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**An Comhchoiste um Oideachas agus Scileanna**

**Tuarascáil ar an Scéim Idirchaidrimh Baile, Scoile agus**

**Pobail**

**Aibreán 2019**

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**Houses of the Oireachtas**

**Joint Committee on Education and Skills**

**Report on the Home School Community**

**Liaison Scheme**

**April 2019**





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**32/ES/21**



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## Chairman's Foreword

As part of their Work Programme, The Joint Committee on Education and Skills decided to examine the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme. The HSCL Scheme is a central component of the Department of Education and Skills' DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools); an Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, which aims to tackle educational disadvantage.

The Committee invited representatives from Tusla, the INTO, Foróige, the Department of Education and Skills and two HSCL teachers to participate in a public meeting to hear their constructive contributions on the measures that need to be taken to build upon and improve this valuable scheme.

It is the view of the Committee that it is imperative to continue to invest in this vital resource. We acknowledge the impact it has made on the students and families who avail of it and would like to see it expanded to include certain at-risk children that are currently not covered by the scheme. Additionally, the Committee believes that flexibility should be given to HSCL teachers in certain aspects of their role to facilitate their work within the multicultural landscape of modern Ireland.

The Committee acknowledges the positive impact of all HSCL teachers, the school Principals that support them and the Education and Welfare Service of Tusla.

I would like to thank all of the individuals as well as delegates from invited groups who appeared before the Committee. I thank them for giving their time, expertise and experience. It has been very useful for us to hear their views and ideas.

*Fiona O'Loughlin*

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Fiona O'Loughlin T.D.

Chairman

February 2019





## 1. Background

The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme is a central component of the Department of Education and Skills' DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, which aims to combat educational disadvantage, through a range of interventions and strategies, designed to improve educational outcomes for children.

Responsibility for the services formerly provided by NEWB (National Educational Welfare Board) now rests with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. This includes the HSCL Scheme, which is a core element of the integrated EWS of Tusla, serving DEIS schools.

All DEIS urban primary and DEIS post-primary schools are currently included in the HSCL Scheme, which serves 528 schools. The 400 full-time HSCL Coordinators are teachers in these schools, assigned to HSCL, to work primarily with the most significant adults in the child's life, so that they can better support children's attendance at school, participate in education and develop positive attitudes to life-long learning.

HSCL coordinators work in an integrated way with all other support services, particularly School Completion Programme staff and Educational Welfare Officers, to implement a whole-school approach to improving attendance, participation and retention in education for the most marginalised and educationally disadvantaged pupils. They also have a critical role in supporting the development, implementation, evaluation and review of the school's DEIS Action Plan, particularly through parental involvement in education and relevant initiatives and interventions that are designed to improve literacy, numeracy and positive engagement.

The HSCL Scheme is managed and coordinated by a national leadership team within the Senior Management Team of the Educational Welfare Services of Tusla.

## 2. Engagement with Stakeholders

The Committee invited written submissions from a number of stakeholders on the matter in October and November of 2017.

Arising from the written submissions, a public meeting of the Committee was held, on [7<sup>th</sup> November 2017](#), to further explore the points made in the submissions.

At this meeting, the Committee heard from the following witnesses:

Ms. Maria Tobin, Integrated Services Manager, National Educational Welfare Services	Tusla
Mr. Noel Kelly, Director, Educational Welfare Services,	Tusla
Ms. Maeve McCafferty	Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)
Ms. Aisling Browne, Home School Community Liaison Teacher	Scoil Mhuire Sóisearach, Newbridge, Co. Kildare
Ms. Jenny Gannon, Home School Community Liaison Teacher	Scoil Mhuire Sínséarach, Newbridge, Co. Kildare
Mr. Martin Shiel, Assistant Principal Officer, Special Education Unit	Department of Education and Skills
Ms. Chris Kelly, Assistant Principal Officer, Social Inclusion Unit	Department of Education and Skills
Mr. Pádraig O'Donovan, Youth Officer	Foróige
Mr. Andrew Leeson, Area Manager	Foróige

### 3. The Role of the Home School Community Liaison

#### The role of the HSCL is to:

- Identify children at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of family-based issues, which adversely affect pupil attainment and school retention;
- Focus directly on the significant adults in children's lives and seeks direct benefits for the children themselves;
- Work in an enabling way with parents to develop their capacity as a key resource in their children's learning;
- Develops the pupil-parent-teacher relationship, so that school becomes a place where all young people can reach their potential;
- Identify and provide for the personal, leisure and learning needs of parents, so as to promote their self-worth and self-confidence, which will have a positive impact on their children's education;
- Become familiar with attendance patterns, in order to maximize student attendance, participation and retention;
- Work in a supportive and purposeful way with parents and to facilitate communication with class teacher, tutor, year-head, and school management, when required; and
- Promote positive teacher and staff attitudes towards partnership-working and adopting a whole-school approach to attendance participation and retention.<sup>1</sup>

For DEIS schools included in the HSCL Scheme, the HSCL Coordinator plays a critical role in supporting the development, implementation, evaluation, and review of the school's DEIS Action Plan, particularly in the promotion of parental involvement by involving parents in their children's learning and developing their confidence and capabilities in their role as primary educators.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Information Booklet for DEIS schools participating in the Home School Community Liaison Scheme  
<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Home-School-Community-Liaison-HSCL-Scheme/Information-Booklet-for-DEIS-schools-participating-in-the-Home-School-Community-Liaison-Scheme.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> **Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and Partnership with parents and others** –Available at  
[https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/deis\\_funding\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/deis_funding_guidelines.pdf)

Home School Community Liaison coordinators run several initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy in line with national strategies. They facilitate the active involvement of parents at curricular and policy level in schools and they train parents to become a resource to one other, to their school and above all, to their own children. Furthermore, as part of their integrated work with the other two strands of the Educational Welfare Service (EWS), namely, the School Completion Programme and statutory Educational Welfare Service, Home School Community Liaison coordinators ensure that all possible supports and initiatives will have been attempted prior to formal referrals being made to the statutory arm of the service. At local level, coordinators operate a cluster model of support where they come together to formulate action plans, share best practice, provide mutual support and develop effective interventions in their own schools.

The Committee was advised that the scheme aims to raise parents' awareness of their own capacity to enhance their children's progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills. It also aims to enhance children's uptake from education, their retention in the system and their continuation to post-compulsory education, as well as to enhance children's attitudes to life-long learning and to disseminate the positive outcomes from the scheme throughout the school system.

#### **4. The Role of Tusla in the Home School Community Liaison Scheme**

The HSCL was originally established by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in 1990. The statutory functions of the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, were transferred to the then newly established Child and Family Agency on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 (now Tusla).

Tusla has responsibility for the operational management of the HSCL Scheme through an integrated services strategy. One national integrated services manager, employed by Tusla, and four senior managers, who are teachers seconded by the Department of Education and Skills, have overall responsibility for the implementation and development of both DEIS policy and planning strategies with HSCL and for Tusla's strategic goals regarding educational welfare. The HSCL portion of the annual DEIS

grant is allocated for the implementation of activities that are consistent with the principles and practices of the HSCL scheme.

The 416 full-time HSCL co-ordinators are all teachers in the designated schools and are assigned for a five-year term to HSCL duties. The Department of Education and Skills remains responsible for the allocation of HSCL Coordinators to schools.

The Committee was advised that the HSCL in conjunction with the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the statutory educational welfare services work to deliver a fully integrated, streamlined and cost-effective service in DEIS schools. The aim of the HSCL is to improve attendance, participation and retention of disadvantaged children within the educational system.

The Committee was also informed that the HSCL is uniquely placed to deliver a comprehensive range of services in line with the strategic goals of Tusla which include: keeping children safe; enabling families to make informed decisions with regards to their health and lifestyle choices; helping children engage to with education and develop as active citizens, capable of economic independence. The overall approach is to build positive and trusting relationships with communities and families.

## **5. The HSCL scheme in practice**

The Committee heard from the Department of Education and Skills that the underlying vision and thrust of the HSCL scheme is preventative; therefore, it seeks to promote and develop real partnership between parents, teachers and communities, in order to enhance pupils' outcomes and learning opportunities, through improved attendance, participation and retention in the education system.

The operation of the scheme can involve either home visitation by HSCL co-ordinators or bringing parents and guardians into dedicated spaces within schools. Hearing from two current HSCL teachers, the Committee was told that, a supportive environment is created where parents and guardians are encouraged to discuss issues concerning their children, their education and their overall participation in the school community. To ensure their children remain in school, open discussion is encouraged aimed at addressing concerns on matters such as the transition from primary to post-primary education, behavioural problems, how to

establish good habits and positive attitude towards schoolwork and how best to ensure children remain in school.

Some parents and guardians are offered courses in areas such as personal development, literacy and numeracy and dedicated parenting programmes to improve self-confidence when helping their children with their homework. This type of engagement has been shown to foster a more positive outlook amongst parents and guardians regarding education. It has encouraged many parents to return to either full-time or part-time education themselves through VTOS or ETBs. It has also been shown to increase their motivation and desire to become more active within their communities and prompts a growth in self-confidence and self-esteem.

The Committee was told that some parents are so isolated during the hours at which their children are in school, that visits from the HSCL teacher may be the only social interaction and support a parent will have.

## **6. The Strengthening Families Programme and the HSCL**

The Committee heard from Foróige in relation to its Strengthening Families Programme (SFP), a service dealing with referrals from HSCLs and education welfare officers. The SFP is similar to the HSCL scheme in terms of its interactions with families and its role in aiding the self-development of parents, guardians and children. It aims at reducing risk factors related to alcohol and drug use, mental health issues and criminal behaviour.

Since its introduction in 2007, over 1,500 families in Ireland have graduated from the Programme.

