



LESSONS FROM RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF DEIS (*Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools*)

AN INFORMATION NOTE FOR SCHOOLS

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What is DEIS?

Launched in 2005 by the Department of Education and Skills, DEIS (*Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools*) is the most recent national programme aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. A very significant element of DEIS is known as the School Support Programme (SSP) which is in place in about 340 urban primary schools, 340 rural primary schools, and 200 post-primary schools with the highest levels of disadvantage (see www.education.ie).

All primary and post-primary schools participating in DEIS receive a range of additional resources including additional staffing, funding, access to literacy and numeracy programmes, and assistance with activities such as school planning. As part of the SSP, interventions such as the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme are available to DEIS urban primary schools and to DEIS post-primary schools.

Measuring the impact of DEIS

Making sure that the intervention is effective is an important aspect of the DEIS programme. Both the Educational Research Centre (ERC) Drumcondra and the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills are conducting ongoing evaluations of aspects of the DEIS programme.

Three reports arising from this research in DEIS schools, undertaken separately and independently by the Educational Research Centre and the Inspectorate, have been published recently:

- *A Report on the First Phase of the Evaluation of DEIS*, Susan Weir and Peter Archer, ERC, 2011 www.erc.ie
- *An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Primary Schools*, Inspectorate, DES, 2011 www.education.ie
- *An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Post-Primary Schools*, Inspectorate, DES, 2011 www.education.ie

The ERC report is based on results achieved by pupils in 120 DEIS primary schools at the beginning of the DEIS roll-out in 2007 and three years later in 2010.

The Inspectorate's evaluations concentrated on practice in 36 schools. The inspectors examined how well schools had identified the learning needs of their students, how the schools had used the resources and programmes available to them to address these needs, and how effective the actions were in the schools.

The full reports are available on the websites of the Educational Research Centre and the Department of Education and Skills.

DEIS is making a difference for students in schools

There is clear evidence that the DEIS programme is having a positive effect on tackling educational disadvantage. The research shows that improvement is taking place in the learning achievements of pupils in DEIS primary schools in urban areas. It also provides

some signposts as to how further improvement in DEIS primary and post-primary schools can be achieved.

- **Improved literacy and numeracy achievements**

Both the Inspectorate and the ERC reports highlight achievement gains in the literacy and numeracy levels of pupils in DEIS primary schools.

- The ERC research shows statistically significant improvements in both the mathematics and reading levels of pupils in 2nd, 3rd and 6th class.
- The Inspectorate evaluations show that good or very good improvement in the literacy levels of pupils, as measured against the schools' own targets, plans or expectations, was achieved in 11 of the 18 schools inspected.
- While the Inspectorate findings with regard to numeracy were not quite as positive as the ERC findings, significant improvements in the numeracy levels of pupils were nonetheless noted by the Inspectorate in 8 of the 18 schools evaluated.

- **Improved attendance**

Both the ERC and the Inspectorate reports suggest that there are significant improvements in the overall attendance of pupils in DEIS primary schools.

- During the Inspectorate evaluations significant measurable improvement in attendance rates, based on the school's own attendance data, was reported by almost all of the primary schools and nearly half of the post-primary schools.
- In conducting its research, the ERC noted better overall attendance among the primary pupil cohorts in 2010 than in 2007.

- **Implementation of DEIS supports**

Both the ERC and Inspectorate evaluations found that many aspects of the DEIS programme were being implemented as originally conceived.

- The ERC evaluation showed that, at national level, most aspects of the urban dimension of the School Support Programme under DEIS as it was originally designed have been put in place.
- The ERC evaluation found that primary schools appeared to engage very well with aspects of the programme such as school planning and uptake of literacy¹ and numeracy² initiatives.
- Both the ERC report and the Inspectorate evaluation in primary schools provide strong evidence that systematic planning processes with regard to DEIS have been taken on board at primary level.
- The Inspectorate evaluations found that the DEIS themes of attendance, literacy, numeracy and partnership with parents featured as priorities in the DEIS planning processes of all 18 primary schools.
- Inspectors found that Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinators and School Completion Programme (SCP) personnel were cooperating effectively

¹ *Reading Recovery, Literacy Lift Off, Reading for Fun, First Steps Reading, First Steps Writing, First Steps Speaking and Listening*

² *Maths for Fun, Maths Recovery, Ready, Set, Go Maths*

with schools to improve student attendance in the vast majority of the primary schools and in the majority of post-primary schools.

