CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

| | |
|---|---|
| Title | Moving beyond educational disadvantage: Report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee 2002-2005 |
| Authors | Hyland, Áine |
| Publication date | 2005-08-01;2005-08-01 |
| Original Citation | Hyland, Á. (2005) Moving beyond educational disadvantage: Report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee 2002-2005. Dublin: Department of Education and Science, pp. 1-37. |
| Type of publication | Report |
| Rights | © 2005, Department of Education and Science. |
| Download date | 2026-09-05 08:01:18 |
| Item downloaded from | https://hdl.handle.net/10468/17095 |

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

# Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage

## Report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee

2002–2005

# Moving Beyond Educational Disadvantage

## Report of the Educational Disadvantage Committee 2002–2005

August 2005

Published by the

Educational Disadvantage Committee

© 2005 Department of Education and Science

Design by Metaphor

# Contents


Preface by the Chairperson iv

Acknowledgements v

Introduction vi

1. The Educational Disadvantage Committee 1

2. Summary of the committee's recommendations to the Minister for Education and Science, 2002–2005 4

3. Guidelines for effective services to address educational disadvantage 10

4. Moving beyond educational disadvantage: Towards an integrated approach to educational inclusion and educational equality 19

5. Taking the lead: A strategy for an inclusive, diverse and dynamic learning society without barriers 26

Goal 1: Achieve educational equality in the broader context of achieving social inclusion 29

Goal 2: Provide inclusive opportunities for learning at all stages of the life cycle, from birth onwards 31

Goal 3: Improve the mainstream education system so that all young people aged from 3 to 18 years receive an education that is appropriate to their needs 33

Membership of the Educational Disadvantage Committee 37

# Preface by the Chairperson

It gives me great pleasure to present this, the final report of the first Educational Disadvantage Committee, to the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin TD. The Educational Disadvantage Committee was set up by the Minister for Education and Science, Michael Woods TD, in April 2002 under section 32 of the Education Act (1998) "to advise the Minister on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage." During its three-year term of office the committee met thirty times, received almost two hundred written submissions from individuals and organisations involved in alleviating educational disadvantage, and hosted a major National Education Forum in November 2002, which was attended by three hundred people. The committee made four written submissions to the Minister for Education and Science, Noel Dempsey TD, in 2003 and 2004.

This final report recognises the developments that have occurred in recent decades to address educational disadvantage in Ireland and acknowledges that a great deal has been done within the education system to support social inclusion. It also points out that the definition of educational disadvantage in the Education Act (1998) is focused on the formal school context and does not refer to education that is provided in other contexts. This has led to an unnecessary fragmentation in policy on educational disadvantage and a failure to gain maximum benefit from the various programmes and initiatives that have been put in place.

The report proposes a re-examination of the fundamental assumptions of the approach in Ireland to addressing educational disadvantage and acknowledges that the foundation for addressing this issue has already been laid in the *National Development Plan 2000–2006,* which commits the government to adopting "a comprehensive, holistic approach" to tackling social inclusion. The commitment in the plan to "encouraging marginalised communities to help themselves by identifying their own problems and working towards their solution in a planned and integrated way with the agencies of the State" is strongly supported by the report, which suggests that educational initiatives to date have not been noted for this approach.

In the final section of the report an integrated national strategy is proposed for achieving educational equality, which will result in an inclusive, diverse and dynamic learning society without barriers. The strategy includes, but also goes beyond, the new DEIS plan *(Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools)* launched by the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin TD, in May 2005, which focuses primarily on delivering equality of opportunity in schools (Department of Education and Science, 2005a). Schools alone cannot achieve educational equality, and the report moves the debate beyond school-based education. Everyone gains when educational inclusion is achieved as part of a bigger social and economic change agenda. In such a situation there are social, economic and political advances, with improved life chances, opportunity and fulfilment for all.

**Áine Hyland**
Chairperson
Educational Disadvantage Committee

August 2005

# Acknowledgements

The Educational Disadvantage Committee acknowledges the support and expertise provided by Maura Grant, Director of Programmes for Educational Disadvantage in the Department of Education and Science, from the time of the setting up of the committee in March 2002 until summer 2004. She was the main link person between the committee and the Department of Education and Science and she provided research and other support to the committee. The committee also thanks the Assistant Secretary, Paddy McDonagh and the staff of the social inclusion unit of the Department of Education and Science, who also made an important contribution to the work of the committee.

The experience and background of the members of the committee were an invaluable resource in the committee's deliberations. The committee is also grateful for the advice and expertise given by a wide range of experts in the field of educational disadvantage and social inclusion, both nationally and internationally. Submissions received from various groups and individuals in response to a public advertisement in 2002 proved to be very helpful, as did the contribution of those who attended the Educational Disadvantage Forum in November 2002, various focus group meetings in 2003 and 2004, and consultative meetings held under the YES process in 2004. The committee is particularly indebted to the Educational Research Centre in Drumcondra, Dublin, and especially to Dr Tom Kellaghan and Dr Peter Archer, for the excellent research support provided throughout the three-year period. The *Review of International Literature and of Strategy in Ireland*, which is published in conjunction with this report (Archer and Weir, 2004), played a major part in informing the work of the committee, as did other reports prepared by the Educational Research Centre, which are available on the committee's web site.

The committee thanks Cynthia Deane of Options Consulting for her work in facilitating the final meetings of the committee and in producing this report.

# Introduction

This is the final report of the current Educational Disadvantage Committee, which was set up by the Minister for Education, Michael Woods TD, in March 2002, with a three-year term of office. Over the past three years the committee has debated and analysed educational disadvantage and the initiatives that aimed to address it. The work of the committee not only focused on the education of children and young people in schools, but also examined educational disadvantage in the broader social context and with a lifelong learning perspective. The committee is pleased to note that many of its earlier recommendations have been incorporated in the DEIS action plan for educational inclusion, announced by the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin TD, in May 2005 (Department of Education and Science, 2005a). This final report of the current Educational Disadvantage Committee adds to and complements the DEIS action plan by integrating school-based responses within a co-ordinated strategy to achieve educational equality for all.

The report will be presented to the Minister for Education and Science and will also be made available to the public. Its purpose is to inform future policy and actions in relation to educational disadvantage by the Department of Education and Science, by other government departments and state agencies, and by the independent sector. In this report the Educational Disadvantage Committee puts forward a strategy for achieving an inclusive lifelong learning society where people are entitled and enabled to achieve their full educational potential and aspirations without barriers.

1

# The Educational Disadvantage Committee

## *Terms of reference*

The Educational Disadvantage Committee was set up in March 2002 under section 32 of the Education Act (1998) "to advise the Minister [for Education and Science] on policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage." The committee advises the minister on

- the creation, co-ordination and implementation of new and existing initiatives
- the identification and commissioning of research and evaluation
- in-career development for teachers and other personnel serving the needs of those experiencing educational disadvantage
- the development of interdepartmental and inter-agency links with a view to ensuring greater cohesion among the initiatives catering for educational disadvantage.

The Education Act defines educational disadvantage as "the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevents students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools." A more general definition sees educational disadvantage as "a situation whereby individuals in society derive less benefit from the education system than their peers" (Combat Poverty Agency, 2003). The Educational Disadvantage Committee set about the tasks defined in its terms of reference with a strong determination to advise the minister on tackling educational disadvantage in its broadest sense by reflecting on the past, analysing the present, and creating a vision of a new future.

## *Membership of the committee*

The Educational Disadvantage Committee was based on an expert rather than a representational model, and it had a three-year term of office. One of the strengths of the committee lay in the diverse backgrounds and experience of its members. The committee included experts from the formal mainstream education system – early childhood, primary, post-primary, further and higher education – as well as from the non-formal youth, adult and community education sectors. It also included people with expertise in the areas of research, literacy, and community and area-based approaches to tackling disadvantage.

Because the committee included people from all learning sectors, with a wide range of views on the issue of educational disadvantage, there has been a very positive and participative process of sharing learning, experience and expertise. The working method was characterised by partnership, wide-ranging debate and consultation, and committee members were open to learning with and from each other.