The Programme itself consists of three hours of training per week over the course of 14 weeks. It is coordinated by the Foróige drug prevention and education initiative and its delivery involves inter-agency collaboration with a number of statutory, community and voluntary partners, including social work, drugs education, youth and probation services and family resource centres.

Similar to the HSCL scheme, the SFP is tailored for families where the children are facing challenges at school and have little structure in their home lives, often because of inconsistent parenting or negative family

experiences. It aims to bring about positive change for the family unit as a whole, rather than focusing on one individual child who has been identified as problematic. The Programme has resulted in improved parent relationships with schools, allowing them to gain the skills and confidence to better engage with teachers and the school community. This improved engagement allows for a unified approach to working with the student. Like the HSCL scheme, the SFP has been proven to be effective in reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors.

## **7. Challenges facing the HSCL scheme**

The Committee heard from the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) who said that the HSCL scheme is continuing to suffer as a result of the recessionary cutbacks of recent years. Members were informed that many HSCL teachers are over-stretched and under-resourced and there is currently little opportunity for professional development or networking. Professional development and ongoing training are seen as highly important given the broad remit of the HSCL role. This ever-evolving role includes courses, training programmes, integration with community groups, policy formation at school level, literacy and numeracy development and staff development.

While the five-year limit on the role is justified by some, it can also be problematic as the turnover can result in schools losing experienced teachers who have invested time and effort in establishing strong relationships with families and, therefore, there are calls for a balance to be achieved in this regard.

The Committee also heard that the current funding for the scheme is not entirely sufficient in providing meaningful and targeted supports, and the cuts to funding for the scheme in recent years has been particularly pronounced in rural DEIS schools and special schools which have specific educational and welfare needs.

Furthermore, the current remit of the HSCL role is not sufficient for the level of engagement required to adequately support members of the Travelling community, who face specific barriers in progressing through and remaining within the education system. There are schools located in areas with a high Traveller population which are non-DEIS and therefore do not have benefit from the HSCL scheme. Another issue raised was that of leadership – where there is poor leadership in school

management, there is usually a correlating poor level of engagement as regards the openness of parents to engage with the HSCL. The increased demands for Garda vetting within schools, which is necessary, was also highlighted as a challenge and a barrier to engagement amongst some parents.

## Recommendations

The Joint Committee recommends that:

1. continued commitment to investment and a renewed vision is provided to ensure it responds to the increasing needs of pupils and families living in challenging contexts;
2. a commitment to ongoing professional development and opportunities for networking within clusters is required;
3. consideration is given to expanding the allocation of HSCL teachers in areas that have a high concentration of Traveller pupils, including non-DEIS schools;
4. the provision of Parent's rooms should be expanded to all schools with HSCL teachers;
5. courses for parents should be facilitated in all schools with a HSCL teacher;
6. continual support to the family and the child is provided throughout the first year to improve their chances of progression;
7. consideration is given to facilitating HSCL teacher visitations at school if it is not culturally appropriate to have visitations at home and discretion given to the teacher to determine whether home or school interactions are most appropriate at any given time;
8. provision of interpreters should be made and not left solely to the school if an interpreter is necessary, perhaps the establishment of an approved interpreter "database" could be considered;
9. procedures to be developed to allow for engagement with parents who may not ordinarily qualify for Garda clearance in certain circumstances, while ensuring the safety and welfare of the child is paramount;
10. HSCL scheme should be expanded to avoid those with special needs not being able to avail of this service.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Committee Membership

##### Joint Committee on Education and Skills

Deputies: Thomas Byrne (FF)  
Kathleen Funchion (SF)  
Catherine Martin (GP)  
Tony McLoughlin (FG)  
Hildegarde Naughton (FG)  
Fiona O'Loughlin (FF) [Chair]  
Jan O'Sullivan (Lab)

Senators: Maria Byrne (FG)  
Robbie Gallagher (FF)  
Paul Gavan (SF)  
Lynn Ruane (Ind)

##### Notes:

1. Deputies nominated by the Dáil Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Dáil on 16 June 2016.
2. Senators nominated by the Seanad Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Seanad on 22 July 2016.
3. Deputies Carol Nolan, Ciaran Cannon, Joan Burton, and Jim Daly discharged and Deputies Kathleen Funchion, Tony McLoughlin, Jan O'Sullivan, and Josepha Madigan nominated to serve in their stead by the Twelfth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 3 October 2017.
4. Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh resigned with effect from 27 February 2018.
5. Senator Paul Gavan nominated by the Seanad Committee of Selection and appointed by Order of the Seanad on 8 March 2018.
6. Deputy Josepha Madigan discharged and Deputy Hildegarde Naughton nominated to serve in her stead by the Twentieth Report of the Dáil Committee of Selection as agreed by Dáil Éireann on 1 May 2018.

## Appendix 2

### Orders of Reference

#### **a. Functions of the Committee – derived from Standing Orders [DSO 84A; SSO 71A]**

- (1) The Select Committee shall consider and report to the Dáil on—
  - (a) such aspects of the expenditure, administration and policy of a Government Department or Departments and associated public bodies as the Committee may select, and
  - (b) European Union matters within the remit of the relevant Department or Departments.
- (2) The Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann for the purposes of the functions set out in this Standing Order, other than at paragraph (3), and to report thereon to both Houses of the Oireachtas.
- (3) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments, such—
  - (a) Bills,
  - (b) proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 187,
  - (c) Estimates for Public Services, and
  - (d) other mattersas shall be referred to the Select Committee by the Dáil, and
  - (e) Annual Output Statements including performance, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public monies, and
  - (f) such Value for Money and Policy Reviews as the Select Committee may select.
- (4) The Joint Committee may consider the following matters in respect of the relevant Department or Departments and associated public

bodies:

(a) matters of policy and governance for which the Minister is officially responsible,

(b) public affairs administered by the Department,

(c) policy issues arising from Value for Money and Policy Reviews conducted or commissioned by the Department,

(d) Government policy and governance in respect of bodies under the aegis of the Department,

(e) policy and governance issues concerning bodies which are partly or wholly funded by the State or which are established or appointed by a member of the Government or the Oireachtas,

(f) the general scheme or draft heads of any Bill,

(ag) scrutiny of private members' Bills in accordance with Standing Order 148B, or detailed scrutiny of private members' Bills in accordance with Standing Order 141,

(g) any post-enactment report laid before either House or both Houses by a member of the Government or Minister of State on any Bill enacted by the Houses of the Oireachtas,

(h) statutory instruments, including those laid or laid in draft before either House or both Houses and those made under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009,

(i) strategy statements laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas pursuant to the Public Service Management Act 1997,

(j) annual reports or annual reports and accounts, required by law, and laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas, of the Department or bodies referred to in subparagraphs (d) and (e) and the overall performance and operational results, statements of strategy and corporate plans of such bodies, and

(k) such other matters as may be referred to it by the Dáil

from time to time.

(5) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order shall consider, in respect of the relevant Department or Departments—

(a) EU draft legislative acts standing referred to the Select Committee under Standing Order 114, including the compliance of such acts with the principle of subsidiarity,

(b) other proposals for EU legislation and related policy issues, including programmes and guidelines prepared by the European Commission as a basis of possible legislative action,

(c) non-legislative documents published by any EU institution in relation to EU policy matters, and

(d) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the relevant EU Council of Ministers and the outcome of such meetings.

(6) The Chairman of the Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, who shall be a member of Dáil Éireann, shall also be the Chairman of the Select Committee.

(7) The following may attend meetings of the Select or Joint Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order, for the purposes of the functions set out in paragraph (5) and may take part in proceedings without having a right to vote or to move motions and amendments:

(a) Members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland, including Northern Ireland,

(b) Members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and

(c) at the invitation of the Committee, other Members of the European Parliament.

(8) A Select Committee appointed pursuant to this Standing Order may, in respect of any Ombudsman charged with oversight of public services within the policy remit of the relevant Department or

Departments, consider—

(a) such motions relating to the appointment of an Ombudsman as may be referred to the Committee, and

(b) such Ombudsman reports laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas as the Committee may select: Provided that the provisions of Standing Order 111F apply where the Select Committee has not considered the Ombudsman report, or a portion or portions thereof, within two months (excluding Christmas, Easter or summer recess periods) of the report being laid before either or both Houses of the Oireachtas.

**b. Scope and Context of Activities of Committees (as derived from Standing Orders) [DSO 84; SSO 70]**

- (1) The Joint Committee may only consider such matters, engage in such activities, exercise such powers and discharge such functions as are specifically authorised under its orders of reference and under Standing Orders.
- (2) Such matters, activities, powers and functions shall be relevant to, and shall arise only in the context of, the preparation of a report to the Dáil and/or Seanad.
- (3) The Joint Committee shall not consider any matter which is being considered, or of which notice has been given of a proposal to consider, by the Committee of Public Accounts pursuant to Standing Order 186 and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993.
- (4) The Joint Committee shall refrain from inquiring into in public session or publishing confidential information regarding any matter if so requested, for stated reasons given in writing, by—
  - (a) a member of the Government or a Minister of State, or
  - (b) the principal office-holder of a body under the aegis of a Department or which is partly or wholly funded by the State or established or appointed by a member of the Government or by the Oireachtas:

Provided that the Chairman may appeal any such request made to the Ceann Comhairle / Cathaoirleach whose decision shall be final.
- (5) It shall be an instruction to all Select Committees to which Bills are referred that they shall ensure that not more than two Select Committees shall meet to consider a Bill on any given day, unless the Dáil, after due notice given by the Chairman of the Select Committee, waives this instruction on motion made by the Taoiseach pursuant to Dáil Standing Order 28. The Chairmen of Select Committees shall have responsibility for compliance with this instruction.

