

**Learning from DEIS**

**Educational Research Centre-Department of Education  
and Skills Joint Research Dissemination Seminar**

**Marino Institute of Education, Dublin**

**Thursday 15 May 2014**

**Opening Address by Ruairí Quinn, T.D.**

**Minister for Education and Skills**

I am pleased to welcome you all to the Marino Institute of Education this morning.

We are here today for a Joint Seminar with the Educational Research Centre on '*Learning from DEIS*'.

As I have noted elsewhere recently, there are three ideas which underpin our approach to reforming our education system.

Firstly, the idea of supporting inclusion and diversity.

Secondly, the idea of improving quality and accountability.

And thirdly, the idea of lifelong learning, and creating opportunities for our people.

The American poet Maya Angelou is a person who knows much about the value and power of education.

She once wrote, and I quote "when you know better, you do better".

That simple phrase neatly sums up a belief in the value of education – a belief that is deeply ingrained in the Irish psyche.

And of course it underpins our conviction that we must continue, with urgency, to tackle educational disadvantage in Ireland.

Tackling educational disadvantage is a central element of supporting inclusion and diversity in our schools.

Educational disadvantage is complex.

But we have developed our approaches to tackling it significantly over the last 20 years.

In the early 1990s, Niamh Bhreathnach introduced Breaking the Cycle – the first programme designed to particularly tackle concentrated disadvantage in our schools.

Another predecessor of mine, Mary Hanafin, introduced DEIS in 2005, building on that work.

Since the introduction of DEIS, it has been the main policy initiative to address educational disadvantage in schools.

DEIS provides schools with a range of interventions.

These concentrate on literacy and numeracy;

On strong links between the home, school and community;

On cooperation between schools; and

On the added value that can be obtained from links between education and other services.

Over 850 schools, with a combined enrolment of more than 160,000 students, are now participating in the DEIS programme.

One of the key commitments under DEIS, is that we continue an ongoing evaluation of the programme.

This is designed to ensure successful implementation, and to measure educational outcomes.

The findings from these evaluations allow us to measure progress and outcomes at both local and national level.

And they also assist us to make evidence based judgements on future policy, so that we make meaningful and sustained progress in combatting educational disadvantage.

From the outset of DEIS, the Educational Research Centre has conducted a range tests and assessments as part of this ongoing evaluation.

The Inspectorate has also prioritised DEIS schools in its work programme, to produce reports on their school performance.

Today is a welcome opportunity for me to restate publicly my commitment to DEIS.

And it is also a welcome opportunity to present the main findings from the research carried out to date – from both the ERC and the Inspectorate.

Perhaps most importantly, today is an opportunity for teachers, schools leaders, policy makers and other stakeholders – to learn lessons from this research, and to build a conversation around its implications.

The ERC's work has concentrated on pupil achievement testing in schools – this morning, ERC researchers will present on their longitudinal studies at primary level.

They will also share some initial findings from their studies at post primary level.

The Inspectorate will present on its research to date, which has focused on School Planning.

This is a key element of DEIS which is now incorporated into the School Self Evaluation process for all schools.

This follows on from an assessment of the positive impact in DEIS schools.

The lessons learned from DEIS must be shared with all DEIS schools.

But they must also inform best practice in all other schools.

You will also hear from the Department's Statistics Section, about the encouraging retention and progression rates for pupils in DEIS schools.

Most relevant for the many school leaders in the audience will be presentations from DEIS Principals, of case studies based on their frontline experience of managing a DEIS school.

I would like to take this opportunity to opportunity to particularly thank Ms Mary Daly, Principal of Saint Dominic's Secondary School, Ballyfermot and Ms Rena O'Shea Principal of St Munchin's Girls National School in Limerick, for agreeing to participate and share their experiences with us.

As you will hear throughout the day, the research to date demonstrates very encouraging results.

Literacy and Numeracy rates in primary schools are improving steadily;

Second level attainment levels are also improving; and,

Attendance, participation and retention levels at both levels are also increasing.

In short, DEIS is working, and the additional resources given to DEIS schools are bearing fruit.

We know that this is particularly true at primary level – very welcome when we know that early interventions are most successful in combating disadvantage.

These results are due to the work of school Principals and their teams.

This morning is an opportunity for me to thank all the Principals and teachers involved in DEIS schools.

Your commitment plays a huge part in the results achieved by all of the children in your schools.

I also want to pay tribute to the non-teaching staff of schools, as well as the other support services who work within and around schools.

Improvements like these don't happen without parental involvement, and the contribution of parents in supporting these improved outcomes is enormous.

Some DEIS supports are now provided through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs – Home School Community Liaison and the School Completion Programme.

Those involved in providing those supports to DEIS schools are also key contributors to the improvements being achieved.

All of you who are involved in DEIS in various ways – all of you have much to be very proud of.

More children staying in school;

More children performing at consistently higher levels in literacy and numeracy;

Ultimately, more of our citizens escaping from the traps which educational disadvantage and poverty become.

These are meaningful gains, for individuals, but also for our society as a whole – I salute you all for the work you have put into reaching this point.

The improvements that have been achieved are significant.

But they need to be further built upon, because average results for pupils in DEIS schools still fall below the national average.

DEIS schools continue to require additional supports to bring pupil achievement closer to the national norm.

I hope that today's event will tell us more about what works best in DEIS schools, and how successful interventions can be replicated across all schools.

During the month of June, I am going to commission one further piece of research related to DEIS.

This research will collate all of the excellent work done by the ERC and the Inspectorate to date.

Building upon all of the research being presented here today.

And it will seek to analyse what all of this research is telling us about what works, and what doesn't.

Above all else, it will provide recommendations for a renewal of our policy to tackle educational disadvantage, including DEIS.

Those recommendations will be delivered to me within the next six months, and I am determined to act upon those recommendations early next year.

Because we can never be complacent about tackling poverty in our society.

We have an obligation to every child born into disadvantage, to help them to overcome those disadvantages.

The funding of the area-based approaches to child poverty are a new direction in Irish public policy.

Over the next few years, I believe that those approaches, combined with a renewal of the DEIS programme, can deliver ever-improving outcomes for children,

And help us move towards eradicating educational disadvantage in Ireland.

Thank you.