James for the remaining months of third year. We see in James' case how the EWO worked with a number of agencies to obtain an educational provision for James. A lot of this work involved negotiation with the school, which did lead to a delay in James accessing education, the 'one size fits all' did not work in James' case and the lack of resources did have a significant impact on his education. James was on a waiting list for ASD services for over two years and when a school place was eventually sourced to respond to his very late ASD diagnosis, this school place was at a considerable

distance from his home. Despite the clear inadequacies of the system James' mother was largely positive about the involvement of the EWS:

> *I suppose they have a job to do and they are helpful if you work with them, they are in your best interests, they are not there for the fun of it, they listen to you. They do listen to you and they do try and work with you like. Obviously they do say this is going to have to happen, I suppose like they did say to me there would be no such thing as court with James because this is a thing they feel they don't take to court anyway.*

This is a very interesting extract where James' mum is positive about the intervention on the one hand but very aware of the legal element of the work of the EWS, there is a sense that perhaps James' mum did not necessarily appreciate the EWS interference and perhaps felt she needed to cooperate with the service because of the ultimate threat of legal proceedings. This case demonstrates the power relations in action between the EWO and the parent and that tension that exists where the EWO is in the position of an agent of the state as well as being the caring professional (Bell, 1999). This is a dilemma long acknowledged in the field of social work and as Dumbrill (2006) states it is vital that the professional uses 'power with' as opposed to 'power over' to develop positive relationships with their clients (p.35). One example of this emerged from the focus group when the EWOs discussed the power associated with their role and the vulnerable position that many parents can find themselves in:

> *I had a case where a boy is school refusing, I said to mum look it will have to go to court or you will have to consider the alternatives and I went through what the alternatives were, I had contacted them all and seen what the availability was, but I am aware that they might make a choice that maybe isn't the best choice for that child cause they want to avoid the court in the long run, if you had.....the optimum circumstances, if you had, it might not be the best choice for that child but it means he will get an education so I would be happy.* (EWO Focus Group)

Often alternative provision is the option chosen by parents when the school placement has broken down or in this case when the parent is fearful of court and this is the only option open to them, this is where 'power over' is evident, and ultimately decisions must always be

made in the best interests of the young person to ensure that they reach their full potential and receive the education best suited to their needs.

13.10 The Prosecutor

The previous cases all illustrate the advocacy role of the EWS but within that role there are numerous references across the interviews to the role of prosecutor despite the focus by EWOs on the welfare approach. In some cases court intervention is never a consideration by the referrer to the service, for instance in Gearoid's case the principal outlined to me how she didn't feel court was ever an appropriate intervention:

> Principal*: I don't think it would have helped the situation, I think it might have made it worse*
>
> Interviewer*: why do you think that?*
>
> Principal*: the mother trusted (EWO) and she was doing everything she could to help the mother and actually she was bringing her along with her because if she was going to say she was going to court, I think all trust would have been lost, I think Gearoid would have gone with the mother and said that's it I'm not taking them to that school anymore.*

Here is evidence of the importance of a trusting relationship between the parent and the EWO, in all cases the EWOs appear to establish a positive relationship with the parents. In cases where that punitive role is adopted, this is where the greatest conflict exists; that after significant time invested in the welfare approach, in certain cases it is then necessary to move to the court process.

One EWO in the focus group outlined her experience of court:

> *I have been loads of times, it's not that I have shied away from it, but I feel it's very dependent on the Judge, but I suppose I personally feel I am on trial sometimes when I go to court*

This quotation illustrates the way the officer often feels that they are on trial, they are questioned about what they did or did not do, the quotation also notes the influence of the Judge's personality on proceedings. In addition, court proceedings can sometimes have little effect on school attendance as one EWO noted:

> *What's the point of going to court? The purpose should be about getting a child an education but very often, we have gone into court but the child hasn't gone back to school*

The frustration of the EWO is evident in this extract, when the process doesn't result in a successful outcome for the child or young person, as the underlying issues causing the poor school attendance are too complex to be resolved with the threat of a criminal conviction and penalty.

Rice & Day (2014) outline how 'the shadow of the law is both the literal shadow cast by the towering bricks and mortar of the court buildings and the almost palpable shadow of the formalities and procedures that go on inside' (p.442). The images here are the Foucauldian notion of the dominant power of the state, with the courthouse as the centre of normalisation where behaviour is regulated, it is an adversarial place for the EWO and the family, where the work of the EWO is questioned and the parent's actions are scrutinized. The world of the court is the world of well-educated professionals who operate through processes and procedures that are unfamiliar to the lay person. These are the 'dividing practices' (Ball, 2013, p. 127) that separate the legal professionals from the lay people, the EWO from the client.

Roisin's case is an example of such complexities. Both of her parents were prosecuted under Section 25(1) of the Education (Welfare) Act:

> Interviewer: *then you received the summons, how did you feel when you saw that?*
>
> Roisin's mum: *I felt gutted over it but I still understood where she (EWO) was coming from, my children was, like basically travellers are fighting for their rights, education is the main right every human being has in the world and yet my children was lacking in it.*

Roisin's mother clearly sees the value of education as a mechanism for cultural capital and the word 'lacking' indicates her awareness that her children were missing something that other children have, however her actions contradict her views as Roisin and her siblings continued to miss large amounts of school. In this case there was persistent non-school attendance despite interventions and meetings and when asked why the attendance did not improve despite the involvement of the EWO, the principal informed me that it was because

the family regularly went to see an ill relative, the EWO also outlined the reasons she was given for the chronic attendance:

> *They had to travel to XXX and what mum said was that it was important that the family went together, because the father had to come with her to show respect for her mother but that is what mum said, she said that education is not as important to travellers as family links and she would prefer her children to have memories with their grandmother rather than having an education and that was part of their traveller culture and that remained the principal reason.*

This was echoed in the interview with Roisin's mum:

> Roisin's mum*: I understood that but I had no other option because my mother was dying and we kind of looked at it at the time that the education would be there when my mother won't be there*
>
> Interviewer: *and you wanted your children to have some time with their grandmother?*
>
> Roisin's mum*: like we are living over 100 miles away from them and it wasn't every weekend the children used to see her.*

Here there is a divergence in the views of the state that is in conflict with the views and cultural beliefs of the travelling community. Both Roisin and her mum were adamant in their interviews that they had no choice, in their opinion Roisin **had** to miss school, however she was positive about the work of the EWO in this case, stating that:

> *I kind of understood where it came from, this was her job……she advised me the best way she could and keep my kids going to school like that.*

In the following extract you can sense Roisin's mum's frustration at the system and how she felt that she was never listened to:

> *I could see from her point of view but I was trying to get my point of view across which was like putting it on a white sheet of paper, nobody could see anything, it was just their way or no way.*

Here she feels invisible, the white sheet of paper is a powerful image of her frustration at the system and how she felt they were not willing to listen to her. The EWO and the school on the other hand were equally frustrated that Roisin continued to be absent from school:

> EWO: *I felt there was no valid reason why the children were not in school*
>
> Interviewer*: ok, it wasn't improving, it wasn't changing?*
>
> EWO*: it wasn't, I suppose the fact that we were involved with the family meant there were periods when it had improved but it wasn't sustained and as a result our engagement with the family wasn't impacting on them.*

When the school principal was interviewed and asked how she felt when she knew this case would go to court, she responded:

> *I had no problem with it because I felt we had done everything that we could do and this was a necessary; it was a necessary step.*

Research conducted by Doyle & Keane (2018) noted that unless the 'impact of inter-generational and community disadvantage' is addressed, young people will 'continue to be excluded from meaningfully engaging in the education system' (p.14). In Roisin's case it is evident that despite the threat of legal action Roisin's mother was unable to change her own situation and how the school despite stating that they 'had done everything', should have considered that they may not have done everything possible to ensure Roisin's 'meaningful engagement' in this case.