## **Appendix 3**

### **List of Stakeholders**

Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI)

Department of Education and Skills

Foróige

Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO)

Ms. Aisling Browne, Home School Community Liaison Teacher, Scoil Mhuire Sóisearach, Newbridge, Co. Kildare

Ms. Jenny Gannon, Home School Community Liaison Teacher, Scoil Mhuire Sínséarach, Newbridge, Co. Kildare

TUSLA



## Appendix 4

# Submissions by Stakeholders



# Strengthening Families Programme



## Foróige

**1.1 Foróige** is Ireland's leading youth organisation, providing a broad range of services and programmes to young people, families and communities across the country. Foróige engages with young people in Ireland aged 10 – 18 to enable them to achieve their full potential irrespective of their backgrounds or the challenges they face. We achieve this through the provision of universal and targeted youth services and education programmes that are proven to deliver positive outcomes for the young people.

Foróige is a volunteer led organisation that works with over 50,000 young people through volunteer-led youth clubs and staff-led youth projects. Our programmes build skills, resilience, belief and aspiration in young people. The benefits of these programmes are far reaching. Foróige's work is embedded in communities across Ireland and is a unique partnership between young people, parents, volunteers, and the wider community.

**1.2 Drug Prevention & Foróige.** Youth work is a strong preventative factor in delaying young people's experimentation with substances and also helps develop their skills to reduce harms associated with alcohol and substance misuse. Foróige staff and volunteers build positive relationships with individuals and groups and provide them with a safe environment in which to socialise and develop skills to make healthy life choices.

Foróige operates a number of drug prevention and education projects around the country, funded mainly through Local or Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Forces and the Young People's Facilities and Services Funds. These projects work with young people, parents and families delivering a range of evidence based educational and awareness programmes along with providing support and training to schools and others in the community. The aim of these programmes is to reduce or delay drug and alcohol use among young people. This is achieved through the delivery of primary and secondary drug prevention programmes for young people as well as training and support for parents, schools and community based organisations.

The Strengthening Families Programme has been identified as a unique programme that delivers a range of proven benefits for families and young people.

## 2. What is Strengthening Families Programme?

**2.1** The Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) is an evidence-based 14-week family skills training programme that involves parents and teens/children in three classes run on the same night once a week. Families enjoy a meal on arrival, then parents and teens /children engage in separate skills based sessions for 1 hour. This is followed by a family skills session in the second hour, where skills are practiced with parents and teens/children. Incentives such as rewards for attendance, childminding and transport are offered to enable families to complete the programme and remove barriers to attendance. SFP can be applied across all prevention levels of support for families, and particularly targeted towards the Hardiker model, levels 2 and 3.



# Strengthening Families Programme



**2.2** SFP is designed to reduce multiple risk factors for later alcohol and drug use, mental health problems and criminal behaviour by increasing family strengths, developing young people's social competencies and improving positive parenting skills. It focuses on building family protective factors such as parent-child relationships, communication, cohesion, social and life skills, resisting peer influences, family organisation and attachment; and reducing risk factors such as conflict, excessive punishment, family drug and alcohol misuse and truancy. The Strengthening Families Programme is disseminated worldwide by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as an effective evidence based family intervention.

## **3. Strengthening Families Programme in Ireland**

**3.1** SFP was first delivered in Ireland in 2007. The programme was implemented in Cork, led by the HSE Drug & Alcohol Services, Local Drugs Task Force and Regional Drugs Task Force. Since then, multiple sites across Ireland have developed SFP 12-16 in their areas (spread across all 4 provinces) and some sites are also developing the SFP 6-11 programme. Many of these are coordinated by Local or Regional Drugs & Alcohol Task Forces, Foróige, Probation Services or Le Cheile. An interagency approach has proven fundamental to its successful implementation, involving a collaboration of statutory, community and voluntary agencies and volunteers. Evaluations take place nationally using the Lutra model or locally using mixed models depending on the requirements of funders.

**3.2** A National SFP Council of Ireland has been established, to facilitate an inter-regional joined-up approach to the development of SFP in Ireland. The members are made up of multi-site SFP Coordinators and Trainers who coordinate the implementation of SFP in their area. Since 2007, in excess of 1,500 families have graduated from sites represented on the National Council. There have been many more SFP programmes run by groups who are not actively involved with the National Council and their graduation numbers are not represented in the figure mentioned. SFP has been rolled out in over 60 sites across the country since it began.

**3.3** Referrals of families to SFP can be through statutory or community agencies or by self-referral depending on the local site criteria. Criteria for referral to SFP is based on families being identified who are experiencing challenges within their family such as inconsistent parenting, poor communication skills, past substance misuse or in relation to young people, challenging behaviour or poor school attendance. A local SFP subcommittee is formed to assess which families are offered places.

## **4. Strengthening Families Programme in Co. Kildare**

**4.1** SFP has been run in Kildare since 2008. The Programme is Co-ordinated by the Foróige Drugs Prevention & Education Initiative (DPEI), which is based in Newbridge. Delivery involves a number of statutory and community/voluntary inter-agency partners, including social work, drugs education, youth, and probation services, Family Resource Centres, and primary care, amongst others. There is a local SFP steering committee made up of interagency partners who support the delivery of the programme. SFP has been delivered in



# Strengthening Families Programme



Athy, Celbridge and Newbridge over these years with the current one (Sept- Dec 2017) being run in Newbridge. This year an independent evaluation was undertaken with a particular focus on 2014, 2015 & 2016 and its findings were recently launched in Naas. A copy of the evaluation executive summary has been attached with this submission.

## 5. Co. Kildare Strengthening Families Programme Evaluation

### Summary of reported benefits

- Better family communication and relationships
- Improved child behaviour and wellbeing
- Increased parental competencies and confidence
- Enhanced social life
- Greater school attendance
- Reduced service utilisation

**5.1** Families reported being better able to deal with problems and to spend more time together as a family. In general, there was also far less tension and conflict in the homes and children were noticeably calmer and more willing to listen. Parents felt that the programme had helped children to understand other people's perspectives, become more considerate, respectful and responsible, and to employ better coping strategies to manage their emotions. Some parents also reported increased trust, self-esteem and social skills among children. In addition, children were reported to have improved decision-making skills and were better able to resist peer pressure. Furthermore, several parents alluded to improved school attendance and behaviour in school.

**5.2** *"My son is very open now whereas before he wouldn't tell me anything"*

*"It helped with his anger issues, he's nowhere near as bad. He'd listen to you now"*

*"She's learnt to stay away from people who are taking drugs. She's become more responsible"*

*"She's more aware of responsibility. She's more aware of telling me where she is, who's she's with and where's she's going"*

*"The teachers couldn't get over the change in him. Before he had to sit on his own ... but now he's interacting back with the class"*

## 6. Educational Benefits

### Benefits to Schools

**6.1** SFP has been identified as a 'fit' for families in cases where schools are facing challenges with young people who have very little structure in their lives primarily due to inconsistent



# Strengthening Families Programme



parenting and family experiences. SFP has the ability to bring about positive change for whole families rather than just focusing on the one identified 'problem' child. In general, positive changes experienced in family and home life lead to better engagement in school.

**6.2** Parent's relationship with the schools also improves as they gain some useful skills in communication which some have indicated helped them engage better at parent-teacher meetings and allowed for a unified approach to supporting the young people. SFP also provides an opportunity to further develop and enhance the parent's education and learning; parents gain confidence and esteem to return to education/training opportunities.

**6.3** SFP has a very positive relationship with school principals, teaching staff and supports the School Completion Programme with any families that are engaging with the process while attending SFP.

## Referrals

**6.4** Schools, Home School Community Liaisons (HSCL's) and Education Welfare Officers (EWO's) are amongst our many referrers to the programme. Almost one third of our current participants on SFP this year have been referred by them.

## Premises and Support

**6.5** This year in Kildare, a school is the host building for SFP 2017. Along with this, a number of HSCL's are trained in SFP to help support families each week while they are attending the programme.

## 7. Case Studies

### Case Study 1

Parent and young person referral received from EWO. Young person has not attended school for a number of months. Parent cannot leave the house as the young person will not let them. Week one of SFP and the young person indicates they will not return to the programme. Each week for the full 14 weeks, this family turn up and engage with each session. Some days there are challenges but in general this young person is feeling heard and respected. This has led to the parent learning and putting into practice new skills. It has also led to her being able to leave home and seek out part-time work and experience life outside of the home. The young person is now part of iScoil and engaging consistently with its content.

### Case Study 2

School has referred a family to SFP at week three of the programme as an emergency referral. At this moment the school have advised that the young person is at risk of suspension due to their behaviour and disrespect for teachers. The parent is adamant that her young person is not at fault and blames the school and its teachers. SFP agree to take on the family on a week by week basis as their impact on other families must be assessed. The



# Strengthening Families Programme



family joined SFP on week four and are still attending. The school principal has indicated that they have noticed changes in his communication and interaction in school along with seeing the parent engaging with the young person. Prior to this, it had been noted that there was very little communication or affection between the family. Now they sit down each night of SFP as a family and share an evening meal as part of SFP.

## 8. Strengthening Families Programme Co. Kildare in numbers

Kildare 2017: 17 Families – (60 family members)

Referrals received – 31 families

Facilitators: 16 (plus 4 support facilitators if required, deliver the SFP each week)

Family Link workers: 15 (support the families each week while they are on the programme)

Childcare Staff: 3

Kildare 2016: 13 Families – (43 family members)

Referrals received – 24 families

Facilitators: 11 (plus 3 support facilitators if required, deliver the SFP each week)

Family Link workers: 10 (support the families each week while they are on the programme)

Childcare Staff: 3

## 9. Strengthening Families Programme Delivery

**9.1** The delivery of the Strengthening Families Programme relies on the support and involvement of link workers and facilitators whose time is given by statutory and community agencies to support and implement the delivery of the programme. Currently in Co Kildare the programme cost of approx. €12,000 is provided by Tusla and the Co Kildare Leader Partnership and the remaining cost of implementation of the programme is supported by the agencies and organisations mentioned above.

