National Educational Welfare Board submission on the Department of Education and Skills Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools

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1.1 Introduction

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) welcomes the opportunity to submit comments and suggestions on the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools. This submission reflects the views of the four services integrated under the NEWB.1

The services integrated under the NEWB operate mainly in schools participating in the DES’s Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. The Education Welfare Service (EWS), the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL), the VTTs and the School Completion Programme (SCP) work mainly with families and children who find themselves on the margins of the education system. These services have a unique insight into the underlying causes of educational disadvantage and the impact of poverty and chaotic family life on children’s attendance, participation and retention in school. The services also have a clear understanding of the need for a whole school approach to support the improvement of literacy and numeracy in children, particularly for those children who have poor or chronic patterns of attendance, poor levels of engagement with the school system and at-risk factors for leaving school early. The organisation’s submission therefore focuses on the needs of children who are struggling within the education system and who require a range of supports, including literacy and numeracy supports, to improve their overall engagement with the school system.

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1 Budget 2011 recommended the redeployment of the 42 Visiting Teachers for Travellers (VTT), currently under the remit of the NEWB, into schools by September 2011.
1.2 What is Literacy and Numeracy?

A. Literacy
There are many definitions of literacy. For some, literacy is a skills-based activity that is autonomous, and can be constructed and deconstructed. Others perceive literacy as a practice, or continuum of practices, situated in various domains, locations, events and networks. The definition or description of literacy in the Draft National Plan acknowledges the conventional discourse on literacy by stating that “Literacy conventionally refers to reading, writing, speaking, viewing and listening effectively in a range of contexts” (DES, 2010). However, the definition extends and expands to add a view of literacy as “a flexible, sustainable mastery of a set of capabilities in the use and production of traditional texts and new communications technologies using spoken language, print and multimedia. In this plan, literacy refers to the development of these capabilities in the first language of the school.”

Viewing literacy as ‘capability’ fits very well within a social inclusion, educational disadvantage context. Schools, communities, families and agencies in areas of social and educational disadvantage recognise that in modern societies “literacy skills are fundamental to informed decision-making, personal empowerment, active and passive participation in local and global social community” (Stromquist, 2005). A perception of literacy as a means of empowerment and emancipation is implicit in this description of literacy. “Literacy, manifest as particular literacies and acquired in context-sensitive ways, can be one of the capabilities which enable us to challenge and to change constraining social realities…” (Robinson, 2003). In the foreword to Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, Koichiro Matsuura states “Through literacy, children, young people and adults are able to develop capacities and create opportunities that can transform their lives. Literacy is, indeed, a means of empowerment” (Matsuura, 2007). The NEWB services operate from the conviction that literacy skills are essential so that a child can engage fully with and benefit from the educational system. Pupils for whom reading is a struggle, for whom engagement with school texts is too challenging and undermining, are more likely to either resort to disruptive behaviour or withdraw from the learning process. In attempting to
address these challenges, the NEWB services are involved in devising and implementing a wide range of initiatives, which support children and families struggling with literacy and numeracy.

Schools on their own cannot achieve high levels of literacy among the pupils they serve. There is a significant body of evidence that shows that parental, family and community involvement is crucial in developing and maintaining meaningful engagement with literacy. While the teaching and learning of literacy is seen as a school-based activity, there is an understanding that there may be a need to explore “looking beyond the schoolhouse walls to target the most powerful educational institution – the family” (Darling, 1993). Family literacy programmes target the whole family, both adults and children, for educational intervention. Because parents in areas of educational disadvantage may have low levels of literacy themselves, achieving the stated target of involving parents in their children’s learning becomes more complex and challenging.

In homes in areas of disadvantage there may be few books, newspapers or any reading materials. Parents may be so taken up with the struggle to survive that education or reading may not even begin to feature as a priority in their lives. Difficulties in family life may be forgotten for a while, at least, when a parent and child sit close together and share the magic of a story. In addressing educational disadvantage Kellaghan (2002, 19) advocates approaches ‘which target not only children’s cognitive and social competence, but also parenting behaviours, family interactions and social support’. When parents and children share books with excitement and appreciation, instead of regarding it as an activity marginal to their lives, ‘they help overcome a major risk-factor for failure at school’ (Segel 1994, 78).

B. Numeracy

Numeracy involves using mathematics in an efficient way in our everyday lives. Each day we use number, measurement and space. Every time we shop or go to the bank, number is central to these transactions. Parking a car or filling a box involves an understanding of space. Measurement is required for cooking, building, travelling or
interpreting a weather forecast. Children’s experience of numeracy at school is mediated through the teaching and learning of Mathematics.

A significant amount of research on Mathematics has been carried out by, or on behalf of the DES. Activity-based teaching and learning is central to the revised Primary School Curriculum (1999). The Evaluation Report on Curriculum Implementation recommended that in the teaching of Mathematics; teachers should provide opportunities for discussion, combined with the use of concrete materials by the pupils (DES, 2005a). This report also stated that the use of precise concrete materials would result in effective teaching and learning, aimed at meeting the individual needs of the learner. The report further recommended that schools promote purposeful parental involvement.

The HSCL Mathematics for Fun initiative (and other mathematics-related HSCL initiatives), is readymade to meet these recommendations both at the primary level and in the junior cycle at post-primary level. In the evaluation report, Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools (DES, 2005b), the Inspectorate recommended that all pupils’ learning in Mathematics be facilitated by the extensive use of concrete materials. It further recommended that HSCL build on the proven success of initiatives to involve the parents of younger children by extending these strategies to enable parents to engage effectively with the school as their children progress through the middle and senior classes. As Mathematics for Fun is practical, workable and non-threatening, it can address these recommendations.

An assessment of Mathematical achievement conducted by the Educational Research Centre (ERC, 1999) highlighted the deficit between the performance of pupils from advantaged and those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Recommendations based on the findings also emphasised the necessity for differentiated and activity-based learning.

The Mathematics for Fun collaborative learning initiative is designed and structured to address the following aims:
• To meet the individual needs of the pupils through hands-on work and parental involvement
• To enhance the parent-teacher partnership
• To help parents understand more fully the challenging nature of mathematics for the pupil as learner and the teacher as tutor
• To break down the fear barrier some pupils may have towards Mathematics by bringing fun and variety into the learning process
• To help parents experience at first hand the working school environment
• To empower parents to engage meaningfully in the learning process of young people

Parents are generally not invited to get involved in the teaching of Mathematics. They often refrain from involvement with the school because of cultural norms that discourage interference with the teacher’s autonomy, according to Yao (Yao, 1988). Addressing this issue is central to HSCL work, as collaborative parent-teacher interaction falls within the goals and basic principles of the scheme. Parents’ involvement in classroom-based numeracy initiatives has been developed and is now an integral to the scheme’s practices.

Numeracy initiatives that allow for consultation and collaboration with teachers and parents need to be promoted and fostered. These initiatives should endeavour to involve parents in facilitating differentiated mathematical activities in partnership with schools and teachers. Building on and supporting existing numeracy initiatives will provide opportunities for developing skills in numeracy and Mathematics among parents and children.
1.3 Following the research evidence

Any plan or approach taken by the Department should be guided by the research evidence available to it. There are a number of Irish and international research studies that inform this area, which should be examined in terms of the policy choices to be made within the plan.

A number of studies pertaining to literacy and numeracy skills in the Irish population underpin the need for developments within the area:

- The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) conducted in Ireland in 1994 found that 25% of the people aged 16-64 scored at the lowest level of literacy (Level 1). The survey showed that early school leavers, older adults and the unemployed were more likely to be at risk of literacy difficulties than the general population (Murray, T.S., Kirsch, I.S., Jenkins L.B *Adult Literacy in OECD Countries (Internet)*. Ottowa: National Centre for Educational Statistics. 1998. Available from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98053.pdf).

- In May 2003, the Educational Research Centre conducted a survey of reading literacy in primary schools designated disadvantaged (Eivers, E., Shiel, G. & Shortt, F. *Reading Literacy in Disadvantaged Primary Schools*. Dublin: Education Research Centre. 2004). The survey highlighted a number of relevant findings including:
  - At each class level, pupils achieved substantially lower average scores than pupils in a representative national sample. The size of the achievement difference was constant across class levels, indicating that the achievement gap did not widen over time. Using performance at or below the 10\textsuperscript{th} percentile as a measure of ‘serious reading difficulties’, 26.7% of pupils in first class, 29.5% in third, 27.2% in sixth class were described as having such difficulties (compared to 10% nationally).
  - At first and third, but not sixth class, girls had a significantly higher mean score than boys, and greater proportions of boys scored at or below the 10\textsuperscript{th} percentile.
• Across all grades, pupils from the Traveller community had average scores well below pupils in the settled community.
• Pupils’ school attendance rates had a weak to moderate correlation with achievement (i.e. those with good attendance records tended to be better readers).
• On average, 5% of teaching staff were unqualified, with teacher turnover equivalent to a quarter of staff over the two years prior to completing the survey.
• When asked to identify the three most serious obstacles to teaching reading in their school, 62% of principals cited low parental literacy levels, while at least 25% cited inadequate psychological services, lack of parental support and of pupil interest, large classes, and a shortage of learning-support services.
• Schools with the most socio-economically deprived enrolments tended to have higher teacher turnover, greater number of unqualified teachers and of pupils in need of learning support and of psychological assessment, and more pupils in receipt of learning support. Such schools also tended to have poorer pupil attendance rates and lower attendance at parent-teacher meetings.

