



**Response to the DEIS Action Plan 2017**

**On behalf of the INTO**

**October, 2017**

## **Introduction**

The INTO notes the publication of the *Report of the Review of DEIS* (DES, 2017a) and the subsequent *DEIS Action Plan 2017* (DES, 2017b) published in February 2017. Given that there has been no comprehensive review of DEIS since it was first introduced in 2005 a report of the review was long overdue.

There are some positive aspects of the *DEIS Review Report* and the *DEIS Action Plan 2017*, such as, the commitment to hunger prevention and to school-based speech and language programmes; the expansion of behaviour-support to primary; and an acknowledgement of the importance of pupil wellbeing. However, there are also concerns that essential elements of DEIS are not adequately addressed or not addressed at all.

The INTO Annual Congress of 2017 adopted the following resolution on DEIS outlining the Organisation's many concerns.

Congress:

- a. notes the publication of the Report on the Review of DEIS along with the subsequent DEIS Plan 2017;
- b. further notes with concern the non-transparent manner in which the allocation of SEN hours were granted to individual DEIS schools with regard to 'Social Context' under Circular 17/17;
- c. rejects outright the concept of the proposed Schools Excellence Fund;
- d. instructs the CEC to enter negotiations to ensure:
  - (i) that schools currently holding DEIS status retain their current status and resourcing levels as a minimum;
  - (ii) posts granted under previous social inclusion schemes be retained in all schools;
  - (iii) the restoration of the Resource Teachers and The Visiting Teachers for Travellers;
  - (iv) the return, where appropriate and extension where identified, of a maximum 15:1 ratio in all DEIS Band 1 junior classes and a maximum 20:1 in senior classes;
  - (v) that psychological, counselling, play therapy and speech therapy services be made available in school provided by the relative professionals;
  - (vi) all additional resources granted to DEIS schools be done in an open and transparent manner;
  - (vii) the publication of the criteria under which additional DEIS status was granted or denied to individual schools;
  - (viii) that the list of hours granted to all individual DEIS schools under 'Social Context' be published, together with a detailed explanation of how such determination was made;
  - (ix) all additional schools granted DEIS status be funded through separate funds from the DES, so as not to impinge on or decrease funding granted to current DEIS Schools; and
- e. further instructs the CEC to ballot members with regard to a campaign on industrial action, up to and including strike action, if agreement is not reached on these matters by 30 September 2017.

## **Identification Process**

The INTO acknowledges that the new identification process has allowed additional schools to be invited to participate in DEIS, however, there are many schools that were surprised at their inclusion or exclusion from DEIS using the new identification process. While the INTO recognises that the identification process aims to be more transparent, responsive and robust, it must also endeavour to capture educational disadvantage as manifested and experienced in schools. The INTO anticipates that an identification process that is responsive to changes in schools' profiles over time will ensure that schools do not have to wait for a full review of DEIS in order to be included in the DEIS Support Programme.

However, the fluid nature of the new identification process is posing significant concern for schools. The INTO reiterates that the inclusion of additional schools in DEIS should not be at the expense of schools currently in DEIS. A model that moves schools in and out of DEIS has the potential to have the unintended consequence of pitting schools against each other in an effort to secure resources from a limited pool. The INTO strongly opposes any approach that will penalise schools for their success in addressing social and economic disadvantage in education. In particular, teachers are anxious that schools in DEIS will be punished for perceived success measured bluntly by student performance in standardised tests. Rotating resources to meet relative, not real need has the potential to disrupt the continuity of educational provision and create instability for the most vulnerable in our education system. Schools in DEIS should not be in fear of losing teachers or other resources that are required to support the education of children at risk of educational disadvantage. A more gradual, sliding scale approach to resource allocation could be considered to ensure that no school experiences a sudden loss of resources in the few cases where a school's profile changes significantly. All DEIS schools must be supported to ensure those experiencing degrees of success do not regress as a consequence of teachers and resources being withdrawn.

Regarding the identification process itself, which is based on Census information and the application of the HP Deprivation Index, it is not clear that all dimensions of educational disadvantage are captured. There is concern that the use of a pupil's home address does not adequately indicate socio-economic status. The current housing policy has an impact on the accuracy of the HP Index as many families experiencing socio-economic status are now living in middle-class, affluent areas. Therefore, there is the potential that data may be skewed for the purpose of identifying socio-economic disadvantage.