This case was heard in court on a number of occasions as the Judge continued to adjourn the case to monitor the school attendance. This continued surveillance did lead to improved attendance and eventually the case was struck out in 2018 as Roisin had full attendance. Despite being in court on a number of occasions, Roisin's mother spoke positively of her experience with the EWS:

> *My overall experience like in one way, they are very good, they make sure every child has their right, travellers etc. for their education and that's the most important thing, like I said there are people out there fighting for their rights.*

Roisin's case illustrates the success of the court process in improving school attendance in some cases. Before this case proceeded to court there would have been numerous warnings

given to the family and senior management would have had to authorise the issuing of the summons. Roisin's case highlights the importance of certain cultural traditions that are clearly in conflict with the 'norms' of the system. The existing legislation however is very rigid and limited in terms of the welfare approach. One District Court Judge, when interviewed, spoke about the benefit of 'a mediation system or its equivalent, some kind of system there where there are parties who are qualified and who would deal with it (poor school attendance) in a supervisory capacity', this Judge was referring to something similar to the Supervision Orders under the Child Care Act 1991, which means parents are 'supervised' by the state (the courts and the social work department) without a criminal conviction attached. The present penalties in the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 include a criminal conviction and a fine of up to 1000 euro and/or one month in prison. There are no other options open to the judiciary under the present legislation. In Roisin's case when I asked the EWO if she could have done more:

> *I'm not sure, I felt I didn't spend enough time with the children, getting to know them. I think there was a need for more welfare within that family, particularly in relation to the father's mental health.*

This is an interesting quote that illustrates the dilemma faced by the EWO. This is a dilemma evident also in social work and within the education welfare service provision in the UK. There is a realisation that families are very vulnerable and sometimes unable to change their circumstances, however the rigidity of the legislation only allows one avenue. There is research that argues that 'legal intervention is not likely to significantly improve school attendance' (Wardhaugh, 1991, p.221), in fact 'it is ineffective in improving attendance' and 'the role of a law enforcement agency will not remove the main hindrances to children's access to education' (Zhang, 2017, p.34), there is also evidence that penalties only improve attendance long-term for a small minority of students' (Finning et al., 2018, p.223). The EWO in this case sees the benefit of additional resources and time to invest in the families to provide a more sustainable long-term intervention. This is a shift in focus from the punishment of parents to looking instead at the overall welfare of children (Sheldon, 2007, p.735).

There is research (Galloway et al., 1981, Waddington, 1997) conducted in the UK regarding the EWO and court prosecutions and much of the findings indicate that there is a lot of

subjectivity when deciding whether to take a prosecution or not. During the focus group with the EWOs, they openly spoke about the subjectivity of taking a prosecution:

> *A prosecution comes down to the individual officer really, because when we go into case management, we put the case to the Senior for prosecution or we do not*
>
> *I have at least 8 or 10 cases that I could have prosecuted, should have prosecuted*

In research conducted by Galloway et al. (1981) they note how 'no consistent pattern emerged in the EWOs reasoning for not taking formal action over a child's poor school attendance' (p.457). Waddington's (1997) research echoes this as he found that 'personal attitudes and opinions' of EWOs impacts on 'the extent to which cases are taken to court' and how there are 'conflicting views' over this part of their work (p.334). In addition to the complex relationships that are formed through the interactions between the EWO and the families, there is an expectation that it is the EWO that makes that initial judgement call – to determine if court action is a necessary step within a case. It is evident from previous research (Galloway et al., 1981, Reid, 2006, Waddington, 1997) that there is a lack of consistency in the selection of cases for legal action, it is a judgement always made by the individual officer when in their opinion, they feel the 'welfare' approach has been exhausted. In the focus group interview it emerged that if families engaged with the EWO then a prosecution was less likely to happen, however the child's attendance may not have improved despite EWS involvement:

> *So you don't prosecute if they are working with you and that's to the detriment of the child, they might be out of school,*
>
> *So if parents are engaging, we don't always go to the next level, in some ways we lose sight of what we think we are doing.*

This is an important factor, that the decision to prosecute or not can very often be determined by the level of engagement with the family, whether as a result of this engagement there is an improvement to the school attendance or not, that the EWO effectively makes the decision themselves based on the success or lack of success of the welfare approach, this reflects the findings in the research from the UK that notes the subjectivity of the decision making process.

There are other questions here worthy of further exploration – what is the role of the school and other agencies in these cases as there appears to be an over reliance on the law? During the focus group interview EWOs were quite critical of the use of court as a mechanism to improve school attendance:

> *I find that as an agency we can pay thousands taking a case to court, but we have no resources if a child needs money for a bus ticket, we dont have any sort of budget for things that would encourage kids and that might resolve the problem, so you are constantly going to St Vincent de Paul and yet there is no issue with taking a case to court that the solicitor will give a bill at the end that will cost thousands!*

This illustrates how well resourced one part of the statutory EWS is compared with the other, however the expectation of the EWO is to work within the welfare remit in order to encourage children to remain in school. Poverty is a real issue for a number of these young people and their families and as is evident for the above extract, state agencies are asking voluntary charities for assistance in relation to matters affecting school attendance.

It is also important to look at the educational provision for young people and its responsibility in engaging and accommodating the needs of the young people within that system as opposed to working to maintain 'the existing relations of domination and exploitation in society' (Apple, 1995, p.9). The EWO often feels that the school looks to them 'to sort the problem', they noted that there is often a lack of understanding of the situation leading to or contributing to poor school attendance:

> *Often when you are talking to a school about a child and where they are coming from, I would often say to them, I would love you to come to the house with me to see what this child has to endure before they get out the door* (EWO focus group interview).

13.11 Conclusion

This chapter examined the role of the Education Welfare Officer through the lens of a number of case studies. The role is one of welfare for the most part, through advocacy, negotiation and mediation. The position itself though carries significant weight and despite the positive relationships we have seen develop between the Officer and the family, there is

a threat of legal action and a possible criminal conviction which clearly influences the decisions made by families in this research. All of the parents mentioned the court process at some point throughout their interviews and it is difficult to ascertain the influence of the role and the power associated with the role. These parents have entered into a relationship where the primary aim of the state is to ensure the continued education of children, regardless in certain cases of the suitability of this provision, this is a relationship that is imbalanced which in some cases may be a necessity to ensure better outcomes for young people. It is important for the EWO to realise and reflect on the position they hold within these power relations to allow for greater consistency within casework and to ensure the young people and families are facilitated or empowered to make informed decisions that affect their lives; 'we cannot be outside of power relations but we can change them' (Ball, 2013, p.30).

In the final concluding chapter, I will draw together the central themes that have emerged from this research and discuss recommendations for future policy making and future research.

14.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

14.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to examine the experiences of young people and families referred to the Statutory Education Welfare Service (EWS) in Ireland. This research set out to explore, the reasons why young people disengage from education, their experiences of education and the interventions used by the Education Welfare Officer. The research sought to answer the following research questions:

- Why do young people disconnect from education?
- How do external factors impact on school attendance?
- What is the role of the Education Welfare Officer?
- How does the dilemma that exists between welfare and prosecution feature in the work of the EWS?

While there has been a substantial amount of research into the complexities of non-school attendance and early school leaving, there is an absence in the literature regarding the work of the Education Welfare Service in Ireland. Very often there can be an assumption that the Statutory EWS is a prosecutory service only and one of the aims of this research is to explore the complexities of the role of the EWO through their interactions with the families in these case studies.