## Educational Disadvantage Forum

The Educational Disadvantage Forum was set up to facilitate participation by a wide range of education partners as well as bodies and agencies active in tackling social exclusion. This forum met in November 2002 and was attended by three hundred people from the major partners in education and from a wide range of organisations working in the area of educational disadvantage. The then Minister for Education and Science, Noel Dempsey TD, the Minister of State, Síle de Valera TD, and the then Secretary-General of the Department of Education and Science, John Dennehy, also attended. The report of the Educational Disadvantage Forum was published in January 2003 (Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2003). In February 2004 issues relating to adult and community education were discussed at a further forum, which was attended by the Minister of State, Síle de Valera TD.

## Working in partnership

The committee worked with a sense of openness to accommodate the different experiences of members and the range of viewpoints they hold on various issues. The concept of partnership was embraced from the outset. Many oral presentations were made to the committee, and members of the committee met various local groups and attended conferences addressing issues related to disadvantage. Feedback from such meetings and from the Educational Disadvantage Forum served to inform the submissions made by the committee to the minister.

There was strong agreement on the aim of achieving educational inclusion, and considerable debate about how best to achieve this. The dedication and commitment of the many individuals, groups and organisations involved in alleviating educational disadvantage impressed the committee. However, it was clear that there is a serious lack of "joined-up thinking" and "joined-up action" at both local and national levels in addressing issues of educational disadvantage. The committee has attempted to join up at least some of the "dots" on the map and to develop a coherent strategy for the future.

The terms of reference of the committee confined it to providing advice to the Minister for Education and Science on "policies and strategies to be adopted to identify and correct educational disadvantage." However, the committee became increasingly aware during the course of its work that government departments other than the Department of Education and Science also play a major role in alleviating educational disadvantage. For example, five other departments (Social and Family Affairs; Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Health and Children; and Justice, Equality and Law Reform) are involved in supporting early childhood care and education.

This report points towards the need for greater integration, both within and among government departments, in a concerted effort to achieve greater social and educational inclusion.

## *Research and analysis carried out by the committee, 2002–2005*

The committee met thirty times during its three-year term of office and made four submissions to the Minister for Education and Science during 2003 and 2004:

- "Identifying Disadvantage for the Purpose of Targeting Resources and Other Supports" (March 2003)
- "Teacher Supply and Staffing in Disadvantaged Settings" (April 2003)
- "A More Integrated and Effective Delivery of School-based Educational Inclusion Measures" (December 2003)
- "Priority Areas for Action within the Adult and Community Education Sector" (February 2004).

The main recommendations in the first three of these submissions are included in the committee's report for 2003 (Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2004). All the committee's recommendations are summarised in the next section of this report.

## *Examining current initiatives for addressing educational disadvantage*

The committee commissioned the Educational Research Centre to review the procedures for selecting schools to participate in initiatives by the Department of Education and Science to combat disadvantage. This research formed the basis of the committee's report to the minister, "Identifying Disadvantage for the Purpose of Targeting Resources and Other Supports" (March 2003).

The Educational Research Centre also reviewed the international research on educational disadvantage and the measures aimed at addressing educational disadvantage in Ireland. These reviews have helped the committee to formulate the strategy for the future that is set out later in this report. *The Review of International Literature and of Strategy in Ireland* (Archer and Weir, 2004) is being published to accompany this report. Two further reviews prepared by the Educational Research Centre are available on the web site of the Department of Education and Science at www.education.ie (click on *Educational Disadvantage Committee*).

2

# Summary of the committee's recommendations to the Minister for Education and Science, 2002–2005

The work of the committee has already begun to inform policy development in the Department of Education and Science, and many of the recommendations made to the minister in the committee's four earlier submissions have been incorporated in the DEIS plan (Department of Education and Science, 2005). There have also been some changes in the structure of the department, as recommended in a report prepared in 2000 by Seán Cromien, former Secretary-General of the Department of Finance, to facilitate more coherent strategic planning aimed at achieving educational inclusion.

This section of the report summarises the recommendations from the Educational Disadvantage Forum and the committee's recommendations from its four submissions. From this it is clear that there has already been some progress in formulating policy and in planning to integrate a range of school-based interventions to address educational disadvantage. There is a commitment in the DEIS plan to getting the school-based solutions right in the first instance. The successful implementation of the plan – in addressing the problems of literacy, numeracy and early unqualified school leaving; in improving the rate of retention to the Leaving Certificate, and transfer to further and higher education and training by young people from disadvantaged backgrounds – will provide a sound foundation on which to build for the future.

It is also clear however, that much remains to be done to link what happens in schools with the wider community and society. The Educational Disadvantage Committee recognises that the problem of educational disadvantage cannot be solved in mainstream school-based educational programmes alone. In later sections of this report the committee proposes a new strategy that places the solutions to educational disadvantage within an inclusive lifelong learning framework.

## *Recommendations of the Educational Disadvantage Forum*

The committee convened the first meeting of the Educational Disadvantage Forum in November 2002, inviting written submissions and nominations from all relevant interest groups and sectors to facilitate the widest possible participation of organisations working in the area of educational disadvantage. Three hundred people attended the forum, and seventy-three written submissions were received in advance. (The full text of the submissions is available on the Department of Education and Science web site at www.education.ie click on *Educational Disadvantage Committee*.) The forum made three main recommendations, which were included in the report published by the committee in January 2003:

1. Formulate a new strategy for educational inclusion, with a compelling vision for the future and a commitment to the key principles outlined by the forum:
   - a rights-based approach to equality
   - the inclusion of diversity
   - the integration of strategy between government departments and other providers and agencies
   - coherence of provision
   - focused target-setting
   - rigorous and systematic measuring and monitoring of outcomes and results
   - planned investment rather than fragmented expenditure
   - targeted responses directed at the most marginalised
   - customer-driven service, which gives responsibility to communities
   - support for consortia which show evidence of integrating other providers and use multi-agency funding
   - focus on outcomes rather than on compliance
   - effecting the institutional change that creates cultural shifts – not just funding stand alone, isolated projects
   - rewarding success as measured by achieving relevant performance outcomes
   - coherence between educational inclusion measures and other policy interventions.
2. Restructure the sections of the department dealing with social inclusion, ensuring that the new division links closely with the central planning and policy function, with the inspectorate and with the network of regional offices.
3. Allocate teachers to schools based on a weighted schedule that takes account of the need for additional levels of support for pupils in disadvantaged areas. Review the allocation on the basis of targets set and achieved by schools under school development planning. Monitor achievement of targets through evaluation by the inspectorate.

## *Submission no. 1: "Identifying Disadvantage for the Purpose of Targeting Resources and Other Supports"*

In March 2003 the committee made a submission to the Minister for Education and Science on identifying disadvantage for the purpose of targeting resources and other supports. The submission described and discussed a number of existing approaches to targeting disadvantage, and made the following recommendations:

- Develop a primary school pupil database to facilitate the identification and ranking of schools and pupils according to indicators of socio-economic and educational disadvantage.
- Collaborate with other government departments and agencies to share socio-economic data which will help to assess objectively the levels of disadvantage in schools.
- The issue of including educational variables (for example, measures of pupil achievement) among the criteria for selection of primary schools needs to be revisited.
- Identify schools that are experiencing changes in their socio-economic profiles and monitor the changes.
- Conduct a wider programme of research on the nature of disadvantage, including research on the social context effect and on differences between urban, town and rural disadvantage.

## *Submission no. 2: "Teacher Supply and Staffing in Disadvantaged Settings"*

In April 2003 the committee made a submission to the Minister for Education and Science on teacher supply and staffing in disadvantaged settings. This submission followed an examination by the committee of the particular problems arising for schools in disadvantaged settings in attracting and retaining an adequate supply of fully qualified teachers. While the report in general refers to both primary and post-primary schools, some of the recommendations in the submission apply only to primary schools. The submission made the following recommendations:

- Introduce an effective, up-to-date and comprehensive database as part of a management information system to allow decisions to be taken in the context of complete information about teacher supply and future needs.
- Have a fully qualified teaching force in place at the earliest possible stage so that all pupils are taught at all times by fully qualified teachers; carry out "qualification impact monitoring" before introducing or extending any programmes, projects or schemes.
- Establish the post of deputy principal as a full-time administrative position in disadvantaged schools with more than twenty teachers.
- Appoint full-time administrative principals to the most highly disadvantaged primary schools with four or more teachers.

