



Report on the Review of School Resourcing to Address Educational Disadvantage in Ireland: Summary paper

Background

Action 4 of the DEIS Plan 2017 recommended the development of a more tailored and graded model for the allocation of resources to schools in the DEIS programme. Considering the changing demographics of schools, the scope of this action was extended to consider the allocation of resources to all schools to address educational disadvantage. To inform the implementation of this action, the OECD Strength Through Diversity – Education for Inclusive Societies project was invited by Minister for Education Norma Foley, to review Ireland's current approach to resourcing schools to address educational disadvantage. The review is part-funded by the European Commission Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training, and is the first publication funded from that initiative.

The review is not a review of the overall DEIS programme. The review findings and recommendations will inform future policy development of the DEIS resource allocation model and school resourcing policies aimed at addressing educational disadvantage in all schools. The resulting policy will include actions aimed at further evaluation of the impact of the DEIS programme in order to inform the department on the continued development of the programme to meet the needs of children and young people.

This review was undertaken to:

- a) provide an independent expert opinion on the current resource allocation model for the DEIS programme.
- b) draw on international examples, to inform a policy approach for an equitable distribution of supplementary resources to support children and young people at risk of educational disadvantage attending all schools, both DEIS and non-DEIS.

Since summer 2023, the OECD Strength Through Diversity review team has engaged with a range of relevant stakeholders to inform the review. The review team carried out online interviews with a range of stakeholders including teacher unions, management bodies and academic experts and representatives from the community and voluntary sector. The OECD review team also visited Ireland in September 2023 and carried out a round of in-person engagements. The review team met officials from across the Department of Education, the DFHERIS, the Department of Social Protection, the DCEDIY and the Child Poverty Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach. The group also visited a selection of DEIS and non-DEIS schools during its visit and consulted with school staff, parents and children.

Findings and recommendations

The review team found that the Irish education system demonstrates strong performance and equity across primary and post-primary levels. Overall, the education system outperforms many other countries and exhibits above-average socio-economic fairness and equity. The principle of the DEIS programme, targeting resources at schools with high concentrations of disadvantage is identified as positive and efficient use of resources. The review team found a culture and commitment across the education system which aims to support those at risk of educational disadvantage.

The review team identified that outcome differences persist for children and young people experiencing disadvantage, in particular the retention of Travellers and Roma. The review team also recognised that a gap still remains between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The review team acknowledges that there is room to build capacity in the Irish education system to address educational disadvantage and it also notes that in many cases the barriers for



some children and young people can only be addressed through collaboration between government departments and agencies.

The review team considered five priority areas:

1. Governance
2. Resourcing
3. Capacity building
4. School-level interventions
5. Monitoring and evaluation

Findings indicate that Ireland performs strongly in each of these areas. The review team identify areas where there is potential for improvement and offers recommendations under each area:

1. Governance

The review team found:

- a strong commitment to addressing educational disadvantage through the DEIS programme.
- a strong focus on stakeholder engagement in policy making.
- a focus on sharing of good practice promoted by the Department of Education but could be a more formal approach.
- more co-ordination in providing health and therapeutic services to children and young people is required.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen the coordination and integration of services across departments.
2. Further promote the sharing of good practices within the education system.

2. Resourcing

The review team found:

- the universal resources provided by the State to all schools are equitable and not negatively impacted by disadvantage but parents are often required to pay a voluntary contribution towards the running of the school.
- the use of the HP Index for the identification of needs enhances trust and support for DEIS but its validity could be further enhanced.
- earmarking and conditionality of DEIS resourcing ensures schools undertake an adequate multidimensional tackling of disadvantage.
- the banding structure for the DEIS programme results in a large difference in the levels of support to schools.

Recommendations

1. Review and monitor the cost of providing education and in particular the impact of those costs on families. Advise schools on how to minimise costs and adjust the capitation grant if required to cover costs that should not be charged to parents.
2. Continue refining and validating the indicator(s) of social disadvantage underpinning the targeting of DEIS resources.
3. Examine scenarios that lead to a smoother allocation of resources and reduce the rigid division between bands.
4. Extend partial additional support to all children and young people defined as disadvantaged.
5. Apply regular assessment of the levels of educational disadvantage of schools to allow for more responsive allocation of resources to schools that matches their level of need.