This research is a small-scale unique qualitative multiple case study of the experiences of seven young people and their families' interaction with the Statutory EWS. The methods used in this research included interviews with young people, parents, school staff, social work, the EWO and one district court Judge. There were 35 participants in total. The data were collected from semi-structured interviews, EWO case notes and a focus group conducted with EWOs from two counties. The qualitative research methods deployed in this research facilitated the researcher to gain an insight into the lives of the participants, their concerns and their hopes for their children. The existing literature and the data collected assisted in the identification of the themes that are central to the research.

In the opening chapters of the thesis, the context for the research is set, the historical origins of school attendance legislation in Ireland are outlined as are the initiatives that

have developed both nationally and internationally to deal with poor school attendance. This research proceeds to examine the complex reasons for school absenteeism and the important influence of the school as a factor in perpetuating issues with school attendance. The complex issues that have emerged from the data collection are explored in detail as is the role of the Education Welfare Officer and the tension that exists within the role. The final chapter presents the main conclusions and outlines the contribution of this research to the field and makes recommendations for future policy development and for research.

14.2 Research Contribution

This research is a signifiant original contribution to knowledge in this field. The findings of this research will benefit Tusla Child and Family Agency to not only explore a definition for the role of the EWO but also to question the purpose and use of prosecution as a method of responding to particular cases going forward. In addition, the findings are important to education stakeholders so that they may consider their role and the role of schools in meeting the needs of marginalized young people with complex issues who present as school refusers. This research has illustrated the impact of external factors on young people's school attendance and overall engagement in education, how factors such as SEN, mental health and poverty all contribute to a young person's disaffection with education and disconnection from learning. This research will contribute to the existing knowledge in the area of school absenteeism and will also serve as a future reference for researchers in the field of school disengagement.

14.3 Summary of Findings

The original research questions sought to answer:

14.3.1 Why do young people disengage from education?

The reasons why young people disconnect from education are complex, the data generated from this research illustrates how significant factors such as mental health, trauma and having a diagnosed or undiagnosed SEN all affect a young person's school attendance. The factors impacting on school attendance that emerge from this research include homelessness, grief at the loss of a parent, addiction and parents who have a mental health issue.

Mental health concerns feature throughout a number of the cases. There is evidence of anxiety and trauma as having a significant impact on school attendance, we see this in Darragh's case with the death of his father and for Adam with the death of his mother. Both of these young people opted out of the system, Adam through school refusing and Darragh with his behavioural outbursts. Students who experience grief and subsequent depression have a negative perception of self and consequently are at a greater risk of disengagement and drop out from education as they 'doubt their ability to do well in school' (Quiroga, Janosz & Bisset, 2013, p.5), add to this 'the inter-relation of psychological symptoms and negative school experiences' (Esch, Bocquet, Pull, Couffignal, Lehnert, Graas, Fond-Harmant & Ansseau, 2014, p. 2) which can ultimately lead to school refusal or disengagement'. The loss of a parent for a child or young person is not only a traumatic event but is also associated with 'persistent vulnerability' (Watson, Whelan, Maitre & Williams, 2015, p.239). In Gearoid's case we see the impact of homelessness and the associated insecurity of his home environment and for Anna whose school refusal was caused by PTSD. These are young people at 'delicate developmental stages' in their lives who are expected to perform 'on a par' with pupils from very different backgrounds (Doyle and Keane, 2019, p.83). In addition, parental mental health proves to also be a significant factor for impacting on school absenteeism and we see elements of this with Darragh's mother and her addiction, with Gearoid's mother who spent her formative years in care and with Roisin's dad and his ongoing depression.

The young people in this research with SEN struggle with school attendance. Peer relations is an essential part of school for all young people and this research illustrates how young people with SEN can be bullied by their peers and/or excluded from school. The effects of bullying include school absence, negative relationships, conflicts with teachers, low concentration levels and decreased academic performance (Downes & Cefai 2016). In addition, the research demonstrates how young people disengage from education as they cannot access the curriculum and subsequently develop 'an impaired self-view' (Finn, 1989, p.119). This leads to behavioural issues resulting initially in suspension and ultimately in exclusion from school. Suspension and or expulsion can have profound affects on students which we see particularly in Darragh's case. Murphy et al. (2019) in their research indicate that young people are more likely to leave school early and are more likely to be involved with the juvenile justice system as a result of expulsion or numerous suspensions, they propose enhanced funding to the NCSE to support the inclusion of

children and young people at risk (Murphy et al., 2019). Downes (2013) also proposes a move away from expulsion and suspension and instead advocates for the use of 'a multiplicity of intervention approaches' to address the different issues arising for young people (p.353). The use of a reduced curriculum or reduced day also impacts on the young people in this research, particularly in the case of Alex and James. We can see how their departure from school is expedited through this mechanism. We see in this research how reduced time-tables particularly for young people with SEN as we see in Alex and James' cases result in disengagement from school, and how a late diagnosis of SEN in both Gearoid and James' cases has a detrimental impact on educational success.

14.3.2 What are the external factors affecting young people's attendance?

None of the young people in this research set out to absent themselves from school, however there are a number of factors that directly impacted on their ability to remain in education. There has been significant research on school climate as being a key factor affecting young people's attendance, participation and retention in education. Schools are predominantly middle class and consequently expect young people to fit in to the school system with its values and ideals. Often school personnel make judgements about the families in this research and dismiss the capability of parents and also dismiss parents' aspirations for their children. In the case studies, we see how schools fail to have young people cognitively assessed at key stages in their educational life and how parents are forced to find funding for such assessments. There is often a deficit view of these families where the school although seemingly promoting inclusion is in fact perpetuating eventual exclusion. This research highlights that the inequality that exists within our society is demonstrated in the micro world of the school. Many of the young people in this research come from a lower socio-economic background and their parents never completed post-primary school. Watson et al. (2015) identify persistent economic vulnerability as being associated with aspects such as lone parenthood and lower level of PCG education (primary care giver). In a number of the interviews parents outline how circumstances prohibited them from completing their education, factors such as early pregnancy and disengagement from school and learning. This research explores the strong link between educational inequality resulting from social class position. We see how poverty affects access to education and five of the parents in this research struggle to negotiate a better

outcome for their children on their own, they rely heavily on the intervention of the EWO and this contrasts sharply with other parents who because they have similar backgrounds to the school personnel, have the ability to advocate for their own children, to obtain and provide private counselling or expedite state services to assist their child.

Overall this research illustrates a serious lack of services for young people in education and health. A number of these young people were not prioritized for educational assessments by their schools, although later assessments of these young people identified SEN as a key factor in school disengagement. In addition, there is a lack of appropriate educational placements for young people who do receive a diagnosis, resulting in young people travelling outside of their community to receive education. Waiting lists for child and adolescent mental health services are significant and can be up to two years in some areas, resulting in no theraputic intervention for young people when they are most in need.

Throughout the research we see that despite a growing economy there are significant levels of poverty that impact on school attendance and how having access to financial resources positively or negatively impacts on the services a child will receive. School climate emerges throughout the data as a principal contributing factor to poor school attendance, and it emerges that 'schooling is damaging' (Francis and Mills, 2012, p. 254) for the marginalized young people in this research who do not conform to the expectations of the school. The research shows how schools perpetuate inequality, how they can misuse power to influence parents in making decisions that they do not fully understand, how young people's access to education is curtailed by reduced time-tables or curricula and how on the other hand parents with the means or capital can significantly influence their child's educational trajectory. The research highlights how young people can effectively be excluded from education through the perpetuation of middle class values and ideals.