While the 2004 ERC study focused on the literacy skills of students in disadvantaged primary schools, the most recent PISA study focused on the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science in a representative sample of Irish schools, with reading being the main focus of the survey in 2009 (Perkins, R., Moran, G., Cosgrave, J. & Shiel, G. PISA 2009: The Performance and Progress of 15-year-olds in Ireland – Summary Report. Dublin: Education Research Centre. 2010). The findings from this OECD study must inform the approach taken by the Department in the area of literacy and numeracy. The Department’s prioritization of literacy and numeracy is vital in light of a number of concerning findings arising out of the survey:

1.3.1 Reading Literacy
- Ireland’s mean score on reading literacy in 2009 was 495.6 points, which is not significantly different from OECD average (493.4). Ireland’s overall rank is 21st among 65 participating countries and 17th of 34 OECD countries.
- Female students in Ireland had a mean score that was some 39.2 points higher than males – the same as the OECD average gender difference.
- Over one in six students in Ireland is estimated to have poor reading skills, with twice as many males (23.2%) as females (11.3%) in this group.
- Ireland’s mean score in 2009 is some 31 points (about one-third of a standard deviation) lower than in 2000. This decline is the largest across all 39 countries that participated in both PISA 2000 and PISA 2009, resulting in Ireland’s rank falling from 5th to 17th among such countries (note: the researchers put forward a number of arguments to explain this variance).
- The performance of students in Ireland declined uniformly across all ability levels and so cannot be attributed to one particular group such as very high or very low achievers doing poorly.
- The percentage of lowest-performing students (those scoring below proficiency Level 2) increased from 11% to 17.2%. Conversely, the percentage of highest performing students in Ireland (scoring at or above Level 5) halved from 14.2% in 2000 to 7% in 2009.

1.3.2 Mathematics

- Ireland’s mean mathematic score in 2009 was 487.1 – a score that is significantly below the corresponding OECD average of 495.7. Ireland ranked 32nd among 65 participating countries and 26th of 34 OECD countries.
- In Ireland, 20.8% of students scored at or below Level 1 (indicating very low performance), compared with an OECD average of 22%. Just 6.7% of students were classified as high achievers, scoring at or above Level 5, compared to an OECD average of 12.7%
- Ireland’s performance in mathematics declined by 16 points since 2003 – the second largest decline among countries participating in both years.
- The decline in mathematics was fairly uniform across the student range of ability, with a slightly more pronounced decline at the upper end of the
achievement distribution, where 6.7% scored at or above Level 5, compared with 11.4% in 2003.

1.3.3 Science

- In Ireland, the mean score on science was 508 in both 2006 and 2009, indicating no change in performance. Ireland’s mean science score is still significantly above the OECD average.

A number of findings in the PISA study explore the relationship between a number of relevant individual, school and family characteristics and their impact on achievement. The findings noted in the section below must inform the Department’s policy decisions in this area.

1.3.4 Characteristics related to achievement

- Forty-two percent of students in Ireland reported that they never engaged in reading for enjoyment (compared to 37.4% on average across OECD countries), while 15.8% reported reading for enjoyment for more than one hour a day. The mean score of students who read for enjoyment for more than one hour per day was almost 100 points higher than that of students who did not read for enjoyment.

- A measure of socio-economic status was associated with reading performance. Students in the top third of the ESCS distribution had a mean reading score that was 76 points higher than students in the bottom third. Similarly, on an aspect of home educational resources (number of books in the home) students with 0-10 books in the home had a mean score that was 115 points lower than students with over 500 books.

- Both Irish born students and non-Irish born students who spoke English or Irish at home had significantly higher mean reading scores than migrant students who spoke other languages at home. Both native students and second-generation migrant students had higher mean reading scores than first-generation migrants.

- Although students in Ireland reported relatively high levels of access to ICT resources at home, and average levels at school, compared to students in other
OECD countries, they underused those resources in both locations. Although students in Ireland have significantly lower levels of self-confidence in performing ICT high-level tasks than found across the OECD, they also have significantly more positive attitudes towards computers. International ICT indices tend to relate to reading achievement in a non-linear fashion in Ireland, and most display significant associations with socio-economic status, as measured by student ESCS scores and school SSP status.

- School-level variables associated with reading achievement include school average ESCS (with higher ESCS schools doing better).
- Students whose parents have a lower level of education i.e. none or primary (2.4%) have a significantly lower mean reading score than students whose parents have a higher level of education i.e. (51%) (with mean reading scores of 430.2 and 517.8 respectively).
- Irish students in lone-parent families remain at a significant disadvantage of 13-score-points when student socio-economic status is controlled for.
- Students reporting higher levels of interaction with parents (e.g. ‘spend time just chatting’, ‘discuss books, films or television programmes’) have a significantly higher mean reading score (526) than students reporting lower levels of interaction (473.5).
- Students who spend a lot of time in paid work during term time, defined as eight hours per week, have a significantly lower mean reading score (462.4) than students who do not engage in any paid work during term time (508.5).
- Students who perceive themselves as having poor relationships with their teachers have significantly lower scores (471.8) than students with relationships of an average quality (508.6). Those with good relationships achieved a mean reading score (517.9) that is not significantly different from the score obtained by students whose relationships were of an average quality.

1.3.5 DEIS

- On average, 23.7% of students in school in the SSP were at a significant disadvantage of almost 70 score-points on the reading scale, compared with students not in receipt of the programme (the group mean scores were 436.4 and 506.3 respectively).
1.3.6 DEIS evaluation

An evaluation of DEIS is currently being undertaken by the Educational Research Centre. The evaluation at primary level focuses mainly on the impact of reading and writing programmes as part of DEIS. The DES Inspectorate has examined DEIS post-primary schools at the level of attendance, retention and participation. The findings of these evaluations have not yet been published. However, when these findings are publicized, they must inform developments within literacy and numeracy provision, particularly for schools participating in DEIS.

1.3.7 Relevant Child Well-being indicators – Attendance, transition to post-primary education, child poverty

The Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs recently published State of the Nation’s Children Ireland 2010, which cites and collates findings on a number of child well-being indicators (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, State of the Nation’s Children Ireland 2010. Dublin: Government Publications. 2010). Data provided to the report by the NEWB highlights a number of key findings at it relates to the attendance of school-going children in Ireland and provides a context for the need for interventions for students who have poor or chronic school-attendance:

- In the 2007 / 2008 school year, 12% of primary school children and 16.9% of post-primary school children were absent from school for 20 days or more.
- For primary schools, the average percentage of children missing 20 days or more was almost twice as high for schools in urban areas (15.1%) when compared to schools in rural areas (8.4%).
- There is a clear relationship between 20-day absences and levels of disadvantage. Using DEIS categories and participation in the School Support Programme, the average percentage of children missing 20 days or more tended to be higher in SSP schools when compared to non-SSP schools (although 20-day absences were still higher in non-SSP urban schools rather than in SSP rural schools)
• For post-primary schools, the average percentage of children missing 20 days or more was higher in community / comprehensive and vocational schools. This was almost twice as high in DEIS schools (26.5%) when compared to non-DEIS schools (14.8%).

The OMCYA also include data provided by the Department of Education and Skills in relation to transfer of children to post-primary education. The key findings include:
• In the 2009 / 10 school year, 94.3% of children leaving national schools are known to have progressed to another form of school (either in first or second level) and 4.2% of children are known to have emigrated with their families. Less than half of 1% of children leaving national schools were known not to have progressed to another school (n = 278), while the destination of a further of 1.2% of these children is unknown (n = 1,003).

The OMCYA report also highlights findings in relation to the number of children at risk of poverty and living in consistent poverty. The relationship between poverty and poor educational outcomes has been well established. The key findings note:
• In 2009, 18.6% of children under 18 were considered to be at risk of poverty;
• Children under 18 had a higher risk of being poor than the population as a whole (18.6% compared to 14.1%)
• The percentage of children under 18 considered to be at risk of poverty was lowest in the Dublin region (10.8%) and highest in the Midlands regions (31%)
• In 2009, 8.7% of children under 18 experienced consistent poverty
• Children under 18 were more likely to experience consistent poverty than the population as a whole (8.7% compared to 5.5%).