- Provide support for teachers and principals in disadvantaged settings, including, for example, extra allowances, post-graduate programmes and in-career development opportunities, sabbatical leave, enhanced pensions, teacher support service, and employee assistance service.
- Introduce an access programme to teacher education for learners from disadvantaged settings.
- Build a more comprehensive profile of pupils and their socio-economic situations across government departments and services; undertake a study to establish the kinds of data that should be held at school level, regional level and centrally on each pupil.

## *Submission no. 3: "Integrated and Effective Delivery of School-based Educational Inclusion Measures"*

In December 2003 the committee made a submission to the Minister for Education and Science on a more integrated and effective delivery of school-based educational inclusion measures. In making this submission the committee recognised that further work needed to be done to link school-based measures with community initiatives and to bring cohesion to disadvantage initiatives outside the primary and post-primary school sector. The submission made the following recommendations:

- Improve the methods of identification and selection to ensure the appropriate targeting of resources for schools most in need.
- Target and deploy financial and teaching resources more effectively, by moving from the current programme-based approach to a more flexible, planned and integrated response to meeting identified needs at local level. The regional structures of the Department of Education and Science offer a new opportunity to engage in a real dialogue with the local partners in education and an opportunity to empower the least privileged parents and youth so that an educational service can be tailored to meet their distinct needs.
- Deliver a range of supports to teachers and schools to help them to understand and serve the needs of disadvantaged communities and to plan, monitor and evaluate the outcomes of educational inclusion measures in order to ensure a real and sustainable impact on the pupils and schools targeted.
- Develop a transition plan to manage the change to the new integrated delivery model.

## *Submission no. 4: "Priority Areas for Action in Adult and Community Education"*

In March 2004 the committee made a submission to the Minister for Education and Science on priority areas for action in adult and community education. Because it is acknowledged that adult education can help to break the cycle of educational disadvantage, the committee recommended systemic and structural changes to give recognition and resources to adult and community education as a distinct and equal sector of the education system. The submission set out the following priority areas for action within further and adult education sector:

### *Structures and policy*

- Establish the National Adult Learning Council as a co-ordinating structure as soon as possible.
- Increase the number of intensive basic education opportunities.
- Adopt a national numeracy strategy.
- Implement English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) recommendations, most notably an interdepartmental approach and a national strategy for ESOL services.

### *Funding and budgets*

- Establish a work-place basic education fund, and, in line with the recommendations of the Task Force on Lifelong Learning, introduce statutory learning leave for people with less than a Leaving Certificate level qualification.
- Provide a dedicated family literacy budget.
- Provide additional resources to Vocational Education Committees (VECs) to enable them to adopt the assessment framework, *Mapping the Learning Journey.*
- Increase investment in the literacy programme.
- Allocate specific programme funding to community education. Access to this funding should be based on specific criteria developed collaboratively by the VECs, the Department of Education and Science and community education groups.

### *Programme development, research and evaluation*

- Develop appropriate assessment, tuition and support systems for adults with specific learning difficulties within the VEC adult literacy service as well as other further education and training programmes.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) with a view to expansion.
- Mainstream the good practice that has been developed through the Education Equality Initiative (EEI) and New Opportunities for Women (NOW) programmes and other pilot initiatives into adult community education provision.

- Enhance the development of the adult and community education sector by carrying out focused research. Collect data and assess the progression routes of adults through community-based education programmes. Analyse the effectiveness of funding criteria and their application throughout the sector.

### *Supports for learners*

- Review selection criteria for programmes to take account of the sensitivities and circumstances of targeted learners.
- Standardise learner supports through interdepartmental collaboration.
- Adopt a policy of integrated child care and elder care for all further education and training programmes funded by the state.
- Introduce more flexible forms of funding to attract the learners who are hardest to reach.
- Increase eligibility for those in low-income households and provide additional financial incentives for participants in education. Motivation and enticements are needed to break the cycle of disadvantage and to encourage the first move towards a return to education.
- Through the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, progress the full implementation of the recommendations of the Action Group on Access to Higher Education.
- Integrate the costs of child care, elder care and of transport into programmes addressing educational disadvantage, and administer them in a way that meets participants' needs. Such an approach will require much greater interdepartmental co-operation.
- Develop a comprehensive Adult Educational Guidance Service, monitor and support it where appropriate.

3

# Guidelines for effective services to address educational disadvantage

Over the past three years the Educational Disadvantage Committee has considered national and international research and practice with a view to identifying a range of effective approaches to addressing educational disadvantage in the current Irish context. It is clear that there are no simple or quick solutions: all the research evidence suggests that effective approaches are as complex and multifaceted as the problem itself. A framework of general guidelines can be formulated, however, based on an analysis of successful practice both in Ireland and elsewhere. This framework will help to inform policy development and service delivery in the future.

Such a framework has been proposed by Professor Peter Evans of the OECD. In his keynote address to the Educational Disadvantage Forum in November 2002, Professor Evans outlined the international policy context within which actions to address educational disadvantage have been implemented. He suggested that what is needed is a new style of integrated services to address educational disadvantage. He identified a number of key differences between the old-style "non-integrated services" and the new-style "integrated services" to address educational disadvantage. (See fig. 1 below.) While the terminology may not always be appropriate to the environment of education, it is nevertheless possible to use the framework as the basis for developing good practice guidelines, which promote the best possible learning opportunities for children, families and communities.

Based on an analysis of international practice, Professor Evans articulated a number of principles of effective service delivery in areas that experience high levels of educational disadvantage. In the best models of practice, services are community-based; are delivered to the school and to the home; are accessible and flexible; involve parents; support pupils in enhancing their learning with minimal disruption; reduce dependence; promote as normal a life-style as possible; avoid fragmentation and duplication, and are accountable through the determination of clear authority and responsibility lines.

## *Fig. 1 Contrast between old and new systems of services to address educational disadvantage*

| New system: integrated services | Old system: non-integrated services |
|---|---|
| Customer-driven | Focused on agencies |
| Family-oriented | Individually focused |
| Outcomes-driven | Input-driven |
| Balance between prevention and intervention | Crisis-oriented |
| Decentralised | Centralised |
| Multi-agency funding, including private sources | Formal service delivery |
| Evaluated by outcomes | Evaluated by compliance with rules and regulations |
| Community-based | Sees clients in agency offices |
| Services delivered through teams of professionals, parents and non-professionals | Services delivered through credentialed professionals |
| Seeks institutional change | Funds isolated projects |

(Peter Evans, in Educational Disadvantage Committee, 2003.)

It is also relevant to note that Ireland's *National Development Plan 2000–2006* similarly highlights the importance of an integrated approach to tackling social inclusion. The plan states that the overall objective of the many social inclusion measures contained in both the inter-regional and the regional operational programmes is to ensure that people who are socially excluded are enabled to fully participate in and contribute to the current and future progress of the regions. The plan adds:

> Achieving this objective will require a comprehensive, holistic approach, involving the target communities and bringing together the services of a range of departments, the local authorities, the relevant state agencies and the voluntary sector. Encouraging marginalised communities to help themselves by identifying their own problems and working towards their solution in a planned and integrated way with the agencies of the state, will be an essential element of the process. Moreover, prioritisation of projects will be essential if the significant resources, which are being set aside within the National Development Plan to deal directly with social disadvantage, are to yield real material benefits for the disadvantaged of our society, their

> communities and society at large. Spreading the resources too thinly across a range of initiatives or putting in place a set of diverse programmes lacking integration and focus, will not address the real and acute needs of those suffering from social exclusion. (Government of Ireland, 1999)

The committee encountered many examples of good practice in the course of its work, for example, in the accounts of projects submitted to the forum and in meetings with groups of community educators. In keeping with models of best practice internationally, it is clear that interventions work best when the services provided by government departments, local authorities, education institutions, various voluntary and statutory agencies and private bodies are integrated, community-based and flexible in their response to locally identified needs and solutions. The following examples are included here to illustrate how the guidelines for effective integrated service delivery, as outlined by Professor Evans, are being implemented in Ireland.