14.3.3 Defining the role of the EWO?

The role of the EWO as it emerged from this research is principally that of advocate for young people and families. The EWOs who participated in the focus group all clearly stated that this was how they saw their role. However there is a tension within the role; the EWO builds a relationship with families, families who are clearly aware of the EWO's ability to prosecute these parents for their children's poor school attendance. It is this

relationship that then makes it difficult for the EWO to take such a prosecution as they have to determine if the parent is 'failing or neglecting' (Education (Welfare) Act 2000) to send their child to school. Each of the case studies, illustrate how the EWO did everything to try and resolve the poor school attendance and how they made a judgement in each of the cases whether they would or would not prosecute. Largely speaking their choice was not to prosecute, but when interviewed the EWOs felt this was contrary to what senior management expects of them, creating additional tension within their role. The EWO's relationship with schools is also complex and in these case studies, we see how the schools often engage only with the parents as a result of the involvement and 'surveillance' of the Statutory EWS.

14.3.4 The Influence of Power

Bourdieu's theories facilitate the examination of the values, meanings and social understandings that people bring to the education system and how this influences the practices in schools, that hold predominantly middle-class values, that then lead to the increased marginalisation of particular groups. On the other hand Foucault refers to the 'disciplinary technology' and the control and surveillance that are all evident in the school system and which can 'exacerbate practices of hierarchisation, exclusion' (Francis and Mills 2012, p.258). This research combines Bourdieu's theory of social positioning and Foucault's perspective on how power is exercised to result in the defined social positioning of individuals who as a result, socially position and define others.

This research also explores the notion of resistance, both the resistance to the middle class led school and also the the concept of risk aversion, where we see resistance behaviours that reject middle class values and codes, in the form of truancy or school refusal, but ultimately this results in the young people maintaining their unequal social positioning. In all of the cases in this research the parents are not treated equally by the school, significant decisions are made about their children without consultation, they are often marginalized and controlled, the 'parents are audience, volunteers, supporters-from-a-distance, the roles are passive and narrowly defined' (Vincent and Tomlinson 1997, p.366).

School attendance legislation is largely punitive and focuses primarily on how to punish parents for their children's school absenteeism and consequently it is about the exercise of power. The complex relationship that is evident between the EWO and the family has

its basis on power, the parent is afraid of prosecution and this influences their decision to cooperate with the EWO 'the relationship of power can be a result of a prior or permanent consent but it is not by nature the manifestation of a consensus (Foucault 1982, p. 788). The EWO needs to be aware of their power and the dilemma that exists within their work. In fact all of the interactions we see in this research between, services and schools and parents and schools, parents and children, children and schools are all underpinned by the influence of power to ensure 'the moulding and transformation of individuals in terms of certain norms' (Foucault, 1994, p.70). The present legislation needs to be reviewed in this context, as one has to question its purpose in addressing the complex issues highlighted in this research, that often underpin school absenteeism.

14.3.5. Welfare or Prosecution?

Currently the Statutory EWS operates under the guidance of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. This legislation makes provision to ensure that all children in Ireland are in receipt of an education between the ages of six and sixteen and outlines the functions of the Board (National Educational Welfare Board) in relation to advising and assisting parents and schools regarding any matters relating to school attendance. The Act clearly outlines the methods whereby a prosecution can be taken but does not outline the welfare role of the EWO under the legislation. This role has evolved over time in an attempt to address the complex issues that cause poor school attendance.

In other countries as discussed in chapters 3 and 4, we see an increasing belief that prosecution is not an appropriate response to the complex issues that cause school absenteeism. It is essential that the young people are given a voice, that they are permitted and asked for their opinions regarding their needs and experiences of school (Downes, 2013, p. 358). Blackett (2016) in his research on early school leaving and 'its consequent negative life impacts' emphasises the importance of 'making individual voices heard' (p.191). The EWO as is evidenced in this research gives the young people and families a voice within the school setting and in communication with other agencies. Advocacy for these parents and young people is an essential component of the role of the EWO and one that is vital to ensure inclusion in education. However, for inclusion to be truly meaningful

and effective schools also need to recognise their role in accomodating the worlds of these young people.

14.4.0 Recommendations

The following are the recommendations from this research, including implications for policy makers and suggestions for future research.

14.4.1 Policy Implications

This research highlights the need for government intervention and policy in a number of areas. School absenteeism is not the responsibility of one organisation, there needs to be a systemic and holistic approach to the complex issues underlying poor school attendance in Ireland today. From a policy perspective this research makes the following recommendations:

1. The current legislation, namely the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, needs to be reviewed and changed to promote alternative methods for dealing with poor school attendance. The District Court Judge when interviewed spoke about the value of a mediation process for parents as opposed to sentencing and imposing a criminal conviction. In Chapter 4, we saw how international and European countries are moving away from prosecution to consider a holistic, multidisciplinary approach to school absenteeism. The current legislation is limited and provides the judiciary with the options of a fine or imprisonment only. As we have seen from many of the cases in this research and in Roisin's case in particular, the imposition of a fine or a prison sentence for a family who are experiencing poverty and complex mental health difficulties is not an appropriate solution. The complex issues highlighted in this research will be further complicated by the Covid 19 pandemic and as school absenteeism increases prosecution cannot be considered as a viable or appropriate solution.

2. Services for young people experiencing mental health difficulties needs to be sufficiently resourced. The waiting lists for young people can range between 18-24 months in some areas before children and young people can access psychological services such as CAMHS. As is evident throughout this research mental health difficulties have a significant impact on school attendance and participation, and the significant waiting periods for services for young people have resulted in extended periods out of education and increased mental health difficulties which is clearly evident in Adam, Darragh and Anna's cases. Consequently there needs to be consideration given to alternative methods of dealing with the complex issues that have emerged from this research, issues such as bullying, bereavement, anxiety, trauma within schools. Multi/inter disciplinary teams within schools have been successful in other European countries in providing multi-level supports to young people within the school setting, for example in the Netherlands the school team consists of the health care services, the truancy officer, the social worker, youth care officer, the police, primary education support services, special education and mental healthcare services (Downes, 2011). The National Action Plan Education 2017 and its objective 1.1 under Goal 1 to 'improve services and resources to promote wellbeing in our school communities to support success in school and life' (p.14) is a welcome move in the right direction but in-school staff and the NEPS service is insufficient to meet the complex needs of many young people as can be seen in this research.

3. Teacher education needs to focus on creating a culture of understanding. Downes (2013, p.358) advocates 'conflict resolution skills and diversity awareness training for the professional development of all teachers including pre-service teacher education'. Teacher training needs to explore the real meaning of inclusivity, to acknowledge the powerful effect of school climate and 'to engage with the realities of young people's lives' (Wrigley, 2014, p.200). This research has shown how each of the young people did not feel included for a variety of reasons, how each of them opted out of the system and how the system attributed this disengagement to deficits within the young person and not to the deficits within the system.

4. Trauma informed practice needs to be a fundamental element of training and workforce development for school staff and service providers. An increasing number of young people are referred to the EWS for poor or non-school attendance as a result of a traumatic event in their life. These are young people who for example have suffered a bereavement of a significant adult as in Darragh and Adam's cases, young people who have been made homeless as in Gearoid's case, and young people like Darragh struggling with drug and alcohol addiction within their family. In a number of the cases in this research there are examples of this, how a traumatic event impacted on the young person's life, on their attitude to school and resulted in school refusal and subsequent anxiety. Murphy et al. (2019) advocate, in their research on homelessness, for 'the provision of emotional counselling and/or theraputic supports in and around schools to support children and young people experiencing trauma and adverse childhood experiences' (p.122), they strongly recommend the appointment of emotional counsellors and therapists within schools to work with young people on their complex emotional needs .