In relation to Traveller children:
• Almost half of the total Traveller population of Ireland are under eighteen years of age and that approximately 6 out of every ten Traveller children (58.9%) lived in families where the mother had either no formal education or primary education only.
1.3.8 School Retention

The DES’s report on the retention rates of pupils in second level schools notes the following findings:

- An analysis of the 2001 cohort shows that 54,067 students sat the Junior Certificate in 2003 out of 56,278 who enrolled in schools in 2001. This corresponds to 96.1% of the initial cohort.
- The final school based retention rate for the 2001 cohort was 81.3%.
- The final adjusted retention rate for the 2001 cohort was 84.7%. The figure is adjusted to factor in pupils who emigrated, died or who left the state-aided schools to pursue their senior cycle education in private non-aided institutions. Adjustments have not been made for pupils who left the state-aided schools to pursue alternative educational pathways.
- The Leaving Certificate retention rate has remained fairly stable over time with an increasing trend. For the most recent cohorts there has been a slight increase year-on-year in the retention rate. Overall, the national unadjusted LC retention rate, at 81.3% has increased by 4.2% since 1991 and 3.5% since 1996.
- A significant gender gap remains at national level between male and female cohorts. The retention rate to LC for males in the 2001 cohort was 76.9% compared with a rate of 85.8% for females, a difference of 8.9 percentage points.
- The retention rate to LC for the 2001 cohort for secondary schools was on average 84.3%, which was 3.7 percentage points higher than the average for community and comprehensive schools and nearly 10 percentage points higher than the average rate for vocational schools. However the average LC retention rate for vocational schools has shown the biggest improvement, with an increase of 13 percentage points between the 2001 and 1991 cohorts.

1.3.9 Growing Up in Ireland Survey

Some of the initial findings for 9-year-olds arising out of the Growing up in Ireland survey should contribute to policy decisions in relation to literacy and numeracy:
• According to parents, 65% of 9-year-olds typically spent between one and three hours watching TV on an average day. A further 9% spent between three and five hours each day.

• 9-year-olds typically spent some time (usually less than an hour per day) playing video games (44%) or using the computer (51%).

• Nearly half of 9-year-old children (45%) had a TV in their bedroom.
• Just under 45% of 9-year-olds had a mobile phone.
• Most children (86%) said there was a computer at home and 91% of these said they would use it to some degree.

• Just under 7% of 9-year-olds had a computer in their bedroom.

• The most popular use for computers, according to the children themselves, was playing games (86%). This was followed by: surfing the internet for fun (49%); surfing the internet for school (47%); watching movies (29%); doing homework (25%).
1.4 Main comments

As noted in the introduction, the main comments and suggestions offered by the NEWB focuses on the added value that the organisation’s services can bring to schools in supporting the holistic educational development of families and children. The comments highlighted by the NEWB take into account the most recent evidence relating to the literacy and numeracy levels of primary and post-primary students, and the impact of poor attendance, retention and engagement on children’s overall experience with school.

While the existing brief of the EWS does not focus specifically on the literacy and numeracy needs of children, the services of the VTT, SCP and HSCL would all work around the literacy and numeracy needs of children in schools (see Appendix 1 and 2 for additional information on the range of supports currently operating within the HSCL and SCP schemes, Appendix 3 highlights the report of the Waterford Traveller Reading Project).

The following general comments are therefore made on the current draft plan:

1. The plan currently focuses on the requirements of the teaching profession to change professional practices to improve literacy and numeracy capabilities in children. The support services of HSCL and SCP should also be included in the plan as agents of change in relation to children’s literacy and numeracy capabilities and be included in all CPD involving literacy and numeracy upskilling. The HSCL Co-ordinator manages a number of innovative literacy and numeracy initiatives for parents and children (please refer to Appendix 1) and the personnel of the SCP programme are available to schools to support the literacy and numeracy attainment of children within the classroom. SCP seeks to support improvements in attainment through homework clubs, through after school study and tuition, through summer programmes and additional support for children out-of-school due to suspension, illness, school
refusal etc who want to be kept up to date with the school curriculum (please refer to Appendix 1).

2. All professionals working in the school setting need to avail of the most current CPD in relation to improving literacy and numeracy in children. A whole school approach which is led by the Principal is a key strategy to motivating staff and students through change. HSCL Co-ordinators and SCP personnel have daily interaction with school staff and students, it is vital that these support services access relevant upskilling opportunities. Furthermore, the schools’ targets for literacy and numeracy should be shared by all agencies working with the child.

3. Need to have a strategy to disaggregate data for specific cohorts within schools – it not sufficient to set overall targets without setting sub-targets for particular vulnerable cohorts who have been evidenced to have literacy and numeracy challenges e.g. boys, Traveller students, second generation immigrants, students experiencing deprivation and students with chronic attendance patterns.

4. There needs to be a focus in the plan on the value of summer programming to improve or maintain literacy and numeracy gains made during the academic school year. According to research conducted by Borman and Dowling in the U.S. (Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis Vol. 28, No. 1 pp 25-48, Spring 2006) ‘summer slide has a particularly harmful impact on the reading achievement of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. Low SES children’s reading skill levels fall approximately 3 months behind those of their middle class peers’. There is merit in examining good practice in the area of summer programme provision and providing schools with the resources to support children who will fall behind during the extensive summer holidays. DES currently funds Literacy through the Arts programme and SCP facilitates literacy programmes during holiday periods. It is essential that these initiatives compliment one another and are run sequentially rather than simultaneously.
5. While the main focus of the plan is to support children in schools, there are a significant number of children in our education system that have poor or chronic school attendance and a number who are out of school altogether. While evidence suggests that the majority of these students are enrolled in DEIS schools, a large number of children also have poor or chronic attendance in non-DEIS schools. Poor or chronic attendance impacts on the learning gains of children and it can significantly impact on literacy and numeracy development, particularly at primary level. Young people who are out of school altogether also need additional supports to reintegrate them back into mainstream school or to progress them into an alternative education setting. Obviously, young people who have spent any length of time out-of-school will have severe deficits in literacy and numeracy development, therefore an additional strategy is required within the plan to support children whose poor attendance or out-of-school classification puts them at a significant disadvantage to their peers.

6. Improve the opportunities for family literacy initiatives. HSCL and SCP were previously involved in the selection and funding of promising family literacy initiatives arising from DEIS 2005-2010. These initiatives must be evaluated and if considered valuable, funded on an ongoing basis. The number of family literacy initiatives should also be extended as the link between the accessibility of reading material in the home and parent’s literacy levels impact on the literacy and numeracy capabilities of children in the home and in school. Good practice has been established through school / community / family literacy initiatives involving NALA, VECs and schools. This good practice should be made more widely available.

The work on family literacy seeks to promote and enable families and communities to gain confidence and competence in literacy, while valuing the context and culture of those families and communities. “Family literacy programmes tend to have more universal aspirations and goals:

- Family literacy targets gains in literacy competence, motivation and self-image for all participants – child and adult.
• Family literacy seeks to enable family members to help each other to achieve such gains – both intergenerationally and intragenerationally – now and in the future.
• Family literacy values the existing home culture and competencies of family members and builds on these.
• Family literacy targets gains in literacy competence in relation to the needs, uses, objectives and values of all participants, not just those of the school system.
• Family literacy seeks to link the needs and competencies of the home/community and school environments so far as is possible” (Topping and Wolfendale, 1995).

While most, if not all, HSCL literacy initiatives fit under the family literacy umbrella, it is worth noting and adding the following²:

**Community Links**

HSCL Co-ordinators work closely with VEC and avail of VEC tutors and VEC teaching hours to provide courses.
HSCL Co-ordinators direct parents to courses provide by VEC. If a relationship has been established and if a parent indicates an interest in improving literacy skills, a Co-ordinator may direct him/her towards NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) services.
HSCL Co-ordinators facilitate FETAC certification of courses.
HSCL Co-ordinators also liaise with the Library service. Co-ordinators avail of local libraries as a source of information and books. They facilitate parent introductory visits and talks. The Library is frequently used as a venue for community celebration thus raising awareness in parents of the facilities provide by the library. Local libraries are centrally involved in the *One Book* Project.

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² In relation to Action 4, Section 7 in the draft Literacy and Numeracy Plan.
Building literacy through computers
Parents are invited to work with pupils on computers, following a specific language or reading programme. Parents who are not computer-literate are afforded an opportunity to familiarize themselves with computer operation and can watch and share their child’s learning.

One Book Project
A book is chosen and adopted by a cluster of schools. Pupils, parents and significant community members are invited to read the book. This initiative is developed through the HSCL Local Committee. SCP, Family Learning projects, Youth Groups, Drama Groups are invited to adopt the book also. The book is publicised and celebrated in the community e.g. at St. Patrick’s Day Parade. Co-ordinators liaise with VEC and with Library service for funding. This is truly a project that takes literacy out beyond the school walls and brings all community agencies into the debate which views literacy “as one of the supreme skills handed on by education, not simply to facilitate the everyday activity or open up new realms of light entertainment, but literacy as a means of discovering and enlarging the reader’s sense of life” (Jackson and Marsden, 1962).

