

TACKLE DISADVANTAGE Now!

AN INTO POLICY DOCUMENT
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FOREWORD

One of the greatest indictments of contemporary Ireland is that, in this time of economic prosperity, there are still large numbers of children and communities who cannot benefit fully from the education system because of socio-economic disadvantage. Our economic prosperity now presents us with opportunities to make a real impact on their education and well-being. The INTO believes that early intervention and structured intensive supports throughout primary education are the key priorities in tackling educational disadvantage. This philosophy should be fully embedded in the education system, to ensure that education policy is based on a firm sense of social justice.

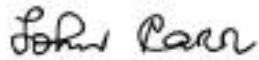
It is now 25 years since the INTO published its first policy document on educational disadvantage. In the intervening years, progress has been made in the allocation of resources and personnel to children living in poverty. Unfortunately, the present lack of co-ordination and continuity in the variety of schemes and initiatives that have been put in place under various Governments results in a loss of strategic planning and long term development in tackling educational disadvantage. Added to the ever more serious problem of under-resourcing and failure to expand effective programmes, this amounts to a failure to really tackle disadvantage.

The INTO welcomed the establishment of the Statutory Committee on Disadvantage, as outlined in the Education Act (1998). We also broadly welcomed and support the recommendations made in its reports on *Teacher Supply and Staffing*, *Identifying Disadvantage* and *A More Integrated and Effective Delivery of School Based Educational Inclusion Measures*. It is now time to implement those recommendations.

The INTO has been to the fore in campaigning on educational disadvantage and has published various policy documents over the years, most notably *Poverty and Educational Disadvantage – Breaking the Cycle* (1994) and *A Fair Start* (2000). The Organization has continued to demand policies that recognize the needs and potentials of the under-privileged in our society. This document builds on our previous policy statements and also links with the reports from the Statutory Committee.

We have had the debate. We have identified the problems. The INTO is now proposing clear and realistic solutions. Urgent action is demanded from the Minister and his Department.

Tackle disadvantage now!



John Carr
General Secretary

September 2004

CONTEXT

The first special measures budget to tackle educational disadvantage, with a total of £500,000, was allocated in 1984. A variety of schemes and initiatives have been announced by various Ministers since then. Appendix 1 gives a summary of current provision.

There has been intense debate over the years about the best ways to tackle educational disadvantage. The main issue relates to whether programmes should be targeted exclusively at schools in areas which have significant numbers of pupils in need or, given that some children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are to be found in most schools, whether all children/schools should be entitled to benefit from all programmes. A 'narrow focus', would involve an intensive, multi-dimensional support for a relatively small number of severely disadvantaged schools. A 'broad brush' approach would focus on individual pupils rather than on schools.

The INTO recommends a dual approach but is clear that the former strategy is the more pressing. In addition, INTO Annual Congress resolutions have stressed the need for special measures to be put in place in designated schools. These approaches are further developed in this publication.

A key characteristic of urban disadvantage is that it tends to be concentrated in geographical areas where large numbers of people live in pre-dominantly Local Authority housing developments. Key characteristics of these areas are high rates of unemployment and dependency, with low household income. A disproportionate number of families are lone parent. The local environment is bleak, and local facilities and amenities inadequate or non-existent. To further complicate the picture, crime levels may be high. If drug abuse is extensive, outsiders, including service agency providers, may be reluctant to enter the area at certain times, thereby isolating the community even further from the economic and social life of wider society.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) also acknowledges the existence of concentrations of poverty in predominantly rural areas, notably in public housing estates on the fringes of small towns. NAPS echoes sentiments expressed in the INTO report *Poverty and Educational Disadvantage: Breaking the Cycle* (1994) by stating that rural poverty is compounded by aspects of physical isolation and demographic dependence. The INTO contends that any school, urban or rural, which is attended predominantly by children from a deprived background, merits intensive,

targeted assistance. A different approach is more appropriate for individual pupils in situations of less concentrated deprivation.