5. Government policy needs to consider the structural inequalities that currently exist in Ireland and to develop social and economic policies that will produce a model of service provision with a community based approach, where there are linkages developed between education, housing, health and juvenile justice. The DEIS 2017 Action Plan advocates under Goal 4 for interdepartmental and cross agency working including groups such as the Department of Social Protection, the DCYA, TUSLA, HSE, Department of Health, Department of Housing, Planning Community and Local Government. We know that the factors leading to school absenteeism are complex and require a multi-faceted, community based approach. The New Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, includes increased funding for hot meals in schools, additional supports for children who are homeless and an emphasis on extending intiatives such as the North East Inner City Initiative (NEIC) established in 2016 to oversee long-term social and economic regeneration of that particular area. Other jurisdictions have moved away from a solely punitive approach to looking at creative ways of improving children and young people's participation

and retention in education. The Global Campaign for Education (2013) under Strategy 7 promote the creation of 'an enabling environment' which supports inclusive education through cross sectoral policies and strategies to reduce exclusion (p.28). Initiatives such as Familibase in Ballyfermot and the ParentChild+ Programme provide exisiting models of good practice. Familibase operate an integrated model encompassing, universal and intensive supports to families. They provide programmes that include; support in early years care, education family support, theraputic intervention, youth and community support and a morning programme to support attendance at school. The ParentChild + Programme originally from the US and now in its 12th year in the Dublin Docklands and the East Inner City is a programme designed to prepare children for later success at school by employing specially trained local women as home visitors to families during the primary school year.

6. Consideration needs to be given to the role of the EWO. There is clear evidence in this research that there is tension within the role as the prosecutory element conflicts with the EWOs' description of their role and due to the limited options within the legislation the EWO often feels powerless and conflicted. The EWO clearly see themselves as the advocate for young people and families and they are most comfortable in this role but acknowledge that other than being the advocate they are limited in the provision of other resources, to young people and families. This is where the role of the EWO within a multidisciplinary team in schools could make a significant difference to marginalised young people in education. Examples of this include the Behaviour and Education Support Teams in some European countries like the Netherlands and Sweden and support teams in schools in the UK that include school staff, psychologists, CAMHS workers and the EWO, where the emphasis for these teams is on both early intervention work with young people and families and on intensive intervention for the more complex cases (NfER, Research Report No. 706). In order to effectively focus on the 'Welfare' part of the role and to fully implement this element, there needs to be a systemic change to the current pastoral care teams in schools.

14.4.2 Recommendations for Future Research:

This research indicates a number of areas that are worthy of further exploration, some of which may have been discussed at some level within this study. The following would be valuable areas of research for this researcher and others:

1. The impact of trauma on young people's attendance, participation and retention in education. The data generated by this research indicates how issues such as bereavement and homelessness severely impact on young people's attendance.

2. SEN and School Refusal – the impact of a diagnosis on a young person particularly at post-primary level – how this often leads to bullying or alienation. How having a diagnosis results in feeling different and can ultimately lead to school refusal.

3. The impact of reduced time-tables and reduced curriculum and its contribution to young people's disengagement from education as is evident in some of the cases in this research.

4. ASD children and appropriate school placement options at primary and post-primary school.

5. The impact of a parent's mental health diagnosis (including an addiction) on a young person's school attendance.

6. The role of the EWO in the enforcement of middle class views and values within the school system.

7. The impact of poverty on school attendance.

8. Ethnic and Cultural Minorities' experiences of the education system.

9. Transition from sixth class to first year for young people with SEN.

10. The benefits of alternative education provision and the 'permission' to opt out during a traumatic event with supported reintegration to mainstream education.

14.5 Limitations of the Research

This research had as its focus the experiences of young people and families referred to the Statutory Education Welfare Service in Ireland and during the course of the research a number of other important themes emerged including; bereavement, trauma, racism, bullying, transitions, the impact of poverty and these are effectively all worthy of individual studies in themselves. This study could have pursued an intersectional view and could have placed emphasis on a number of issues but instead the focus centred on SEN, educational inequality and mental health as the lenses to examine the most relevant experiences to the participants in this research. The sample size is small as is common in qualitative studies and was maintained as such to ensure the quality of the information collected. There was difficulty in accessing the voices of the young people as very often they had already disengaged and consequently proved difficult to interview apart from Adam who impressed me with his reflective, articulate view of his own life and school experiences. Another limitation of this research is that of my role as state agent and the influence of the power associated with my role as researcher and as Senior Educational Welfare Officer entering into the lives of marginalised families.

14.6 Summary

There are a number of key factors illustrated by this research that contribute to school absenteeism. Throughout the research the parents of the young people expressed their hopes and aspirations for their children to succeed in education, however there exists 'a distorted economy of pupil worth'(Tomlinson, 2000, p.7). This research has demonstrated through seven case studies the individual stories of these families and young people, how none of these children set out to have poor school attendance or to school refuse and how none of these parents made a conscious decision for their child not to attend school. In all of the cases in this research the parents are not treated equally by the school, significant decisions are made about their children without consultation, they are often marginalized and controlled, the 'parents are audience, volunteers, supporters-from-a-distance, the roles are passive' (Vincent and Tomlinson 1997, p.366). There is little doubt that the role of school is key, in particular the school's attitude towards the pupils they teach, how subjects are taught, what subjects pupils are offered, the involvement of pupils and parents with their school, relationships with teachers and staff.

These are all key elements to ensure the retention of young people within the education system. Fundamentally there is a need for a major shift in mind-set for government, they need to see that schools are part of a process but not the only process, hence in continuing to fund schools solely in an attempt to 'combat' or 'eradicate' disadvantage they are in fact continuing to widen the gap for future generations between those who are advantaged and those who are marginalised.

The current legislation (Education (Welfare) Act 2000) is not an appropriate mechanism to deal with the complex issues that have emerged from this research. The EWO is caught in a dilemma between the practice of 'welfare' versus the practice of 'prosecution'. The use of power and surveillance is not the way to address the complex issues highlighted in this research.

Each of the parents in this research were grateful for the assistance of the EWO with their child's educational provision. Each one acknowledged the efforts made by the EWO in trying to ensure that their child received an appropriate education and the EWOs when interviewed clearly appreciated the difficult circumstances faced by families on a daily basis. The EWS seeks to promote inclusion and to ensure that a child's right to education

is protected. Historically, the system has not met the needs of the parents of these marginalised young people, it is time for that to change so that the hopes of these parents for their children can be fulfilled.

I want my children to go to school and get the education I didn't get. (Roisin's mum.)

15.0 Appendices:

A: Child and Family Agency Educational Welfare SUMMONS SYNOPSIS - 2016

Status	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total	%
Adjourned/Stuck out with leave to re-enter	11	15	3	1	30	5%
Adjourned	0	12	37	91	140	22%
Convictions	68	59	48	13	188	29%
Probation Act	13	2	15	6	36	6%
Bench warrant issued	2	4	9	8	23	4%
Struck out	78	54	65	12	209	32%
Dismissed	3	2	0	0	5	1%
Withdrawn	0	2	6	1	9	1%
No order made	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Ongoing	0	0	0	5	5	1%
Total no. issued	**175**	**150**	**183**	**137**	**645**	645
Total no. of summonses in relation to post primary pupils	115	91	132	89	**427**	
Total no. of summonses in relation to primary pupils	60	59	51	48	**218**	
Total no. of children involved	101	98	117	100	**416**	

Figure 1: Synopsis of Summons Issued and results of court activity in Munster between 2013 and 2016. Received 14th April 2017 from the Regional Manager EWS.

B: Consent Form for parent to participate in research in relation to the Education Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency

I, (NAME)_____ agree to participate in Sinead O'Flynn's research study. The purpose of the study has been explained to me in writing and at a meeting and I understand fully what the research entails. I have also been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. I agree to be interviewed by the researcher and to allow access to and use of the case notes held by the EWS.

I am participating voluntarily.