7. There is a need for a stronger focus in the plan for the out-of-school sector and other community initiatives that focus on literacy and numeracy. The plan needs to support and strengthen links between schools and communities in trying to address the deficits in literacy and numeracy. This includes working with youth services, childcare committees, alternative education settings and community initiatives so that staffs in all services understand new approaches to literacy and numeracy and vice versa.

8. Better supervision and self-evaluation practices for teachers. There is a need to invest in reflective practice approaches in schools to support teachers working intensively in the area of literacy and numeracy development.
9. Children who have difficulties with speech and language development can have delayed or impeded development in other areas such as literacy and numeracy. Accessing this service can often be difficult for children who are in need with long waiting lists in some areas. A strategy to improve access to this service for children who require it should be examined.

10. The NEWB is interested in further information on what other posts are to be redeployed in DEIS schools (alongside cuiditheoiri) to support literacy and numeracy.

11. It would be useful if staff within the supports services could have access to the generic-based programme adapted for all schools. Is there merit in exploring this programme’s development for other stakeholders such as parents or community workers?

12. There is a need for a layer of additional, intensive support for students in non-DEIS schools experiencing difficulties with literacy and numeracy due to their backgrounds. While the evidence suggests that students with the lowest percentile levels of literacy and numeracy live in disadvantaged communities, the ESRI (Smyth, E. & McCoy, S. *Investing in Education: Combating Educational Disadvantage.* Research Series Number 6, May 2009. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute. 2009: 16) has also evidenced high concentrations of students with lower SES in non-DEIS schools (61% of young people from semi/unskilled manual backgrounds and 56% of those from non-employed households attend non-DEIS schools). It is important to note that 52% of Traveller students are not enrolled in DEIS schools so consideration should be made as to how to direct resources at them should they require literacy or numeracy support. Like the NBSS model, schools should be able to submit to the Department a request for additional support for students who are in the lower percentiles of literacy and numeracy.

13. There is merit in exploring a wider approach to the development of literacy and numeracy. Other supports such as homework clubs, after school activities (including sport), personal development programmes, out of school supports
etc. also contribute to the literacy and numeracy skills of children. These supports are developed in a holistic way to tackle the multi-faceted elements of a child’s life.

14. The NEWB welcomes the delivery of JCSP in Youthreach but is there merit in JCSP being delivered in other schools where there is need and alternative education centers where early school leavers attend?

15. The plan needs to examine the use of modern technologies and approaches to improving literacy and numeracy development in children. Children more commonly use and have access to technologies such as mobile phones, computers, Internet, email, computer consoles, white boards etc. and may favour the use of these technologies over more traditional methods such as reading books and magazines. The development of the Kindle electronic reader is set to revolutionise print media and book publication. The education system needs to keep pace with technological changes and explore these methodologies for use in a school-setting. The Department’s ICT strategy should link closely with the Department’s literacy and numeracy strategy and good practice should be examined and piloted.

16. Parents should not only receive information about their child’s literacy and numeracy development but be active agents of change to improve their own literacy and numeracy capabilities and to build capacity within their own communities. A variety of methodologies for reporting back to parents should also be considered.

1.5 Specific points relating to Traveller education and Literacy and Numeracy

1. It is generally accepted that a child’s self-concept is of major significance when it comes to learning. The Traveller child has few, if any, role models in his / her life of Travellers in further education, employment etc. Therefore the self concept is that ‘we cannot succeed’ and ‘are not able to succeed’ in the world of books and education.
It is of vital importance that the education system should do everything possible to enhance the self image of the Traveller child and in some measure to expiate historic injustices.

An improved self – concept will undoubtedly accelerate the progress of the Traveller child in all areas of development. Therefore constant encouragement and positive affirmations should be built into any programme of work and the teacher needs to be sensitive to where the child is coming from.

2. Traveller parents: Many Traveller parents have little and negative experiences of the educational system. Sometimes they see education as a threat to their value system and way of life. The development of relationships with Traveller parents is vital and meeting parents initially on their own territory (while time consuming) builds trust and helps gain an understanding of their lives.

*Use of appropriate language is vital when communicating with parents* – some Traveller parents who missed out on school may not even understand common subject names e.g. Geography - so we need to ensure that our communication doesn’t further alienate parents from school life. The more confused someone is the more unlikely they are to ask questions.

Traveller parents gauge their child’s success in terms of the child being able to read and write (they often rely on their children to read letters etc.) and are very disheartened about the education system if they see no major improvement in these areas. The child’s failure to read reinforces the parents’ notion that school is failing to teach their child and has no value for them. Therefore ongoing communication with the parent is vital to support parents to understand what the child should be able to read / how to encourage reading and to explain if the child has learning difficulty.
Traveller parents are greatly encouraged if the child comes home reading and it goes a long way towards encouraging greater participation in the education system.

Parents often fail to link time spent in school with success or failure and may be inclined to think that one day a week out of school will do the child no harm.

Again parents need very concrete examples of what the child is missing out on in terms of reading / mathematics etc and to understand how vital the early years of the child’s education is.

3. **Language**: Many teachers say that Travellers have a restricted or limited vocabulary. While this is true in that they may not have a wide vocabulary this statement also arises from the fact that the teacher does not understand the world in which the Traveller child exists.

It is the norm for children to speak about their house, trips to the sea, zoo etc in school and in general the teacher shares and understands and perhaps is more accepting of this world. The Traveller child may live in a trailer and has very different language to describe this and play time may revolve more around activities outside the home – some Traveller children have very detailed vocabulary when it comes to discussing horses / fishing / boxing / fairs etc.

The following was dictated to the teacher by a 13 year old with poor literacy –

**Fishing**

How to catch a pike

Things you need

A float

And a hook

And some ledger

And some weights
The child may not have vocabulary for the seaside or the zoo etc. and often do not understand the context in which many stories etc are set.

Therefore it is vitally important the child is given time to talk about his world, that there is an acceptance and celebration of that world and that it is reflected in the classroom, in reading materials etc. The language of the home needs to be given status within the school.

Recognition also needs to be given to the child’s accent and dialect – and opportunities should be given for the child to express him / herself freely – without feeling ashamed or undervalued.

4. **Early education:** The plan clearly states that the quality of early childhood education is crucial in improving literacy and numeracy standards. Early childhood education is deemed to formally begin with the provision of the free year of pre school education (i.e., for three and four year olds). It is important to note that many Traveller children are not taking up this year, and where they do attendance can be patchy.

Traveller parents can be unaware of the importance of early year’s education and be more indulgent about letting children stay at home. This has two very negative effects: it establishes a pattern of school absence which can be hard to break, and it generates a pattern of interrupted education in the early years which makes it very difficult for teachers to assess the progress children are making and diagnose the difficulties they may be experiencing.

5. **Primary level:** The plan points out that DES policy is that interventions should take place from Senior Infants onward, but suggests that this may be already too late, and that there is a case for targeting interventions from Junior Infants. Evidenced-based early interventions would seem to offer significant benefits in terms of supporting children, but if a school focuses significant resources on early interventions when Traveller children may be absent from school for considerable periods, it could prove problematic in terms of meeting their needs in 1st -6th class. Many interventions (for instance Reading
Recovery and Maths recovery) are designed for and directed at children in a very specific age range (5 years 9 months – 6 years 3 months).

The plan recognizes the efficacy of lower pupil teacher ratios in infant classes, particularly in terms of facilitating the development of oral language skills, which would be of significant benefit to Traveller children, were they in school to participate. However, once again the evidence would suggest that this is not the case in many instances. Traveller children are very vulnerable in terms of non school attendance at what is likely to be the most critical stage of their education in terms of language and literacy acquisition.

6. Post-primary: Page 11 of the draft plan highlights concerns of principals that poor literacy skills are hindering pupils from accessing the post primary curriculum. The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education strategy confirms that this is an issue for a significant number of Traveller children, coupled with poor attendance (as low as 50% attendance is cited ) generates a situation in which it is challenging to provide a structured on-going programme of remediation . The draft plan also highlights the difficulty with teacher education at post primary, which means that teachers have frequently got little or no training in literacy.

7. Youthreach: The draft plan highlights that improving literacy and numeracy takes up a lot of time in Outreach Training Centres. Travellers are over represented in these centres. Travellers currently represent 12% of the Youthreach intake.

9. Withdrawal of VTT service: The link between attendance, attainment and retention is well recognised. The withdrawal of the VTST will impact on the tracking monitoring and addressing school attendance and consequently impact on educational outcomes.

10. Assessment and testing: Standardised testing is currently not culturally appropriate and future assessment tools need to recognise this.
11. Nomadism: There is a need for a literacy and numeracy strategy for nomadic children.
1.6 Recommendations

Without literacy skills there is little hope of social inclusion for marginalised families. It is essential that continued support be given to initiatives to support parents and communities in strengthening literacy skills.

- The plan could be strengthened by examining the roles and responsibilities of the support services under the NEWB in the area of literacy and numeracy.