## *Service delivery is person-centred ("customer-driven")*

Engaging the target groups was a critical challenge faced by many Education Equality Initiative projects, which developed a number of successful practices to enhance access, including outreach, introductory learning activities, enabling learning environments and support services.

Prolonged and targeted outreach was essential to encourage adults experiencing educational disadvantage to consider participation in structured learning. Successful outreach took many forms, including a neighbourhood worker approach, involving door-to-door visits; community consultation; peer support groups; one-to-one mentoring; a "gateway" approach, where the project acted as a referral agency for the target group and bringing learning opportunities to learners in their own community.

Education Equality Initiative projects demonstrate that some people find existing adult education and training services hard to reach. However, they respond positively when service providers work together to make available integrated learning opportunities and supports. Project outcomes demonstrate that investment in learning for those adults who had little privilege and few educational opportunities in the past provides verifiable, rich dividends in personal development, family development, human capital development and social capital development (Department of Education and Science, 2005b).

## *Services are family-oriented*

The family and the community are central in any policy developments to address educational disadvantage. This has been reflected in many recent developments, nationally and internationally. The OECD report *Parents as Partners in Schooling*

recognises the success of Ireland's Home-School-Community Liaison scheme and states that it is clear from Irish and other countries' experiences that

> Educational initiatives based in schools can raise the educational level of the adults involved, and result in a general sense of empowerment in the local community. Parental involvement, especially in areas of socio-economic deprivation, does not just benefit the children and the school – it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning. (OECD, 1997)

The Home-School-Community Liaison scheme, which is funded by the Department of Education and Science at primary and post-primary levels, enhances co-operation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of children. The scheme has generated a high level of activity involving parents and there has been a positive reaction to such activity by parents, who have reported increased confidence and a greater awareness of what is happening in school as a result of participating in the scheme. It has also brought about a change in the attitudes of some teachers, who have become more open and accepting of co-operation with parents. The reported effects on pupils include improved behaviour, improved school attendance, improved scholastic achievement, greater care in school work, and more positive attitudes to school and teachers, to themselves and to their parents (Archer and Weir, 2004).

There is a need for continued flexibility and responsiveness to identified needs so that the best use can be made of expertise and resources at local level. For example, where there is a well-developed community education system in place, a member of a local community education network might be well placed to form a link between families, the community, and the schools. However, the present Home-School-Community Liaison scheme requires that only an experienced teacher from one of the schools can formally provide this link.

## *Interventions are outcomes-driven and evaluated by outcomes*

> The ultimate goal of schemes to address the problems experienced by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, whether stated explicitly or not, is to bring about improvements in their intellectual development, and their educational achievements and attainment. … Overall, the evidence … suggests that the various programmes have impacted on participating schools in ways that would generally be regarded as very positive and likely to give rise to improved educational performance by the pupils in the schools. It is disappointing that, with only a few exceptions, improved performance has not been observed in evaluations to date. (Archer and Weir, 2004)
>
> … ongoing monitoring or self-evaluation – for accountability or for learning – were not routine practice in the majority of projects. (Department of Education and Science, 2005b)

As shown in these comments, the practice of evaluating the outcomes of projects in terms of improvements in attainment is not common. Some examples of good practice are beginning to emerge, however. The five-year (2001–2006) Bridging the Gap project has defined a goal-based strategy to address educational disadvantage in forty designated disadvantaged schools in Cork city. The setting and monitoring of goals and targets is an important part of the project methodology. Participating schools are helped to identify targets for their school and community-based initiatives and to monitor outcomes against these targets. At the end of each year of the project the schools submit reports including the data they have collected to show evidence of the project's impact on pupils' performance.

Schools have adopted a wide range of approaches to the collection and presentation of data, and many of the school reports provide good examples of collective goal-setting and the use of basic measurement techniques. Some schools have used standardised tests; others have developed rubrics to measure the performance of pupils in targeted areas of achievement. Self-assessment by pupils, teacher observations, interviews with pupils and teacher questionnaires have also been used. Informal tests and other simple measurement techniques such as "tick sheets" have been developed by teachers to monitor improved attendance, completion of homework assignments, and mastery of specific skills.

From the internal evaluation reports on the project there is evidence that the whole-school approach to setting targets and monitoring results produces positive outcomes for teaching and learning in the participating schools. It is also clear that empowering schools to respond flexibly to the needs of their pupils and of the community has a positive impact on schools and produces good learning outcomes (Bridging the Gap Project, 2003 and 2004).

## *There is a balance between prevention and intervention*

The School Completion Programme is a Department of Education and Science programme, which has been in operation since 2002. It is to be extended as part of the new DEIS School Support Programme, following an evaluation. However, as the programme has not yet been evaluated, the description given here is based on material produced by the Department of Education and Science (2002).

The School Completion Programme aims to have a significant positive impact on levels of pupil retention in primary and second-level schools and on the number of pupils who successfully complete the senior cycle. It concentrates on preventing early school leaving and on intervening to support pupils in completing the senior cycle. Targeted primary and second-level schools, in communities with the highest levels of early school leaving, participate in the programme. Schools and collaborating agencies are required to develop a retention plan in consultation with school staff, with parents and with local representatives of relevant statutory and voluntary agencies. This plan includes a collaborative programme of in-school and out-of-school actions to prevent early school leaving and to support young people at risk.

Programme actions operate on two related levels: preventive actions and continuing supportive actions when risk symptoms emerge. The retention plan targets programme resources, in the first instance, at individual young people who are most at risk of early school leaving. In addition, some strategies include a wider group or the entire school population. Participating schools must also plan a whole-school strategy for developing an ethos of retention and for promoting the completion of the senior cycle, by making school more relevant, meaningful and attractive to the pupils who are most at risk. The programme is based on the co-ordination of education provision with other initiatives, such as the National Educational Welfare Service, youth services and interventions supported by the Combat Poverty Agency and area-based partnerships.

Most of the school-based programmes include multifaceted actions such as social and personal development, sport and leisure activities provided in collaboration with community, youth and sporting organisations and actions in conjunction with local statutory bodies, including health and social services, probation and welfare agencies and others, as appropriate.

The School Completion Programme has not set any explicit targets for retention or completion at national level, but each local cluster must set quantifiable targets in terms of pupil support and retention. The targets are agreed with the management committee, the School Completion Programme co-ordinators and the Department of Education and Science. Regular progress reports are submitted to the department by the participating schools.

## *Decision-making is devolved ("decentralised")*

Area Development Management Ltd (ADM) is an intermediary company that supports integrated local social and economic development through the management of programmes that promote social inclusion, equality and reconciliation. ADM occupies a unique place, working on behalf of both policy-makers at national level and practitioners at local level. It administers a number of programmes, each of which has an educational dimension, even if the main emphasis is on some other aspect of social inclusion. ADM collaborates with government departments to manage programmes such as the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, RAPID and the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, which are provided locally through area-based partnerships on a community basis.

The experience of programmes managed by ADM shows that local communities have achieved great success and that, with the continued support of the state, considerable further advances can be made. Benefits flow into communities through the better focusing of resources on identified areas. An integrated approach to revitalisation can create real, lasting change, promoting conscious and constructive learning that develops the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the community. Local networks support the development and implementation of revitalisation plans by giving access to a wide range of skills and knowledge (Area Development Management Ltd, 2005).

## *Services are community-based*

There are many good examples of community-based services in the areas of youth work and adult and community education. Community-based learning is particularly valuable for young people and adults who have not succeeded in the mainstream school system. It provides opportunities for them to experience success by completing individual and group projects and activities. They can receive recognition of their achievements from peers, parents and other adults. They can participate equally with people of different academic achievements in work and recreational activities. Participants in community-based learning are provided with the opportunity to develop their capacities and attributes as creative, loyal and dependable members of a group and to become accepted by others. Involvement in community life creates a sense of collective community responsibility and a sense of connection and belonging to the community.

The report of the National Youth Work Advisory Committee, *Youth Work in the Context of Educational Disadvantage* (2005), illustrates the benefits of community-based learning. Youth work allows young people to meet a wider group of adults and introduces them to the range of skills and interests that exists in every community. It brings them into meaningful, sustained and task-oriented contact with adults who can also act as role models. Youth programmes use the community – its people, its environment, its social life and social problems – as a learning resource.