**9.2** Co-ordination of the delivery of the programme is undertaken by the Foróige Drug Prevention & Education Initiative Youth Officer. This is a significant undertaking in terms of the time and resources required to oversee all of the elements of the programme from referrals and home visits to coordinating the steering group and weekly programme sessions.

**9.3** Given the success of the model, the proven outcomes and the demand for places on the programme, our ambition for the programme in Co. Kildare and elsewhere is that a role be funded to oversee the delivery of SFP.



# Strengthening Families Programme



9.4 The Costs associated with this are outlined here.

- Full time SFP Coordinator post (35 hours per week):€41,000  
(Including Employer PRSI)
- Travel & Subsistence: €3,000
- Management & Administration Costs €8,000
- Annual programme budget €26,000
- **Total per annum: €78,000**

9.5 With the appropriate funding in place and structured for a minimum of five years, our ambition would be to deliver SFP twice annually within Kildare. This post will also support the delivery of ancillary services such as additional family support work, home visits and other local needs that are identified as a fit for this role. This funding would also free up the existing DPEI youth officer to provide significant additional drug prevention & education programmes to young people and parents in the area.

## 10. Conclusion

10.1 By working with all family members at the same time, SFP has been shown to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors for families and for young people. The programme works because of the unique relationship building and community engagement of Foróige and its partners. The evaluation report clearly demonstrates the benefits of the programme and outlines the need for a sustainable funding structure to be put in place.

10.2 It is evident based on the number of referrals that the demand for access to this programme is growing year on year. The formation of the National Council has brought together a wealth of national knowledge and skills to help embed SFP in communities around Ireland by ensuring adherence to the integrity of the model. Funding remains the biggest barrier to the more widespread roll out of the programme, but there is a clear appetite to see this programme delivered more widely.

10.3 Foróige are committed to supporting the delivery of SFP in Kildare and elsewhere and maintaining the crucial interagency relationships that help achieve the desired outcomes. Once the programme is complete, Foróige can offer additional support through engagement



# Strengthening Families Programme



in other programmes for young people and parents so that the educational, learning and other benefits of involvement in the programme continue to develop.

# **An Evaluation of the Strengthening Families Programme in Co. Kildare.**

## **Executive Summary**



**Mairead Furlong, Yvonne Leckey & Sinead McGilloway**

**(Independent research consultants)**

**May 2017**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) in Co. Kildare. The evaluation took place between January – April 2017 to explore the perspectives of families and stakeholders involved in the programme. The Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) has been delivered annually in Co. Kildare since 2013, and previously in 2008 and 2009. This evaluation investigates the delivery of the SFP from 2013 – 2016, with a particular focus on programme impact and implementation in 2016.

### Summary of findings

- A range of benefits were reported for families, including improved family relationships, enhanced parental wellbeing and parenting competencies, and improved child behaviour
- Family attendance and completion in Newbridge 2016 was high. Of the 13 families who commenced the programme, 5 attended all 14 sessions and 7 families attended 10 or more sessions. One family withdrew from the programme at Week 5
- Parents indicated a high level of satisfaction with the programme experience; however, materials may need to be adapted for purposes of engaging more effectively with teenagers
- Some families may require additional/ongoing support for parental depression and for challenging child behaviour
- Involvement in SFP delivery was perceived as beneficial for services
- Several factors were identified as key for the sustainability of the SFP in Co. Kildare, including embedding delivery in an area with a high level of service provision for families; managerial and funding structures put in place beforehand; potentially reviewing the number of very high risk families accepted on the programme; identifying an appropriate venue; finding and retaining a pool of trained staff; and exploring avenues to source additional funding
- The cost of delivering the SFP should be considered in the context of the personal, family, societal and economic costs that would potentially have been incurred if the family had not engaged with the programme

### Experiences of families

The collective findings from this study indicate that there were many benefits for families who had participated in the Strengthening Families Programme (SFP), including: improved family communication and relationships; increased parental confidence and competence in dealing with

challenging child behaviour; enhanced peer relations and social support; greater school attendance for the children; and a reduction in service utilisation for some families.

Interviews with parents also highlighted perceived improvements in child behaviour and parental stress although the questionnaires indicated that, three months following the programme, some parents were still experiencing moderate levels of depression and reported high levels of difficult child behaviour. Such families may require additional support. It should be noted that the questionnaires were used only to collect data for the child with the most challenging behaviour in the family and therefore did not capture any potential benefits amongst siblings (where applicable). Furthermore, it was not possible within the context of this study to collect data from families before the programme started; therefore, the nature and extent of any change achieved as a result of the SFP is unknown. Future larger evaluations of the SFP are needed to address this important question.

### **Summary of reported benefits**

- Better family communication and relationships
- Improved child behaviour and wellbeing
- Increased parental competencies and confidence
- Enhanced social life
- Greater school attendance
- Reduced service utilisation

“I feel like a family now whereas before it was just like four people in a house” (parent)

### **Summary of reported benefits for families from the qualitative analysis**

Parents reported a high level of satisfaction with the programme experience and appreciated the meals, transport, and personal touches of the family portraits and the graduation night. The children also enjoyed the fun and the activities. However, a few teenagers would have preferred if their sessions were more lively and engaging. Parents reported challenges with regard to difficulties in engaging children in family sessions, the need for more personnel to manage children with disruptive behaviour, the quality of food in Newbridge 2016, and the need for linkworkers for all families.

### **Experiences of SFP staff <sup>1</sup>**

The SFP also led to a number of benefits for services involved in delivery, including: offering a unique, intensive and preventive family-focussed intervention; reducing service utilisation by

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Staff’ refers to service personnel involved in implementing the SFP, including Site Coordinator, facilitators, linkworkers, steering group, referral agents, funders and so forth

families and/or helping families to engage with other services; enhancing the professional 'toolkit' of staff; and helping to develop interagency collaboration more generally within Co. Kildare.

- SFP offers benefits to families and services in terms of:
  - Family focus
  - Intensive support
  - Preventive
  - Fits remit of funding organisations
  - Evidence-based
  - Practical to implement
  - Cost effective
  - Loss if not there
- Reduces family utilisation of services
- Helps families engage with other services
- Enhances professional skills of staff
- Built interagency collaboration in Co. Kildare

#### **Perceived benefits of SFP to organisations**

According to staff interviewed in this study, it is logistically challenging to implement the SFP on an annual basis given funding and staffing restrictions. The findings indicate several factors that may be key to ensuring successful implementation and sustainability of the programme, the most important of which was the need to embed the SFP in an area with a high level of service provision for families (e.g. Newbridge). This would be important in easing the workload of acquiring and retaining SFP staff and of receiving appropriate referrals. Other significant factors include: managerial and funding structures put in place beforehand; potentially reviewing the number of very high risk families accepted on the programme; identifying an appropriate venue; finding and retaining a pool of trained staff; and exploring avenues to source additional funding.

- Managerial and funding structures in place
- Embedding in the right location
- Referral issues
- Getting the venue right
- Staffing
- Programme delivery

#### **Key factors that help or hinder implementation**

Given that most, if not all, of the families presented with a high degree of need and risk, the evidence from this evaluation indicates that the impact of the programme may extend beyond the family unit to the wider community (e.g. greater school attendance, reduced service utilisation). Therefore, the costs of implementing the SFP should be offset against the personal, family, societal and economic costs that would have been incurred if families had not attended the programme. For instance, as a result of the SFP, some children were removed from the Child Protection Notification System, thereby preventing family breakdown and the costs of foster/residential care.

*“Me and him [Dad] used to not be able to talk but now it's different. We're always talking. We do more stuff together.” (Teenage boy)*

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank all of the families and staff who participated in this evaluation, for giving their time and speaking openly about their experiences of the SFP. We are also grateful to the Kildare Children and Young People’s Services Committee (CYPSC) for funding the study. We extend special thanks to Emma Bemey, CYPSC, and Pdraig O’ Donovan, Foróige, for facilitating contact with families and staff, and for answering our many questions.

Kildare CYPSC and the Strengthening Families Programme Steering Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners for their contribution to Strengthening Families Programme in Kildare.

Foróige, TUSLA, County Kildare LEADER Partnership, South Western Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force, Newbridge Family Resource Centre, HSE Primary Care Social Work Service, Kildare Youth Services, TUSLA Family Support Service, Curragh Family Resource Centre, ARAS Addiction Service, Department of Children & Youth Affairs, Extem, Happy Days Childcare Athy, Integrated Services Programme (ISP) Kildare, Kildare County Council, Kildare County Childcare Committee, Kildare Traveller Action, Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board, Le Chéile, National Lottery, Probation Service, Scoil Mhuire Newbridge, KARE, An Garda Síochána, Teach Dara Kildare Town, The Mill Community Centre Celbridge, Curragh Post Primary School, Curragh Girls National School and those who have volunteered or supported us through donations.



Submission to  
The Joint Committee on Education and Skills

*On Home School Liaison Scheme*

On behalf of the INTO

November 2017

## **Home School Liaison Scheme**

The INTO engages regularly with its members with a view to informing INTO policy. The following INTO submission on the topic of the Home School Liaison Scheme has been informed by consultations with teachers and specifically by regular meetings with HSCL representatives.

### **Background**

The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme was initiated as a pilot project in 1990 to promote partnership between parents and teachers with the purpose of enhancing pupils' learning opportunities and to promote their retention in the education system. The HSCL Scheme was further extended in 2005 under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the Action Plan for educational inclusion. Central to the success of the DEIS Action Plan is the commitment to building relationships between the home and the school to better support children at risk. The INTO acknowledges the significant role that the HSCL scheme has played in helping to tackle educational disadvantage and, in particular, the commitment to the scheme and the visionary approach under the direction of the pioneering national co-ordinator, the late Concepta Conaty R.I.P. However, the HSCL scheme has been seriously impacted in recent years as a consequence of recessionary cutbacks. The INTO is hopeful that the Educational Welfare Board (EWS) within Tusla will offer a renewed commitment to safeguarding and progressing the HSCL scheme.