In this document, the term 'disadvantage' refers to socio-economic disadvantage only. It is important to note that the recommendations set out here do not attempt to deal with measures that need to be put in place to help children who may be disadvantaged in other respects – specifically, children who have special educational needs, Traveller children, and the children of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

1. IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION

A range of indicators should be used for the identification of schools requiring additional support. The criteria used to select schools for the Breaking the Cycle Scheme should be regularly reviewed, including issues related to housing, medical cards, lone parents, low income and educational background. The original criteria were:

Large Urban Schools

- 1 Number of pupils from a family in which the main breadwinner has been unemployed for a year or more.
- 2 Number of pupils whose family holds a medical card.
- 3 Number of pupils living in a rented local authority house or flat.
- 4 Number of pupils living in a lone-parent household.
- 5 Number of pupils whose mother did not take at least the Group or Intermediate Certificate Examination.
- 6 Number of pupils whose father did not take at least the Group or Intermediate Certificate Examination.

Small Rural Schools

- 1(a) Number of pupils from a family in which the main breadwinner has been unemployed for a year or more.
- 1(b) Number of pupils from a family in receipt of assistance because of limited means from farm incomes.
- 2 Number of pupils whose family holds a medical card.
- 3 Number of pupils living in a lone-parent household.
- 4 Number of pupils whose mother did not take at least the Group or Intermediate Certificate Examination.
- 5 Number of pupils whose father did not take at least the Group or Intermediate Certificate Examination.

The INTO believes that the development of the primary school database will ultimately assist in the better identification of schools and pupils in need of support under educational disadvantage. In the interim, the INTO believes that a range of factors as listed above should be used for identification. In a rural context, the criteria used for determining disadvantage should be broadened to include such factors as isolation and remoteness, poor road network, falling enrolments, overall population decline, and the decline in the number of services available.

Experience already shows that the schools with concentrated levels of educational disadvantage are readily identifiable. As a matter of urgency, existing data should be used to assess the level of disadvantage for purposes of prioritising. This process should be subject to a reasonable appeal system. Further surveying on a periodic (e.g. every three to four years) basis would update this. However, no such surveying should be used as a reason for delaying the expansion of the key schemes to schools in high-poverty areas, as outlined below.

2. AN INTEGRATED RESPONSE

The INTO supports the concept of 'banding' for accessing and deploying supports for schools in tackling educational disadvantage.

Schools in Band One would be schools with highly concentrated levels of educational disadvantage. These should have staffing and local supports allocated to them on the following basis:

- A class size of 15:1 at junior level and 20:1 at senior level in an extended Breaking the Cycle model.
- Early intervention programmes based on the Early Start pilot project model and the development of a three year infant cycle.
- The Home School Community Liaison scheme.
- Participation in a School Completion Programme.
- Appropriate special educational needs provision including resource teaching and learning support provision for both literacy and numeracy.
- The current support teacher network which is on a pilot basis in certain schools, should be extended to all schools in band one.
- Given the range of school planning and administration duties, as well as the number of statutory and other agencies that the school must interact with, the INTO believes that principals of schools in areas of concentrated disadvantage should become administrative on the same basis as that for special schools, ie, at four teacher level and that the larger schools in such settings should have an administrative deputy principal appointed once the school reaches 20 teachers.

Other bands would be on a reduced/sliding scale basis.

A separate band should be used for supports for rural disadvantage. These would include reductions in class size, a home-school-community liaison scheme and also intensive support for literacy and numeracy skills.

Financial support for individual pupils in schools outside designated bands should also be made available for appropriate supports including books, teaching resources and educational opportunities.

Supports from other Government Departments such as social welfare payments, the back to school clothing and footwear allowance and the school meals scheme also need to be implemented on a properly funded and co-ordinated basis.

3. SUPPORT STRUCTURES

The INTO believes that a great deal of work remains to be done to ensure appropriate support structures are put in place for schools and pupils in areas of concentrated disadvantage. These should include:

- The development of an Educational Disadvantage Support Service on the same basis as the newly established Special Education Support Service. This will enable the development and resourcing of appropriate professional development opportunities as well as models of best practice.
- The School Development Planning Service in liaison with the Educational Disadvantage Support Service should provide appropriate supports on planning and organisation for schools.
- Supply panels should be developed to cover as a priority schools in areas of concentrated disadvantage.
- Additional support in the form of school meals provided by ancillary staff, homework clubs and breakfast clubs should also be developed.
- In view of the increasing levels of challenging behaviour and the identification of special educational needs, the DES should include on the staffing allocation to schools in concentrated areas of disadvantage an appropriate allocation of the classroom assistants to be deployed at school level as appropriate.