The involvement of adult volunteers as youth leaders in the community brings an important dimension to youth work in the skills and experience that they contribute. The direct, purposeful learning from experience of real-life situations that is part of the youth work process greatly enriches the educational development of young people and complements the formal education system. They also gain valuable learning experience in how to participate in and manage democratic systems, which is likely to be highly beneficial to the future health and well-being of society (National Youth Work Advisory Committee, 2005).

Foróige is one of a number of youth organisations that contribute to the personal development and civic education of youth in the non-formal sector. The majority of its work is with young people experiencing poverty and disadvantage. Its vision is the empowerment of youth as agents of change in society. Its Computer Clubhouse project in Blanchardstown, County Dublin, and its Beara Youth Development Project in County Cork are clear examples of youth development work that have a positive impact on the local community.

## *Services are delivered through teams of professionals, parents and non-professionals*

The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, has a role in supporting school-age children as well as early-years provision. The programme is having an impact on families and communities by enabling parents to obtain access to education, training and employment. In the area of adult learning and the professional development of child care workers, pioneering work is being done by the programme through investing in human capital, by working with children, staff members and parents.

High-quality, accessible early-years provision helps to reduce the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on educational experience and attainment. Through various projects, parents are being supported in becoming aware, confident and actively involved in their children's education. Effective transition pathways help children to move from home to pre-school, to primary school and on to secondary school. This involves co-operation between all the significant adults in the child's life: family, early-years services, schools, health services, and community agencies and workers.

Another example of a team-based approach to service delivery is the Incredible Years Programme run by the Clondalkin Partnership and supported by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). This programme actively involves parents, children and teachers in dealing with children's challenging behaviour.

## *There is a focus on creating real and sustainable change ("re-imaging education")*

While clear evidence of good practice is emerging from pilot initiatives and projects, the resulting learning and innovation are not always used systematically to inform sustainable change in policy and practice. The adult and community education sector has been very active in pushing the boundaries and in promoting systemic change. It appears that some of the fundamental principles of good adult and community education practice are beginning to influence mainstream educational thinking about the future. In a report entitled *Learning in the 21st Century* produced by the Information Society Commission, David Hargreaves (2005) makes the case for a radical rethinking of school organisation and the fundamental assumptions of schooling, based on personalising learning to meet the needs of all learners. He suggests that we are in transition from the nineteenth-century "educational imaginary" to one for the twenty-first century, which has the following features:

1. Pupils' identities and destinations are fluid, and intentionally so, as to think otherwise is to subject them to stereotypical and limiting expectations.
2. Intelligence is multidimensional, plastic and learnable.
3. School is culturally heterogeneous, as pupils are often a mix of social class, gender, religion and ethnicity, with a lower level of social capital.
4. Schools of a particular type are highly diverse and not interchangeable.

5. School is designed and organised to provide personalised education for all pupils.
6. Education is lifelong for everybody and covers informal as well as formal learning.
7. Education is unconstrained by time and place, partly because it takes place in the home and community as well as in schools, and partly because of the impact of new technologies.
8. Roles are blurred and overlapping: teachers learn as well as teach, pupils mentor other pupils as well as learning for themselves, and new professional roles emerge to complement that of the teacher.
9. Schools and educators are embedded in complex, interconnected networks.
10. Education is user-led (both pupils and parents can be regarded as "users").

## *Conclusion: Integrated services are an effective approach to addressing educational disadvantage*

From the examples of practice given above it is clear that services to address educational disadvantage in Ireland are moving, albeit slowly, towards a more integrated model. The committee is firmly of the view that this approach offers the best possible opportunity to improve the learning experiences of children, families and communities in the future. In the following sections of this report the committee puts forward a strategy for moving beyond educational disadvantage and working towards an integrated approach to educational inclusion and educational equality.

4

# Moving beyond educational disadvantage: Towards an integrated approach to educational inclusion and educational equality

## *We need to go beyond schools to end educational disadvantage*

The definition of educational disadvantage as set out in the Education Act (1998) clearly sees educational disadvantage in the formal school context and does not refer to education that is provided in other settings. This definition does not take adequate account of the evidence from national and international research that an integrated approach is a better way of dealing with educational disadvantage and of promoting lifelong learning for all. This has led to an unnecessary fragmentation in policy on educational disadvantage and a failure to gain maximum benefit from the various programmes that have been put in place.

Society is changing at a faster pace than ever before, and the education system needs to recognise, respond and adapt to changes in the socio-economic environment. It needs to respond more effectively to diversity: diversity of learners, of learning needs and of learning contexts. In this report the Educational Disadvantage Committee proposes an integrated strategy for achieving educational inclusion. This section of the report outlines a number of the main issues that have emerged from the committee's work over the past three years and that have shaped the proposed strategy.

## *Re-examine the fundamental assumptions of our approach*

The deficit model of disadvantage, which has been the basis of most policy interventions in recent decades, is now seen as outdated and inadequate. A more enlightened approach to educational inclusion and equality is one based on fundamental principles of human rights and social justice. The emphasis is on recognising and accommodating diversity in a positive sense and on achieving not only *equality of opportunity* and *equality of participation* but *equality of outcomes* and *equality of condition*. While earlier policy approaches were based on achieving equality of opportunity, and efforts are currently being made to achieve equality of participation through a variety of targeted intervention programmes, the aspiration for the future is to achieve equality of outcomes. Only when this is achieved can equality of condition be realised.

> Policies that seek to achieve equality of condition are underpinned by a political belief that all people are equal and therefore these policies aim for equal status for all citizens. … This approach involves fundamental changes in the political, social, economic and cultural infrastructures in our society. (Berni Brady, in Area Development Management Ltd, 2005)

## *Learning is a lifelong process*

> Lifelong learning: all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. (European Commission, 2002)

The *National Development Plan 2000–2006* adheres to the definition of lifelong learning adopted by the National Employment Action Plan as "all purposeful learning activity, whether formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence" (Government of Ireland, 1999).

These definitions of lifelong learning cover learning from pre-school to post-retirement learning and include the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. The objectives of lifelong learning include active citizenship, personal fulfilment and social inclusion, as well as employment-related aspects. The emphasis is on the individual learner and on promoting equality of opportunity and quality of learning experiences. In Ireland there is a need to raise awareness of the benefits of lifelong learning (Roger O'Keeffe, EU Commission, in Area Development Management Ltd, 2005).

In the context of lifelong learning, solutions to educational disadvantage must begin at pre-birth stage and continue throughout the life cycle: through early childhood, primary, second-level, further, higher, adult and continuing education. Interventions must span the entire spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning, from "cradle to grave". This demands a radical rethinking and re-evaluation of what learning has come to mean and cannot be done without systematic and long-term planning, and change in teacher education, work patterns, and certification methods.

Ireland lags behind other industrialised countries in having no legislative basis for paid educational leave to enable people to gain qualifications later in life, having been educationally disadvantaged in their earlier years. In some countries people are entitled to supports that enable them to return to education if they have not achieved a certain level of qualifications. The National Qualifications Framework provides a policy context that will make possible greater inclusion of all learners, irrespective of age.

## *Educational disadvantage cannot be tackled by the education system alone*

Educational equality is strongly related to social and economic policies, not just to educational policies. Poverty and educational disadvantage are closely related. Educational disadvantage will not be eliminated until poverty issues are addressed. Supporting designated disadvantaged schools within a framework of special initiatives, while going some way towards alleviating the problem, is a limited model for the longer term. Policy should be based on the rights of all learners to an education that enables them to reach their full potential.

Issues that contribute to disadvantage – for example poverty, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, inadequate and sub-standard housing – must be tackled in parallel and in an integrated way. RAPID and Clár areas have been identified as priorities for government investment. There is an urgent need for increased investment in the education system in RAPID and Clár areas.

For a child to engage meaningfully in the education process, parents and families must be supported in being strongly involved in their child's education, both by the school and by the community. A holistic approach, whereby every family member is engaged, should be the ultimate goal.