- Inspectors also found that all 18 primary schools were availing of one or more of the DEIS literacy initiatives and all of these schools were using one or more of the DEIS numeracy initiatives. Where effective literacy strategies were noted in post-primary schools, resources associated with JCSP were used.

- ***Ongoing provision of activities for parents***

The reports from both the ERC and the Inspectorate confirm that schools are conscious of the importance of good school-parental linkages.

- Both the ERC and the Inspectorate reports confirm that primary schools are maintaining and continuing to provide activities for parents including activities that are related to their children's learning.
- At post-primary level, the Inspectorate evaluation findings point to positive engagement by schools in implementing interventions to improve partnership with parents and the community.

What are the lessons for schools?

The evidence from the Inspectorate evaluations appears to tell us that some key features of schools' practice can have an impact on student achievement.

- ***School planning processes***

Systematic school planning processes are important. The Inspectorate research shows that where schools planned well for a particular theme (for example, to improve attendance, or retention, or literacy achievement) the outcomes for students under these themes were better. Effective planning processes require:

- specific and measurable target-setting
- selection and implementation of appropriate strategies and learning activities to achieve the targets set
- monitoring of progress
- review of targets in the light of progress.

- ***Target setting and use of data***

The effective use of data is important in setting specific and measurable targets. For example the use of a range of assessment data in the setting of targets for literacy and numeracy and for examination attainment (post-primary level) is necessary. Effective target-setting to improve attainment levels involves the following critical components:

- close examination and analysis of information and data, including assessment information and examination attainment records, to identify the learning needs of students
- a clear link between information on students' learning needs and abilities and the targets set for their learning at individual, class and school level
- a clear and meaningful link between the targets set and what happens in the learning settings, a critical issue here being the extent to which curriculum delivery, teaching approaches, and programmes are purposefully planned, coordinated and used to give effect to the targets.

- ***Planned implementation of literacy and numeracy support***

Support for literacy and numeracy works more effectively when it is incorporated into the learning activities in classrooms through good teaching practice, rather than being provided as a series of discrete strategies that are simply grafted on to the existing work of the school.

- In order to ensure that students derive maximum benefit from literacy and numeracy support, schools should work towards mainstreaming support and programmes according to a whole-school, target-based plan
 - Classroom teachers need to be aware that they play a key role in achieving school targets and national targets for literacy and numeracy.
 - Post-primary schools need to define literacy and numeracy requirements across the curriculum and to establish cross-curricular strategies to support the needs of all students within classrooms.
- **Integration and coordination of the roles of mainstream and support personnel**
The delivery of support and programmes is effective when there is planned coordination and integration of the roles of mainstream and support personnel.
 - Shared responsibility for students' learning can be promoted through collaborative delivery of programmes and supports in mainstream classrooms.
 - Post-primary teachers of all subjects need to be aware that they are responsible for teaching literacy and numeracy within their subject.

The above lessons drawn from research and evaluations in DEIS schools are relevant for all primary and post-primary schools working towards improvement in literacy and numeracy provision for learners.

Is there any other guidance available on what works best in DEIS schools?

In 2007/08 the Inspectorate reviewed the work of eight DEIS primary schools, in which they had identified effective practice. The findings are published in a report entitled *Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices in DEIS Schools* (2009). The report, available on www.education.ie outlines key aspects of practice about the management, teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy noted in these effective schools. The report highlighted:

- Leadership style was a very important influence and one of the main contributors to the schools' overall effectiveness
- Sharing responsibility and a "can do" attitude were noteworthy characteristics of leadership in the effective DEIS schools
- Teachers' were committed to strategic planning and they set aside specific time for planning and review
- The schools were committed to continuous professional development
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy was prioritised clearly and purposefully in the schools
- Teachers carefully assessed where their pupils were starting from so that they would know whether their varied interventions were successful
- The teachers were adamant that consistency of approach and collaborative decision making were critical to school success
- There were high levels of team teaching in the schools and most of the schools had moved away from the practice of withdrawing pupils from mainstream classes for supplementary teaching.

More detailed advice on the promotion of literacy and numeracy in schools is available in the following publications:

- *Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices in DEIS Schools, Inspectorate, Department of Education and Science, 2009*
- *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life – the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020, Department of Education and Skills, 2011.*
- Eivers, E., Close, S., Shiel, G., Millar, D., Clerkin, A., Gilleece., L. & Kiniry, J. (2010). *The 2009 National Assessments of Mathematics and English Reading*. Dublin: Stationery Office.