- The plan calls for more innovative and modern approaches to literacy and numeracy. The plan must keep pace with the rapid changes in children’s lives as it relates to their accessibility to new and more modern forms of technology.

- There is some growing concern in relation to the turnover of teachers in DEIS schools. Some thought must be given to securing experienced teachers within DEIS schools.

- The UK Initiative Bookstart provides parents - through their early health visits - with free books for their new child. Early intervention in the area of literacy and numeracy is essential and waiting until a child is participating in pre-school education may be too late to intervene. The Department should explore the impact of this initiative with a view to its introduction in Ireland [www.bookstart.co.uk](http://www.bookstart.co.uk)

- It is essential to participate in an ongoing research brief; in particular it would be worthwhile to examine what is working in other jurisdictions so as to inform future policy development in Ireland.

- **Provision of Books**
  It is not possible to address literacy difficulties in schools serving marginalised communities without an adequate supply of attractive books of a high standard of content and presentation. Children coming from homes where there may be few
books need to be exposed to the best available in terms of children’s literature. If there are books in their environment, if children are immersed in books at home and in school, children will read. The recent Budget withdrew schools’ library allocation. It is strongly recommended that this decision be reversed for schools in the DEIS programme. Annual funding is required to supplement and update stocks of books in the classroom. It is recommended also, that books are brought to the home. Adequate funding is required for:

a. Gift packs of books at birth
b. Books at entry to school
c. Books at transfer to Senior School (Second Class)
d. Books (Novel, Dictionary, Atlas) at transfer to Post-primary

- **Literacy and the Community**
  It is important to address the community dimension of literacy. Fostering and celebrating literacy-related activities through initiatives such as the One Book project help build a culture of reading in the home and community. This initiative brings together, in an integrated approach, Adult Education, Family Learning, Youth and Drama groups and the Library service. Community resources such as local poets, writers, community arts events, local libraries and schools can be engaged to enhance the literacy experience in a community and it is important that these and Schemes such as Writers-in-School continue to receive funding.

- **Promoting literacy through the media**
  Parental involvement in their children’s literacy could be promoted by means of an advertising campaign on television and on radio. Short messages and information could be conveyed about the benefits of:
  - Bedtime story
  - Reading to/with your child
  - Talking to your child
  - Activities with your child
  - Paired Reading
  - Sharing a novel
  - Storysacks
• Choosing books
• Books as gifts: Santa/Birthdays
• Using the library
• One Book project

• **Home, School Community Liaison Scheme and other support services**
The Home, School Community Liaison Scheme and other support services are vital in supporting literacy in the home and community. In the recent budget a significant number of schools have lost HSCL, RTT and VTST services. It is imperative that there are no further losses. The services provided by these services will be needed to an even greater degree in the current economic climate. HSCL offers an avenue back into the education system to parents who may have been early school leavers.

• **A Whole-School-Approach**
Whole school planning is essential in order to ensure a consistent, structured, planned approach to literacy. Reading Recovery, First Steps and Literacy Lift Off are now in operation in DEIS schools. Parent involvement built into these approaches will increase their effectiveness. A planning and consultation process involving principal, class teachers, learning support, resource teacher, parents and HSCL is recommended. Monitoring and evaluation of strategies and approaches to assess their effectiveness is required.

1.7 **NEWB’s participation in this process**

The NEWB welcomes the high level implementation group approach and wider Forum – the composition of both should reflect a broad number of stakeholders. The NEWB will be seeking representation on both bodies.
Appendix 1

DEIS and the schemes

1. HSCL scheme
The DEIS plan includes “Targeted measures to be implemented to tackle problems of literacy and numeracy with particular reference to family literacy, early education, primary and second-level education and the role of the local authority library system”. HSCL Co-ordinators are actively involved in promoting parental involvement in literacy initiatives in the home, at school and in the community. Each one of these programmes fit loosely under the aspirations and goals of family literacy. These projects and initiatives do “link schools and communities more closely together “and facilitate that level of parental involvement that leads towards educational success. Embedded in the HSCL Scheme is the belief that parents are the first and most important educators of their child. The role of parents in fostering and developing their child’s literacy skills is central and this is the focus of the literacy work of the HSCL Co-ordinator. It is critical therefore to reach out to parents, inviting them to partnership with teachers in the education of their child. There is a particular need to work with and support:

- Parents who may have been early school leavers;
- Parents who may have a negative experience of the school system;
- Parents who may believe themselves to have been failures in the school system;
- Parents who have little belief in their capacity to contribute to their child’s education.

Marginalised parents may not be familiar with the school system. Crozier (1997) argues that working-class parents defer to the professionalism of the teacher and do not see a role for themselves in the education of their children. Therefore, the building of the parents’ knowledge of the educational system and their confidence in supporting their child in it is a critical element of the work of the HSCL Co-ordinator and all other agencies. To achieve this, “a targeted and focused resource aimed at the most marginalised” is required. (Conaty, 2002).
The following initiatives and interventions within HSCL support the child, parent and school in relation to literacy and numeracy development:\footnote{3 These initiatives and interventions support Actions 1 and 2 in Section 7 of the draft Literacy and Numeracy Plan.}

**Home Visits**

Home visitation is at the heart of the HSCL Scheme and Co-ordinators are recommended to spend at least one-third of their time on home visitation. Home visitation is the outreach of the scheme to marginalised parents. The Co-ordinator visits homes to build bonds of respect and trust between home and school. He / she goes to the home to listen to parents, to learn about their lives, their children and their difficulties.

The Co-ordinator also goes to the home to affirm the parent:
- As a person whose views the school values;
- As a parent who is doing the best they can for the child;
- As the first and most important educator of the child.

The Co-ordinator acknowledges the learning that takes place in the home and encourages the parent to talk to, play with, involve in household activities and, of course, share books with their child.

The Co-ordinator brings information about what is happening in the school and how the school operates. Marginalised parents may not be familiar with the school system. Lareau (2000) proposes that working class parents, unlike their middle-class counterparts, believe that teachers are responsible for education. They seek little information about either the curriculum or the educational process and their criticisms of the school centre almost entirely on non-academic issues. This may inhibit their ability to support their child’s learning.

The Co-ordinator encourages, supports and facilitates parents in engaging with their child’s learning at home and in becoming involved in school activities in support of their child’s learning.
For many parents this can be a huge challenge. Often the first step back towards the classroom may be a non-threatening leisure course. As parents’ confidence develops, more formal courses are offered both in curricular areas and in promoting personal development. Gradually, parents are encouraged into the classroom to engage in literacy and numeracy initiatives with pupils.

**Early language development: Pre Infant and Infant Programme**

At pre-school and early primary level the focus is on early language skills as the foundation for later literacy achievement. Parents are invited into the school for a number of sessions before their child starts school. Information is given about how the school operates and the personnel working in the school. The focus is on preparing the child for school and on the importance of talking, listening, playing, enjoying nursery rhymes and colouring with the child.

Packs containing materials to support early learning are demonstrated and an opportunity is afforded to parents to work on the material with their child. Best practice is modelled for parents and then in a workshop setting parents work with their child each week using books, jigsaws, play dough, crayons and scissors. Parents are given a pack to take home to repeat the activity in the home setting. Joint parent / child activities are arranged in the classroom.

**Early Start Parent Courses**

Courses are provided for parents of Early Start children in the following areas:

- Fine Motor Skills and Hand-Eye Coordination
- Language Acquisition
- Pre-reading and Reading
- Pre-Maths activities
- Gross Motor Skills

Information, guidelines and advice are given to parents on how ordinary family activities such as cooking, meal times, walking, tidying, shopping and bed-time afford opportunities for learning. Explanatory videos may be shown. Children are then brought to the Parents’ Room and parents engage in activities with their child during
the sessions and appropriate Home Packs are brought home to consolidate the learning.

**Language Development Programmes**

Specific language development programmes such as Chatter Box: LDA: Conceptual Language or Stile LDA/SRA Reading Lab are implemented in the classroom by parents.

Workshops are provided for parents on how to stimulate their child’s language development through gardening activities and simple seasonal activities in the outdoors.

The Home School Community Co-ordinator supports work done by the Speech and Language therapist with parents and children in the classroom by visiting homes and encouraging parents to repeat the exercises with the children at home.

A Speech and Language Therapist works with parents in the classroom modelling language development strategies and approaches and these are then implemented by parents working with groups of children in the classroom. A specific programme entitled *Kidstalk* has been devised in which a number of themes are chosen centred around books appropriate to the themes. Pupils are presented with their favourite book to take home and keep.