## *Link change in education to the broader socio-economic reform agenda*

> No just society will allow its weakest members to be ignored or its state systems such as education to disregard or pay insufficient attention to the fact that many children start school with major disadvantages. "Society" implies a sharing based on need, a real sense of inclusion. (INTO, 2000)

Our whole society stands to gain when educational disadvantage is tackled. There are social, moral and political advancements: less crime, disaffection, marginalisation and ghettoisation, more enhanced life chances, opportunity and fulfilment for all. The National Crime Council has pointed out, for example, that a significant proportion of the prison population is educationally disadvantaged. The expenditure on custodial detention would be reduced if educational disadvantage was eliminated.

Research carried out by the Educational Research Centre found that the disadvantage associated with poverty and social exclusion assumes a multiplier effect when large numbers of pupils in the school are from a similar disadvantaged background. This is known as the "social context effect". The factors that contribute to the social context of educational disadvantage need to be thoroughly researched.

## *Start "joined-up" thinking, planning and action at local and national levels*

Based on best international practice and on Irish experience, the optimum approach to addressing educational disadvantage is to formulate a coherent policy framework at national level, and to implement it through local and regional consortia, with co-ordinating structures at county and national levels. At national level the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and the Senior Officials Social Inclusion Group have an important role to play in ensuring that social inclusion initiatives are co-ordinated across government departments and agencies. County and city development boards, which were set up under the National Development Plan, also have considerable potential in relation to co-ordinating the local provision of social inclusion measures. This potential has not yet been realised.

There is a need for a radical reform of systems and structures, based on setting clear and unambiguous targets for improvement at national, local and individual school levels, on supporting the achievement of these targets and of monitoring outcomes consistently.

Various government departments spend significant amounts of public money in areas of disadvantage, including the Department of Education and Science, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Department of Health and Children, Department of Social and Family Affairs, and Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. There must be greater collaboration between these departments in addressing issues relating to disadvantage and in coming up with an agreed overall agenda for how each department can optimise its investment in these areas and avoid duplication of expenditure.

Within the Department of Education and Science and its agencies the various sections dealing with educational disadvantage need to work in closer collaboration with each other. This includes sections dealing with schooling at primary and second levels as well as sections dealing with youth, community and further education and the higher education section. It also includes services and agencies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the State Examinations Commission, the National Educational Psychological Service, the National Council for Special Education, the National Education Welfare Board, the National Qualifications Authority, and the Higher Education Authority. In particular, there needs to be a closer link between school-based initiatives and community education initiatives in areas of educational disadvantage, with flexibility in the mechanisms of funding and provision.

## *Change the mainstream, not just the margins*

Policy development must move beyond projects and programmes to effect long-term and sustainable cultural and institutional change for the benefit of all citizens and the national economy. If there is to be real change it must happen in mainstream systems and services that are provided to communities, families and individuals. It is not sufficient that good practice is happening in initiatives, projects and programmes targeted at marginalised groups: change must permeate the system itself.

This means that every school must respect, recognise and include diversity in its enrolment policy, curriculum, pedagogy and school organisation. It means providing professional development for teachers (initial, induction and in-service) to enhance awareness of diversity issues and to disseminate effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment. It means forging closer links between schools, families and communities, based on respecting the unique contribution of each to the learning life of individuals. It means ensuring that assessment systems at all levels are designed to affirm successful learning.

At national policy level it means setting strategic targets for improving levels of educational attainment among all age groups in the population. The standards of international best practice must be applied in Irish schools in relation to class size, pupil-teacher ratio and resources for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and for learners with special needs.

Improving mainstream schooling will result in an education system that is better for everybody: more learners will stay longer in the system and will achieve higher standards of attainment and qualifications. This in turn will have important benefits for individuals, for communities, for society, and for the economy.

## *Identify and target areas of greatest need*

In targeted provision, adequate resources must be provided to meet the needs of individual schools, based on the level of disadvantage evident in the community that the school serves. The communities with the highest concentration of families in need should be given priority in investment, while recognising that there are individuals in every community who require additional financial and educational support.

Appropriate criteria for identifying areas of greatest need should be agreed and refined, and up-to-date lists of schools, prioritised by level of disadvantage, both primary and post-primary, should be drawn up. This process can be advanced at primary level by the immediate establishment of the primary school pupil database.

It is recognised that the existing lists of so-called "designated disadvantaged schools" are out of date and that they need to be updated. Work is now being undertaken to update the list of primary schools, where the list drawn up in the context of *Giving Children an Even Break* in 2001 requires some refinement. In the view of the Educational Disadvantage Committee, the situation is more critical at

post-primary level, where the current list of designated disadvantaged schools is some fifteen years old and is acknowledged to be out of date. Work carried out by the Educational Research Centre in 2001 suggested that if an objective set of indicators comprising *(a)* the proportion of pupils in a school who have a medical card, *(b)* failure or poor results in the Junior Certificate examination and *(c)* the rate of early school leaving, were applied to each post-primary school in order to draw up a new rank order of so-called "designated disadvantaged" schools, almost one hundred post-primary schools that are not currently designated disadvantaged would be so designated. Given the advantages that can accrue to pupils who attend designated disadvantaged schools, including eligibility in some cases to participate in the access programmes of higher education institutions, it is the view of the Educational Disadvantage Committee that the designation of post-primary schools by the Department of Education and Science should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Schools must have sufficient resources to support the development of high standards of literacy and numeracy among the whole school population. Schools also need easy access to the necessary inter-agency supports by way of speech therapy, psychological service, child guidance, psychiatric service, and school meals, as well as ancillary staff including caretakers, secretaries and classroom assistants, to meet the needs of the school community.

Pupils with special learning needs should be integrated within mainstream schools only when sufficient resources, including properly qualified staff, are in place before the pupils are enrolled.

Adequate provision also needs to be made in mainstream classrooms for pupils with physical or sensory disabilities.

Special attention needs to be paid to including minority groups, such as members of the Traveller community, refugees, and asylum-seekers, in education programmes at all levels. The challenge is to create an inclusive education system, from pre-school to adult education, based on equality and diversity policies. Such inclusive institutions would welcome and respect diverse learners and their cultures.

A mechanism needs to be established to provide support for individual pupils at risk in non-designated schools. While their needs may not be as visible or as pressing as the needs of those in areas of concentrated disadvantage, they are nevertheless real and need to be addressed.

Educational disadvantage can take many forms. While there can be many positive benefits from multi-grade classes, some small rural and urban primary schools that are not designated disadvantaged can find it difficult to cater for the needs of all pupils in such classes without adequate support, resource teachers or reduced class sizes. Some pupils in these schools may experience multiple forms of educational disadvantage.

Innovative and diverse programmes must be provided for learners who do not benefit from the existing school system. More flexible structures are needed, especially for local services and schools during the post-compulsory period, to improve the linkage between compulsory schooling and further and adult education.

## *Schools and communities can support each other*

Educational disadvantage is a community issue and it needs to be dealt with both at community level and in schools. The school has a very important part to play but is only one of the community partners. This needs to be recognised by the Department of Education and Science in all of its measures to address educational disadvantage.

The committee recognises that the school supports the community and that the community can also support the school. The healthy development of young children can be enhanced by the school working in genuine partnership with families and with other agencies in the community. This collaboration produces important benefits for the child, the family, the school and the community.

There is a need to provide a range of appropriate and flexible supports for children and families to ensure that all children derive benefit from their school experience. These supports can be both school-based and community-based. The family should also be supported as a learning environment. The effectiveness of all support and interventions should be monitored systematically. However, as disadvantage manifests itself differently in each community, monitoring systems need to be sufficiently flexible to ensure that all positive outcomes are acknowledged.

Effective co-ordination of education-based services is needed, both within individual schools and within the wider education system. The school plan is of central importance, as it requires schools to concentrate on achieving social cohesion.

5

# Taking the Lead: A Strategy for an Inclusive, Diverse and Dynamic Learning Society Without Barriers

In this final section of the report the Educational Disadvantage Committee proposes an integrated national strategy for achieving educational equality that will result in an inclusive, diverse and dynamic learning society without barriers. As mentioned earlier, there are many dimensions of educational equality. *Equality of opportunity*, *access* and *participation* have been the focus of many previous policy interventions in Ireland. However, *equality of outcomes* is the more challenging aim that it is hoped to achieve by adopting an integrated and coherent approach in the future. The critical link with *equality of condition* is also recognised.