I also understand that I can withdraw from this study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data collected within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising both my and my child's identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

Please tick ONE box:

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

Signed:_____

Date:_____

C: Assent Form for children to participate in research in relation to the Education Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency

I, (NAME)_____ agree to take part in Sinead O'Flynn's research study. The reason for this study has been explained to me in writing and at a meeting and I understand fully what the research is about. I have also been given the chance to ask questions about the research. I agree to be interviewed by the researcher for this study and to allow the researcher to use any case notes that are on file.

I am participating voluntarily. It is my choice to take part in this study.

I also understand that I can withdraw from this study, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am in the study.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the information collected within two weeks of the interview, in which case the information about me will be deleted.

I understand that my name will not be used and the researcher will not use any information that would cause me to be recognised by those who know me.

I understand that parts from my interview may be used in the thesis and other documents relating to this study if I give permission below:

Please tick ONE box:

I agree to allow the use of parts of my interview ☐

I do not agree to allow the use of parts of my interview ☐

Signed:_____

Date:_____

D: Consent Form for school staff to participate in research in relation to the Education Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency

I, (NAME)_____ agree to participate in Sinead O'Flynn's research study. The purpose of the study has been explained to me in writing and at a meeting and I understand fully what the research entails. I have also been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. I agree to be interviewed by the researcher in connection with the research.

I am participating voluntarily.

I also understand that I can withdraw from this study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data collected within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity and that of my school.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

Please tick ONE box:

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

Signed:_____

Date:_____

E: Consent Form for EWOs to participate in research in relation to the Education Welfare Service of the Child and Family Agency

I, (NAME)_____ agree to participate in Sinead O'Flynn's research study. The purpose of the study has been explained to me in writing and at a meeting and I understand fully what the research entails. I have also been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. I agree to be interviewed by the researcher in connection with the research.

I am participating voluntarily.

I also understand that I can withdraw from this study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data collected within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up of this research.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

Please tick ONE box:

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

Signed:_____

Date:_____

F: Letter to Parents to explain the Research and Interview Process:

Name and Address of Parents,

Relating to: (Name of Child/Young Person)

Date: (xxxx)

Dear Parent,

You are being asked to take part in a research study as part of my doctorate in University College Cork.

This research will examine your experience of the Education Welfare Service and the work of the Education Welfare Officer who worked with you on your case. I will be interviewing parents and young people from a number of schools who have been referred to the Education Welfare Service. You and your child are being asked to participate in this study as you were referred to the Education Welfare Service by your school and you and your family worked for a significant period of time with the Education Welfare Officer. (Name of Officer assigned to the case) Hopefully your input will help to improve the way we work within the Education Welfare Service.

What you will be asked to do:

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following;

- Have an initial brief meeting with me to further explain the research and discuss the consent form
- Allow access to the case notes held by the EWS
- Participate in a recorded interview lasting approximately one hour
- Possibly participate in a follow up interview
- Read over and respond to the transcript (notes) of the interview
- Allow me to interview your child in connection with this research

Risks and Benefits:

Risks for participating in this study are minimal. The only cost to you will be your time. The information you provide will be beneficial in that it will give me a clear understanding of the work of the Education Welfare Officer. The information you provide could further improve the future service provided by the Education Welfare Service.

Your Participation is Voluntary:

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. You may refuse to answer any of the questions you are asked. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty. It is your choice to participate at all times. You will be asked to sign a consent form before the research commences.

Confidentiality:

The answers you give to my questions will be treated confidentially. The research will assure anonymity and I will make all efforts to disguise your identity and the identity of your child/children. The interviews will be conducted in private, preferably in your home, and the notes will be kept on the researcher's computer and they will be held safely for a period of 7 years. Only I and my supervisors will have access to these notes. If I quote abstracts from your interview in my thesis, I will ensure that they are disguised. There is a possibility that my research could be published at a future date but I will ensure you are not identifiable in any of the material used.

If you have any further questions relating to this study, please contact me at XXXXXX and I will be more than happy to meet with you to explain my research.

Yours Sincerely,

_____

Sinead O'Flynn,

PhD Student UCC,

Tel:

G: Letter to Child /Young person to explain the research and Interview process

Name and Address of Child/Young Person,

Date: (xxxx)

Dear (Name),

You are being asked to take part in a research study as part of my studies in University College Cork.

This research will examine your experience of the Education Welfare Service and the work of the Education Welfare Officer who worked with you and your family on your case. I will be interviewing your parents also and other parents and young people/children from a number of schools who have been referred to the Education Welfare Service. You are being asked to take part in this study as you were referred to the Education Welfare Service by your school and you and your family worked with the Education Welfare Officer. (Name of Officer assigned to the case)

What you will be asked to do:

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to do the following;

- Have a short meeting with me so that I can explain the research and discuss the consent form
- Allow me to look at and study your case notes
- Take part in a recorded interview lasting approximately one hour
- Possibly take part in a follow up interview if this is necessary
- Meet with me to discuss what I have learned from my study

Your Participation is Voluntary:

Taking part in this study is voluntary. This means that it is your choice whether you take part or not. You may choose not to take part at all. You may refuse to answer any of the questions you are asked. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. You will be asked to sign a

form at the start, this is called a consent form and this gives me permission to include you in this research.

Confidentiality:

The answers you give to my questions will be treated confidentially. This means the information you give me will be treated with care and only I and my supervisors will have access to this information. In this research I will not use your real name. The interviews will be in private, preferably in your home, and the notes will be kept on the researcher's computer and they will be held safely for a period of 7 years. If I use any of the words you use from your interview in my thesis, I will ensure that they do not identify you as information from my thesis may be published at a future date.

If you have any further questions relating to this study or if you don't understand something in this letter, please contact me at XXXXXX and I will be more than happy to explain this further.

Yours Sincerely,

_____

Sinead O'Flynn,

PhD Student UCC,

Tel:

H: Letter to School Staff to explain the Research and Interview Process:

Name and Address of school staff member

Relating to: (Name of Child/Young Person)

Date: (xxxx)

Dear xxxx,

You are being asked to take part in a research study as part of my doctorate in University College Cork.

This research will examine your experience of the Education Welfare Service and the work of the Education Welfare Officer who worked with you on XXX'S case. I will be interviewing school staff, parents and young people from a number of schools who have been referred to the Education Welfare Service. I will also be interviewing the EWO who worked with you on this case. (Name of Officer assigned to the case). Hopefully your input will help to improve the way we work within the Education Welfare Service.

What you will be asked to do:

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following;

- Have an initial brief meeting with me to further explain the research and discuss the consent form
- Participate in a recorded interview lasting approximately one hour
- Possibly participate in a follow up interview
- Read over and respond to the transcript (notes) of the interview

Risks and Benefits:

Risks for participating in this study are minimal. The only cost to you will be your time. The information you provide will be beneficial in that it will give me a clear understanding of the

work of the Education Welfare Officer. The information you provide could further improve the future service provided by the Education Welfare Service.

Your Participation is Voluntary:

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. You may refuse to answer any of the questions you are asked. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty. It is your choice to participate at all times. You will be asked to sign a consent form before the research commences.

Confidentiality:

The answers you give to my questions will be treated confidentially. The research will assure anonymity and I will make all efforts to disguise your identity and the identity of your school and school staff. The interviews will be conducted in private, and the notes will be kept on the researcher's computer and they will be held safely for a period of 7 years. Only I and my supervisors will have access to these notes. If I quote abstracts from your interview in my thesis, I will ensure that they are disguised. There is a possibility that my research could be published at a future date but I will ensure you are not identifiable in any of the material used.

If you have any further questions relating to this study, please contact me at XXXXXX and I will be more than happy to meet with you to explain my research.

Yours Sincerely,

_____

Sinead O'Flynn,

PhD Student UCC,

Tel:

I: Letter to EWO to explain the Research and Interview Process:

Name and Address of EWO

Relating to: (Name of Child/Young Person)

Date: (xxxx)

Dear xxxx,

You are being asked to take part in a research study as part of my doctorate in University College Cork.