There is also concern that the data used to inform the identification process does not sufficiently reflect all the needs and issues of DEIS schools. For example, the identification tool does not take account of data that captures chronic need arising from experiences of addiction, crime, prison confinement, gangland feuds and mental health issues. Similarly, homelessness is not accounted for in the identification process despite the current crisis. In addition, the current housing crisis does not appear to be

reflected by the small area population statistics, as many homeless families are in hotel or short-term accommodation, with many others on supplementary rent in homes in affluent areas. In light of the fact that such acute social issues can impact negatively on children's educational attainment (Buckner, 2008; Murray, Farrington, & Sekol, 2012) it is vital that the Census data is combined with additional local information in determining educational disadvantage.

**The INTO recommends** that individual schools should be given direct access to the criteria under which additional DEIS status was granted or denied to allow schools to project their future status.

**The INTO recommends** that the use of Census data should be complemented with additional information from schools at local level to ensure all elements of educational disadvantage are more accurately reflected.

### **Funding**

The *DEIS Action Plan* contains insufficient detail in relation to the proposed future funding of DEIS. There is no budgetary commitment beyond the next year and a half, which is of €5 million this year, plus €15 million for 2018. The additional funding was assigned to allow the inclusion of additional schools in DEIS in September 2017 although there is no indication whether there will be additional funding to expand the scope of DEIS in the future. The original *DEIS Plan* offered more certainty with financial projections over a five-year period. Budget projections are vital to reassure the system as a whole of the future sustainability of DEIS. In addition, there is no reference to additional funding for non-DEIS schools where children at risk of social and educational exclusion are enrolled. Additional capitation funding enables schools to support pupils' participation in all school activities such as extra-curricular events and school trips.

**The INTO recommends** that a multi-annual budgetary plan over a minimum of 5 years be drawn up to allow for a gradual increase in DEIS supports and the inclusion of additional schools.

**The INTO recommends** that an additional capitation grant should be available to all schools where pupils at risk of social exclusion are enrolled.

### **Pupil Teacher Ratio**

It was disappointing that the issue of Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in DEIS schools was not addressed in the *2017 Plan*. Research strongly indicates that small class sizes makes a significant difference, particularly for disadvantaged children and those in the early years (Blatchford, 2003). A recent Education Research Centre (ERC) report confirms the positive impact of reduced class sizes under DEIS policy, and further

recommends that class sizes in DEIS schools should continue to be monitored (Kelleher and Weir, 2017).

Additional posts were granted to schools designated as disadvantaged as part of the original Disadvantage Area Scheme (DAS), Breaking the Cycle, and Giving Children an Even Break (2001). Breaking the Cycle (1996) introduced a staffing ratio of 15:1 maximum in the junior classes (infants to 2<sup>nd</sup> class) in 30 very disadvantaged schools. These schools retained this allocation when DEIS was introduced. In addition, support teachers (originally teacher counsellors) were appointed to some disadvantaged schools to provide an essential support to pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. These various posts are referred to in the DEIS Review report as 'legacy' posts. These posts were granted to schools on the basis of need and, therefore, should not be considered as 'legacy' posts. The INTO is of the view that all posts in DEIS schools should be allocated on the basis of need rather than 'legacy' and that posts held by schools on the basis of need should not be taken away. More, the more favourable ratio of 15:1 maximum in junior classes should be extended to include all DEIS Band 1 schools as those schools have the highest level of educational disadvantage and need in our system.

The reduction in the staffing schedule for DEIS Band 1 was considered one of the most important supports for schools by allowing teachers to give more individualised and focused attention to pupils at risk. It is wholly inappropriate that a reduced PTR does not apply to DEIS Band 2 and Rural DEIS schools. Despite reductions in PTR in non-DEIS schools, the ratio in DEIS Band 1, has not been reviewed or reduced since the original plan was developed in 2005.

**The INTO recommends** that a ratio of maximum 15:1 in junior classes and maximum 20:1 in senior classes should be granted to all DEIS Band 1 schools.

**The INTO recommends** that the current DEIS ratio of 20:1 in junior classes and 24:1 in senior classes should pertain to all other DEIS schools, both urban and rural.

### **Excellence Fund**

The INTO rejects the concept of an 'excellence fund'. While additional funding for DEIS schools is welcome, schools should not have to compete for funding. The establishment of a new *School Excellence Fund (SEF)* has the potential to assist schools locally in their efforts to tackle educational disadvantage. However, the fund should not develop as a competitive, 'reward' system among the most challenged schools (DES, 2017b, p.13). Instead funds should be available to support schools in identifying and prioritising initiatives and approaches specific to their individual contexts and needs. In order to ensure effective engagement from schools, the *School Excellence Fund* should not be accompanied by bureaucratic 'documenting' and increased paperwork for teachers and principals (DES, 2017b, p.30). Furthermore, continued financial support should not be contingent on onerous data collection and completion of progress reports. The suggestion that schools will be obliged to collect

quantitative data, such as standardised test results, for the purpose of the *School Excellence Fund* also causes concern. DEIS schools already report test scores to the DES annually.