Further innovative language development initiatives are currently being implemented such as:

- Story Cubes
- Barrier Games

**The Tommy Teanga Initiative**

This initiative is located in inner city Dublin – in a multi-ethnic, multilingual school community. The project is an example of where positive initiatives have been taken to promote linguistic diversity. The aim of the project is to explore with teachers, pupils and parents some of the practical and cost-effective ways in which they could develop
multilingual strategies to promote linguistic diversity in their classrooms. Project activities include multilingual storytelling, creating multilingual cards and posters, learning new words in different languages and integrating multilingual activities into the daily classroom of the Junior Infant class. Children also demonstrate their budding Irish language skills. The partnership between parents and teachers around language awareness and respect for language and cultural diversity is core to this project.

This project was one of the winners of the European Award for Languages 2008.

**Literacy materials into the home**

Gift packs of books, colouring books and colouring materials, information on the school and courses for parents are brought to homes by Co-ordinators.

In the CLOVER (Children Learn On Very Early Reading) project in Clondalkin which is funded by Clondalkin Partnership and Clondalkin Library, gift packs of books and literacy materials are provided for pupils. These packs are provided at entry to school and at transfer to Senior School (Second Class) and are distributed by parents. These parents undertake a specific training course – CAPE (Clondalkin Area Partners in Education) for which they achieve FETAC certification.

At entry to post-primary, gift packs may include a dictionary, atlas or set of mathematical instruments.

Books and accompanying CD’s are brought to homes by parents as Home Visitors who talk to the parents about the book. For the One Book Project a CD version of the book selected is also provided where possible.

Co-ordinators provide Toy Libraries from which parents may borrow toys or games. These are usually accompanied by prompt cards to stimulate conversation and language development.

As part of a structured literacy drive over a defined number of weeks, a variety of fun literacy materials such as work sheets are sent to homes to be worked by parents and pupils together.

**Storysacks**

Sacks containing books, games and suitable props are created by parents. Puppet figures are knit or crocheted. Additional materials can be made or bought. Parents
may keep them for their child or donate them to the school. Storysacks are also bought commercially. Parents go into the classroom to tell the story using the props. Some parents visit neighbouring schools with the storysacks and so increase in confidence. Storysacks are a fun approach to highlighting the wide range of learning from books.

**Literacy for Fun**
A wide variety of literacy games are played in the classroom at work stations supervised by parents. These games are played initially with parents in the Parents’ Room in order to familiarise parents with them. Pupils rotate among the tables and work on areas such as word-synthesis, word-analysis, phonics, spelling, vocabulary-building, grammar and story building.

The following initiatives and interventions through HSCL support Action 3 in Section 7 of the draft plan:

**Building Parents Knowledge of the school**
At the beginning of the school year the content of the curriculum for that year is outlined to parents. Class meetings are organised to inform parents on specific aspects of the curriculum.

Workshops are arranged for parents to help them to understand the Letterland or Jollyphonic approach to teaching reading. Parents are also involved in Reading Recovery, First Steps and Literacy Lift Off activities, working with pupils in groups. With support from HSCL Co-ordinators, parents are involved in school policy-making, both organisational and curricular. Parents are taking an active part in Literacy Committees both at primary and post-primary level promoting literacy development.

Through the HSCL Local Committees parents are involved in planning, devising and implementing One Book related activities to foster literacy in the community.
Courses and Classes for Parents

Leisure Classes

Courses are provided in areas such as Art, Crochet, Yoga. These are organised initially to bring parents into the school environment. Parents are may have unhappy memories of their own school experience and Co-ordinators work to ensure a warm, non-threatening experience for their return to the learning environment. These courses are a valuable means of re-engaging parents with their own and their children’s education.

Curricular Courses

Courses which help bring parents closer to their children’s learning are provided by Co-ordinators. They may be linked directly to classroom learning, using the children’s text books and workbooks. Courses are provided in

- Maths and Science
- Irish
- English
- Computers

Courses are provided also which cater for parents own learning needs. Courses leading to Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Third Level and FETAC qualification are facilitated.

Paired Reading

The Paired Reading strategy is explained to parents and guidelines on how Paired Reading operates are sent home to parents. The importance of reading for fun and enjoyment is emphasised. Parents are encouraged not to be critical or to over-correct their child’s attempts. Topping (2003) notes the effectiveness of the Paired Reading approach, finding in published studies that Paired Readers progress at about 4.2 times ‘normal rates’ in reading accuracy during the initial period. This initiative may be operated at Post-primary level also by parents and by senior students such as Transition Year or Leaving Cert Applied students.
Literacy for Fun

A wide variety of literacy games are played in the classroom at work stations supervised by parents. These games are played initially with parents in the Parents’ Room in order to familiarise parents with them. Pupils rotate among the tables and work on areas such as word-synthesis, word-analysis, phonics, spelling, vocabulary-building, grammar and story building.

Storybook Reading

Parents are invited into the classroom to read stories to groups of children. Parents can choose from a range of attractive, colourful books and may choose a book well in advance if they are apprehensive about their own reading skills. A wide range of benefits can accrue from parents and children sharing books.

- Storybook reading by parents in school portrays the parent in the role of teacher.
- A parent reading to a child is perhaps modelling behaviour with which many children may not be familiar.
- Storybook reading between parent and child is an opportunity for bonding, for physical closeness and for building relationships.
- Stories can open new vistas to a child of an exciting world of wonder and of challenges.
- Language acquisition, cognitive, emotional and imaginative development are fostered through storybook reading.
- Storybook reading can foster a love of books, reading and learning and lay a foundation for lifelong learning.

Parent involvement in Junior Certificate School Programme

Co-ordinators promote and support parent involvement in JCSP initiatives such as Reading Challenge, Word Millionaire and Keywords. Parents are invited to the school to celebrate their child’s achievements.

Class novels

Class novels are read simultaneously by parents and pupils, both at home and in school. Craft activities based on the novel have been undertaken by parents and
students together. Parents come into the classroom to discuss the novel with the pupils and to engage in fun activities based on the novel.

Writing initiatives

Parents work with their child on the First Steps programme and the Write-a-book project. A Class Mascot is taken home so that the family members can be involved in including it in recording news of family events.

Intergenerational projects are undertaken in which grandparents and children together compile a Grandparents Book recording events from the Grandparents life and times. The book is presented as a gift to the Grandparent at a special ceremony in the school. Community Literacy activities are undertaken in which photographs taken by parents, pupils and community working together are used as a stimulus for writing activities.

2. The School Completion Programme

The School Completion Programme also provides and funds interventions that support the literacy and numeracy needs of young people at risk of leaving school early.

The focus of the School Completion Programme (SCP) centres on young people who are at risk of leaving school early as early school leavers are more likely to experience social exclusion, poor patterns of employment and marginalisation. The programme incorporates the elements of best practice established by the 8-15 Year Old Early School Leaver Initiative and the Stay in School Retention Initiative at second level. Both of these initiatives had pilot phases that ended in 2002.

The SCP is based on an integrated approach involving all the key stakeholders, and aims to have ‘a significant positive impact on levels of pupil retention in primary and second level schools and on number of pupils who successfully complete the Senior Cycle, or equivalent’ (SCP Specification Booklet). There are currently 124 SCP projects in existence, which includes 42 new projects that were established under the Department’s strategy DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: An Action Plan on Educational Inclusion. A total of 691 schools (227 post primary and
464 primary) currently has the services of the School Completion Programme under DEIS.

Before the DEIS expansion, eligible post-primary schools were selected for the programme on the basis of their low pupil retention rates. These schools were grouped into 82 clusters of one or more second level schools and their main feeder primary schools. Under DEIS, primary and post-primary schools were selected using a set of criteria developed by the Department of Education and Science and the Education Research Centre (ERC). The existing clusters have established Local Management Committees comprised of school principals, various voluntary and statutory agencies, SCP local coordinator, parents and community interests. These Local Management Committees are responsible for developing and managing a costed and integrated plan for addressing early school leaving in the area (the Retention Plan).

**Project Aims**

The main aims of the programme are:

- To retain young people in the formal education system to completion of the Senior Cycle, or equivalent.
- To improve the quality of participation and educational attainment of targeted children and young people in the educational process.
- To bring together all relevant local stakeholders (home, school, youth, community, statutory and voluntary) to tackle early school leaving.
- To offer positive supports in primary and post-primary schools towards the prevention of educational disadvantage.
- To encourage young people who have left mainstream education to return to school.
- To influence in a positive way policies relating to the prevention of early school leaving in the education system.
SCP and Child Literacy

The Educational Research Centre’s (Eivers, Shiel and Shortt, 2004) finding that up to 30% of young people in disadvantaged schools experience literacy difficulties re-enforces the need for SCP to support the existing provision of literacy in schools and offer direct support in literacy to targeted young people, where appropriate, particularly in after school settings and holiday programmes.

SCP has recently engaged in a consultation process with local projects to identify the core strategies comprising an effective early school leaving prevention programme. Of the sixteen strategies identified as core within the School Completion Programme ‘Learning Support / Literacy and Numeracy Support’ was identified as seventh on the list. While SCP personnel are not directly involved in the delivery of learning support / literacy and numeracy support, they do support and enhance the work of class teachers and Resource teachers in agreement with school administrations.