- Priority should also be given to the development of appropriate in-service and professional development courses in consultation with the relevant providers including the Colleges of Education, the INTO Professional Development Unit and the network of Education Centres.
- The key priority area for the National Educational Welfare Board should continue to be the development of a proper educational welfare officers service for schools in concentrated areas of educational disadvantage.
- The Employee Assistance Scheme should be re-developed and made available to such schools as soon as practicable.
- The DES should allocate a specific budget each year towards tackling educational disadvantage. The INTO has previously suggested the figure of 15% of the annual education budget for this.
- A cohesive inter-agency approach at local level between the various Government Departments and Agencies also needs to be developed, particularly in the area of health, to ensure adequate support to children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and provision of speech therapy within schools where required.
- Last but by no means least, in the context of the recommendations of the Statutory Committee, and to alleviate the serious difficulty of teacher recruitment and retention, the payment of an additional allowance to teachers in schools in concentrated areas of educational disadvantage needs to be implemented as a matter of priority.

4. TRANSITION PLAN

The INTO believes that in the development of a new focus on educational disadvantage, and in conjunction with the implementation of the recommendations of the Statutory Committee, proper consultation and negotiation on a partnership basis needs to take place. The INTO also believes that an action plan should be developed and implemented on a phased basis over a three year period, beginning immediately, to ensure a smooth transition to a new better resourced and co-ordinated system.

Appendix 1: Summary of Current Primary Education Schemes to alleviate Educational Disadvantage

1. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

1.1. Early Start

Early Start is a pilot pre-school intervention project for pupils aged 3 to 4 years who are most at risk in areas of social disadvantage. It aims to expose young children to an educational programme, which would enhance their overall development and prevent school failure and offset the effects of social disadvantage. There are approximately 1,600 pupils in 40 schools (16 full units and 24 half units) with 56 teachers and 56 childcare workers.

1.2. Rutland Street Project

The Department funds the Rutland Street Project which caters for 95 pupils age 3-5yrs and which includes a pre-school centre, a special staff teaching allocation, classroom assistants, secretarial services and cooks, together with the provision of school meals.

2. PRIMARY LEVEL INITIATIVES

2.1. Giving Children an Even Break incorporating Breaking the Cycle

A new Programme, *Giving Children an Even Break*, was announced in January 2001. It benefits 2,320 primary schools, involving the appointment of 204 extra teachers. The Programme has two elements – Urban and Rural.

Urban: Enables 224 schools to implement a maximum class size of 20:1 in junior classes and 29:1 in senior classes, resulting in the allocation of 150 posts to 89 urban schools. For the 2002/2003 school year the Minister approved the reduction in the maximum class size in senior classes for these schools from 29:1 to 27:1. The maximum class size for junior classes will remain at 20:1. In addition, grants were provided to 763 urban schools in 2001 for initiatives focused on disadvantaged pupils.

Rural: Under the rural dimension of the Programme involving 345 schools,

a local coordinator was allocated to clusters of five schools (total of 79 clusters). In 71 cases where it was not possible to include a school in such clusters, additional grant aid was allocated. Grants are also being provided to 1,381 targeted rural schools.

2.2. Breaking the Cycle

The five-year pilot phase of this scheme involving 32 urban and 121 rural primary schools ended on 30 June 2001. The scheme provided for extra staffing, funding, in-career development and a pupil teacher ratio of 15:1. The purpose of these additional resources was to support each participating school to develop improvement strategies, which are designed to break the deterministic social mould, which surrounds educational disadvantage.

2.3. Disadvantaged Areas Scheme

This Scheme benefits 314 schools by providing ex-quota teaching posts, additional funding to launch book rental schemes, additional capitation grants, a maximum class size of 29:1 and a home/school liaison grant to develop links with parents.

2.4. Support Teacher Project

This scheme supports 48 designated schools with 42 teachers. It aims to support the holistic development of pupils, who are experiencing difficulties in their lives and in their learning which is expressed in disruptive, disturbed and withdrawn behaviours. The thrust of the work is preventative and supportive and is concerned with advising on and participating in a whole-school strategy to devise, identify, implement and review good practice in behavioural management. It aims to prevent the occurrence of disruptive behaviour as well as supporting relevant personal where disruption occurs.