The piloting of new initiatives should not rely on an excellence fund, but should be funded as a core part of the DEIS School Support Programme. The proposals set out for a *School Excellence Fund* in the *DEIS Action Plan 2017* (DES, 2017b, p. 29) should be an integral part of DEIS, and funded as of right rather than be linked to an excellence fund, the amount of which is not mentioned. In addition, the source of funding to support local initiatives should primarily rest with the DES to ensure future sustainability, continuity and certainty for schools.

In addition, the INTO believes that the title *School Excellence Fund* is a misnomer and it recommends that consideration be given to an alternative, more appropriate name. A *School Excellence Fund* promotes a sense of inter-school competitiveness, as opposed to the more desirable intention of building inter-school collaboration, clustering and networking. Furthermore, the concept of an excellence fund is contrary to the principle of equity in education.

**The INTO recommends** that the proposed *School Excellence Fund* should be renamed *DEIS School Fund* and funding should predominately be sourced from the DES.

### **Early Start**

The INTO acknowledges the commitment, under the *Report of the Review of DEIS*, that early years' provision in Early Start and in Rutland Street is being kept under review. However, it is disappointing to note that there is a lack of commitment to the expansion of Early Start in the subsequent *DEIS Action Plan 2017*. The original commitment, in the 2005 *DEIS Plan*, to extend access to Early Start to children in all Urban DEIS Band One primary schools has also failed to materialise. The INTO does not accept that the proposal to expand Early Start has been surpassed by other policy developments such as the introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). Clarity is required regarding the future of Early Start and Rutland Street Pre-school, which are highly-intensive, early-intervention, quality education programmes that aim to enhance overall development, promote positive educational outcomes and offset the effects of social and economic disadvantage.

In general, the INTO welcomes the extension of the ECCE scheme, however, the scheme should not be considered as a replacement for the targeted and specific support provided by qualified primary school teachers and childcare workers in Early Start. The *Report on the Review of DEIS* acknowledges that there is still a gap in achievement between children in DEIS Band One schools and children in non-DEIS schools. Children who attend Early Start should also have an opportunity to avail of

two years in Early Start, or an extra year in the infant classes. An additional year in the early years could assist in addressing this gap in achievement.

The INTO recommends that consideration should be given to facilitating the second year of the free pre-school year as part of the infant cycle in schools. This could be explored initially on a pilot basis in DEIS schools to ensure that pupils at risk of exclusion start junior infants with similar social and learning experiences as their peers. This proposal of providing a pre-junior infant year, with a qualified primary teacher for the infant school day, should be piloted initially in schools that have the capacity. Children would benefit from the experience and expertise of a qualified primary teacher for a longer day. Early intervention can reduce support required in the long term and be more cost-effective in terms of the requirement for other future services.

**The INTO recommends** the piloting of a pre-junior infant year in a number of DEIS schools.

### **Travellers**

Approximately half the pupil Traveller population attend DEIS schools. The INTO recognises that Traveller pupils have very specific educational needs. Priority should be given in the funding of DEIS to schools with high concentrations of Traveller pupils to address the key challenges of attendance, participation and retention. The error of removing Resource Teachers for Travellers (RTTs) and expecting existing resource teachers to pick up the load has proved to be ineffective in the provision of learning support for both the travelling community and their settled peers.

The support provided by the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers is badly missed in our education system. The visiting teachers provided a valuable liaison between Traveller families and schools in developing relationships and advocacy support. This gap remains unfilled. Without additional resources or opportunities to develop expertise the Educational Welfare Service (EWS) has not been in a position to fill the gap. The re-introduction of the Visiting Teacher Service or the development of a team within the EWS with an understanding of Traveller culture is essential in enhancing the educational experience of Travellers and in promoting access, progress and achievement.

The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teachers in DEIS schools require professional development opportunities specific to engaging and supporting Traveller pupils and their families to achieve more positive educational outcomes, if they are to fill the gap left by the abolition of the Visiting Teacher Service. In general, there was a significant opportunity missed in the action plan to clarify the crucial role of the HSCL teacher in breaking down the barriers to access, progression and attainment as it relates to Traveller pupils. Although the level of engagement required to support Traveller pupils requires intervention beyond that which can be incorporated into the

current remit of the HSCL role. The INTO proposes that consideration be given to expanding the allocation of HSCL teachers in areas that have a high concentration of Traveller pupils. Expanding the capacity of HSCL to support Traveller pupils and their families would require specific professional development opportunities for HSCL teachers that would endeavour to develop an understanding of Traveller culture and their barriers to education.