The rationale for SCP personnel to be involved in supporting and enhancing the learning support framework in schools and communities experiencing disadvantage is a sound one. According to Neild et al. (Educational Leadership, October 2007, Vol. 65, No. 2: pp. 28-33) ‘a high percentage of dropouts send distress signals in the middle grades, long before they actually drop out of school’. Furthermore, in research carried out in the U.S. by the authors, they found that a 6th grader (on average, 12 years old) with even one of the following four signals had at least a three in four chance of dropping out in high school:

- A final grade of F in Maths.
- A final grade of F in English.
- Attendance below 80 per cent for the year.
- A final ‘unsatisfactory’ behaviour mark in at least one class.

International research work (for example, Brooks et al. and the National Dropout Prevention Center) has also identified the value of literacy and numeracy support as a key component of early school leaving prevention programmes. Brooks et al. identify...
a key strategy in this area ‘to provide activities to increase literacy and numeracy skills’ whereas the National Dropout Prevention Center focuses attention on ‘early literacy development’. In short, the relationship between poor literacy and numeracy skills and potential early school leaving has an evidence-base in educational research. Therefore, initiatives like SCP have a role in trying to support schools and communities in trying to address poor literacy and numeracy skills that can lead to poor educational outcomes, early school leaving, unemployment and social exclusion.

Activities

Activities in the School Completion Programme are offered in-school, after school, out-of-school and during holiday time.

SCP initiatives / interventions supporting Child Literacy

As initiatives / interventions within SCP are provided in-school, after-school, out-of-school and during holiday time, SCP projects have opportunities to support literacy and numeracy development in young people identified at risk of early school leaving in a number of different settings.

In-school – SCP personnel support and enhance the in-school learning support / literacy and numeracy support framework. For example:

- By providing support to reading programmes, literacy programmes, maths programmes (through funding and / or personnel),
- Small group work / one to one work (SCP personnel involved in literacy and numeracy support in the classroom).
- Breakfast clubs (opportunity to support young people who may have difficulties before entering the classroom, including homework completion).
- By providing funding / personnel to interventions such as Reading Therapy, Drama tuition, Computer Clubs, Music Tuition.
• By introducing new literacy programmes to schools such as Acceleread Accelewrite Programme (e.g. South West Wexford SCP), Toe by Toe Literacy Programme (e.g. Quarryvale / Balgaddy SCP)

After school – SCP personnel can provide young people identified at risk of early school leaving (and others in order to prevent stigmatisation) a range of supports out of the classroom, which directly and indirectly supports literacy and numeracy development. For example:

• Homework clubs – according to SCP data, 57 out of the original 82 projects provided homework clubs in 2006 / 2007. Homework clubs provide young people with an opportunity to focus on homework completion in a more relaxed setting. Homework clubs are particularly well attended at primary level.
• After school clubs – which focus on homework completion as well as other activities that tap into the multiple intelligences of young people (e.g. sports, drama, art, music, computer skills, dance, cookery).
• Additional subject support / tuition – particularly at post-primary level.

Out-of-school – SCP’s work in this area is primarily at post-primary level. SCP works alongside schools and other services (for example, NEWB and HSCL) to ensure that young people who are out of the school system acquire educational support and / or progress to other educational opportunities (including the return to mainstream school).

Holiday time - The recommendation by the Education Research Centre (Eivers, Shiel, and Shortt, 2004) that “schools alone cannot redress educational disadvantage” bears out the emphasis in the School Completion Programme of an integrated approach in working with local communities and agencies in addressing the problem of early school leaving. This recommendation also underlines the importance of holiday literacy programmes such as “Literacy Through the Arts” where a multiple intelligence approach is adopted or Summer Reading Programmes where parents and
local services are involved in supporting the young person in improving literacy skills.

Holiday time supports put in place by SCP provide an opportunity to support young people at risk of early school leaving during their free time. According to research conducted by Borman and Dowling in the U.S. (Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis Vol. 28, No. 1 pp 25-48, Spring 2006) ‘summer slide has a particularly harmful impact on the reading achievement of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. Low SES children’s reading skill levels fall approximately 3 months behind those of their middle class peers’. Some SCP holiday time interventions focus on literacy and numeracy development. However, the majority do not. Research from the U.K. also indicates that evaluations of summer programmes focus on social and personal development outcomes rather than academic outcomes (Mason et al (2000) Research Brief No. 200, Department for Education and Employment: UK). The identification of best practice that focuses on literacy and numeracy development in the summer months would be a welcome addition to the body of knowledge in this area.

SCP initiatives in this area include:

- English classes for International students – Arklow / Rathdrum / Dunlavin SCP
- Summer language school (for students with poor language and literacy skills) – Bray North SCP
- Summer programme - literacy / phonics – Caritas College SCP
- Literacy through the arts summer programme – Greenhills SCP
- Literacy programme – Leitros SCP
- Film making course – North Mayo SCP
- Language development programme (for International students) / Developing literacy through activity primary school – Westside Galway SCP
- Literacy and sport summer school – St. Dominic’s / Old Bawn SCP
- Summer Reading Club – Collinstown Park SCP.
Appendix 2

Existing Numeracy Projects in DEIS Schools:

All of these projects are facilitated by the HSCL Co-ordinator, in partnership with other agencies such as SCP, VEC, National College of Ireland, SVP, local partnerships, VTST and other local organisations.

- Mathematics for Fun
- Quizmo Multiplication and Division
- Maths Week Activities
- Maths Recovery
- Cooking with Numbers
- Maths for Parents
- Maths for Outside Agencies
- Ready Steady Maths
- Better Maths Programme
- Computer Courses for Parents
- Preparing for Life Programme
- Learning for Life Programme
- DEIS Numeracy Plans
- Ready Set Maths Workshops
- Parents Count Too
- Helping Hand with Junior Certificate Maths
- Junior Certificate Mathematics
- Leaving Certificate Mathematics
- Maths Trail
- Mathematics Courses for Parents
- Paired Maths
- Maths Board Game sent Home
- Nintendo Maths
- Monopoly
Appendix 3

Waterford Traveller Reading Project 2008-9

Introduction
This project was a joint initiative between a NEPS psychologist and the Visiting Teacher for Travellers in Waterford. The aim of the project was to promote evidence based practice in the teaching of reading to Traveller children and thereby to raise their levels of achievement. The project involved 11 teachers in 10 settings. There were 7 primary and 2 secondary schools and one Youthreach project involved in the study. Participants were in the age range 6-17 years. In total 33 students participated, 17 girls and 16 boys, although valid data was available for only 24 students (13 girls and 11 boys).

The project involved the following elements:
- A presentation to Resource Teachers for Travellers (RTTs) about effective interventions in reading
- Implementation of a range of evidence based interventions over a period of 3 months (October to early January)
- Completion by teachers of logs to monitor attendance, duration of teaching and learning
- Completion by teachers of qualitative questionnaires
- Collection or pre and post intervention data using a standardised reading test
- The use of positive declarations by students to promote a positive self-belief about themselves as readers
- A total on 3 meetings for RTTs to set-up, monitor and evaluate the project

Data were collected about the gains children made in reading using the WRAT 4 Test, including word reading and sentence comprehension. Some teachers also collected spelling scores. Mean pre-intervention standard scores were 77 in word reading, 77 in comprehension and 71 in spelling, indicating a generally low level of attainment.

Table 1 Interventions, participants, and teaching inputs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Programme</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Mean age at start of intervention</th>
<th>Total of teacher time per student</th>
<th>Total of learning time per student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceleread / Accelewrite</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11 y, 9m</td>
<td>4 h, 30m</td>
<td>7h,43m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paired (peer) reading</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9y, 7m</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>12h, 30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARROW</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10y, 9m</td>
<td>1h, 42m</td>
<td>8h, 32m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11y, 2m</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Interventions and gains in word reading and sentence reading, with number of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Programme</th>
<th>Mean gains in word reading</th>
<th>Mean gains in sentence reading</th>
<th>Mean gains in spelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceleread / Accelewrite N=12</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paired (peer) reading N=3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARROW N=9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio Gains</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect Size</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Traveller Outcomes

These results indicate that participants made exceptional progress, irrespective of which intervention they followed.
To bring these results to life, the following table illustrates these results, expressed as gains in reading ages for the average participant.

### Table 3 Average gains for participants, in years and months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average word reading age at pre-intervention</th>
<th>7 years, 4 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average word reading age at the end of the project</td>
<td>8 years, 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(14 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average spelling age at pre-intervention</td>
<td>6 years, 7 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average spelling age at post-intervention</td>
<td>7 years, 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average sentence reading age at pre-intervention</td>
<td>7 years, 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average sentence reading age at the end of the project</td>
<td>8 years, 4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15 months)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above represents average gains for the 24 participants. Within this, some individual students made exceptional gains, as illustrated below.