### **Rural HSCL**

Initially, all DEIS primary schools, both urban and rural, were included in the HSCL Scheme, however, it is regrettable that since the abolition of the rural co-ordinators no progress has been made in filling the gap left behind in the system. Rural DEIS schools have specific needs and would benefit from improved home-school links. In general, the INTO is of the view that there is a role for HSCL support to build home-school relations in all primary schools. At the very least the HSCL scheme should be reassigned to all schools recognised as having educational disadvantage status, and consideration should be given to extending the scheme to special schools who have particular needs in terms of home school relations.

### **Supporting Travellers**

The attendance, participation and retention of Traveller pupils continues to be of concern in both DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The HSCL teacher does not currently have the capacity to fulfil the duties previously held by the Visiting Teacher for Travellers (VTT). The VTT had a specific understanding of Traveller culture that has been noticeably lost to the system. The level of engagement required to support Travellers needs intervention beyond that which can be incorporated into the current remit of the HSCL role. In an attempt to counteract the loss of resources to Travellers, the INTO proposes that consideration should be given to expanding the allocation of HSCL teachers in areas that have a high concentration of Traveller pupils, including non-DEIS schools. Extending the capacity of HSCL to support Traveller pupils and their families would require specific professional development opportunities for HSCL teachers that would enhance their understanding of Traveller culture and their specific barriers to education. An

expansion of the HSCL service could only complement support for Traveller families from other education welfare services.

### **The Five-Year Limit**

The DES has introduced a five-year limit on the deployment of teachers to the role of HSCL and this five-year term was restated in the *DEIS Action Plan 2017*. While there is a rationale to introduce a limit, for example, to enable more teachers the opportunity to take up the role, the INTO suggests more flexibility at local level. The principal may be best placed to determine the most appropriate teacher for the role of HSCL considering that the responsibility of staff deployment is the function of the school principal as set out in Section 23 of the *Education Acts 1998-2012*. A balance must be achieved to ensure that the five-year limit does not result in schools losing experienced teachers, who have invested time in establishing strong relationships with families, from the role. Therefore, the INTO is of the view that schools should be granted the autonomy and flexibility at local level to deploy the best placed teacher to the role of HSCL rather than be confined by a five-year limit .

### **Home Visits**

Home visitation is an integral part of the HSCL Scheme's focus on partnership. In many cases it promotes co-operation between the school and the home, and maximises the child's involvement and their retention in the education system. However, the nature of HSCL home visits has evolved in recent years and HSCL teachers sometimes find it problematic fulfilling the requirement for home visits. In some cases, parents are more amenable to school visits as opposed to home visits. Some parents are reluctant to accommodate HSCL visits in the home as the practice does not align with their culture. The INTO acknowledges the importance of home visits in ensuring a holistic perspective, however, interactions with parents should be about the contact irrespective of the context. Schools and HSCL teachers need to be trusted with the flexibility and discretion to determine locally whether home or school interactions are most appropriate at any given time.

### **HSCL CPD**

The lack of commitment to date to a system-wide, professional development programme is an ongoing concern for HSCL teachers. The preventative role of the HSCL encompasses a broad remit including courses/classes, transfer programmes, integration with community groups, policy formation at school level, literacy/numeracy development and staff development to name but a few. Therefore, the HSCL teachers need ongoing professional development opportunities in order to extend and enhance their very specific role. There is some ambiguity around the role of the HSCL. Regular, ongoing access to professional development would help restate and clarify that role particularly within the context of the Education Welfare Service (EWS). Since the recessionary cutbacks, professional development opportunities have been minimal. Professional induction support is also required for newly appointed HSCLs as there is increasing turnover due to the five-year limit. Adequate induction is important to ensure consistency, experience and expertise is harnessed. With a view to ensuring a co-ordinated, inter-agency approach, the INTO also recommends that professional development should be provided to all teams within the EWS – the HSCL teachers, School Completion Programme (SCP) personnel and Education Welfare Officers (EWO), in addition to providing HSCL specific professional development. The INTO is supportive of an integrated approach to supporting families but where the different roles and

responsibilities are respected. It may be at times appropriate for the various teams to work together, however, it is important that the HSCL teacher is not expected to undertake the role of social worker or any other professional.

The INTO acknowledges and welcomes the recent commitment by the Educational Welfare Service to a comprehensive CPD programme that is currently underway.

### **Meitheal**

The INTO notes development of the *Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS)* Programme and the *Meitheal* practice model. While the INTO supports the commitment to professional development, it is important to state that HSCL teachers are not social workers or welfare officers, and they do not want to take on roles for which they are not qualified. Participation of HSCL teachers in *Meitheal* should not be obligatory. However, there may be times when it is appropriate for HSCL teachers to become involved with *Meitheal* where it is of benefit to the child. In such cases they should have the opportunity to do so with the relevant supports in place. Any involvement by HSCL teachers or class teachers in *Meitheal* should be supported with substitution cover and other practical supports as required. Moreover, any involvement in *Meitheal* or similar programmes should not involve excessive paperwork for teachers and schools.

### **Conclusion**

The INTO is strongly of the view that the role of the HSCL teacher in building lasting relationships between the home and the school is essential in tackling educational disadvantage. Parental involvement, especially in areas at risk of social exclusion, does not just benefit the children and the school - it is a crucial aspect of lifelong learning (OECD, 1997). The HSCL must be supported with regular professional development to allow them to continue to work to enhance the capacity of families to support their children in pursuing improved educational attainment.

# **Written submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills**

## **Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL)**

1. DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, is the Department of Education and Skills’ main policy intervention to address educational disadvantage. DEIS Plan 2017, published earlier this year, represents a renewal of the DEIS programme and sets out a vision for future intervention in the area of social inclusion in educational policy.
2. The Home School Community Liaison Scheme is a key element of the DEIS School Support Programme and provides support for DEIS urban primary and post primary schools as part of the integrated Educational Welfare Service of Tusla.
3. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, which is the dedicated state agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children, has responsibility for the management of the HSCL Scheme together with the School Completion Programme (SCP) and the statutory Educational Welfare Service. Tusla’s Educational Welfare services works collaboratively with the DES and schools to ensure that children’s participation in the education system is maximised.
4. All DEIS Urban Primary and DEIS Post Primary schools are currently included in the HSCL Scheme, which serves 539 schools. The scheme is delivered by 416 full-time HSCL Coordinators who are teachers in these schools and assigned to HSCL duties either in individual schools or clusters of schools, catering for approximately 156,000 pupils. The current cost of this provision to the DES is €25 million.
5. The underlying vision and thrust of the HSCL Scheme is preventative; therefore, it seeks to promote and develop real partnership between parents, teachers and communities, in order to enhance pupils’ outcomes and learning opportunities, through improved attendance, participation and retention in the education system.
6. The role of the HSCL Coordinator is to work primarily with the salient adults in the child’s life, in order to empower them, so that they can better support their children to attend school, participate in education and develop positive attitudes to life-long learning. Central to the HSCL initiative, is the identification of educational needs and the provision of a tailored and proportionate response to those needs, through a range of interventions, which are evidence-based, focused and structured. (See Appendix 1 Job Description of HSCL Coordinator).
7. HSCL Coordinators, as agents of change in schools, work in an integrated way with all other support services, particularly SCP staff and Educational Welfare Officers, to implement a whole-school approach to improving attendance, participation and retention in education for the most marginalised and educationally disadvantaged pupils. They also have a critical role in supporting the development, implementation, evaluation and review of the school’s DEIS Plan, particularly through parental involvement interventions that are designed to improve literacy, numeracy and positive engagement.
8. HSCL Coordinators also play a key role in effecting successful transitions through the education continuum – from pre-school to primary school, from primary school to second level, within second level from Junior to Senior Cycle, and onwards through appropriate pathways to further and higher education. The role of the HSCL coordinator is to ensure that parents are linked in with the various stages of the education continuum by facilitating engagement between teaching and other staff and parents.
9. The post of HSCL Coordinator is required to be rotated at least every 5 years in order to provide greater opportunities to gain HSCL experience, and, in turn, to bring experience gained in the role back into the school to complement teaching and learning in the classroom. This arrangement serves to develop experience and build capacity

within the teaching staff in the important area of parental engagement and identification of the challenges in the home background of particular pupils.

10. DEIS schools participating in the HSCL Scheme are required to allocate at least 10% of the annual DEIS Grant to each school for use on HSCL activities and made available to the HSCL Coordinator. (The overall annual DEIS grant to schools is approximately €16 million.)

**Social Inclusion Unit**  
**Department of Education and Skills**  
**31<sup>st</sup> October 2017**

## Appendix 1

### Job Description/Role of the HSCL Coordinator

The HSCL Coordinator shall:

- Encourage, support and facilitate partnership between parents and teachers in the education of their children.
- Work with staff to develop an understanding of educational disadvantage and promote innovative approaches and methodologies to address it.
- Actively develop and promote parental involvement as an integral part of the school development/DEIS planning process and in their work, to support the development, implementation and review of the DEIS Action Plan.
- Establish structures to identify the needs of parents.
- Work with parents to prepare and support them as a resource to their own children and also to the wider school community.
- Visit the homes of students in order to:
  - Build bonds of trust between home and school.
  - Encourage parents to become involved in their child's education.
  - Bring information about the school and about services available in the community.
  - Seek out potential parent leaders, who are willing to participate in the HSCL Scheme's activities and to be a resource to other parents.
  - Monitor the effectiveness of interventions, which have been put in place.
- Facilitate the provision of leisure, curricular, parenting and personal development programmes for parents.
- Within the Educational Welfare Services of the Child and Family Agency, work collaboratively with the statutory Educational Welfare Service and the School Completion Programme (SCP) to address issues which impinge on the school attendance, participation and retention of children at risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving.
- Participate in, contribute to and support integrated services policy and practice of the Educational Welfare Services within the Child and Family Agency.
- Establish and maintain appropriate structures to facilitate the involvement of parents in their child's learning in school and in the home in areas such as literacy, numeracy, leisure/curricular courses, personal development, parenting, shared reading etc.
- Facilitate the training of parents as community leaders and as a support to other parents.
- Liaise with voluntary and statutory agencies in the community.
- Establish/maintain/participate in the Local Education Committee which seeks to respond to school- related issues at community level, that impinge on learning and to seek to address these issues, by working collaboratively with parents, students, voluntary and statutory agencies.
- Facilitate partnership with teachers, parents, pupils and community agencies in formulating school policies.
- Plan, monitor and evaluate HSCL interventions and programmes.