2.5. Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)

All primary schools with designated disadvantaged status were invited to join this scheme in 1999. Currently, 277 primary schools are participating.

The Scheme is delivered through a co-ordinator (teacher), who is assigned to a school or group of schools. The aims of the scheme are:

- 1) to maximise active participation of the children in the schools of the scheme in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure;

- 2) to promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of the children;
- 3) to raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their children's educational progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills;
- 4) to enhance the children's uptake from education, their retention in the education system, their continuation to post-compulsory education and to third level and their attitudes to life-long learning; and
- 5) to disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system generally.

The scheme is concerned with establishing partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of the child's learning. The role of the individual coordinator is to work with school staff, parents and relevant community agencies in advancing these aims. There are currently 176 whole time equivalent posts at primary level and a National Co-ordinator and two assistant co-ordinators oversee the day-to-day operation of the Scheme.

2.6. Book Grant Scheme

This grant is paid to schools based on the number of 'needy' pupils enrolled. Needy is defined as those families on low incomes, those dependant on social welfare or those experiencing financial hardship due to specific circumstances. School principals administer the scheme locally. The Department provides seed capital for the Book Rental/Loan Schemes. In addition, funding is provided by way of Library grants by the Department to enable Local Authority Librarians select, purchase and deliver books to primary schools as part of their service.

3. SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAMME (PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY)

The focus of the School Completion Programme is on young people between the ages of 4 and 18 years who are educationally disadvantaged and at risk of leaving school early. The latest statistics, which reflect the extent of early school leaving in Ireland place the School Completion Programme in context:

- Between 700 and 1,000 young people do not transfer annually from primary to second level.
- Of those who entered second level in September 1993, 2,400 (3.2%) left school before completing the Junior Certificate three years later in 1996.
- Almost 10,600 of those who sat the Junior Certificate in 1996 did not sit the Leaving Certificate.
- In all, at the end of the 1990s, about 13,000 (18.4%) young people leave school annually without the Leaving Certificate.

The School Completion Programme incorporates the elements of best practice established by the '8-15 Year Old Early School Leaver Initiative' (ESLI) and the 'Stay-in-School Retention Initiative at Second Level' (SSRI). It is designed to deal with issues of both concentrated and regionally dispersed disadvantage.

A Local Management Group is established to manage each of the 82 Projects at local level which include the already established 17 sites of the 8-15 Early School Leaver Initiative. It must have representatives of relevant schools, parents, together with local statutory, voluntary and community agencies. This Local Management Group will consult with the local Home School Community Liaison Committee, where one exists, on a two-way advisory basis.

Schools participating in SCP: 112 Post Primary
: 288 Primary

Appendix 2: INTO Congress Resolutions Educational Disadvantage

1999

Congress demands that the Minister for Education and Science fulfil his stated commitment to prioritise socio-economic disadvantage in education by implementing a range of measures to include as priorities:

- (a) extending the Early Start pre-school scheme on a permanent basis to every school designated disadvantaged;
- (b) expanding the Breaking the Cycle scheme to include all designated schools within three years;
- (c) providing teacher counsellor posts in all schools;
- (d) resourcing a support system for students and their families which would involve opportunities for homework guidance and vacation projects;
- (e) tracking the estimated 1,000 children who do not progress to second-level schooling each year;
- (f) a maximum class size of 25 pupils;
- (g) the amendment of the criteria for disadvantaged status allowing rural schools to avail of this status.

2000

Congress notes the publication by the DES of the New Deal on Educational Disadvantage and calls on the Minister for Education and Science to:

- (a) establish immediately the Statutory Committee on Disadvantage as outlined in the Education Act (1998);
- (b) review the criteria for designation with a view to establishing agreed criteria for:
 - (i) the identification and rating of schools in areas of concentrated disadvantage, and
 - (ii) the identification of schools and children in areas of dispersed disadvantage;

- (c) intensify and extend the programme of assistance, including social, medical and educational services in designated schools which would include the provision of a hot school meal service to pupils;
- (d) appoint an administrative principal to designated schools of four or more teachers;
- (e) reduce class size with immediate effect in designated schools to 20:1 with a view to a reduction to 15:1 by the school year 2002/03;
- (f) extend the panel of supply teachers to serve designated schools;
- (g) extend the Early Start, Breaking the Cycle and Teacher/Counsellor programmes to all designated schools;
- (h) provide appropriate supports and incentives for teachers and principals who work in designated schools;
- (i) provide professional development programmes for teachers in designated schools, and
- (j) provide appropriate measures to respond to the needs of disadvantaged pupils in all schools, including the establishment of mobile inter-disciplinary teams.