### Exceptional gains

**Participant 14- Age 10,**  
**Shared reading**
- Basic reading  
  6 Years, 8 months - 8 years, 9 months
- Comprehension  
  9 years, 7 months - 11 years 4 months
- Spelling  
  8 years - 8 years, 7 months

**Participant 26- Age 12,**  
**ARROW**
- Basic reading  
  11 Years, 2 months - 16 years
- Comprehension  
  12 years, 6 months - 14 years, 1 months

While all the results are very pleasing, it may be helpful to consider the amount of teacher time and learning time used for each intervention (see Table 1). Notice, for
example, that ARROW, using very little teacher time per student, is therefore a cost-effective intervention.

**How do these results compare with other studies?**

Shiel, Morgan and Larney (1998) conducted a comprehensive review of ‘remedial’ education in 1997. They tracked 124 students who had literacy support over 2 years (from 2nd class to 4th class).

- The average pre-intervention literacy (comprehension) score was SS 83.
- The average gain after 2 years of intervention was 3.41 standard scores. For children from disadvantaged communities, the average gain was of 0 standard score points, after 2 years.

Therefore, children in the Waterford Traveller Project made more than twice as much progress in 3 months, than children had made in 2 years in the Shiel et al study.

Nugent (2006) evaluated outcomes for 100 primary aged children with severe dyslexia, availing of specialist services (special schools, reading unit, dedicated resource teaching) after 2 years of intervention.

- Average pre-interventions scores were SS 77 in word reading and SS 76 in comprehension.
- Average gains were of 5.95 in word reading and 10.01 in reading comprehension after 2 years.

This means that children in the Traveller study made more progress in word reading in 3 months that children did in special schools after 2 years. They made four times the rate of progress in reading comprehension than those receiving specialist services.

These findings are set out graphically below.
**Comparison of rates of progress over 3 months**

![Bar chart showing rates of progress over 3 months.](chart.png)

**How did we do it?**
When looking at very exceptional results, it is natural to ask, how was this achieved? The main element in the success of this project was the commitment and dedication of teachers. Each teacher implemented an evidence based intervention in a systematic way and monitored outcomes. It would be tempting to believe that participants were in some way unusual—perhaps the cohort were very settled and well motivated? In fact, during the course of this project there was considerable upheaval and distress in the Traveller community due to feuding between some families, (which has been well documented in the national media). Many children moved away (mostly temporarily) and some were exposed to appalling violence.

Sadly, absenteeism was a factor in the non-completion of 6 participants, while a further 3 could not be included due to scores that were below the baseline or an inability to co-operate with testing.

Nonetheless, the results for the remaining 24 are most impressive and show what can be achieved. One additional element to this project that should be mentioned was the use of positive declarations by teachers. This approach aims to raise achievement by involving children in making bold, positive statements about their reading, such as, ‘I will be able to read this book’ etc. See McKay (2006) for a full discussion.

**Traveller Project and the use of declarations**
Six teachers in 7 schools gave feedback about use of declarations
Variable implementation
Some students reluctant and self-conscious
Some students needed help to vary their statements
Even when students did not enjoy the process, teachers felt it was beneficial
‘I didn’t expect the change in children’s confidence, self-esteem to be so dramatic’

Summary of Achievements
In summary, Traveller children in this project made exceptional progress in literacy. The following bullet points summarise the key achievements and are supported by teacher comments, as returned on questionnaires.

• Children’s literacy skills improved
  Since completing ARROW M’s class teacher has noticed an improvement in attitude towards reading. For the first time ever, M is asking for books that she can take home.

• Children’s self-confidence improved
  The pupils enjoyed the experience and grew in confidence (paired reading)

• Teachers tried new interventions and tests
  We are now following a definite programme. I liked the structure of it.

• Teachers felt more motivated
  I know now what can be achieved. I can also clearly see the benefit of qualified people supporting the students (Acceleread / Accelewrite)
  I did not expect results to be so good. Very encouraging. (Acceleread / Accelw)
  Just do it –find a way. It works and it is well worth the time and effort (ARROW)

Congratulations to all the teachers and children who participated in this project!

Dr Mary Nugent, NEPS 2009
**Waterford Traveller Reading Project 2010**

**Introduction**
This project was the second project in a joint initiative between a NEPS psychologist and the Visiting Teacher for Travellers in Waterford. The aim of the projects was to promote evidence based practice in the teaching of reading to Traveller children and thereby to raise their levels of achievement. This year’s project involved 9 teachers in 9 primary schools. Participants were in the age range 7-13 years. In total 28 students participated, 19 girls and 9 boys.

The project involved the following elements:
- Implementation of a range of evidence based interventions over a period of 3 months (February to early May 2010)
- Completion by teachers of logs to monitor attendance, duration of teaching and learning
- Completion by teachers of qualitative questionnaires
- Collection or pre and post intervention data using a standardised reading test
- The use of positive declarations by students to promote a positive self-belief about themselves as readers
- A total on 3 meetings for RTTs to set-up, monitor and evaluate the project

Data were collected about the gains children made in reading using the WRAT 4 Test, including word reading, sentence comprehension and spelling scores. Mean pre-intervention standard scores were 85 in word reading, 86 in comprehension and 84 in spelling, indicating a generally low average level of attainment. These scores are generally higher (by an average of 10 standard score points) than the pre-intervention scores collected in last year’s Traveller project, indicating that the application of targeted interventions in Waterford is raising Traveller achievement over time.

The evidence-based interventions chosen by teachers for this project were as follows: ARROW, Acceleread / Accelewrite, Paired reading, Toe by Toe and precision teaching. In one school a combination of Toe by Toe and precision teaching was used.

**Table 1. Mean pre-and post-intervention scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-intervention word reading score</th>
<th>Post-intervention word reading score</th>
<th>Pre-intervention comprehension score</th>
<th>Post-intervention comp score</th>
<th>Pre-intervention Spelling score</th>
<th>Post-intervention spelling score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 shows, the participants in this project made impressive gains in all aspects of literacy, and their post-intervention scores brought their literacy skills within the average range (except for spelling skills, which were just outside the average range). Means gains in standard scores were as follows: 5 in word reading, 6 in comprehension and 5 in spelling.
To bring these results to life, the following table illustrates these results, expressed as gains in reading ages for the average participant, who was aged 9 years and 5 months at the start of the intervention.

Table 2 Average gains for participants, in years and months (over 3 months of intervention)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average word reading age at pre-intervention</th>
<th>Average word reading age at the end of the project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 years, 9 months</td>
<td>8 years, 7 months (10 months)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average sentence reading age at pre-intervention</th>
<th>Average sentence reading age at the end of the project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 years, 5 months</td>
<td>8 years, 7 months (14 months)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average spelling age at pre-intervention</th>
<th>Average spelling age at post-intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 years, 7 months</td>
<td>8 years, 4 months (9 months)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above represents average gains for the 28 participants. Within this, some individual students made exceptional gains, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3 Exceptional gains for individual participant, in years and months (over 3 months of intervention)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 24 (ARROW)</th>
<th>Average word reading age at pre-intervention</th>
<th>Average word reading age at the end of the project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 years, 10 months</td>
<td>10 years, 10 months (2 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average sentence reading age at pre-intervention</th>
<th>Average sentence reading age at the end of the project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 years, 9 months</td>
<td>12 years (3 years, 3 months)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average spelling age at pre-intervention</th>
<th>Average spelling age at post-intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>9 years, 6 months (4 years)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments
Once again, the main element in the success of this project was the commitment and dedication of teachers. Each teacher implemented an evidence based intervention in a systematic way and monitored outcomes.
This year, absenteeism was not such a significant factor as it was last year, and there was no drop out of participants. However, some children would have achieved even more, had their attendance been better.

One additional element to this project that should be mentioned was the use of positive declarations by teachers. This approach aims to raise achievement by involving children in making bold, positive statements about their reading, such as, ‘I will be able to read this book’ etc. This year, teachers were far more confident in using this approach and found new and innovative ways of integrating positive affirmations into their work, such as getting students to write, decorate and display their affirmations.

**Summary of Achievements**

In summary, Traveller children in this project made excellent progress in literacy. This second year of the project is particularly satisfying as we are now beginning to see a trend for on-going improved achievement among Traveller children. The following bullet points summarise our key achievements and are supported by teacher comments, as returned on questionnaires.

- **Children’s literacy skills improved**
  Definite improvements in literacy of the children involved. (Acceleread / Accelewrite).

- **Children’s self-confidence improved**
  Increased reading fluency and confidence in all the students who took part. (ARROW)

- **Children enjoyed the interventions**
  Children never tire of the activity and enjoy it immensely (Paired reading).

- **Teachers were satisfied with the programmes used**
  I would definitely recommend the programme to other teachers. I felt the children could really see what they had learned- felt more able and confident (Toe by Toe/ precision teaching)

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**Congratulations to all the teachers and children who participated in this project!**

Dr Mary Nugent, NEPS 2010
References


Department of Education and Science (2005b), Literacy and Numeracy in disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners. Dublin: DES.