## **Home School Community Liaison Scheme.**

### **Introduction**

In order to be successful, any organisation or enterprise must undergo continuous planning, evaluation, modification and adapt to changing needs and demands. Since its establishment in 1990 by Dr. Concepta Conaty the Home School Community Liaison scheme (HSCL) has continued to change and evolve in a consistent and systematic way, so that it remains central to a school-wide approach to addressing issues of marginalisation and educational disadvantage, as well as being central to the Department of Education and Skills' DEIS programme. As part of Tusla Child and Family Agency's Education Welfare Services, together with School Completion Programme (SCP) and Education Welfare Service (EWS), HSCL is working towards a fully integrated, streamlined and cost-effective delivery of service in schools serving designated areas of disadvantage, so as to improve the attendance, participation and retention of children in education.

Tusla the Child and Family Agency was established in 2014, to deliver world-class integrated services for children, has at its core, the far reaching goals of keeping children safe, enabling families to make good decisions about their health and lifestyles, helping children and families engage with education and helping children to develop as active citizens, capable of economic independence. These strategic goals cannot be delivered without key partnerships in and with communities, schools, organisations and agencies, whose services are based on the needs and strengths of families, as well as being responsive, inclusive and radical. Furthermore, services need to be theoretically grounded, evidence-based, clear in their values and professionally delivered.

Home School Community Liaison has always reached out to communities and to parents in a true spirit of partnership and empowerment. The emphasis is on developing potential and utilising resources inherent in communities and families. Implicit in this approach is a constant commitment to positive and trusting relationships, an ability to listen and empathise, as well as reaching out to the most marginalised, recognising vulnerabilities, sharing power as well as developing and maintaining high levels of motivation among staff.

### **Vision, Strategic Planning and Targets**

The vision, mission and strategic goals of HSCL fit very consistently and appropriately with those of Tusla and are clearly fit for purpose in the new integrated service delivery framework, while remaining true to the scheme's original founding principles. They are:

- to maximise the active participation of children in the learning process, in particular, those who might be at risk of failure
- to promote active cooperation between home, school and relevant community agencies in promoting the educational interests of children
- to raise parents' awareness of their own capacity to enhance their children's progress and to assist them in developing relevant skills
- to enhance children's uptake from education, their retention in the education system and their continuation to post-compulsory education
- to enhance children's attitudes to life-long learning
- to disseminate the positive outcomes of the scheme throughout the school system

These goals underpin all HSCL activities and link clearly to the ethos, mission and overall purpose of the schools that serve areas of disadvantage and are fundamental to the acknowledged success of the Home School Community Liaison scheme. Strategic thinking and planning for ongoing success implies imagining the future and scanning trends, environments and societal changes that have long-term implications. The setting of precise and realistic targets that are consistent with and aligned to the overall vision, mission and strategy of the school and of Tusla is now a central part of all HSCL activities in schools/communities.

### **Management of Home School Community Liaison Scheme**

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency has responsibility for the strategic management of the HSCL Scheme under the Educational Welfare Services (EWS).

One National Integrated Services Manager, employed by Tusla, and four Senior Managers, who are teachers on secondment to Tusla from the DES, have overall responsibility for the operational management of the HSCL programme, as part of its Educational Welfare Service; this responsibility includes the implementation of DEIS policy and planning strategies, in line with the Department of Education and Skills' requirements. The Senior Management Team (SMT) mentors, guides and advises schools and their HSCL Coordinators on the implementation of the HSCL Scheme, locally and nationally. They work in clear geographical areas and in close co-operation with other EWS managers, to ensure a streamlined and effective delivery of service to marginalised children and families. This can only be achieved by having a clear focus on improved measurement and outcomes, targeting in a cohesive and planned manner, the families of pupils at risk of educational failure and putting in place a range of appropriate interventions.

The Board of Management (BOM) of participating schools has responsibility for implementing and supporting the HSCL Scheme. The HSCL Scheme is delivered at local level by HSCL Coordinators, who are employed by the BOM of their schools and in the case of ETB schools, by the relevant ETB. HSCL Coordinators record their own work, monitor outcomes for students and report to their Principal and BOM. The HSCL Scheme is subject to DES inspections, as part of ongoing DEIS inspections and Whole School Evaluations.

### **Role of Senior Management Team**

The Senior Management Team of Tusla Education Welfare Services has both a strategic and operational focus and plays an important leadership role in the DES and Tusla, with regard to the development of strategies to address educational disadvantage. It represents EWS and DES on a wide range of committees and fora, both internally and externally, in strategic planning and development for educational disadvantage.

- The Senior Management Team supports and develops the implementation of HSCL at school, family and community level, to ensure that integrated service delivery to marginalised communities is prioritised, in accordance with the DEIS plan .
- Members of the Senior Management Team visit designated schools to meet with school management and HSCL coordinators in order to advise, support and help schools plan, monitor and evaluate strategies to deal with educational disadvantage.

- They affirm success; help coordinators set realistic targets; share and develop good practice; assist in problem solving and promote positive, professional working relationships with all members of the school and community and with DES and Tusla personnel.
- They encourage and facilitate the school community to define, renew and evaluate its part in developing collaborative working relationships with all relevant agencies, dealing with disadvantage.
- They monitor the implementation of HSCL policies, encourage and facilitate close cooperation with other DES/ Tusla initiatives, particularly SCP and EWS.
- They plan and deliver a comprehensive programme of professional development for all HSCL coordinators at regional and national level. In addition, they provide staff development sessions in designated schools and third-level institutions, with particular emphasis on developing an understanding of educational disadvantage and implementing a whole school approach to its alleviation.
- They plan, organise, and facilitate information/professional development meetings for clusters of coordinators.
- They provide strategic plans, advice, data and reports as required by the DES/EWS on aspects of educational disadvantage, and specifically on the implementation of literacy and numeracy initiatives, in accordance with the DEIS plan.
- They engage in ongoing professional development as part of Tusla leadership team, to enhance their role and effectiveness and to maximise their positive impact as leaders within the education system and as support agents in schools.
- They support the systematic analysis of data on progress and outcomes; assist in evaluation of strategies and engage with relevant Social Inclusion personnel in reviewing resources.

### **Interventions to Improve Attendance, Participation and Retention**

Initiatives currently operated by HSCL coordinators, in conjunction with Local Education Committees, for students and parents include:

- Literacy and numeracy initiatives (e.g. Maths for fun, Maths Eyes, Science for fun Reading for Fun, One Book One Community, Storysacks)
- Structured information briefings/courses pertinent to the life of the child in school e.g. transfer from pre-school to primary and from primary to post-primary, cyber-bullying and health issues etc.
- Supports and courses, such as parenting skills, speech therapy and FETAC accredited courses, e.g. Maths, Irish Language, IT., Child Care
- Home visitation/personal parental contact by HSCL coordinators, who seek to build trust, encourage, affirm and involve parents in further self-development, education, life-long learning, training and leisure pursuits.
- Facilitating active parental involvement in school life at curricular, policy and organisational level.
- Harnessing and strengthening local communities, through partnership, by setting up and maintaining Local Education Committees, comprised of parents, pupils, school management, local agencies and community services, all of whom work together to identify and address issues in the community that impinge on learning and participation.

- Training parents to be a resource to their children, to each other, to the school and to the wider community, through practical involvement in school and community life and activities.
- Developing Action Plans at school and school cluster level, focused on attendance, participation, retention, educational progression, literacy and numeracy, target-setting and measurement of progress and outcomes, to ensure improvement for the children and young people concerned.

### **Literacy and Numeracy Development**

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) – An Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, states that targeted measures should be implemented to tackle problems of literacy and numeracy, with particular reference to family literacy, early education, primary and second-level education and the role of the local authority library system.

HSCL coordinators are actively involved in promoting parental involvement in literacy and numeracy initiatives in the home, at school and in the community, some of which are:

- Early language development, involving parents, where the focus is on preparing the child for school and the importance of talking, listening, play and modelling best practice.
- Storybook reading, where parents are invited into classroom to read stories to groups of children, thus providing opportunities for bonding, language acquisition, cognitive, emotional and imaginative development.
- Specific language development programmes, implemented in conjunction with class teachers and literacy coordinators.
- The provision of literacy materials to homes, both at school entry and transfer time.
- Paired reading, involving parents and also senior students working with younger pupils.
- Literacy for Fun to develop words, phonics, spelling, vocabulary, grammar and story-telling.
- One Book projects, involving whole communities and local libraries, in reading a selected book and building numerous activities around the project.
- Maths and Science for Fun and follow up Maths Trails, utilising the community and local area as a vehicle for learning.

### **Continuous Professional Development (CPD)**

A comprehensive programme of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is essential to ensure that each HSCL Co-ordinator is fully equipped to implement local evidence-based initiatives and interventions that deliver positive outcomes, best practice and integrated working, in accordance with the vision and objectives of HSCL and of the DES, as well as Tusla. Senior Managers plan and deliver a comprehensive programme of continuous professional development for all HSCL coordinators, which aims to:

- impart the core vision and principles of HSCL
- equip new coordinators with the skills and confidence to work in a collaborative way with parents, schools and communities
- ensure an integrated approach to working, in accordance with the single strategic approach to attendance, participation and retention.