> International evidence is overwhelming that the more unequal a society is economically, the more unequal it is educationally; this means that there is no meaningful equality of opportunity without equality of condition. Therefore, there can be no simple internal education settlement to the problem of class inequality in education. (Kathleen Lynch, in Area Development Management Ltd, 2005)

The proposed national strategy to achieve educational equality is based on the committee's research and analysis of many aspects of educational disadvantage and the broader social context. The strategy includes, but also goes beyond, the new DEIS plan, which deals primarily with creating equality of opportunity in schools. This strategy takes account of the findings of national and international research, including the two reviews by the Educational Research Centre that were commissioned by the committee. It incorporates the views of a wide range of policy-makers, providers, practitioners and participants in learning programmes, as gathered through the Educational Disadvantage Forum and the committee's consultative process. It also includes the views of the statutory committee members, who brought to the process a wide range of expertise and experience.

Research shows that schools alone cannot achieve educational equality, and we have begun to move the debate beyond school-based education. Everyone stands to gain when educational inclusion is achieved as part of a bigger social and economic change agenda. There are social, economic and political advances, with improved life chances, opportunity and fulfilment for all.

Research also shows that the education system in itself can sometimes make matters worse, by reinforcing inequality and widening the gap between those who benefit from it and those who are excluded from it.

The language and frames of reference of educational disadvantage need to change, to focus on fundamental principles of human rights and social justice.

> Linguistic analysis and conceptual formulation hold a central place in building inclusive education for all. We must move beyond labelling people as educationally disadvantaged or marginalised and stretch towards formulations that name the aspiration of inclusion for all …
> The language of 'educational disadvantage' is jaded language and no longer holds a moral imperative or signals the scandal of this situation and the urgency of its transformation. It is essential that we find new language to describe the reality of those young people who are being failed by the present system. We need metaphors and narratives that jolt the imagination of those educating children and young people, so that images of the possible inform their practice. (Ann Louise Gilligan, in Area Development Management Ltd, 2005)

We aim to achieve the positive inclusion of diversity, rather than maintaining a negative emphasis on difference and disadvantage. A rights-based approach to social inclusion means that it is not enough to confine our efforts to addressing discontinuities, gaps and barriers: significant improvement in educational outcomes is the goal.

Our vision is of an inclusive, lifelong learning society in which everyone can achieve their full educational potential and aspirations without barriers. The full implementation of this strategy will enable this vision to become a reality.

## *Principles underpinning the strategy for educational equality*

From our research and analysis we have identified a number of principles that we believe must inform the strategy for educational equality:

- A rights-based approach to equality
- Inclusion of diversity
- Integration of strategies, structures and systems
- Coherence of provision
- Focused target-setting and measurement
- Monitoring of outcomes and results.

Research carried out by Kellaghan et al. (1995) has shown that there are seven elements that constitute a precisely targeted, comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to addressing disadvantage in schools. These elements are:

1. Curriculum adaptation at primary and post-primary levels, with particular reference to literacy and numeracy
2. Smaller classes, particularly in the early grades, to facilitate individual attention and the development of relationships between teachers and pupils
3. Pre-school provision, reflecting an emphasis on prevention rather than remediation
4. A high degree of involvement by parents in the educational process, both in their own homes and in schools
5. The reform of school organisation to develop a unity of purpose and to build on existing strengths of teachers and pupils
6. Adequate financial resources so that schools can operate comfortably
7. A high level of involvement of other community agencies.

While it is clear that progress has been made in some of these areas in recent years, there is still a great deal to be done. The DEIS plan addresses some of the issues at a policy level; however, it is critically important that this is followed up in implementation so that real change happens in schools and in the lives of pupils, families and communities. The committee, in putting forward its strategy for educational equality, aims to integrate the school-based responses proposed in the DEIS plan within a lifelong learning approach to educational and social inclusion.

## *Setting strategic goals*

The strategy proposed by the committee has three goals:

1. Achieve educational equality in the broader context of achieving social inclusion.
2. Provide inclusive opportunities for learning at all stages of the life cycle, from birth onwards.
3. Improve the mainstream school system so that all young people aged from 3 to 18 years receive an education that is appropriate to their needs. (This goal is the focus of the DEIS plan.)

For each goal we have set out examples of a number of specific objectives and concrete actions, based on the committee's work to date. We know that further work is needed to elaborate the objectives and actions in more detail, and to identify clear targets, performance indicators and critical success factors that will enable us to know whether we are achieving the goals.

GOAL 1

# ACHIEVE EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY IN THE BROADER CONTEXT OF ACHIEVING SOCIAL INCLUSION

## *Examples of objectives and actions*

### *Objectives*

- Address poverty and other issues that contribute to educational disadvantage, such as employment and income resources, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and inadequate and sub-standard housing. These issues must be tackled in parallel and in an integrated way.
- Start "joining up" social inclusion policies, strategies, service provision and practices between government departments and public authorities.
- Promote closer links between school-based initiatives and community education initiatives in areas of educational disadvantage, with flexibility in the mechanisms of funding and delivery.

### *Actions*

- Increase spending and the general resourcing of education as a proportion of gross national income (GNI).
- Plan investment strategically, avoiding fragmented expenditure aimed at short-term solutions.
- Advance the broader socio-economic reform agenda as outlined in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* and *Sustaining Progress.*
- Give priority to government investment in RAPID and Clár areas, especially in infrastructure.
- Develop an integrated strategy to optimise investment in these areas and avoid duplication of expenditure.
- Ensure that the National Educational Welfare Board, the national body charged with responsibility for full school attendance, is fully resourced to carry out its responsibilities under the Education (Welfare) Act (2000).
- In particular, provide adequate resources to address the problem of absenteeism in RAPID areas by ensuring that the full complement of educational welfare officers is appointed.

- In keeping with best practice internationally, link up the services provided by government departments, local authorities, various voluntary and statutory agencies and private bodies.
- Ensure that services are community-based and flexible in their response to locally identified needs and solutions.
- Ensure that the various sections within the Department of Education and Science dealing with educational disadvantage work in closer collaboration with each other. This includes sections dealing with mainstream schooling at primary and second levels as well as sections dealing with youth, community and further education and the higher education section.

## Goal 2

# Provide inclusive opportunities for learning at all stages of the life cycle, from birth onwards

## *Examples of objectives and actions*

### *Objectives*

- Provide quality early learning opportunities in appropriate environments for all children.
- Promote high standards of literacy and numeracy across all age groups.
- Provide immediate and appropriate learning support for individual learners or groups of learners whose progress is below the standard of their peer group.
- Ensure that everybody has the opportunity to achieve at least a qualification at level 4 in the National Framework of Qualifications, either in school or in other settings, as a basic entitlement.
- Ensure that everybody has the opportunity to progress to more advanced levels of qualifications in the National Framework of Qualifications, whether in further or higher education or training or through lifelong learning.
- Monitor individual progress and learning outcomes achieved by all learners.
- Build partnerships between school-based and community-based education, which respect, acknowledge and use different experience and expertise.
- Provide quality community-based learning opportunities for all age groups.
- Provide learning opportunities for parents of school-going children.
- Enable schools to provide a more complete service to their community.
- Integrate successful youth work and relevant community education approaches in mainstream schools to meet the needs of learners.

### *Actions*

- Implement fully the provisions of the National Qualifications Framework, which integrates formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- Ensure that parents have a range of choices within the school and community from which to choose early childhood care and education opportunities for their child.
- Use schools as one of the locations for before-school and after-school education programmes.

- Investigate the potential of *extended schools, full-service schools* and *citizen schools* in collaboration with community and youth organisations.
- Promote programmes such as arts-based learning, anger management and addiction counselling.
- Expand and develop the behaviour and anger management programmes that include parents, children and teachers already successfully in operation under some area partnerships.
- Develop and implement a national literacy strategy.
- Promote the sharing of professional expertise among people working with different age groups.
- Conduct a well-resourced national campaign to end low adult literacy.
- Provide support and opportunities for learners who have not achieved an upper secondary education to participate in work-place learning, community-based learning, or formal education and training programmes.
- Ensure an adequate supply of qualified personnel to provide the full range of educational services.