Capacity building

The review team found:

- additional teaching resources and leadership resources are a benefit to many DEIS schools.
- initial teacher training prepares teachers to support disadvantaged children and young people.
- professional learning is responsive to the local needs of teachers and of DEIS schools, but multiple factors limit teachers' engagement.
- Action Planning in DEIS schools supports capacity building.
- the already increasing emphasis on informal learning and communities of practice can strengthen capacity.
- staff shortages across a range of positions create a challenging context for both DEIS and non-DEIS schools to meet learners' needs.
- diversity of school staff remains limited. Those from disadvantaged, Traveller, Roma or migrant backgrounds are underrepresented.
- high levels of needs for children and young people are placing a strain on the entire support system and DEIS schools are particularly affected by limited capacity to provide the holistic approach required.

Recommendations

1. Address staff shortages through:
 - a. developing better data on teacher supply and demand.
 - b. increasing diversity in the profession.
 - c. considering flexibility on staffing of roles such as HSCL coordinator and guidance posts.
2. Support participation in professional learning through:
 - a. embedding PL in ongoing teacher appraisal.
 - b. providing schools with access to substitutes, sufficient resources, and time.
3. Focus capacity-building efforts on priority areas both in and around DEIS schools through:
 - a. improved inter-agency collaboration to provide supports.
 - b. target capacity building at the most disadvantaged schools – including building administrative capacity and peer-support.
 - c. promoting mentoring.

School-level interventions

The review team found:

- DEIS supports are viewed positively and widely sought, however non-DEIS schools may not have the adequate supports to support children and young people experiencing disadvantage.
- uniquely, literacy and numeracy programmes are a central feature of the DEIS programme.
- DEIS supports demonstrate a holistic approach to addressing educational disadvantage, however, there is an unmet need for assessments and therapies for children and young people.
- both DEIS and non-DEIS schools promote engagement with parents and the wider community, however, schools without access to the HSCL scheme may not have resources and capacity for this engagement.
- pilot projects allow the Department of Education to develop initiatives to address local needs, evaluate their impact and identify if there is potential for scaling.
- many schools must rely on teachers or parents volunteering their time to ensure the provision of certain services.



- there are significant costs for families at the school level.
- perceived supports, such as reduced school days and exemptions from Irish, can limit future opportunities for children and young people.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen equity in the provision of additional resources across schools through:
 - a. reducing costs.
 - b. reviewing volunteering commitment of teachers.
 - c. strengthening coordination of educational and health and therapy service provision.
2. Review additional costs of education to families:
 - a. review basic costs to families.
 - b. review cost of transition year.
 - c. review the impact of the removal of examination fees.
3. Promote promising models and examples of engagement and collaboration with parents, families and communities through:
 - a. sharing good practice between schools.
 - b. expanding the HSCL scheme.
 - c. introducing cultural mediators. These roles work with marginalised communities to support schools and teachers to reach out to specific groups of children and young people and their families, facilitate successful communication and promote positive relationships.

Monitoring and evaluation

The review team found:

- Ireland has strong expertise in monitoring and evaluation, through quantitative and qualitative sources, in regard to DEIS.
- the system emphasises the role of self-evaluation for school improvement.
- the Inspectorate serves a vital role in school evaluation.
- there is a limited use of granular and combined administrative data to better understand individual level outcomes, rather than school level outcomes.
- there is an absence of evaluations on the causal implications of the DEIS programme.
- schools may not have the capacity to fully utilise the range of data available to them for planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendations

1. Enhance the educational system's efforts and capability to utilise detailed data more effectively through:
 - a. a strengthening of the analysis of student-level HP Deprivation Index information in the short term.
 - b. fostering stronger inter-departmental collaborations to expand the range of background characteristics of children and young people in the long term.
 - c. improving monitoring by utilising standardised assessments.
2. Promote research methods that could provide more information on the causal effects of the DEIS programme.
3. Provide additional training and external supports to schools to strengthen their capacity to use data.