

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

### **Home-School-Community Liaison Scheme**

**November 2017**

#### **Summary**

The HSCL Scheme is one of the success stories of Irish education. It is an effective strand within the overall suite of measures in 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 is one of the 'success' stories in Irish education policy. Its original piloting in 1990 was preceded valuable policy learning on what worked in combating educational disadvantage in other jurisdictions. 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 joined-up 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 highly 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.

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 must be a model which continues the DEIS approach supplemented by a “*tapering of funding*” approach as recommended by the ESRI the implementation of which 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

European Union 2017 *EU Council Recommendation on the 2017 National Reform Programme of Ireland and delivering a Council Opinion on the 2017 Stability Programme of Ireland*