- develop coordinators at a personal and professional level to be agents of change in school and community
- utilise appropriate planning and reporting tools, that are consistent across all EWS strands
- utilise evidence-based models and interventions to achieve outcomes
- target in a consistent and realistic way, those most at risk of educational disadvantage

### **Outcomes from HSCL Activities**

HSCL continues to work towards improved attendance, participation and retention, in line with the strategic vision of Education Welfare Services, Tusla. Several outcomes at home, school and community level include more involvement of parents in school structures, such as Parents Council, Boards of Management, increased levels of literacy among marginalised parents as a result of HSCL interventions, involvement of parents in classroom activities and in family learning programmes. At school level, many schools have demonstrated a marked improvement in literacy and numeracy levels, as well as in attendance, participation and progression of children in education.

### **Funding of the HSCL Scheme**

The DES remains responsible for the allocation and funding of teaching posts to the participating DEIS schools, to facilitate the deployment of teachers to the HSCL Coordinator posts.

In addition, the DES is responsible for the payroll costs of the four seconded managers. Their secondment arrangements are reviewed on an annual basis. The payment of travel and subsistence for the Senior Management Team lies with Tusla.

In the past three academic years, schools have been asked by the DES to provide details of expenditure of the HSCL portion of the DEIS grant. It is a requirement that a minimum of 10% of the annual DEIS grant to each school must be allocated for use on HSCL activities. HSCL Coordinators have also been asked to provide data on Key Performance Indicators and Aims and Objectives. The data returned from schools is examined by the DES and the Tusla Senior Management Team and the outcome of this examination assists in informing future developments in HSCL. Furthermore, to date it has highlighted the need for continuous review and restatement of the targeting criteria, as well as emphasising the necessity of utilising evidence-based interventions to achieve outcomes.

### **DES Engagement with Senior Management Team (Tusla)**

There is continuous contact between personnel in the Social Inclusion Unit, DES and the Senior Management Team to discuss various issues surrounding HSCL Coordinator assignments, allocation of HSCL posts to schools, review of HSCL allocation to schools, queries from schools on sharing arrangements for HSCL posts. This very positive working relationship is essential for the continued success of the HSCL Scheme and the alignment of policy between DES and Tusla so as:

- to provide more effective service delivery, through appropriate intervention, for children who have difficulties in relation to school attendance, participation and retention
- to foster and develop improved engagement with other agencies and services working with children and families

- to influence more effective policy-making with an increased emphasis on planning, outcome measurement and the gathering of evidence on the impact of interventions

### **Cluster Model of Support**

At local level, HSCL coordinators meet in clusters to share best practice, discuss and formulate clear action plans that will underpin the delivery of a high quality, efficient and effective service. The use of SMART targets and of an outcomes focus for all work, utilising past experience to build on successes, to modify and formulate plans, to organise schedules and work in a more efficient manner with other organisations and agencies, means that coordinators will continue to need this very important support structure to help them adapt and respond to changing needs in their communities and schools and above all, to deliver improved attendance participation and retention of young people in the school system.

Central to this endeavour, is a fully integrated and co-operative approach to working with the other two Education Welfare Service Strands, SCP and EWS; this ensures, that prior to referrals being made to statutory EWS service, all possible supports and initiatives will have been attempted, in order to address issues of poor school attendance/participation. It means a more consistent and streamlined, professional approach is required, that there is clear communication at organisational and local level and with other agencies, that there is proper planning, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives undertaken, in order to avoid duplication and that there are evidence-based improved outcomes for children and young people.

### **Advantages of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme**

There is ample evidence that the number of advantages of having a HSCL scheme, such as the one in question, far surpasses the disadvantages. Some advantages are:

- the school acts as an outreach service to marginalised families, whose experience of their own education/school is, in many cases, not positive
- the HSCL coordinator is a major agent of change, both in the school and in the community, because of the unique relationship they have with parents and the in-depth knowledge they have of the causes and effects of marginalisation
- HSCL co-ordinators are highly respected in local communities and are seen as the friendly face of the school, there to listen, advise and support parents in their role as primary educators
- HSCL coordinators bring a knowledge of pedagogy and of school structures, that is essential in supporting parents to ensure their children both attend school and participate in the learning process
- HSCL coordinators bring their expertise to the classroom, to the whole school and to their own teaching methodologies, when they return to classroom teaching
- leadership and interpersonal skills are developed during the five year tenure of a HSCL assignment; these skills equip many HSCL coordinators to become leaders/principals, both in Deis and non-Deis schools; in non Deis schools, this is a major advantage, as many of the same problems are evident and strategies can be developed, based on proven interventions in Deis schools

- the knowledge of the local community as well as of support agencies/services, gained by HSCL coordinators helps to direct and assist parents to access appropriate supports, thus leading to more efficiency and cost effectiveness

### **Disadvantages of Home School Community Scheme**

- the scheme as currently structured, operates during the school year, given that coordinators are teachers; this means that no HSCL service is available during holiday time; other Tusla services operate on a calendar year basis
- the fact that posts that are shared across primary and post-primary sometimes means that there is no HSCL service in the primary school in June, if the base school for the coordinator is the post-primary
- it is sometimes difficult to fill HSCL posts, if they are shared across schools that are competing for the same cohort of pupils; this may happen in areas of high concentrations of disadvantage or where the demographics have changed significantly since the post was initially allocated
- in small schools, with few teachers, there may be difficulties finding staff with the required 3 years teaching experience, to fill the HSCL post
- when allocation reviews occur, the second- level school can lose the HSCL post; there is then no continuity of service to maintain the improvements in attendance, participation and retention that may have been gained in the primary school

### **A professional and highly skilled workforce**

There is no doubt that the people entrusted to deliver high quality service to children and families must not only be professional, but also committed to a vision of a better and more egalitarian world of fairness, justice and positive life chances. Home School Community Liaison Coordinators , as well as principals/ management and school staffs, working in schools serving areas of disadvantage consistently demonstrate a generosity of spirit, a belief in the power of education, a commitment to hard work, innovation, cooperation and real partnership with parents and communities. They furthermore engage on a daily basis with staffs and colleagues, to create a readiness and acceptance of change, to overcome resistance, to motivate and to bring about a support structure for successful endeavours and initiatives. The challenge of sustaining momentum, of developing new competencies and skills, of reinforcing new behaviours and approaches will always be part of any successful change strategy. With regard to changing and developing school culture, so that it becomes more inclusive, as educators, we must always be conscious that cultural change is concerned with developing values, beliefs and norms, as well as new behaviours and responses that are appropriate and fitting to a fundamental and far-reaching vision. In its new Tusla family, HSCL will continue to be a leading force for positive change and improved life chances for children at risk of educational failure. It remains committed to empowering people, to giving them the confidence and skills to contribute meaningfully to their community, school, or workplace. Through the ongoing work of building trust and supporting parents in their role, HSCL coordinators will continue to open up paths towards more enriched lives for those they serve.

**Educational Welfare Services,  
Tusla Child and Family Agency,**

**November 2017.**

## Submission for the Education Committee

Aisling Browne, Scoil Mhuire Sóisearach, Ballymany, Newbridge, Co Kildare.

Jenny Gannon, Scoil Mhuire Síns earach, Ballymany, Newbridge, Co Kildare.

Aisling Browne, a Primary School Teacher from Kerry, began her teaching career in 2000 in Southill Junior School, O'Malley Park, Limerick City. Aisling qualified with a Bachelor of Education Degree from Mary Immaculate College of Education and after five years working in Southill, moved to Scoil Mhuire Sóisearach, Newbridge working as a mainstream classroom teacher from Junior Infants to 2<sup>nd</sup> class. Aisling is currently working in the role of HSCL since 2014. Aisling has spent all of her teaching career to date, working in areas of educational disadvantage and holds a strong belief in the importance of access to education for each child in these areas. She firmly believes in the importance of building positive relationships between Home and School so as to enhance the educational experience of the child.

Jenny Gannon has been teaching in Scoil Mhuire Senior School since 1999, the year Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) began in our schools. She has had numerous roles within the school in a mainstream classroom, as part of the School Support Team and this is her second time to serve as a teacher in the HSCL position in the Senior School, having previously been in the position from 2008- 2011 and she returned to the post in 2016. Jenny originally qualified as a secondary teacher from Mater Dei Institute of Education, completed her Graduate Diploma in Primary Education with Hibernia College and also has completed a Masters in Diversity in Education with St Patrick's College.

Aisling and Jenny work closely together –providing a Parent's Room for families from both the Junior & Senior School. They plan together and facilitate opportunities for Parents to positively engage in school and in their child's education. Aisling & Jenny organise tutors and encourage involvement in courses for parents as well as initiatives to enhance the educational experience for the family as a whole. Working to break down barriers between home and school, Aisling and Jenny strive to develop positive relationships with parents so as to improve attendance, participation and retention levels in their schools.

The HSCL scheme itself was an initial three year pilot scheme starting in 1990, the scheme progressed from there and in 1999 all Primary and Post-Primary schools in the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme at that time, were offered a HSCL service. It was in 1999 that ScoilMhuire, both Junior and Senior got a HSCL Co-ordinator. The HSCL scheme was further expanded in 2005 under DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools).

In 2009, the operational responsibility for HSCL (and School Completion Services) transferred to the former NEWB which had the statutory functions in respect of school attendance through Education Welfare Officers (EWOs). On January 1st 2014, the statutory functions of the NEWB under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, were transferred to the newly established Child and Family Agency *Tusla* (the Agency) and the NEWB was dissolved.