This research will examine your experience of working with the families referred to the Education Welfare Service and will look in particular at your involvement in XXX'S case. I will be interviewing the school staff, parents and young person also involved in this case. Hopefully your input will help to improve the way we work within the Education Welfare Service.

What you will be asked to do:

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following;

- Have an initial brief meeting with me to further explain the research and discuss the consent form
- Participate in a recorded interview lasting approximately one hour
- Possibly participate in a follow up interview
- Read over and respond to the transcript (notes) of the interview

Risks and Benefits:

Risks for participating in this study are minimal. The only cost to you will be your time. The information you provide will be beneficial in that it will give me a clear understanding of the work of the Education Welfare Officer. The information you provide could further improve the future service provided by the Education Welfare Service.

Your Participation is Voluntary:

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. You may refuse to answer any of the questions you are asked. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty. It is your choice to participate at all times. You will be asked to sign a consent form before the research commences.

Confidentiality:

The answers you give to my questions will be treated confidentially. The research will assure anonymity and I will make all efforts to disguise your identity. The interviews will be conducted in the office, and the notes will be kept on the researcher's computer and they will be held safely for a period of 7 years. Only I and my supervisors will have access to these notes. If I quote abstracts from your interview in my thesis, I will ensure that they are disguised. There is a possibility that my research could be published at a future date but I will ensure you are not identifiable in any of the material used.

If you have any further questions relating to this study, please contact me at XXXXXX and I will be more than happy to meet with you to explain my research.

Yours Sincerely,

_____

Sinead O'Flynn,

PhD Student UCC,

Tel:

J: Protocol 1. Guiding Questions for Education Welfare Officers

Note: EWOs will have been given these questions in advance of the interview

Introduction

Thanks again for meeting with me today. As you are aware, I am conducting research into the day to day work of the Education Welfare Service and our role in both the welfare and prosecution of parents who are failing or neglecting to send their children to school. Today I would like to ask you some questions about a family that you have worked closely with. It is my intention to interview the family in question and discuss their experience of our service; I will also be talking to school staff as they have a key role to play prior to referral.

Q.1. What first attracted you to this profession? Can you tell me about the work you did before this?

Q.2 What are the good things about this type of work? What do you find difficult about this work?

Q.3. What are the main qualities a person would need for this type of work in your opinion?

Q.4.Can you remember when did (child's name) first come to your attention and how?

Q.5.What was the reason given for the referral and who made the referral?

Q.6.Why did you decide to act on this referral initially?

Q.7.How did you make initial contact with the family?

Q.8.Outline your first meeting with the family and your observations at the assessment stage.

Q.9.What steps did you take to encourage the young person to return to school?

Q.10.Did you do an Education Welfare Plan with the family and if you did, how successful was this? What were the key components of the Education Welfare Plan?

Q.11.What in your opinion were the key issues preventing the child's school attendance in this case?

Q.12.What other agencies were involved with this family and outline what you know about their involvement? (Only if relevant)

Q.13.Can you cite any example in this case of effective interagency collaboration?

Q.14.At what point did you conclude that this case should or should not proceed to court?

Q.15.Who did you make this decision in conjunction with and what were the factors taken into consideration?

Q.16.Can you outline the procedures taken to bring this case to the courts if applicable?

Q.17.What was the outcome of the court proceedings? What was your opinion of the outcome?

Q.18.What was the outcome for the child/family? Did anything change for the child?

Q.19.In your opinion, would you have done anything differently in this case? Can you outline how you might have worked this case differently if you had the chance to do so.

Thank you for your time. I really appreciate your help. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you feel may be relevant to this research? If you have any further questions around this piece of research, please feel free to ask me. Once I have completed my research, I will be more than happy to meet with you again to outline my findings and I would really appreciate your input again at this point.

K: Protocol 2. Interview Protocols for Parent Interviews

Note: Parents will have been sent these questions in advance of the interview

Introduction:

Thanks again for agreeing to meet with me today. As I explained to you at our initial meeting, I am conducting research into the work of the Education Welfare Service. In this research I am looking at the reasons why we do or do not prosecute parents for their children's non-attendance at school. As you know the school referred your case to our Service as (child's name) had significant absences from school. Today, I am going to ask you a number of questions around school and you child's experience of school. If you aren't sure what I have asked, please stop me and I will explain more clearly. Please feel free to stop the interview at any point if you feel uncomfortable about anything. I will start the interview by asking you about you own experiences of school.

Guiding Interview Questions for Parents

Q.1.Tell me about your own memories of school. Did you like school yourself? Why/Why not?

Q.2. Are you working now? What do you work at? Tell me about your job.

Q.3. Tell me about your child's experience of school from Junior Infants to now. Can you remember what he/she was good at? Were there some parts of school they enjoyed more than others? Can you remember any time in school when it was difficult for your child? Was there a particular time when things changed in school for them, can you tell me more about this?

Q.4.What kind of supports did you receive from your child's school? Were these helpful at all? What was the best support that you remember being offered at this time?

Q.5.Can you recall your initial meeting with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO)? Can you tell me about this meeting? Did you and your family discuss this meeting afterwards? Did anything change for you after that meeting?

Q.6.What kind of assistance did the EWO offer you? Did their assistance help your situation? Was there anything that did not help? Is there anything the EWO could have done differently?

Q.7.Were there other agencies involved with you and your child at this time? If so briefly outline the nature of their involvement? What type of assistance did these agencies offer you? Did you find this helpful? Is there anything they could have done differently to help you?

Q.8. Do you think there is anything you could have done differently in relation to your child's school attendance?

Q.9.Were you made aware from the beginning that this case could proceed to court? What was your knowledge of the court process? Was it fully explained to you by the school or the EWO?

Q.10.Tell me how did you feel when you received the summons? How did your son/daughter feel? Can you remember the discussions you may have had around that time? How was your first court appearance? Did you have anyone to support you? How did your son/daughter feel about the court experience? How did you feel on that day? When it was over, did you discuss it at home? Can you remember what you talked about?

Q.11.What was your overall experience of the Education Welfare Service?

Thank you so very much for your time. Was there anything I should have asked you about that I may have forgotten that you feel is relevant to this research? When I have completed my research I will discuss my findings with you if that's ok and feel free to give further input at that stage also.

L: Protocol 3. Interview Protocol for the Young Person/Child

Note: The young person/child will have received the questions in advance of the interview

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I am doing research for University College Cork and I am looking at the work of the Education Welfare Service. I don't know if you remember the Education Welfare Officer that worked with you and your family – it was (Name of EWO). Well today we are going to have a chat about your experience of school and of our service. If you don't understand something I ask, please stop me and I will explain more clearly. If at any stage you feel you want to stop the interview just say so and we'll stop.

Guiding Interview Questions for the young person:

Q.1.Tell me a little about you. What kinds of things are you interested in? What do you like to do outside of school? Where do you and your friends go at the weekends? Tell me what do you like most about school? Can you remember a 'brilliant day' at school? Can you tell me about it? Was there any day that was not so good? Can you tell me about that? What do you dislike most about school?

Q.2.When did you first find it difficult to attend school? What was happening in your life at that time? Can you remember when you stopped attending school or the time your attendance wasn't good? What did you do when you were not in school? Can you remember how you felt at that time?

Q.3.How did your parents help you to attend school? Give me some examples of the kinds of things did they do to help? Did anyone else help you in your school?

Q.4.What did you think of the Education Welfare Officer when you first met them? Do you remember how you felt? Do you think they helped you in any way, if so how? If not, why not?