## Goal 3

# Improve the mainstream education system so that all young people aged from 3 to 18 years receive an education that is appropriate to their needs

## *Examples of objectives and actions*

### *Objectives*

- Ensure that all children reach an appropriate standard of literacy and numeracy to enable them to cope with the demands of the curriculum.
- Adopt coherent approaches to the identification of disadvantage and the targeting of resources appropriately.
- Improve statistical data-gathering and analysis.
- Monitor the effectiveness of all programmes and interventions in meeting defined targets.
- Reduce class sizes in accordance with the findings of research and evaluations.
- Foster greater family and community involvement in the educational process.
- Provide additional learning pathways within the mainstream education system to meet the needs of individual learners or groups of learners.
- Ensure that the National Educational Welfare Board develops guidelines for school attendance strategies and codes of behaviour as a means of intervening at school level to minimise absenteeism.
- Provide timely and effective additional support and specialised help to ensure that no learner is left behind.
- Provide focused professional development for teachers and principals at the initial, induction and in-service stages of their career.
- Include social cohesion targets as an element of school planning in all schools.
- Promote a culture of inclusion in school organisation.
- Take measures to improve the attendance and attainment of Traveller children at primary and post-primary level, ensuring that all Traveller children transfer from primary to post-primary school.

## *Actions*

- Adapt curricula, teaching methods and materials to engage all learners.
- Assign additional resources to support the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills to all age groups.
- Support the family as a learning environment.
- Make the school a focal point of community education.
- Retain experienced teachers in the system, for example by providing enhanced pension arrangements.
- Support schools in implementing inclusive policies and in monitoring the achievement of inclusion targets.
- Help schools to develop positive approaches to the management of discipline and behaviour.
- Extend the range of choices to include a wider range of learning options in the junior cycle and senior cycle.
- Recognise attendance at certain prescribed programmes (including Youthreach and out-of-school programmes) as meeting the requirements for compulsory schooling.
- Prevent early school leaving by providing appropriate intervention programmes in pre-school, primary and post-primary schools and in the community.
- Under the National Educational Welfare Board, develop a register of young people aged 16 and 17 years who leave school early to take up employment, and make appropriate arrangements for their continuing education and training, in consultation with providers and employers.
- Use school-based and school-focused models of professional development more widely; for example:

  *Initial teacher education:* provide modules on inclusion, diversity, adapting curriculum and pedagogy to suit the needs of all learners; encourage all colleges of education to provide teaching practice in areas of poverty and disadvantage for all their students in the course of their teacher education

  *Induction:* provide mentors for new teachers: share experience, expertise and good practice

  *In-service:* provide continuing professional development for teachers, and leadership and management development for principals, linked to the strategic goals of educational inclusion and equality (for example active learning methods, using ICT, classroom interaction, group work).

## *From rhetoric to reality: Implementing the strategy*

The Educational Disadvantage Committee occupies a unique statutory position, which enables it to promote a new understanding among policy-makers and practitioners of the principles that underpin a rights-based approach to educational equality. In formulating its strategy the committee has drawn on international and national research, together with national and EU legislation and social policy, to ensure that real change comes about in the education system and that its structures are more attuned to meeting the needs of all learners equally.

The committee is aware that certain conditions need to be in place if this strategy is to be successfully implemented. The first condition is a *clear focus on outcomes*. The detailed objectives and targets need to be "smart" – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed – and to be shared by relevant stakeholders, who agree on what constitutes success. The goals, objectives and actions need to fit together coherently and reinforce each other, and there must be a match between what is intended and how it will be achieved.

The second condition is the *availability of resources*. The strategy must use existing resources and expertise to best effect, and adequate additional resources need to be made available to implement the strategy. Implementation is most effective when resources are employed flexibly, concentrated in priority areas, and not spread too thinly.

The third condition is the *effective communication* of the strategy to all the relevant people. This will build the commitment of the main participants to the strategy and enable it to be implemented. In addition, there is a need for committed and co-ordinated leadership to achieve the strategic goals.

The final condition for the successful implementation of the strategy is a systematic approach to *measuring and reporting outcomes* that involves all the relevant people: policy-makers, providers, practitioners, and participants. From the outset it is important that there are clear and agreed procedures and criteria by which outcomes are measured. A collaborative approach to developing benchmarks and indicators of success and to collecting and analysing data will ensure that there is greater "ownership" of the findings and results.

In presenting its advice to the Minister for Education and Science, the committee considers it important that there be continuing evaluation and review of the effectiveness of the proposed strategy and its implementation. This may form part of the remit of the next Educational Disadvantage Committee.

## References


Archer, P. and Weir, S. (2004) *Addressing Disadvantage: A Review of International Literature and of Strategy in Ireland. Report to the Educational Disadvantage Committee.* Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Area Development Management Limited (ADM) (2005) *Building Equality through Education: Going Forward in Partnership. ADM Conference Report.* Dublin: ADM.

Bridging the Gap Project (2003, 2004) *Bridging the Gap Project Evaluation Report.* Cork: UCC.

Combat Poverty Agency (2003) *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland. Poverty Briefings Number 14.* Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

Department of Education and Science (2002) *Guidelines for the School Completion Programme.* Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

Department of Education and Science (2005a) *DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: an Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.* Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

Department of Education and Science (2005b) *Education Equality Initiative Phase 1: Policy and Practice Lessons.* Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

Educational Disadvantage Committee (2003) *Educational Disadvantage Forum: Report of Inaugural Meeting.* Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

Educational Disadvantage Committee (2004) *Submissions Made to the Minister for Education and Science: 2003 Report.* Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

European Commission (2002) *A European Area of Lifelong Learning.* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Government of Ireland (1998) *Education Act, 1998.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

Government of Ireland (1999) Ireland: *National Development Plan, 2000 – 2006.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

Hargreaves, David (2005) "Personalising Learning." In *Learning in the 21st Century: Towards Personalisation.* Dublin: Information Society Commission.

Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) (2000) *A fair start.* Dublin: INTO.

Kellaghan, T., Weir, S., Ó hUallacháin, S., & Morgan, M. (1995) *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland.* Dublin: Department of Education/Combat Poverty Agency/Educational Research Centre.

National Youth Work Advisory Committee (2005) *Youth Work in the Context of Educational Disadvantage.* Dublin: National Youth Work Advisory Committee.

OECD (1997) *Parents as Partners in Schooling.* Paris: OECD.

## Members of the Educational Disadvantage Committee

### Chairperson

Dr Áine Hyland (Professor of Education and Vice-President, University College, Cork)

### Committee members (July 2005)

Ms Inez Bailey (Director, National Adult Literacy Agency)

Ms Berni Brady (Director, Aontas)

Dr Concepta Conaty (National Co-ordinator of Disadvantage Initiatives, Department of Education and Science)

Ms Rita Conway (Post-primary teacher, Terence MacSwiney Community College, Knocknaheeny, Cork)

Dr Peadar Cremin (President, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick)

Dr Tony Crooks (Chief Executive Officer, Area Development Management)

Ms Carmel Curran (Principal, Drumcondra National School, Dublin)

Ms Valerie Duffy (Chairperson of youth affairs, National Youth Council)

Ms Noreen Flynn (Primary teacher, Basin Lane Convent National School, Dublin)

Dr Ann Louise Gilligan (Co-ordinator, Educational Disadvantage Centre, St Patrick's College, Dublin, and Chairperson, National Educational Welfare Board)

Ms Maura Grant (Director of Programmes relating to Educational Disadvantage, Department of Education and Science, and former Principal, Blakestown Junior National School, County Dublin)

Dr Tom Kellaghan (Director, Educational Research Centre, St Patrick's College, Dublin)

Mr Paddy McDonagh (Assistant Secretary, Department of Education and Science)

Mr Tommy Monaghan (Community Welfare Officer, Northern Area Health Board)

Mr Éamonn Ó hAllmhuráin (Post-primary teacher, St Paul's Secondary School, Brunswick Street, Dublin)

Mr Pat Ryan (Chief Executive Officer, City of Galway VEC)

Mr Aidan Savage (National Co-ordinator, School Completion Programme)

### Secretary to the committee

Dr Tony Gaynor (Higher Executive Officer, Department of Education and Science)