The review of DEIS acknowledges that there is a gap between the progress and achievement of Traveller pupils and that of their peers. The gap created by the removal of the resource teaching posts for Traveller pupils has not helped. In addition, the new allocation model for special needs education posts does not appear to reflect adequately the needs of Traveller pupils.

**The INTO recommends** that additional funding be provided to all schools with Traveller pupils to enhance their educational experiences and to promote access, progress and achievement.

**The INTO recommends** the reintroduction of the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers or the provision of a similar support service.

**The INTO recommends** that the resource teacher posts for Traveller pupils be reinstated in the absence of any visibility of additional support for Traveller pupils in the new allocation model for SEN.

## **Wellbeing**

The INTO welcomes the commitment to wellbeing which was a major gap in the previous *DEIS Plan*. It is challenging to pursue learning when many pupils have outstanding emotional needs that need to be addressed first. Under DEIS, the PDST provides support to teachers in urban DEIS schools that enables them to implement literacy and numeracy programmes such as Maths Recovery, First Steps, Reading Recovery and Ready Steady Go Maths. Overall, DEIS teachers welcome the provision of high quality professional development in targeted literacy and numeracy programmes. However, teachers require time, resourcing and fully substitutable CPD to allow them to fully engage with these programmes on an ongoing basis. In addition, teachers have identified a challenge in sustaining these programmes and embedding them at whole school level. Professional development should be expanded to include in-school and ongoing support tailored to the school's individual context. Schools would prefer CPD for all staff simultaneously to ensure consistency across the whole school. The INTO also recommends that the *DEIS Plan* extend support to the development of other wellbeing initiatives, in addition to Friends for Life and Incredible Years, such as PAX and Restorative Schools, to ensure that there is flexibility and choice at local level in addressing mental resilience and personal wellbeing.



**The INTO recommends** that substitute cover be available to all teachers to participate in training and professional development programmes such as Friends for Life, Incredible Years, PAX and Restorative Justice.

**The INTO recommends** that schools should have the autonomy and supports to choose and implement the most appropriate wellbeing programme to suit their individual school context.

### **Counselling Services**

The INTO notes the lack of commitment to emotional counselling services for pupils in DEIS primary schools. Young people at risk of social and economic exclusion have the highest level of complexity of need that must be addressed and supported in a targeted and specific way. The current services provided by the Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and other outside supports are not sufficient to meet the demand for services required. Furthermore, the counselling service provided to schools by Tusla has recently been discontinued. The INTO acknowledges the inequity of the provision in the original model as it was not available to all schools, therefore, any future policy decision should ensure that a counselling service is made available to all schools.

The INTO notes the proposal to consider the transfer of the Teacher Support Scheme to the NCSE Regional Support Service. However, it is imperative that support teacher posts remain in their existing schools. The establishment of the NCSE Regional Support Service should be seen as an opportunity to develop a support service to meet the emotional and behavioural needs of pupils and to provide a counselling service to pupils.

Teachers' own mental health and well-being needs to be supported through access to counselling and other professional support services to help staff deal with the challenging context in which they teach. Teaching children with serious social and emotional difficulties, in addition to learning difficulties, requires significant emotional and physical energy and resilience from teachers.

Schools serving areas of extreme disadvantage need access to play, music and art therapy on site provided by professional practitioners where and when a need is identified by the school and confirmed by the therapist. This service should be afforded as a right, where required, and not limited. Supports such as this could ultimately prove to be cost saving as there would be less demand on other services provided through NCSE, TUSLA and the HSE.

It is the INTO view that all schools should have direct and timely access to multi-disciplinary support services, with priority given to DEIS schools initially. Psychological, counselling and other therapeutic services should be made available in-school by the relevant professionals, commencing with schools, where there is capacity. The *DEIS Action Plan 2017* recognises the need for cross-agency interaction

in the pursuit of social inclusion in education, however, there is little clear direction as to how this will be achieved.

**The INTO recommends** that support teachers (originally teacher counsellors) are retained in their current schools and that similar supports are extended to other DEIS schools as high concentrations of pupils with emotional and behavioural challenges attend DEIS schools.

**The INTO recommends** that a counselling service and other therapy services such as play, art and music therapy should be available to all primary school pupils who require such services.

**The INTO recommends** that teachers in DEIS schools are supported in sustaining their own individual resilience and wellbeing through appropriate professional support services.