Congress further calls on the Government, in the light of economic growth and prosperity, to implement a comprehensive programme of economic and social measures to support families in disadvantaged areas, as part of an urgent and all-out assault on the effects of poverty in education.

2001

Congress:

- (a) instructs the CEC to object to the manner in which the Department of Education and Science's new initiative to tackle educational disadvantage was introduced and to the preconditions attached; and
- (b) demands that a comprehensive package of measures be implemented immediately, as outlined in the INTO policy document *A Fair Start* in order to tackle the most acute problems arising in schools.

2002

Congress

- (a) notes that tackling the effects of acute socio- economic disadvantage in primary schools has not been a State priority during the successive years of Budget surplus;
- (b) deplores the delays and lack of co-ordination which have characterised the official response to educational disadvantage;
- (c) demands that the Early Start scheme be made permanent immediately and extended to all designated disadvantaged schools by September 2003;
- (d) calls for extension of the Breaking the Cycle programme to all schools designated disadvantaged;
- (e) recognises the particular need to support teachers, as evidenced by severe recruitment problems in situations of acute disadvantage;
- (f) demands that new maximum class size of 20:1 extended upwards throughout main-stream classes in designated schools, beginning with 3rd classes in September 2002 and applying to all class levels by September 2005; and
- (g) calls on the CEC to highlight and campaign on the position of pupils, teachers and schools affected by disadvantage.

2003

Congress, recognising the ongoing crisis in recruitment and retention of staff in designated disadvantaged schools, calls on the DES to introduce:

- (a) an allowance payable to teachers in disadvantaged schools, comparable to that allowance paid to teachers with a Special Duties Post;
- (b) an early retirement scheme for teachers serving in these schools based on an additional 1 years full pension and lumpsum credits being granted to a teacher for every 8 years served by that teacher in a disadvantaged school.

2004

Congress, recognising the ongoing crisis in recruitment and retention of staff in designated disadvantaged schools, calls on the CEC to intensify its campaign for the payment of a special allowance to teachers, equivalent to that of a Special Duties Post, as agreed at Congress 2003.

Appendix 3: Provision for Disadvantaged Schemes 2003

Provision by the Department for programmes specifically designed to tackle educational disadvantage in the formal and non-formal education sector in 2003 is approximately €456 million. This figure incorporates provision in the following areas (approximate figures):

Sector	Approximate Allocation	Individual Component
Early Education	€7 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Early Start Pilot Project ● Rutland Street Project ● Pre Schools for Travellers ● Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
Primary Level	€70 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disadvantage Areas Scheme – €14.32m ● Breaking the Cycle – €3.586 m ● Giving the Children an Even Break – €17.88m ● HSCL – €7m ● Support Teachers – €1.68m ● Book Grants – €5m ● Traveller Education – €21m ● Reading Recovery – €0.2m
Post Primary	€33million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disadvantage Areas Scheme -- €14m ● Book Grants – €6.4m ● HSCL – €7.25m ● Traveller Teacher Resource – €5.4m
Primary and Post Primary	€23 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School Completion Programme

Further Education	€152 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Youthreach ● Back to Education Initiative ● Adult Literacy ● VTOS ● Travellers ● Drugs Court ● Equality Initiative ● Childcare
Youth	€13million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Special Projects for Youth ● Youth Encounter Projects
Third Level Access	€158 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintenance grants for third level students – €132 million ● Third level Access fund – €26m
NEWB	€5.4 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● €5 million for school retention / disadvantaged areas ● €0.4 million for other activities

This expenditure relates specifically to schemes that target expenditure at socio economically disadvantaged students and does not include expenditure on those schemes that benefit the general student population.

Note: figures used to calculate teacher salaries throughout are €40k for primary and €45k for post primary.

Appendix 4: Further Reading and References

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