Q.5.a.How did you feel when your parents had to go to court? Were things different at home? Did your parents talk to you about this? Did you feel less connected to school at this time?

or

Q.5.b.Why did you return to school? What changed for you? Was it something the school did or the Education Welfare Officer or your parents? How do you know this? How did you feel about going back to school? Was that difficult? How do you think it could have been made easier for you?

Q.6.What if anything, changed for you as a result of meeting the Education Welfare Officer? Would you say they helped you in anyway? Was there anything that you think they could have done differently to help you or your family?

Thank you very much for your time today. If there's anything else you think I should have asked, please feel free to say. Otherwise, it was lovely to meet with you and hopefully I will meet you again to tell you and your parents about what I have learned through my research.

M: Protocol 4. Interview Protocol for Relevant School Staff

Note: Relevant school staff will have received these questions in advance of the interview

Introduction:

Thanks for agreeing to meet with me and help me with my research. I am conducting research on the work of the Education Welfare Service as part of my Doctorate. I will be looking at the work of the service and the reasons behind the decisions made to prosecute a family or not. I am interested in the school interventions prior to referral to our service and the family and young person's relationship with school staff. If any of my questions need further clarity, stop me at any time during the interview. Feel free to include any information you feel is relevant to my research.

Guiding Interview Questions for School Staff (Principal, Teacher, School Completion Programme Worker, Home School Community Liaison Officer)

Q.1.Tell me what attracted you to the role you are now in? Were you always in this area of work? Can you tell me a little about your current role?

Q.2.What were the reasons for your referral of (Child's Name) to the Education Welfare Service? What were your expectations for the referral? Did the school make a referral to any other agency at this time? What was the nature of that referral?

Q.3. Is there an issue with attendance at this school? If so, why do you think this is and how could this be changed? What strategies do you use at this school to promote good attendance?

Q.4.What interventions had been tried by the school staff including yourself with this child/young person, prior to referral to the Education Welfare Service? Are these interventions generally successful with pupils? Can you give me some examples of the work you do/strategies you use with school refusers or poor attenders?

Q.5.Do you think teaching staff generally help pupils who have poor attendance in any way? Do you think that sometimes they feel they don't have a role in this area? Why do you think that is? How do you think teachers generally view pupils who have poor school attendance?

Q.6. Outline the level of contact between your school/agency with the Education Welfare Service at the time of referral? Once the EWO had commenced work with the family, what was the extent of your involvement with the child/family? Was there something that could have been done differently at this point? How successful was the interagency work in this case? Can you cite examples from this case of successful interagency working?

Q.7. In your opinion, did the referral to the Education Welfare Service make a significant difference to the school attendance of the young person? If so, in what way and if not why not? What do you believe could have been done differently in this case?

Q.8. Is there anything you have learnt from this case that will better inform your future work practice?

Thank you for your time. I really appreciate your help. Was there anything else you would like to add at this point? If you have any further questions around this piece of research, please feel free to ask me. Once I have completed my research, I will be more than happy to meet with you again to outline my findings and I would really appreciate your input again at this point.

N: Focus Group Questions

These questions were emailed in advance of the session to the EWOs.

1. How would you describe your role as EWO? (Advocate/Prosecutor)

2. What do you think are the Organisation's expectations of the role? Does that differ from your expectations in any way?

3. Do you see any conflict/tension within the role?

4. How would you describe your relationship with schools?

5. How would you describe your relationship with parents/young people/children?

6. What element of the role are you most comfortable with? (Can you give examples?)

O: Interview Protocol District Court Judge:

I am conducting research as part of my Doctorate with UCC on the work of the Education Welfare Service. I am interested in the view point of the Judiciary on the legislation and the work of the Education Welfare Service.

The following questions serve as a guide to prompt discussion:

Q.1 Can you tell me how you came to be in the position you are in now?

Q.2. Are you familiar with the work of the EWS? Can you tell me about your views on the EWS and the work it does?

Q.3 Can you tell me a little bit about your experience of the Education Welfare Act 2000 in the district courts?

Q.4 Do you think this legislation works for/against people? In what ways? Do you think this legislation is necessary?

Q.5 Does the legislation give the judiciary enough options when it comes to ruling on these cases? Could there be a broader set of penalties and if so what type of penalties or should there be other options (other than penalties)?

Q.6 Is the work of the Educational Welfare Officer prior to court, clearly evident in the court report that you receive at the start of the court case? Is there clarity around that work that has been done by the service? Is there any other information that you feel should be provided in that report?

Have you opinions on how issues like school attendance can be impacted by poverty, culture, race/ethnicity, disability?

Q.7 Is a criminal court an appropriate venue for this type of case? In your opinion is there a more effective way of resolving school attendance issues?

Q. 8 Can you recount anything in particular that may have struck you about any of these cases to date (if you have had involvement)? Can you recall a time perhaps when there was tension between the legislation and your own personal view of the situation?

Q.9 Do you feel it would be beneficial if a module on the EWS could be included in future training for the judiciary?

Q.10 Are there any other thoughts you would like to share in relation to early-school leaving, the work of the judiciary or the EWS?

Thank you for your time.

P: Sample Pre-Analysis Coding

Emerging Themes after the initial coding of 5 interview transcripts for Roisin:

Interviews with District Court Judge, Parent, Child, EWO and School Principal

Research Questions Emerging Themes Emerging Theoretical Concepts

Figure: 2

Who are the young people referred to the EWS?	Social Welfare recipient family, Poverty evident, traveller background, parent has mental health issues, cycle of poor or non -school attendance in the family, learning difficulties, issues with transition from primary, go on to Youthreach once of age	-Identity/class, Poverty – exists or not? -Cultural space or habitus/field (Bourdieu), -Mental health – health inequality and social spaces – linked with cultural situation (Bourdieu).
What are the reasons for poor school attendance?	Poverty, transport issues, cultural reasons, mental health issues, general family illness, difficulty with transition from primary school, education not the priority, schools with high numbers of peers from same background	-Bourdieu, Lareau – Social cultural capital -Institutional habitus – the school contributes to this 'culture' -'deficit' view by the school of the young person/family/their culture
What interventions were used by the EWS and were they effective?	School more flexible- reduced timetables- increased support. Greater inter- agency involvement, regular meetings with EWS, involved both parents, court/legal process	-Duality of role – support parent yet prosecute them? -Foucault – the courts - observation/power/control
What is the role of legislation as a response to poor school attendance?	Pressure of court improved attendance, involved father, Focused the school in keeping an eye and being more supportive, Resulted in NEPS referral at post primary school (for an assessment)	-Child bullied because she did go to school, dropped out at 16 anyway once proceedings stopped – social capital/cultural capital/social acceptance -12 times in court to date: cost v benefit -Inadequacy of legislation - fine/convict/prison

Q: Coding Sample – Darragh

Interview excerpt	Descriptive Code	Pattern Code
Interview with mum: 'I didn't know anything about that either (possible educational assessment in school) there was a teacher inside in the class watching him do his homework or whatever'	Lack of understanding of situation, parent not informed of her son's assessment	Cultural capital
Interview with Principal: 'his mother was there but we knew she had her own issues…but we knew she was supportive of the school….she was always on our side'	Natural assumption that the school was always right. Dismissive of mother's story	Cultural capital
Interview with EWO: 'He's constantly involved with the guards, he's constantly involved with curfews, having a probation officer, that's all hanging over him'	One of the main reasons cited for continued school attendance Young person dismissed	Power Resistance

Figure: 3

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Case Notes – EWOs

Interview Transcripts:

1. Interviews with parents
2. Interviews with young people
3. Interviews with School Principals
4. Interviews with Education Welfare Officers
5. Interview with Home School Liaison Staff
6. Interview with School Completion Coordinator/worker
7. Interview with District Court Judge
8. Interview with Social Worker
9. Focus Group Transcript

Internet Sources:

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