### **Teachers and Principal Teachers**

The INTO welcomes the commitment to the initiation of a Sabbatical Leave Scheme, for teachers in DEIS schools, is back on the agenda. The INTO strongly supported the original commitment to the Sabbatical Leave Scheme included, but never actioned, in the *2005 DEIS Action Plan*. Such a scheme would provide opportunities for principals and teachers, working in the most demanding and difficult contexts, to apply to undertake a period of development to enhance their own learning and effectiveness, and bring subsequent benefits to their students and schools.

There is a strong concern that the fluidity of the new identification tool will have the unintended consequence of undermining stability in schools, creating a destabilizing, flux in staffing. The changeable nature of resource allocation, from one year to the next, has the potential to impact negatively on staff turnover, morale and opportunities for permanent contracts.

There are no specific provisions set out in the *DEIS Action Plan 2017* to support principals of newly-included DEIS schools in terms of developing a school plan specific to DEIS schools. It is essential that all new schools participating in DEIS are offered the same professional development support as was originally provided under the *2005 DEIS Plan*. There is also need to reinstate all posts of responsibility in DEIS schools to facilitate in-school management structures.

**The INTO recommends** that all new schools participating in DEIS receive professional development in relation to DEIS and supporting pupils at risk of social exclusion.

**The INTO recommends** that INTO be fully consulted by the DES on the organisation and implementation of a sabbatical leave programme for teachers.

## **Speech and Language**

The intention to pilot further previously trialled Speech and Language Therapy interventions in individual schools or school clusters is a positive addition to the DEIS Support Programme. Services to support speech and language can significantly improve engagement with education, particularly those at higher risk of educational disadvantage. In areas of socio-economic disadvantage, more than 50% of children are entering school with impoverished language skills (O' Connor et al, 2012). In-school speech and language pilot programmes, such as *Chit Chat*, have increased access for children, reduced stigmatization and increased parental and school involvement in speech and language development (Hayes et al., 2016).

**The INTO recommends** school-based speech and language services in all DEIS school.

## **Arts Education**

Pupils at risk of socio-economic exclusion have limited, if any, opportunities to engage in cultural and Arts activities. The INTO proposes that DEIS schools should be better supported to provide access to cultural and Arts experiences, such as gallery and theatre visits, to ensure that pupils in DEIS schools have some similar experiences to their peers from middle class backgrounds.

**The INTO recommends** that explicit funding be allocated to provide pupils in DEIS schools with access to cultural, artistic and positive lifestyle experiences.

## **School Meals**

The INTO believes that 100% of funding should be provided for school meals in the schools identified with the highest level of need. Additional funding to support breakfast clubs and afterschool clubs should also be made available where a need is identified. Teachers report that the quality of school meals varies greatly. The provision of such meals requires more rigorous regulation to ensure pupils are provided with nutritious and child-friendly meal options to minimise food waste and align with school policies on healthy eating.

**The INTO recommends** that the DES and the DSP adopt a coherent approach to the provision of school meals to ensure that food waste is minimised, the administrative burden for schools is reduced and the needs of the most disadvantaged children are adequately addressed.

**The INTO recommends** that in order to minimise commercialisation schools should be offered independent information of local school meal providers to allow BOMs to choose a suitable company in a non-pressurising way.

## **School Completion Programme**

The School Completion Programme provides invaluable support to children at risk of early school leaving. The INTO notes that the DES intends addressing the Governance challenges that were highlighted in the review of the School Completion Programme.

**The INTO recommends** that funding for the School Completion Programme should be restored to its pre-recession level.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The INTO acknowledges the importance of monitoring and evaluating education initiatives, however, there are additional concerns about the reoccurring references to the input/output/outcome approach and the extreme focus on target setting. The INTO opposes any approach to education that reflects a managerial model that takes time and energy away from teaching and learning. The *DEIS Plan* is heavy on targets, specifically, in literacy and numeracy, with a notable absence of references to supports for the multiple intelligences and the Arts.

## **Conclusion**

The DEIS Action Plan 2017 promises a more fluid approach to the allocation of resources to tackle poverty and social exclusion in education, however, this must not be to the detriment of schools currently in DEIS. There are positive aspects of the plan including the inclusion of additional schools, the commitment to in-school speech and language therapy, the increased focus on wellbeing and the extension of local Area Based Childhood (ABC) programmes. However, there are very clear shortfalls in the new *DEIS Plan* including the missed opportunity to retain current PTR in the most disadvantaged schools, to further reduce the PTR, a lack of commitment to longer term funding and the notable lack of reference to therapeutic and emotional supports. The *DEIS Action Plan 2017* is strong on target setting but unclear on how the achievement of these targets will be supported. Finally, the most significant issue arising from the report is the lack of certainty regarding future supports for the most vulnerable children in education.

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