Responsibility for the services, formerly provided by NEWB, now rests with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the new Agency, which is the dedicated state agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. The work of HSCL continues as a vital part of the integrated Educational Welfare Services of the Agency in DEIS schools. Within the integrated model, HSCL, SCP and EWO's are committed to working together for the good of each child and family ,identified as needing support.

### The Home School Community Liaison Scheme

- Targets children at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of family-based issues, which adversely affect pupil attainment and school retention.
- Focuses directly on the significant adults in children's lives and seeks direct benefits for the children themselves.
- Works in an enabling way with parents to develop their capacity as a key resource in their children's learning.
- Develops the pupil-parent-teacher relationship, so that school becomes a place where all young people can reach their potential.
- Identifies and provides for the personal, leisure and learning needs of parents, so as to promote their self-worth and self-confidence, which will have a positive impact on their children's education.
- Becomes familiar with attendance patterns, in order to maximize student attendance, participation and retention.

- ☐☐ Works in a supportive and purposeful way with parents and facilitates communication with class teacher, tutor, year-head, and school management, when required.
- ☐☐ Promotes positive teacher and staff attitudes towards partnership-working and adopting a whole-school approach to attendance participation and retention.

#### Our priorities as we work with families –

- ☐☐ To carefully identify the families in need of support and to focus on these marginalized families in our schools
- ☐☐ To complete home visitation. Home visits essentially help to bridge the gap between home and school, school and home. All HSCL coordinators are expected to spend at least 33% of their time on home visitation to build bonds of trust, establish positive relationships and support the children's education in school.
- ☐☐ To facilitate courses for parents that enable them to support their children's learning. Literacy and Numeracy based courses and activities are key to improving Parental confidence and capacity in assisting their child with homework.
  - To encourage parents to volunteer and participate in classrooms activities and school based initiatives eg. Maths Games, Better Basics Reading Programme. Etc.
  - The provision of a dedicated space of a Parents' Room is essential for effective communication, building a positive and trusting relationship and providing an area dedicated to parents where they are made to feel welcome, motivated and empowered to contribute positively to their children's learning.
- ☐☐ We aim to introduce new incentives and programmes to combat educational disadvantage.
- ☐☐ We liaise with voluntary and statutory agencies in the community realizing the importance of interagency work and collaboration for the good of the child and family. Seek course tutors from other agencies to work with parents.
- ☐☐ We work with the SCP staff and the EWO to offer integrated support to families and encourage their engagement in the education system as well as addressing issues that impact negatively on attendance, participation and retention.
- ☐☐ We contribute to the formulating of our school DEIS plan as well as implementing strategies and action plans outlined in the DEIS plan.
- ☐☐ We facilitate partnership between parents/children, staff, community agencies and service providers in the process of formulating school policies and supporting initiatives within the school.

- HSCL contribute to Care teams and school support plans for children in our schools
- We plan, monitor and evaluate HSCL interventions and programmes.
  - Record all contact with target families while ensuring the dignity of and respect for each parent and what information they share with HSCL.

Currently there are 400 HSCL teachers serving 528 schools. A number of these teachers are shared between schools in a particular area.

### The Future and vision for HSCL

- Essential that the scheme is retained and developed-it is of paramount importance to supporting all of our children and families in education.
- It is vital that the role remains filled by a qualified teacher. This is an educational resource for a family and it is essential it remains so. A Teacher is best positioned in the role, bringing their educational experience and knowledge to the role and to the provision of supports for parents.
- There needs to be further rollout of HSCL posts in many areas throughout the country. Some towns for examples have HSCL in one of the primary schools but this doesn't follow through to the secondary school. HSCL plays a key role in the transition from Primary to Post-Primary, implementing Transfer Programmes as well as educational supports for parents, especially the parents of children with Special Educational Needs. A teacher in the role of HSCL can offer educational advice and insight where needed.
- The HSCL is a very positive professional experience for teachers, and upon return to the classroom, the experience lends its hand to a better understanding of the 'child' in our class. An opportunity to work in the role of HSCL should be afforded to as many staff members as is possible.
- Imperative that a module on the HSCL scheme is included in all Teaching Degrees. Student teachers should explore and understand the role and the value of the role as well as the educational importance of it. Teacher Training Colleges must afford quality time looking at the impact of educational disadvantage in schools and how all teachers have a part to play in breaking the cycle of disadvantage.
- As a recommendation at the end.... it is of paramount importance that HSCL doesn't simply become a vehicle for combating attendance issues. The overall role of HSCL has so much more to offer to the education system and to the community.

## ASTI Submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills

### Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme

#### Summary

The HSCL Scheme is an effective strand within the DEIS programme to address educational disadvantage. ASTI's main concern is that the majority of educationally disadvantaged students are not in DEIS schools. Therefore we need to re-examine policy to see how adequate supports can be provided to non-DEIS schools with disadvantaged students.

#### Introduction

The ASTI welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills on the Home School Community Liaison Scheme. It is important that legislators are informed of what is happening in our schools and how education policy goals are being implemented. Teachers are a valuable source of information in identifying gaps in policy and actual implementation of education policy. Moreover, as the HSCL scheme in terms of teachers' pay accounts for €24.8m of the overall DEIS budget of €96.3m in 2014/15, it is appropriate that the Scheme is discussed by the Joint Committee.

#### HSCL Scheme

The main focus of the HSCL scheme is preventative, ensuring that interventions are put in place that will impact positively on parents and children in order to improve educational outcomes. Specifically, the programme targets children at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system because of family-based issues, which adversely affect pupil attainment and school retention.

The HSCL Scheme represented an new departure in education policy in that it focused exclusively on parents. Its original piloting in 1990 was preceded by examining what worked in combating educational disadvantage in other systems, most notably Scotland. It was extended to designated disadvantaged schools in 1999 and, since 2005, has been extended to all DEIS urban primary and DEIS post-primary schools.

In 2009, the HSCL scheme and the School Completion Scheme was transferred to the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). In 2014, the statutory functions of the NEWB were transferred to the newly established Child and Family Board – Tusla. In this agency, the Education Welfare Service is based on an integrated service model in line with the integrated approach in the *National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 –Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*.

While teachers did express concerns during this period over the new integrated model, such concerns related primarily to operational matters and a lack of clarity around the concept of an integrated services model. ASTI, in cooperation with the other teacher unions, had several meetings with the new Educational Welfare Service to ensure clarity for HSCL on these matters.

## **Is the HSCL Scheme effective?**

Anecdotally, there is a strong consensus in schools that the HSCL scheme is effective. Because the scheme focuses directly on the significant adults in children's lives, it is a powerful resource for addressing problems which impact on children's attendance, retention and attainment in schools.

Evaluations of the scheme in 1994 and 2003 have confirmed the experience of schools. The 2003 evaluation by the Education Research Centre concluded that:

*“While there is scope for better integration, there is an underlying coherence to the Department's strategy and that strategy has evolved in line with finding of research on the kind of interventions that are likely to be effective”. (ERC, 2003: 110)*

Subsequent evaluations have been in the context of evaluations of the implementation and impact of the DEIS scheme. The 2015 ESRI report noted the positive evaluations of the Scheme at school level, particularly in terms of parental attitudes and pupil behaviour. (ESRI, 2015: 23)

Bearing in mind that the HSCL Scheme is preventative in focus, it is of note that a 2011 Inspectorate report, on DEIS schools found that across six areas for DEIS planning, schools indicated best practice in relation to attendance, retention and completion. (DES 2011)

In its report for the review of DEIS in January 2017 to support the measures in the National Action Plan on Education, the Department of Education stated that the scheme:

*“has a very important role to play in supporting pupils and their families in transition through the various stages of education. HSCL staff have a particular role to play in working with parents and pre-school settings in relation to school readiness....They also work with Guidance Counsellors and Higher Education Access programme staff to facilitate onward progression to further and higher education” (DES, 2017: 68)*

## **ASTI Recommendations to the Joint Committee**

As is evidenced in the evaluations to date, it appears that the HSCL Scheme is working satisfactorily. Moreover, the DEIS Plan 2017 – published under the National Action Plan for Education – contains specific actions to improve the operation of DEIS.

The core ASTI concern relates not to the operation of the HSCL Scheme per se but rather to broader aspects of policy to combat educational disadvantage. DEIS is the only programme to address educational disadvantage in our schools. It is a targeted programme focusing on areas with high levels of deprivation as demonstrated by key socio-economic indicators. The rationale for targeting is twofold. When resources are finite, targeting areas of greatest need is demonstrably fair. Secondly, targeting is meant to address the 'multiplier effect', wherein schools with significant numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds have specific dynamics which are school-wide and on students' achievement.

However, the ASTI believes that this one-model only approach is flawed in that it does not address the needs of educational disadvantaged students *outside* areas with high levels of deprivation. The majority of educationally disadvantaged young people do not live in DEIS-designated areas. The schools which these students attend do not receive any additional funding to put in place interventions to meet their needs. Frequently, this difference in funding occurs in the same town or rural area with the absurd result wherein siblings attend different schools, one-DEIS the other non-DEIS.

A further flaw in the current DEIS-only model is that the profile of students in a school changes over time. Schools not designated DEIS status pre-2005 may now have a significantly different student profile. This changing socio-economic profile is reflected in the 2017 EU Commission Recommendation on the National Reform Programme of Ireland which stated that *“the low work intensity of many households creates concerns that some people are left behind as the recovery continues.”* The report also noted that child poverty remains higher than the EU average. (EU Commission, 2017: 5-6)

The ASTI believes that a more effective policy response to educational disadvantage would be a *“tapering of funding”* approach based on the DEIS model as recommended by the 2015 ESRI report. This simple measure would contribute significantly to addressing educational disadvantage in rural and small urban areas.

## References

Department of Education and Skills 2011 *An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Post-Primary Schools*

Department of Education and Skills 2017 *Report of the Review of DEIS*

ERC 2003 *Review of the Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme*

ESRI 2015 *Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS*, Research Series No. 39

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